



Bignor House enters the wedding business

A NEW wedding business has officially launched in West Sussex. Bignor Park is opening its beautiful gardens and rustic stables for wedding parties to enjoy.

More than 200 people attended a launch event last Thursday, hosted by Ned Bigham and his wife Clare, or Viscount and Viscountess Mersey to address the couple correctly.

Ned, a professional music composer, only moved back to his childhood home last July, four years after inheriting the estate and title in 2006, following the death of his father Richard.

At the centre of 1200 acres of outstanding natural beauty in the South Downs National Park, stands Bignor House, an early 19th Century manor house built by Cornish tin miner John Hawkin, a key figure in the excavation of Bignor Roman Villa.

It is now the family home of Ned and Clare, along with their two daughters Flora and Polly.

Adapting to life at the centre of a grand estate, after living in London, has been 'consuming' for the couple, but ultimately 'exciting too'.

Over the past year their life has been reminis-

cent of scenarios developed by television programmes such as *Country House Rescue*.

"There is an aspect of that," admitted Clare, "because we have to run it so it is financially viable, because an estate like this does cost a lot of money."

Ned said: "The interesting thing about those *Country House Rescue* style programmes, which we do enjoy watching, is seeing the hair brained schemes, and how they have not necessarily been worked out."

Instead, the pair has settled upon a practical business model aimed at allowing them to manage the upkeep of the estate, without jeopardising the special nature of the setting.

Or as what Ned referred to in a self-deprecating manner as 'being a bit more boring really... not building the butterfly farm, and not the golf course, or anything else that is going to be capital intensive, perhaps not find takers, or will cause a lot of upset'.

The idea of using Bignor Park as a wedding venue was forged during the restoration of the functional old stable block, adjacent to the main

house.

"When we started doing up the stables we had no idea that we were going to turn them into a party and wedding venue," said Ned. "They just badly needed restoring."

The project was part of extensive building and renovation works the couple started as part of their new tenure of the estate, but at first they missed the potential it offered.

Now, they are delighted with the idea of sharing such a 'magical place' during 'an incredibly special moment in two people's lives'.

Wedding parties have exclusive usage of the Bignor House's nine acres of gardens over their booked weekend, including the stone Greek Loggia licensed for outside ceremonies, the Zen Pond created by Ned's mother Joanna, and a commemorative temple dedicated to his grandmother Kitty.

For more information on events at Bignor Park, including corporate away days and team building activities, visit www.bignorpark.co.uk. The bi-annual Bignor Park Fete takes place this year on Saturday June 5.