

Todmorden Market

Contributed by RoryD

An enchanting but typically down-to-earth account of a day as a stallholder at the Todmorden Market, West Yorkshire.

Todmorden Market. It's a Wednesday and stalls cost £12.40 for the day. The greengrocer's stall opposite me is selling 7 bulbs of garlic for £1. I'm trying to remember the Nigel Slater chicken recipe that requires 40 cloves of garlic, and work out that with an average of seven cloves per bulb, now might be a good time to make it.

Ken has the stall next to me. Ken has run a market stall on and off for 40 years. For a while, he traded his slippers in Rawtenstall, on the Lancs /Yorks border just north of Manchester. Ken was big in the Round Table in Rawtenstall, and one Christmas he was assaulted by a man after his collection bucket. Ken was dressed as Father Christmas when the man asked 'Who's in charge here?' Looking round at his fellow round-tablers, whose number included 4 elves, a reindeer and one donkey, he quite reasonably answered 'Me, I suppose.' The man butted him, cracking his jaw and leaving him with £700 of dental work. Four days later, Ken was back on the Christmas trail. The table had a converted caravan which doubled as a grotto. Whilst pulling it into position a week before Christmas, Ken slipped and fell, breaking his arm. For a week, leading up to Christmas the tabloids called him 'The Unluckiest Santa in the World';

I have a long chat with a German man who is on holiday. His English, though ropey, is significantly better than my Deutsch, though we laugh at the katze auf dem wagen. He's into what (I think) he called upwards cookery. Downwards cookery he says is when you see a recipe that you like, and go out and buy the ingredients to make it. Because we habitually like to eat the same things, we end up making, tasting, eating and experiencing the same flavours over and over again. Upwards cookery is the other way round. He picks up a pack of green cardamoms. What we need to be doing is picking ingredients we've never used before, (he waves the cardamoms), and find a recipe that uses them. We tag it onto the idea of shopping locally (well he's at my stall after all) and eating seasonally, and agree that it's an interesting way to think about food. He buys some Ecuadorian black peppercorns, a tarragon, lemon and pepper sea salt, and some star anise. 'What are you doing with the star anise?' I ask. He smiles, and says he's off to find a recipe book.

At home later on, I'm back with the green cardamoms. We find a recipe for a white chocolate mousse with bay leaves and green cardamom seeds. It is staggeringly different, and far far too good for two people on a Wednesday night. The cardamom, which I used to pick painstakingly from my pilau rice, is minty, and fresh tasting. The mousse is light and fragrant and to my white chocolate-hating wife, a real revelation. We're suddenly big fans of 'upwards cookery'.

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