



It was a chance visit with a friend who lived in the area that led Ann Maddison to the tiny village of Simonburn and the business that she discovered was up for sale. After running 55 pubs for a major brewery and spending too many hours stuck in traffic on the M1, she knew instantly that she had found the peaceful retreat of her dreams. She bought the business then and there and promptly set about making her dream a reality.

Taking over just last April, she did a complete makeover of the existing tearoom business. It was launched five years ago by the previous owners who received a major setback when Foot and Mouth disease devastated the area, and now has a mini-conglomerate of a business encompassing a village shop, post office, tearooms and garden, guest house and craft shop.

"I knew if I was going to make a real go of it, we would have to have more than one string in our bow so that if something happened to one part of the business there would be other things to fall back on. In the pub trade I learnt that you can't survive by just selling beer!" she explains.

Simonburn, an estate village untouched by the ravages of modernisation, is as pretty a place as you will find in the north and has been used several times as a stage set for Catherine Cookson films.

"Visitors tell me they feel immediately at peace as soon as they cross the little hump-backed bridge entering the village," says Ann.

Ann also knows it takes a lot of planning and hard work to make her business survive and thrive. "The summer season is over now, but our guest rooms are still full. I'm trying to make sure we get our fair share of people travelling to and from Scotland on the A68 but we also need the fishermen, shooting parties, winter walkers and wedding guests to get through the winter," she points out.

Not leaving anything to chance, Ann now offers a traditional Sunday lunch to local people and visitors, as well as keeping the tearooms open seven days a week from 9am until 6pm. "I've received a wonderful welcome from the people in the village and nearby," she says, "which has been half the battle." So whilst there's always a market for afternoon tea, Ann is now taking bookings for Christmas lunches!