

Left: Jacobo Britton statue in the nave of Durham Cathedral. Durham Cathedral is the greatest Norman building in England, perhaps even in Europe. It is cherished not only for its architecture but also for its incomparable setting.

Clockwise from top left: Greek olives for sale at a continental market in Northumberland; Cattle farmers with their herd of Jersey cows; market place, Saint Nicholas Church, Durham; a shop sign at Craster in Northumberland; an artisan cheese maker from the Northumberland Cheese Company; Lucy Carroll of Carroll's Heritage Potatoes, which she and her husband Anthony run; salad Blue, Burgundy Red and Shetland Black heritage potatoes.

It's a beautiful autumnal day in the North East of England. Precisely the kind that defies those 'British weather' jibes; leaves are seasonally bronzed, the sky is near cloudless, and a morning sun warms the first breath of winter air.

Across a cobbled courtyard, and bathed in an almost ethereal light is Durham Cathedral. Each year thousands of visitors descend on the medieval (and university) city of Durham to view the famous building. Boasting remarkable Romanesque architecture, the cathedral was constructed in 1093 and completed 40 years later. Today it is considered to be among the greatest architectural experiences in Europe.

This is just one of many historical sites to be found across the North East, which stretches from the 'counties' of Northumberland in the north (bordering Scotland) to Tees Valley in the south, with County Durham and Tyne and Wear in between.

Entrenched in history, the North East is home to several country homes and English gardens, and has more castles than any other region – a result of border battles with its northern neighbour, Scotland, several centuries ago.

Given the surrounding countryside and fertile farmland, it's not entirely surprising food is amongst the many selling points (including shopping, galleries and theatre). Local produce is easily attainable and of exceptional quality. Specialist butchers, fruit growers, farm shops, delis, cosy bistros and high-end restaurants have encouraged a renewed interest in local produce, which shows no signs of slowing.

With this in mind, the free guide 'Taste Durham' was launched to promote cafés, farm shops, restaurants and hotels within the city and county of Durham, detailing the service, quality of menu and use of local produce. The superb Seaham Hall Hotel, a short drive from Durham, is included – and rated highly. In fact dining at the hotel's restaurant The White Room is an absolute must (take our word for it, the food is divine).

At the helm of the restaurant is Michelin-star chef Kenny Atkinson. The young chef featured on the BBC television series *Great British Menu*,

and has made quite a name for himself both regionally and nationally. Where possible, Atkinson uses local producers and Freemans Butchers is among them. A third-generation family business, and National Catering Butcher of the Year, their beef is aged on the bone for a minimum of 21 days, which intensifies the flavour and tenderises the meat.

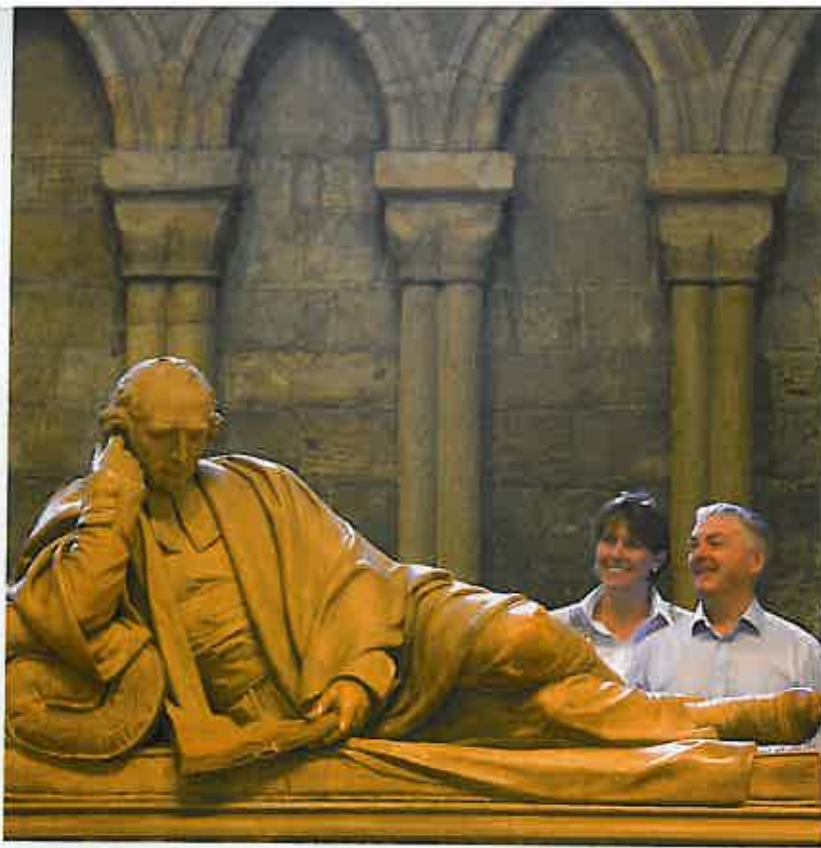
As any great chef knows, presentation is as important as taste. Therefore to add interest to a plate, the restaurant will often use Carroll's Heritage Potatoes.

Located on Tiptoe Farm in Northumberland and overlooking the River Till, the farm produces a range of unusual, if not forgotten, varieties. For example a Highland Burgundy Red (1936) is floury, with a red hue, while a Salad Blue (1900s) has vibrant purple skin. These aren't merely novelty potatoes either. Each of the 14 varieties are packed with flavour and lend themselves to different cooking methods.

Local producers such as Carroll's regularly sell their products at farmers' markets, which have grown increasingly popular in recent years. Alnwick and Hexham are two of the best. Alnwick, home of Alnwick Castle, (used as Hogwarts in the *Harry Potter* films) and the stunning Alnwick Garden (complete with its very own tree house restaurant), hosts a farmers' market on the last Friday of every month.

Further south in Hexham, an award-winning farmers' market takes place on the second and fourth Saturday of the month. Food miles are kept to a minimum as all stallholders come from within a 50-mile radius. Rare breed beef, organic vegetables, hand-smoked game, fresh mussels, jams, pickles, cheeses and breads are among the many items to be perused and bought whilst overlooked by the town's impressive abbey. Northumberland Cheese Company is a regular stallholder and FOOD was invited to their farm in Blagdon to learn about the cheese-making process.

The company first began making cheese in 1984, using the milk from their own sheep. Today they have added goat's and cow's milk to their repertoire from which they make 16 artisan cheeses. Their range is divided into cellar-aged cheeses (that are encouraged to develop a surface



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