

The Attic

Nowadays people speak in referential terms about their attics. The younger set speak about their houses and discuss how much space they have in the attic. They speak about storage space in the house and about converting the attic into an office, a playroom for children or maybe making an extra bedroom for the younger members of the family.

It is now a common sight to see people putting in attic windows to open up the house and give it more light and the illusion of space. People also convert to dormer style.

I was reminded of this when I was speaking to some in laws this morning. The male member of the family has been working up in the attic since Christmas. His wife rarely sees him. I was talking to him and he found it to be a great therapy to be up there working away tidying it up and converting it. He might eventually make it into a man den for himself. I thought that was a brilliant idea with your very own coffee maker, TV, recliner and music centre. There might even be room for a wee bed for the afternoon nod. You could retire to your very own personal den at your leisure.

I just see a minor glitch in that it might be difficult to get in house planning permission. You could have a one/one split and stalemate with the casting vote going against the worker in the attic.

Last year a nephew of mine added on a playroom and bedroom by converting his attic thus giving himself much more space and light with the addition of Velux windows. His children are thrilled with the added space.

We have a fairly big attic ourselves which we have floored and insulated. We have added an attic ladder which makes access so much easier. It is used mainly to store Christmas and seasonal decorations. We actively resist making it into a dump doing bi-yearly decluttering sessions.

I remember in my youth that we never heard the word attic being used in the lexicon of Kerry folk. Everything was kept up in the loft. There was a loft in the shed. Lots of people had pigeon lofts. Every upper space was generally called a loft. Every lower piece of furniture with the drop-down bed was a dresser. I remember there was many a good night's sleep in the loft bed.

The loft and the armchair and the mattress had a special place in Irish folklore. Long before banks and wills became popular there were certain hiding places for the tins of money or household or personal valuables. The loft was nearly always number one to be searched when some parent died in the house.

Mattress money is a well-known term in Irish life because many a few pounds was secreted there over the decades.

We all remember that lovely song "granny 's just left you her old armchair" and then family members giggled and chaffed at the joke of it all. But this granny was no one's fool. She had hidden wealth in the chair and when the chair eventually broke down she had two thousand pounds or more hidden there.

Then we had that great song sung by The Clancy Brothers and other ballad groups entitled "The old maid in the Garret"

The Garret was a habitable loft or small or cramped living space at the top of the house. It was the least prestigious position in a building with its sloping ceilings.

The poor lady in the song did not want to die an old maid in the Garret at home. She would have to go away and find her own bitty garret and if she could not get a man, she would surely get a parrot.

From the above we can see that the loft was not held in high regard but was very demeaning accommodation.

Somewhere along the line the garret became a loft and now the attic is the in-vogue term. If you google up the word attic you will be immediately confronted by a whole array of ideas for what use you can convert your attic into.

For many years artists have used the upper room as their studio and what a perfect sanctity of peace and quiet it would be for the creative artistic mind.

Likewise with writers who can go up to the upper loft and stay in perfect peace of body and soul to whet their compositional juices and ready them for an attack on the laptop keyboard.

I suppose one of the most common uses of attics nowadays is home/office space where people working from home can find relative peace away from the hurly burly of family life. I was watching the Late Late Show recently and they had a very interesting piece on attics and garages. The presenter of a new 10-week television series was telling and asking people to look in their attics. He said that there were lots of hoarders around the country with attics packed with valuable antique stuff. Many had all sorts of whimsical pieces worth considerable sums of money.

I have had a look at our attic, and I will not be contacting him or his team. Our boxes of Christmas decorations have not moved into the antique category yet.

Likewise, I will not be creating extra attic space. I have enough work in maintaining the present square footage we have here at home.

I have seen some lovely books with ideas on attic conversions. There is a whole plethora of magazines featuring home improvements. TV programmes dealing with "Home of the Year" and renovating old houses regularly discuss attic conversions. They are a fairly regular feature of our television viewing nowadays.

Finally, I refer you to two recent books by much loved authors. The first one is "Up in the Attic" by much loved poet Pam Ayres. The second publication is a lovely sentimental book entitled "Books from The Attic" by Alice Taylor.

The stories and poems bring the lofts and attics of the country back to life from former to present times.

We will all have our own personal recollections and memories of lofts, garrets and attics.

They have played a major part in our memories and lives.

Let's not be too lofty to convert our attics to upmarket garrets and be ready for air B&B post pandemic. They could also be converted into ideal shebeens. Now there's an idea for a safe gin and tonic or Jameson with a few friends.

On second thoughts maybe not as the creaking joints and replaced knees and hips might be put under too much pressure on the ascent and descent. It might be a better idea to convert the garden shed instead into a coffee dock.

I rest my attic plans.