

Undoubtedly we are having a great summer so far this year, and I'm sure many of you are keen to get outside and enjoy the beautiful Kent countryside. Here at the George and Dragon in Chipstead, we are fortunate enough to have a large alfresco dining area with a herb and vegetable garden, which makes the most of our south facing position, bathed in sunlight from late morning to late evening. Sometimes though, I also like to find time to get out and enjoy more of the local countryside, so when Rob Martin from locally-renowned Coldbreath butchers in Seal asked me to join him for an afternoon walk around Ruffits Farm checking on his herd of cows, I jumped at the chance.

I met Rob and a very eager little terrier called Obi leaning against the gate of their farm just outside Ightham. Looking into the field behind, I was a little surprised not to see any of their cows. Rob explained that the herd was spread over the 150 acre farm, giving them all plenty of space to roam and enjoy a variety of different grasses and fauna, sunny spots and sheltered woodland.

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” We came across the first few members of the herd in a folly at the far end of the north field. The small group of about 12 cows was made up of four different breeds. The Sussex – a red-headed native, the beige Limousin-Sussex – a continental cross, the black Aberdeen Angus which is native to Scotland, and the black and white British Blue, formally known as the Belgian Blue but renamed due to its increasing popularity in the UK. Rob explained that by keeping a number of different breeds in one herd, it allows them to sell local beef all year around. The different breeds have different characteristics. The continental varieties tend to give a longer and much leaner body than the native bread cattle, which are easy to calve.

The Martin family hope to breed the herd with their new Aberdeen Angus bull ‘Belhaven Dramatize’, nicknamed Duncan. Duncan’s reputation already precedes him, having won two prestigious farming awards this year, most recently the ‘Other Breeds’ category at the Kent Show in June. “His shape and build make him a perfect example of the breed,” explained Rob. “We are expecting great things from him when the calving season begins in the autumn”.

When we came across Deano grazing amongst his female friends in one of the farm’s meadows, I wasn’t disappointed. Whilst calmly walking alongside Deano, Rob pointed out his award-



◀ **Cattle class:** Rob Martin from Coldbreath’s butchers on his 150-acre cattle farm near Ightham. The butcher has won a string of prestigious awards over the years and they are also famous for their locally-reared turkeys at Christmas

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Truly independent and family-run local butchers are now rare gems. The award-winning Coldbreath’s in Seal has been owned by the Martin family since 1976 and rears and butchers their own cattle from the farm in Ightham. Continuing our regular ‘field to fork’ series, **Ben James** meets the herd



winning characteristics. Unfortunately, I was too preoccupied with weighing up if I could scale the nearest gate in the event of a stampede to quite catch them all.

Walking back alongside the chalk covered South Downs, I suddenly realised how easy Rob had made it sound. A farm and butcher’s shop owned by the same family since 1976, rearing and butchering their own cattle, selling it alongside other meats like lamb and chicken, all reared by neighbouring farms in the surrounding villages. Supermarkets spend millions of pounds a year claiming ethical superiority over their competitors in the sourcing of local British meat, so it was refreshing to discover that the best of British is available from local farmers just a few miles from your home.

Back at the shop on the main parade in Seal, I was impressed by the service Rob, his father Chris and their team are providing. I can see how this level of service has won Coldbreath’s butchers contracts with National Trust properties Ightham Mote and Knole Park, as well as a number of prestigious local schools. When I asked Rob what this week’s best selling cut of meat was, he replied: “our prime mince beef and home made burgers. With all the hot weather I think a lot of our customers are making their own burgers for the barbecue”.

Inspired by this idea, I order a few kilos of their prime mince for the George and Dragon Chipstead’s signature burger. Washed down with a pint of George’s Marvellous Medicine it’s a perfect local burger and beer combination! ■

Classic local beef burger

■ The beauty of making your own burgers is that you can add practically any spices and herbs you want when making the mix, creating your own individual flavour. The following recipe is a great simple one to try at home, adapted from the recipe we use at the George and Dragon in Chipstead. You’ll need: 1kg prime mince; 50g tomato ketchup; 10ml Worcestershire sauce; 100g diced red onion; 10g chopped flat leaf parsley; 3g cracked black pepper; 6g table salt

Method

Combine all the ingredients into a large

bowl and mix well using your hands. Shape into chunky sized patties (this recipe is ideal for five patties). Wrap

each of the patties individually in cling film and place in the refrigerator for a few hours to rest. When required either: heat a frying pan and fry for 4-5 minutes each side, before finishing in the oven, depending on how rare you prefer the meal.

Alternatively, place on the BBQ, again turning after 4-5 minutes before moving to the edge of the heat to cook through.

