

## Focus

## The right time, the right place



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Montreal 1976. The Olympics. Finnish runner Lasse Viren wins gold medals in the 5K and 10K for the second successive Games. Romanian teenage gymnast Nadia Comaneci scores the first perfect 10 at just 14 years of age – and the UK's Danny Nightingale scores one of Team GB's three gold medals in the modern pentathlon with team-mates Adrian Parker and Jim Fox.

Danby, North Yorkshire 2019. Christmas. Danny and his wife Liz pick up their ukuleles, chord and lyric sheets and head out for another evening of merriment with the Eskuleles at the Fox & Hounds in nearby Ainthorpe.

It's not exactly shooting pistols anymore, more duelling banjos for the man who also guided the modern pentathlon team to bronze in the Olympics held in South Korea in 1988.

Today the Nightingales act as a different kind of host to Montreal or South Korea at their home of Crag House Farm, just half a mile off the moor road that leads from Blakey Ridge to Castleton and Danby where they moved to in the 90s having previously lived in Westerdale – and having swapped their homeland of Somerset for the North York Moors when Danny took up a teaching position in Redcar.

Their fabulous barn conversions in listed buildings opened in 2011 and 2014 respectively and offer fantastic holiday accommodation for six people in each.

They are continuing a tradition that always seems to have been prevalent in Crag House's past, of housing quite a gathering.

And the Christmas tree I saw in Dale View when I visited? All I can say is wow, which is pretty much what you will say too about the interior of the buildings as and when you visit.

"We love it here on the Moors," says Liz. "We always wanted to live in the countryside. You're either a country person or you're not and we couldn't live anywhere else."

"We had our own livestock here for many years, doing our own version of TV's *The Good Life* with pigs, turkeys, hens, ducks and cattle."

"We used to buy an occasional spare bull calf that our neighbouring



**BARNSTORMER:** Top, Liz and Danny Nightingale outside the converted barns at Crag House Farm, Danby Head, which have wonderful views across the valley. Above left and right, inside the barns.

PICTURES: RICHARD PONTER

dairy farmer Graham didn't want," says Danny. "I remember our first was a little Guernsey we bought for a fiver."

"It wasn't really a beef animal but we fed it on rolled barley for a couple of months and it tasted delicious with wonderful yellowy fat, a bit like what you get on a pheasant."

"When we came here we had thought that one day we would like to do something with the barns," says Liz.

"The whole place was really ramshackle. It had been a dairy farm but had fallen into neglect. We'd

taken on 25 acres and it became a wonderful place for our four boys to grow up. We always had people here too."

"The boys' friends, then girlfriends, our own friends. You

*'You're either a country person or you're not and we couldn't live anywhere else.'*

can't ever imagine your children leaving home but one by one they did."

That was when Danny and Liz began turning their attention to the barns. Being listed buildings and in a National Park and having bats as permanent lodgers there were several issues to address.

"It was quite a slog getting all of the permissions we required along the way and took us quite a few years."

"Thank goodness we managed to get planning for both because if we'd gone through it all for one and

## HISTORY HOUSE

There is an old book, *Unhistoric Acts* by local author George Baker, and within it he records the past history of Crag House Farm and neighbouring homesteads:

"On the west side of Danby Dale nearly opposite Danby church though separated from it by a deep descent to Danby Beck is Crag House which was built in 1770 by William and Mary Hartas as their home in succession to the old family residence Thatch House about two fields distance.

"In the year 1815 it was the home of William Hartas' only son, George, and his large family of sons and daughters."

had had to start again for the other I don't think we'd have had the energy, but we got there and we had some particularly useful advice along the way.

"It took the form of what we had to do anyway, but it also proved to be exactly right."

"The lady who came to see us regarding what we could or could not do with our barns being listed buildings told us the interiors still had to be like barns inside, while also including bedrooms, living rooms, kitchen and bathrooms.

"At first that wasn't what we'd had in mind but then it made us think out of the box and it really was very helpful."

"When you go into either Beacon View or Dale View now you get the feeling of being in what was once a barn, but also the homeliness and warmth of family accommodation."

"I enjoyed the planning and working with our builder, Philip, who sees the magic of producing just the right feel."

Danny, who has now retired from a long career in teaching, tells of a direct descendant of those who built Crag House Farm, Ruth McKay having stayed in one of the barns for her 90th birthday.

"This has always been a happy place for families who have lived here and now we are able to welcome many more to this part of Danby Dale."

"We love people coming and they arrive from near and far. Wherever in the world our visitors come from we try to get hold of their national flag and run it up our flagpole for when they arrive."

"We even put up our Yorkshire flag for your visit – and we got the rose the right way up!"