



Monday 15th November 2021

Dear Customer,

I hope this finds you well. As forecast last week we have been enjoying clement weather. It's been stunning actually - the landscape illuminated by the soft autumn light and glorious rose sunsets. It doesn't feel like the middle of November, more like September. The only giveaway, the wilting gardens and dropping leaves. Wilting, but still blossoming with roses and hebe, crocosmias and alstroemerias - which needed a spellcheck of course. It even makes up for the shortening days and makes it all quite bearable. Could all turn on a sixpence though. Apparently trouble coming to do with the Polar Vortex.

We have Suffolk squash and Lancashire leeks in the bags this week. Here are a few tasty recipes you could try:

Whole Roasted Butternut Squash

Preheat oven to 220C/ 425°F/Gas 7. Line a roasting tray with aluminium foil. Put the squash in the pan. Pierce the squash in 5-6 places with a sharp knife and the place on the tray. Roast for 60-80 minutes, or until the outer skin is browning and starting to shrivel and the squash tender. Break open or peel and remove the seeds.

Squash and Carrot Soup

<i>30g margarine</i>	<i>2 tbsp extra virgin olive oil</i>
<i>2 onions, finely chopped</i>	<i>3 garlic cloves, crushed</i>
<i>1 butternut squash</i>	<i>500g carrots, peeled and roughly chopped</i>
<i>1 litre vegetable stock</i>	<i>½ tsp chilli flakes</i>
<i>12 sage leaves</i>	

Put 15g margarine and 1 tbsp oil in a large heavy-based pan or casserole dish set over a low heat. Add the onions, garlic and a pinch of salt; sauté gently for 10 minutes until the onions are translucent, stirring frequently. Add the squash, carrots, stock and 200ml water. Bring to the boil, then reduce the heat and simmer for 20-25 minutes, or until the squash is completely soft. Remove from the heat and leave to cool for 10 minutes. Blend until smooth and season. Put the remaining 15g margarine and 1 tbsp oil in a pan over a medium heat. When hot, fry the sage leaves for 1-2 minutes, until golden and crispy. Serve topped with the chilli flakes, crispy sage leaves and a drizzle of the sage-infused oil.

Squash and Leek Pot Pies

<i>1 large leek, washed and sliced</i>	<i>margarine</i>
<i>375g puff pastry</i>	<i>small butternut squash, peeled and cut in small chunks</i>
<i>200ml vegetable stock</i>	<i>1 tbsp crème fraiche or dairy alternative</i>
<i>375g puff pastry sheet</i>	

Cook the leek in a little margarine until softened, about 7 minutes. Add the mushrooms and cook for 4-5 minutes. Add the squash and cook for a minute then pour in the stock, cover and simmer for 5 minutes. Heat the oven to 200C / Fan 180C / Gas 6. Stir the crème fraiche into the vegetables, check the seasoning and divide between 4 pie dishes. Top with pastry, trim and crimp. Cook for 25-30 minutes until tops are golden and crisp.

Boris Johnson has just spoken about 'storm clouds brewing over Europe in reference to the spike in Covid cases. What about our own bloody storm clouds, they're not just brewing No change in 6 months and the 1000 deaths a week, week in, week out. We have been lodged, like a stuck record, at the top a spike since early June. One in 50 have the virusad infinitum.

With no more lockdowns on the cards, is this it ? Is this as good as it gets ? Unless the virus changes dramatically, it's looking that way. It's not a great prospect. Nearly two years now. When it started, there was a beginning and we thought there'd be an end. But there is no end, we are stuck in the groove. The Pfizer anti-viral drug sounds encouraging though doesn't it cutting hospitalisations and deaths by 90%. But it doesn't get rid of it. We need to get rid of it. How's China doing ? A quick check – 32 new cases, the biggest outbreak in a while.

I started this yesterday, Sunday, then got carried off into WW1. I had the TV on in the background showing Remembrance Sunday programmes. In the corner of my brain Walter Barned was lurking. He was my great uncle. The only people alive who could possibly be thinking of him today are myself and my cousins. Yet we have never remembered him. We were told he lied about his age to join up and was killed in the Somme. But none of us really knew. I had to find out. All that is available to see online is that he is remembered at Thiepval, his name etched into a pillar with all the other thousands whose bodies were never recovered. To see his military records it would cost over £48 for a year's subscription. Just ridiculous, I only wanted to nip on for a quick look, not spend the next year searching for heaven knows who. In the end I thought I would do it to find out definitively for all of us. We owed it to him to know. I'm going to email them after this and tell them what a rip-off it is. I wouldn't have minded paying a tenner.

There were just 4 documents with which to piece together his war. He was with the Lancashire Fusiliers 1st / 6th Battalion, and I had to trace their war to know his. They were sent to protect the Suez Canal in Egypt and from there, it was Gallipoli. There were photographs of the troops, and he must have been one of them, on the SS Nile, an open-topped boat, just before they arrived. When they disembarked in the sea, they waded into barbed wire, got trapped and were gunned down. Two thirds of his battalion perished and he was wounded. Those that survived Gallipoli eventually regrouped and returned to Egypt. From there they sailed to Marseille and made their way up to the Somme. From my research of the dates of death – it just said 'killed in action' - it looked like he must have been killed in the Battle of Messinesin Flanders fields. Well

that's the short version. I must have spent about 5 hours tracing his tracks, imagining what this young boy must have gone through and the millions like him. So Walter my great uncle, lies there, somewhere, in Flanders fields where the poppies blow.

Putin and Deng Xiaoping look to be coordinated. The former intent on regaining Ukraine, the latter Taiwan, and that's just for starters. The US has vowed to defend both. We are being arrogantly provocative and goading. There's no easy answer but God help us that we should ever end up in another World War. It doesn't take much with madmen at every helm.

Kind wishes, Isobel