Exiles send plea to arsonists: Don't burn our cottage

Western Mail Reporter
DON'T SET fire to our dream cottage — that's the plea to Welsh arsonists from a young family living thousands of miles away from Wales but hoping to return.

Mr David Barton, his wife Linda and their three children are living in the New Hebrides, an island group about 1,000 miles east of Australia, and saving hard to renovate their 300-year-old cottage near Lampeter.

Reports filtering through to them of the arson campaign against unoccupied homes have prompted Mr Barton to ask the Western Mail to publish his appeal to those responsible.

"The house is our only home and we are working overseas to restore it to its former state so that we may settle back into the area from which the family originated," Mr Barton said in a letter to the paper.

The family would be living in the house now but for the fact that Mr Barton was unable to find a job in the Lampeter area last year when they came home after 10 years in Australia.

For the past five years, Mr Barton said, it has been their ambition to return to live in the area where his wife's ancestors farmed for generations until her parents moved to London in the 1940s.

They thought they had achieved the ambition 12 months ago when they came home and bought the stone cottage and six acres. Mr Barton said they had underestimated the rise in British property values and their savings were not sufficient to renovate the house after paying for it.

Mr Barton, an air traffic controller in Perth, Australia, and a policeman in his native Sussex before that, said he was "unable to find a job of any description in the Lampeter area."

Two months after they arrived the Bartons found themselves repacking and returning to Australia where Mr Barton reluctantly accepted a Government contract as an air traffic controller in the New Hebrides, a joint British and French colony.

The family hopes to return to Wales permanently when Mr Barton's contract expires at the end of next year. He is considering buying a business in the area.

Speaking from his home in the New Hebrides, Mr Barton said, "It would be tragically ironic if the campaign against holiday homes was to destroy a house which will soon be occupied by permanent members of the local community."

His brother-in-law, Mr Peter Gudgeon, and Mrs Barton's parents all live in the Tregaron area and check the cottage cottage about twice a week.

But at Christmas it was the target of a break-in for which robbery was apparently not the motive. The locks had been broken, the door left open but nothing was stolen, Mr Barton said.