

A LANE TO A ROAD

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Viewmount House, County Longford

The last number of weekends Hannah and I have been up and down the country promoting [Improper Butter](#). We do this primarily through in-store tastings and by participating at food festivals. This helps to build a good relationship with our stockists, as well as raising brand awareness. Last weekend we were in Galway for [Galway Food Festival](#). Tomorrow (Friday 25 April) I will be in Waterford ([Ardkeen Quality Food Store](#)) and the following weekend (May Bank Hol) we will both be in Cork. Improper Butter's hometown of Dublin is hardly getting a look in!

Thanks to this bit of travelling, Hannah and I had the great fortune of an unforgettable dining experience in County Longford two weekends ago. We were in Sligo doing a promo with one of our stockists, [Kate's Kitchen](#) and begged our friend William Barry (who has relocated there for the year) to give us a bed for the night.

Fuelled by his passion and interest, William has Irish food knowledge far exceeding the average foodie. William writes for the [McKennas' Guides](#) and has a list of places to visit across the island of Ireland, from Malin Head to Mizen Head. He had been plotting a trip to [Viewmount House in County Longford](#) for a while. When Hannah and I announced our visit, William proposed a wee jaunt out there. Neither Hannah nor I had heard of Viewmount before, we're now slightly ashamed to admit. This is because in recent years, this country guesthouse, has been getting stellar write-ups, accolades and awards.

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I wasn't taking photographs or even mental notes at the time, so I'll not go into too much detail but give a brief overview of our experience and urge you to make the trip yourself. Fronted by Beryl, you are greeted with a warm welcome from the moment you step in the front door of the grand Georgian residence. We ordered drinks and mulled over a [four-course evening menu](#), which has plenty of choice. Not being able to choose for want of everything is a great first and last complaint!

Between Hannah, William and myself we ate duck, quail, pork, veal, fish and all sorts of wonderful things in between. Aside from the four courses of our choosing, we were served an amuse bouche opener comprising of elements of duck (it sang with flavour and texture), as well as a midway palate cleanser of Seville orange jelly with organic Glenisk natural yoghurt. Despite being avid fish and meat eaters, both Hannah and I ordered the vegetarian main course. Homemade mushroom ravioli with butternut squash and pea shoots was unctuous, meaty, nutty, creamy: all the unami you could ever dream of on a plate.



A number of the standout elements of the evening: a warm homemade breadbasket, a fabulous full-bodied red wine (recommended), the slowest braised pork cheek, a rhubarb dessert that invoked childhood memories and a dark chocolate truffle on the petit fours slate. I cannot for lack of memory describe the detail and intricacies of the plates of food we were served. And I



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cannot for lack of eloquence describe pleasure derived from them. The dining room itself – spacious yet cosy, atmospheric yet peaceful – along with the outstanding service completed the experience.



[Gary O Hanlon](#) is the head chef at Viewmount House since 2008. I am no expert, but I've eaten in a handful of great Irish restaurants and Viewmount is right up there in my books. Gary's cooking is classic, yet modern and original. I feel that too much of what is considered 'great' food nowadays can be pretentious and inaccessible. Having 1. great ingredients 2. a mastery of classic cooking techniques 3. an intuitive understanding of flavour and art 4. a hard and relentless work ethic and 5. a bit of 'je ne sais quoi', as Gary does translates into *great* food. Hannah and I were talking the other day about how Imelda May has a special gift in that she appeals to people across a broad demographic spectrum. Gary O Hanlon is the Imelda May of the Irish food scene. Brilliant, with something for everyone.

Viewmount House

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<http://www.viewmounthouse.com>

Tags: [Ardkeen Quality Food Store](#), [County Longford](#), [flavoured butter](#), [Gary O Hanlon](#), [improper butter](#), [Irish butter](#), [Irish food](#), [Kate's Kitchen](#), [McKennas' guides](#), [Viewmount House](#)

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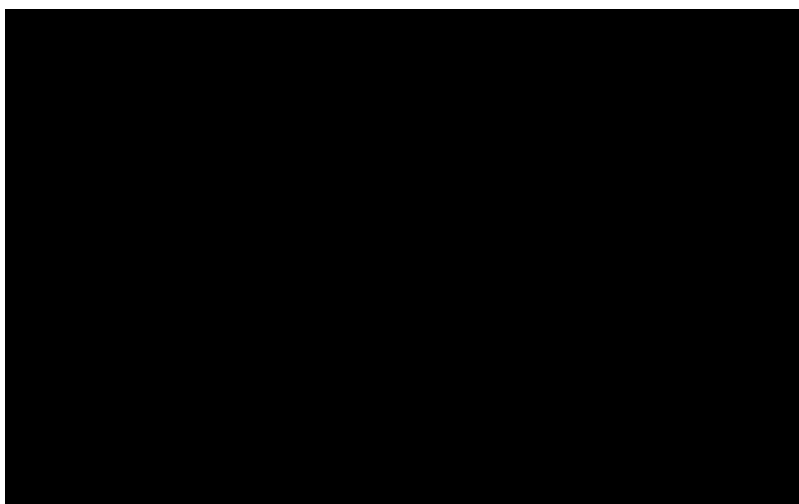
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April 3, 2014: Improper Butter update

It has been an exciting couple of weeks for Improper Butter since we appeared on the sixth series of Dragons Den Ireland (watch back [here](#)). Aside from enabling the addition of [new stockists](#) and giving a healthy boost to Improper Butter sales, we received *incredible* goodwill from the public who watched the programme. Notifications on our Twitter, Facebook and email did not stop for more than 72 hours post the airing of the show. The question that most people asked us afterwards was, how did we remain so calm and confident in front of the gaze of the Dragons in the Den?



In answer to that, we have to say that we definitely had nerves. However, we just managed to somehow keep them hidden. Secondly, we were confident that we would be able to warm up the dragons with a taste of Improper Butter. Although they didn't show it in the edit, all the Dragons LOVED our Garlic, Flat-Leaf Parsley and Lemon butter which we presented to them on a sirloin steak. That set us out on a great path. Thirdly, while we hoped for positive feedback and offers from the Dragons, we were also prepared to stand up and fight for our business, as we do every day. Hannah and I live Improper Butter, day in day out. We [spoke to Barbara Scully on Dublin South FM](#) yesterday afternoon and explained that if we didn't know the answers to the Dragon's questions, who would have?

While we are constantly learning and adapting as we move forward, we have a fixed vision for our long-term strategy: that is building an exciting and delicious food brand around the 'Improper' name. Currently, our focus is on getting Improper Butter listed in stockists nationwide in Ireland. With its ease of use, Improper Butter must be an accessible product. The cost of a packet of Improper Butter is an affordable luxury. When you buy Improper Butter you know you are buying quality and convenience.

There is huge scope for Improper Butter to do well on the world stage if we stick to our strategy, execute well and, as the founders of Innocent always advised "Keep the main thing the main thing". For us this means building on the Improper brand. With that, we are currently working on a new brand identity, which we are very excited about (the Improper name of which we are very proud will stay). Watch out! Elaine

<http://www.improperbutter.com>

Tags: [business](#), [compound butter](#), [dragons den](#), [entrepreneurship](#), [flavoured butter](#), [garlic butter](#), [graduate careers](#), [improper butter](#), [Irish butter](#), [Irish food](#)

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improper butter

Update via her.ie: The Improper Butter Story So Far

This is taken from a post I wrote for [her.ie](#) recently about Irish women in business. The platform gave us a chance to tell our story to new and future fans of Improper Butter. The original article can be found [here](#).

—

Hannah and I met while studying at UCD. I was studying Business and Law; Hannah was studying Commerce. We actually met in the chamber choir, but we were also in a few classes together and worked together on the odd project.

Intuitively we were drawn together.

We laughed at the same things, read people and situations the same way and had the same appreciations for the finer things in life! We didn't know it at the time but we never had more disposable income and freedom. A lot has changed since then. We have never been so busy or poor!

We both finished our final set of exams in UCD in May 2012. I went off to complete a summer internship in Goldman Sachs in London for the summer. I thought I was set up. The Olympic games were on and the sun shone for a good bit of that summer, but I saw none of it.

Being inside the world of the financial markets was fascinating, but it was not for me. I couldn't stop wondering what I could achieve if I was working 15 hour days for myself rather than for someone else. Unsure of what direction to take my career, I decided to take a year out.

I took myself off to the French Alps to combine my love of cooking with my love of skiing by working as a chalet chef. I have always been a massive foodie. My love of cooking came from my love of eating. I wanted to be able to cook nice things so I could eat them myself. My time spent in France was a dream.

Hannah also took a year out. She has a gift of a beautiful singing voice. She was always asked to sing at weddings, funerals and other events. She decided to give professional classical singing a chance and went off to complete a diploma in voice at the Royal Irish Academy of Music in Dublin.

During that time Hannah began to realise that if she was to pursue music, she would spend the next ten years of her life living out of a suitcase, travelling the

cities of Europe alone. The level of competition in the industry is tough and as determined and talented as Hannah is, she wasn't secure on having the future success of her career dependent on being in the right place at the right time. She wanted more control over her destiny.

She was drawn back to the world of business, and especially marketing, which she had always loved in college.



I returned from France last April with the idea to develop and market an original food product, one that used the finest of Irish produce. The concept of flavoured butters had been in my head for years, since I came across a recipe by Nigel Slater – a lentil soup with a Moroccan spiced herb butter swirled into it. It was delicious. I thought, why isn't anyone adding value to Irish butter in this way?

In Ireland, we have the best butter in the world. People know garlic butter. My idea for Improper Butter builds on that by doing something that restaurant chefs have been doing since the 1970s. Scratch cooking at home has risen in popularity in recent years. Improper Butter is a convenience product to aid the home cook: a butter for spreading on your bread, melting on your fish or meat, stirring into you potatoes, tossing over your veg.

I told Hannah my ideas. She was at a crossroads also having just completed her diploma. She said she would be interested in getting involved. I couldn't believe it. I had a business partner and a best friend ready made and waiting, and one that knew how to make things look good. I was a taste master; she was a marketer.

My one concern about going into business with Hannah was not a falling out. Neither of us are demanding in friendship terms. But I was concerned that Hannah never used to reply to my calls / texts / emails! I needn't have worried about Hannah's availability; Hannah focuses on what is important in the moment. When she's with you, she's with you. When we are not together, we communicate constantly. If our business is successful, Whatsapp can talk 50% of the credit.



We started conducting market research last summer. That included going into supermarkets and speaking to managers about consumers and consumer behavior, conducting focus groups and selling a product at farmers markets. We launched our retail product (a range of four flavoured butters) in November. We now have roughly 40 stockists of Improper Butter around the country, from independent grocers to butchers and fishmongers. We also supply *Improper Butter* to cafes, restaurants and other businesses such as manufacturers of other prepared foods.

It suits us both being our own bosses. We are both very headstrong and have a clear, shared vision. We are learning by doing. In the first four months of starting the business we learned more than we did four years in college. We both work upwards of 12 hours a day, six days a week. It's hard to switch off, but because we are both so passionate about our product and our business, you want to be tuned in 24/7. Because you wear every hat when you're bootstrapping, you're learning and figuring out things as you go along. It is an education.

What makes *Improper Butter* stand out at the end of the day is the product. It's the quality of the fresh herbs and ingredients we source to blend into Irish creamery butter, our recipes and our production methods that make the *Improper Butter* a stellar product. Taste and provenance are everything. If you buy a block of *Improper Butter* it will transform your meal.

With regard to advising people who want to take the leap and start their own company, I would iterate as the well know sports-brand does: just do it. But having a good idea is only 1% of the way there.

Get the idea out there, learn about your customer and appeal to what they want by constantly adapting. Most businesses succeed because of the people behind them are driven, passionate, professional and hard-working, not because they had the best idea.

Tags: [business](#), [butter](#), [Elaine Lavery](#), [female entrepreneurship](#), [Hannah O'Reilly](#), [improper butter](#), [Irish butter](#), [Irish dairy](#), [Irish women in business](#), [youth entrepreneurship](#)

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Sweet Butters for Pancake Day

Is there anyone who doesn't like pancakes? French crêpes or fat American-style, pancakes are a treat that anyone can make. You can't beat the trusty lemon-sugar or Nutella combos, but a little thinking outside the box, and the choice of toppings is endless. Hannah and I recently had brunch in [Herbstreet](#) and the menu offered blueberry pancakes topped with orange and honey butter. I was delighted to see a sweet butter on a menu, since from [day one](#) we have been producing the most indulgently delicious sweet butters.

When we launched Improper Butter in the shops, we decided not to include a sweet butter in the range, as we did not want to confuse the message (something that we must continue to educate about). However we do offer a range of sweet butters to cafes and restaurants directly, as they are the perfect accompaniment to not only pancakes, but to French toast, waffles, bagels and scones. In time, we hope to launch a range of sweet butters for the home cook.

With pancake Tuesday just around the corner, it is the perfect opportunity to share a really simple recipe or two for a sweet butter. Serve melting over freshly made hot pancakes this Tuesday for something different. Each recipe makes enough for 10 -12 generous servings.

Cinnamon and honey butter

Brunch. Pancakes, waffles, French toast. Also delicious melted and tossed through popcorn.



150g Irish butter, at room temperature

75g honey

5g ground cinnamon

Combine the honey and cinnamon in a small saucepan and heat through. When the pan is beginning to simmer, turn off the heat. Allow to cool. Pour the honey and cinnamon over the butter and blend in a bowl with a handheld whisk for a minute or two till combined. Spooned into a sterilised jar, keeps in the fridge for a number of weeks.

Amaretto and Morello Cherry Butter

This is the perfect sweet butter for a crêpe dessert. Also lovely spread over homemade scones.



100g Irish butter, at room temperature

30g dried Morello cherries

25g ground almonds

25g Amaretto

20g honey

Finely chop the morello cherries, then blend all ingredients in a bowl with a handheld whisk. Spooned into a sterilised jar, keeps in the fridge for a number of weeks.

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Tags: [amaretto](#), [cinnamon](#), [cinnamon and honey butter](#), [compound butter](#), [crepes](#), [flavoured butter](#), [honey](#), [improper butter](#), [morello cherries](#), [Pancake day](#), [Pancake Tuesday](#), [pancakes](#), [sweet butter](#)

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improper butter, Sweet things

The improper mantras of doing business properly

Today I am convinced that business success or failure hinges on positive psychology. That does not mean playing a game to negotiate your way through the everyday encounters you face. It means believing in your idea, yourself and your team. Here are some of the rules that are helping us just about scrape by day-to-day.

- 1) Have an original idea OR believe you can do something better than the existing competition in the marketplace. Seek market validation before setting out gung-ho.
- 2) LOVE your idea unconditionally (this must come naturally) and while ensuring you have the means to survive, be willing to give up everything else for it. Everything else is time, money and relationships – romantic or otherwise.
- 3) Familiarise yourself with the various semi-state agencies and partner businesses that can help with advice, expertise and finance. Don't expect anything to be handed to you on a plate. Be professional, share your ambitions and assert your entitlement.
- 4) Have confidence in your own and your teams' abilities...
- 5) But know your weaknesses. Play to your strengths and seek additional training / outside expertise in areas beyond your capabilities.
- 6) Spend money on key areas. i.e. if you are offering a differentiated product / service, don't scrimp on product / service experience, scrimp everywhere else.
- 7) Offer value for money and don't be apologetic about making money from offering that value. Set ambitious goals and work hard to reach them. Dreams are fiction. Goals are reality.
- 8) Be willing to take risks, but only calculated risks. Know the upsides and know the downsides. If you take a risk, the worst-case scenario could be a failed business. If you don't take a risk, the worst-case scenario could be a failed business.
- 9) Have a long-term strategy and try not to sweat the small day-to-day stuff. This is far easier said than done. Being able to vent to a trusted business partner who shares your frustrations helps enormously. Do not vent day-in-day-out to your mother/child/significant other. You will do their heads in.
- 10) Look after yourself. Sleep will be unavoidably compromised, so eating well and taking exercise are key. Try to take one day off a week. You will work your balls off the other six.

I recently read a phrase saying "the worst day as an entrepreneur is better than the best day working for an MNC". I am not sure that I agree. But an average day as an entrepreneur beats an average day working for an MNC every time. And most days are by definition average.

Tags: [abilities](#), [ambition](#), [business](#), [business advice](#), [business tips](#), [entrepreneurship](#), [goals](#), [improper butter](#), [motivation](#), [passion](#), [skills](#), [start-ups](#), [start-ups advice](#), [targets](#), [weaknesses](#)

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Improper Butter: 11

January 2014

I got out of the habit of writing a blog and then kept on putting it off. Not exactly procrastinating, but relishing the Christmas holidays after working up till the last minute and then being thrown back in the deep end this week.

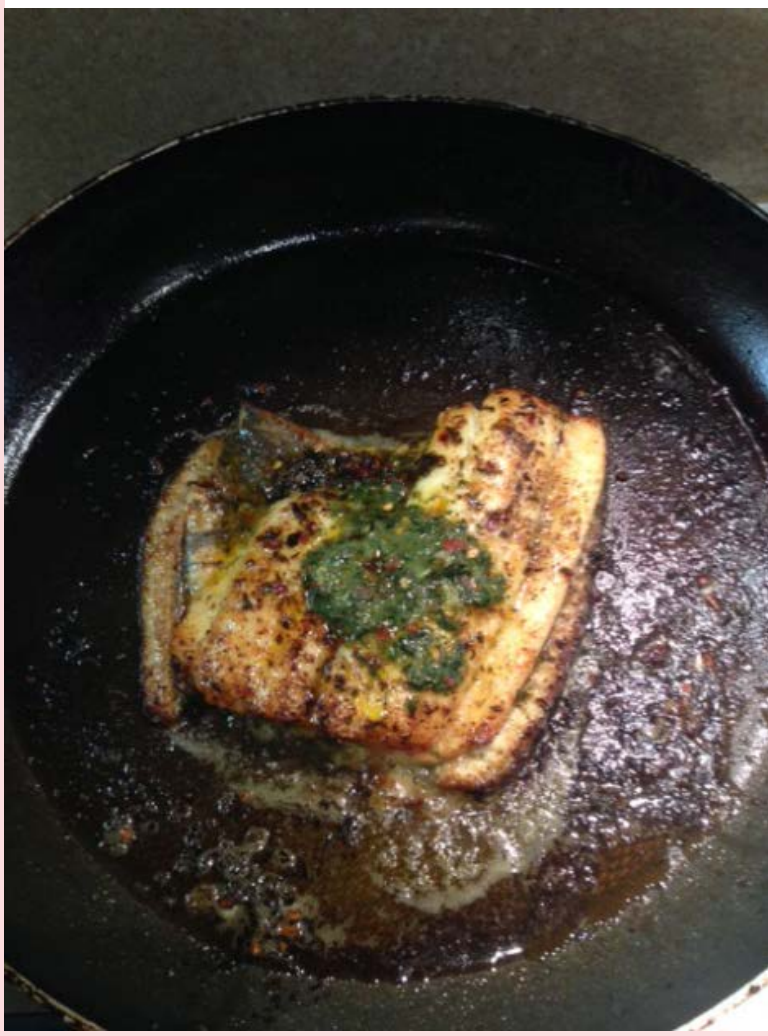
I have a newfound respect for entrepreneurs and self-employed people. The initial motivation to start your own business is the tip of the iceberg. What keeps you there is something else entirely. Like a musician or band, it is very rare that a business becomes an overnight success. You need passion. That's a given. But it is pride that really pushes you on. The motivation is not money or success; it is respect. To earn the respect of others. To be validated. For Improper Butter to be voted as one of ['The 20 Best Irish Food Finds To Watch Out For In 2014'](#) as nominated by those *in the know* by the [Irish Food Guide](#) this week, was one of those little validations that keeps us going. It's a small thumbs up that won't get noticed by the vast majority but for us it is heartwarming and encouraging. We have so many well-wishers but there are as many who shut you down before you ever got a chance. It's not personal; it's business. But even businesses deserve a break. Thanks to the Irish Food Guide and to those who mentioned us for the nod.



Joey's Big Break flop

At the moment our plans are to push on with expanding our list of stockists and growing distribution to serve nationwide. In-store tastings are the key to product education and to building up a loyal customer base. Hannah and I intend to carry out as many as possible of the in-store tastings ourselves, as the faces to front Improper Butter. We are also doing some product research and development, commencing this week, which will be ongoing.

I wanted to finish with a quick recipe as I haven't posted one in a while. I know it's January and that means everyone is on a diet, which means that butter is forbidden, but I hate diets and believe in eating and drinking everything in moderation, balanced with exercise. It's a fish recipe (healthy peeps, dead healthy), which my dad made using our Garlic, Chilli and Basil Butter this week and it was sublime. If you're adamantly on a health kick, skip the carbs and have it with a green salad or some steamed broccoli.



Serves 4

4 fillets plaice (or other white fish)

100g Improper Butter Garlic, Chilli and Basil

Place a wide saucepan on a medium heat for a minute or two. Throw in and melt $\frac{1}{4}$ of the Improper Butter until just foaming. Place two of the fillets in the pan, skinside up. Cook for 3 minutes and then flip over. Slice a second $\frac{1}{4}$ of Improper Butter into two and place one on top of each of the two fillets. Allow to cook for another 3 minutes, while the butter slowly melts on top. Remove to a warm plate while you repeat the process with the second two fillets of fish. Serve with potatoes – mashed or steamed and green veg.

Tags: [entrepreneurship](#), [fish recipes](#), [garlic butter](#), [Garlic Chilli and Basil butter](#), [improper butter](#), [Irish artisan food](#), [Irish butter](#), [Irish food](#), [Irish Food 2014](#), [Irish food business](#), [Irish Food Guide](#), [Joey's big break](#), [plaice with flavoured butter](#), [white fish butter recipe](#)

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Improper Butter: RDS National Crafts & Design Fair 2013

I write with a glass of red wine in hand, awaiting a pheasant dinner – game chips, red cabbage, herb and onion stuffing and gravy, to be followed by mince pies. This might be the last chance I have to relax and enjoy until the main event on December 25th itself. I'm not complaining, I'm just saying I wouldn't mind closing my eyes and waking up again on Christmas day, Improper Butter having made and delivered itself to shops around Dublin and beyond and presents bought for one and all.



This week, we added a couple more stockists including [Cavistons](#), [Wilde & Green](#), [Get Fresh](#) and [Fresh Avenue](#). This week we also received the news that [Avoca](#) are listing us (you will find Improper Butter in their stores from the end of this week), which is very exciting. We've had a couple of business-ey phonecalls and meetings, and had more and more positive feedback from buyers and customers. All. Going. In. The. Right. Direction.

We try to forget the bad things that happen, like standing in a freezing kitchen till 11 o'clock at night, not receiving deliveries, equipment breaking and not having enough money in our bank account to pay for anything (this year we won't be donating to charity at Christmas, because we are charity). If I wasn't doing this with my best friend, it wouldn't be happening. Instead of punching a wall, only she can make me laugh in the most desperate of times, times when I find myself dressed in a Mickey Mouse jumper and a hairnet, covered in basil juice. Fellas, I'm available for dates Thursday, Friday and Saturday nights in case you're asking.

National Crafts & Design Fair 2011

What I really came here to tell you was that this Wednesday till Sunday (4th – 8th Dec) we are taking a stand at the [RDS National Craft & Design Fair](#). It is a gorgeous event, where you will find us in the food hall along with [Lough Derg Chocolates](#), [Cashel Blue](#), [Boutique Bake](#), [Big Red Kitchen](#) and 100 other Irish artisan producers tasting and selling their Christmas indulgences. For you, we will have Improper Stuffing Butter, Improper Irish Whiskey Butter w. Dried Cranberries + Orange (brandy butter but better) and Improper Butter w. Cashel Blue cheese. They will be packaged in larger tubs for Christmas and we'll be putting together a lovely deal of two butters for (7 yoyos), all wrapped up in ribbon and looking pretty. Apart from food you can do all your Christmas shopping under one roof at the event, with businesses such as [Mayfly](#), [Chupi](#) and [Daintree paper](#) showcasing and selling in the mainhall. A chance to have all you Christmas shopping well in time for Christmas, so you can enjoy the mulled wine, mince pies and drunken antics of the silly season? Why wouldn't you? We're doing a giveaway on our Facebook page at the moment where you can win a pair of tickets. They are literally up for grabs for whoever wants them. Couldn't be easier. G'wan check it out. El x



<http://www.improperbutter.com>

Tags: [Avoca](#), [Boutique Bake](#), [brandy butter](#), [cashel blue](#), [Cavistons](#), [Christmas food](#), [Chupi](#), [Craft Fair RDS](#), [Daintree paper](#), [improper butter](#), [Improper Irish Whiskey Butter w. cranberries + Orange](#), [Improper stuffing butter](#), [Irish business](#), [Irish butter](#), [Irish food](#), [Lough Derg Chocolates](#), [Mayfly Dublin](#), [National Crafts & Design Fair](#), [Stuffing](#), [Wilde & Green](#)

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