

the table

Racing? No, we go to Goodwood for haunch of lamb

The Earl of March's estate in West Sussex has thrived on its equestrian and motorsport events. Now he wants to make it a top foodie destination

As we sip coffee in the magnificent library at Goodwood House, the Earl of March makes an observation about my journey down from London and the lunch I will be enjoying a little later. "You have certainly come further than your food has."

The earl, best known for his development of Goodwood's Festival of Speed and numerous other savvy, money-spinning enterprises, has just opened a new restaurant on the West Sussex estate. At Farmer, Butcher, Chef the organic meat on the menu — and it is mostly meat — comes from animals that have been born, bred, butchered and cooked on the estate through an intimate collaboration between the three men whose job titles sit at the top of the menu. The restaurant wouldn't exist, however, without the driving force of a woman: the 84-year-old Duchess of Richmond, the earl's mother.

Goodwood, home of the Dukes of Richmond for more than 300 years (the first duke was an illegitimate son of Charles II by his French mistress Louise de Kérouaille), has always been an estate where private passions are brought to a wider public. This is one of the oldest homes of cricket, with games taking place in front of the house from 1702, and the earliest set of rules, drawn up for a match in 1727 between the 2nd Duke and a neighbour, are still held here.

Horse racing began in 1802 under the 3rd Duke as an entertainment for local army officers. Today there are 19 days of racing a year including the Glorious Goodwood festival. The motor racing circuit was opened by the 9th Duke in 1948 and his grandson, the present Earl of March, established the Festival of Speed and Goodwood Revival, the celebration of historic motor racing.

The earl, 62, took over the running of the estate from his father, the 10th Duke, when he was 40. The duke and duchess still live on the estate but the earl and his second wife, the former Janet Astor, live with their four children in the main house, which also contains offices from which are run the various business ventures that allow them to reside there.



Now the duchess, a passionate champion of animal welfare and organic food, has inspired the latest project. Farmer, Butcher, Chef serves meat only from the estate's organic farm and aims to do so in a way that ensures nothing, from skin to shin, is wasted. "It is really because of her interest and energy and drive early on, way back, that it has happened at all," says the earl of his mother. "We wouldn't have gone organic without her and she provided the thrust."

There are three restaurants and a café on the Goodwood estate, but the origin of this one can be traced to the 1960s when the future duke and duchess were living near Rugby and as a young mother she became seriously ill, dropping in weight to 6st. Her doctor thought it was some sort of digestive problem but "it was never really diagnosed," she says. "I kept losing weight and having tummy upsets and feeling awful and lacking energy. I never did find out what it was really."

She attributes her rehabilitation to working with a nutritionist doctor. "I was — poor children! — into salads and raw food, wholemeal bread that I made myself. That's nothing now, what people do all the time. Then it was quite a change."

The earl looks mildly pained. "I remember you cooking great saucepans of brown rice and stuff and going to the local goatherd to buy horribly smelly proper yoghurt," he says. "I was just dying to have a burger and chips."

"No way!" says the duchess, good-naturedly.

Above: Goodwood celebrates historic motor racing. Right: the Earl of March with his mother, the Duchess of Richmond. Below: pork collar



"We used to quite often have a day of apples," he recalls. "We just ate apples for the day."

"Very good detox."

"Very good for you," he agrees. "I did make jolly nice puddings."

"We were allowed two sweets a day," he says. "We have been pretty good on the whole on food, but maybe a bit weak on sugar."

The duchess grew much of her own veg in a kitchen garden and was an early member of the Soil Association. Her friends thought she had gone mad. "I did yoga and stuff, which nobody had ever heard of. My friends said: 'Why on earth are you doing that?' They do admit now that they thought I was a crank."

She couldn't persuade her husband to turn the 3,400-acre farm organic — "I didn't have a loud enough voice, did I?" — but



after her son took over she and her daughter-in-law pressed the case for converting it to organic methods. "We teamed up against them," she says. "I am thrilled to bits. On my deathbed I expect I will think: 'Well, the farm's organic.'"

The duchess is scarred by an early memory of cattle being driven with electric prods "in a terrible state, sweating, panting, a horrendous sight. I thought: 'If that's how we get our meat, I am not getting any of that, thank you.' Dreadful."

She is "not what vegetarians would call a vegetarian but I do mostly eat vegetably things if I can. I like fish and I will eat chicken if I know it's organic." She eats meat if she is out and she knows "where it's come from."

The beef served at Farmer, Butcher, Chef is from the deep-red Sussex cattle who graze on the chalk downland and are fed on forage grown on the estate. The lamb comes from Southdown lambs and the pork from free-range pigs, a mixture of Gloucester Old Spots and Saddlebacks crossed with a Large White boar. "Born and bred here, fed here and only eat food that is grown

here," says the earl. "I just think provenance is more important even than being organic."

Occasionally if the weather has been very dry they will bring in some feed from outside, but the butchering takes place on site and he even has hopes of one day slaughtering the animals on the estate. The earl wanted the menu to consist only of Goodwood meat. "I wasn't having that," says the duchess firmly. A fish dish and a vegetarian option were added.

The earl is a full-blooded carnivore. "I'm on a new regime. No carbs, masses of protein. We definitely eat too much meat, but I am telling myself it's not so bad because we know where it's come from."

"Mmm," says his mother doubtfully. She is used to the earl's exuberance. When he was 16 she spent weeks taking him his food in hospital after he borrowed her car, took it for a spin on the Goodwood track and crashed it into a tree.

Recently he took his 16-year-old daughter to try the food at Farmer, Butcher, Chef. "She ate one of the bar snacks and said: 'This is the best thing I have eaten.' It was venison carpaccio.

"Ohh! Raw deer! Oh God! But she got into it and now she is down there all the time."

Later when I have lunch with John Hearn, the master butcher, and Tim Hassell, the general manager of the farm, my favourite bar snacks are the salt-cured, steamed, scraped, dehydrated and fried pork skin and the deep-fried ox tongue.

The haunch of lamb, devised by the butcher and chef as an alternative dish when rump runs out, was a highlight of the main courses offered. The most delicious dish, though, was the slow-cooked shin of beef. Worth waiting 300 years of farm evolution for.

The executive chef, Darron Bunn, has worked at a three Michelin-starred restaurant and five-star hotels. "The relationship between the chefs' team, the farmer and the butcher is truly unique," he tells me. "I have worked at the very highest restaurants and hotels where good relationships with suppliers are essential. This situation is different, it is much more of an education between us: understanding the animals and availability better; the butcher understanding our needs and

what the cuts are used for; the farmer understanding all of the above in order to grow the perfect fit-for-purpose animal to ensure we can get the maximum from the animal, avoid any wastage and give our guests a different, unique dining experience. Very exciting, as well as a learning curve."

The earl, who bears more than a passing resemblance to Hugh Grant, loves Bob Dylan and is a professional photographer who still has exhibitions, has a laid-back air about him but is in reality pretty laser-focused on his mission: "To keep living in the house. It's very important to all of us. We don't want to turn it into a hotel."

Food is central to the masterplan, whether it is hosting a dinner for 1,500 during the Festival of Speed, or offering family meat feasts at the new restaurant. "If you are here for the day, racing or whatever, if you have a bad food experience it is all wrecked. And if you have a great food experience, it is enhanced. Food has always played a part in this place." **Damian Whitworth** goodwood.com/estate/farmer-butcher-chef