

Meet the trailblazers

What do the names Bradenham, Carmarthen and Cumbria have in common? They're all names of traditional British hams. Never heard of them? What about Parma, San Daniele and Serrano? Despite their overseas origins, these Continental creations are far more likely to register than many of our native meat-stuffs. But there's change afoot, of the tastiest kind. Susan Low meets the producers who are championing British food in a very special way

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PRODUCERS WITH PASSION James Swift, Simon Gaskell, Ian Whitehead and Jean Edwards

IT'S A FAMILIAR STORY. The British make excellent charcuterie, yet trendier Continental imports are better known here than their home-grown counterparts. But there's good news in the world of salting and curing: there are several artisan producers who are set to change our perceptions and tantalise our tastebuds.

Inspired in part by the likes of Jimmy Doherty (of the BBC Two series *Jimmy's Farm*) and Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall with his *River Cottage* rural idyll, plus the growing interest in hand-made food with clear provenance, more people are making their own charcuterie, from traditional British-style bacon, pork pies, sausages and the like to Continental-style cured hams and salamis.

Mark Berry is a British-born, French-trained master charcutier, whose *nom de guerre* is Marc-Frédéric, and who has been teaching charcuterie skills for 16 years – mostly in France, a feat he dryly describes as “like taking coal to Newcastle”. Berry believes the media is helping to expand people's ideas of what charcuterie means, but says there's a lot to learn about ham – “enough to keep me teaching about it until retirement.”

British charcuterie is unbeatable, says Berry, but headmits there's confusion about what it actually is. “Here in England we probably eat more charcuterie than any of our European counterparts, including the French, yet we don't recognise what it is. It's the skill of preserving raw meat either by smoking, curing or cooking, or even a combination of all three.” In its broadest sense, charcuterie encompasses everything from sausages, blood puddings, terrines, pâtés, meat pies and pasties, bacon (at which Britain has long excelled) and cured and smoked fish (ditto).

The British climate is generally considered too damp to make traditional whole air-dried hams, such as Tuscany's Parma ham and Spain's jamón Iberico (though a few producers manage it – see box on p67). “It's difficult to age hams here,” Berry says. “We have to concentrate on smaller cuts, such as coppa (air-dried pork collar) and culatello (a smaller cut from the leg, air-dried) – so we get the flavour of air-dried ham but without such a long ageing time.”

If you haven't come across the new breed of British hams and salami yet, watch out – they're heading to a market, deli, supermarket or restaurant near you. Turn over to meet some of the people behind it all. >>





James Swift and one of his porky friends

Fast movers: Trealy Farm Charcuterie

Trealy Farm's salamis and air-dried hams, served at many of the UK's best restaurants, look like the finest Continental produce, but they are all hand-made in Monmouthshire, Wales. Trealy has only been around since 2006 but it's already a huge success, having scooped a number of prestigious awards, including Food Producer of the Year at Radio 4's annual Food and Farming Awards in 2009.

Trealy owes its existence to a chance meeting between original partners James Swift and Graham Waddington (who has since left the company) at the Abergavenny

Food Festival back in 2004. They discovered a shared enthusiasm for Continental-style charcuterie and decided to turn a pipe dream into reality. As Swift puts it, "We wanted to create a new tradition of charcuterie, if that doesn't sound too grand."

Five years on, Trealy's charcuterie, including Italian-inspired coppa, bresaola (air-dried beef with spices), lardo (matured pork fat, a Tuscan speciality), wild boar salami and pancetta, along with Spanish-influenced lomo (air-dried pork loin) and chorizo, has a clear European influence, but its Monmouthshire air-dried ham harks back to deep-rooted local British traditions.

Much of Trealy's success is down to the quality of the meat—traditional-breed, free-range animals from a co-operative of local farmers raising Tamworths, Gloucestershire Old Spots and Saddlebacks.

Trealy is now making ham from Prince Charles' Tamworth pigs. Swift says: "We heard he was sending his pigs to Italy to be made into air-dried ham, so we asked to have a go. He sent some pigs to us and some to Italy and, although the Italian ham was good, he was happy with ours—and he's been working with us ever since." Trealy makes three types of salami and five types of air-dried meats from the Highgrove pigs and they're resold at Fortnum & Mason.

• Other Trealy products are available from delis and food shops throughout the UK, and online at trealy.co.uk and rivercottage.net.

It began with a eureka moment: Suffolk Salami

Ian and Sue Whitehead at Suffolk Salami started out as pig breeders in 1987, raising Duroc and white Landrace pigs, then diversified into traditional British charcuterie, including sausages and bacon, a few years later.

As Ian explains, they'd always had a hankering to make their own salami but had never known how to go about it. The eureka moment came while travelling in Italy. "We were looking in a butcher's window one day and it was one of those magic moments. The butcher invited us in and showed us how he made his salami."

Further travels in Spain and Germany ensued, followed by a training course in Germany, then came a period of experimentation back at home. "It's not that easy," Ian admits. "A fresh sausage you can taste and tweak right away, but it takes a month to make salami. A lot can go wrong; it took about 18 months to two years to get it right."

Ian says, "When we started out I wanted to make something that would compete with what was available on the Continent." The Whiteheads make just two salamis, all using meat from their own pigs: a semi-dried chorizo that can be eaten raw or cooked; and an Italian-style air-dried salami with a protective white penicillium mould on the outside (the hardest one to do, according to Ian) that gives the meat a distinctive flavour.

• Available from independent delis throughout the UK (seesuffolksalami.co.uk for stockists).



Trealy Farm's award-winning salami



Sue and Ian Whitehead

The old guard: keeping traditions alive

Historians say charcuterie was a skill Roman soldiers picked up from the Gauls of France and Belgium during the Gallic Wars. By the Middle Ages charcuterie was well established in the UK.

The British climate has mostly put a damper (literally) on air-dried ham-making à la Parma, but it's not unknown on these shores. Two long-standing producers are carrying on the tradition and even combining it with a bit of innovation.

The family company Richard Woodall (richardwoodall.com) has been based in the Lake District since 1828. It produces top-quality Cumberland ham (an unsmoked, cured ham for cooking) and Cumbria Air Dried Ham (Continental-style, made for eating raw). The original unsmoked air-dried ham and a smoked Cumbria Mature Royal Ham, introduced in the late 1980s, has recently been joined by a smoked ham called Black Combe, from a family recipe that dates back to 1843.

MD Colin Woodall describes it as "an English version of German Black Forest Ham" and says: "The method came from my grandmother, who moved to Cumberland when she married. The recipe came to light after she died, scribbled on a tatty piece of paper tucked inside a recipe book. Everything was measured in 'a pinch' or 'a handful', so it took time to work out accurate measurements." The ham was first sold cooked but, after some experimentation, they decided it was best cured and eaten raw.

In Carmarthenshire, Wales, Ann and Chris Rees own the small company Carmarthen Ham (carmarthenham.co.uk). Chris says, "People have been making ham in this area for centuries." He believes that when the Romans came to Britain, people in his area were already making air-dried ham, and the Romans learned the art from them and exported the technique to Italy. The Reeses are primarily butchers but continue to make small amounts of their cured, air-dried hams from Welsh pigs to a family recipe.

On the Continent, particularly in France and Italy, charcuterie made with the meat of wild boar has a long tradition, particularly where wine is made

Wild at heart: The Real Boar Company



Simon Gaskell

In the Cotswolds, the beasts at Simon Gaskell's The Real Boar Company are less genteel than Prince Charles' Tamworths, but they yield results that are undeniably tasty.

These large, somewhat scary-looking beasts, with their bristly coats and sharp teeth, are fast and fierce – quite different from the domestic pig. On the Continent, particularly in France and Italy, charcuterie made with the meat of wild boar has a long tradition, particularly in regions where wine is made. The animals have a fondness for ripe grapes – and grape farmers, it seems, have a particular fondness for wild boar salami. Or may be it's just a taste for revenge.

Regardless, wild boar makes excellent charcuterie, as The Real Boar's salamis and chorizo demonstrate. Reared on 20 acres of land in the Cotswolds, the animals forage among oak, apple and cherry trees for the 18 months it takes them to reach maturity.

British salami-fanciers, though, aren't quite as enamoured of boar meat as people on the Continent are. Perhaps because the wild boar was hunted to extinction here 300 years ago, we've lost our taste for it,



Not to be messed with: wild boars are fierce

despite its relative leanness and deep flavour. Gaskell has experimented with making bresaola and coppa from wild boar and from his rare-breed Oxford Sandy and Black pigs, but he is concentrating on making salami for now. "Wild boar can be difficult to sell," he admits, "but people understand salami."

The Real Boar Company's salamis are made by Andrew Werrit and Charlie Palmer, young, talented charcutiers from

Tucks Butchers in nearby Sherston. As well as the original wild boar salami with red wine, Real Boar makes a Cotswold game salami with boar, venison and pheasant and the newest addition has a distinctly British accent – it's made with sloe gin and has a warming, savoury gaminess that sets it apart.

- Available from delis, butchers, cafés and farm shops throughout the UK (visit therealboar.co.uk for stockists).



Jean and Martin Edwards with their air-dried salamis

Trial and error to success: Deli Farm Charcuterie


Long-time food-lovers Jean and Martin Edwards set up Deli Farm Charcuterie on the Cornish coast in 2006. “We’d always been interested in food and cooking and thought it would be fun to do something foodie together,” says Jean.

Their original plan was to make pâtés or terrines, but they eventually settled on Continental-style charcuterie. “Before we started, I’d no idea how it was made – all I knew was it was almost impossible to buy good salami or air-dried meats made in this country,” says Jean. After a lot of research and discussion, they set to work creating their own recipes for Italian-style salamis. “We made mistakes,” she admits, “but often that’s the best way to learn.”

Deli Farm specialises in air-dried salamis and hams made from locally reared pork

and beef, interestingly flavoured with combinations such as orange and ginger, and coriander and cumin. Our favourites, though, are more in the traditional vein: a lean, aromatic salami spiced with fennel and star anise and a richly flavoured bresaola with a concentrated flavour and subtle sweetness. Deli Farm also makes air-dried duck breast ‘ham’ (traditional in parts of Italy) and has recently brought out a couple of new products: dry-cured, smoked and air-dried leg of lamb and air-dried venison.

“I find experimenting with different meats, recipes and techniques the most interesting part of the job,” says Jean, “but you have to be patient, as air-dried products take time.”

● Available from delis and farm shops throughout southwest England, and online at delifarmcharcuterie.co.uk. 

The best of the rest

● Peter Gott at Sillfield Farm raises rare breed pigs and wild boar on his Cumbria farm and is a favourite supplier at farmers’ markets around the country. As well as fantastic bacon, Gott makes European-inspired charcuterie such as chorizo and pancetta made from wild boar, and Tyrolean-style speck.

Available online at sillfield.co.uk

● British chorizo made using traditional Spanish methods is the speciality of Tim French and Matthew Chiles of The Bath Pig Company, who started in 2009. Available online at thebathpig.com

● Italian-born Vincent Castellano of Castellano’s delicatessen trained as a butcher/charcutier in the French Alps and has been based in Bristol for more than 25 years. He makes a variety of pâtés, sausages and hams, available from farmers’ markets.

For more info, visit castellanos.co.uk



Peter Gott knows how to make a good sausage

Bring home the bacon

Keen to try making your own sausages? You’re in luck. There are a growing number of cookery schools where you can learn it all, from basic butchery skills to the finer points of charcuterie. The School of Artisan Food in Nottinghamshire (schoolofartisanfood.org) has a range of classes, while Ballymaloe Cookery School (cookingisfun.ie) near Cork in Ireland offers a one-day course in butchery and charcuterie. Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall’s River Cottage Cookery School (rivercottage.net) in Dorset has one-day courses on curing and smoking meat, plus pig butchery. Thyme at Southrop (thymeatsouthrop.co.uk), in the Cotswolds, has one-day charcuterie courses taught by master charcutier Mark Berry. And for details of a new one-day butchery and charcuterie course in Oxfordshire, see p10.

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