



ISLANDERS of a certain age will remember entering a gloriously old-fashioned building in St Helier's Pitt Street and emerging with what was known in that bygone era as a gramophone record.

Sadly, for many years this wonderful emporium – the Foot building complete with its famous His Master's Voice logo on its gable wall – lay in a state of neglect and dilapidation; its decay frequently debated by politicians and conservation experts but its future largely uncertain.

Until, that is, the National Trust for Jersey, after a decade of tireless campaigning, completed a two-year renovation scheme and unveiled the beautifully restored Foot Buildings in April 2018.

That timely intervention has provided the chance for a dream to come true for husband and wife team Drew and Ella Locke, who now run their increasingly popular café, Locke's Stories, from part of the tastefully refurbished premises.

Telling tales

‘The ‘stories’ part of the café’s name reflects the tradition of the building,’ Ella explained. ‘The place has a long history and everything about the building was carefully documented throughout its restoration. It is also now a place to which people can come, look back fondly on that history and tell their own stories.’

Catering, however, was not the career in which the couple started out. Ella began her working life as a PE teacher, while Drew played professional rugby, until injury forced him out of the game. They then embarked upon two years of training in London – Drew at an award-winning café in Wandsworth and Ella at establishments in Covent Garden and Bond Street.

This brought Ella into contact with another Ella, the food writer and entrepreneur Ella Woodward of Deliciously Ella fame.

With their training over, the pair embarked upon a two-month trip to Australia in order to fuel their business objectives with some serious market research. They eventually arrived in Jersey, which Ella said looked to them like a good move, in April 2017.

Good news on the grapevine

‘We contacted Jersey Business and presented our business plan to Cedric Bird,’ Ella said. ‘He had heard on the grapevine that the National Trust could be interested in the possibility of a café in the refurbished Pitt Street premises and a meeting was duly set up between them, Jersey Business and ourselves.’

‘We met with Charles Alluto, the Chief Executive Officer of the National Trust for Jersey, and then with all the directors and within two days they said that they would like us to run it. This was in May 2017 but, unfortunately, the building was not going to be ready until May 2018.’

For the intervening period, Ella returned to teaching, while Drew – showing considerable enterprise and more than a hint of what was to come – ran a coffee cart in St Helier.

Preparing the Pitt Street premises for its new role as a catering establishment required some considerable upgrading work; despite the renovation programme. ‘To begin with, the water cylinder was far too small for a café,’ Ella said. ‘All the electrics and lighting had to be changed, a kitchen was installed from scratch and appropriate furniture brought in. We quite literally started with an empty shell and everything needed to be altered.’

The result was something that Jersey had clearly been waiting for – and it got people talking and asking questions: ‘Is it a café? Is it a restaurant? Is it a coffee shop?’

‘What we have created is something different,’ Ella stressed. ‘It has the casual environment that

we wanted. Our specialty coffee roasted by our friends at Extract Coffee Roasters paired with Classic Herd keeps people coming back.

‘They also love the styling of the place. The mix of old and new attracts people in. And our all-day brunch is beautifully presented.’

A treat for the taste buds

A look at the menu confirms that the taste buds are in for a treat and there is certainly a hint of the Australian influence gleaned from that earlier market research trip. On the Brunch Menu, the ‘Avo Good Day’ offers poached eggs, avocado hummus, chilli feta, crispy chickpeas, coriander and charred sourdough mop. Other selections include such tantalising delights as their signature BLT, pulled ham hock, or smoked salmon with poached eggs accompanied by dill labneh and chimichurri.

And where else could you slake your thirst with beers such as Beavertown Neck Oil or North Brewery Herzog Kolsch?

Ella and Drew clearly have innovative skills but they still found that running a business of this kind in Jersey could lob niggling problems their way. ‘Staffing presented one difficulty,’ Ella said. ‘When we started out we only had one chef and that certainly limited capacity. Kitchen staff are very hard to come by.’

‘We are up to strength now but people tend to move on to other things in this industry. People like to travel and it is hard to keep staff for the long term. That is the nature of this business.’

"We would never have this cafe without Jersey Business"

Jersey Business – helping the economy

Easing the way, however, has been Jersey Business. ‘We would never have had this café without them,’ Ella confirmed. ‘Cedric initiated everything for us.’

Of course, good old-fashioned hard work is also the key to building any successful enterprise – and Drew and Ella are certainly prepared to pull their sleeves up and put in the necessary time.

‘Drew and I work very hard every day,’ Ella revealed. ‘It takes time, love and dedication. But because we make sure that every day the café is run as we want it to be run, I am confident for the future.’

"Jersey Business is a wonderful asset for the Island and it really helps the economy. Cedric helped us to hit the ground running with all the courses they offer including PR, marketing, tax issues, and

the importance of social media. It is all just so very helpful."

'The challenge is to keep doing what we are doing – and to do it well.'

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