

The beautiful game



Charles Bowman can be found out on the Lancashire moors every game season before serving it up in the pub his family have owned for decades.

Emma Mayoh reports

MAIN PHOTOGRAPHY BY KIRSTY THOMPSON

Left: Roasted grouse is a popular dish on the menu at The Inn at Whitewell

Below: James Whaites plates up the grouse



Charles Bowman loves being with Hectic and Bedlam. Not that the Inn at Whitewell managing director is disorganised - the opposite is true. These are the names of his black Labradors, constant companions when he goes shooting.

Ever since he was seven and had his first gun, Charles has gone on organised shoots every season, whatever the weather, in pursuit of grouse, pheasant and partridge to serve up at the family dinner table.

Everyone from his father, Richard, the former Lancashire cricketer who bought the Duchy estate inn in the 1970s, his grandfather, and Charles' own children Alex, eight, and Willa, six, have provided local game for family feasts.

It's a practice Charles has extended to his business life because every October and November he brings back a bounty of glorious grouse for head chef, Jamie Cadman and sous chef, James Whaites, to serve up for hungry customers at the historic Bowland inn.

Charles, who runs it with his mother, Pam, and wife, Louise, explained: 'It's something I've been doing for a long time. When I was young, even before my dad bought the pub, we used to come up on shoots to this area. My grandfather used to shoot here in the 20s, 30s and 40s too. I remember plucking the first bird I shot and it carried on from there.

'I never did the cooking, though. Mother was always responsible for that



Charles Bowman with his latest catch



James puts the finishing touches to his dish

Locally shot grouse, whole roasted and served with bread sauce, cranberry compote, game chips and roasting juices

Ingredients

(serves 4)

- Four grouse
- Four slices of bacon
- 400g cranberries
- 1 orange
- 1 lemon
- 75g - 100g sugar
- ¼ loaf day old white bread
- 400 - 500ml milk
- ½ tsp grated nutmeg
- Dash red wine
- Potatoes

Method

For the grouse: Season the grouse, pan fry until golden, place bacon over the breast and roast for 13 - 14 minutes at 180°C. Take the grouse out of the pan when cooked and leave to rest for five minutes. Slice the bacon and add to the pan. Put it back on the heat, de-grease the pan with a small amount of red wine and reduce.

Add a little chicken stock, reduce again and finish with a knob of butter

For the cranberry compote: Juice and zest the orange and lemon, add the sugar and bring to the boil.

Add the cranberries and reduce for 5 - 10 minutes until the cranberries are soft and the liquor is almost at a syrup consistency.

For the bread sauce: Infuse the milk with the nutmeg. When the milk is at simmering point, turn the heat right down and add the bread, stirring frequently until thickened. Season to taste and add a squeeze of lemon.

For the game chips: Thinly slice some potatoes (however many you want), deep fry them and season.

and she is far better at it than me. There's nothing better than serving up a grouse that you've got yourself on a Sunday, it's just something I've always enjoyed.'

Last year more than 400 diners tucked into his locally shot grouse and already this year more than 200 people have enjoyed a taste of it. Charles is hoping partridge, which is served on the menu until January, will also be popular at the inn, which dates back to the 1300s.

'It is a little bit more expensive than chicken but our grouse is very reasonable,' said the 43-year-old. 'If you've not tried it before, I can't encourage you enough to try it. For health reasons it is good, it is very low in fat and lean because it is wild. You get a lot more bang for your buck.'



'It's naturally reared in the wild which is the best thing and it makes a massive difference to the taste. Grouse has a wonderful flavour because they have a rich diet of heather and insects up on the moor. It gives them a really deep taste.'

Charles' passion for grouse includes him being involved in this year's Great Inns of Britain Game On campaign which celebrates the best of regional British game. The Inn at Whitewell is one of 22 places in the country to be involved.

The chefs at the Inn at Whitewell also serve up a menu full of local produce, including beef and ham which come from Burholme Farm, located on land at the back of the pub, Goosnargh chicken and locally grown vegetables. For sous chef James Whaites there is nothing quite like serving up a dish of grouse, roasted in its own juices.

The 25-year-old, who has worked at the inn for almost three years, said: 'Charles always brings a lot of birds back and they will be on the menu the day after. It's a really tasty meat and we can serve it very fresh. The locally shot meat is much better, too.'

'The meat has a lot more flavour and it's something that people do seem to enjoy. We can sell up to 50 in a week. It's also very easy to cook up for a dish too because you can have it roasted in around 20 minutes. It's the perfect meat to serve on a weekend and you can really enjoy it and savour it.' 🍷