

Bringing the cheese back to Cheesewick



Heeding chef Jamie Oliver's plea to "Save British Farmhouse Cheese", a group of women including chefs, writers, and designers, who all shared a passion for fine food, got together to launch Chiswick Cheese Market. **Nicola Gould** visits London's only cheese market which will soon celebrate its second anniversary



It is a happy coincidence that the leafy suburb of Chiswick in West London was once known as Cheesewick or Ceswican in Old English, meaning "Cheese Farm".

More than a thousand years after the settlement was named, a group of women have succeeded in bringing the cheese

back to Chiswick by launching a monthly cheese market.

Held on the third Sunday of each month in the Old Market Place, the market is fast becoming a place of pilgrimage for cheese lovers from all over the capital and beyond.

Cheese producers and cheesemongers from as far away as Dorset and Bath now

stand the market and an ever-growing band of locals and visitors shop there, sampling and choosing from 150 different cheeses as well as related products such as chutneys, crackers and olives.

Each market day there is something new, with hot food stalls, olives, cured meats and cheese-related collectibles now making the cut.

And it all began through a passion and a shared love of cheese, fine food and Chiswick.

Fran Warde, the author of numerous cookery books and previously Food Editor at Red magazine, describes how the women joined forces to form a CIC (Community Interest Company) and launched the first market in May 2021.

In a fitting opening ceremony, the Mayor of Hounslow cracked open a giant parmesan cheese and announced that one of the country's only markets devoted to cheese was open for business.

The market is run by the Cookbook Kitchen, a group of women who are passionate about Chiswick and cheese, she explained.



Fran Warde pictured with the women chefs, designers, writers and foodies who created Chiswick cheese market — Sarah Cruz, Donna Freed, Lucy Cufflin and Jules Kane

They include graphic designer Sarah Cruz, long-time chef and cookery writer Lucy Cufflin, New York native and writer Donna Freed, chef Jules Kane, professional cook Lucy Lee-Tirrell, designer and foodie Abigail Pitcher and bestselling cookbook author Jo Pratt.

“The Cookbook Kitchen ran things like super clubs, the book festival and talks,” she said. When the lockdowns arrived the community in Chiswick pulled together to support one another. And the foodies of the Cookbook Kitchen were galvanised into action when Jamie Oliver launched a campaign to “Save British Cheeses”.

The campaign highlighted the plight of the country’s cheese producers after restaurants were forced to close their doors and farmers were contemplating pouring their milk away.

Although the big cheese plants kept up production, the specialist cheese makers producing the finest British cheeses in the

traditional way had lost a large sector of their market.

A group of green-fingered Chiswick residents had already pointed the way by launching London’s new flower market in September 2020, so the idea of a cheese market seemed the right response to support the country’s cheesemakers.

“We searched London markets like Borough for cheesemongers and between us we had soon located and contacted a number of cheese producers and sellers who believed in us and were prepared to give the new market a go,” Fran said.

Among them was Roberto Espinoza of The French Comté who has been selling fine French cheese on London’s Borough Market for the past 12 years.

Originally a chef in Switzerland then Scotland, Roberto ran his own French bakery before becoming a cheese seller.

“I was approached on the Borough and it seemed like a really good idea. As far as I know this is the only cheese market around and I was happy to join and start selling here on the first market,” he said.

Fay Birchenough, who runs Big Wheel Cheese based in Kent, was also in at the start. “I think I was invited to join this market on one of the London farmers’ markets I stand,” she said.

Fay began her business selling just three English cheeses and could not resist adding to the range to the point where she now sells a wide choice of fine cheeses.

James Brownbill, who runs The Marlow Cheese Company, has taken the market to his heart, so much so that he now produces a special Cheesewick cheese made with goats’ cheese and black truffle.

“This business was the brainchild of my late wife, Lynda Hill,” James explained. “She watched a *Countryfile* programme in 2015 and asked me to build her a cheese room on the side of our house.”

Being a builder, James readily agreed and they began making cheese using milk from a local herd of Guernsey cows.

“We called our first cheese Cygnet and then went on to produce a second, then a third and a fourth.”

Another cheese seller, Louise Taylor, has



Food writer and foodie extraordinaire Fran Warde is one of a group of local women who launched and now run Chiswick cheese market



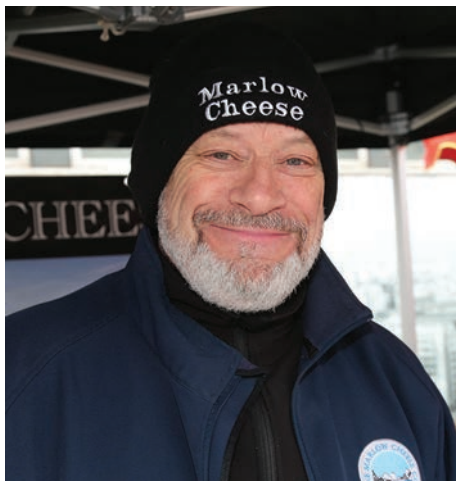
Monika Linton, the founder of Brindisa, one of the founding food businesses on Borough Market, was visiting Chiswick cheese market to see what it had to offer



Louise Taylor sells goats cheese made at Nut Knowle Farm which became a cheese producer after the owners bought some goats to scare off burglars



Fay Birchenough runs Big Wheel Cheese on the market



James Brownbill of the Marlow Cheese Company has created a Cheesewick cheese in honour of the new cheese market



Francesca Basaratti sells cheese and cooking related antiques and collectibles on Chiswick cheese market



Roberto Espinoza who has run The French Comté for 12 years has traded on the market from its inception



Jacky Roberts of Grate and Grill was the first hot food stall on the market selling cheese toasties made from four types of cheese

an interesting story about how Nut Knowle Farm became a cheese producer.

“The couple who live there bought some goats after they were burgled as a sort of burglar alarm, thinking they would make a lot of noise if there were intruders,” she said.

They soon had a herd of 300 goats and began making cheese.

Among the new recruits to Chiswick cheese market is Carolyn Hopkins who had travelled to London from her home in Dorset to sell world beating cheese from her Truckle Truck.

“This is my first time at this market,” said Carolyn, who used to work at a deli before deciding to go into business on her own selling the award-winning cheeses she loves so much from an eye-catching truck.

“Although I am new here, my first impression is that it is a very good market and I am enjoying trading here with like-minded people,” she said.

Not everyone is selling cheese. The market, which has more than 40 traders, includes stalls selling everything from specialist crackers to cured meats.

Francesca Basaratti adds to the mix with her stall featuring cheese and cooking related antiques and collectibles.

“My husband and I retired and we were going to go travelling but the pandemic arrived which put a stop to those plans, so we decided to start an antiques business instead,” Francesca said.

They started the business online and someone from the CIC spotted that the couple were selling a lot of cooking related items.

“They approached us and as I used to live in Chiswick it felt a bit nostalgic to

return to our old stomping ground and sell on the market,” she said.

“We find a lot of people like to buy old cooking utensils and products, either to use or to decorate their kitchen,” she added.

Alongside vintage and collectibles, a street food section is growing. Although a welcome addition to the market, the organisers say they don’t want it to take over the show. Cheese remains the big attraction, which is why Jacky Roberts’ Grate & Grill street food business is bang on target.

The first street food business to join the market, Jacky specialises in cheese toasties made with four different cheeses as well as a market day special such as cheese, chorizo and rocket.

“It’s a lovely place to trade on a Sunday,” she said.

As the market nears its second birthday, the organisers, who are all volunteers, can congratulate themselves that their initiative has provided a boost for cheese producers and sellers near and far.

Profits go back to the community and the market has already raised £15,000 for good causes. The February market alone raised £8,000 for aid to Ukraine and featured a high-end vodka seller who hails from Ukraine as well as Ukrainian food and dance.

And it’s not just good causes that are benefiting. The Chiswick Flower Market, which set the ball rolling, believed Sunday markets would bring new life to the High Street. In addition to the flower and cheese markets, there is also a monthly antiques market, and judging by the crowds visiting the events, the initiative is helping local shops and businesses too. ■



Carolyn Hopkins travels from her home in Dorset to sell world famous cheese from her Truckle Truck

FACTS & FIGURES

- **Market days:** the third Sunday of each month
- **Market rent:** £80
- **Chiswick’s claim to fame:** Chiswick in West London was the home of the 18th century English artist William Hogarth and is also the location of Chiswick House, a neo-Palladian house recognised as one of the finest in England. It is also home to Fuller’s Brewery, the capital’s largest and oldest brewery. A leafy suburb with a village feel, Chiswick is popular with young professionals, arty, creative people and families.