

Cause for celebration at village tearooms

By HELEN COMPSON

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IT WAS love at first sight the day Ann Maddison laid eyes on the Simonburn Tearooms.

She had spent the previous decade managing 35 pubs and leading an altogether different lifestyle.

But when a friend took her for coffee in the tiny Northumberland hamlet, Ann made an impromptu decision that she hasn't regretted one bit.

"I came up to Chollerford on a business trip, when my friend brought me here," she said.

"I fell in love with Simonburn itself - it was absolutely instant - and then I discovered the tearooms were up for sale.

"I made the decision the same day. I just snapped the place up."

At that time, the tearooms were only open during the summer season.

While recognising the potential of the business, Ann was unsure how it would fare during the winter season, but she decided to give it a whirl anyway.

Twelve months on, and currently celebrating her first anniversary at the helm, she couldn't be more

delighted at how things have gone.

She said: "I thought it was going to be quite slow at first, because it had been run on a part-time basis and used to shut during the winter, but it really took off this winter.

"This is now one of the few tearooms in such a rural area that actually stays open all year round.

"Once I'd got up and running, I introduced Sunday lunches, using as much local and organic produce as I could, including local beef and lamb.

"Now the Sunday lunches are becoming so popular that people are starting to have to book in advance.

"I'm amazed at how the business has taken off during its first year - it's doing really very well."

Ann puts much of the success down to word-of-mouth and the fact that people still enjoy good home-cooking.

The Simonburn Tearooms have become a popular watering hole for walkers and cyclists, while Ann is also encouraged by the level of group bookings and repeat trade.

A cottage industry in her own right, she also provides bed and breakfast in

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■ **First anniversary:** Owner Ann Maddison is pictured in the Simonburn Tearooms.

Photo: D140646

three bedrooms upstairs, and sells local produce and products in her recently-opened shop, Northumberland Gifts.

On top of that, she also saved the hamlet's Post Office from closure by agreeing to retain it on the premises.

She opens that up for

business every Monday and Tuesday.

For the time being, Ann is running her business single-handed during the week, but gets help from her family at weekends and during the summer season.

Husband Trevor remains at their marital home in

Seaburn, where he runs a driving school, but his weekends are spent helping Ann.

"It's not much of a rest for him!" she said.

"And I'm not sure how much longer I can keep doing everything myself.

"I will just have to see what this summer brings."