





PHOTOGRAPHS: ISSY CROKER; CHARLOTTE RIDLEY

THE BEST STAYCATION MALTON

A DECADE AGO THIS YORKSHIRE TOWN WAS IN A SLUMP. BUT AFTER FOSTERING ITS CAN-DO, INDEPENDENT SPIRIT AND HALE-AND-HEARTY LOCAVORE ATTITUDE - TOPPED OFF WITH THE ADDITION OF AN ELEGANT, JUST-OPENED INN - IT HAS EMERGED AS A FLAGSHIP FOR RURAL ENGLAND. BY HORATIO CLARE



IN ROOM 16 AT THE NEWLY REFURBISHED Talbot, I wake to birdsong and a tableau worthy of Constable: a manicured garden, a field of hay bales and the snaking River Derwent. This stretch of water was just wide enough for the Romans to set sail to the sea, through rich deciduous forest and lush pastures. No wonder they chose to settle in this spot, which nudges the Yorkshire Wolds halfway between Scarborough and York. Malton was still buzzing in the 19th century, when it helped inspire a struggling, post-Chuzzlewit Dickens to pick up his quill and pen *A Christmas Carol*. Barely 10 years ago, though, this was just another struggling market town. Ruddy-faced merchants still hawked fish and fowl on the main square, but shops were closing; teenagers couldn't escape fast enough.

That was before Tom Naylor-Leyland, now 37, had a Dickensian benefactor's epiphany. Malton had been part of his vast Fitzwilliam family estate for more than 300 years, but he'd decamped to the capital,

cupcakes for one of the 30 stalls. A thousand people turned up, which seemed a lot then, but not nearly as much as the 30,000 who attended in its sixth year, when 180 producers crowded into the square and narrow surrounding streets. A new artisan food scene had ignited, and by the time Antonio Carluccio declared Malton to be Yorkshire's food capital in 2012, the only query came from Dennis at the pet shop, who wondered why it couldn't be the pet-shop capital.

It now says Yorkshire's Food Capital on the town sign; it's even painted on a brick wall opposite the Malton Relish deli. The festival has become the gastronomic Glastonbury, or the gourmet Hay, and the crowd that visits every May (the 25th and 26th this year) keeps getting bigger and smarter.

When I meet Naylor-Leyland in the new Talbot, he is champing, Labrador-like, to take me on one of his richly entertaining food tours. Dressed in regulation high-waisted trousers, braces and a puffy flat cap, he starts, as ever, across the road at

HOTEL GAME-CHANGER

Coaching inns have long been the heart of market towns, and **The Talbot** looks set to win that position again. The 17th-century hostelry and hunting lodge was reimagined this year by Sam and Georgie Pearman, formerly of The Lucky Onion, the group behind such elegant Cotswolds hangouts as the Lucky Duck and the Wheatsheaf. Today it's a 26-bedroom bohemian pile of sweeping stairs, high ceilings and roaring fires; a democratic Garrick Club that welcomes dogs as readily as it pampers millionaires in search of lost England.

Some of the oil paintings suggest a stiffly bucolic past, but for the most part this is a place of cleverly mismatched furniture and relaxed greens and greys where locals are welcomed warmly for a pint. The food, of course, is at the centre of it all, with Sam Pearman and head chef Robert Brittain focusing on regional dishes, from bone-in Yorkshire Shorthorn beef to Whitby cockles and surely the greatest devilled kidney on sourdough anywhere. At the

A COMMUNITY OF RIGHT-ON ARTISAN FOODIES WHO WERE WELCOMED WITH OPEN ARMS AND LOW RENTS NOW INCLUDE A BUTCHER, A BAKER AND A MACARON MAKER

where he butlered at Dukes London, did research for Labour MP Kate Hoey and worked the deli counter for Notting Hill locavore Sally Clarke – at all times pained to admit to an ancestral line that includes the Marquess of Rockingham, twice Prime Minister. Some time in the Noughties, however, he was visiting London's Borough Market and noticed covetous queues for Yorkshire grouse and Bridlington lobster. 'I thought: we are the source of that, and we should be shouting about this, loudly.'

So he moved into a little flat above the bookmakers in Malton (these days he lives over the pet shop) and set about a new mission, to shout about the town's bounty. He started cataloguing hundreds of producers, from suppliers of woodcock and wigeon to the Syrian couple behind Yorkshire Squeaky Cheese, the local answer to halloumi. For the first Malton Food Festival, in 2009, he persuaded chef Andrew Pern of the Michelin-starred Star Inn to hold cooking demonstrations, and asked his wife Alice, a writer and brand collaborator, to bake vast quantities of

Talbot Yard, once an abandoned red-brick stableyard and now home to a community of right-on artisan foodies, welcomed by him with open arms and low rents since 2015. The old stables contain a gin distillery, a coffee roastery, a gelateria, a butcher, a baker and a *macaron* maker, all proudly Made In Malton, as the moniker goes. As we bounce between shops, he fills me in on his many plans for Malton, including a new Meadowfest music festival on 20 July, where performers such as Levi Roots will play rootsy, pre-1978 music ('There was more joy before synths came along,' says Naylor-Leyland).

Even without his infectious enthusiasm, I would have fallen for this little parish, with its higgledy-piggledy passageways; the crisscrossing waterways of the Derwent Valley; the old counting house that inspired Ebenezer Scrooge's workplace; the Cross Keys, a Hollywood fantasy of an English pub, hoary Yorkshire banter and all. The Romans knew Malton was a find, and it always has been, really. Its resident aristocrat has merely helped spread the word.

adjoining Malton Cookery School, head tutor Gilly Robinson teaches how to whip up recipes with North Moors Grouse or Whitby razor clams and lobster. Like owner Naylor-Leyland, this is a place of exquisite taste, but it's much too relaxed and self-effacing to say so. *talbotmalton.co.uk; doubles from £110*

WAKE-UP CALL

The breakfast at The Talbot is outstanding, but try to resist caffeinating. Save that for **Roost Coffee & Roastery**, in the first of Talbot Yard's former stables, where David and Ruth Elkington share the brick-and-wood space with a Golden-doodle called Skye and a giant, shiny machine called Diedrich, a coffee roaster resembling a reclining Dalek. On Mondays and Tuesdays, Diedrich fills the air with notes of chocolate and vanilla. The team creates blends of Colombian Caturra beans, Costa Rican Catuai, Brazilian Mundo Novo and more, all somehow infused with a bit of Yorkshire. It's a complicated process, falling somewhere



between science, art and instinct. All you have to do is order the house blend and inhale. roostcoffee.co.uk

BANGERS AND BAKES

Talbot Yard's other stables stick firmly to Naylor-Leyland's artisanal brief. At **Food 2 Remember**, which is carrying on Malton's long tradition of butchery, ask owner Paul Potts to tell you where the merguez sausage or Barnsley chops are from: the answer will be a farm within a 10-mile radius, and he might even be able to name the exact animal. The dedication levels are similar at **Bluebird Bakery**, an airy place of spelt, sourdough and bloomer, much of it baked how the Romans did it; and at artisan gelateria **Groovy Moo**, where the cheerily formidable owner, Michelle Walker, makes her gelato the Italian way, but with Yorkshire milk and cream (the bestselling flavour is Bakewell Tart). But the prize goes to **Florian Poirot**, named for its owner, a wonderfully French Frenchman whose beautiful *macarons* took the Best Sugar Showpiece gong at the 2017 World Pastry Cup. He's spiky-haired, small as a scrum

half and deceptively insouciant about his wondrous creations: crumbling, sensuous salted caramel, or a gin-and-tonic version using booze from **Rare Bird Distillery**, located just around the corner. malton.com/talbot-yard-food-court

HIGH SPIRITS

Rare Bird's Matt Stewart, the yard's final resident, was a fireman until he and his wife Elizabeth swapped their life savings for Florence, a copper still with the soul of a Wes Anderson submarine, filling it with hibiscus, rosemary and cardamom to create their own brand of gin. Stewart seems happy with this decision and has now added Yorkshire's first gin school upstairs. Machines with names appear to be a thing in Malton: at the **Brass Castle Brewery and Taphouse**, on Yorkersgate, they toss prized hops such as Galaxy, Amarillo and Equinox into steel drums called Tom, Dick, Harry and Bertha. These cheery vats turn out gluten-free, vegan-friendly potions, including Fruit Lupe IPA and Bad Kitty, a vanilla and chocolate porter so thick and chewy that it could render food obsolete. brasscastle.co.uk

DIETARY REQUIREMENTS

Even away from Talbot Yard, Malton gets full points on any artisan-foodie tick list. Looking for a vegan-vegetarian deli-café? **The Purple Carrot** started life as a stall at the town's monthly market and now serves its famous samosas and courgette lasagne in a cosy space on Market Street. Or perhaps a wood-fired Italian snack? At **La Pizzeria**, Francois Strydom churns out sausage and rapini combinations as if it's feeding time in Naples. Strydom is nicknamed 'the Fat Chef', even though he looks more like pizza's answer to Heston Blumenthal. And as for pubs with grub, Naylor-Leyland swears by the fish finger sandwiches at **The New Malton** and insists that it serves the best sticky toffee pudding in all of England. facebook.com/purplecarrotpopup; fatchefcompany.co.uk; thenewmalton.co.uk

INTERIORS MONOLOGUE

Malton's shops – as independent as its food outlets – tend towards the whimsical. On **The Shambles**, an arcade straight out of *The Old Curiosity Shop*, there's a cobbler, a dusty vinyl-record emporium,

Top, from left: the dining room at the recently refurbished Talbot; Bluebird Bakery, set in former stables in Talbot Yard



an antique-furniture store and **Universal Geek**, which claims to be the smallest comic shop in the world. **Kemps General Store** serves up knick-knacks worthy of the coolest kids' bedroom, while the more conventionally stylish **Hare & Wilde** will have everyone filling their homes with Aztec rugs, hanging planters and St Ives harbour lights. universalgeek.co.uk; kempsgeneralstore.co.uk; hareandwilde.co.uk

TIMES PAST

The **Malton Museum**, in a Yorkersgate townhouse, is the place to get a handle on those Romans. Apparently, a commander called Candidus arrived with his cavalry

unit and decided he liked the place, building a fort and naming it Derventio. Meanwhile, on the northern edge of town, **Eden Camp** was once a World War II POW camp and is now a very human war museum, with a Dig for Victory exhibition about the wartime push to dig allotments (there were 1.4 million across the country by 1943) and a reading room with newspaper front pages from every day of the war. maltonmuseum.co.uk; edencamp.co.uk

KEEP IT COUNTRY

Even in Malton's old stone centre, the surrounding waterways and fields seem to be calling. From the back of The Talbot,

enter a terrain of herons, waterfowl and horses. Get in a car and you're soon in the rolling Howardian Hills, which conceal the 18th-century **Castle Howard**, one of England's great stately homes and twice the setting for screen adaptations of *Brideshead Revisited*. Head north to reach the fringes of Dalby Forest, with its mountain-bike trails and high ropes through the dense canopy. From here, it's a Romantic poem of a drive through the North York Moors to the seaside town of Whitby, to find trawlers, chippies, memories of Captain Cook, and the 16th-century ruins of Whitby Abbey, which inspired Bram Stoker's *Dracula* in 1897. castlehoward.co.uk

Clockwise from top left: The Talbot; Tom Naylor-Leyland; an old weather vane; the Talbot feasting room; flavours at Rare Bird Distillery; Malton Station

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