

LOCAL FOOD HEROES



Martin Haines

Stephen Wheeler, commercial manager at speciality food company *Mise en Place*, now part of Cheltenham-based *Creed Foodservice*, shares some of the successes and challenges of local food producers

Brussels sprouts may have been voted Britain's most hated vegetable but we still chomp our way through 35,000 tonnes of them a year, and 2,500 tonnes of them are grown under our Gloucestershire noses by brothers Martin and William Haines of Chipping Campden.

I visited them during their busiest time of the year – picking and packing surges 300 per cent in the lead up to Christmas. Staff numbers peak at 100 pickers in the fields and another 70 in the warehouse, sending off orders to the likes of Marks & Spencer and *Creed Foodservice* of Cheltenham.

Martin told me that their best sprout peelers will each prepare around 200 kilos a day – that's enough for 1,000 Christmas lunches.

The Haines family has been farming in Chipping Campden for over 300 years and they now cultivate 2,000 acres from Worcester to Stow-on-the-Wold. Brussels are their largest crop, but in season they send to market other brassicas, broad beans, peas, marrows, courgettes and squashes.

They also now contract grow in Morocco and South Africa to fulfil UK demand for Brussels during the summer months.

I asked Martin why the Cotswolds are so good for growing Brussels sprouts. "Whiskey is best from the Scottish Highlands, wine from the Loire Valley. There's something in the Cotswold soil that gives sprouts a unique depth of flavour and sweetness," he said.

With varietal names reminiscent of Greek gods, such as Maximus, Crispus and Helimus, sprouts may not be everyone's idea of heaven, but they are good for you. An equal serving of Brussels will give you three times more vitamin C than an orange, lots of fibre, no cholesterol and high levels of cancer fighting anti-oxidants.

The Romans in Britain originally cultivated our must-have Christmas vegetable, but they were first mass produced around 1200 AD in what is now Belgium. Now African grown Brussels appear on supermarket shelves in July and make way for English-grown from September to April.

"We have been successful in marketing this wonderful vegetable nearly all year round," Martin told me, but I still like them best sweated off in butter with chopped shallots, mixed with creamy mash, and fried till they're golden brown as a post-Christmas bubble and squeak treat.



Seasons greetings from *Creed Foodservice*



James Bubb has joined the team at Prescott Brewery

Cheers to beer

Prescott Brewery has appointed a new man to help produce its racing-themed beers. **DANIEL POUNTNEY** met him

MOST twenty-something men are enthusiastic about a beer or two but James Bubb is nothing short of passionate about it.

At 26, he's one of the youngest head brewers in the country after being appointed by Prescott Brewery in Cheltenham.

Despite being of an age where most of his peers are more interested in downing vast quantities of lager than studying the complexities of real ale, James has a wealth of experience.

He spent valuable time at St Austell Brewery and Skinners Brewing Company in Cornwall before Prescott.

"This is a great opportunity and I have absolute belief in the beers we're producing," he said.

"My aim is to extend the range of pubs and other outlets where our beers are available and to do that we have to make sure that we're really satisfying our customers with great ales."

St Austell was where James learned all about the pub trade and the actual brewing process but it was at Skinners that he perfected his craft.

He worked on a series of award-winning ales including Betty Stogs – CAMRA's 2008 Champion Best Bitter of Great Britain.

Now he'll be turning his attention to Prescott's golden ale Hill Climb (3.8 per cent) and fine session bitter Track Record (4.4 per cent).

James has also been given the task of brewing a third bitter, Grand Prix (5.2 per cent) which is going to be a powerful, full-flavoured ale.

Beers from the company always carry names and images that reflect a golden age of motorsport at Prescott Hill Climb, a few miles north of Cheltenham.

Nathan McWattie, who co-owns the business with his father-in-law Graham Meader, said James was a critical addition to the business.

"We really have been lucky to attract such a keen individual with such solid credentials," he said.

"His presence will enable Prescott to get up to full speed very quickly."

Nathan and Graham decided to start their brewery three years ago.

They were enjoying a beer while watching classic cars roar up the Prescott circuit and decided it was a perfect match.

Naming their new company was easy, Prescott Brewery both recognises the place where it was conceived and Nathan's home – he lives at the top of the historic circuit.

The majority of Prescott Brewery's ingredients come from a 50-mile radius.

Hops come from Herefordshire or Worcestershire and malt comes from Warminster, in Wiltshire.

Nathan and Graham are currently brewing around 5,000 litres a month and selling it all.

Their ales can be sampled at The

Gardener's Arms at Alderton, the Tudor House Hotel in Tewkesbury, and both The Royal Oak and the Bugatti Inn in Gretton.

They are available at the Royal Union in Tivoli too.

Landlord Robin Carter said they were strong products coming from a well-run business.

"Prescott's Hill Climb is as good a light ale as you'll find anywhere in the country, packed with flavour and full of taste," he said.

■ For more details, visit www.prescottales.co.uk



James and co-owner Nathan McWattie