

Local Talent at Melplash

Reliving happy childhood memories, **Shirley Booth** shares her delight with the wealth of local talent in the West Dorset food community at this year's Melplash Show.



A caterpillar made from a tromboncino courgette with cress

This year's Melplash Show was again a celebration of local talent. The horticultural tent always brings back happy memories of my childhood, attending flower shows with my father (and entering—with my miniature garden and home made jam tarts!). Perhaps that is the reason the Children's Classes are the first thing I race to look at. They are a delight. The judges must have had a difficult time as there was so much creativity and imagination on display. In the class 'Favourite Animal Made From Vegetables', we found a tromboncino courgette with cress growing through to represent a caterpillar and, in the younger section, an endearing cat made from a melon—both first prize winners! There were classes for A Musical Instrument Made From Vegetables and Miniature Village in a Seed Tray, amongst others. All were entertaining and inspiring and it was encouraging to see what children can think of and construct, as there were plenty of entries without prizes which were equally deserving of a win. I heartily recommend encouraging your children to enter. It is a lot of fun and, even if you don't win—there is always next year!

Representing local talent in the cookery theatre was Jamie Pimbley from The West Bay Hotel where he is busy building on the fine reputation forged at The Half Moon in Melplash. And there was some nationally recognised local talent from Mark Hix MBE, who needs no introduction to readers of *The Marshwood Vale Magazine*. Mark enthralled the crowd in his usual down to earth and entertaining style, whilst demonstrating some intriguing recipes with

octopus: grilled with a sweetened cider vinegar and greengage sauce; roasted with a mix of seashore vegetables in a ginger dressing. Mark is an expert forager, and explained how he was using foraged vegetables which can be found along the estuary in Bridport. For those similarly inspired, he also runs courses in foraging—a day spent with Hix and Wild is informative and fun, with plenty of chat and bonhomie, culminating in the eating of an imaginative and delicious meal around Mark's Kitchen Table with other members of the group.

A life-long supporter of British fishermen, Mark finished with an impassioned plea for us to support them too by becoming more aware of where our fish comes from—how it is raised, and whether it's sustainably fished; and expressed his anger at how small EU boats are able to land under-sized fish from our waters, yet we are forbidden to use small boats to do the same. 'We've given up our fishing rights to Europe' he lamented. At the end of the presentation the dishes that Mark had prepared (together with some of the actual china dishes!) were auctioned off. A generous member of the audience gave thirty pounds for the star dish of grilled octopus, and over a hundred pounds was raised for charity. Many thanks go to Mark for supporting our local show once again.

A truly uplifting story followed in the next presentation, told by Mark Banham, Wine and Spirit Education Trust (WSET) Diploma holder and judge who, as Trade Ambassador, was presenting locally-made wines from Furleigh Estate, just outside Bridport. The story of Furleigh is a story of chance and synchronicity. The 85 acre estate was for many years a dairy farm, until the mid 1990s when it was sold. But fate was to intervene when, some years later, it came back on the market and one of the daughters of the original farming family, Rebecca Hansford, who was now working in the city, was told by her parents that it was for sale. So of course she had to buy it! She completed the purchase on Christmas Eve 2004; and, with the help of her husband and winemaker Ian Edwards, set about turning it into a vineyard, planting 22,000 vines. Furleigh's very first vintage, a mere five years later in 2009, was entered into the French competition *Effervescents du Monde*, and won Gold. Quite an achievement, especially as they were the first English vineyard to do so.

Mark clearly enjoyed telling us the story, and then

proceeded to give us a masterclass in wine tasting, as taught by the WSET : first use your eyes, then nose; then swirl, and slurp. He explained that ‘length’—how much of the flavour stays in your mouth is always an indicator of quality—and Furleigh’s wines have plenty of that.

All Furleigh’s wines are estate-bottled: the grapes are grown, pressed, fermented, aged and finally bottled on the estate, something of which Rebecca is very proud. We had time to taste three of their signature sparkling wines: *Bacchus 10*, so-called because of its low alcohol content at 10%, had an elderflower nose with notes of melon and lemon on the palate—fresh clean and balanced; next came *Wessex Heathland* made from a blend of 60% Chardonnay grapes, 20% Pinot Noir and 20% Pinot Meunier. This had more biscuity notes, was crisp and creamy, and ages well. Finally we tasted Furleigh’s signature fizz—*Wessex Hills*. This is made in classic cuvee proportions (a third each of the classic Champagne varieties Chardonnay, Pinot Noir and Pinot Meunier), and spends five years on the lees, which gives it a round and rich flavour: “definitely a superior fizz”, I noted. Furleigh’s wines have gone on to achieve many more accolades, winning numerous awards and competitions. With Ian Edwards having even been named UK Wine Maker of the Year in 2012, Furleigh are definitely putting our little corner of West Dorset on the map.

As well as celebrating local food and drink there was an Italian flavour to the cookery theatre: Chiara Tomasoni, Head Chef at River Cottage, kicked off the demonstrations, and went on to judge in the Food Hall, awarding a first to Baboo Gelato (does that sound Italian?) and second to Mercato Italiano, a food and restaurant hub run by Bridport’s favourite Italian resident and adoptee, Ilaria Padovani.

Italy again featured strongly in the final drinks presentation. David Blacklock Smith has spent many years as a mixologist, previously working at Hix, but he is now shaking the flask at Mercato Nero, upstairs from Mercato Italiano,

David demonstrated three cocktails, and gave us some good tips: for example, keep vermouth in the fridge. Many people make the mistake of having a bottle languishing at room temperature, just as they also mistakenly do with sherry. He explained how he makes his own Saffron Gin, and how the added flavour is not used to mask inferior ingredients—a premium Italian brand of gin is always used. As is the vodka in their own limoncello—a clean 44% abv vodka, so it’s stronger than most. In fact, David kindly shared with us how he can make limoncello at little more than a moment’s notice if they run out. It’s almost a trade secret but, by vacuum packing the spirit and lemon, and immersing the package in a Bain Marie style hot water bath (temperature secret!),



Mark Hix at this year’s Melplash Show

he can have limoncello ready in hours, rather than the months it usually takes. After such an intriguing explanation, we had to taste it, and we were all offered a taste of his signature cocktail, Limoncello Spritz, made only with Prosecco and Limoncello. David explained that they don’t add soda, as he feels it waters it down too much. And indeed it was delicious.

Every year at Melplash I intend to see more of the animals—it is an Agricultural Show after all—but sadly there wasn’t enough time. Not even for the adorable goats, but I did catch a little bit of a Guide Dog Demonstration—and heard a moving and uplifting talk from a guide dog owner, who told us a how his dog had given him back the will to live after losing his sight. Guide Dogs is a very worthwhile charity to support.

I just had time to call in to the Home Produce tent to pick up something very special. After my surprising success with a first prize in the Flower Wine category last year, I had been inspired to enter again—this time with home-made liqueurs. Again, to my astonishment, I won a first and second, as well as a trophy for ‘The Best Exhibit in the Wine, Spirits & Cordial Classes’. I hope our local children will be similarly inspired to have fun entering the show, and I look forward to seeing their entries, but probably not in the wine class just yet!

In the younger section, a cat made from a melon.

