

Bon Courage, Mes Amis!: Thoughts on restoring a rural ruin

BON COURAGE, MES AMIS!

Thoughts on restoring a rural ruin



SHEILA WRIGHT

In 1994, primary school teacher Sheila Wright suddenly had the means to buy a house in the Creuse department of central France but the amount of her windfall meant that she was looking at the bottom end of the market. She found herself falling ridiculously in love with a very old stone farmhouse which had been abandoned for 50 years and had an alarming 20ft crack up the front. As she looked round the old kitchen, the smell of damp stone and ancient dust was all-pervading. In the gloom, shadowy alcoves and battered wood frames were barely visible on the rough granite walls. Mysterious bits of string dangled from the immense beams above, and between these beams were dark, narrow boards through which light filtered where rain had rotted them away. One wall of the room was taken up by a vast fireplace with a huge hearthstone. Up the wide chimney, past various sinister blackened iron hooks, a patch of bright blue sky was visible. The wall separating the adjacent cellar-like room from the adjoining barn had crumbled and fallen, covering the earth floor with tons of loose granite. The jagged top of this wall was now only five feet high and over this, the neighbouring cart bay, cow shed and stable were all visible. From these inauspicious beginnings, Sheila, her husband Ron, their large family and many friends worked hard to create a holiday home full of happiness, music, laughter and love. Along the way (only 5ft 2in and in her mid-50s) she developed a passion for building with stone, constructing two granite staircases herself over a five-year period. French neighbours seeing the Wrights tackle their enormous DIY task fervently wished them bon courage which could perhaps be translated loosely as Good luck you'll need it! This book traces the story of the ongoing restoration in a series of chapters which also give Sheilas thoughts on aspects of Creusoise life and her experiences in

France. It is illustrated with her own charming pen and ink drawings.

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