

**FREE Pimms  
and  
lemonade  
with every  
picnic**

Page 25



Wine – page 24

TheJournal

# taste

## OF THE NORTH EAST

# Sing out the names of our heroes

A nationwide search is under way to find Britain's best food champions. **Jane Hall** looks at some of the region's early contenders.

**FAST food was once hailed as the culinary saviour of our fast-paced world.**

Burgers, ready-made meals and pizzas, we were told, were going to be the nutritional answer for all those too busy or too stressed to spend more than five minutes topping up their energy levels.

It all sounded too good to be true – and so it has proved.

Britons spend more than £52bn on food every year – more than 90% of that on processed fare. But the popularity of convenience meals has been linked to the rise in obesity and type 2 diabetes, both of which are soaring in the UK and other affluent nations.

There can be few people today who now don't know that junk food is bad for you.

Which may be why the clamour for organic, traceable and locally generated produce is growing louder by the month.

There is a new eagerness to discover the provenance and traceability of what we eat, resulting in a greater pride in the extraordinary diversity of British regional food and drink.

Farmers' markets, local food festivals, and agricultural shows up and down the country are on the rise in urban as well as rural areas. Caterers and retailers are also sourcing more regional produce.

Now the unique contribution these local food champions make – a £3.6bn trade supporting over 50,000 full-time employees – is to be honoured with the launch of the inaugural Local Food Hero Awards.

Led by celebrity chef Gary Rhodes and backed by UKTV Food, the awards are a tribute to everyone who tirelessly puts British produce onto plates, into shops and markets and on pub and restaurant tables.

This is celebrating homegrown local success stories – and those individuals who have gone the extra mile, the food heroes who don't compromise on quality in favour of a fast buck on mass production lines.

Celebrity chef judges and regional experts will help uncover Britain's hidden food talents, but the lion's share of the decision is being left to the public, who have until August 21 to nominate and vote for their favourite producer.

Shortlisted nominees will then battle it out in a celebratory 11-part UKTV Food series hosted by Rhodes.

There are already 15 nominees from the North-East and 18 from Cumbria.

They include Melmerby's famous Village Bakery in Penrith, Cumbria, and Robson's of Craster in Northumberland, renowned the world over for its smoked kippers.

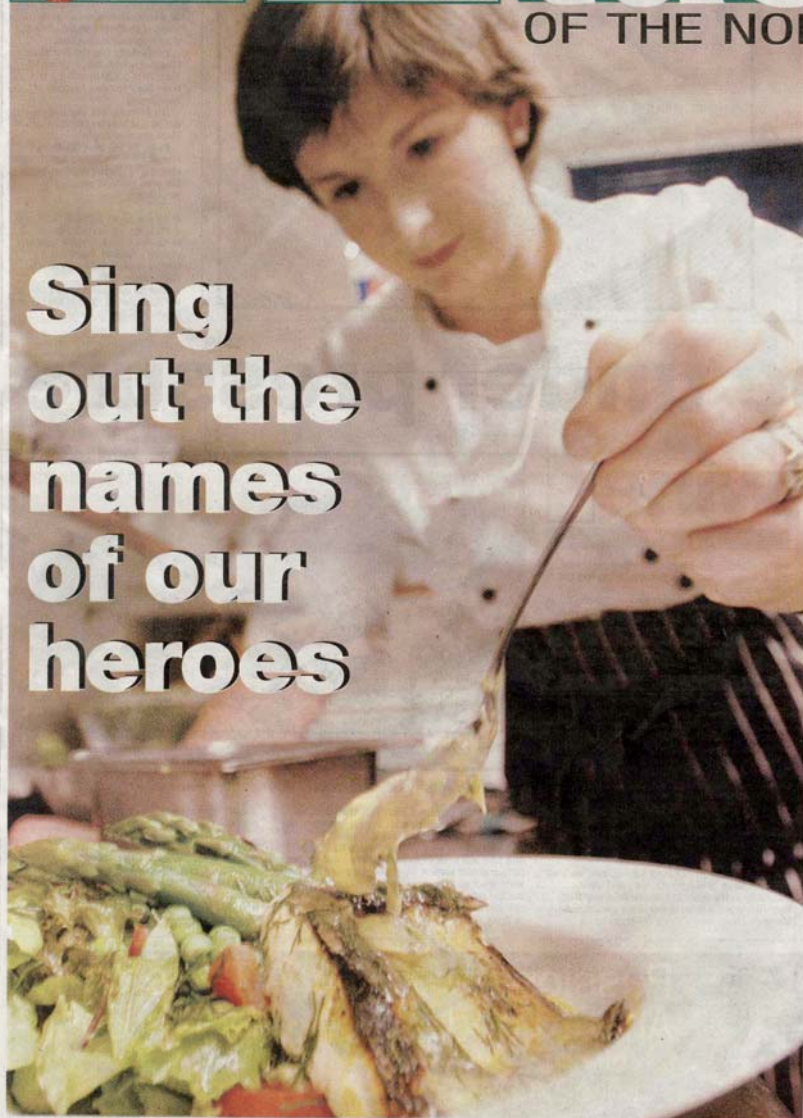
Also on the North-East list is Carroll's Heritage Potatoes from Cornhill-on-Tweed, Northumberland.

Run by husband and wife team Anthony and Lucy Carroll, the business at Tiptoe Farm in the beautiful River Till Valley keeps once popular potato breeds in the public eye.

All 23 varieties available predate the 1950s, with some as old as 1856.

Two generations of Carrolls have farmed at Tiptoe and Anthony, 48, inherited the business 22 years ago. The former cereal farmer decided early to diversify into potatoes.

He was committed to passing on his enthusiasm and passion for the humble spud, but could have had no idea how the venture



**THAT'S GOOD!** Emily Sillar of The Comfort Food Company in Newcastle prepares a meal with ingredients sourced from named local suppliers.

Turn to Page 26

## Amongst those already nominated in the North for the Local Food Hero Awards are:

### Northumbrian Quality Meats

WITH an aim of providing the very best organic beef and lamb available, Steve Rainsbow (pictured below) prides himself on producing the old fashioned way.

Beef, lamb, pork, cured bacon and a range of organic burgers at an affordable price, have ensured a growing reputation for the owner of Northumbrian Quality Meats. The organic

farmer moved from Newcastle to Heslham 25 years ago, where he bought 700 acres of run-down agricultural land.

Determined to revitalise the farm and his way of life, Steve planted 40,000 trees and built all the dwellings himself.

Farming has now become a complete way of life for Steve – he manages his 750 acres via traditional methods, ensuring livestock has plenty of room to roam. With a vision to provide a sustainable farm without pressurising the environment, all his produce is organic.

Steve offers his customers advice and organises open days in the summer, where visitors can see how his meat is produced as well as learning how to cook it. (01434) 270184, www.northumbrianorganicmeat.co.uk



### North Accomb Farm Shop

MOST of the produce on sale in this Routelisted family run farm shop at North Accomb near Stockfield in Northumberland, is either grown or made on the spot.

Robin and Caroline Baty (pictured) opened the shop in 1978. Ham and bacon are cured on the premises and oven-recipe sausages are sold alongside milk, homemade butter from the farm's Friesian herd.

British choosies and free-range eggs. In the farmhouse kitchen you will find homemade cakes and ready prepared frozen meals, including Lancashire hot pot and pasties. Turkeys and geese are reared for Christmas.

It all began when Caroline found herself with too many eggs. (01661) 843181, www.northaccombfarmshop.co.uk



MENU OF SUPPLIERS: Tom and Emily Sillar.

### The Comfort Food Company

SECRETED down narrow Pudding Chare off Newcastle's popular Bigg Market, this modest and brightly-decorated restaurant sources prime and unusual local produce for its short à la carte menu.

Typical dishes include wild garlic and Parmesan fritto, Castlebliss Aberdeen Angus rare steak with sautéed onions, and Robinson's bonny honey centre caramel.

Run by husband and wife team Tom and Emily Sillar, the eatery has won a string of top awards since it opened for business in 2004.

This is not only because of the high standard of food on offer, but Tom and Emily's commitment to using the best ingredients the North-East has to offer. At the back of each menu there is a list naming the local farms and suppliers from whom their meat, fish, game and vegetables come.

The Sillars set-up the business after deciding to return to the North-East from London after Emily, 30, who originally hails from Alnwick, was married in broad daylight. Tom, 41, is a former wine buyer. (0191) 263-1525.

### Jenkins & Hustwit

DEMAND for Hilary Jenkins and Ann Huswit's luxury fruit cakes and Christmas puddings has spread way beyond their base in Bishop Auckland, County Durham.

A decade after the two farmers' wives opened for business, their speciality cakes, which include gluten-free, low fat and reduced sugar recipes, are available in some of the nation's top food outlets, including Selfridges in London, Birmingham and Manchester, and Asda.

All this is a long way from Hilary and Ann's humble beginnings baking cakes for friends and family in their respective farmhouse kitchens.

They use no preservatives in their cakes and pride themselves on their simple traditional methods and recipes that have been handed down through the generations. (01388) 605 005, www.jenkinsandhustwit.com



RIGHT INGREDIENTS: Bakers Hilary Jenkins and Ann Huswit.

### Buttery – Local food fresh to the door

EDWARD Richardson (pictured right) offers year-round deliveries of, where possible, locally grown organic fresh produce to Durham City and its outlying towns and villages.

During the UK growing season most of the contents of the boxes come from local growers, including the nine-acre Georgian walled garden at Crossdale Hill, where Buttery is based. Outside the season there is more imported produce, but each box always contains half-a-dozen Buttery Farm eggs.

Organic Durham honey and organic milk is also available on request. (0191) 378-9193, www.buttery.co.uk



# Sing our heroes' praise

### From trawler to table for the finest fresh fish...

Fresh fish – Never frozen  
Straight from the Sea to your table

Unit F3  
Greenmarket  
Edna St  
(0191) 2617026

High St West  
Wallend  
(0191) 2627450

Chiron Fisheries

Free yourself  
www.jobsnortheast.co.uk  
First for local jobs on-line

### From Page 23

would take off. Helped by Lucy, 42, a former nurse, and their two children, Thomas, 18, and Rosie, 17, Carroll's Heritage Potatoes now supplies to farmers' markets, farm shops, and leading restaurants and food stores across the UK such as Fenwick and Cafe 21 in Newcastle. Tilly's delicatessen in Rothbury, Northumberland, Booths supermarkets in the North West; Claxworth Farm Shop in Borewell, Derbyshire; Harvey Nichols in Edinburgh and Fresh & Wild in London's Notting Hill.

Lucy is obviously delighted that Carroll's Heritage Potatoes is an early name in the frame for the Local Food Hero Awards.

"She sees their nomination as a sign of the public's growing concern about what they eat and how it is produced."

"There is definitely a growing movement among the public, not only towards looking at where food comes, but in enjoying fresh seasonal produce," she said.

"This is now extending to retailers and restaurants."

TASTE THE DIFFERENCE: Gary Rhodes is presenting the shows.

"We are now receiving extraordinary support from restaurants, not just as regards supply but with our potato varieties being named on menus, such as Yukon Gold mashed potato or Dunbar Rovers."

Lucy says that but for Carroll's Heritage Potatoes, many varieties would have been consigned to the history books. "A lot are still grown by gardeners, but are not available in a commercial environment. That's how we got started – we grew a lot of the dying varieties in our garden and loved them so much we decided to do it in a bigger scale."

"The old varieties are so much more satisfying, they have a special flavour, interesting colours and shapes and give the customer a unique taste of history."

Win or lose, Lucy supports the Local Food Hero Awards and the ethos behind them. "I think it is a fantastic idea to draw attention to where food comes from."

● To find out more about Carroll's Heritage Potatoes call (01890) 863 060 or go to www.heritage-potatoes.co.uk  
● To nominate or vote for your favourite local food producer log on to www.localfood.co.uk and click on the Local Hero 2006 icon. Voting closes on August 21.

### Other names currently in the frame in the North-East are:

Northumberland Cheese Company, Blythton, (01670) 789798, www.northumberlandcheese.co.uk  
The Herb Patch, Brookside House, Elchester County Durham, (01207) 562099, www.herbpatch.finet.co.uk  
Cuckoo's Bakes Fruit Farm, Corbridge, Northumberland, (01434) 633109, www.cuckoosbakes.co.uk  
Blythton Farm Shop, Milk Hope Centre, Blythton, Northumberland, (01670) 789924, www.theblythtonfarmshop.co.uk  
The Cheep Shop, Okgate, Marjeth, Northumberland, (01670) 504434, www.thecheepshop.org.uk  
Bywell Fish and Game Smoking, South Accomb Farm, Stockfield, Northumberland, (01661) 844284.  
Cull's Lowry, The Broadacre, Postland, Northumberland, (01661) 820387, www.cullsworby.co.uk  
Feathers, Heddon-on-the-Hill, Northumberland, (01661) 843007.  
Teeshouse Restaurant, The Alnwick Garden, Alnwick, Northumberland, (01665) 511852, www.alnwickgarden.co.uk  
L. Rabson & Sons, Craster, Northumberland, (01665) 576223, www.ljppot.co.uk