



## MPs TUCK IN TO BATH GOODIES

*Sal Godfrey joined the Bath food and drink producers of Taste of Bath who took their wares to the Palace of Westminster to put the west country's finest on the world stage*

A few months ago, as we stood in the busy buzzing taproom of Electric Bear draining frosty bottles of beer, Helen Rich (the one-woman powerhouse behind Taste of Bath) mentioned to me that she and Ben Howlett MP were cooking up a plan to take Bath's best independent food producers on a road trip to Westminster. Helen asked me if I'd come along and document the experience.

On Wednesday 8 June, eight representatives from Bath's food and drink producers community assembled in the Jubilee Room at the Palace of Westminster and set out their wares for the Taste of Bath roadshow, hosted by Bath MP Ben Howlett. On hand to provide the drinks were Honey Midford Cider, showcasing Stoney Bonk and its classic sparkling cider, Electric Bear Brewing, with a selection of artisan beers, the Bath Gin Company, home of the beautiful and enigmatic Gin Austen, and Round Hill Roastery, with the incredible perfume of fresh coffee, which brought MPs and Westminster staff in their droves.

To soak up the booze, the Bath Soft Cheese Company brought along a selection, including a few hefty wheels of award-winning Bath Blue, while the Somerset Hotsauce Company offered tasters of fiery potions made with a top secret blend of herbs and spices. And for dessert, Meg's Cottage brought samples of their homemade fudge and Choc on Choc showed off its chocolate work with chocolate cheese platters and chocolate biscuits (that's 'biscuits' made

entirely of chocolate, not your usual digestives). Finally, Helen was there to represent the rest of the Taste of Bath producers, including such firm local (and national) favourites as Heavenly Hedgerows, Yuyo Drinks, and Henny & Joe's Chai. She was joined by David James, chief executive of Bath Tourism Plus – there to fly the flag for the city.

As is the way with these things, we weren't entirely sure how many people to expect, but it wasn't long before the Jubilee Room was straining at the seams. More than 300 people of all sorts turned up, from civil servants and Members of Parliament to bloggers and journalists, all enticed by the promise of Bath's incredible food scene, handily transported to London for their delight and delectation.

Reactions were great all around – Doug at The Somerset Hotsauce Company told me: "At one point I thought I might run out of samples. Everyone was really positive, enjoyed the food and had a great time."

As Helen later said: "It was such a relaxed affair with lots of laughter and banter and we received so much positive feedback on our produce and our city. People across the UK are unaware of the fabulous foodie credentials of Bath and Ben Howlett MP's showcase enabled us to shine a light on the city's incredible foodie scene."

Among the throng were a few famous faces – I spotted Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs Liz Truss tucking into some Bath Blue and MP Ian Paisley tasting the fabulous range from Electric Bear Brewing. Doug

of Somerset Sauce, who had a handy position right opposite the door, swears he saw Boris Johnson stick his head in and then rush away, although I'm unable to personally confirm that rumour. Also present was David Evennett, Minister for Tourism.

Although David Cameron didn't find time to visit us (to be fair, there was an emergency vote going on in the house, regarding the extension of the deadline for EU referendum voter registration), he was there in spirit – it seems he's a big fan of Choc On Choc, which had a great picture of him at its stand showing off a special limited edition chocolate bar with his face on the front. Last year, Choc On Choc created bars featuring the faces of the main party leaders and got customers to vote for their favourite candidate by purchasing accordingly (Dave won, with 42% of the vote).

All in all, the event was a fantastic

**WEST COUNTRY ROADSHOW:** main picture, Gerard Krow of Honey Midford Cider with Elizabeth Truss, Secretary of State for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs and Bath MP Ben Howlett

**Inset,** Elizabeth Truss samples Bath Gin

**Opposite page,** MP Peter Bottomley tucks in, organiser Helen Rich of Taste of Bath with MP Ben Howlett, and the crowds sampling Bath food and drink in the Jubilee Room, Westminster





success for Bath's talented independent food and drink producers, and it was great to highlight a side of Bath that not everyone knows about. Ben Howlett MP told me: "I really enjoyed welcoming so many Bath local producers to Parliament allowing us to join together in showing off how much Bath has to offer. It is a fantastic city, yet many people I spoke to only thought of it as a spa town, not realising how much more it has to offer. I want to thank all the amazing producers who gave up their time to come and show off their tasty produce, alongside Helen Rich from Taste of Bath and David James from Bath Tourism Plus.

The Secretary of State was very impressed with what the city has to offer as were all other visitors. I look forward to running a similar event next year, giving Bath a national stage."

Helen's determined to make sure it doesn't stop there: "We hope this is the start of a local food revolution. On the back of this amazing day in Parliament, Taste of Bath is working with Visit Bath, Bath BID and the local council to make local food more accessible to the people of Bath."

If there's one thing this event has proved, it's that when it comes to promoting brilliant local food, Helen is unstoppable.

Helen now has plans to roll out the Taste of brand. She already delivers crates of delicious Bath produce to visitors, locals and businesses and now plans to celebrate the food and drink of other areas. Next year, look out for Taste of reaching another city, while within five years she's planning on having an online store for ten cities, making the best of local produce available across the UK.

Sal Godfrey runs @BathIndieChat on Twitter. Independent businesses are invited to join the weekly Twitter sessions and share their thoughts for an hour from 9pm on Mondays, using the hashtag #bathindiechat. ■

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