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Opening Extract from...

The Devon Food Book

Written by Carol Trewin
Photography by Adam Woolfitt

Published by Flagon Press

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THE DEVON FOOD BOOK

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FLAGON PRESS

First Published in 2010 by
Flagon Press
Forge House, Fore Street
Winsham, Chard
Somerset TA20 4DY
www.james-crowden.co.uk

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Visit the Devon Food Book website
www.thedevonfoodbook.co.uk

ISBN 978-0-9557073-9-1

British Library and Cataloguing-in-Production Data.
A catalogue record for this book is available from
The British Library.

Design Andrew Crane
<http://andrewcrane.posterous.com/>
Typeset in Formata and Bodoni



Printed and bound by Butler Tanner & Dennis, Frome, Somerset
www.butlertanneranddennis.com/

►
*Rainbow over the red
sandstone cliffs of
Salcombe Hill, Sidmouth*





*Nutcombe on the
edge of the Exmoor
National Park above
Combe Martin*

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Acknowledgements

Getting the Devon Food Book researched, written, photographed, designed and printed on time has been a major undertaking, not least because of the size of Devon, two coasts and two moors, as well as the depth and breadth of its history. Before she died, Carol Trewin had envisaged a book along the lines of *Gourmet Cornwall* but it soon became apparent that the Devon book would have to be far larger and more comprehensive.

The Devon Food Book has been published with sponsorship from a wide range of food producers and organizations. It is very much a community publication and has the backing of many Devon food and drink producers. In particular the publishers would like to thank all those that have contributed either financially or in kind: Michael Caines, Gidleigh Park and ABode, Devon County Council, Tamar Valley AONB, Brend Hotels, Mole Valley Farmers, Jilly Greed, One Voice Media & PR, Little Comfort Farm, North Devon Plus, Devon Farms, Food and Drink Devon, Ocombe Farm, Riverford Organic Vegetables, Darts Farm Shop, Paul Parnell, Jack in the Green, Peter and Henrietta Greig, Pipers Farm, Andrew Maunder, Lloyd Maunder, Patrick McCaig, Otter Brewery, Luppitt, Richard Haddock, Churston Traditional Farm Shop, Plymouth Gin and Guy Crowden. The publishers would also like to thank all the other food and drink producers featured as well as the farmers and chefs, the market traders and shop keepers who gave up their time to be interviewed and photographed as well as members of Slow Food Devon who have all been incredibly supportive. In some ways the book has now evolved into a social history of Devon as well as a food document.

On the design side I am very grateful indeed to Andrew Crane for his patience and artistic flair in producing such a stunning book, to Adam Woolfitt for his breathtaking colour photography, style and precise eye. To Ann Wilson of George Nympton not only for copious research and editing but for her long hours of administrative work behind the scenes. To Jennie Rayment for trying out all twenty five recipes. To Chris Chapman for the Headland Warren and Three Rabbits photographs. To Sue Andrew for the stag roof boss photograph. To Tom Greeves for information on Dartmoor, warrens, rabbits, hares and tin mining. To Sally Vincent and Denise O’Leary for help with interviews, to Nell Barrington and Guy Crowden for proof reading and to Jenny de Gex for sourcing two pictures at short notice.

To Flaydemouse of Yeovil for scanning and to Butler, Tanner and Dennis of Frome for printing. To the eminent chefs and food writers who paid tribute to Carol Trewin and to Carol herself for persevering with the book when others might well have thrown in the sponge. To the staff and doctors of Derriford Hospital, Plymouth who tried their very best to accommodate having a writer on their ward and to all Carol’s friends from the Western Morning News who kept her spirits up right to the very end.

The book is fine tribute to Devon’s food and drink producers but also to Carol Trewin herself and the fine tradition of food journalism that she pioneered in the South West.

James Crowden

Chittlehampton Church near
Umberleigh. North Devon





Thatcher's tools
Newton Poppleford

Tributes to Carol Trewin 1953-2009

“The story of food in Devon is a complex and intertwined one. As a journalist, Carol Trewin understood these complexities, drawing vital connections between farmers and fisherman, artisan food producers, chefs and ordinary food consumers. She had an innate understanding of the importance of such issues as regionality, traceability, and seasonality, long before they became popular buzzwords. Carol helped to define and redefine the food culture of our region. I have long maintained that Devon has the best larder in Europe. The Devon Food Book is magnificent proof of this and a lasting legacy to Carol’s life and work.”

MICHAEL CAINES MBE Executive Chef at Gidleigh Park, The Bath Priory, and Michael Caines Restaurants

We were very lucky to have a journalist of Carol’s calibre covering food and drink in Devon and Cornwall. She had a real love of everything local but because she was such a good writer whatever she chose to write about from local fishing and seafood through to her overriding passion for the Devon and Cornwall food industry was of great value. She was such a lovely person and will be sadly missed.

RICK STEIN Padstow

Carol was an amazing woman, her support and passion for the West Country food and farming industry was second to none. She was kind and generous and will be truly missed.

MARK HIX Hix Oyster and Fish House, Lyme Regis

Carol not only had the greatest in-depth knowledge of farming, food and drink in Devon, she was also such a talented writer who observed always with the utmost clarity and honesty. In The Devon Food Book, she explains and records myriad complex subjects objectively and totally without sentiment, placing food traditions and production within an historical, cultural and human perspective. Her keen, enquiring mind delves far beyond the surface of our beautiful Devon landscape to unearth and chart not just the glories of the Devon table, but also stories of the hardships, mistaken food policies, and politics that have inevitably had an impact on the foods that we eat and enjoy today.

MARC MILLON food, wine and travel author, member of Slow Food Devon, Topsham



OVERLEAF
*From Cadbury Cross looking
towards Chapeltown between
Bickleigh and Crediton*

►
Clovelly fishermen c. 1899

◄
*The Iron Coast: Shipload Bay
looking towards Hartland Point*

HARTLAND POINT is majestic and stubborn. This rocky headland with its small lighthouse, set in the far north-western edge of the Devon coast, juts out into the sea at the exact spot where the North Atlantic meets the Bristol Channel. In the distance lies Lundy, an island famed for its puffins and pirates. It is hard to imagine, standing on the windswept cliffs that anywhere could be less hospitable on a grey winter's day. Giant waves pummel the cliffs three hundred and fifty feet below and relentless gales lash the rugged coastline. This, the most remote of Devon's parishes, is surrounded on two sides by the sea. Yet only a mile or two inland, in the Hartland Village Hall the monthly farmers' market gives a strong clue to the burgeoning food renaissance in this part of the county, not previously famed for either its fish markets or the lushness of its pastures. This was once one of the least fertile agricultural



areas of Devon and proved a very tough coastline for fishermen endeavouring to make a living, because it was and still is, a very long way from any centres of population. This remoteness, local distinctiveness and need for survival has over the centuries changed the profile of not just the landscape but of the food that is found there. In *Moortown Diary*, Ted Hughes says that he thought Yorkshire was remote, until he saw the 'isolated self-sufficiency' of the old North Devon farmers, which was 'like nothing else he had ever encountered'.

At almost the diametrically opposite end of the county lies Beer, one of the last beach fisheries in England. Here a handful of boats catch their share of the rich South West stocks of fish and shellfish. Once the catch is landed, the boats are then winched or towed up the pebble beach by

tractors and come to rest, their gaily painted hulls jauntily wedged in a ragged line. The dramatic chalk cliffs rearing up out of the sea are part of the historic Jurassic coast, but move slightly inland and the rich, fertile farmland of East Devon produces an abundance of livestock, crops and vegetables.



▲
Beer- fishing boats and beach huts

This is the point about Devon. Although it is little more than 70 miles from coast to coast at its broadest point, it is a county of many contrasting landscapes. From north to south, east to west, the agriculture is finely tuned and in the centre, overshadowing most of the county, the great brooding granite mass of Dartmoor. It is this very diversity of the landscape that has created a rich larder of food and drink - ingredients that make Devon one of the most sought after destinations for gourmets, chefs and food connoisseurs.

It is a county of two moors - Dartmoor and Exmoor - two coasts, north and south and literally dozens of rivers, some running north-south through drowned river valleys, known as rias, and others finding their way lazily to the sea, meandering through traditional water meadows and lush pastures.

Take your pick from the Exe (the longest) and the Dart, to the Taw, Torridge, Teign, Tavy (the fastest), and the Tamar. Also not to be overlooked are the Otter, the Yarty, the Axe and a whole host of short, fast rivers

▶ ▶
Widcombe-in-the-Moor





▲ *Drying the salmon fishing nets, on the Dart c 1899*

running pell-mell down steep ravines from Dartmoor's peat laden and spongy bogs like the Plym, the Meavy, the Yealm, Avon and the Erme. It is these rivers connecting the moorland to the sea which make Devon's farming so varied. And this gave rise to a unique form of transhumance where most of the county had rights to drive their cattle and sheep up onto the high moorland pastures where they were looked after by the quarter men for most of the summer and then driven

down to the markets in autumn. Tightly controlled common grazing often with hereditary rights. A form of extensive summer ranching, semi-nomadic in nature.

Over the centuries the development of farming crops and livestock has given rise to a well balanced agriculture, producing everything from beef to milk and clotted cream, to a wonderful range of cheeses. Sadly the traditional cycle between dairy and pig farming, using up surplus whey, has been largely lost, but pigs also came into their own as part of the orchard tradition, either eating unwanted windfalls or the lucky recipients of



► *South Devons tucking into pomace from Heron Valley Cider Farm, Crannacombe, Loddiswell*



▲ *Treatise on Cider by John Worlidge 1678*

pomace and pulp at the end of cider making. Vegetables too have been a far greater part of Devon's agriculture than many realise - cabbages, broccoli and cauliflower are widely grown on the south coast, early potatoes as well as main crop potatoes, and for more than a century the market gardens of the Tamar valley were a centre for the earliest soft fruits and a great source of apples and plums. Even Seakale was first domesticated in South Devon.

Oliver Cromwell, who visited Devon on campaign during the Civil War in the autumn of 1645 and the spring of 1646, reckoned that 'the husbandry of Devon was the best he had seen in the whole country', and he should know, having to feed his troops at every town, village and farmstead. No doubt this was because of their early history of enclosures. Cromwell visited Ottery St Mary, Bovey Tracey, Ashburton and Torrington. It goes without saying that the Devon cattle, which eventually became the Red Rubies of the North and South Devons of the South Hams, would have been highly prized.

In the 21st century enterprising growers have extended not only the seasonal range of the crops but the varieties available - think Branton asparagus, hemp (for seeds and oils). With one eye on future climate change, experiments have been conducted with olive growing in the Tamar



► *A Devon Bull belonging to Mr W Porter of Hembury Fort, Buckwell near Honiton for which a prize of £30 was awarded at the RSA Meeting at Cambridge 1840*

Valley and there are more than a dozen productive vineyards in the county.

Historically Devon was a county that for hundreds of years had also shown enormous ingenuity with development and a keen spirit of exploration. From the early fishermen taking enormous risks to sail to Newfoundland as part of the salt cod trade, to the men of war and pirates,