

# *Made in Britain*

{East Midlands} Continuing her new series which celebrates local food producers and traditions, Clarissa Hyman enjoys regional specialities from the heart of England – fine, artisan cheeses, freshly ground flours and ice creams from the dairy



Stichelton is made at  
Collingthwaite Farm by  
Joe Schneider (pictured)  
and Randolph Hodgson

# Stichelton Cheese

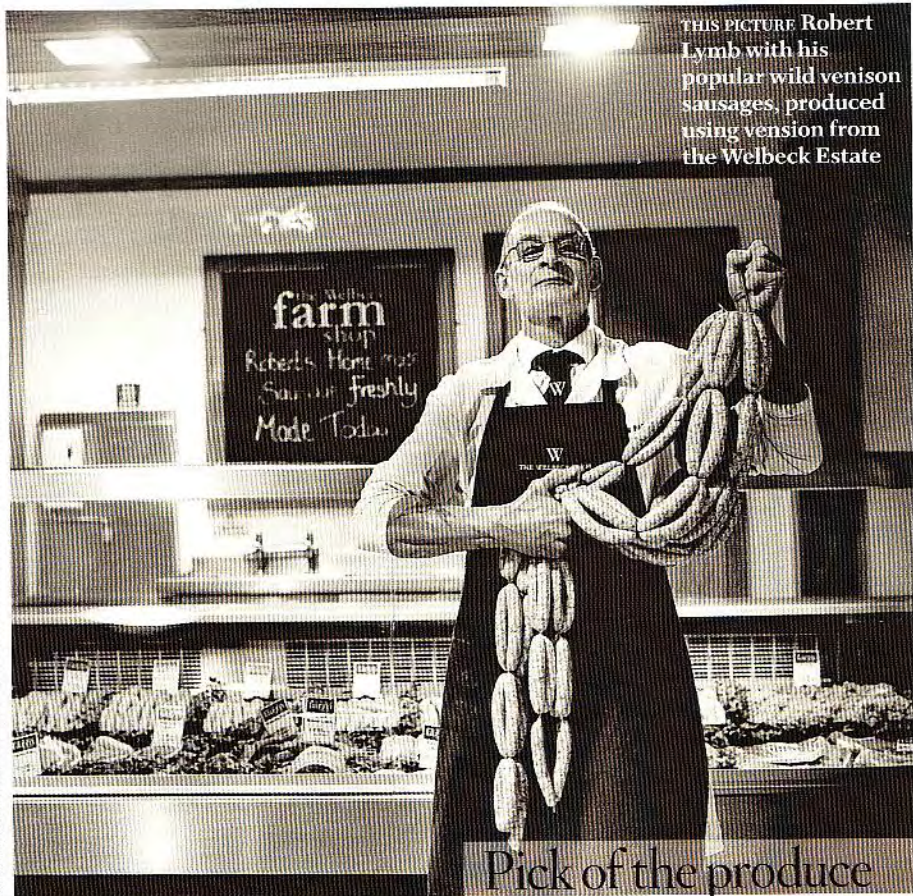
A rule-breaking, creamy blue is pretender to the throne of the 'King of Cheese'

Stilton has ruled the nation's cheeseboard for three centuries. Its history is well known and its name and production process are protected under European law, which means only certain creameries in Leicestershire, Nottinghamshire and Derbyshire can call their blue cheese Stilton.

This is good in the sense it stops the uncontrolled reproduction that has ruined the name of many a fine British territorial. It is bad in the sense it has also led, arguably, to a loss of flavour complexity, as well as allowing white Stiltons stuffed with mango, cranberries, apricots and ginger that can only have been dreamt up by a marketing madman. But it is the regulations about pasteurised milk that have left the king of cheeses with a tarnished crown. That is until Randolph Hodgson of Neal's Yard and cheesemaker Joe Schneider (creator of Daylesford Organic) rebelled against the tyranny of technology, nanny state scientific caution and the dead hand of bureaucratic legislation in pursuit of excellence.

Stichelton (pronounced Stickleton) is made at Collingthwaite Farm on the Welbeck Estate on the northern borders of Sherwood Forest in Nottinghamshire. It is produced in a way that makes it more like the original than any other, in that it is made with organic, raw milk but such are the legislative rules it cannot be called Stilton for that reason alone. The name derives from the original name of Stilton village as recorded in the ancient Lincoln Rolls (and, no, you can't eat them...)

The finest Stilton – or in this case Stilton-style cheese – takes time, skill and almost artistic intuition. At Stichelton Dairy, the milk from a herd of organic Friesian-Holstein cows is piped directly into



THIS PICTURE Robert Lymb with his popular wild venison sausages, produced using venison from the Welbeck Estate

## Pick of the produce

the dairy. Joe describes the process: "We make Stichelton with a small quantity of starter and rennet. As a result, acidification is very slow and the curd is very fragile." The curd is hand-cut into small pieces and most of the whey is left to drain away. It is then scooped into a bath where the curd drains overnight; by morning, it is like a mat of springy bricks. Milled again, it is salted and poured, unpressed, into cylindrical hoops. The hoops are turned daily and then removed after five days, when the sides are hand-smoothed to close any cracks. Six to seven weeks later, as the cheeses really begin to mellow, they are pierced to allow the blueing process to begin. Finally, they are aged for around 12 weeks.

Schneider's hope is that Stichelton raises the bar for great British blue cheese. It has a hedonistic quality: melting, buttery and salty with layers of mellow, nutty flavours and a good balance between the creamy ivory paste and the bite of the blue. Production is tiny, but the handmade, labour-intensive cheese commands a premium and it is constantly evolving, adjusting to the nuances of daily artisan production. At its finest, it is a stunningly good cheese – and a lesson that sometimes rules are made to be broken. Available from Neal's Yard Dairy (020 7240 5700) and Welbeck Farm Shop (see right). For more information, visit ([www.stichelton.co.uk](http://www.stichelton.co.uk)).

In the 1890s, the garden staff at Welbeck numbered more than 1,000, plus two horses and two donkeys. Home to the Dukes of Portland, Welbeck was almost self-sufficient in the early decades of the 20th century. Today, the 17,000-acre Estate, still in private hands, now also sports a farm shop, thanks to Joe Parente, the enterprising young scion of the family.

The shop has a superb cheese counter displaying Stichelton, Sparkenhoe Red Leicester and Lincolnshire Poacher. The butcher's counter offers beautifully prepared cuts of Estate lamb (even the shepherd comes here to buy his meat), mutton, oxtail, brisket and splendid boulders of marbled beef cut from the bone. Most of the beef comes from Richard Bower, whose family have been farming here for more than 60 years. Game includes venison, wood pigeon, rabbits and mallard. The most popular sausages, made in-house by Robert Lymb, include wild venison, and pork and tomato. A range of frozen meals, such as Aromatic Duck Casserole and homemade soups, sell alongside "Today's Milk" from Tuxford Dairy and Doug's Super Spuds from one of the Welbeck tenant farmers. Welbeck Farm Shop, Welbeck Estate, Worksop, Nottinghamshire (01909 478725; [www.thewelbeckfarmshop.co.uk](http://www.thewelbeckfarmshop.co.uk)). ▷

