

AROUND BRITAIN WITH A FORK

Matthew Fort on what the Kitchen Doctor did next



A few years back, Rosie Sykes' recipes graced these very pages. Some readers will remember that she was Weekend's Kitchen Doctor (a title later appropriated by lesser figures). Basically, the idea was that readers, faced with certain challenges in the kitchen, wrote in, laying out their problems – afraid of fish; veg-hating kids; dietary prohibitions; that kind of thing. Then, with great good humour and immaculate skill, Rosie would trek off to the household in question and rustle up a dazzling sequence of dishes, which would be scoffed down by the grateful reader and their families and friends. It was a cracking good column because Rosie was a cracking good cook.

Is a cracking good cook, I should say, because she never gave up the calling. She sees cooking as a way of making people happy. "And I like making people happy. My mum cooked every day, but she stopped when I was in my teens, and I sort of took over. Then my dad started asking for a spoon so he could clean his plate, and it all went from there."

She's been busy since she left these pages, but never more so than now, what with a pub kitchen to lash into shape and a book, *The Kitchen Revolution* (Ebury Press, £25), just out. She co-wrote *The KR* with Polly Russell and Zoe Heron, drawing on their experiences as working mothers and her own as the Kitchen Doctor. Hopefully the book will, she says, "help people organise themselves in the kitchen, and build their confidence about cooking".

She is "proud about staying more or less seasonal" in spite of the limited number of winter vegetables available in the UK. But seasonality is something she sets a good deal of store by. Respect for seasonal, and preferably local, ingredients was instilled into her by the two chefs she regards as her mentors: Joyce Molyneux, the goddess of the Carved Angel in Dartmouth, and Shaun Hill in his Merchant House days. "Joyce was the real reason I came into cooking," says Rosie. "I never felt she



Where to get it

The Olde Bell High Street, Hurley, near Maidenhead, Berkshire, 01628 825881

Gabriel Machin 7 Market Place, Henley-on-Thames, Oxon, 01491 574377

Kingcup Farm Willetts Lane, Denham, Bucks, 01895 832865
Stockings Farm Bottrells Lane, Coleshill, Amersham, Bucks, 01494 729418

Brown Sugar Stoke Row, Oxon, 01491 68290

CA Belcher & Son Cutbush Park, Danehill, Lower Earley, Reading, Berks, 0118 9752 4660

got the recognition she deserved. She was an amazing woman, but very shy. Shaun's just lovely, and a wonderful chef." The admiration is reciprocated – Hill tells me that Rosie's "a delight to have in the kitchen – she has a real passion for food".

Rosie has brought this passion for local and seasonal to her latest venture, the Olde Bell in Hurley, one of those home counties villages that reeks discreetly of money and rather less discreetly of tourism. The Olde Bell sits quietly near the heart of this genteel, Thames-side village, much as it has done since the year dot (or AD1135, according to a sign on the front). It has been brought into line with the 21st century in a respectful way, and has a vast garden at the back. Rosie doesn't own it, but her stamp is firmly on the menu, even though she has now handed over day-to-day cooking to Tony Arbanjo and Florence Fowler, both recently arrived from the much-lauded

Anchor & Hope in London. The food has about it a distinctive gastronomic intelligence and literacy – it's Europhile in a very English way, combining deft technique and direct flavours to draw the best out of carefully chosen ingredients.

Some of Rosie's meat comes from Gabriel Machin of Henley (which is a relief, seeing as the other week I said here that it's one of my favourite places to shop), lamb and Gloucester Old Spot pork from Stockings Farm in Amersham. Bread comes from Brown Sugar in Stoke Row, which uses flour from a local mill that grinds the wheat from local farms. Kingcup Farm provides some of the veg – "The first time they sent me some Swiss chard, I wept – literally. It was so fresh and good" – while Steve Belcher, an old-fashioned green-grocer in Reading, fills in the fruit and veg she can't get on her doorstep.

It's the kind of grub that sends you away happy, which, of course, is Rosie Sykes' mission in life.

