

# Paradise Hats – the Luton Lunch

I was most fortunate to be part of a fabulous afternoon with fellow Feltmakers at the stunning Putteridge Bury Hall in Luton for our annual luncheon event.

Putteridge Bury traces its roots back to Edward the Confessor's time when a tax of 3½d was paid daily to Hiz (now Hitchin) for 100 acres. By 1911, the original house had been replaced in the style of Chequers by architects Sir Ernst George and Alfred Yates and cost £30,000, according to newspaper reports. The grounds were later redesigned by Edwin Lutyens and planted by Gertrude Jekyll.

Queen Mary and King George V visited Putteridge Bury and planted an oak tree to the south of the house. During World War II, the house was requisitioned by the government for use by the armed forces. Being steeped in an illustrious history made Putteridge a suitable setting for the Feltmakers' lunch.

This lunch was my second adventure into my world as Freeman of the Feltmakers. I acquainted myself with many lovely milliners, each sporting stunning works of art on their heads. With so many impressive creations, it felt as though Ascot had arrived early! Events such as these are enormously informative and convivial and I would go as far as to say they are therapeutic in that we get the opportunity to connect and discuss the ups and downs of millinery today.

I met some classical milliners, such as the



amazing Ian Bennet, who trained with Philip Somerville, and many other contemporary milliners who each have their own style, such as Katherine Elizabeth and Oscar & Willow millinery. It's amazing the variety and skills of the talent I was so pleased to learn from.

One can never stop learning in millinery - from sourcing the materials to making a hat. It's a revolutionary minefield of change and adaptability.

I have been a hat designer for thirty years I

don't feel it's "old hat" to be constantly soaking up new pieces of information and skills, especially by mixing with my fellow professionals.

On top of this, we indulged in a sumptuous lunch, starting with roasted plum tomato and red pepper soup. My appetite was impressed, especially as I am a vegetarian. The baked beef tomato with halloumi risotto cream, spinach, broccoli and carrots was one of the best I have tasted. Braised shin of beef with dauphinoise potatoes, a vegetable medley and wild mushroom jus was available for the meat eaters, and we finished with lemon and lime cheesecake served with orange jelly and a dark chocolate biscuit.

Our keynote speaker was Aimee Gomez, a pioneer in Luton, encouraging young people to get more involved in the art of fashion, in particular, millinery. She has developed an amazing interactive digital concept to show how hats work! Her pioneering electronic game takes you on a journey through a hat factory where you can create your own headpiece and even wear it! Passionate about preserving the hat heritage of Luton, Aimee has been part of the University of Bedfordshire's Heritage Accelerator Impact programme where she focuses on Luton's hatting heritage.

Grateful thanks to John Horn for arranging such a lavish event with great attention to detail. I wait in anticipation for the next!

**Mary Spiteri**

