



**Monday 31<sup>st</sup> July 2023**

Dear Customer,

I hope this finds you well. It's Sunday, and foul yet again. It just won't stop raining. My friend called in here for lunch today on her habitual drive from the south of France to the north of Scotland. She looked tired, had aquaplaned all the way. The forecast for the next two weeks shows only more of the same. Finally the English season is getting into full swing. We have the first sweetcorn of the season in the bags from Suffolk; we have cavolo nero, lettuces, courgettes and Gatsby new potatoes from Herefordshire; and broccoli from peaty Lincolnshire.

Here are a few tasty recipes you could try this week:

#### **Cavolo Nero and Red Pepper Omelette**

olive oil	1 small onion
1 green chilli	1 red ramiro pepper
2 Hen Nation eggs	salt and pepper
Cheddar cheese, grated	cavolo, shredded

Steam the cavolo nero until tender but still with some bite. Heat the oil in a pan. Finely chop the onion, green chilli and red pepper and fry for three minutes. Add the steamed cavolo and cook a few minutes more until wilted, then transfer to a bowl. Add a little more oil to the pan. Mix the eggs together briefly and season with salt and pepper. Once the oil starts to smoke a little, fry the eggs without stirring for a minute then add the vegetables and cheese. Fry for another three to four minutes until the eggs are set. If necessary, tip the pan slightly so uncooked egg runs to the edges where it will cook more quickly. Sprinkle with some more salt and serve without folding.

#### **Lemony Broccoli and Potato Smash**

700g new potatoes, scrubbed, coarsely chopped	1 head broccoli, cut into florets, stems thinly sliced
40g margarine	1 tsp finely grated lemon rind
1 garlic clove, crushed	2 tbsp milk, warmed
¼ onion, very finely sliced ( or 2 spring onions / or chives	

Place potato and broccoli stems in a large saucepan. Cover with water. Bring to the boil over high heat. Season with salt. Cook for 10 minutes. Add broccoli florets and cook for 6-8 minutes or until vegetables are tender. Drain. Return to the pan. Meanwhile, combine the margarine, lemon rind and garlic in a small bowl. Add the margarine mixture to the potato mixture and smash until just combined. Add the milk the onion. Season. Beat with a wooden spoon until combined.

Not much happening here, all quiet. In fact, too quiet. I was walking on the Georgian racecourse yesterday and in the distance could hear ewes and lambs crying and bellowing. It's that unbearable time of year when they are separated. It's the saddest sound in the world. I always have to resist, and usually can't resist, going to them, as they call out, that visceral pull. We are all just animals. Some hear it as the quaint sounds of the countryside, all I hear is agony. When I got home the vast pasture of Westfields opposite my house was empty. It had been these ewes and lambs that have I have been watching since the spring, they were all gone.

Posts of commiseration kept flashing up on my screen from the local Facebook group. Seemingly 5 local businesses have folded in this last week alone. All of them had been here for decades: the Crossview Tearoom gone; Ravensworth Garden Centre gone; Pendleys Café gone; York House antique shop gone, the Fleece pub and restaurant gone – all in one single week. All citing rising costs and that they couldn't take it anymore. A lot is said about what interest rate rises are doing to our mortgages but not a lot about what they're doing to small businesses. Their loans and mortgage interest rates are far higher, and often with

homes secured on them. It's some grotesque version of Tipping Point. And another big one supposedly being dropped in again this week, another hike, another load of small businesses, home-owners and renters will be swept off the edge. Our new aspiration is survival.

On a positive note, some change is afoot in the countryside. I read yesterday that famous animal rights activist and badger-lover Brian May, Queen guitarist, had been to view the 9,500-acre Rothbury estate in Northumberland. Having been in the same family for 700 years, it is now on the market for £35 million. I don't know what took Brian so long actually to make such a move, but if he buys it, we can be sure the grouse shooting will end, nature will be restored and that it will become a wildlife haven.

The National Trust has now banned fox hunting on their 625,000 acres, though they aren't very good at policing it. United Utilities, England's largest corporate landowner, have just announced they will not be renewing the 24 grouse / pheasant shooting licences on their 140,000 acres when they expire. Aviva has acquired 16,000 acres in West Aberdeenshire and are working with Scottish Woodlands, to undertake peatland restoration as well as planting up 5000 acres of native woodland and 2,500 acres of conifers. Anyone not playing their part is 'oh so yesterday'.

I went for a walk in the parkland at nearby Hauxwell Hall the other day, home to Middle East diplomat Sir Robert Dalton. He has several thousand acres. There was no livestock at all anywhere. The grass in all the surrounding fields was thigh-high. Intriguing. Was he rewilding, signing up to one of the new environmental schemes. Further investigation and I was told that all the farm tenants were not having their tenancies renewed. I wondered if he might be amenable to having some conservation grazers, now in their senior years, to stay, if he might rent me some land. I wrote to him. It would be good to bring the sheep back, closer to Richmond. It's really beautiful there - lush, sheltered, and not next to the fastest rising river in the country which causes me so much anxiety.

I got an immediate message back from his daughter who he'd passed the letter to, who wants to meet me, had seen me on TV. I apparently had bought some Wensleydale sheep from her partner some time ago when I was buying up male lambs and 'spent' ewes, to save them from slaughter. She has 200 sheep of various breeds and now wants to find a way to do something with their wool. It could be interesting. And Mick, who looks after my sheep, lives just 2 miles from there.

Meanwhile, a trailer has just gone past loaded with crates of pheasant chicks. On their way to Whitcliffe woods at the end of the lane to start their new lives, which will last precisely until December when they will be shot.

Best wishes and hope you have a good week.....Isobel