



THE GREAT BRITISH CHALLENGE

WORDS BY FOOD EDITOR, REGAN MALONEY.

Did you know that March celebrates British Pie Week? That it was National Carrot Day on the 3rd February, or that 2,000 year old oyster shells found in Italy originated from Whitstable? ...neither did I! and so being a passionate supporter of homemade, home-grown and seasonal produce, with a yearning to know more about the history of British food and where it's from, I set myself the ultimate British challenge. I am making it my mission to Find, Eat or Make something British every day throughout 2012. So far, I've made some amazing discoveries, a lot of which have been right on our Kent doorstep, and some that are worth a journey, and so I thought that as we hit Spring, I'd share the best of the year so far with you.



EAT

The Pig, is a hidden gem in the New Forest. Describing itself as a 'restaurant with rooms', it rears, grows and sources all of its food within a 25-mile

radius of Brockenhurst. Being only an hour and a half drive from where I live in Kent, it seemed the ideal destination to help inspire and feed the Challenge. From the moment we arrived, I had access to handmade local chocolates, Kent Oyster and Vinegar crisps, and Dorset tea in the minibar. For dinner, we were presented with a selection of amazing 'piggy' treats from ham hock scotch eggs, crunchy pork scratchings and sticky baby ribs – I even had a gin & tonic jelly with popping candy for dessert!

The breakfast was simply unbelievable – fresh milk served in cute little bottles,

eggs from their own chickens, a fully cooked breakfast comprising homemade black and white pudding, home grown mushrooms and tomatoes, and a selection of other meats all reared and cured locally. The self service table was full of simple, home grown fruits and oats, soaked and infused by the chefs very own hands, home baked breads with homemade preserves... the list just goes on. This really has, so far been the highlight of the 'Eat' part of my year, and I'd recommend that anyone who's looking for a foodie weekend, and a little R&R in the country consider going. www.thepighotel.co.uk

FIND

I've uncovered so many interesting facts about British cuisine, the most surprising of which was that we have over 700 different types of cheeses in the British Isles at the moment – giving the French a real run for their money. Kent is producing some great

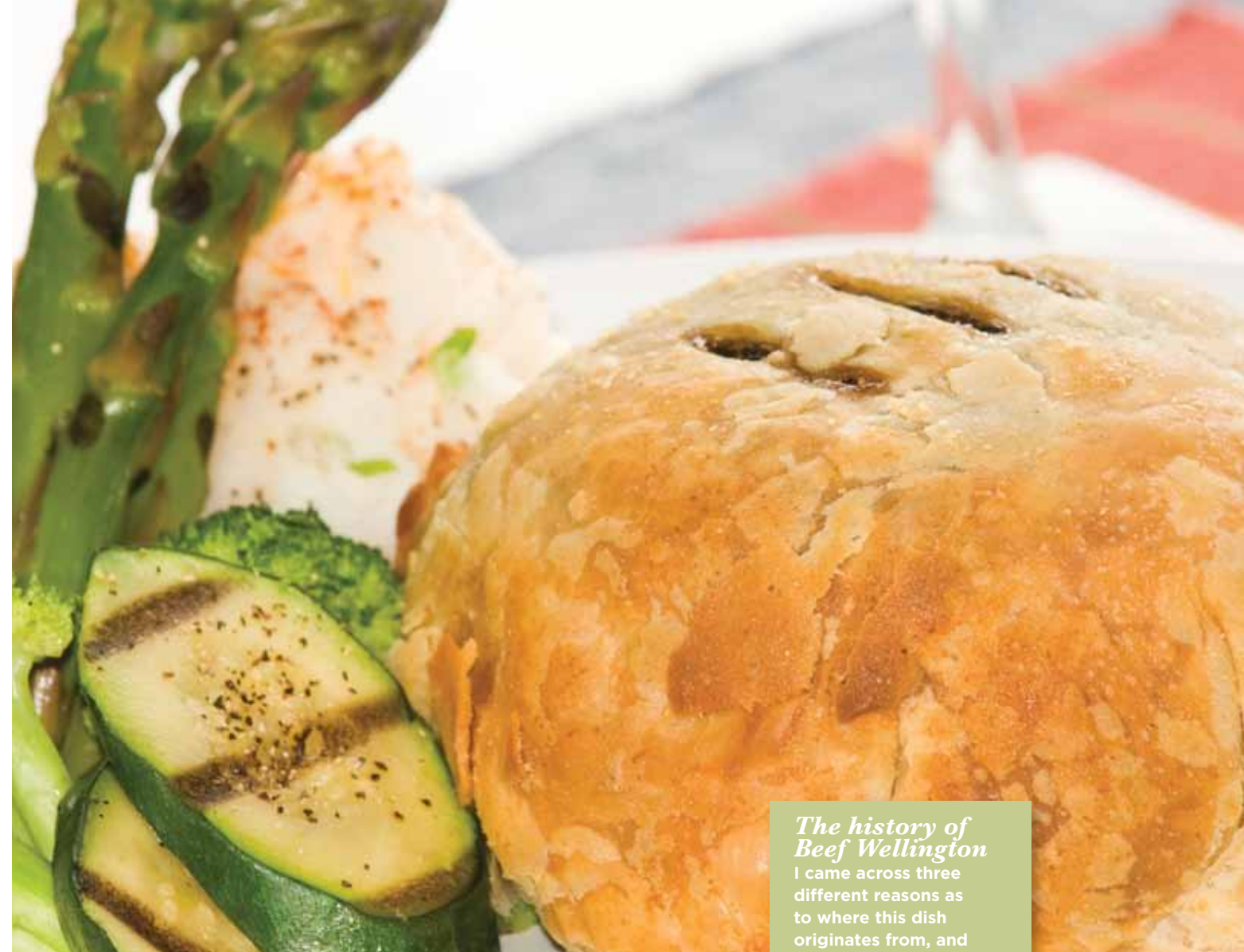


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ones, with 'Winterdale Shaw Cheddar', matured in chalk caves under the barn of where it's made in the North Downs of Kent, and 'The Cheesemakers of Canterbury', who are producing some delicious smoked, blue and goats cheeses.

Another great 'Find' has been The Farm Shop – a quirky establishment located on Westerham Road. It's like a teeny tiny slice of British heaven at the end of a row of cottages, and it's run and owned by a lovely lady who bakes all of her own cakes, and sources every item from local farmers and producers. It has everything from preserves and local meats, to homemade gifts and crafts.

There are loads more great 'finds' all plotted on a handy map on my Great British Challenge website www.thegreatbritishchallenge.com



The history of Beef Wellington

I came across three different reasons as to where this dish originates from, and why it was named 'Wellington'. I think my favourite is that it was supposedly named after a particularly shiny pair of wellington boots, which were shaped like the the beef when it was first cooked. Others suggest that it was named after the winner of the Waterloo battle in 1815, (Arthur Wellesley, the Duke of Wellington). One of his cooks, wanting to honor the Duke, is said to have created this dish to serve him one night at dinner. The final theory is that it is in fact of Irish origin, and should be called 'Steig Wellington'. Whichever the correct story, I'm just pleased that the British have embraced it.

MAKE

The 'Make' side of the Challenge has been great fun – I hosted a 'Great British Supper Club' with fellow foodie Jane Kerr in a secret location in Bromley, with each course representing England, Ireland, Scotland and Wales and I've been re-creating British treasures at home such as Jamie Dodgers. But the most popular recipe so far has to be my Lamb Wellingtons. The traditional version is of course 'Beef Wellington', but I thought I'd put a modern day spin on it.

LAMB WELLINGTON

Ingredients:

1 x large, meaty lamb neck
10 x large sized white button mushrooms
1 tin of anchovies
1 sprig of rosemary
1 pack of ready rolled puff pastry
Salt & freshly ground black pepper
1 egg yolk
- makes one large wellington to serve 2 people -

Instructions:

1. Roughly chop the mushrooms, rosemary and anchovies, and place in a food blender with salt and pepper. Blitz until it's turned to a thick pulp.
2. Roll out the pastry and smear the mixture, around half a centimetre thick in to the middle.
3. Place the lambs neck in the middle of the mixture and then roll the pastry over so that the lamb has an even coating of the mixture, and the whole lot is completely covered with pastry.
4. Brush the top of the pastry with egg white, and then place on a baking tray, in the middle of a pre-heated oven for 20 minutes on Gasmark 6, or until the lamb has cooked through (as this is lamb neck, the meat should not be pink as the fat needs time to soften).



If you'd like to get involved, or find out more about Regan's Great British Challenge, visit www.thegreatbritishchallenge.com