

A setting favoured

Robin Hill, in the grounds of the former classical mansion Woodhill



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The chance to buy a home as good as Robin Hill, in the grounds of the former classical mansion Woodhill House in elevated Tivoli, and on such an exceptional south-facing site with centuries of 'old Cork' history attached to it, doesn't come along very often.

One chance did come to pass, albeit briefly, six months ago; a detached red-brick family home called Dún Rua on 0.4 of an acre came for sale, and was quickly snapped up.

Now, the even better pitch and grounds of Robin Hill, all backed up by an ancient 300 year old, sun-soaking red-brick orchard wall, is likely to see as-swift action, albeit at a higher price level.

It's one of a handful of prized, detached family homes built above Lovers Walk in venerable Tivoli, and those in the enclave were built on the orchard grounds of the late Georgian Palladian mansion called Woodhill House.

Woodhill House was built in the 1700s by Cooper Penrose, at a time when its many acres of grounds cascaded down the Tivoli hillside to meet the River Lee at Tivoli Strand (now, infilled as the Lower Glanmire Road.) The Quaker Pen-

rose family were one of Cork's leading 'merchant princes' in the 1700s and their c1770s 'villa' the hospitable Woodhill House had its own cultural hub, complete with library, art and sculpture galleries, and was much visited by

writers, artists, and radicals.

It's where Robert Emmet's lover Sarah Curran took sanctuary from 1803-1805, after Emmet's execution. Woodhill was sacked after Lord Edward Fitzgerald sought sanctuary there too, whilst it also had a role in a famous abduction case on Tivoli Strand, when Cooper Penrose's niece and heiress Mary Pike was taken by Sir Henry Hayes of Mount Vernon/Vernon Mount over on the south city flanking hills, and who dastardly contrived to marry the lady completely against her will.

The saga deserves a movie or a series to be made of it, including as it does offers of ransom and banishment to Tasmania for the bold Sir Henry. Today, much of the Penrose family history and some of their family possessions and artefacts, are in safe recall and custody in the Penrose Gallery in the Crawford Municipal Art Gallery.

Long may the Penrose/Hayes connection and notorious chapter

of Cork family interactions be preserved in safety there, as Vernon Mount was destroyed by fire in 2016 after scandalous abandonment. Woodhill House was dismantled in the 1980s, having been being vacated as far back as the 1930s when the last of the Penrose family moved to England.

All that sort of carry-on, and ups and downs of grandeur, will be grist to the mill and tales to be told, over the dining table, of whoever is the next occupant of Robin Hill: how could anyone not be fascinated with such a backdrop to their home and grounds?

Locally, a 'new' Woodhill House was built on several private acres on the lower section of Lovers Walk in the 1980s, and is currently for sale with a €1.9m price tag, down from an earlier ask of €2.4m.

The upper section, winding above Lovers Walk's high-walled run is where some of Woodhill's formal gardens, orchard and glasshouses would have been, and



for centuries

House, is set in a place very much to be prized, says **Tommy Barker**



Woodhill, Tivoli, Cork
 €795,000
 Size: 237 sq m (2,543 sq ft)
 Bedrooms: 4
 Bathrooms: 3
 BER: E1
 Best Feature: super setting



that's where the most recent house trading activity has been centered.

Dún Rua came to market in November 2016 guiding €595,000 via Savills, and sold for nicely over that for its trading-down owners. Although not yet on the Price Register, it's understood that Dún Rua made about €650,000, in a smoothly-executed deal.

In fact, it went so smoothly that on the day last week when the *Irish Examiner* called up to Robin Hill, a removal van could be seen up the drive at Dún Rua as its buyers moved in.

Just one other house separates Robin Hill from Dún Rua, and that one in the middle clearly has had a major upgrade budget lavished on it, complete with glass baluster balconies, with that house's long-time owners reckoning the setting, aspect and location all justified the renewal of their pride and joy.

Now, into this rather exalted and quite exclusive company, Robin Hill is new to the market,

being sold by its owners for the past 20 years, and, again, it's a trading-down option and sale.

Selling agent is Jackie Cohalan of Cohalan Downing Associates, who's quite enraptured with it and she is relishing the prospect of viewings up here, on the edge of the city, in a sun-basking spot, on pristine, tiered gardens. As spring turns to summer, weather like we've had the past week or two may even mean a smitten, swift sale?

Guide price is €795,000, and simply put, this home with roots back to the 1930s, in a sublime old orchard setting, is quite the stunner.

Appropriately enough, it's done in a sort of timbered, Elizabethan Tudor revival style, of a sort of English look widely popular, and readily embraced in Cork, in the first half of the 1900s, when similar-look homes were built in the emerging suburbs for the upwardly mobile and aspirant

classes, in settings such as the Model Farm Road, and Douglas (eg the 'old' Endsleigh).

That look is historically appropriate (even if coincidental,) as the 1770s built Woodhill is said to have replaced an earlier Elizabethan

home on these grounds.

Why would the setting not be in favour for home hunters and builder, over very many centuries?

It's a walk to the city, all out of harm's way and well above the

tides, set on a sandstone hill and bluff overlooking the Lee, estuary and what's now the Marina. It could hardly be better pitched for views (the new Páirc Uí Chaoimh stadium is the latest arrival and change in the foreground) and for the sun when it shines.

That's why this would have been selected as the productive garden and orchard for the original Woodhill House, and a key, surviving feature of that estate is the walled garden/orchard wall all the way along Robin Hill's rear boundary. Up to 12' tall, and perhaps 200' in length, it was built of hand-made slob red bricks, and even today productive apple trees are trained up along it, currently shimmering in May blossom.

Peaches, figs and pears would be as happily at home here, and the departing owner quips that an en-



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gineer told him "the wall's not in great shape, there's only a few centuries more left in it!"

Robin Hill's on 0.75 of an acre of summer bliss grounds, and almost as old as the red brick wall are the property's high, side boundary walls, while the gardens within are in several tiers, steeper at the bottom where there's a shared entrance for one other private home almost out of sight below thanks to the site's slope.

There's a drive up to the side and back of the 2,543 sq ft Robin Hill, which is placed close to the middle of immaculately presented gardens of lawns, pond, pergola, hedging and shrubbery. All the greenery has been trimmed with tonsorial precision to look its very best for its outing on the market, looking elegant, without being too overwhelming.

So! after 20 paragraphs of historical ramble and preamble, what of the house itself which is bidding to be some new family's home?

Essentially, it's a three-bay, Dutch dormer styled two-storey house, with tiled roof and several dormer windows to the south and north facades, with a timbered central front gable setting a certain high-brow tone.

It's got a very pleasing facade, with low run of hedging which makes it look a bit like an Edwardian gentleman's beard and 'tache, shining up either side of the two bay windows left and right of a central set of French doors.

Those doors open into a mid-section family room with fireplace, wood floor, coved ceiling and some feature plasterwork arches or alcoves. There's a further reception also with fireplace on the city/western side, which in turn opens to a slender, full depth sun room with overhead railed balcony which, almost frustratingly, has no easy access to it from first floor level.

Off at the far, eastern side, is the room that gets most use of all, day-in, day-out, and it's the full-depth/triple aspect kitchen/family dining room.

This is very much the heart of the home, notes Jackie Cohalan and is entered from what's now the main access point, an asymmetric sun-room extension on the eastern flank, with steeply pitched, jutting, angular roof, like the prow of a ship.

It's a lovely ante-chamber approach and leads to the house proper, through a double set of stripped pine doors with stained and leaded glass. This is a look that very much suits this home's relaxed older house vibe, with polished wood floors suiting other pitch pine furniture pieces (many from the ace restorer Bruce Perkins) as much as it

suits the brick open fireplace, given a nod of extra distinction thanks to the way the bricks are laid in a diagonal, herringbone pattern under a stout timber mantle.

Similar bricks feature up at the kitchen end, around the range cooker alcove, and there's also an island and units all made up in painted solid timbers, with black granite tops all done by Linehan Design. It's quite a deep room, 'though not too wide at the far, kitchen end, where the look is all tied together by some judiciously-chosen striped wallpaper. It looks so right, that it's only afterwards you realise it's because the limited wall space has no wall-hung units: less is more, in this case.

In any case, there's also a utility and a multi-purpose rear, two-storey extension used as a gym/study, with garden access. This extra room is a bit of an odd-shape or presence, one that doesn't seem to have found much purpose save for providing a base for what's now the first floor rear bathroom annex, wrapped in a tiled roof and upper sides.

This rear upstairs add-on is home to quite a large sized main family bathroom with corner bath, and stand-alone large shower enclosure. The room has three, east facing Velux windows in the wall, at chest and eye level, looking over a garden corner complete with sheltering palm trees.

Elsewhere, in the main house's upper floor-plan there are four double bedrooms, at least two of which are double aspect (views to the south, over the gardens and across the Marina are captivating), and the master is en suite, with shower.

Overall condition, inside and outside at Robin Hill is excellent, with warm feel and a good choice of rooms, and it's completely lovely as it stands.

Yet, and yet. There's a feeling it could be even better, even bigger, swell a bit more to match its exemplary sheltered grounds, perhaps add on a contrasting modern wing, all singing and dancing and all glass and steel? Or, perhaps, a more Tudor-Bethan great room for 21st century banqueting and family get-togethers?

The house right next door clearly added some grandeur and modern touches and, arguably, Robin Hill has one of the very site perches within old Woodhill's gardens, showing that, yes, time moves on, and that even great houses and lifestyles evolve.

And, that make a place like this very much to be prized, if not priceless. **VERDICT:** Centuries of Cork roots. Some 350 years of astute site selection on, shows there's something quite special about this Cork, Tivoli hillside setting. One to view...

