

Rifling Through My Drawers

of stone except for the bathroom extension and it was in the bathroom wall that we found the dry rot just before New Year. I moved out. I had a book to write, the bath was going to have to come out, the wall was going to have to come down, the whole place was going to be sprayed with toxins in order to defeat the dry rot and a house with no bath and an unusable kitchen was no place for me to stay and write about comfort food.

Clarissa's Comfort Food should have been the easiest of books to write, made up of those tried and tested recipes that I had always enjoyed. I took myself off to the Cholmondeley Arms, my favourite pub in Cheshire, down near the Shropshire border, which is owned and run by my old friend, Carolyn Ross-Lowe. She and her late husband Guy started the pub twenty years ago and it's everything a pub should be. It's in an old school, converted so that ex-pupils come back to take a drink where they once studied, and while it isn't a gastro-pub as such, it serves excellent food, such as delicious oxtail, kedgeree, marvellous steaks and always roasts on Sunday. It sources much of its food locally from the Cholmondeley Estate, which runs a hub for produce from its various farms. The pub has a great atmosphere and is full of entertaining and amusing locals, everything from a QC to Johnnie O'Shea who hunted the Cheshires for twenty-five years, and is a whippety man, with endless stories about his training as a boy in Ireland and about his time hunting. Ginger McCain, the trainer, is also a regular and comes in with his clients.

One reads that country pubs are failing at a rate of knots and why should I doubt what I read in the newspapers? I have been to a lot of pubs that I would be quite happy to see fail: a combination of Brake Brothers food and microwaves and very