

# Sunshine dream in RUIINS

## Dozens of Britons moved to Cyprus for a new life. Landslides devastated their precious homes... and now they can't get anyone to take the blame

### From George Odling

IN CYPRUS

**M**AGNIFICENT views of the sparkling Mediterranean, luxury villas at affordable prices, easy access to lush golf courses — and they even drive on the left. No wonder Cyprus has become the destination of choice for thousands of Brits seeking a new life in the sun. But one community nestled in the island's hills has seen its dreams shattered as their homes are ripped apart and rendered worthless by gaping fissures opening up beneath them. Already, 17 families have been evicted in Pissouri Village, where at least 70 houses are collapsing downhill due to underground landslides. The fissures are thought to be caused by underground landslides created by water flowing beneath the earth into the valley, due to heavy rain and the fact that Cyprus does not have a robust sewerage system. Dozens of desperate families have pleaded with the Cypriot government to help with their plight. They argue that if the government had acted when they first identified the problem years ago then the scale of the disaster would have been much less. In 2015 the then minister of the interior, Socrates Fissikis, said it was the government's duty to intervene, but following his resignation in May 2017, no action has been taken. 'We have had nothing since; they haven't even sent anyone down here to look,' says former chartered surveyor Antony Walker, 73, whose home is one of the affected. 'They have kicked the can down the road while our homes slip further every day. At first they said it was the fault of the developers, but each was built at a different time by different developers; and how would that explain why roads are collapsing?' A group of 29 villagers, who have named themselves the Pissouri Housing Initiative Group (PHIG), believes the Cypriot government should apply to the European Union for money from its solidarity fund to help with the problem. 'No insurance company

will insure against damage caused by landslides,' Mr Walker explains. So many are in this desperate situation wherein they have a mortgage to pay on a house that is collapsing into rubble, and they can't afford to go anywhere else. Meanwhile the Cypriot government, which helped create this mess, has turned its back on us.' The Daily Mail reported in May on the plight of the Phillips family in nearby Paphos, who plan to sue the government for allowing their home to be built on an unsafe site. Unlike the Phillips family, villagers in Pissouri consider taking the government to court as a last resort because the process could take more than a decade due to the country's clogged up courts and sluggish legal system. The group's lawyer, Elina Zoi, says: 'These people don't have ten or 15 years to fix this. Some are in their 80s and their homes will have crumbled to nothing well before then.'

**T**HERE are around 70,000 British expats living in Cyprus and the property sector is booming. Some 1,057 contracts were deposited at Land Registry offices for the sale of properties and land in April this year, up 62pc on the same month last year. The High Commission confirmed it is talking to the Cypriot government about a solution. A spokesman says: 'We are continuously pursuing with authorities in Cyprus for a solution to the problems residents in the area are experiencing.' A spokesman from the Cyprus Interior Ministry admits there are 'serious problems of soil instability' in the area and blamed the developers, even advising the villagers to sue them.



THEY'RE WAITING FOR US TO DIE

PHOTOS: GEORGE GILLARD



VILLAGE CRUMBLING



HOME NOW WORTHLESS



POOL COLLAPSED

Devastated: Clockwise from top, some of the stricken Pissouri residents, the Ellis's pool, cracks in the Fields's home and a collapsed wall in the village

### IT'S TAKEN A TOLL ON OUR HEALTH

PETER and Kayt Field's luxury four-bed villa with swimming pool was declared 'unfit for habitation' in March 2016. And since the couple fled the house, the home they shared for 25 years has crumbled and been looted several times for the belongings they left behind. The pair, from Northamptonshire, bought the home in 1993 and for a quarter of a century there were no issues. But former colonel Peter, 81, who spent 48 years in the Army, began noticing cracks in 2015. It wasn't long before the doors no longer fitted in their frames and the couple were forced to move into a downstairs bedroom while they searched for somewhere safe to live. 'While we were sleeping in the house you could hear pieces of it falling away — it would sound like a gunshot, then part of the house would crack and hit the floor,' Kayt says. It has all taken a serious toll on our health — my husband has had to have two stents and a pacemaker put in. 'The notice of eviction was pinned on our door while we were out shopping. We had no warning. Limassol council offered to let us use the road sweeper for a day to help us move, but that was about it. The couple, who have two children and four grandchildren, say their home should be worth €700,000 but is now 'worthless'. It would have been nice to have been able to leave something to our children,' Peter says. 'But that looks unlikely now.' The couple hope the Cypriot government will be able to compensate them for the loss of their home, but are very frustrated

## 'We could hear pieces falling away — it sounded like gunshot'

with the lack of response from the authorities. 'I think they are just waiting for us to die so the problem goes away for them,' Kayt says. **WE ARE GETTING NO HELP AT ALL** THE field outside Mick and Louise Ellis's home opened up overnight in August 2016. Over the next two weeks their swimming pool and driveway dropped by 8ft. Louise, 50, and the couple's children Georgina, 19, and Isabel, 15, returned to Aylesbury, Bucks, in December 2018 because the drive of the house they had bought in 2013 was now too dangerous. Mick, 63, a quality manager at the Mediterranean Hospital in Limassol, says: 'We sold our house in Aylesbury and everything we had to start our life out here. 'I do not earn enough to rent a property and at my age it will not be long before I retire — what then? 'My pension will not sustain me and my family as well as the rent. 'Going through the courts will take up to

but one part of the house has dropped half a yard,' the former probation officer says. 'We could hear the cracks. You can hear the bits of concrete crumbling onto the floor. It is heartbreaking.' The couple have been forced to borrow money and return to the UK. 'We worked all our lives to have a decent retirement and then your dream literally collapses around your ears,' Sheila, also a former probation officer, says. 'We are having to face facts that our home for 25 years is gone and we no longer have a home. 'No one from the government has come to see it for themselves. They can't predict a landslide, but they can help and they have a duty to do so.' **WE DON'T KNOW WHAT WE'LL DO** KATHERINE YEOMANS had been in love with Cyprus since holidaying there as a child. The mother of two and her husband Jeremy, 54, an accountant, sold everything and got a mortgage to buy their luxury three-bed house with a pool and moved over in December 2014. They had no idea the home was next to what would become a gaping fissure. Just two months after they moved in cracks began to appear in the garden, and by 2017 the pool had collapsed. The entire home has now twisted around by 5ft and is surrounded by rubble and fissures which widen every day. Katherine says: 'We've paid thousands to have things constantly repaired, but it's a losing battle. We still have €96,000 on the mortgage to pay off. We just don't know what to do. It's hopeless.'

### 15 years and the costs are enormous. We are being given no help at all.'

### GOVERNMENT HAS DUTY TO HELP US

GREAT-GRANDPARENTS Bill and Sheila Potter bought the land for their home in 1992 after visiting Cyprus on holiday and 'falling in love' with it. They sold everything they had in Huddersfield, West Yorkshire, and built the home themselves. 'The first Christmas present I bought Sheila was a cement mixer,' Bill, 69, says. 'It took two years to plan the house the way we wanted it; all the relevant surveys and checks were done and the architect told us everything was to a very high standard. We spent the next ten years gradually adding to the house, the pool and everything else.' They lived there happily until 2015, when cracks opened up all over. By 2016 the pool had to be filled in because its boundary walls had collapsed. 'The fissure has not just ripped it apart

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