2026

INSPIRATIONAL CHEESE RETAILERS



A Cut Above

Celebrating the specialist retailers setting new standards for cheese counters

numéro 10

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Finnian's



Earsham Street Deli

Welcome



Welcome to the sixth edition of *Inspirational Cheese Retailers*, brought to you by the team behind *Speciality Food* and Le Gruyère AOP.

Like cheesemaking itself, cheesemongery is a lifestyle, a way of life that encompasses so many things that makes independent retail truly great – with the delicious artistry of cheese thrown into the mix.

Every year it is an absolute pleasure to meet and celebrate some of the UK's finest cheese selling establishments, and 2026 has been no exception. I have no doubt that you will be inspired by the businesses profiled in the pages that follow; their passion for the craft of cheese, their dedication to growing, supporting and educating their community, and their joy in discovering new cheeses and experiences to keep the wonder alive is tangible and written in the DNA of their excellent establishments.

Read on for some enlightening cheese inspiration.

HOLLY SHACKLETON | EDITOR

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Earsham Street Deli

How We Put This Guide Together

For the sixth edition of *Inspirational Cheese Retailers*, *Speciality Food* has once again partnered with Le Gruyère AOP to celebrate the brightest and the best independently run cheese counters in the UK.

This is a mission close to the hearts of both teams, after decades of working to champion and support the nation's hardworking independent retailers and shine a light on the skills and artistry of fantastic cheeses and their makers.

To create this publication, we asked cheese lovers spanning professionals within the sector and consumers to nominate their most-loved cheese shops – and, as ever, the entries wowed us, both in terms of the quantity of businesses that were so valued by so many and the quality of their work.

The hard work began there, with the task of whittling down the reams of entries to just 15, but our in-house team and the passionate experts at Le Gruyère AOP collaborated to create a list we are hugely proud of and excited to share with you.

Some of the cheese retailers you'll meet in these pages are following in their family's footsteps while others have ventured out into the world of selling driven by their own drive to promote excellent cheese, but they all have something vital at their core: a hunger to relish and revive the UK shoppers' appreciation for finely crafted cheese.

Another boon of producing *Inspirational Cheese Retailers* is having the opportunity to revisit the cheese retailers we championed in last year's publication to see how they have fared in the past 12 months... Suffice to say, they have flourished and we share their stories in the following pages too.

From our team of cheese lovers to yours, we present our pick of 2026's finest independent cheese retailers. We hope you find them as inspiring as we do, and that their stories spur you on to keep cheesemakers across Britain and the world flourishing.

LE GRUYÈRE® SWITZERLAND AOP



© JONTY STOREY

HELEN DAYSH

Helen Daysh, head of marketing UK at Le Gruyère AOP

Working with the team at *Speciality Food* to produce *Inspirational Cheese Retailers* is a pleasure each year, not least because my colleagues and I at Le Gruyère AOP are passionate about supporting independent food retailers across the UK, and this provides an exciting opportunity to celebrate them at their very best.

The businesses profiled here are true inspirations, powered by a love of excellent cheese, and the impact they have on the artisan cheese sector as well as their communities is to be admired.

We can all learn from their dedication to the cause, and I look forward to their continued success.


South West Cheese Shop


Cheese Shop Chester


Cheese at Turnpins


LE GRUYÈRE





Centuries of Craftsmanship

Le Gruyère AOP has long been a cornerstone of excellent cheese counters across the world... Here's why

While variety plays a vital role in every cheese counter up and down Great Britain and beyond, there are some cheeses which have secured their positions and continue to be loved by cheese fans and discerning retailers alike – and Le Gruyère AOP is top of the list.

With today's consumer ever more passionate and educated about the markers of quality, provenance and tradition – not to mention great taste – Le Gruyère AOP offers not only a versatile and unwaveringly delicious option for cheese boards and kitchens, but a rich history of time-honoured craft that never fails to inspire, too.

Quality is king

At a time when provenance is so important, Le Gruyère AOP's is impeccable. The 160 small dairies which produce the cheese (often making only 14 wheels daily) are governed by the PDO specifications which ensure that the cheese is consistent, made to the highest standards possible and entirely traceable, from the cows which supplied the milk, right through to the affineur who aged it and beyond.

Every step in the production of this extraordinary cheese is carefully recorded. No sooner has the milk arrived at the dairy than a sample is taken which will be held for six months so that any imperfection can be traced back to the supplier. It is very much in the producer's interest to achieve the highest standards for his wheels of Le Gruyère AOP, as each wheel is graded and the producer is paid according to how many points his cheese scored.

The true taste of rural Switzerland

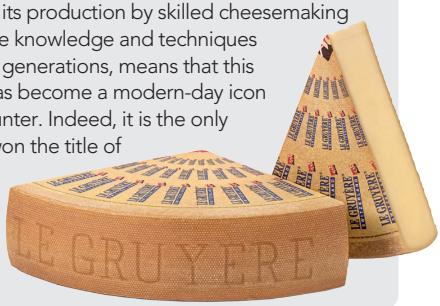
This is a cheese which rests on a bedrock of tradition and history.

DID YOU KNOW?

Le Gruyère AOP is an entirely natural, artisanally-made product which is made with animal rennet and naturally gluten and lactose-free.

AN AWARD-WINNING CHEESE

Le Gruyère AOP is the winner of numerous awards, and no wonder – its consistently unique and perfectly balanced flavour, as well as its production by skilled cheesemaking experts who utilise knowledge and techniques passed down the generations, means that this ancient cheese has become a modern-day icon of the cheese counter. Indeed, it is the only cheese that has won the title of Best Cheese in the World at the World Cheese Awards six times.





Le Gruyère AOP has been made in the Gruyère region and then in the Swiss cantons of Fribourg, Neuchâtel, Jura, Vaud and the Bern area since the twelfth century, which has allowed plenty of time for the cheese to reach its present – some would say perfect – state. But, of course, it's the taste of Le Gruyère AOP which has ensured its longevity and present fame. Ranging from delicately floral to deeply nutty, these flavours originate in the milk of the Alpine cows and this milk achieves its unique flavours because of the lush



HOW TO BE CONFIDENT YOU'RE STOCKING THE REAL DEAL

Inspirational Cheese Retailers readers can rest assured in the knowledge that there are details on genuine wheels of Le Gruyère AOP that confirm their authenticity: a casein mark which appears on every wheel, alongside the date of production; also the words 'Le Gruyère AOP' alongside a number which specifies the dairy at which the cheese was produced. This can be easily identified at gruyere.com.



hillside grasses on which the animals are fed.

The small but interesting variations in the flavours of Le Gruyère AOP are the result of cows being fed on rich grass in the summer and hay in the winter. No silage is used and nor are any preservatives or additives.

An international favourite, made by artisans

It is sometimes thought – quite wrongly – that such a well-established and internationally recognised cheese must be factory made. In fact, nothing could be further from the truth. The rules which govern the consistency and quality of this cheese ensure that the finished product has the unique and subtle flavours which lift Le Gruyère AOP above anything machine-made. During production, the paste quality, texture, aroma and appearance of every cheese are all carefully monitored. These necessary rules stipulate that milk producers may not produce any cheese and that cheesemakers may not produce any milk. This allows the same highly-skilled people who produce the mountain-made Gruyère d'Alpage AOP in the summer to produce milk in the winter months.

The freshness of the milk is assured by the ruling on proximity: the small herds which produce the milk which is delivered twice daily to the dairy must be located no more than 12.4 miles from the dairy. The milk must also be poured into the cheesemaker's copper vat no more than 18 hours after milking.

Versatile and full-flavoured, there are plenty of ways to enjoy this Swiss classic at its best

Due to the simplicity of Le Gruyère AOP – its only ingredients are milk, salt and animal rennet, not to mention time and expertise – the environment from which the milk comes is of paramount importance. Thankfully, the Swiss pastures on which the cows graze are full of natural herbs and flora, imbuing the cheese with a unique taste of the Alps.

The delicate balance of sweet and savoury notes, plus Le Gruyère AOP's signature nuttiness, lends the cheese an enviable versatility. Of course, it is delicious on a cheeseboard and can stand up well to savoury preserves and biscuits, but it is also an impressively useful ingredient in the kitchen and can be enjoyed in traditional dishes such as fondue as well as served with pasta, vegetables and meat.

TASTING NOTES

- Le Gruyère AOP is available in two ages, each of which displays subtle differences in flavour:
- Le Gruyère AOP Classic (aged six-nine months) Nutty, sweet and refined – delicious melted and popular with fans of mild cheeses
- Le Gruyère AOP Réserve (aged 10 months and up) Aromatic and full of flavour – its complex, mature flavours make it a popular choice for a cheeseboard

A CHEESE FOR EVERYONE

Award-winning Le Gruyère AOP is suitable for all cheese lovers to enjoy, thanks to being naturally gluten and lactose-free – so nobody, including lactose-intolerant or coeliac customers – need miss out on this one-of-a-kind cheese.

HOW TO CUT LE GRUYÈRE AOP

Cut the wheel in half using a cheesewire then cut into quarters using a double-handled knife – halve these quarters into eighths, then cut the top half into three wedges and the bottom into six slices. Wrap the cut portions with clingfilm in order to avoid the cheese getting into contact with the air.



The Swiss pastures on which the cows graze are full of natural herbs and flora, imbuing the cheese with a unique taste of the Alps

LE GRUYÈRE AOP IS A DELICIOUSLY VERSATILE INGREDIENT. VISIT **GRUYERE.COM/EN/RECIPES** FOR A HOST OF SERVING SUGGESTIONS



Finnian's

An affinity with the Continent has led to a perfectly curated cheese selection



KENT

LOCATION:
BISHOPSBOURNE

FOUNDED:
2024

FOUNDER:
FINNIAN DUNLOP



"It's a blessing and a curse that the shop is so small, because it can be very easily manned by one person which leads to a lot of one-to-one interactions that allow my small team and I to really connect with our customers"

Decades of fine food retail experience paved the way for the success of Finnian's, a destination cheesemonger located in an indie hub in Bishopsbourne. Prior to opening the bricks and mortar store in November 2024, Finnian Dunlop hosted a market stall at Folkestone Harbour which not only gave him a taste of running his own business but put his expertise in cheese on the map for both locals and tourists.

"I'd say I have a natural affinity for selling cheese," he begins. "My mum was a caterer and worked in a deli, and prior to working at a well-known fine food retailer I worked in hospitality – so it's been a natural progression for me to open my own place, and that was always my goal."

While Folkestone Harbour Arm offered a younger, vibrant and tourist-heavy clientele, Bishopsbourne is an overall more residential operation. "We're located in a small converted farmyard in a village and my neighbours are a great farm shop and a bakery, so I'm in great company and have become a little hub for local food lovers."



Being just down the road from premium hotel The Pig and close to Canterbury feeds tourists and families through the doors too – as well as those travelling to and from Belgium and Holland due to its proximity to Dover.

Whatever the demographic, Finnian's carefully curated range is a hit. "Cheese is always the star, but my wine knowledge has helped me to curate a nice little range of bottles that

MASTERING HOSPITALITY

Hosting comes naturally to Finnian, in large part thanks to his background in hospitality. "It's a blessing and a curse that the shop is so small, because it can be very easily manned by one person which leads to a lot of one-to-one interactions that allow my small team and I to really connect with our customers." In the absence of a defined shop window, it is this ability – "verbal merchandising" – that really pushes the shop forwards.

LE GRUYÈRE® SWITZERLAND AOP





complement cheeses." He often makes pairings based on the classic 'what grows together goes together' adage, pairing a really good Sancerre with a cheese from the Loire Valley.

The wider range contains everything you could need for a well-rounded cheeseboard such as crackers and chutneys, including Opinel knives – a particular passion for Finnian.

"The cheese range evolves throughout the seasons and through areas of interest," says Finnian, "but despite having a vertical fridge as well as a small counter space is very limited so I have to be particular about what I bring in - with an average of around 30 cheeses at any given time."

A history rich in living and working on the Continent is represented in a strong European influence across the shop, with a strong showing for French, Swiss, Greek, Spanish and Italian produce. "Plus, being on the doorstep of Europe, it makes sense that I showcase some of the best cheeses from across the Channel."

Finnian's relatively small capacity allows for an outsized opportunity to interact with his customers. "There are a handful of cheeses that will always be in my counter, such as Colston Bassett Stilton and Baron Bigod, but I play around a lot with the range and think that is where the fun comes in for both me and my customers," he says.

With a loose 50:50 split between British and Continental cheeses, there is scope to experiment with both halves of the range. "I'm frequently changing around classics like Cheddars - one week I'll have a Montgomery and the next I might have Isle of Mull – and while I would never say that Cantal is a straight alternative to traditional Cheddar, I will suggest it if a customer is looking to experience something new."

The ultimate new-ness is in the pipeline thanks to Finnian's long-held desire to create his own cheese. Indeed, a team member is joining him on his quest so customers have a particularly exciting addition to the counter to look forward to...

BEST SELLING CHEESES



Fen Farm Dairy
Baron Bigod
A traditional farmhouse Brie style cheese, handmade at Fen Farm from their own grass-fed Montbéliarde cows.
fenfarmdairy.co.uk



Montgomery's Mature Cheddar
A traditional, handmade, unpasteurised Somerset Cheddar, matured for 12 months for deep, rich nutty flavours.
montgomerycheese.co.uk



Curlew Dairy
Yoredale Wensleydale
A soft, creamy, buttery texture with lemon yogurt acidity and mineral, earthy tones closer to the rind.
curlewdairy.co.uk



Kingcott Dairy
Kingcott Blue
A soft-centred, lightly veined blue cheese, with smooth even blue tastes.
kingcottdairy.co.uk



Earsham Street Deli

Organic evolution has shaped this destination cheese counter



SUFFOLK

LOCATION:
BUNGAY

FOUNDED:
2007

FOUNDER:
MICHELLE STEELE



"I don't think you can ever stand still in retail; I'm always asking how we can improve the customer experience. Everything we do is centred around making shopping enjoyable rather than transactional"

Earsham Street Deli has become one of Suffolk's best-loved food destinations by staying true to a simple philosophy: put people first. Owner Michelle has spent almost two decades building the business into a thriving independent retailer where exceptional British cheese, carefully curated food and genuine customer relationships all play an equally important role.

"I took over the business in 2007 when I was just 22. I'd finished university, didn't really know what I wanted to do and had always worked in retail and hospitality." At that time, the deli already existed in a much smaller shop further along the street, and the opportunity came along at exactly the right time. "It wasn't some lifelong dream," she says, "it just happened. Looking back now, though, I genuinely think it was what I was meant to do. Retail is completely in my veins."

The team moved into their current, much larger premises in 2015, which transformed what they could offer. "The extra space allowed us to create a much better shopping experience and expand the range without customers feeling cramped. Then, in 2022, we opened a second shop at Snape Maltings, followed by The Edit opposite the original Bungay store earlier this year, giving us room to expand into gifts, homeware and lifestyle products while creating even more space for cheese."

Constant evolution is the name of the game at Earsham Street Deli. "I don't think you can ever stand still in retail; I'm always asking how we can improve the customer experience," says Michelle. "Since having my daughter,

CHEESE FOR ALL

"I never want people to feel intimidated," says Michelle. "Cheese should be accessible to everyone, whether they're spending a few pounds or putting together a £300 celebration cheeseboard." Michelle's team encourages customers to taste, ask questions and explore. "There are no silly questions and absolutely no snobbery. Staff training is really important too. We organise producer visits, Academy of Cheese training and every team member receives a monthly cheese voucher so they can take cheeses home and experience them properly before recommending them to customers. It's much more authentic when someone can honestly say, 'I've tried this and I loved it'."

LE GRUYÈRE® SWITZERLAND AOP







I've spent more time working on the business rather than always being behind the counter, focusing on buying, merchandising and curating the range.

"Everything we do is centred around making shopping enjoyable rather than transactional."

When it comes to the deli's cheese range, customers can enjoy a carefully curated blend of excellent British cheeses with a handful of Continentals – with a rolling roster of 'guest cheeses' thrown in to enliven the counter.

"Space is always at a premium, so we're constantly reviewing the range. A few years ago we introduced a monthly Guest Cheese, giving customers something new to discover while keeping their favourites on the counter. If a guest cheese proves really popular, it often earns a permanent place," Michelle explains.

An impressive proximity to one of the UK's most-loved cheeses is a boon for the business. "Because we're close to Fen Farm Dairy, Baron Bigod is naturally one of our biggest sellers, and it's wonderful having that relationship with Johnny and Dulcie," she says. "We also work directly with many producers wherever possible and complement that with trusted wholesalers."

Indeed, relationships are the beating heart of Earsham Street Deli. "We've watched customers' children grow up and now they're coming in to shop on their own. That's incredibly special. If we can help someone discover a new favourite cheese while making them feel welcome, then we've done our job. That's what independent retail is all about."

BEST SELLING CHEESES



Trethowan Dairy Pitchfork Cheddar
Clothbound and aged for 12-14 months, each wheel of this Cheddar is subtly different.
trethowan brothers.com



Shadow Blossom
An Alpine-style cheese coated in an aromatic blend of five peppers and spices.
hofkaeserei-kraus.de



Mrs Temple's Cheese Binham Blue
A creamy blue cheese that melts in the mouth. Made in Norfolk.
mrstemples cheeses.co.uk



Fen Farm Dairy Baron Bigod
A traditional farmhouse Brie style cheese, handmade at Fen Farm from their own grass-fed Montbéliarde cows.
fenfarmdairy.co.uk



Cheese at Turnpins

A passion for cheese and an enviable location makes this a must-visit



LONDON

LOCATION:
GREENWICH

FOUNDED:
2025

FOUNDERS:
NICOLA HILL AND CHRIS HOLMES



"The quality, innovation and creativity of British cheese is extraordinary, and if we can introduce more people to that, then we're doing exactly what we set out to achieve"

Cheese at Turnpins in Greenwich Market has enjoyed a whirlwind first year. Founders Nicola Hill and Chris Holmes swapped careers in law and wealth management for artisan cheese, opening just in time for Christmas in one of the capital's busiest tourist hotspots.

"It was a complete career change for both of us," says Nicola. "I spent 20 years as a partner in a law firm before taking a sabbatical and deciding not to go back. Chris had his own wealth management business, and we'd always loved visiting cheese shops whenever we travelled. We kept asking ourselves why there wasn't a proper artisan cheese shop in the centre of Greenwich."

In time, the perfect retail bolthole became available in Greenwich and the pair set about learning all they could in order to pass their knowledge – and love – for great cheese on to their customers. "We knew loving cheese wasn't enough," says Chris. "We spent around 18 months preparing, taking courses, learning from experienced cheesemongers and immersing ourselves in the industry



before we even opened the doors.

"After getting the keys we had just a few weeks to fit it out, stock it and get trading. It was incredibly intense."

Nicola continues, "We knew January would have been far harder for a new artisan cheese shop, so we fought to get everything ready for late November. Looking back, it was madness, but absolutely worth it."

Throughout the pages of this publication you'll come across gratitude for the kindness and openness of the artisan cheese community, and Nicola and Chris experiences this in droves. "The community has been invaluable," Nicola says. "Everyone has been incredibly generous with their advice and encouragement. Emma Young, The

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Cheese Explorer, was instrumental in helping us fill the knowledge gaps we didn't even know we had. We've also become part of the wider cheesemonger community, where people are always happy to answer questions and share experiences."

"It's a wonderfully supportive industry," agrees Chris. "We couldn't have asked for a better welcome."

Welcoming too has been the pair's community, the customer element of which consists of three distinct groups: loyal local customers, visitors from around the UK and international tourists. "Greenwich is such a unique location because you have residents shopping during the week and visitors from all over the world at weekends," says Nicola.

Cheese at Turnpins has also been busy collaborating with fellow businesses located nearby. "We also work closely with other local businesses, supplying cheese for gin tastings, collaborating with walking food tours, pubs, galleries and book clubs," says Chris. "Community is a huge part of what we do."

The pair are on a mission to change customers' perception of cheese. "We'd love to see more people buying artisan cheese regularly rather than seeing it as a luxury for special occasions," says Nicola. "Britain produces exceptional cheese, but we don't yet have the everyday cheese culture you find in France."

"That's what excites us most," continues Chris. "There has never been a better time for British cheese. The quality, innovation and creativity are extraordinary, and if we can introduce more people to that, then we're doing exactly what we set out to achieve."

ONE-TO-ONE SERVICE

Nicola and Chris pride themselves on offering a completely personalised service. "Whether someone is spending £10 or £100, we take the time to understand what they enjoy, tell the stories behind the cheeses and create something tailored to them rather than offering a standard package," says Nicola. Chris agrees. "Time is probably our biggest USP. We want people to feel welcome, ask questions and discover something new every time they visit."

BEST SELLING CHEESES



Curlew Dairy Yoredale Wensleydale
A traditional Wensleydale but not as crumbly as others, this is creamy with a light sharpness.
curlewdairy.co.uk



Dorstone
This turret-shaped goat's cheese combines a light, fluffy texture with bright, citrusy flavours and a gentle acidity.
nealsyard creamery.co.uk



Westcombe Smoked Cheddar
Smoked over beech wood for 48 hours for coffee and caramel notes and an impressive complexity.
westcombe dairy.com



Le Gruyère AOP
An artisanal cheese that's smooth and aromatic at six months, becoming full-bodied and savoury at 24 months.
gruyere.com



Brie Yourself

This neighbourhood hub is a beacon for lovers of Continental cheese



LONDON

LOCATION: HACKNEY

FOUNDED: 2024

FOUNDER: TATIANA RUBANOVA



"Our job isn't simply just cutting cheese. Good service, quality products and genuine relationships are what build loyalty – and that's exactly the kind of shop I wanted Brie Yourself to be"

Less than two years after opening the doors to Brie Yourself in Hackney's Fish Island, founder Tatiana has created far more than a cheese shop. Combining Continental cheeses, neighbourhood partnerships and a strong sense of community, the business has quickly become a destination where customers stop by as much for a chat as they do for cheese.

"We opened in November 2024, so we're still quite a young business," begins owner Tat. "We're a European cheese shop, with around 30 cheeses on the counter at any one time, mostly from Continental Europe. Alongside cheese we sell wine, charcuterie and carefully chosen accompaniments, but we're also becoming something of a neighbourhood deli with sandwiches, cheese boards and a growing food offering."

People often pop in just to say hello, even if they aren't buying anything, plus "Fish Island is also full of dog owners, so we always keep a little tub of "dog cheese" behind the counter for our four-legged regulars."



Supporting local food producers is also of key importance to Tat – growing the community beyond customers to suppliers, too. "We stock products from food entrepreneurs who live nearby, whether that's olive oil, locally roasted coffee or speciality teas. Even if the

THE PLACE TO BE

Events play an important role in community-building, with Brie Yourself the home of "very informal" evenings called Cheese & Wine Club. "There's no ticket or lecture," she says, "just people getting together to enjoy wine, cheese and conversation. We always include an interactive theme, such as blind tasting two rosés where guests have to guess which comes from Provence and which comes from China. It's all about having fun while discovering something new."







ingredients come from elsewhere, I love that the people behind those products are part of our local community."

The desire to build a community is shared by many others in the area. "Fish Island feels like a village, despite all the new developments around it," she explains. "I know most of my customers by name, so I often shape the range around what they ask for. If someone remembers a cheese from childhood or wants something they've struggled to find, I'll do my best to source it."

While using education to welcome consumers into the artisan cheese fold is a tried and true retail method, "I prefer to think of it as entertaining them," says Tat. "Of course we explain different milk types, ageing and production methods, but stories are what people really remember.

"When new staff join, I tell them that our job isn't simply cutting cheese – it's making customers smile through the stories behind the products. Those conversations give people confidence to try something different and make every visit enjoyable."

The team at Brie Yourself is not interested in overselling. "I'd much rather someone buys the right amount, enjoys it and comes back next week than leaves with too much cheese that goes to waste," Tat explains. "Good service, quality products and genuine relationships are what build loyalty – and that's exactly the kind of shop I wanted Brie Yourself to be."

BEST SELLING CHEESES



Jumi Hörbi
A spicy, herby hard cheese coated in a herb and flower exterior.
jumilondon.com



Bleu Des Causses AOP
A powerful and aromatic cheese with intense character and creamy texture.
bleu-des-causses.com



Caseficio Polito Mozzarella di Bufala Campana PDO
Made exclusively using milk sourced from the cheesemaker's buffalo farm.
caseificio polito.it



Rove des Garrigues
A tiny fresh goat's cheese which is very flavoursome, with notes of thyme and lemon.
unenormand ealondres.co.uk



Essen General Store

A passion for people and craft powers this community destination



NOTTINGHAMSHIRE

LOCATION:
BEESTON

FOUNDED:
2021

FOUNDERS:
SAM SKINNER-WATTS AND ED MOORE



"Our aim remains the same: to celebrate exceptional food, support independent makers and give people a reason to keep coming back"

After years spent working for other people in hospitality and fine food, Sam Skinner-Watts and Ed Moore decided to set up shop themselves – first with a pop-up at a local brewery and stalls at local markets, before moving into their own bricks and mortar premises in Beeton. "Ed and I have over 25 years' experience in hospitality, food retail and management. My background includes pubs, bars and delicatessens, while Ed came from fine food and restaurant environments. Those different experiences complement each other really well, both operationally and creatively."

While Sam and Ed describe their business as a general store, the cheese counter is definitely the heart of operations, he says. "We specialise in artisan farmhouse cheeses, particularly raw milk cheeses, sourced from small producers with real stories behind them. We work closely with respected suppliers like Mons Fromagerie and Neal's Yard Dairy, constantly looking for exceptional cheeses and supporting independent makers."

This philosophy branches out beyond cheese into the rest of the shop's comprehensive – and delicious – range. "Beyond cheese, we stock artisan charcuterie, antipasti, natural wines, preserves and store cupboard products, but everything has to be made by someone who genuinely cares about quality." Story and quality are key. "We source products on merit rather than following trends, and we're always evolving our range to keep things fresh and exciting."

Supporting independent producers is central to everything they do. "We only stock cheeses we genuinely believe in, made by farmers and cheesemakers who care deeply about their craft. If independent cheesemongers don't support these producers, many simply won't survive."

Beeston is a gratifyingly diverse location for a shop such as this, says Sam. "We have local families, professionals, students from the University of Nottingham and people visiting for lunch or special occasions. Because we offer retail, takeaway food, wine, tasting events and cheese, we're able to appeal to lots of different audiences."

Trust is steadily building with these audiences. "What's really rewarding is seeing customers who first came in wondering what kind of shop we





were become regulars," he continues. "Many now trust us to put together their Christmas cheese boards, picnic hampers and celebration food. Building that trust has been one of our biggest achievements."

The Essen General Store team is hugely passionate about being part of their local community. "We work alongside our staff every day, serving customers, cutting cheese and washing pots. The shop isn't just somewhere to buy food; it's somewhere people come for conversation, recommendations and a warm welcome," says Sam. "We want Essen General Store to still be part of Beeston in another 20 years, and building genuine relationships is the best way to make that happen."

The coming months are set to be strong for the shop and its dedicated team. "We're always looking for exciting new producers and products to champion while continuing to grow alongside our customers. Whether that's showcasing fantastic local cheesemakers, introducing new tasting experiences or discovering the next great artisan product, our aim remains the same: to celebrate exceptional food, support independent makers and give people a reason to keep coming back," says Sam.

A CONSIDERED APPROACH

Just as important as the quality and range of cheese and other products on offer is the methodology of the business – and both Sam and Ed have used the experience and knowledge gleaned from their years in hospitality to shape how they treat people. "We don't believe in scripted service or hard selling," explains Sam, "instead we believe in welcoming customers properly, having genuine conversations and helping them find something they'll enjoy. If someone leaves smiling, we've done our job."

BEST SELLING CHEESES



Primrose Creamery Lindley
Lindley is a soft, Jersey cream-enriched cheese made with raw cow's milk with a mild earthiness.
primrose creamery.com



Wakebridge Manor Creamery Wakebridge White
A clothbound, pressed sheep's milk cheese that is close textured, creamy and savoury with a hint of sweetness.
wakebridge manor.com



Le Gruyère AOP
An artisanal cheese that's smooth and aromatic at six months, becoming full-bodied and savoury at 24 months.
gruyere.com



Errington Cheese Blackmount
A fresh, soft, lactic-style goat's cheese, rubbed in vegetable ash.
errington cheese.co.uk





The Granary Deli

The latest chapter of this popular shop is impressive local cheese lovers



YORKSHIRE

LOCATION:
WATLINGTON

FOUNDED:
2002

FOUNDER:
ROBIN
HOLMES-SMITH



"There are cheeses in here that I don't particularly like, but plenty of customers do. You can't fill a shop with only the things you enjoy. Everything has a purpose"

When Robin and his wife took over The Granary Deli in 2002, they inherited a business with an enviable reputation but a difficult recent history. Originally founded in 1985, the deli was one of the UK's early champions of British artisan cheese, established by pioneers who travelled the country in search of exceptional makers long before regional cheese became fashionable.

"It had an amazing cheese reputation," Robin says. "The people before us hadn't completely ruined that, thankfully, but there wasn't much left. We bought it for very little and just started building it back up."

Both Robin and his wife brought strong retail experience rather than formal cheesemongering credentials. Robin had managed stores for Woolworths and a garden centre group, while his wife had been a buyer for Habitat. What they shared was a genuine passion for good food. "We were both interested in food and how it all went together. We knew a bit about cheese, but nothing compared to what you need when you're selling it every day."

That meant a steep learning curve. Robin immersed himself in books, visited cheesemongers across southern England and spent years learning not only how cheeses taste, but why they taste that way. "You have to understand everything that influences a cheese – from the pasture the animals graze to the way the cheesemaker works. Then when customers ask questions, you can explain why one cheese tastes

A CONSIDERED RANGE

While cheese is the shop's centrepiece, The Granary also stocks carefully chosen wines, beers, chutneys, oils, preserves and kitchenware. One unexpected success is its extensive greetings card selection, which brings customers through the door before they discover everything else the shop has to offer. "Our card selection has become a bit of a destination, which is good as it takes us a very long time to source good options, so we've located them in what could otherwise be dead space at the end of the shop," he explains. "People don't always buy a cheese on their way back out, but at least they've become familiar with what we sell."





completely different from another."

Their efforts paid off quickly. The deli doubled its turnover in the first year, fuelled by a determination to source unusual products and constantly expand the range. Today, cheese remains firmly at the heart of the business. The counter carries around 120 cheeses for most of the year, with British cheeses taking pride of place alongside carefully selected Continental favourites.

Rather than curating the selection around his own preferences, Robin



focuses on offering something for every palate. "There are cheeses in here that I don't particularly like, but plenty of customers do. You can't fill a shop with only the things you enjoy. Everything has a purpose."

Introducing new cheeses, however, can be a challenge. The Granary offers tastings every weekend, but changing customers' buying habits isn't always easy. "They'll taste something they've never had before, tell you it's absolutely wonderful, buy some, and then next week they're back to their usual favourite. Occasionally something sticks, but it's definitely a one-in, one-out policy because the counter is already full."

One of Robin's favourite parts of the job is helping customers discover something new. "When people don't know what they like, that's brilliant. We can start tasting and work through different styles until we find the right one. Then you've really done your job." Only after a customer has fallen in love with a cheese does Robin introduce the stories behind it. "The history comes afterwards. Once they've found something they enjoy, they're much more interested in where it comes from, who makes it and why it's special."

After more than two decades at the helm, Robin's philosophy remains refreshingly simple: offer exceptional products, keep learning and help every customer leave with a cheese they'll genuinely love.

BEST SELLING CHEESES



Colston Bassett Stilton
The only remaining exclusively hand-laded Stilton, with mineral tones and spiced sweetness.
colstonbassett dairy.co.uk



Bleu d'Auvergne
A bold and salty blue cheese with a creamy, bittersweet aftertaste of mushroom.
mons fromages.com



White Lake Cheese Rachel
A semi hard, washed rind cheese with a delicate yet moreish sweet, mild flavour.
whitelake.co.uk



Schlossberger
A full-flavoured and nutty cheese matured for a minimum of 18 months.
jumilondon.com





Cheese & Pickle Deli

Community comes first at this counter, from suppliers to customers



LEICESTERSHIRE

LOCATION:
PENNBURY

FOUNDED:
2023

FOUNDERS:
SAM SPENCER AND SARAH WELTON



"We want everyone to feel welcome, whether they spend a lot of money or nothing at all. The experience and connection matter"

"We fell into it almost by accident," says Sarah, who co-owns Cheese & Pickle Deli with her sister Sam. "The site was developed in 2019 from a disused farm, with the buildings converted to create Pennbury Farm Café alongside several independent businesses. My sister, Sam, had been working on the site from the beginning, initially with the previous owner, who had run a stationery shop before developing the farm shop."

When the next owner, Kate, took over the farm shop, she stripped it back from a traditional farm shop with a butchery and fresh produce to focus more on deli foods, homeware and gifts, she explains. Sam stayed through all those changes. "I had also helped out on the site, and Sam and I started saying how great it would be to have somewhere like this ourselves."

Then, in early 2023, Kate asked Sam if she would be interested in taking over. "She asked me to join her, and suddenly our conversations about doing it ourselves became reality," Sarah says. "We took over on 1st April 2023 – which felt like a slightly unfortunate date to announce it, as everyone thought it might be an April Fool's joke!" The pair

A FOCUS ON LOCAL

A big priority for the Cheese & Pickle Deli team has been finding and supporting local suppliers. "We love giving new producers a chance. People sometimes come in with a product they have made themselves and have never approached a retailer before. We understand how daunting that can be, so we try to help where we can," says Sarah. "One producer came to us with beautifully packaged mulled-wine spice bags. We decided to stock them, and she has since gone on to supply farm shops, garden centres and major retailers. It is wonderful to know that we were among the first to give her product a chance."

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decided to build on what was already there while bringing back some things that had disappeared.

"We currently stock products from more than 40 local producers, including cheese, bread, eggs, honey, jams and chutneys, as well as locally made cards, art, homeware and gifts," Sarah explains. "We try to avoid products that people can easily find in supermarkets; we want customers to discover something different when they come to us."

For Sarah and Sam, the focus is on being customer-centric. "We want everyone who comes through the door to feel welcome, whether they spend a lot of money or nothing at all. A small sale is just as important to us as a big one, because the experience and connection matter."

Connections are readily made at the cheese counter, where Sarah and Sam offer customers the chance to taste cheeses before purchasing. "It's important to us that people find something they genuinely enjoy," she says.

The counter currently stocks around 20–25 cheeses, which includes a core range that customers know and love as well as seasonal cheeses and products requested by customers. The pair's support for items made nearby is represented here, too. "We particularly like supporting local cheeses, including those from Leicestershire," she says.

Sam and Sarah are still learning as they go, but they are enjoying the journey. "It is a small, family-run business – essentially myself, my sister and my children helping when they can – and we want to keep developing the range while continuing to support local producers."

BEST SELLING CHEESES



Long Clawson Blue Stilton
Creamy and a touch crumbly, this has threads of distinctive, savoury blue veining throughout.
clawson farms.co.uk



Snowdonia Red Storm
Complex and refined vintage Red Leicester with sweet caramel notes.
snowdonia cheese.co.uk



Champignon Mushroom Brie
This triple cream, soft ripened Brie is a beautifully rich and luxurious cheese.
carronlodge.com



Montagnolo Affine
A triple cream, soft cheese which has been surface ripened and has blue veins throughout.
carronlodge.com



The Cheese Press

A fateful meeting has led to one of Yorkshire's premier fine food spots



YORKSHIRE

LOCATION:
RICHMOND

FOUNDED:
2022

FOUNDER:
AMBER LEE



"We are all about creating a welcoming space where people can discover great cheese, hear the stories behind it and enjoy genuine hospitality. That's still the part of the business I love most"

Like many excellent businesses run with heart, fate stepped into the founding of Richmond's The Cheese Press. "I founded Cheese Press almost by accident," says Amber Lee, owner. "Before opening the shop, I worked in health and safety and compliance for a facilities management company supporting the MOD. It was very different to what I do now."

She had become increasingly interested in artisan food, particularly cheese, after visiting a cheese and wine shop in the south, and upon returning to Richmond was struck by there being nothing similar.

"One day I walked past the premises we're in now, saw it was empty and knocked on the door," she says. "I spoke to the landlord, then met my partner afterwards and said, 'I think I've just taken on a lease!' Looking back, I still can't believe I was brave enough to do it!"

Like many passion projects, the shop was a side hustle for a while. "I kept my day job for the first year, working four days a week while running the shop the rest of the time. After 12 months, I knew I had to commit fully," she says.



Four years later they have expanded into more of the building, added an event space, and introduced wine, deli products, hampers, subscriptions and a busy programme of events.

This evolution didn't come easily. "I had very little business experience, so everything has been a learning curve," says Amber. "We didn't spend heavily on marketing or PR, and we've grown steadily rather than quickly. Looking back, I think that was probably the right approach because we didn't know how the business would be received."





Taking a step back to see the wood for the trees has been a vital lesson. "One of the biggest lessons has been learning to work on the business rather than constantly in it. Planning ahead for seasonal occasions, developing the website and thinking strategically all take time when you're also serving customers every day."

The Cheese Press's enviable location provides Amber with a rich vein of customers, as well as a story and unique selling point. "Richmond is a wonderful place to trade," she says. "We have loyal local customers, but we're also the gateway to the Yorkshire Dales and on the Coast-to-Coast route, so we welcome walkers and visitors from all over the UK and overseas. That mix keeps things interesting and means we introduce a lot of people to Yorkshire cheese for the first time.

"Ultimately, that's what Cheese Press is all about: creating a welcoming space where people can discover great cheese, hear the stories behind it and enjoy genuine hospitality. That's still the part of the business I love most."

SUPPORTING LOCAL CHEESEMAKERS

Local is king at The Cheese Press. "We're Richmond's only dedicated independent cheesemonger and we're passionate about championing Yorkshire producers. Around half of our rotating range of approximately 50 cheeses comes from local makers, alongside carefully chosen British and Continental cheeses." That doesn't mean that Amber and her team are willing to sacrifice quality on the alter of 'local'. "We don't stock something simply because it's local – it has to be exceptional," she says. "I love telling customers about the cheesemakers, the families behind the products and the seasonality of artisan cheese. Visitors especially enjoy discovering cheeses they've never heard of before."

BEST SELLING CHEESES



Curlew Dairy Yoredale Wensleydale
A softer, creamy, buttery texture with lemon yogurt acidity and mineral, earthy tones closer to the rind.
curlewdairy.co.uk



Swaledale Cheese Swaledale Blue
Crafted using rich, locally sourced milk to create a smooth and creamy cheese with gentle complexity.
swaledale cheese.co.uk



Isle of Mull Cheddar
Drier in texture than other Cheddars with flavours that are upfront, richly savoury and boozy.
isleofmull cheese.co.uk



Delice de Bourgogne
Rich and creamy with notes of lemon and mushrooms.
fromagerie-lincet.net



Chester Cheese Shop

A love of the craft of cheese runs through the veins of this establishment



CHESHIRE

LOCATION:
CHESTER

FOUNDED:
1985

FOUNDER:
CAROL FAULKNER



"We enjoy showcasing the connections we have with makers – which is the important bit, really. The husbandry, how they take care of their animals, has always been of huge importance to them and to us"

A familial appreciation for good food and doing the right thing run through the heart of Chester Cheese Shop, now run by Ann Faulkner after originally having been founded by her mother Carol in 1985. Carol had form in the cheese world before opening the shop's doors; "she made cheese at Reaseheath when she was young," explains Ann, "and was always frustrated by the lack of decent cheese for cheese boards when she ran a Chester pub called the Blue Bell."

One day Carol went into the local video shop and was told the owner was selling up, so she was able to satisfy her ambition of having her own cheese shop. Ann was involved from the get go. "I've always been involved in the shop, from working here in the summer holidays as a child to running it now," says Ann, "and looking back on it now the thing I remember most is the cheese counter being full of French, Swiss and Italian cheeses as well as a handful of British ones."

A young Ann travelled with her mother to meet cheesemakers, from



Jamie Montgomery in Somerset to Lucy Appleby in Cheshire, and an appreciation of the mastery of cheese has been with her ever since.

Three years ago, when Carol was 85, she handed over the keys of the shop to Ann – "but still sometimes comes into work!"

Ann has been able to succeed in Carol's mission to bring a lot more British cheese into the counter. "Mum always wanted to have an entirely British cheese counter, but she didn't think it would be possible with our location in a small town. Thankfully we've got a couple of incredible cheesemakers



on our doorstep – Appleby's, Bournes Cheese, Larkton Cheese and Burt's Cheese, as well as some makers in Wales which are local to us and we feel really lucky and proud to have that."

It's no wonder the shop has become a destination for shoppers seeking a taste of the local area. Tour operators send visitors from around the world in their direction, and British holidaymakers also make the most of having such a resource available to them.

Today's full range of 60-70 cheeses includes others from around the UK as well as Europe, with Ann working closely with wholesalers and a consortium of small Swiss makers to curate a small but perfectly formed selection. At the heart of the range are the cheeses created by makers that Carol, Ann and the team have fostered strong bonds with. "The thing I love most about this industry is the people you're working with – really genuine people."

While space for events in the shop is limited – but they do host tastings – Ann has been creatively collaborating with local businesses, including a nearby vineyard which hosted an open day which Chester Cheese Shop attended with snack packs of cheese, and a butcher with freshly made steak sandwiches. The joy of independents remains heady in Chester, despite a lack of support from the council.

"I would love to have tables outside and serve platters and wine, but the council has made licences too expensive," says Ann.

BUILDING CONNECTIONS

Ann and her team invest time in educating their customers about the cheeses they sell. "We take pride in telling their stories; we enjoy showcasing the connections we have with makers – which is the important bit, really. The husbandry, how they take care of their animals, has always been of huge importance to them and to us, as has the relationships we build. We have plenty of stories... Mum still tells one about being woken up by Irish cheesemakers at 3am after a night at the pub!"

BEST SELLING CHEESES



Burt's Cheese Burts Blue
A semi-soft cheese made using pasteurised cow's milk.
burtscheese.co.uk



Bourne's Cheese 1845 Heritage Cheshire
Clothbound for a creamy, salty, and complex cheese with a rich aroma and sweet finish.
hsbourne.co.uk



Colston Bassett Stilton
Hand ladled and award-winning with a creamy texture with a sweet and salty richness and a lingering, mellow complexity.
colstonbassett dairy.co.uk



White Lake Cheese Sheep Rustler
Semi-aged for three months, offering a perfect balance of salt, savoury notes, caramel and butterscotch.
whitelake.co.uk



The Cheese & Wine Shop

Transformation is the name of the game at this cheese lover's paradise



DURHAM

LOCATION:
DARLINGTON

FOUNDED:
2024

FOUNDER:
CAROLINE ELLIOTT



"We were customers before we became owners, and are still learning every day – but that's part of the excitement. The cheese community has been incredibly welcoming and generous with its knowledge"

When Caroline and Dean took over The Cheese & Wine Shop in Darlington in late 2024, they had plenty of commercial experience but very little knowledge of cheesemongering. Less than two years later, they've expanded into premises 10 times the size, grown turnover by around 40%, and built a thriving destination for artisan cheese, wine and food lovers.

"The shop has been part of Darlington since 1997 and has always been well respected," begins Caroline. "We were customers before we became owners because we loved good food and wine, and it was the place to discover something different from the supermarket."

When the previous owners decided to close for personal reasons, they saw an opportunity for a fresh start. "I was working as a product and marketing director, so I understood retail and branding, but I knew almost nothing about cheese. We'd completed Cheese Academy Level One, but honestly, we didn't even know how to cut cheese.



We simply believed we could create a better customer experience."

Caroline and Dean gave the shop a light refurbishment, extended the opening hours and focused on making it welcoming. "The response was incredible," says Caroline. "On our opening day people queued for more than an hour because they didn't want to lose such an important independent business."

Caroline left her corporate career completely to focus on the shop. "It was a huge leap financially – we cut back on everything – but we believed in the business." They immersed themselves in the cheese world, meeting cheesemakers and fellow cheesemongers.

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The Cheese & Wine Shop moved premises earlier this year, a change which is already proving fruitful. "Our original shop was charming but tiny, and we'd reached the point where we simply couldn't grow any further," explains Caroline. "The new premises are around ten times larger and on a much busier street, giving us far greater visibility."

The extra space has allowed the team to expand into grazing boards, hampers, tasting events and, in the future, online sales. "We've also renovated beautiful upper floors where we now host cheese and wine tastings and private events. It's transformed what we're able to offer."



CREATING A COMMUNITY

"Customer service, without question" is Cheese & Wine Shop's unique selling point. "We never want people to feel intimidated by cheese. If someone walks in saying, 'I know nothing about cheese', that's brilliant - we can take them on a tasting journey and help them discover something they'll love.

"Independent retail is about conversations. We get to know our customers, our suppliers and the stories behind every product we sell. That's something you simply can't replicate online or in a supermarket."

Caroline and her team are along for the ride too. "We're still learning every day, but that's part of the excitement," she says. "The cheese community has been incredibly welcoming and generous with its knowledge. Our ambition is simply to keep growing while creating a place where people feel comfortable discovering great cheese, great wine and great conversation."

BEST SELLING CHEESES



Teesdale Cheesemakers Doris
A Dales-style cheese, crumbly in the middle with a soft edging.
teesdalecheesemakers.co.uk



Délice de Bourgogne
Rich and creamy with notes of lemon and mushrooms.
fromagerie-lincet.net



Fen Farm Dairy Baron Bigod
A traditional farmhouse Brie style cheese, handmade at Fen Farm from their own grass-fed Montbéliarde cows.
fenfarmdairy.co.uk



Hofkäserei Kraus Alp Blossom
A showstopper cheese offering a paste rich in umami and a delicate, aromatic rind.
hofkaeserei-kraus.de



Thyme Deli at Errichel

Authenticity is key to the success of this truly unique experience



PERTHSHIRE

LOCATION:
ABERFELDY

FOUNDED:
2020

FOUNDERS:
REBECCA AND PAUL NEWMAN



"The Aga is still there, the space feels like home and visitors often comment that it's unlike anywhere else they've shopped"

Cheese has long played a role in Rebecca Newman's food-loving life. "My passion for cheese actually began when I was 18, working on a deli counter in Edinburgh while I was a student. It opened my eyes to a world beyond Cheddar and Brie and sparked a lifelong love of artisan food." Later, Rebecca's husband Paul, a chef, and Rebecca established Errichel on our family farm near Aberfeldy with a restaurant, B&B and holiday cottages.

"During the Covid pandemic in 2020, when hospitality was forced to close, we saw an opportunity to expand the small retail offering we'd already built around our own preserves, meat and farm produce," she explains. We converted our farmhouse kitchen into a deli and café, and it quickly became an important part of the business... We've never looked back."



Preparing Sunday roasts for vulnerable members of the community during the pandemic built valuable connections which have stayed strong, and despite its rural location the shop is said by Rebecca to be "in the middle of everywhere as we're right in the heart of Scotland, and people travel across the country to meet friends or family here, while tourists regularly discover us as they explore Perthshire."

WELCOMING CUSTOMERS HOME

Independents are often rightly proud of the fact that their shop feels like home to customers, but in this case that is quite literally true. "We're probably one of the few cheese shops where customers are genuinely walking into someone's farmhouse kitchen. The Aga is still there, the space feels like home and visitors often comment that it's unlike anywhere else they've shopped." The counter service is very traditional too: "customers are encouraged to taste before they buy, which helps introduce them to cheeses they might never have considered otherwise."





Tucked away on a farm outside Aberfeldy, the team has been creative in their signposting to welcome customers from the nearby A9 road, as some thought they might be trespassing on private land while driving up to the site.

Locals and visitors alike relish experiencing an authentic taste of Scotland's cheese scene thanks to Rebecca, Paul and their team. "They're a huge part of what we do," she says. "Our Scottish cheese tastings allow guests to sample five cheeses with carefully selected accompaniments, and they can even add wine pairings. It's a fantastic way to showcase Scottish cheesemaking, and people almost always leave with a favourite cheese to take home. It's also an activity that works whatever the weather, making it particularly popular with visitors to the area."

The range changes seasonally and caters for all, with up to 40 cheeses on the counter during the busiest months. "We make sure there's a balanced selection across different milk types, including cow, sheep and goat, as well as both pasteurised and unpasteurised cheeses. That means we can satisfy different dietary requirements while still offering plenty of variety."

The team focuses heavily on Scottish cheeses alongside "outstanding" Continental Classics, says Rebecca, but this is no homage to flavour-added cheeses. "Personally, I'm quite a cheese purist. Apart from the occasional seasonal special, we don't stock many flavoured cheeses because I believe great cheese should speak for itself," she explains.

Getting the job done and word out is a sizeable task, but by smart promotion and building small relationships this small team of six is able to thrive. "I look after our social media myself, alongside everything else!" says Rebecca. "Word of mouth remains incredibly important, helped by tourism awards, local partnerships and, perhaps most importantly, the welcoming atmosphere people experience when they visit. We want everyone to leave feeling they've discovered somewhere special."

BEST SELLING CHEESES



Errington Cheese Lanark Blue
A semi-soft cheese with a beautiful, creamy texture and characteristic blue veins that provide an earthy, tangy flavour.
errington cheese.co.uk



Kaltbach Le Gruyère AOP
Aged for 12 months in a sandstone cave to develop fruity tang and fine, crunchy salt crystals.
emmi-kaltbach.com



Errington Cheese Elrick Log
A semi-firm lactic goat's milk cheese with a bright, lemony flavour and spice notes that increase as it ages.
errington cheese.co.uk



Inverloch Dairy Dhorlin
A brine-washed cow's milk cheese similar to Taleggio with a nutty finish.
scotcheese.com



South West Cheese Shop

A shared learning experience builds rapport and excitement at this counter



DEVON

LOCATION:
BARNSTAPLE

FOUNDED:
2024

FOUNDER:
ROBERT COLLIER



"It's all about getting people excited about cheese. The artisan cheese industry has been incredibly welcoming, and that enthusiasm is infectious"

The recent history of South West Cheese Shop is a classic case of 'local boy makes good' – combining a wealth of cheesy goodwill thanks to a long-established shop and loyal customers, and a fresh take powered by passion.

"I'm a Barnstaple lad, so I've always known the shop," says Rob Collier. "It has a long history in the town, and I'm actually the fourth owner." Rob came into the business from a completely different career, having spent around 16 years in pharmaceuticals. "I was feeling burnt out and wanted a change," he said. "My wife encouraged me to take the leap, and although I didn't specifically set out to buy a cheese shop, the opportunity came along at exactly the right time. I've always loved cheese – my best man's speech at my wedding was centred around my passion for it – so it felt like the perfect fit."

The first year was about respecting the shop's heritage. "It already had a fantastic reputation, so I didn't want to change everything overnight. Instead, I gradually put my own stamp on it," he explains. "We refreshed the branding, refitted the shop and made it feel more welcoming to a wider audience while keeping everything customers already loved."



Education has been a key part of the shop's latest chapter – both for customers and Robert himself. "For me, it's all about sharing knowledge and getting people excited about cheese. I began studying with the Academy of Cheese and have now completed Level Two – that gave me the confidence to share knowledge with customers rather than relying purely on enthusiasm."

A considered range of fan favourites and new discoveries keeps tills ringing. "We stock around 60 to 70 cheeses at any one time, with a strong focus on local producers alongside carefully chosen Continental classics. We keep a stable core range because customers return for their favourites, but we also introduce seasonal and exclusive

LE GRUYÈRE® SWITZERLAND AOP





cheeses to keep things fresh and encourage people to try something new."

Sampling is a huge part of that. "Once people taste something, many of their preconceptions disappear. I love introducing customers to cheeses they might never have considered before and helping them discover new favourites."

Time is the biggest challenge Rob has experienced since taking the shop on. "Running an independent business means wearing every hat. Alongside serving customers, you're managing suppliers, stock, finances, marketing and everything else." Thankfully, Rob's previous career gave him a strong analytical mindset. "I enjoy looking at the numbers, monitoring margins and reducing waste," he says. "If we can make savings behind the scenes, it means we don't always have to pass cost increases straight on to customers. Being open and honest about pricing also helps customers understand the realities of running an independent business."

Rob's mission is simple: get more people eating better cheese. "Every customer is on their own cheese journey, and helping them discover something new is the most rewarding part of the job. The artisan cheese industry has been incredibly welcoming, and that enthusiasm is infectious. If customers leave the shop excited to try something different – or come back asking for another recommendation – then I know we're doing something right."

INVESTING IN SOCIALS

Social media can often seem a 'nice to have', but in 2026 it is an invaluable source of new customers – and Rob has found that investing in it has reaped rich rewards. "Traditionally, the shop attracted a lot of local retirees, but we've broadened that considerably," he says. "Rather than trying to do everything myself, I invested in a freelance social media manager. It's one of the best business decisions I've made. The engagement has been fantastic, we've reached completely new audiences, and we're seeing people come into the shop specifically because they've discovered us online. It isn't always easy to measure the return directly, but I see it as an investment in the business rather than an expense."

BEST SELLING CHEESES



Lynher Dairy Stithians
Stithians is a bright, savoury cheese with a rich, creamy rounded flavour with a clean tang.
lynherdairy.co.uk



Ticklemore Cheese Devon Blue
Renowned for its creamy, rich and buttery taste, as well as having an incredibly unique crumbly texture.
ticklemore cheese.co.uk



Belton Farm Vintage Red Fox
This cheese offers an intense and complex blend of sweet and savoury flavours, as well as a cunningly unexpected crunch.
beltonfarm.co.uk



Sharpham Dairy Cremet
Decadent soft mould ripened cheese, added double cream creates a mousse like texture, developing rich earthiness with age.
sharpham cheese.co.uk





The Cornish Cheesemonger

A passionate love of cheese keeps the excitement alive in Cornwall



CORNWALL

LOCATION:
TRURO

FOUNDED:
2026

FOUNDERS:
KALVIN AND KATIE ASHWOOD



"The beauty of cheese is that there's always another favourite waiting to be discovered. That's what keeps us excited every single day"

For passionate foodie pair Kalvin and Katie Ashwood, opening The Cornish Cheesemonger was a natural progression fed by a deep-rooted love of cheese.

It all started with a market stall selling Cornish cheeses, before they opened their bricks and mortar shop just a few months ago. "The biggest push was listening to customers," explains Kalvin. "People kept asking us to source cheeses they couldn't buy locally, so every week we'd add something new. Before long, customers were travelling from all over Cornwall because they wanted access to great artisan cheese."

Eventually Kalvin and Katie reached the point where they simply couldn't take enough refrigerated stock to market, so opening a permanent shop became the natural next step.

Gratifyingly, since opening the couple have barely been able to draw breath such has been the "amazing" response to their arrival on the town's food scene. "We knew Truro had good footfall, but we didn't expect the shop to be busy from morning until evening. It's wonderful, but it's also been a real learning curve," says Kalvin.

"We wanted to create a traditional cheesemonger that we'd be proud of, and seeing customers embrace it so quickly has been incredible."

Community is at the heart of the enterprise. "We're not just a cheese

A SIZEABLE PROPOSITION

The cheese range at The Cornish Cheesemonger is sizeable, creating both a high workload and an opportunity to continually explore the sector and be inspired. "We stock over 200 cheeses, which is a huge commitment for a young business," explains Kalvin. "Cheese is challenging because you have to manage stock carefully and minimise waste, so we've had to learn quickly." Alongside the cheese, they only stock products that genuinely complement it – artisan charcuterie, crackers, olives, chutneys and other grazing-board essentials. "Every single product is something we've tasted ourselves. If we don't believe in it, we won't sell it. We love to source locally, but quality always comes first."

LE GRUYÈRE® SWITZERLAND AOP



shop – we're part of the community," he continues. "People come in for a small piece of cheese and end up staying for a chat. Sometimes they just need someone to talk to. Independent food retailers have a really important role because they're places where people feel welcome."

The community aspect of the site is perfectly exemplified in the Cornish Kindness Shelf. "This is where customers can leave a note for someone who might need a little lift, and we'll reward that kindness with something from the shop. Even better, other customers now regularly 'pay it forward' by donating towards it. That's become something really special, and we're very proud of it."

Social media has been a key tool in reaching out to their community, with Kalvin becoming a local celebrity famed for his love and knowledge of cheese while Katie is the expert behind the camera and Instagram account. "People regularly come into the shop asking for cheeses they've seen online, which is fantastic."



Regular events also drive footfall and customer awareness. "The response to our monthly Meet the Producer evenings has been brilliant and it's helping customers connect with the people behind the food," says Kalvin.

"The beauty of cheese is that there's always another favourite waiting to be discovered. That's what keeps us excited every single day."

BEST SELLING CHEESES



Treaveador Farm Dairy Harvest Moon
A unique soft cheese washed with Cornish Cider, coloured with anatto and finished with freshly cracked black pepper.
treaveador farmdairyltd.com



Lynher Dairy Cornish Kern
A European-style cheese that offers a balance of sweet and savoury flavours.
lynherdairy.co.uk



Fen Farm Dairy Baron Bigod
A traditional farmhouse Brie style cheese, handmade at Fen Farm from their own grass-fed Montbéliarde cows.
fenfarm dairy.co.uk



Isle of Mull Cheddar
Drier in texture than other Cheddars with flavours that are upfront, richly savoury and boozy.
isleofmull cheese.co.uk

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& Caws

Strong relationships forged with local cheesemakers are at this shop's heart



ISLE OF ANGLESEY

LOCATION:
MENAI BRIDGE

FOUNDED:
2021

FOUNDER:
EDMUND BILLINS



"Having worked in the industry for such a long time I was able to build a range quite easily with what I already knew and loved, but our location allowed me to discover plenty of cheeses that I previously wasn't aware of"

As long-time professional passion for cheese partnered with a wife hailing from Wales meant that running his own cheese shop in the region was almost a given for Ed Billins, founder of & Caws, who has applied his expertise to great effect – much to the joy of the local community.

"I managed a La Fromagerie shop, in Highbury, North London, for 10 years before spending some time at Neal's Yard Dairy, so when the time came to move to Wales in order to be closer to my wife's family it seemed the obvious thing to do was to open my own place," he begins.

Opening at the tail end of the Covid-19 pandemic and opening on 19th December – "a baptism of fire!" – was a punchy start for the business, but pushed Ed to work hard, get his head down and focus on delivering a fantastic range of cheeses (in a big way) right at the very start of the shop's existence.

Being surrounded by a number of excellent Welsh cheesemakers meant that from the get-go there were plenty of producers to tap up for partnerships – and while the shop isn't entirely focused on Welsh cheese, it does form a vital part of its range and USP.

"Having worked in the industry for such a long time I was able to build a range quite easily with what I already knew and loved, but our location allowed me to discover plenty of cheeses that I previously wasn't aware of," says Ed. "We love what they do, so it's easy to promote and sell them, and it's been great to get to know them."

Despite the number of makers of fine cheese, in North Wales, particularly on Anglesey, there's only a small number of specialist cheesemongers to celebrate them – giving the business a built-in USP, Ed explains.

The move from London to a rural region has also had a positive impact on Ed's appreciation of the art of cheese. "When you're based in an urban area it

GRASS ROOT CONNECTION

One of Ed's sources is a customer-turned-supplier, who used to discuss with Ed his dream to make cheese before going on to launch Wacky Wedge – home of a delicious small goat's cheese. "Of course I wanted to support him, so we tried some of his early cheeses and advised him on where we thought he should go... Since then he's grown really quickly and is now supplying La Fromagerie and Neal's Yard Dairy, so he's doing really well."

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can be hard to build connections with cheesemakers," he explains, "you're selling great cheese but are always one step apart from the process. Here I can speak to the farmers and cheesemakers face-to-face and meet the animals producing the milk. That's a really nice change from what I was used to."

Locals and tourists alike also appreciate the location of the shop, with a loyal community swelling in July and August with the arrival of visitors.

"In the colder months it can be a struggle to get footfall on a weekday, so while we originally planned to focus just on the cheese we've expanded to sell coffee and sandwiches, and open late as a cheese and wine bar on Fridays." Cheese is still the bread and butter of the business, with the name & Caws (Welsh for '& Cheese') exemplifying Ed's dedication to keeping cheese front and centre of the shop's output.

BEST SELLING CHEESES



Holden Farm Dairy Hafod Cheddar
An organic cheese with a slightly brighter acidity, balanced by a full, rounded richness.
holdenfarm dairy.co.uk



Trethowan Brothers Gorwydd Caerphilly
An edible mushroom tasting rind followed by a creamy breakdown layer leading into a soft crumbly delicate centre.
trethowan brothers.com



Wacky Wedge Yr Afr
An unpasteurised goat's milk cheese with a savoury paste and mushroomy rind.
wackywedge.com



Caws Rhyd y Delyn Mon Las (Anglesey Blue)
A handmade farmhouse cheese. Creamy and rich, and similar in style to the French Blue Fourme D'Ambert.
cawsrhydydelyn.co.uk



THE CHEESE SHOP, NANTWICH

Inspirational Cheese Retailers 2025: Revisited

Discovering new – and new-to-us – cheese retailers is always a joy, which is why the *Speciality Food* team relish the time every year where we deep dive into the world of cheesemongers to pick out those who are representing the skill with style... and taking cheese-loving shoppers along with them for the ride.

Once those retailers have featured in *Inspirational Cheese Retailers*, the work doesn't stop there – they carry on their day-to-day tasks of inspiring consumers to opt for excellent artisan cheese by sharing the stories of makers, suggesting inventive pairings and generally creating an atmosphere that makes shoppers want to linger a while over truly great cheese.

From uncovering exciting – and delicious – new finds to add to their counters to innovating with flavour pairings and caring for their community, the retailers on the following pages are true gems

We were delighted to catch up with the cheesemongers we featured in last year's publication, and can say with confidence that despite strong headwinds they are still powering through their mission to welcome more people into the wonderful world of fine cheese. Some are being especially savvy with the numbers to ensure they offer good value to their loyal customer base and keep things manageable for all in tricky times; some are partnering with local producers to create partners for their cheeses that truly can't be found anywhere else; and some are letting their palates go wild to the delight of those who walks through their door.

One thing that is uniform across the businesses featured in the following pages is that they all remain resolutely passionate about great cheese and share an insatiable hunger to discover delicious new finds to add to their counters – much to the joy of their communities, which lie at the heart of their operations.

Things may be tough in retail and cheese, but the people representing both sectors day in, day out are lighting the way with an inspiring blend of innovation and warmth.



The Cambridge Cheese Company

LOCATION: CAMBRIDGE **FOUNDED:** 1994
FOUNDER: JACKY AND PAUL SUTTON-ADAM

Jacky Sutton Adam, owner of Cambridge Cheese Company, has found that a constant evolution of cheeses is what keeps business booming. "This year, we are seeking out makers of raw milk cheeses, both across the UK and into Europe, which has proved hugely popular with our customers." Recent additions to the range include Abaty and Abaty Glas from Caws Penhelyg in Aberystwyth.

The shop's customers are confident in their purchasing power, says Jacky, music to the ears of the team amongst a challenging outlook for the industry as a whole thanks to shopper budgets being increasingly squeezed. "Things have been brisk and overall busier," she says, "we had a strong sense of customers planning their Christmas 2025 festivities and buying with confidence from early November. This was great for stock management and cash flow!"

Investments have been made across the board. "We have also been investing in a complete integration between our webstore and the bricks and mortar side of the business," she explains. "The aim is to create a more streamlined



shopping experience for the sizable group of customers who visit in person and also use our website. Another benefit to customers is a new loyalty scheme that earns points whichever channel they choose to use. "

CATERING FOR TRENDS

In a sector where it's easy to opt for the traditional options we all know and love, Cambridge Cheese Company team have found success in satisfying the demand for the ever-evolving trends in cheese. "In these changeable times we are spending more time watching for trends and responding to shifts in demand. For example, the small is beautiful trend, especially popular with Millenials and Gen Z, is one which is still evolving," she says. "Happily we really love an excuse to go shopping for the shop!"

PERFECT PAIRING



Yoredale Wensleydale
A traditional Wensleydale but not as crumbly as others, this is creamy with a light sharpness.
curlewdairy.co.uk



Miller Damsel's Cranberry & Raisin Toasts
Charming with a canapé. Splendid with soft cheese. Slim and ultra-crispy for nibbling.
artisanbiscuits.co.uk



"I'm hooked on this pairing at the moment. Yoredale's complex flavour profile delivers a clean, yoghurt-y tartness, opening out to notes of mushroom, with an indulgent buttery finish. The fruit toasts bring a tangy acidity that works well along the whole taste journey!"

PERFECT PAIRING



Butlers Cheeses Blacksticks Blue
The original contemporary farmhouse blue cheese, renowned for its creamy texture and bite.
butlerscheeses.co.uk



Wilderbee Hot Honey
Bee-friendly, single-source organic wildflower honey, infused with a fruity, fiery sustainably grown fresh scotch bonnet chillies.
wilderkitchenfood.com



"The sweetness and heat of the hot honey cut straight through the richness of this blue cheese. It's one people come back for again and again. These are strong sellers for us right now and feel very reflective of what people are leaning towards."



Cheeses of Muswell Hill

LOCATION: LONDON **FOUNDED:** 2009
FOUNDER: MORGAN MCGLYNN CARR

The past 12 months has been a supremely busy time for Morgan McGlynn Carr, who has reached some individual milestones including 10 years as the resident cheese expert on Channel 4's *Sunday Brunch* and creating the popular Cheese 101 series on Instagram. "This series has gone viral, reaching a global audience and really shifting how people engage with cheese, particularly around confidence, pairings and understanding what they're buying," she explains.

Cheese pairings have become a signature for Morgan, whose most recent book – *The Complete Cheese Pairing Cookbook* – has been a hit for cheese lovers across the UK and beyond, and of all ages; having taken on the shop at an impressively young age, Morgan has become somewhat of a cheese icon for younger cheese lovers, no doubt aided by her sparkling content across television and social media.

The modern approach to cheese retail that she and her team take is at home in their diminutive but inspiration-inducing shop in Muswell Hill, London, and on top of running her own successful retail business, Morgan is partnering with two other food icons – Fortnum & Mason and The Cheese Bar – to take over the cheese counter and cheese belt respectively for upcoming special events.

"Within the shop, we're continuing to focus on exclusivity and curation," she says. "We're now stocking 10+ cheeses that you won't find anywhere else in the UK, which is performing incredibly well and becoming a real point of difference for us.



THE EDUCATOR

Cheese education has played a vital role in the evolution of Cheeses of Muswell Hill. "More broadly, I'm seeing a real shift towards customers wanting more guidance and confidence with cheese, especially around pairings and entertaining, which is shaping both what we do in the shop and how I communicate online," she says.







Green & Lovely

LOCATION: EAST MOLESEY **FOUNDED:** 2022
FOUNDER: PAUL AND LUCY DONOUGHUE

The Green & Lovely's mission to stand as far apart from the multiples – in ethos if not location – has undoubtedly served them well since they were last profiled for *Inspirational Cheese Retailers*. "It seems to be what people are looking for and want more of," says Paul Donoughue, owner. "People want to be greeted and treated well – and they seem to recognise that there's a kind of contract between the shopkeeper and customer: the customer has the upper hand and we are there to serve them, but they are there because they want the advice and guidance that we can provide."

While the average spend has dropped in the past 12 months the number of customers has risen, says Paul, and while some have dropped off the radar – they still say 'hello' in the street and are welcomed in for a chat – more locals have been added to the roster. "We are located in a unique and busy place where community is important, and it's vital for us too whether it's between us and the customer or us and our suppliers," explains Paul.

The cheese industry is full of fantastic people who require the support of retailers and consumers to continue producing excellent cheese, he says, keen to share their stories with his customers as well as build more connections with cheesemakers. "It's heritage, culture and peoples' livelihoods. It matters."

AN APPETITE FOR GRAB & GO

While many customers are delighted to while away a chunk of time in Green & Lovely, Paul has learned that some "don't want to hear me wax lyrical about the cow whose milk went into the cheese they're buying or tell an amusing anecdote." For this audience, Paul has dedicated fridge space to a grab and go format, where customers can quickly purchase wrapped and labelled cheese as well as savoury pastries and other products without waiting for the cheese to be prepared.

PERFECT PAIRING



Feltham Farm Gert Lush
A modern take on a bloomy white-rinded cheese with a fully broken-down paste and delicate rind.
felthamsfarm.com



Jam Packed Scotch Bonnet Chilli Jam
A punchy and versatile chilli jam made using fresh Scotch Bonnet Chillies.
jampacked preserves.co.uk



"There's something beautiful and bizarre about the pairing of a very hot chilli jam with a Brie-like cheese such as Gert Lush. You'd think it wouldn't work because you're pairing something strong with something mild, but there's something beautiful in the marriage of them."

PERFECT PAIRING



Fine Cheese Company Piccalilli
Tangy and crunchy with a hit of mustard heat, this is a delicious pairing with strong-flavoured hard cheeses.
finecheese.co.uk



Montgomery Cheddar
A complex mature farmhouse Cheddar with deep savoury notes. Made with unpasteurised cheese in Cadbury, Somerset.
montgomery cheese.co.uk



"When I run cheese pairing events I try to put something quite left field in there and people do often run with it. Our own label chutney, produced locally, is particularly popular, but The Fine Cheese Company's Piccalilli served with a punchy Cheddar always flies off the shelf."



Victoria's Cheeses

LOCATION: ELY **FOUNDED:** 2024
FOUNDER: VICTORIA DUNTHORNE

Despite the cheese and retail industries navigating a rocky past during the past 12 months, Victoria's Cheeses has gone from strength to strength thanks to founder Victoria's passion for creating a space where all feel welcome and catered for.

While her customers are being "careful with their money", she's found that both customers after a couple of cheeses every week and those ready for a "blowout" are coming through her doors.

Creativity has undoubtedly played a role, both in terms of selling format – see panel – and the way that Victoria collaborates with nearby businesses. "Every Friday we sell bread from a local micro bakery, and sometimes the baker leaves with cheese which only has a couple of days left on it, which he turns into bread." At the time of writing, the week's special is a local smoked Cheddar and paprika bread.

Victoria's fabulous cheese is also baked to perfection by a local lady who makes an ever-changing menu of three-cheese scones. "We thankfully don't have much wastage as we have a good turnover and stock control, but it's great to be able to freeze any leftover cheese then for it to come back to life in a delicious bake."





A NOVEL IDEA

Blind date bags are proving especially popular at Victoria's Cheeses. "For £10 customers can take home a little bag containing some cheese to nibble on a Friday night, and lots of people come in just for that," Victoria says. "I've got customers who have been buying every week for over a year."

These bags aren't made up of cheeses that are close to past their best or need shifting, instead they change weekly to feature cheeses that perhaps the customer wouldn't ordinarily buy. "The whole idea is to take the choice away and introducing them to new cheeses," she explains.

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The Cheese Shop

LOCATION: NANTWICH **FOUNDED:** 2020
FOUNDERS: NICK BIRCHALL AND CHRIS HOGAN

A small, dedicated and close-knit team have been key to the success of Nantwich's The Cheese Shop since we last visited – and in fact, *Inspirational Cheese Retailers* has played a role too... "Traditionally our customer base was very local, but since we featured in the last edition it has become nationwide," begins Nick. "People are still coming in saying that they saw us in the publication, so it's been fantastic for us."

The team is also relishing the opportunity to cater for weddings with their cheese wedding cakes, orders for which are coming in thick and fast after a post-Covid lull from as far away as Scotland.

The ban on raw milk cheeses from France has undoubtedly impacted The Cheese Shop amongst many other businesses, but Nick and the team have seen the lack of French fromage as an opportunity to showcase alternative cheeses. "We're always looking out for new cheeses and coming up with new suggestions for our customers," he says.

Swiss cheese is a particularly popular trend right now, and while classics like Le Gruyère AOP, Emmental and Schlossberger are still popular there's a newfound appetite for the likes of Wild Garlic La Bousse: "20 arrived one Thursday and I was astounded that they'd all gone by the time we closed on Saturday!"

The team's expertise is spreading far and wide – see panel – and Nick is now writing a regular column about cheese for a local magazine, *County*, as well as hosting regular cheese tastings on Zoom: an initiative that started out of necessity during the pandemic and is still going strong. Meet the Maker events are set to bring yet more excitement to the team's schedule in 2027.

SOCIAL STARS

Social media has been a boon for The Cheese Shop, which uses it to promote exciting new stock via Facebook, Instagram and TikTok. "I was initially against TikTok," says Nick, "but it's far exceeded my expectations. It's huge for us now."

His content is turning Nick into a local celebrity: "everywhere I go I get stopped and asked, 'are you the cheese man from TikTok?' I can't get away with anything any more!"

At the time of writing, The Cheese Shop are set to launch TikTok Shop and TikTok Live in the next couple of months.

PERFECT PAIRING



Burts Cheese
Burts Blue
The flagship product of Burt's Cheese, a semi-soft cheese made using pasteurised cow's milk.
burtscheese.co.uk



Miska Midnight Mocha Truffle
The perfect balance between bold coffee intensity and silky chocolate indulgence.
miska.uk



"Miska is a local chocolatier who makes exclusive chocolates in the shape of mice and cheese wedges for us. In terms of pairings, we particularly love her dark chocolate with blue cheese, and the crunch and rich flavours of coffee beans is also a delicious pairing with blue cheese."

PERFECT PAIRING

Cashel Blue
A unique Irish cheese with layers of flavour. It's sumptuously rounded with creamy, savoury blue notes, a light salt edge and subtle hints of spice.
cashelblue.com



Zuccardi Malamado Fortified Malbec
A full-bodied and sweet red wine that is fortified in a similar way to port and an excellent accompaniment to cheese.
hatchmansfield.com



"I think fortified red wines work brilliantly with blue cheese in the same way as a port does, when standard red wine might not stand up to a punchy blue. This pairing goes down well at events."



Gershon & Sons

LOCATION: OLD AMERSHAM
FOUNDED: 2022
FOUNDER: KATHERINE GERSHON

Since they were profiled here, Gershon has been going from strength to strength – experiencing an increase in footfall and a newfound reputation as a "destination," says Katherine, "and we hope that the other retailers nearby are experiencing the same uplift."

Despite the business's success, and especially while high streets are struggling across the UK, Katherine is "humbled" that people will travel to the shop to buy cheese. When they are there, her knowledge of cheese can turn a small order into a sizeable one: "recently, a lady phoned looking for a baby Stilton which we didn't have as we only stock it at Christmas, so I offered her a whole Cashel Blue instead... This turned into a £400 order."

In their third, going into fourth, year, customers are seeing Gershon & Sons as a valuable local resource as opposed to a novelty, explains Katherine. "We've grown a reputation and a customer base, and are often at food markets which has helped grow awareness of our brand. Plus, we seem to be on the right side of Google's algorithm!"

The ban on unpasteurized French cheeses has benefited the business as well as being a challenge. Whether or not customers understand the ban they expect cheesemongers to be able to supply alternatives to their favourites, and this is something Katherine happily does – with support from the suppliers.

This extra legwork has been a boon, meaning that shoppers have come to Gershon & Sons when supermarkets haven't been able to satisfy them, but finding British alternatives isn't always the ideal solution, she explains. "British cheese needs to stand in its own right; I don't think it should always be used as a substitute for Continental cheeses."

The time has come for Gershon & Sons to enter the digital age with the launch of a transactional website. "This is something we always wanted, but we haven't been able to get it done until now – it'll be launching this autumn."

HAMPERS, LEVELLED-UP

Hampers have long been a much-loved format for fine food lovers, and Gershon & Sons has mastered the art by incorporating its other speciality – wine – into their offering. "We sell around 70 wines in the shop alongside traditional cheese accompaniments such as crackers, chutneys and olives, and have also brought in other giftable items such as soap and artisan chocolate." The hampers are entirely customisable to customers' desires, appetites and budgets.

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Must Be Crackers

LOCATION: DUNFERMLINE **FOUNDED:** 2023
FOUNDER: AILEEN WRIGHT

Despite the challenging landscape for retailers across the board, Aileen and the team at Must Be Crackers have achieved tangible growth year on year – which they are wisely investing back into the business. "Every year we achieve a new expenditure goal, so one year we wanted headed paper with our logo on it – we had to buy three years' worth to make it good value – and towards the end of last year we had a local company install a bespoke fitted walk-in refrigerator, which was a gamechanger as we came into Christmas. We had a place to store cheese, so we could plan ahead instead of being reactive... I probably ordered and sold twice as much cheese as the previous year."

Christmas 2025 pushed the team to "breaking point," says Aileen, but they learned a valuable lesson: their maximum capacity, the learnings of which they will now apply throughout the year – including at Easter, another busy time.

"Despite the long queues, we didn't have a bad word said by the customers," she continues, testament to the community she has built. Speciality retailers are often a hotspot for community, but Must Be Crackers have turned this into an artform. "One of the things I love the most about the shop is the banter, and you can't put into words what we give to customers and they give to us."

The connection is invaluable to some customers. "Customers confide in us because they consider the shop to be a safe place, sometimes quite sad and difficult things, but they feel comfortable to be themselves which is a privilege. I love that when we ask a customer about their day, they know we really care about the answer."

BRANCHING OUT

Year on year, Must Be Crackers' customers become increasingly adventurous in terms of the cheeses they are open to trying and buying. "Our customers really broaden their horizons year-on-year," Aileen says, "so while when we first opened – in a town which had previously not had a cheese shop – goats cheese was a slow seller, our customers are now seeking out goats or sheep cheeses, and more unusual varieties. This drives me to expand my scope too and seek out new cheeses and suppliers. My customers challenge me to do my job as best as I can, bringing them more interesting ideas to try."

PERFECT PAIRING



St Andrews Farmhouse Cheddar
A rich, buttery cheese with a golden yellow curd. Tangy, salty and full of complex character with well balanced acidity.
standrewscheese.co.uk



Ginger Beard's Preserves Candied Jalapenos
Sweet with a medium chilli heat, these are an exciting alternative to traditional pickles.
gingerbeardspreserves.co.uk



"I could never be without St Andrews Farmhouse Cheddar because it is made locally to us, and it's fun to serve it with candied jalapenos- you need a robust Cheddar to stand up to the heat."

PERFECT PAIRING



Tracklements Sticky Fig Relish
Made by soaking plump figs in spiced vinegar before gently cooking them with rich, dark sugar. The result is at once tangy and sweet – superb with soft cheeses.
tracklements.co.uk



Cabécou
The Cabécou du Périgord Germain doesnt lack character: both hot and cold, its always creamy and gooey. Mainly eaten "young", its taste will be more characteristic.
carronlodge.com



"Cheese pairing is subjective, so I'm guided by what my customers say they like. Everybody has different palates so likes different things, but I'm always there to guide and advise."



The Cheese Shop

LOCATION: BRADFORD-ON-AVON
FOUNDED: 2015
FOUNDER: CHRISTOPHE BONNEAU

The Cheese Shop in Bradford-on-Avon enjoyed its best-ever Christmas in 2025, says Christophe Bonneau, owner, and the *Inspirational Cheese Retailers* team is delighted to be named as a possible reason for this as Christophe sharing the news on social media led to increased footfall: "we had a massive response from it!"

For such a small shop – just 18 square metres – it was quite a feat to serve 1,000 customers during Christmas week ("there were queues along the street"), not to mention the fact that Christophe is a one-man-band. The quiet period after Christmas was well utilised, with Christophe giving the shop an attractive refresh, and tourist season kicked off in earnest in March.

There is a fair amount of competition for cheese sales in Bradford-on-Avon thanks to a number of farm shops and independent fine food retailers in close proximity, says Christophe, but his loyal customers – largely retired shoppers who come in for a dose of excellent cheese every week – have kept The Cheese Shop on as their retailer of choice, and the site is also popular with the growing tourist cohort.

Christophe has been smart about how to position his business alongside the competition. "Thankfully their cheese counters are smaller than mine and more expensive, but they also offer coffee and more of a 'destination' experience.





"If people put trust in you to give them what they want, and you serve them in the right way, they're likely to come back," he continues. Building trust and growing a community has come via face-to-face interactions and word of mouth, he explains, with social media a valuable tool which sometimes falls down the to do list thanks to his small-scale manpower.

KEEPING REGULARS SATISFIED

Having run another shop for two decades – with a team of seven under his care – has benefited the business, as Christophe has earned a reputation for curating and caring for an excellent range of cheese to satisfy both of his customer bases, but the smaller scale of his current operation suits him well. "My regulars tend to go for the same cheeses, so I have a range that caters to them as well as bringing in new guest cheeses every month."



Cheese & Bees

LOCATION: WALPOLE ST ANDREW
FOUNDED: 2022 **FOUNDER:** PETER POOLEY

Peter, who runs Cheese & Bees, is renowned for his high energy levels – and this has undoubtedly been a powerful force behind the success the business has experienced since we last visited. Indeed, the shop has changed site since then, and now has its own dedicated retail space as opposed to the area it previously held in a farm shop.

Christmas 2025 was "phenomenal" says Peter, which he partly attributes to the fact that the new shop is on a main bus route that covers two counties as well as on the main thoroughfare of the village. Featuring in *Inspirational Cheese Retailers 2025* also helped "put the business on the map," he says, with customers seeing the shop as a destination worth travelling to.

Keen shoppers require smart stocking and Peter is ramping up the wine side of the business's offering by bringing in an in-house sommelier – Bob – who can advise on pairings as well as share his expertise at tastings and events.

Cheese & Bees' popular YouTube content, *The Cheesemonger's Guide*, is also going from strength to strength and is set to go above and beyond the world of cheesemaking to feature vineyards and other creators of the accompaniments they sell.

"These videos show our audience behind the scenes at these businesses, and share a little more information about the products we stock and how you can make the most of them," says Peter – "they combine so many different foods and skills, so they become an unlimited amount of fun. And that's what it's all about at the end of the day – creating experiences people enjoy."

A new, smart way Peter and his team have introduced customers to fabulous new cheeses is via toasties, where they pair excellent cheese from their counter with jams and chutneys lovingly made by a local lady. "We experiment with pairings behind the scenes, but one which has gone down incredibly well is goats cheese with blackcurrant jam."



CHANNELING PASSION

The world of artisan cheese can often seem a world away for some consumers, so a relaxed approach to education is working well for the team at Cheese & Bees. "I'm a bundle of energy and a bit of a cheese geek, and as well as passing that on to my team customers pick up on it too – they want to connect and understand about what we're selling them, and that requires someone to open the door for them and make them feel relaxed about it all," says Pete.

PERFECT PAIRING



Alex James Blue Monday
Featuring bold cracks and streaks of blue, this is handcrafted using traditional methods and matured for a minimum of 12 weeks.
shepherdspurse.co.uk



Rococo Artisan Bar Milk Salted Caramel
A blend of Madagascan beans and caramelised sugar to create rich caramel notes with a subtle Anglesey sea salt finish.
rococochocolates.com



"People would normally pair cheese with dark chocolate, but milk chocolate and caramel really work with Blue Monday – I've tried it at several tasting events and it blows peoples' minds."

PERFECT PAIRING



Caws Cenarth Perl Wen
Perl Wen is a unique cross between a traditional Brie and a Caerffili, with a soft centre, fresh citrus flavour and a hint of sea salt.
cawscenarth.co.uk



Paso Primeira Rosado
Big, bold, fun. Deep colour with big flavours of strawberries, raspberries and cherries.
paso-primero.com



"We send Perl Wen to McNeil's Smokehouse in Worcestershire, where they smoke it over beech. This gives it a subtle flavour that works with the mushroom and buttery notes, and is delicious with rosé."



Broad Bean Deli

LOCATION: LUDLOW
FOUNDED: 1977 (TAKEN OVER 2016)
OWNER: IAN EVANS

"Broad Bean is now in its 10th year of trading with the current team, and it blows my mind that we're still growing," says Ian Evans, owner and recently voted in as chair of the local Chamber of Commerce. "We grew at a crazy rate of knots until Covid, which I'd say set us back 12 to 18 months, and post-Covid we've grown double digits year on year."

No doubt playing a part in this growth is Ian and the Broad Bean team's keen eye on the numbers. While inflation goes up, he is cannily able to squeeze the margins to maintain a fair price for customers by keeping an eye on supplier pricing and some smart stockpiling... and with basket spend and footfall increasing, it's clear this has been a good move.

"It's not a question of making gains per product, we're looking at the longer term picture," he continues. "A lot of people that I speak to in retail and the fine food sector are having a tough time of it, so I pinch myself that we're doing comfortably."

Communication is the name of the game, suggests Ian. "Taking the time to explain to customers that yes, the price of this has increased but here's an alternative and you can use less of it to get the desired outcome, that goes a long way," he says. "It's about not being frightened to discuss pricing with customers, but not overexplaining and scaring them off. Our message is along the lines of, 'we know it's hard, it's hard for us too, but this is how we're trying to make it manageable and comfortable for all of us – we put effort in to build connection and understanding."



PERCEIVING VALUE

"Fine food is often seen as a luxury, but everybody deserves good food," says Ian. That's not to say that items in the shop are 'expensive' – "we sell local milk cheaper than at the Spar around the corner. People can come in for milk and eggs because they're at a low price, we upsell them some cheese to have with their omelette, and then they're spending £14 with us weekly. Good food should be enjoyed every day, not saved for special occasions."

LE GRUYÈRE SWITZERLAND AOP





Relish Delicatessen

LOCATION: ST HELIER, JERSEY
FOUNDED: 1995
FOUNDER: FLORIAN DE PORAY (SINCE 2010)



Relish Delicatessen has continued to flourish, despite some significant challenges in the last 12 months since they were originally profiled, "specifically the ability to obtain stock," says Florian de Poray. Challenges with Brexit implementation has delayed the arrival of cheeses, compounded by the restrictions on raw milk products coming in from France. "Our customers are particularly keen on unpasteurised cheeses and so it has been tricky to satisfy their requirements over the past nine months."

The current retail landscape is not an easy place to be, and so Florian and his team have implemented new marketing measures to increase footfall and build a growing audience.

"We have become increasingly aware that high-street shops have to work hard for their survival and so for the first time we have significantly increased our marketing," he explains, "not only online but also with a high-end 12 page brochure posted to all the households in our community before Christmas and again before Easter. This has been warmly received and increased our visibility, footfall and profits."

Florian recognises the value of strong messaging and visuals – and this is reaping rich rewards. "This marketing initiative, specifically targeted to our key market demographic will be continued. Presentation of both our delicatessen and our products is especially important to our brand and we continually update our presence, allowing our customers a beautiful and welcoming experience in various European languages."

SUPPLIER SUPPORT

"We continue to receive superb support from our UK suppliers; a huge shout-out should go to The Fine Cheese Company for their superb stock and organisational skills," says Florian. "We have particularly enjoyed some of the British seasonal cheeses such as Raedwald from Fen Farm Dairy in Suffolk which proves exceptionally popular with our customers. Fine Cheeses also provide excellent varieties of Gorgonzola, which sell very well."

PERFECT PAIRING



Gorgonzola Dolce
A soft and creamy blue cheese with a slightly sweet flavour and delicate blue veining.
finecheese.co.uk



The Fine Cheese Co. Pickled Pears for Cheese
Baby pears in spiced and sweetened white wine vinegar.
finecheese.co.uk



"We include Gorgonzola Dolce in our daily sandwich collection of filled ficelles: long thin sourdough baguettes which we designed and have made locally. The cheese is paired with thin slices of pickled pear, supplied by the Fine Cheese Company. Delicious!"

Metz Cheesemonger

LOCATION: FARSLEY **FOUNDED:** 2024
FOUNDER: EMMANUELLE METZ

"We're really good at getting bored," begins Emmanuelle Metz of West Yorkshire's Metz Cheesemonger. "In the past year we've made a lot of improvements to the shop and run various events – we're always trying to make things a bit different. Covid offered an opportunity for reinvention but as a rule cheese shops are quite similar, and we like to stand out from the crowd."

The shop, located in what was previously a textile factory and is now a community space for creative businesses, has recently started hosting music events in a bid to stand out from the crowd. "This came out of a conversation with a customer who is a music teacher at our local university," Emmanuelle explains. "She told me that she was in a band and working on an updated version of Serge Gainsbourg's Latin music, so we hosted a gig, offered bottomless cheese and people brought their own drink. It created a great atmosphere."

The feel of the event was conducive to people chatting while they enjoyed the cheese, and people – understandably – asked for the event to be repeated, so there are now more music and cheese nights on the horizon.

CHEESEMONGER TURNED CHEESEMAKER

Emmanuelle is currently working on a big project – making her own cheese and maturing it in locally-grown hay. "Our choice of cheese is restricted, so I decided to keep creating and innovating," she explains. At the time of writing, Emmanuelle is in the experimental stage, currently with Tomme de Savoie, to see how the flavour of the hay alters the strength of the cheese, as well as ewe's milk cheeses. She hopes that one day she can take on some more space in order to make the cheese in-house, but current plans involve getting the hay-matured cheese in her counter ready for Christmas.



PERFECT PAIRING



White Lake Glaston Tile
A fresh, young goat's cheese with a versatile, firmer texture than a curd and a more pronounced acidity. Dense, bright and slightly salty.
whitelake.co.uk



Fresh radish
The fresh pepperiness and crunch of radishes make them delicious with soft, sprightly cheeses.



"The peppery crunch of radish is delicious with a creamy fresh goats cheese such as Glaston Tile. Summer is the best time of year for goats milk as it brings a slight nuttiness to the cheese as well as a sweetness. I love this pairing so much I have been known to enjoy it for my evening meal!"

GOD SAVE THE CHEESE.

GRUYERE.COM



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