

Movers, bakers & shakers  
MALTON

This pretty North Yorkshire market town is home to a raft of small food producers, the revamped coaching inn at its heart shining a spotlight on local herb-fed chicken, mellow nutty cheeses and rhubarb and raspberry gin

Words and photographs CLARE HARGREAVES



**A**s I watch Yorkshire farmer Ed Wilkinson's clutch of birds pecking at fragrant fronds, I wonder if this is the sweetest-smelling chicken farm in Britain.

Ed believes his free-range chickens are also among the tastiest in Britain, thanks to their special diet of herbs.

It started by accident. Ed trained as a chartered surveyor but, after a stint in London, the stone-walled fields of his native Yorkshire beckoned, so he returned to the family farm near Thirsk to raise turkeys and chickens. His aunt, meanwhile, had set up a herb-growing business and Ed noticed that the eggs produced by her chickens, fed on the waste herbs, were exceptionally flavoursome. He wondered how poultry fed on herbs would taste, so gave it a try.

"Birds are inquisitive and, as soon as they saw the herbs, went for them," says Ed. Like the rest of us, though, they have their dietary preferences. They prefer soft, aromatic herbs such as coriander and basil, both on the menu on the morning I visit **Herb Fed** ([herbfedpoultry.co.uk](http://herbfedpoultry.co.uk)). "They're less partial to hard herbs, and they won't touch sage," says Ed. "The herbs give an incredible depth of flavour."

Diet is equally important for the 35-odd butterscotch cows grazing the buttercup-studded meadows around **Botton Creamery** in Danby Dale, beneath the heather-clad rumps of the North York Moors. Most British dairy herds are Friesian, but here the cows are Dairy Shorthorns, native to this region, and their rich, unpasteurised milk is being turned into exquisite cheeses right on the bucolic farm itself.

Botton's standout cheese is Dale End, a tangy cheddar that can rival any of its better-known Somerset equivalents. The work of 'cheddaring' and pressing the cheeses into cloth-lined moulds is orchestrated by Alastair Pearson, aided by residents of the Camphill Community, which supports people with learning difficulties and mental-health issues. Each team member has a task, whether it's milking the cows, washing the cheeses or cleaning equipment.

If some of the other cheeses have a continental feel about them it's because Alastair learned his craft in Germany. »

LEFT: ED WILKINSON'S HENS BEGIN THEIR BASIL BUFFET

His Summer Fields, made to a Swiss recipe, is mellow and nutty, almost fudgy like a mature gruyère. There's Moorland Tomme and Yorkshire gouda, too.

With such outstanding produce on the doorstep, it's no surprise that, when I head south across the Moors to the newly revamped Talbot Inn, just off Malton's pretty market square, I find both Herb Fed chicken and Dale End cheddar on the menu. They sit alongside other local supplies, from honey from hives in the garden, to just-caught Whitby crab and hogget from Malton butcher Food 2 Remember ([food2remember.co.uk](http://food2remember.co.uk)). Chef Robert Brittain's style is to let ingredients speak for themselves, so Ed's chicken is simply spatchcocked and served with a herb mayonnaise and hand-cut chips or – appropriately, given its diet – over a basil-fragrant pistou soup. And Botton's cheddar gives a flavoursome punch to the signature twice-baked Dale End cheddar soufflé.

The inn's décor is equally relaxed, in a glamorous, playful sort of way. Ex-Lucky Onion stalwarts, Georgie and Sam Pearman, spruced up the 26-bedroomed Talbot earlier this year, bringing a modern style to the imposing 17th-century coaching inn. The sedate, white-tableclothed restaurant has been replaced by oak-floored rooms where modern art and antique finds rub alongside ancestral portraits. Eating is when and where you want. Already savoured the views of the watermeadows from the plant-draped Garden Room? Curl up by the log fires in the Snug, or slouch into a leather armchair beneath the wall-mounted wild boar in the navy-walled Upper Bar. Wherever you sit, jeaned and Converse-sneakered waiting staff miraculously appear.

The inn's transformation goes hand in hand with the drive by owner Tom Naylor-Leyland to turn Malton into Yorkshire's foodie capital. It's working: over the past four years, an impressive 26 food and drink businesses have set up shop in and around the town, and you can meet the region's food producers at Malton's annual food festival and monthly food market. Penetrate its narrow brick lanes and you'll even find the Malton Cookery School ([maltoncookeryschool.co.uk](http://maltoncookeryschool.co.uk)) and the Brass Castle micro-brewery: try its citrusy Sunshine pale ale in its streetside taproom or head back to the Talbot's bar to order a pint of its malty Northern Blonde ([brasscastle.co.uk](http://brasscastle.co.uk)).



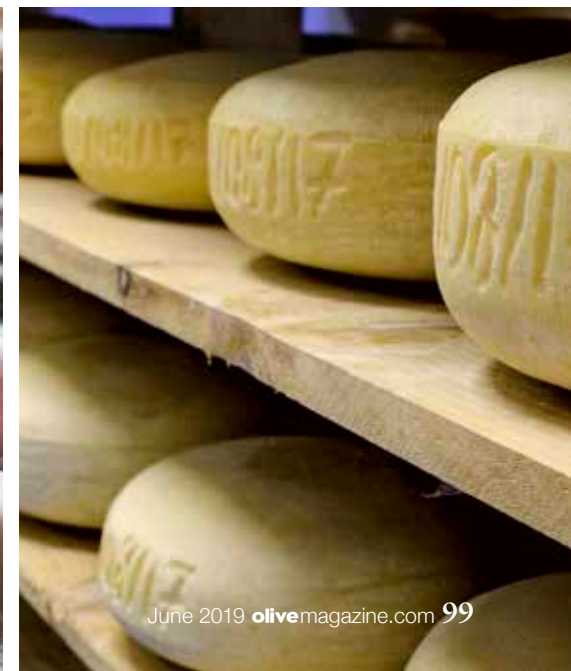
"Malton was facing the challenges that so many market towns faced, like out-of-town shopping and the rise of internet shopping. We had empty shops," says Tom. "I was in London's Borough Market and saw Yorkshire produce being celebrated, so I thought, why can't that produce be celebrated in Yorkshire itself?"

Thanks to Tom's efforts, the town's red-bricked Talbot Yard, which once stabled horses while their owners were victualled at the inn opposite, now accommodates several thriving food businesses. These include an artisan roaster, Roost ([roostcoffee.co.uk](http://roostcoffee.co.uk)), and the Bluebird Bakery, run by Nicky and Al Kippax ([bluebirdbakery.co.uk](http://bluebirdbakery.co.uk)). The Kippax's tiny Malton outlet may be little more than a multi-tiered trolley but the joy of it is that you can watch the bakers shaping their dough in the kitchen behind as you buy. And the cream-hued flour the bakery uses is grown by local farmers and milled by Philip Trevelyan on the fringes of the North York Moors National Park ([yorkshireorganicmillers.co.uk](http://yorkshireorganicmillers.co.uk)). I eat Bluebird's sourdough toasted for lunch at The Talbot, topped with pork terrine and a dollop of chutney made from local sloes by Sloemotion ([sloemotion.com](http://sloemotion.com)). »



ABOVE, FROM TOP: SETTLE IN FOR HERB-FED CHICKEN AND HAND-CUT CHIPS AT THE TALBOT INN; A MUSTARD AND TEAL BEDROOM; HOG A SEAT AT THE UPPER BAR. OPPOSITE, CLOCKWISE FROM TOP RIGHT: BLUEBIRD BAKERY'S HELEN LOWDELL; BOTTON CREAMERY CHEESES; COFFEE BEANS AT ROOST; JOFF CURTOYS WITH HIS RHUBARB AND RASPBERRY GIN; BRASS CASTLE'S TAPROOM

THE KIPPAX'S TINY MALTON OUTLET MAY BE LITTLE MORE THAN A MULTI-TIERED TROLLEY BUT THE JOY OF IT IS THAT YOU CAN WATCH THE BAKERS SHAPING THEIR DOUGH IN THE KITCHEN BEHIND AS YOU BUY



## EXPLORE

Come evening, I join locals, hotel guests and their dogs around the fire in The Talbot's vaulted lower bar, where bar manager David Jhugroo dispenses a range of local drinks against a backdrop of stuffed gamebirds.

In the non-alcoholic department, it's hard to beat the apple juice pressed by Cameron Smith inside the remains of a 12th-century manor in the village of Husthwaite, due west. An amateur historian, Cameron discovered that for the past three centuries Husthwaite's fertile soils and microclimate had made it famous for fruit growing (the village even supplied Captain Cook). Sadly its fruitful industry ground to a halt when the 60s Beeching cuts closed the railway line that took the fruit to market, and its orchards fell into neglect. Then,



### OVER THE PAST FOUR YEARS, AN IMPRESSIVE 26 FOOD AND DRINK BUSINESSES HAVE SET UP SHOP IN AND AROUND THE TOWN

a decade ago, with the help of grant funding, Cameron persuaded the village to replant its orchards to how they'd been in 1856. Today Husthwaite is again the 'Orchard Village' it traditionally was, producing a not-too-sweet apple juice, as well as three very drinkable ciders ([orchardsofhusthwaite.co.uk](http://orchardsofhusthwaite.co.uk)).

There's more apple action in the gardens around Malton, where fruits are being harnessed by university professors Alan and Kathryn Murray, property developer James Cleary and assorted family and friends, to make Malton Cider ([maltoncider.com](http://maltoncider.com)).

"We had two apple trees in our garden, James had a cider press and scrapper, so we said, let's have a go," Alan tells me. The cider started off being just for friends, then extended to community pressings. Eventually, the group started flavouring it with Yorkshire's most iconic crop, rhubarb, which happily also flourished in the Murrays' garden.

Rhubarb from Yorkshire's Rhubarb Triangle is also celebrated in a host of gins and liqueurs, the standout being the delicately blushing Hedgerow Gin made by Sloemotion. Conservationist-cum-businessman Joff Curtoys, who crafts it, actually started (more than a decade ago) by making sloe gin liqueur as a way of saving North Yorkshire's hedgerows and their wildlife. "By buying sloes from farmers we gave them a reason

to hang on to their hedges," Joff tells me. "Yellowhammers and buntings flourished."

Spotting the gin craze, in 2017 Joff returned to the hedges, this time to gather botanicals for a distilled Hedgerow Gin. Last year he launched a rhubarb and raspberry version – now his bestseller – that includes Timperley Early cultivated by John Dobson in the heart of the Rhubarb Triangle ([therhubarbtrianglefarmshop.co.uk](http://therhubarbtrianglefarmshop.co.uk)).

At the Talbot Bar, I try a combo of Joff's new gin with fresh raspberries, lemon juice and soda. Unlike so many rhubarb gins, it's dry and tangy, not syrupy sweet. If quaffing this helps save Yorkshire's birds and bees, I might just have to force down another.



### HOW TO DO IT

Doubles at The Talbot start from £100 ([talbotmalton.co.uk](http://talbotmalton.co.uk)). Malton's food market takes place on the second Saturday of each month; the town also hosts several food festivals ([visitmalton.co.uk](http://visitmalton.co.uk)). For more info about North York Moors food producers, see [tasteofthenorthyorkmoors.com](http://tasteofthenorthyorkmoors.com). Clare travelled to Malton with Cross Country Trains ([crosscountrytrains.co.uk](http://crosscountrytrains.co.uk)). Follow Clare on Instagram @larderloutUK.



FROM TOP: MILLER PHILIP TREVELYAN; RHUBARB AT MALTON FOOD MARKET; PORK TERRINE WITH SLOE CHUTNEY AT THE TALBOT