

Monks Eleigh - Corn Craft enters new era with a change of name

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AS a young girl Caroline Gage couldn't walk two steps in her Monks Eleigh home without treading on bits of straw.

Her parents, Royston and Win, made traditional corn dollies from one room at home so it was inevitable the straw would end up all scattered around the house.

It seems fitting, then, that Caroline should return to carry on the family business after spending years in London before heading back to Suffolk.

Back in the late 1960s when her parents were making the corn dollies, they needed a vacuum and to raise extra cash put the corn dollies out on the roadside to sell. And they sold.

And it is from these small beginnings that the pair built up their successful business Corn Craft, which has now been renamed as the next generation steps in to steer it along.

Bridge Farm Barns, sits at the side of the road in Monks Eleigh and Caroline is more than happy to get back to her roots, helped by sister-in-law and business partner Sarah.

And what a place to work. Away from any hustle and bustle but close enough to everywhere to attract visitors from London and beyond, the barns, in Caroline's own words, are an Aladdin's Cave of goodies.

After years working in PR in London, Caroline is happy to be back in Suffolk.

"I think it has worked for me because I went off and did my own thing and then came back because I wanted to rather than because it was expected of me."

For Sarah, her sister-in-law, a background in office administration meant she was the ideal partner for Caroline to help the business tick along.

Married to Caroline's brother, Michael, Sarah is enjoying her new role.

She said: "I'm really pleased to be joining the business. It is a wonderful place and Caroline and I are very much looking forward to the future."

It wasn't so much from little acorns but from little corn dollies that Corn Craft was born.

Royston learnt the tradition from his grandfather and when he married Win they started their little cottage industry alongside the poultry and arable farm they ran.

Win said: "There was always straw everywhere.

"We needed a vacuum and we wondered one day if the corn dollies would sell alongside the fruit and vegetables to raise some extra cash and they did sell. That's how it all started."

Caroline added: "You couldn't move for straw in our house. It was wonderful growing up like that and I'd have to skip round the straw to get to the front door."

Founder members of the Suffolk Craft Society, Win and Royston are proud and pleased the business is staying in the family.

"I think it has helped that Caroline and Michael went off and did their own things.

"We never pressured them to join us. They came back after pursuing other things and we are pleased with the outcome."

Nowadays the corn dollies are part of a much bigger enterprise – Bridge Farm Barns – which makes for an interesting visit.

The mixture of many different things to buy plus a welcoming tea room sees visitors coming back time and time again, and usually discovering something new each time they visit.

Christmas will arrive at Bridge Farm Barns around the middle of October.

"We think two and a half months is long enough for somewhere to sell Christmas," said Win.

For now, Caroline and Sarah are travelling to buyers fairs and are getting used to the business's new name.

"There won't be any dramatic changes. We're not going to fix what isn't broken," they said.

Further information is available at www.bridgefarmbarns.co.uk.