

Grace and favour rooms

It's now possible to dine or even stay overnight in some of our best-loved country houses or in splendour on their estates. Rosie Paterson meets the new lords and ladies of holiday let



Bradford estates, Staffordshire

FOR weeks after it opened to guests for the first time, Charlotte's Folly was the darling of Instagram, its eye-catching, rusty-rose-pink exterior and Emma Ainscough interiors flashing up on everyone's 'For you' page, begging the question: 'Where is this house and can I live in it?' Well, no, but you can stay in it temporarily, courtesy of the Viscount and Viscountess Newport, who run the Bradford estate on which it sits.

The 12,000-acre estate, which straddles the Shropshire and Staffordshire borders, also includes the Newports' ancestral seat Weston Park, 1,000 acres of Capability Brown-designed parkland and the White Sitch, a 19th-century pleasure ground.

It was to this pleasure ground that Lady Charlotte (daughter of the 2nd Earl of Bradford and great-great-great-great aunt of Alexander, Lord Newport), would walk from the main house, down a tree-lined woodland carriageway and via the folly. The latter shows up on maps dating as far back as the 1880s, but when the Newports decided to restore it, in the depths of lockdown, it was covered in questionable 1960s pebbledash. The couple managed to recover some of its original features, but had to guess at the exterior colour. 'It was built as a folly, but it didn't have a true purpose, it was simply there to be beautiful... so we imagined it to have been some crazy colour,' explains Eliza, Lady Newport.

The interiors were entrusted to Miss Ainscough—a young, up-and-coming interior designer whose style had already caught the Newports' eyes. She could, the Viscountess explains, embrace the cottage's 'cuteness' without getting bogged down by it. Diamond mullioned windows and Gothic door arches are cleverly contrasted against a leopard-print hair fender, cream bouclé sofa and kitsch checkerboard tiles; colour and pattern warmly embraced.

The folly's namesake was a woman who lived a life far more exciting than her time → and rank might suggest, who would surely approve of such a renovation. Lady Charlotte, a keen watercolourist, drove her own carriage around the estate and was an early adopter of photography. In her diaries, she writes about exploring the White Sitch and a tree that was brutally struck by lightning. 'I swear I know which tree it is!' exclaims Lady Newport. 'There is a stump there.'

A second property on the estate, the whimsically named Hansel and Gretel Cottage, is also available as a holiday let and the Newports have plans to develop more of the buildings, as well as an intricately carved wooden boathouse in their care.

Charlotte's Folly is available to rent through Unique Homestays (www.uniquehomestays.com/self-catering/uk/shropshire/weston-under-lizard/charlottes-folly)



Getting into the swing of letting: Viscount and Viscountess Newport of Bradford estates