

The holiday makers

David and Julia Hogarth, who have more than 30 years' experience of owning and letting their own and clients' holiday cottages, have launched a new business



Cumbrian Cottage Holidays: the Hogarth family

The view is everything you want from a holiday cottage getaway – lake, fells, fields and forests – all visible from the outdoor terrace or through large, picture windows. A wood-burning stove and underfloor heating keep the open plan, luxury kitchen-diner and living area cosy. There are four bedrooms, each with their own bathroom, while a lounge is filled with a sofa from which the whole family can watch the smart TV thanks to high-speed WiFi. And there is even a pub just a few steps away.

Owners Julia and David Hogarth seem to have thought of everything at Lake View, Ullswater. But then they are experts.

The property at Brackenrigg is one of 16 they own and let to holidaymakers, along with a growing number owned by clients who draw on their services via a new business the Carlisle-based couple has launched, Cumbrian Cottage Holidays.

It follows decades of success in the industry that has seen them develop several property and holiday letting businesses. Despite being grandparents, and selling other companies in recent years, rather than put their feet up they are back where they belong.

“It’s fair to say we still have the bug, and alongside requests from owners who became our friends from working together, we are now offering a personal service to both our owners and our holidaymakers,”

says Julia.

“It’s what we do,” says David. “We’ve got a lot of experience to help other people. “We love property and the cottage industry in particular. We have some lovely owners who are excited about having a second home and holiday makers who are very happy and give good feedback, so everybody wins.

“The new business is still in its infancy and will take a while to build up but we already have 60 properties to let.”

The self-catering holiday cottage market has exploded in recent years and with the advent of Airbnb and booking.com more owners are going it alone and, at the same time, the smaller, independent holiday letting companies have been acquired by ▶



Lake View, Ullswater



Julia and David Hogarth

national brands.

Cumbrian Cottage Holidays fits somewhere in between. “We aren’t going to compete with the national companies,” explains David. “We want to run about 100 cottages and keep it personal, working alongside owners who may have been doing their own marketing to help increase their occupancy levels and bolster their income. We have two websites and good marketing and years of experience in the market.”

It started for the Hogarths – who met in London in 1979 as managers working for Marks & Spencer – when they decided to leave the capital and return to David’s native Cumbria. Having been outbid on a café business in Ambleside they arrived with nothing but plans for a better quality of life. “People thought we were utterly mad to give up two successful careers,” recalls Julia.

With their retail experience they took

the chance to buy the village shop in Houghton from ex-Carlisle United and Ipswich footballer Frank Clarke. “We thought we’d stick with what we know, and it took off,” says David. “We ended up joining the Spar group and we were the first store to open late hours and all day Sunday.”

The enterprise grew until they had nine Spars and two newsagents and off-licences in the Carlisle area.

“From that we started a little building business but then the recession hit and because we couldn’t sell six barn conversions we’d done in Wreay we started to let them with Country Holidays, who were a big national company at the time. After Spar bought all the shops from us we invested more in property to generate income. We realised we could do a better job letting them ourselves and started our first letting business, Cumbrian Cottages, over 30 years ago holiday letting our own

cottages and those of friends. Our first office was the hexagonal building that’s now a cafe at Quarry Rigg, in Bowness.”

As the business grew Gail Corbishley joined them as office manager having over ten years’ experience in the holiday market. Gail is a partner and customer support and owner manager in the new business.

Cumbrian Cottages blossomed with more offices in Carlisle and Keswick with a staff of 20 and 500 cottages on its books.

“Some of the people we were letting to decided they wanted to buy a holiday cottage for themselves,” explains David. “It was really the start of the boom in second home ownership along with self-catering holidays which has grown and grown.”

They responded by starting an estate agency, Cumbrian Properties. David’s brother Adrian joined them and that business grew to 12 offices across Cumbria, while Cumbrian Cottages was sold in 2010 to a private buyer.

After a three-year gap they still had the bug and their own cottages and were keen to get back into the lettings market so founded Lakes Cottage Holidays in 2013. At its peak, it had 600 properties across the UK and three offices. Its success attracted national company, Sykes Cottages, which bought the business in August 2017.

David and Julia’s three daughters Rachael, Caroline and Sasha have been involved in the various businesses throughout and even two of their grandsons got involved, with a blog called Louix and Frankie’s Adventures.

They still had Cumbrian Properties but then sold the south Lakes offices to their managers and in December 2021 Adrian took over the brand in the north.

David and Julia concentrated their efforts on their property development company, transforming the former Talkin Tarn Hotel into 13 luxury cottages, with kitchens supplied by Caroline’s company

Wood Grange Developments. They retain three of the luxury cottages for their own portfolio.

But they still weren't done.

"Over the past few years we have received messages from previous owners and holidaymakers saying the industry no longer has a personal touch, the remaining agencies are all owned by large companies who are very corporate in their attitude to owners and holidaymakers and you never get to speak to the same person twice," says David.

"We believe our owners and holidaymakers are equally important as without one, we can't have the other. We are always available to help, no matter what the problem or question, being very hands on and living and working within the Lake District we are extremely knowledgeable about the area and the cottages we market."

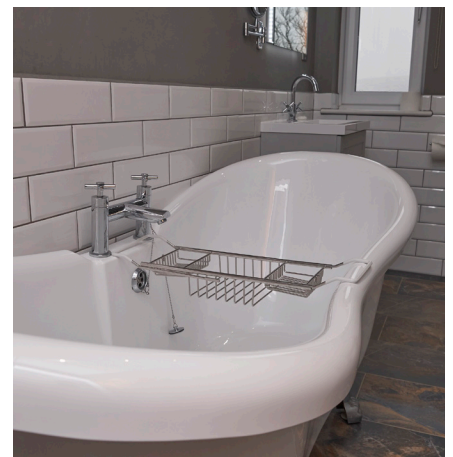
As long-time owners themselves they have in-depth understanding of what holidaymakers are looking for, and how to advise owners. "It's easy to see the mistakes that people make," says Julia. "You can't cut corners because holidaymakers' expectations now are very high."

David adds: "When we started out things like having a colour TV were a selling point. Now a cottage has to have very good WiFi, ideally a hot tub and 60 per cent of our owners accept dogs. Someone once wanted to bring their parrot, and we've even had somebody ask to bring a house-trained rabbit, but we stick to dogs."

"People are also wanting more short breaks at different so owners need to be flexible on changeover days and length of stay."

The couple have ensured they meet all their own standards at Lake View, which was an ordinary semi-detached house when they bought it in 2017. They had plans however, and brought in Black Box Architects, of Carlisle, to design a side extension that runs down the depth of the house and beyond. At the front, floor to ceiling glazing brings light into the dining area, from where there are views down the lake and across to Arthur's Pike, views that can also be enjoyed from the covered, outdoor terrace. When the weather is less cooperative, there is a cosy sitting area by the wood-burning stove and a luxury fitted kitchen with a granite-topped island, breakfast bar and hot water tap, dove grey units and integrated appliances.

The four bedrooms – two on the ground floor and two upstairs – all have their own bathroom or en suite shower room facilities, including free-standing, claw foot



baths. If not all four are needed, the first floor can be closed off. Picture windows throughout the house are free of panels to maximise the lake and fell views.

For those taking a break from cooking on holiday, Brackenrigg Inn serves pub classics and pizza and even has its own microbrewery, all just 100 yards from the front door. Pizza is also served down the road in the new garden Glasshouse at Another Place The Lake, which also offers casual dining in The Living Space and more formal dining in Rampsbeck Restaurant.

Another Place also offers a range of outdoor and lake-based activity, while Ullswater 'Steamers' can be boarded at Pooley Bridge, which has independent Verey Books, specialist food and drink at Chestnut House, a post office and fine dining at 1863.

Julia adds: "People seem to like it. You know you are doing something right when people want to come back and you get repeat bookings. That's also what we're aiming for with our clients."

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CUMBRIAN COTTAGE HOLIDAYS' TIPS FOR OWNERS

1. Invest in good quality beds; if you're letting for the first time, be prepared to spend more on beds than you may have planned.
2. Don't treat your holiday let as somewhere to offload old, unwanted furniture as you replace what is in your home – holidaymakers don't want shabby seats or tatty tables.
3. Employ good quality cleaners who you'd be happy to have in your own home. Cumbrian Cottage Holidays recommend Bright & Beautiful.
4. Open fires and stoves are a hit with guests and especially useful attracting out of season bookings.
5. Be flexible on changeover dates and offer short breaks all year round.
6. Have as many bathrooms as you can fit into your property, ideally en suite facilities for every bedroom.
7. Aim to align your standards with hotels, not B&Bs.
8. Quirky accommodation is popular, so pods, shepherd huts, treehouses.