

**SE** Features  
**HD** **Shaun's making Mary quite contrary to her big sister**

**WC** 1,726 words

**PD** 11 October 2014

**SN** The Journal, Newcastle

**SC** THEJOU

**ED** 1; National

**PG** 51,52

**LA** English

**CY** (c) 2014 The Newcastle Chronicle & Journal Ltd

**LP**

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Chef Shaun Hurrell is the man charged with taking Jesmond Dene House's new gastro pub from first orders to hopefully dining honours. Jane Hall caught up with him

**TD**

IT is bad things that are supposed to come in threes - but in the case of Shaun Hurrell, the trio of major changes that have happened in quick succession in his life recently, are proving to be very lucky.

Firstly, his long-time girlfriend Victoria Soulsby announced she was expecting their first child. Then, the couple decided with impending parenthood, they would move back to Victoria's native Tyneside from London - a place that has been good to Shaun on the professional front already in the past.

And thirdly, he landed the dream job - head chef at Jesmond Dene House's new food and drink venture in the heart of Northumberland.

St Mary's Inn, just off the A1 at Stanington, is set to open on November 1, which is where things may start to become ever-so-slightly tricky for Shaun.

Baby Hurrell is due on November 20 (if he/she doesn't decide life on the 'inside' is boring and launch themselves into the world early), which means the 30-year-old may not just be having sleepless nights about heading up the sizeable kitchen team at what promises to be an exciting new addition to the region's burgeoning dining out scene.

It has to be said, though, that Shaun doesn't come across as a panic merchant and seems like the sort of guy who is used to taking things in his stride.

It probably owes much to his adventurous and eclectic back-back ground.

He spent the first seven years of his life in York, before his dad, who was a welder, decided to up sticks with his family and head off to Australia on a skilled migration package.

His parents later split up, and his American mum moved with the then 11-year-old Shaun to Colorado, where he stayed until the age of 14.

There followed a brief year-long return to Australia, before Shaun went back to the US, this time ending up in Sonoma County in California just a short drive from San Francisco.

Sonoma's biggest claim to fame is as one of California's premier wine growing areas alongside its neighbour, the Napa Valley.

It was here that the teenage Shaun fell in love with good food and cooking.

"I landed a job working for a fruit and veg shop," he recalls in his distinctive Yorkshire-cum-Australian-cum-laidback-Californian accent. "We would **buy** from the local farmers and I got to meet these people and chat to them. Then all these chefs started buying from us.

"I got into it from there, really. My first chef job was at the age of 18 in a bistro. I worked in northern California until about the age of 21, when I moved back to England and ended up in Newcastle."

The reason for the move was simple. "When people think of Californian cuisine, it tends to be in terms of product-driven food, but not in terms of technique. As a chef, if you want to learn the technical side, you come to Europe."

He decided against returning to York and eschewed the idea of London on cost grounds. He had a friend living in Newcastle who recommended the city to him.

And so began what was Shaun's first association with Jesmond Dene House. The multi-award-winning **hotel** had not long been open and he joined the team as a chef de partie on the fish side. From there, he moved around the kitchen (and met Victoria who was working on reception) and left at 25 as a senior chef de partie to try his luck in London.

It was an amicable parting. "I left because I had gone as far as I could go at that time at Jesmond Dene House," he explains. "It was the best place to work in Newcastle for a chef and there wasn't anywhere else in the area that I wanted to go."

Instead, he was offered a job at the two-Michelin-star Marcus Wareing at the Berkeley (now just known as Marcus) as a commis chef.

It was, says Shaun, "a hard kitchen to work in, but that's what I wanted. Marcus was there every day. He's good; tough but fair."

"I learnt how to work hard and it was long hours. But it was a disciplined kitchen and I learnt a lot. I stayed for about 18 months and am still good friends with the people I worked with."

He moved to Fergus Henderson's The St John **Chinatown** Restaurant and **Hotel**, working with head chef Tom Harris in the kitchen.

Shaun was part of the team that helped win the venture a Michelin star. The hotel later went into administration, was bought out, reopened as One Leicester Street, and with the kitchen still under the control of Tom Harris, again secured a Michelin accolade.

By then Shaun had left, however, and progressed to the small 19-seater Kitchen Table in London's Charlotte Street, overseen by James Knappett. From there he joined the wonderfully named Farris School of Dancing pub, in Hackney. "My first head chef gig," he says.

But just five months into the job, Victoria fell pregnant, which is when the couple decided to head back North.

And so Shaun's professional life has sort of come full circle as he's back within the Jesmond Dene House family, albeit now running his own show at the soon to open St Mary's Inn.

He is "really excited" about what the future holds, both on the professional and personal fronts.

The inn is part of a new Bellway Homes development at the former St Mary's Hospital, two miles west of Stannington.

St Mary's Inn sits in the hospital's former administrative block at the heart of what will be a purpose-built village.

It is Jesmond Dene House's first stand-alone development since it opened in 2005, and will have cost £1.5m to develop when it opens.

But while the inn boasts 11 boutique bedrooms, it is not a second Jesmond Dene House.

The **hotel's** owners and Shaun are both keen to emphasise that St Mary's Inn is just that, a place that offers food and **board**. But it is setting out to be somewhere that offers exceptionally good food.

It will not be fine dining like its bigger and more upmarket sister, but St Mary's Inn will certainly be offering a cut above the average in its field regionally, with obvious exceptions like John Calton's Staith House on North Shields' Fish Quay and Rhian Cradock's The Feathers Inn at Hedley on the Hill, to name just two multiaward-winning gastro pubs.

Under Shaun's guiding hand St Mary's will serve high-quality pub food at reasonable prices. Starters will be priced between £5 and £7; mains will come in at £10-£15; and desserts at £5-£6. There will obviously be links between St Mary's Inn and Jesmond Dene House, but the **hotel's** marketing manager Nicky

Sherman says: "What we are creating is a traditional warm and cosy country pub. We aren't just going to take Jesmond Dene House and put it at Stannington.

"It will first and foremost be a pub in a beautiful area of Northumberland, serving good-quality, value-for-money food. But at the same time, we hope it will be a destination place in the same way that Jesmond Dene House is now."

With Shaun at the food pass, local ingredients will be very much to the fore. Indeed, they can't get any more local than the few feet the majority will be travelling from plot to plate.

The inn's **site** includes a mature orchard with apple, pear, plum and cherry trees, as well as extensive grounds, part of which will be turned into a kitchen garden producing fresh seasonal salads and vegetables.

There are plans to develop a nuttery growing hazelnuts and St Mary's Inn honey is already being used at Jesmond Dene House.

Shaun hopes within the next 12 months the inn will be virtually selfsufficient on the native fruit and vegetable front, with well-known North East supplier Ken Holland filling any gaps.

Other local suppliers will include beers from Wylam (they have already produced a special St Mary's Inn ale), fish from Latimer's Seafood in Whitburn, Carroll's Heritage Potatoes from Coldstream, kippers from L Robson and Sons of Craster, Marlish bottled water from Morpeth, and Lindisfarne Oysters.

Mostly everything else will be made in-house from breads and charcuterie to pickles and preserves, and the menu will reflect an artisanal take on British comfort food.

There will be a bar menu, as well as more extensive table choices and afternoon tea - a popular attraction at Jesmond Dene House and something not usually offered by pubs. The inn will seat around 140 in total in the bar and the five dining areas, which will feature homely wood burning stoves.

The food will owe much to Fergus Henderson, famous for his 2004 tome The Whole Beast that promoted nose-to-tail eating.

"The whole ethos is about not wasting anything and old style British cooking," Shaun explains.

"Food-wise, we want St Mary's to offer a British take on comfort foods. There will be a strong ethos towards artisan cooking, with everything made in-house and using local suppliers where possible.

"St Mary's allows us the opportunity to build a team of chefs who are interested in going back to the basics of great cooking and learning skills such as bread-baking and meat-curing that have perhaps got lost along the way."

St Mary's Inn, St Mary's Lane, St Mary's **Park**, Morpeth, Northumberland, NE61 6BL, 01670 293 293, [www.stmarysinn.co.uk](http://www.stmarysinn.co.uk)

It will first and foremost be a pub in a beautiful area, serving good quality foodShaun Hurrell

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**PUB** Trinity Mirror Group PLC

**AN** Document THEJOU0020141011eaab00071