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Honor Moore

People

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2013

## Honor Moore : A Cook's Life

Honor Moore

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Honor Moore

A Cook's Life



# A Cook's Life





A Cook's Life

HONOR EDGAR  
1923 - 2013

# A Cook's Life

**Honor Moore**

© Photos: Edgar Family

Texts: Honor Edgar

**Honor Edgar (Moore)**  
**28th May 1923 – 29th May 2013**

Honor Edgar's life was food. From picking ripe blackberries as a young girl in the fields where she kept her pony, cooking in the NAFFI kitchens during the war, pulling together meals on very little money for a large family after her husband died in 1965, creating, testing and perfecting recipes for her readers, to still being able to rustle up a delicious meal at over 80 years of age.

This book is a beautiful melding of stories and recipes from a woman whose life story deserves to be told. A remarkable woman whose incredible talent with cuisine touched the lives and pleased the palate of everyone she encountered. A book she would never see come to fruition, but in truth that is how she wanted it; she always wanted to have something to work on. She had monumental battles with her computer but most of the work was saved by Kate.

Though time stole her from us, Honor's eldest daughter Patsy painstakingly compiled this shortened version of what would have been an incredibly long and beautiful journey of a book. We present to you our tribute to a cook's life.

## HONOR EDGAR 1923 - 2013

By any yardstick, Honor was a most remarkable and exceptional woman.

However, before I speak exclusively about our Mum, I would like to reflect on her early years with her beloved Sam, our father. I am indebted to our very close family friend, Noeline Coffey, who pointed me in this direction.

During the war Honor had written to Sam every week to keep him up to date with the goings-on in their home town of Newtownards. He was in the RAF as some sort of ground operations person. They had apparently been mere acquaintances up to this but Dad treasured the weekly letter from Honor so much that when he was invalided out of India, he returned to Newtownards determined to marry her.

On the first of February 1947 they were married. He was then a journalist with the Newtownards Chronicle and she had started her daily cookery column in the Belfast Newsletter. A position in the Irish Times was advertised, Dad applied and RM Smiley took him on. This was a most prestigious appointment, as the Irish Times was probably second only to the London Times in terms of standing of all newspapers in these islands.

They moved to Dublin. A flat in Pembroke Street was followed by the basement flat in Palmerston Park and then 15 Temple Villas – that enormous house where we were all raised.

They were extremely happy together and the large rooms were perfect for the regular parties that they hosted. I'm sure that the windows there are still rattling to the sound of Brendan O'Dowda singing Percy French songs. I vaguely remember one dishevelled drunken lout being escorted off the premises whilst continuing with his own song "The Auld Triangle".

As blow-ins from that very Protestant town of Newtownards, Mum and Dad had fitted in to the Dublin social scene. And they reveled in it. Little did they know how some of the friends made at those parties would play such an important role in all of our lives later on. We thank them all for what they did. Enough said!

I can only remember one row between them. Dad had been badly delayed by the hospitality of the Pearl Bar and came in somewhat under the weather. Whatever sparked it off, I will never know, but Mum chased Dad up the three flights of stairs to the bathroom and he locked himself in pleading with Mum not to waken the children. Of course we were all awake! Apart from that moment, the house was happiness personified.

We were taken on annual holidays – Curracloe, Co. Wexford, Connemara and then regularly to Glenbeigh, Co. Kerry.

The big kitchen was the centre of all of the action with Mum cooking from morning til night. Dad's father had made her a rotating round griddle that connected to the gas on the cooker. Pancakes were made first to get the temperature right for the soda farls that were the main production of the day. Bread in the oven with an apple tart or crumble.

Only on Saturdays should we not disturb Dad. He had been appointed Irish Editor of the Empire News and all of his stories had to be read to a copygirl in London – we dared not go near his office!

The Empire News folded in 1960 and Dad started his public relations company. It was then only the second such business in Ireland. He had taken a great leap of faith but it paid off and it was soon a thriving operation employing three staff with me as messenger boy delivering press releases to the papers after school every day.

Let me focus now on our Mother, Honor Edgar.

She wrote a daily cookery column for the Belfast Newsletter from 1944 to about 1968 under the nom de plume "Housekeeper". As Honor Moore she was cookery editor of Woman's Way and the RTE Guide writing weekly for both and compiling all sorts of supplements, features and even a small book for the Guide. In addition there was always something else going on in her cookery world. As examples, I can think of a TV series with Tom Doorley for RTE; almost constant photo shoots of food dishes to accompany articles or PR promotions; judge this and judge that; and, of course, product testing. If the Edgar gang did not like it, forget it!

She was also a PR Consultant. When Dad died suddenly in 1965, she had to take over the running of his business. She knew nothing about PR but, through necessity, learned quick time. Within days, she was representing the interests of Marathon Oil, Irish Base Metals including the Tynagh Mine, Tara Exploration etc; The Irish Shoe Federation and many more.

Oh! She also raised the seven of us. Where did she find the time? In her own words ... she raised us by healthful neglect. How she managed to keep us from being dispatched to some institution, none of us will ever know. But that was very much on the cards. From what we now know about those places ... and we were to be taken there!!!

So how did Honor's life give her the strength, the interest in cookery, the ability to be such a remarkable woman?

Five years ago when the cookery assignments were diminishing (she was 85 after all), my sisters decided that she should write a book – to keep her busy, you know.

Patsy has produced a book on the Honor Edgar story. The stories are incredible to read, being snippets from her early life interspersed with recipes.

In it Honor talks about her early family life. Of how her mother was sent to agricultural college in Cork where the cookery teacher was, and I quote "a very idiosyncratic lady who refused to use anyone's given name, but tagged nicknames on to the current intake every term. The cry would go out "Small, dark, Protestant one, come here and make bread". Her mother would cheerfully make soda bread. Remonstrated by the Matron, Cook simply replied "She's small, dark, the only Protestant body in the school and she makes the best bread". Cook also had a unique recipe for griddle bread. "Take two plates of flour, a teaspoon of salt and a half spoon of soda; mix with the fill of the wee blue jug of buttermilk" ... the art of accurate measurements was learned.

It must have been the thing to do in those days because Mum was sent to agricultural college in Cookstown. Again I quote "It was designed to teach poultry keeping and dairying as well as cookery and home-making to farmers' daughters, enabling them to have a bit of financial independence. The money from butter and eggs went to the women, the last remnant of the Brehon laws, perhaps? It was our first time away from home and probably the first time we had intimate contact with anyone of a different religion. We were all too busy and often too tired to worry about "what foot anyone dug with". We walked three miles to church every Sunday, those of us who were Protestant, envying the Catholic girls whose church was on the outskirts of Cookstown. The Church of Ireland church was in the centre of town (another half mile), and the Presbyterian one a further half mile. There were further complications – the Catholic service started half an hour before the others and the Presbyterian minister could be relied on to preach for half an hour longer. As Sunday dinner was special, and on a first in first served basis, my new friend Mary Anderson and I considered slipping into the Catholic service. We decided we'd be seen, so we opted for the Church of Ireland and a leisurely walk back for dinner."

This somewhat ambivalent relationship with religion was rammed home when Dad died. We had gone ahead on a family holiday to Glenbeigh while Dad had a heart check up in Vincent's. He was released from hospital, but the morning after he arrived in Glenbeigh he had a massive heart attack.

Mum was earning 12 or 14 pounds a week at the time writing cookery which was not sufficient to feed seven children, let alone pay for an expensive funeral in Dublin. Right across the road from where we were staying in Glenbeigh was a graveyard. Being the practical one she said that will do. This did not go down well with Dad's parents who hated the fact that their son was living in the "South" much less be buried there. They did not attend his funeral.

This ability to read a situation and make it work for your own circumstances is what carried our family through those most difficult times. She could make a meal out of nothing and embedded that ability in all of us.

Around this time, she found and befriended a butcher in Benburb Street who had a contract to supply the army in Collins' Barracks. He always had a surplus of cheap cuts which he sold at knock down prices. Honor would bone these and roll them for a roast or make mince in the trusty Kenwood for a huge range of delicious meals or sometimes not so depending on her cookery experiment of the day. All of her recipes were tried, tested and refined on us before going into print!

The butcher also provided sheeps' heads to feed the dogs and visitors to our house were regularly greeted with the sight of one or two partially dismembered sheeps' heads inside the front door or a head rolling down the stairs being chased by a dog or two.



Somehow or other, Mum managed to scrape up the money to continue to send us all to Wesley, to feed and clothe us and to provide for our general needs.

One of her highly successful tricks was the development of the skill of preparing dishes for photo shoots. She insisted that these should be made in her own kitchen where she had all of her equipment. Mountains of fresh produce was delivered to the house and after a day of photography it was all supposed to be thrown out. Not in our house. We feasted for days on the fruits of her labours.

As a few years passed, we began to wonder would Mum marry again. When Gary Hayes appeared on the scene we were all delighted. He was the PR man for the Canadian side of Northgate Exploration and they met through work. When they could not be together, Honor never looked at another man again.

Temple Villas had been rented for 3 pounds a week and the review date was coming up in 1972. The government came to the rescue by passing an act limiting rent rises to 100 per cent of the existing rent and that tenure should remain the same. The Edgars had this enormous house in Rathmines for the next 21 years for 6 pounds a week. With the help of Richard Keatinge, who was a neighbour, and worked for a bank Mum bought the house for 40,000 pounds on Monday and sold it for 80,000 on Friday. The proceeds fully paid for 2 Effra Road.

Her cookery career continued to flourish but perhaps the highlight was her appearance on the Late Late Show where pitted against such luminaries as Theodora FitzGibbon, Sean Kinsella and Jimmy Flahive, she decided that plain cooking was her forte. Not the extravagant dishes beside her. For years she was greeted in the street as "the lady with the mince".

In 2003, Honor suffered the first of a few strokes. Undeterred she pulled herself back from the brink of a disabled life and even took up driving again. As none of us would get in the car with her for our own safety, that was a short-lived reunion with her car.

She had become more or less housebound. Honor made her last outing the Friday before her death on 29th May. She looked sublime attending the service to say goodbye to our brother Brian before his cremation. That was the final task that she had set herself.

Honor would undoubtedly have had to go into care were it not for Kate. For years Kate had to put up with Mum's idiosyncrasies. More latterly, this became a much more onerous task. Each of us owes Kate immense gratitude, for it was solely through Kate's presence that Honor was able to finish her days in her own home.

Robert Edgar  
May 2013

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It all began in the usual way, more or less, I was born in Milecross Lodge, about a mile from Newtownards, in Northern Ireland. I'm told that my mother's dog, an Airedale, took up residence under my bed and refused to let any visitors in, unless he knew and liked them. At that stage my grandmother ruled the roost and that included my three uncles, James, Wallace and Bertie. Then there were my parents plus a couple of live-in maids to help my mother with the cooking, cleaning, looking after the hens and milking cows, as well as making butter and doing the washing and ironing – the usual chores of a farming family at the time.

My grandmother died when I was about 2 years old and everybody gathered for the funeral. Apparently she was very popular in the district – there are pictures of Sunday School pupils assembling in Newtownards near the railway bridge (which isn't there any more) before walking up to the Milecross fields for their annual outing.

It was, in its own way, an unusual household. When they were married, my father and mother moved into the family home, Milecross, a Georgian house on Bradshaw's Brae, outside Newtownards. Before everybody had left after the funeral, a solicitor arrived and handed a letter to James, the eldest of the sons living in Milecross, notifying him, along with his brothers and sister and her husband (my father), myself and the maids, that they had a month to clear out, as Milecross had been left to Alex Moore and his family who lived in the next house up the road. Presumably he had been looking after Milecross since my grandfather died. I imagine the resulting language was pretty choice. Alex Moore's wife lost no time in evicting all her relations, something that started a family row that lasted for years.

I do know that my Aunt Meta didn't speak to her sister-in-law, Aunt Betsy, from that day on except for one memorable occasion. Apparently, shortly after the ultimatum, they met face to face, one going up and the oth-



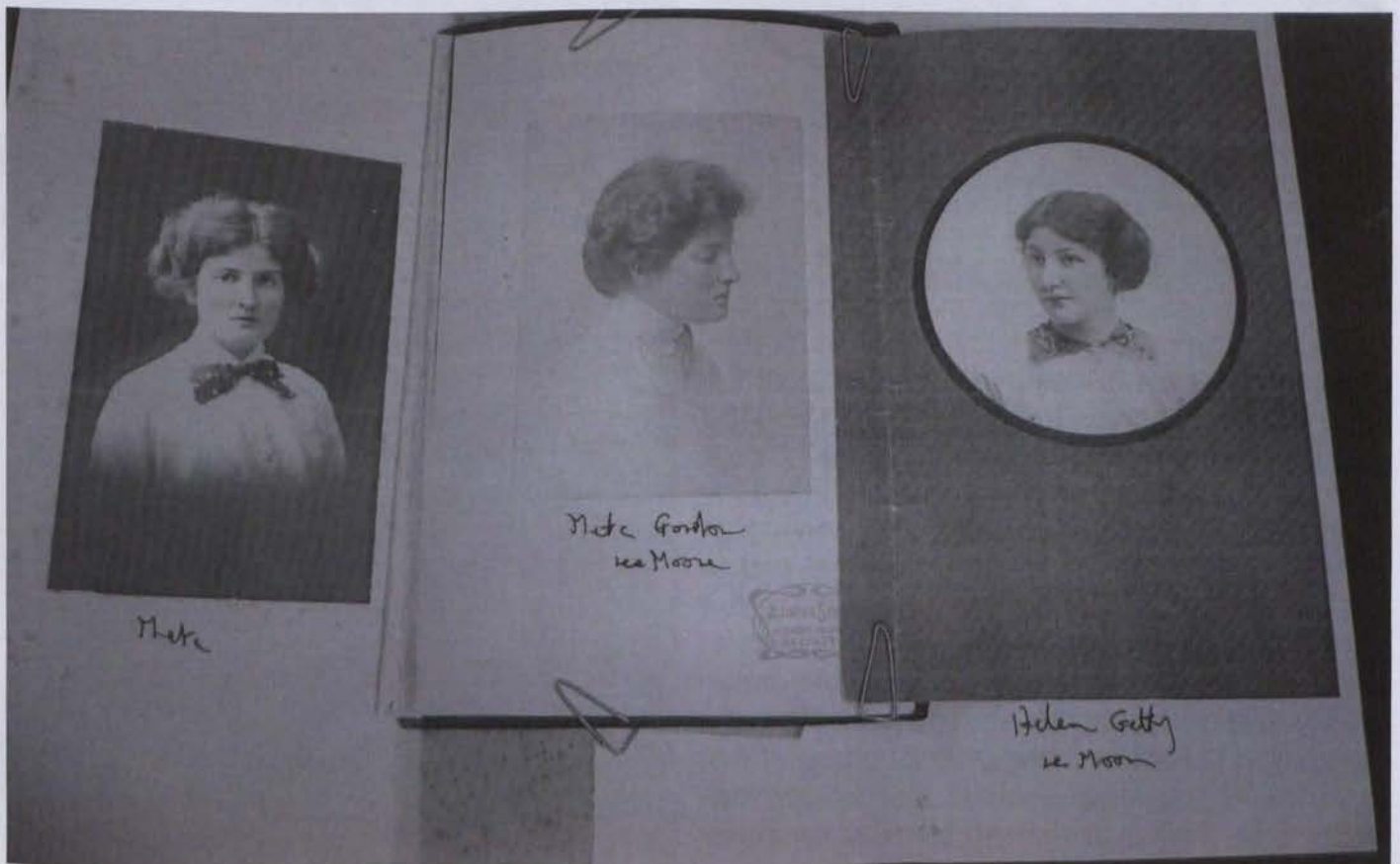
er going down a road nearby in their pony-traps, and after a few sharp words the whips were raised and they set about each other vigorously. Fortunately their aim was not as it could have been and the frightened ponies got a belt each and took off in opposite directions. I remember one occasion after my mother died when Aunt Meta was in our house and was about to go home. As I opened the side door to let her out, a car swept round to the front door which only strangers ever used. Aunt Meta let out a furious roar that stuck in my memory all my life. "What is that bloody woman doing here? Betsy's got some neck. Let me out quick or I'll tell her what I think of her!" The funny thing was that Aunt Meta entertained Aunt Betsy's daughter Molly to afternoon tea when they were both living in Strabane and if I was staying there, I was always sent out on the morning of Molly's visit to pick quantities of strawberries in the walled garden so that she could make jam. She probably got a share of the windfall apples later in the season to make apple or blackberry jelly, but by that time of the year, I had gone back to school and somebody else had to collect up the apples and pick some blackberries.

My father was left with the job of providing a home for himself, my mother and me, then a small baby, plus three of his brothers-in-law, and one live-in maid. With a household of that size, it was fortunate that my mother was a capable cook and organiser, though one my aunts did suggest that she was more interested in hens and sheep than in housework and entertaining. Helen was the youngest of the Moore family and had followed her sister Meta to the Munster Institute in Cork, an agricultural college for the daughters of the farmers of Ireland. There they learned milking, butter and cheese making, poultry keeping, and housekeeping including home laundry, simple sewing and practical cooking. The kitchen was ruled over by a very idiosyncratic lady who refused to use anyone's given name, but tagged nicknames on to the current intake every term. The cry would go up "Small, dark Protestant one, come here and make bread." And my mother would cheerfully set to and make soda bread. Remonstrated with by Matron one day, Cook simply replied "She's small, she's dark, she's the only Protestant body in the school, she doesn't mind, and she

makes the best bread, so what's wrong with that. It's the truth." Cook's recipe for griddle bread was unique. "You take two plates of flour, a teaspoon of salt and a half spoon of soda, then mix it with the fill of the wee blue jug of buttermilk." Which must have been really helpful for the students when they went home to the family kitchen.

As the house that we moved to after Milecross was a good mile from the school, I had a governess for a year or two, presumably to save somebody having to take me there and back twice a day. I never remember walking it but I do remember getting there on a bicycle bought by my Uncle James.

Growing up, I can never remember seeing vegetables being bought, although we must have done so with carrots as we couldn't grow them in the garden. When we ran out of potatoes, Uncle John would provide a bag of Queens from his farm up at the top of Bradshaw's Brae. I think there was some sort of complicated understanding whereby we looked after and hand-fed the motherless lambs and returned them when they were



old enough to fend for themselves. Aunt Kitty (my Uncle John's wife) was less than enthusiastic about baby lambs running round the kitchen floor. She had to put up with a sheepdog or two lying in the living room at Uncle John's feet but they were well trained and didn't talk to anyone except Uncle John! We were forbidden to touch them because they were working dogs, not pets.

John and Kitty had built their own house up the Belfast Road, in front of the original family farm house which had fallen into decay over the years. The family had decamped to Milecross en masse – my grand-

his name inscribed clearly on his carriage and was summonsed to appear in court in Dublin. He set off in the carriage – presumably having arranged changes of horses in advance. When he duly presented himself in front of the judge, his plea was that he hadn't committed any offence as his name and address were clearly written on the carriage and he invited the judge to see it for himself. The judge looked all round the carriage but couldn't see anything, until Bradshaw invited him to bend his neck and look underneath it. History doesn't record the judge's reply, but probably, to misquote Queen Victoria, "We were not amused!"

The Bradshaw boys were reputedly involved in smuggling and had the pleasant habit of noting when there was a burial in the Catholic graveyard half way down the Milecross avenue, digging up the coffin again and hauling it to and fro across the road to frighten off curious visitors. I don't think they were actually grave robbers, more coffin borrowers. One who apparently was wise to their tricks, the shepherd who lived in the hills above the farm, insisted on taking a short cut up the Milecross Avenue. To deter him, the Bradshaw brothers tied a torch to the horns of the farm billy goat, and lit it as the shepherd passed the graveyard, rattling a coffin and screaming like banshees. The shepherd took to his heels pursued by the goat, thinking that it was the devil himself that was following him. He did not reach his house, but was found dead next day in a field, with a terrified expression on his face. We probably would have never have heard about this tale, true or not, had it not been for Uncle Bertie's experience. He had been out late at a dance, and was driving the pony and trap home in the usual way, relying on the pony to know its way straight home. It got him safely half way up the avenue when something frightened it, the beast took off for its stable, tipping Bertie out on the avenue. When he looked up there was a huge figure staring at him and making the most horrendous noise. He took to his heels and didn't stop until he was in his bed. In the morning, at breakfast,



father and grandmother with the boys, Alex, John, Willie, James, Wallace and Bertie and the girls, Anna, Bessie, Meta and Helen – or as many of them who weren't married by that time. Nobody knows how Grandfather Moore raised the money to buy the place but there was a story that he had won it playing cards. The Bradshaws who built it, and for whom that bit of the then main Belfast / Newtownards Road was named – Bradshaw's Brae – were distinctly odd if not downright peculiar. Father Bradshaw objected to being told that he had to have

he was telling the tale of the apparition that came out of the graveyard. When he described the black furry demon that roared at him, the brothers laughed and told him that he had tripped over the stray donkey that had been grazing the long grass.

On the other side of the road there was a Quaker meeting house, but apparently they weren't disturbed by the Bradshaw boys' tricks. My grandfather was credited with having donated the land to build the Quaker meeting house across the road from the Milecross avenue.

At the time I was talking about, there wasn't much emphasis on eating vegetables as an essential part of a healthy diet although the Vegetarian Society had been established



in England in 1847. It was slow in catching on in Ireland! Our most famous vegetarian was George Bernard Shaw. Admittedly he turned to vegetarianism because he discovered it was the cheapest way to eat when he moved from Dublin to London to live with his mother who couldn't afford to employ a cook. As was the custom then, she thought cooking was beneath her dignity! Judging by the plainness of the dishes in the cook-book that bears his name, GBS thought that eating was a waste of time!

Potatoes, of course, were an essential part of the Irish diet, North and South, and were cooked with considerable care. The same could not be said of other vegetables which were mostly boiled to ribbons. A bit of butter, a dollop of parsley sauce or some cheese sauce to tart up cauliflower were occasional embellishments as I was growing up, but at least most of the vegetables we ate couldn't have been fresher. We learned the gentle art of making vegetables a pleasure to eat much later, just as we found out that there were other vegetables than those that grew in our gardens and greenhouses.

My uncle, John Moore, decided that there was no way he would have a garden in front of his new house to waste a man's time growing flowers, or vegetables that could be bought cheaper in the shops. He built a raised and tarmacadamed area right around the front of the house and fenced

off a part of one of the fields behind the house for a few useful hens, and later some "dual purpose" vegetables like cabbage and turnips that could be fed to the sheep, but again no flowers!

Aunt Kitty welcomed the opportunity of the parking space, throwing open the house and inviting friends and relations to come and view the TT races - a road race that went through Newtownards, Comber and Dundonald - in comfort, across the front field, with tea and sandwiches on tap all day.

If you get the impression that John didn't hold much truck with vegetables you would probably be right, although I did see him tucking into salads for supper in summer. His brother James, who lived with us, organised the garden at Hillcrest, putting in seed potatoes on St. Patrick's Day and harvesting the first earlies on July the Twelfth as a celebration - or something? However the potatoes stayed in the ground for at least another fortnight, to enable them to grow to a respectable size. All the vegetables were har-



vested only when they were fully grown and ripe: the only thing that defeated him was a late pear tree of an old variety that apparently didn't ripen at all. Needless to say, all the vegetables were boiled or occasionally steamed until they were completely tender, then served plain. He went off to Champneys health spa every year on holiday and came back boasting about the food there.

The first 24 hours you could drink water, the next 24 hours you added orange juice and then on the third day you were allowed to add a whole orange. It was supposed to give you a complete cleansing of all the impurities that your body had accumulated during the previous year. It didn't purge him of his choice language.

One of the things that has changed most over the years since I started writing about food is the availability and variety of vegetables - allied sometimes to the dislike of eating them - which seems to run throughout almost the whole population. We tend to be offered a better selection in restaurants, and often they are better cooked than in the home - which is the opposite to the custom in Mediterranean countries where the average restaurant may not even offer a salad, instead concentrating on the more expensive meat and fish dishes. Contrasting, until recently, with the housewife who would get her fresh vegetables from the local market and dish them up with pride. For these more northerly islands, most of the various new diets have brought an increased interest in encouraging people, children in particular, to eat fresh fruits, vegetables and beans instead of chips, sweets and bars.

When I was growing up, we had a large garden with an East-facing greenhouse containing a grapevine which had probably been installed when the lean-to house was being built - before our time there! My father was particularly proud of his tomatoes which he grew in well-washed gellignite boxes from the quarry. Two of the three uncles who moved in with my father and mother ran the quarry. They came home for lunch every day and as their car turned the corner on the hill leading up to Hillcrest, every hen in the place headed out to the nearest gate to wait for Uncle James to feed them - before he had his own dinner, of course. In addition to feeding the hens, James also constructed a large shed, which was supposed to house the last of my ponies, but instead provided shelter for one or more Jersey calves during particularly cold winters.





Every Sunday Uncle Bertie took my brother John and me up to the quarry to check that the gelignite store was securely locked and the blacksmith's shed secured, after which we would go to fish for sticklebacks from the pond supplying water for the forge. Later we both learned to steer in one of the cars Uncle Bertie drove in various states of repair. There was a powerful Alvis with one front seat and several blanketed gelignite boxes (empty!) for the small passengers. One of the boxes caused much amusement when I brought it in to the Home Economics sewing class in the Tec to be padded and covered to hold knitting wool. Fortunately we never seemed to encounter a policeman on these outings.

There was plenty of fruit in the garden, too: apples and pears, with one plum tree that was loaded down with a crop - once - when we had a particularly hot summer. Also, raspberries and loganberries, blackcurrants, rhubarb, strawberries and gooseberries grew, with blackberries round the hedges. One of the less enjoyable of our chores was picking gooseberries for bottling, jam making, or for sale. To earn some pocket money, I also used to pluck, clean out and truss chickens for sale at 6 pence (4 cent) a bird, but then you could buy a bar of chocolate for 2 pence. To be fair, it made a change from cleaning and scrubbing out hen-houses and painting or creosoting them.



for testing



## CHAPTER 1

# Vegetables for testing

## Chapter 1: Vegetables for testing

It must have been sometime in 1940 that my father came home with a pack of vegetable seeds, a gift to the Department of Agriculture from their counterparts in the USA. At the time everyone was being urged to "Dig for Victory" and we had been co-opted into helping to fence off part of the Back Field, skim off the grass and dig it up ready for vegetable growing. The packets of carrot seed were greeted with scorn by Uncle James, on the grounds that they were fancy and he'd never been able to grow carrots in the garden. However, father insisted that all the seeds had to be tested in Irish conditions. As a compromise, he sowed all the American seeds himself, not in the garden but in a newly ploughed field which was part of his personal support for the "Dig for Victory" Campaign. He must have felt quiet satisfaction when everything came up, including the carrots, - plump, straight and juicy. Uncle James took charge of the vegetables in the garden, - potatoes, onions, cabbage, leeks, lettuce, cauliflower, peas and broad beans. They were not harvested until they had grown to a decent size, and then, of course, they were well boiled!

James used to drink the cabbage water, declaring, - probably rightly - that there was more nourishment in the water than there was in the overboiled mushy cabbage. He wasn't alone in his preference for crisp cabbage. A Mr John S. Reynolds from London complained bitterly that it came to table looking like soggy green blotting paper and tasting of nothing very much. He professed what he described as a Slav recipe for tasty cabbage called "Bigosz". Mr Reynolds suggests slicing a large Savoy cabbage, a cooking apple, a medium-sized onion, 2 or 3 skinned tomatoes and 2 or 3 carrots, and putting them in a heavy saucepan with 2 bay leaves, a dash of paprika, salt to taste and the absolute minimum of water. Then you cover the pan and simmer it until the cabbage is just tender and drain it well - being careful to avoid letting it boil dry. He

mentioned a suggestion that some people advocate the inclusion of a meaty bone when cooking his Bigosz. That is the clue to the origin of this recipe. "Bigos" is a very substantial hunter's stew from Poland combining sauerkraut, onions and apples with a variety of meats - pork, beef, veal, fat bacon, sausages, frankfurters or kielbasa, ham, tongue, poultry and game, and probably a legacy from the many Polish nationals who came to England to fight against Hitler. In 1952 you probably couldn't even get the sauerkraut unless you made it yourself, much less all the meats, so it's not surprising that it ended up as a vegetarian dish.

Tomatoes grew successfully in an east-facing, unheated greenhouse that also housed a grapevine, both under father's careful supervision: Uncle James never entered the greenhouse! At the end of the season the green tomatoes and windfall apples were turned into chutneys and the surplus red tomatoes bottled, while soft fruits were turned into jams and preserves. Toadstools grew in the fields but mushrooms were a rarity: I only remember one year when they appeared in plenty, and were greeted with considerable suspicion, but by this time I had come across mushrooms in Domestic Economy classes in school and they weren't wasted. Main-crop potatoes, swedes, turnips, kale and savoy cabbage came from Uncle John's farm, some three or four miles away, probably on some sort of barter exchange.

### Roast Vegetables

*1 aubergine, halved lengthways  
3 courgettes,  
1 large onion, halved and sliced  
3 cloves of garlic, sliced  
2 green peppers, halved, de-seeded and cut in chunks  
3 tbsp olive oil  
1 tsp Herbes de Provence  
Salt and pepper.*

*Heat half the oil in a pan and stir-fry the onion until almost tender. Add the garlic and cook for 1 minute more. Take the pan off the heat and stir in the courgettes and peppers. Brush the*

aubergine slices with oil and toast under the grill until beginning to brown at the edges, add to the other vegetables and stir in with any remaining oil. Season and sprinkle with herbs. Roast at 180° C, 350° F, gas mark 4, for about an hour, stirring several times until the vegetables are tender. Serve hot or cold.

A can of chopped tomatoes can be added about half way through the cooking time. In winter, a mixture of carrots, parsnips, turnips, potatoes and sweet potatoes or butternut squash as available, can be combined with onions, garlic, olive oil and seasonings in an oiled roasting tin and roasted, covered with foil for about 1 ½ hours until fairly tender, then uncovered, stirred and cooked until the edges of the vegetables have begun to brown.

An alternative method of preparing the vegetables uses less oil: Put 3 or 4 tablespoonfuls of olive oil into a plastic bag, add sea salt and freshly milled black pepper plus a generous quantity of a dried herb mix and crushed garlic. Add the prepared vegetables and shake until evenly coated. Transfer to one or more roasting tins and cook as above, stirring the vegetables several times as they colour, and changing the position of the trays.

Another simple combination, thinly sliced potatoes and onions, responds to the same treatment. Choose a soapy variety of potato such as Cara, King Edward or Pentland Dell. Oil or butter a shallow casserole or roasting tin and scatter in half a large sliced onion. Sprinkle with 2 tsp chopped fresh rosemary and arrange 675g peeled and thinly sliced potatoes on top. Add the other half of the onion slices to 25g melted butter or 2 tbsp olive oil, stirring until they are well coated. Scatter over the potatoes and bake in a pre-heated oven at 400°F, 200°C, gas mark 6 for about 1 ½ hours, covering as soon as they begin to colour.

#### **Patsy's Gratin of Cauliflower (6 to 8 servings)**

Cauliflower with a cheese sauce is a firm favourite – so long as the cauliflower is not overcooked, but it can be even better done German style with extra flavourings in a recipe Patsy picked up in Cologne.

*Florets from 1 large cauliflower  
4 streaky rashers, chopped  
4 spring onions, trimmed and chopped  
1 small red pepper, seeded and diced  
2 large tomatoes, seeded and diced.*

#### ***Cheese Sauce:***

*600ml milk  
50g unsalted butter  
50g plain flour  
100g grated mature cheese  
1 tsp wholegrain mustard  
Salt and pepper to taste.*

Boil or steam the cauliflower until just tender, drain and set aside. Meanwhile fry the bacon until crisp. Drain and set aside. Add the spring onions and red pepper to the pan and stir for 2 minutes, add the tomatoes and cook 2 minutes more. Stir in the cauliflower florets and turn into a buttered casserole. Sprinkle with the bacon.

Make up the cheese sauce using half the grated cheese and pour over the cauliflower, sprinkle with the remaining grated cheese and bake for 15 minutes at 400°F, 200°C, gas mark 6 until the cheese on top has melted and begun to colour. Note: The bacon can be omitted for a vegetarian main dish, to be served with rice.

#### **Kate's Spicy Aubergines**

Take 1 teaspoon each of whole cumin and allspice and dry-fry to bring out the flavour. Grind with a pestle and mortar. Set aside.

Fry chopped red onion in olive or vegetable oil until soft, stirring frequently in a frying pan. Do not allow to colour.

Take roughly equal amounts of diced aubergine and diced tomato (preferably de-seeded and even peeled), toss with a little more oil, dust with salt and pepper and roast at 400°F, 200°C, gas mark 6, in a single layer for about 30 min., shaking the pan once or twice to brown the vegetables evenly. Combine with the onions and serve warm with dressing that combines chopped fresh coriander and mint leaves with thick Greek yoghurt and a light seasoning of salt and pepper.

Salads consisted of lettuce leaves topped with quartered tomatoes, sliced hard-boiled eggs, with a few radishes, and spring onions, dressed with bought "salad cream" and sometimes with pickled beetroot on the side. It was probably due to wartime shortages of fuel and the efforts of the Ministry of Food, that Marguerite Patten was one of a team of people who showed that it was possible to produce edible meals from the meagre rations of meat, butter, tea, sugar,

eggs, milk, jam, margarine and cooking fats. Surprisingly poultry and sausages weren't rationed but they were often kept "under the counter" and nobody dared ask about the meat content of the sausages! We were lucky in that we had both cracked and recycled eggs,\* our own milk, plus the occasional boiling fowl. For most people in Belfast, the shortage of tea, sugar and jam were perhaps the most difficult to cope with, and the coarse wartime bread, wasn't, to put it mildly, to everyone's taste, but there was a fair amount of barter so that if there was a wedding or a celebration, something always "turned up".

\* "Re-cycled eggs" were those that proved to be infertile after they'd spent 14 days in the incubator: they were carefully cracked individually into a saucer before being inspected and used in baking.

I was training as a Home Economics teacher at this time, and we had a limited supply of raw ingredients to work with; eggs were fresh if we brought them from home for our Christmas cakes or meringues. Those supplied in the school kitchens were "ok to use" so long as they didn't smell too bad, but they were "unusable" if they exploded as you cracked them! Mrs Beeton's directive of "Take 12 eggs" didn't come into our reckoning except as a joke.

The most used American gadget that Aunt Bessie sent one Christmas was a potato ricer, to make super-smooth creamed potatoes, and a quick topping for fish pies and Shepherd's Pie that appeared regularly for dinner. This next version of creamed potatoes would have been too posh for regular use!

#### **Potato Puff (4 servings)**

*2 cups mashed potato*

*25g butter*

*175 ml / ¾ cup milk or cream*

*2 eggs, separated*

*Salt and pepper to taste.*

*Optional: grated cheese.*

*Stir the butter into the hot potato and beat to a cream. Add ½ cupful of milk and then beat*

*in the egg yolks, and the rest of the milk. Whisk the egg whites until stiff, season with salt and pepper, and fold into the potato mixture. Turn into a buttered dish or casserole. Sprinkle with some grated cheese, if desired. Bake at 400°F, 200°C, gas mark 6, for about 20 minutes until well browned and cooked through.*

As Hillcrest's kitchen didn't boast of a deep fat fryer, we didn't encounter chips until much later in life, but sautéed potatoes, shallow fried in dripping, were equally popular. Now they have been replaced by potato wedges roasted with olive oil, garlic and herbs. The peeled potatoes are cut in sixths or eighths, brought to boiling point covered with water, drained well and tossed in olive oil in a roasting tin, then sprinkled with whole or crushed garlic, pepper and mixed dried herbs and roasted at 425°F, 220°C, gas mark 7 for about 30 minutes, turning several times to brown them evenly.

My mother was not really a patient woman and she had short shrift with unwelcome visitors, human or animal. Outside the kitchen window in late spring there usually were one or two coops in the garden for the broody hens which had "laid out" in one of the hedges where if we didn't find the nest in time, turned up with the remains of a clutch of chickens. These were housed, with a small run for protection, in safety - until a large town cat came up the fields and discovered them. After the third chicken vanished, out came the little .410 shotgun and the cat met a swift end and was immediately buried deep in the manure heap. We knew better than to broadcast its fate. Once, when some of the local young lads cast ambitious looks on the ripe apples in the garden and climbed though the hedge, my mother was looking out through the kitchen window, saw them and carefully lifted down the trusty .410 and shot through the open window over their heads: they fled and never came back. Locally we must have had a curious reputation! Indoors the family preferred mousetraps to cats: indeed Uncle James usually directed a well-aimed kick towards any cat he saw heading for the house: their place was outside, like the dogs.



We used to take care of motherless lambs for Uncle John, bottle feeding them and raising them in the kitchen until they were sturdy enough to face the spring sunshine, later to rejoin the flock. Mother owned a few Border Leicester sheep, including a couple of rams called Rorke's Drift and Spion Kop. Sadly we never asked why you would name two very prolific rams after British battles in the Boer Wars more than thirty years earlier. None of the sheep went to the Balmoral Show although our Jersey bull calves had to be trained to the halter and taught manners in the hope that someone at the Show might take a fancy to them, and take them off our hands — mine in particular — as teaching bull calves to the halter was one of my least enjoyable chores. They tended to be more than a trifle thrawn. Well, when you think that the cows refused to let down their milk unless you could sing "The Hills of Donegal" tunefully! Me, I couldn't sing in tune to save my life, much less to persuade

a cow to behave herself, so whenever Annie went home to Donegal on holiday, milk production dropped noticeably. And the cows were amenable by comparison with the young bulls!

The experts at showing sheep then at Balmoral were rivals, both clergymen of different persuasions. One powdered up the faces of his Border Leicesters, washed their feet and trimmed their fleece into a flat boxy shape very precisely, the other specialised in Black Faces that needed far less dicking up. The competition for Champion ewe, ram or lamb between the two of them was a joy to watch and woe betide the sheep that misbehaved in the ring. Other competitors were ignored, as were onlookers, while the final preparations went on, and we children were discreetly removed from the line of fire as the sheep went back into their pens — with or without their rosettes.

When I was old enough to be a useful pair of hands, the Balmoral Show was spent, for the most part, in the pavilion devoted to the Ministry of Agriculture's Poultry and Dairy Instructresses and their "clients". This was an opportunity for them to repay the hospitality they had received on their visits to the poultry farms in their district. I was roped in — and taken out of school for the last week in May — to wash dishes, make tea and sandwiches, run errands and generally make myself useful. Whenever there was a lull in "customers", I would slip out to watch the judging, the show jumping, or on occasion, go to find out how "Mrs Abernethy" had fared in her classes. Of all the hundreds of hens we had, in the fields around the house, Mrs Abernethy was the only one that had a name. She was a perfectly ordinary looking Rhode Island Red even after she had been bathed, had her nails polished and dried herself on a chair in front of the kitchen fire. But she was one of a group of hens that had been the first to lay 200 eggs in one season, as certified at the Testing Centre in Knock, on the outskirts of Belfast. So, when she arrived at Hillcrest, she was treated like royalty — actually probably

rather better than royalty would have been treated by my mother – given a numbered ring, a separate pen with chosen companions, plus a handsome cockerel to keep her happy. In due course, the eggs she laid were carefully numbered and put into muslin sacks before going in to the incubator. As the chicks hatched out, they too were marked and ringed. Later the pullets would be sent off for a year, to the Egg Laying Trials to see if they had inherited their mother's egg laying abilities. This "selective breeding" may have been a slow way of improving the laying abilities of hens, but they survived the "Trials" happily, coming back full of bounce to enjoy their freedom for several years more instead of being worn out and not even fit for the pot by the time they were little over 18 months old like today's battery hens.

As the hens laid early in the morning, in separate nests, closing the trap door after themselves, the eggs were usually quite clean, needing only a quick wipe with a damp cloth; or at most a rub with Monkey Brand Soap if they "laid out", something that would undoubtedly be frowned on by today's Health and Safety inspectors. Then there was the occasional lady who turned up proudly followed by half a dozen or more baby chickens, having escaped the deprivations of the local fox.

Needless to say, it wasn't only female chicks that hatched out: at least half would turn out to be male, ready to be separated out as soon as their distinguishing characteristics appeared. At the time, Mr Watanabe from Japan was working in the North of Ireland and it was said that he could sex day-old chickens as fast as he could pick them up, but we had to wait until they were at least a few weeks old before we could separate them out and give them different rations, fattening up most of the roosters for dinner. Plucking and dressing them for family meals soon became a source of pocket money for me, but a lady past laying more often came our way. It was fascinating to watch Mother on the prowl: she'd gently amble through

the hens in the field, probably on a Thursday, looking at this one or that, and suddenly swoop, pick one up and run a hand under her breastbone and tail quite gently. Then if she announced "This lady hasn't laid for a week or two" she'd be for the chop. The hen was plucked and hung up in the pantry for a day or two before being dressed, trussed and usually stuffed. It would be simmered gently at the back of the range in a big pot with onions, celery, carrots and barley until it was almost tender: the hen would then be lifted out and the contents of the pot seasoned up to make a tasty soup. A well-seasoned fowl would be draped with streaky rashers and go on to a roasting tin and into the oven, along with par-boiled potatoes, to be roasted in dripping. In those pre-cholesterol days, a jar of lard or beef dripping was essential in winter for fried bread and roast potatoes, so every scrap was saved. On one occasion there was even enough to allow me to make soap with it, when, during the war, there was a shortage. Undoubtedly it wasn't the mildest of soaps, but it was better than nothing for scrubbing down tables and floors before the days of nicely scented detergents. We used soft black soap for hair-washing with warmed rainwater plus a spoonful of vinegar for the final rinse, to make sure it was squeaky clean.

I don't remember much about the first Easter Monday dinner I cooked but it was probably roast free-range "chicken" with a simple stuffing, roast potatoes, over-cooked cabbage and Bisto gravy, followed by an apple tart. The family, Uncle Bertie and my brothers John and Roger, were watching my father starting to carve the chicken when we realised that there was no sign of Uncle James. Six year old Roger went off to look for him and came back looking very shocked and announced that Uncle James' feet were sticking up in the cow's barrel at the gate, (it was 5 foot deep) and he was stuck. Apparently James had been taking advantage of the Easter holiday by cutting pea stakes up a tree, and had fallen, head first, into the barrel and drowned in about 3 inches of water.

There was panic and mass exodus from the dinner table. It seems that James had taken a step-ladder out to cut branches to use as pea-stakes later in the season – at least that was what we were told. Two or three days later we were told that he had changed his will and that his share of the quarry and money was not going to be our inheritance. Nobody had dared to ask him about it. A few nights earlier the dogs had started barking furiously and when we went out to investigate, we found James lying in the little garden at the side door unconscious. The doctor was sent for and he gave his considered and rather irate opinion that James was completely drunk out of his mind and that all we could do was to get him to bed and let him sleep it off. On the following day

a bottle of whiskey in the cupboard to be served with hot water and lemon juice as a cold cure and as a libation for the Christmas cake, mince pies and Christmas pudding. These had to be made on Annie's afternoon off as she was bitterly opposed to the consumption of drink. Indeed, when she travelled to Dublin on the occasion of the first papal visit there, her only comment on it was a diatribe on the number of drunken men she had seen in the Phoenix Park and on the streets of Dublin and she vowed never to go there again!

The following Easter Monday, Ellen, who came up daily to do the washing and ironing, milk the cows and make butter, dropped dead in the wash-house.



James couldn't remember anything about the previous evening's escapade – we had never known him to take a drink – Hillcrest was an abstemious house: there was always

When our Aunt Bessie who came to stay when my mother became ill, discovered that we were heathen, she insisted that we went to Sunday School, so we used to go



up to Ellen's house for milk and biscuits before Uncle Bertie picked us up to take us up to the quarry. When the next Easter approached, as you can imagine, there was a certain amount of panic in the household, but it passed without any further disasters.

There had been quite a row when Aunt Bessie came to visit from America and discovered that we didn't go to Church or Sunday School. She even persuaded my mother to take us to church one Sunday but she didn't appreciate my mother's whispered comment about our grocer. "Look at him carefully calculating how much extra he can charge us all for our groceries". It was not long afterwards that she changed grocers but that caused even more comment as he didn't go to the same church!

The cattle and sheep were out in the fields every day, pig sties were mostly open to the air and the poultry were out from dawn till dusk. Fruit and vegetables were grown with manure and a minimum of artificial fertilizers. Growing up on a small farm with three or four fields there was enough room for a couple of Jersey cows and three or four bullocks, one Muscovy duck and an increasing number of chickens and hens, plus, from time to time, a pony. This meant, in the later days of rationing, there was plenty of milk and butter, eggs and an occasional boiling fowl.

When I look back at the food we ate when I was growing up on a small farm in Northern Ireland in the late twenties and thirties, it was completely different, for the most part, from what we eat today. Porridge and a cooked breakfast for the men – the traditional "Ulster Fry" before they went off to work – two of my uncles to the Moore family quarry and my father to the Department of Agriculture in Belfast – he and my uncle, Dr. Gordon, had transferred back to the North after 1922. The other uncle, Wallace Moore, worked in the linen industry in Belfast until it collapsed.

Dinner was a predictable affair – roast beef or mutton on Sunday; cold meat on Monday (washing day!), heated up in gravy on Tuesday or turned into the traditional Shepherd's Pie with its topping of mashed potatoes, Cottage Pie or Fish Pie on Wednesday, Chops on Thursday, Fish on Friday and a Stew on Saturday, with potatoes and vegetables from the garden and a milk pudding or fresh fruit and custard. Curiously, I never remember eating pork then – bacon, sausages and Christmas ham, but no fresh pork.

### **Shepherds' Pie (4 Servings)**

450g minced lean lamb  
1 onion, chopped  
25g unsalted butter, or sunflower oil  
25g plain flour  
300ml lamb or chicken stock  
700g peeled potatoes  
Salt and pepper  
Optional:  
About 150ml milk, heated,  
A knob of butter

Steam or boil the potatoes, drain if necessary, and set aside. Meanwhile melt the butter or heat the oil in a frying pan. Add the minced lamb and stir over a moderate heat until browned. Add the onion and continue cooking until the onion softens. Sift in the flour and stir until well blended, then add the stock, or water plus a stock cube. Bring to boiling point, stirring. Check the seasoning and add a few drops of gravy browning, if available. Turn into a pie dish or casserole and rice the cooked potatoes on top. Alternatively, mash the potatoes with the hot milk and a knob of butter and pile on top of the lamb. Bake at 350°F, 180°C, gas mark 4, for about 30 minutes, until browned and crisp on top.

### **Ringing the Changes**

Add 2 medium sliced par-boiled carrots and/or a sliced courgette to the meat mixture as it goes into the pie dish.

For a "Greek Shepherds' Pie" fry the lamb, onion and 1 or 2 crushed cloves of garlic in olive oil. Omit the stock and add a medium can of chopped tomatoes instead. Decorate the mashed potato with a few chopped olives. For the Cottage Pie, use minced lean beef instead of the lamb, and beef stock. Top with sliced cooked potatoes arranged in a lattice

pattern and bake until the potatoes are crisp and browned. These pies can be put up in single or two-serving portions to be cooked, cooled, wrapped and frozen. (Short storage – 4 to 6 weeks). At one stage I was cooking up batches of ready-to-thaw-and-heat-up dinners for an old friend who lived on her own and preferred science fiction to cookery books. It wasn't until a generation later that a vegetarian version of Shepherds' Pie came into our repertoire, by which time Mrs B. no longer needed food parcels.

### **Vegetarian Shepherds' Pie (4 servings)**

225g red lentils or Puy lentils  
 1 large onion, peeled and chopped  
 1 stick of celery, sliced  
 1 clove of garlic, crushed  
 2 medium carrots, pared and diced  
 125g mushrooms, wiped and sliced  
 25g butter  
 2 tbs olive oil  
 2 tbs tomato puree  
 1 tsp mixed herbs  
 Salt and pepper to taste  
 675g peeled, cooked and mashed potato  
 Optional:  
 50g grated cheese.

Rinse the lentils well, cover with cold water in a saucepan, simmer until tender. (This depends on the age of the lentils.) Drain well. Meanwhile soften the onion and celery in the oil and butter. Add the garlic and mushrooms, cook for 2 minutes, then stir in the lentils, tomato puree, herbs and seasoning. Turn into a greased pie dish or casserole and top with mashed potato. Sprinkle the potato with grated cheese if desired. Bake at 400°F, 200°C, gas mark 6, for 30 to 35 minutes. Serve with a salsa or a salad.

Note: If re-heating from frozen in a microwave, turn the pies carefully out of the foil containers on to a Pyrex plate, then turn over to place the potato topping uppermost. Heat on full power for about 3 minutes, stand for 1 minute and check that the pie is hot in the centre before serving.

We were brought up with Fish on Friday – and often on Wednesday too. Fish Pie topped with riced potatoes, was a favourite or for a change, there would be Steamed Cod in Parsley Sauce with creamed potato and cabbage or carrots,

while Potted Herrings appeared quite often in summer. I do have a vague recollection of making Fish Cakes with tinned pink salmon in Domestic Science class in school, but that would have been a trifle complicated to prepare for the two sittings at lunchtime. The uncles came from the quarry at 12.30 on the dot, James having fed the hens before they sat down at 12.45, whereas my brother and I landed in breathless at 1.15pm, having cycled uphill all the way home from school. We had a whole half hour to eat and digest lunch if we were to get back in time for afternoon school at 2pm. It didn't help when I was stopped by the local policeman for breaking the law: I was giving "a carry" to a classmate who was running along the street to beat the bell. After the long ticking off we both got, inevitably, we were late, which was bad enough, but half way through the next class the Headmaster burst into the room and marched up to me, demanding what on earth I had been doing to get myself, and the school, into trouble with the law. The next time I encountered the same policeman, years later, he informed me that he had been asked to give me a character reference as I was being investigated by Authority on account of a letter I had written, which was to the offices of the local Communist party asking about "funny incidents" they had encountered when canvassing for the local election. I had been asked to write the "Irish Letter from Home" in an Air Force Newsletter being published in New Delhi. To their eternal credit – and probably their sense of humour – they replied with a couple of printable incidents which were duly published.

### **Fish Pie (4 servings)**

500g cod or firm white fish fillets  
 2 eggs, hard-boiled  
 45g butter  
 45g plain flour  
 600 ml milk  
 Salt and pepper to taste  
 2 tbs chopped parsley  
 Crumble Topping  
 25g flakemeal

25g flour  
25g grated cheese  
25g chopped walnuts  
1 tbsp chopped fresh herbs

*Cook the fish in lightly seasoned milk, using a saucepan or microwave, until just tender – about 5 minutes. Drain and reserve the milk, set the fish to cool slightly. Melt the butter in a small saucepan, stir in the sieved flour, continue stirring for one minute, then whisk in the warm milk. Cook until the mixture thickens, then season lightly. Flake the fish, discarding any skin and bones and stir into the sauce with the chopped hard boiled eggs. Pour into a greased pie dish or casserole. Make a crumble topping by rubbing the butter into the flour and flakemeal. Mix with the cheese and sprinkle on top of the fish. Bake at 375°F, 190°C, gas mark 5, for about 30 minutes. Decorate with walnuts and herbs.*

As I was too young to start the Domestic Science teacher training course at 17, I was sent away to put in a year at the agricultural college in Cookstown. It was designed to teach poultry keeping and dairying as well as basic cookery and home-making to farmers' daughters, enabling them to have a bit of financial independence. The money from the butter and eggs was, by tradition, the women's perquisite, the last remnant of the Brehon laws perhaps? The course cost 4 guineas a term all found and we had to provide 2 print dresses, 3 white aprons, 1 tough cotton coat to wear when cleaning out poultry houses and the like, and most important, ankle-length leather boots and Wellingtons – plus warm underwear. As we had to be out in the byre, awake, at 6.20 am, one young lady slept in her bra and corset, stout black stockings, knickers and woolly vest, so she just had to pull on her boots and button her dress and she was ready to tackle her cows. We learned to milk cows by hand as well as by machine, make butter and cheese, feed and look after poultry, despatch them in due course and dress them for the table. For some unknown reason, I arrived a day late and was taken by Matron up to a dormitory, shown my bed and locker, and introduced to the girls on either side of my bed. One

third of the girls doing the ordinary 8 month course left every term and new girls were slotted in to the empty beds, where we were alternated according to religion. For most of us, it was our first time away from home and probably the first time we had intimate contact with anyone of a different religion, but by the time the first pangs of homesickness wore off, we were all too busy and often too tired to worry about "what foot anyone dug with". In fact, it was another 4 years before I heard that particular expression – and then I took it literally and answered "Either."

We walked three miles to church every Sunday, those of us who were Protestant, envying the Catholic girls whose church was on the outskirts of Cookstown. The Church of Ireland was in the centre of the town, half a mile further on, and the Presbyterian one another ½ mile beyond that. There was a further complication – the Catholic service started half an hour earlier than the others, and the Presbyterian minister could be relied on to preach for a good half hour longer than the Anglican rector. In addition, Sunday dinner at 1pm was special, and distributed on a first-come-first-served basis. My new-found friend, Mary Anderson, and I debated whether we could slip into the back of the Catholic church unnoticed, but we reckoned that Miss Doran, the cookery instructor, had eyes in the back of her head and would have reported us. After dutifully sampling the Presbyterian sermon, I defected to the Church of Ireland and a leisurely walk back to dinner.

The Dairy School at Cookstown was near the river Bann. The building itself was on a hill beside it, and separated by a walkway backed by a 12 foot wall in which there was a shelter in case it rained. It was rounded in all directions and I seem to remember a seat at the back where you could sit and admire the river. We were assured that it was a favourite place for Dean Swift to sit when he was visiting the area – he was the preacher for a short time in a nearby parish. How the mighty have fallen! In our day it was the duck house and we had to go out and shut them in to keep the foxes from killing them – that was quite a pleasant chore unless it was raining. However we also had to clean it out periodically and that was a stink-

ing task, as it was thick with trampled mud and duck dirt. It was no wonder that I was not very pleased when I found a duck egg in my eggcup for breakfast on the first of April – considerably less so, when I cracked it and found, instead of being boiled, it had been incubated for over two weeks and there was a stinking half-formed duck inside! I haven't eaten a duck egg since then and tackle boiled eggs with suspicion.

Meat loaves came into Mary Anderson's life when she joined her Canadian Air Force husband Andy, as a post-war emigrant to British

225ml milk  
75g flakemeal  
Salt and pepper to taste

Line a lightly greased 900ml/ 2 lb loaf tin with the rinded rashers. Combine all the other ingredients. Take a teaspoonful of the mixture and fry it off in a small pan. Cool and taste it, adjusting the seasoning if necessary. Pack the meat mixture into the loaf tin and level off the top. Fold any rashers that protrude from the tin over the meat and bake at 350°F, 180°C, gas mark 4, for 1 ¼ to 1 ½ hours. Serve hot, cut in thick slices, or cold with a salad or as a sandwich filling.



Columbia, finding herself living in a caravan on the university grounds in Vancouver, and coping on her husband's student grant. I still make the Family Meat Loaf and a Gold Cake from cookbooks she sent me shortly after she settled in Canada.

### **Canadian Meat Loaf (6 to 8 servings)**

250g streaky rashers, rinded and stretched  
675g minced beef  
1 large egg, beaten  
1 medium onion, finely chopped  
1 tsp dried mixed herbs  
1 tsp Worcestershire sauce

#### *Variation 1:*

Use 350g each of minced lean beef and minced pork or sausage meat instead of beef alone, and omit the Worcestershire sauce.

#### *Variation 2:*

Before it goes into the oven, make three deep diagonal slits in the loaf, and fill each slit with tomato ketchup.

#### *Variation 3:*

For a "Frosted Meat Loaf", have ready smoothly creamed potato made from about 4 or 5 large potatoes. Turn out loaf on to an ovenproof plate and spread with the creamed potato. For

*the "icing" or the frosting, sprinkle with about 4 tbs finely grated cheese, and return the loaf to the oven for 5 minutes to brown the potato frosting.*

It was thinking of this meat loaf that sparked off the idea that brought a rare "Cookery Special" on the Late, Late Show down to earth. I was invited on as the fourth leg of a quartet that included Jimmy Flahive, the Head Chef of the highly praised restaurant then the pride of Dublin airport. He was one of first TV personalities: we all marvelled at his speed and skill in chopping onions! He had presented a typical chefs' dinner menu that featured smoked salmon and fillet of beef. Then there was Theodora Fitzgibbon, feared food columnist of the Irish Times, famed for her exquisite dinner parties, who did a posh family dinner that included a vegetable soup, pheasant and a Sherry Trifle. There was also an English celebrity guest, Magnus Pyke, the idiosyncratic arm-waving scientist who had just published a book on the delights of science called "Butter Side Up!" He was so dedicated to practical research that he actually spent three weeks in Dartmoor to check the nutritional aspects of prison diet in wartime. I felt that it would be pointless to try and compete with Theodora and Jimmy's classic styles of cooking and as a contrast I filled my table with a series of different mince dishes, all based on a pound (450g) of mince, from a simple Shepherds' Pie and everyday meat balls to South African Bobotie, Mexican Chilli, Greek Moussaka, Italian Lasagne and Spaghetti Sauce. It worked! And incidentally, twenty five years later they are still just as popular. In fact, at one stage I was known as "the woman with the mince" after the Show.

At Cookstown, Co Tyrone, the Northern equivalent of the Munster Institute, every student paid 6 pence (about 6 cent in today's money) for a cookbook called "Cookery Notes", which was originally prepared for use in Schools and Classes for Girls, working under the schemes of the Department of Agriculture: my mother's copy probably vanished in the move from Milecross – I never saw it. Needless to say, although gas and electric ovens had appeared by the time I used the revised cookbook, there was

still no mention of actual oven temperatures. One of my daughters used a further revised version of Cookery Notes in primary school in Dublin, in the 60's. By then the soda bread had been tamed further and baked in the oven, showing that few farmers' wives were baking in a pot oven over an open turf fire any longer, thanks to the country-wide spread of electricity and bottled gas. In the 60's edition, specific oven temperatures were not given in the Cookery Notes, even though there were detailed instructions given for cleaning gas and electric cookers, as well as oil stoves and heat storage cookers!

### **Soda Bread**

(as given in the "Cookery Notes", now long out of print)

*4 level breakfast cupfuls of flour (1 lb/ 500g)  
1 small teaspoonful salt  
1 level teaspoonful bread soda  
Sour milk or buttermilk to mix*

*Mix all the dry ingredients together. Form into a stiff dough with sour milk, knead well, flatten out about two inches in thickness, score the top with a knife, brush over with sour milk and bake, until, when tapped on the bottom, it makes a hollow sound.*

*The basic soda bread could be enriched with butter or lard for "Soda Cakes", with treacle and a pinch of ground ginger for Treacle Bread. The addition of sugar and raisins made a Sweet Soda Cake, or the same mixture could be turned into scones. A mixture of wholemeal and plain flour was recommended for a wholesome nutritious loaf. Bread like this, made with milk, was, even then, regarded as being more nutritious and economical than bought bread!*

### **"Brown Bread**

(as given by the cook in the Munster Institute in Cork)

*"Take 1 ½ plates of flour and a fist full of bran and a teaspoon of salt and a teaspoon of soda and the fill of the little blue jug of buttermilk. Mix it all together and keep it in the oven till it's cooked."*

While the rest of the aunts were content to make soda breads, Aunt Meta specialised in yeast Barmbracks for afternoon tea on Sundays – and in expressing her opinion of the local politicians in no uncertain terms. She was also a keen follower of rugby and never missed an International when it was Belfast's turn to host the game. Her eldest son, Robin, who joined the Indian army straight from the Cadet Corps in Campbell College, Belfast, and Sandhurst, used to send her regular supplies of Darjeeling tea. Her second son, Wallace, became a vet and joined up in the Veterinary Corps in 1939, spending his war looking after mules in Burma. I never knew whether or not he was joking when he told us that of all the thousands of mules in his care, only two produced offspring, but it was in Burma that the third brother, Ian, turned up too: he joined up as soon as he passed his school exams. My abiding memory of Ian is of him striding round the lawn at Stragullen outside Strabane, practising the bagpipes–, but using the chanter to avoid annoying the neighbours. I was closer to my cousin Tony, than the boys. She was sent to a Home Economics course in Belfast, then to a "finishing school" in Switzerland and when war broke out joined the W.A.A.F'S, was later invalided out and joined the A.T.S. When the boys were de-mobbed, Robin tried farming in Tyrone and later emigrated to South Africa, Wallace went back to his veterinary research job in Belfast and Ian emigrated to Kenya to farm in the mountains.

From time to time, after my mother died, I was sent off to my Aunt Meta in Strabane to make myself useful in the summer holidays from school. Aunt Meta had an interesting collection of books, from cowboy books by Zane Gray, murder mysteries and biographies – no romances – so I had something to keep me occupied in the evenings as there were few visitors and no television. One of my chores was picking strawberries, raspberries, gooseberries and currants. Stragullen boasted a large

walled garden, which I remember as being at least 2 or 3 acres, with every vegetable in season you could want, as well as hard and soft fruits. This was all looked after by one man, who doubled as Aunt Meta's chauffeur. She stopped driving when she found that cars had been fitted with an automatic clutch. She had happily progressed from the pony and trap to double de-clutching, and drove herself all around the North, and had no problems when she took the family on holiday to Oban and later to Donegal. I joined them in 1939 in Downings, as a special treat. I was heading for a year as a sixth form boarder in Londonderry High School and Aunt Meta considered I needed a civilising influence. We took time to hear Neville Chamberlain's famous speech declaring that Britain was at war with Germany and I must have been very popular with the school when I turned up three days late.







## CHAPTER 2

### CORNED BEEF HASH

One way to fix that we had to do was to do it right to do it.



## Chapter 2: Corned Beef Hash

Canned Corned Beef and "Spam" were included as part of the wartime meat ration both in the North of Ireland and in England, so the Ministry of Food published recipes for them and for the repulsive "dried egg", in the Kitchen Front broadcasts of the day. Leaflets entitled "Man About the Kitchen" were optimistically aimed at encouraging men to take their turn in the kitchen when their womenfolk had been called up to work in the munitions factories or in the Land Army. Corned Beef Hash had several advantages – it was quick to prepare and cook, used only one frying pan and could be varied by adding nearly any left-overs lying round in the kitchen. One version involved cooking extra potatoes in advance which saved fuel, while the American version used raw potato giving a very different result.

Peel and grate or finely chop 2 medium onions and fry in a tablespoonful of dripping until soft but not coloured. Add 250g diced cooked potato and 250g diced corned beef, cook for 2 or 3 minutes, then add 250g sliced tomatoes. Season lightly and cover the pan with a lid or plate, cooking over a very low heat for 15 minutes. Serve sprinkled with chopped parsley. (2 servings) Curiously I never remember putting tomatoes in Hash – lots of chopped parsley, and later when we discovered the joys of olive oil and garlic it took on a Mediterranean flavour.

For the American version, put ½ cupful vegetable stock into a frying pan, add 1 to 2 teaspoons of dripping or fat and bring to boiling point. Add a large cupful each of diced raw potato and corned beef. Add another spoonful of fat, cover and cook over a low heat for about ¾ hour until the potatoes are cooked through and a browned crust has formed on the bottom of the pan. Fold over and serve with pickled beetroot, green vegetables and tomato ketchup.

One surprising thing that we failed to discover when trying to saving fuel, was that veg-

etables tasted much better when cooked quickly with less water and definitely without the addition of bread soda. It took a much shorter time than we had been taught either at home or in school. That change came much later. We even discovered that red cabbage could be cooked in minutes instead of hours - if it was shredded finely enough.

Added to rationing, at this time "fast days" were observed with more attention than is customary today – fish was not always available and cheese was not as popular as it is today though there were screaming headlines in the English papers announcing "Sorry! There's no Kraft Cheese or Velveeta now being made." Hearty home-made soups were Friday dinners in many homes as we learned to use dried beans. Pulses like lentils that didn't need overnight soaking and long cooking were more popular than beans for soups. Lentil and Vegetable Soup was anything but penitential when, later on, you could get a ham bone to make a pot of stock – we learned very fast that it was necessary to taste the stock before using it in case it was too salty!

### Lentil and Vegetable Soup (6 to 8 servings)

225g red lentils, washed  
2.2 litres water  
25g butter or 2 tbs olive oil  
1 carrot, pared and diced  
1 large onion, chopped  
2 sticks of celery, chopped  
1 medium parsnip or a wedge of Swede turnip, peeled and diced  
1 leek, washed and sliced  
2 large potatoes, peeled and diced  
A "faggot" or bouquet garni  
Salt and pepper  
Chopped fresh parsley to garnish

Soften the onion, celery and leek in the melted butter or hot oil briefly in a soup pot. Add the lentils and vegetables with the water, a little seasoning and the herbs. Bring to boiling point, stirring occasionally, cover and leave to simmer until all the vegetables are tender, about 30-35 minutes. Check the seasoning, remove

the bundle of herbs and serve sprinkled with chopped parsley or garlicky croutons.

*Note: This is a fairly thick soup: it can be thinned down if you wish. Make with water for a vegetarian soup, or with ham bone stock if you wish. And indeed, if you prefer smooth soups, you put it through a mouli, blender or sieve, warm up again with a spoonful or two of tomato puree and decorate each serving with a swirl of plain yogurt or double cream and a sprinkle of chopped chives. Two different soups from the one theme and five minutes extra effort. These soups were usually served with fresh griddle bread.*

The text book we used in the Belfast 'Tec. was originally issued by the Glasgow and West of Scotland College of Domestic Science. It had all the classic Scottish recipes: Potted Hough was made with leg beef, Poor Man's Goose involved liver, as, curiously, did a couple of cocktails which sound particularly revolting. The recipe for Haggis came in very useful when I was asked to make a batch to serve at a lunch for a party of about forty Scottish grocers and their wives. The head chef in Jury's Hotel at the time, understandably, declined the honour. As a Frenchman, he wouldn't have had much sympathy for anyone who suggested accompanying a dish of a sheep's innards and neeps (Swede turnips) out of his kitchen with a kilted piper in full cry. Fortunately St. Patrick's Haggis was a success although admittedly it just touched on the original Glasgow recipe from time to time. It was generously flavoured with a therapeutic dram or two of Paddy whiskey.

The Glasgow Cookery Book also introduced us to Beef Olives or Paupiettes – not the Escoffier version "Oiseau sans Tete - Headless Birds" which involved lining the centre of the piece of steak with bacon before stuffing it with a rich pork forcemeat. His combination of 4 egg yolks, 2 whole eggs, 250g of butter and 250g of a flour panada to 500g of minced lean pork was a mind-boggling total of high cholesterol fat and calories – and he then enclosed them in a thin wrapping of salt pork fat to keep them from drying out as they cooked! Our Beef Olives were a much more

modest affair designed to teach us to use our hands making the little parcels of stewing steak and tying them neatly with string so that they wouldn't leak as they cooked slowly until they were completely tender.

### **Beef Olives (4 to 5 servings)**

*500g striploin of beef, well-trimmed and cut into thin slices*

*25g butter*

*25g plain flour*

*600ml beef stock*

*3 tbs sherry or red wine (optional)*

*Stuffing*

*1 small onion, finely chopped*

*100g white breadcrumbs*

*250g sausage meat,*

*2 tbs chopped parsley*

*1 medium egg, beaten*

*Salt and pepper*

*Combine all the ingredients for the stuffing in a bowl. Mix well and divide into 8 portions. Roll each into a small sausage shape. Place one on each piece of meat. Roll up and secure with cocktail sticks or tie with string.*

*Melt the butter in a frying pan and brown the beef rolls all over. Lift out and put in a heavy saucepan or a casserole. Stir the flour into the pan drippings until blended in and add the stock gradually. Bring to boiling point and add the sherry or wine if used. Check the seasoning and pour over the beef olives. Cover the dish or saucepan or casserole closely and simmer over a low heat, or cook in the oven at 325°F, 170°C, gas mark 3, for about ¾ hour or until the beef is completely tender. Remove the cocktail sticks or strings and serve with a selection of vegetables and creamed potatoes.*



CHAPTER 3

**AUNT META`S BARMBRACK**

### Chapter 3: Aunt Meta's Barmbrack

A great favourite was Aunt Meta's speciality, the fruity yeast barmbrack that she learned to make at the Munster Institute in Cork. It was also one of the pleasures of afternoon teas at the Spring and Horse Shows at the RDS, provided by the famous Mrs Lawlor of Naas. She made large oblong loaves of barm-brack when she had the catering contact for the RDS. Neither of them would have compromised and made a quick Cold Tea Brack which is more common nowadays. The traditional yeast barmbrack resembles the Swiss or German Stollen without the sausage of almond paste in the centre, and does not have to be basted with melted butter to keep it moist. Needless to say, there are as many different recipes for Stollen as for barmbrack: There's even an argument about the spelling of the latter - some people prefer "Barnbrack" or "Barnbreac". There is still a surprising amount of home baking being done in Ireland and no country show is complete without its baking tent, where you can marvel at the variety of shapes and flavours you can get by mixing wholemeal and white flour, salt, baking soda and buttermilk.

#### Traditional Barmbrack

50g fresh yeast or 25g dried yeast  
1 tsp sugar  
4 tbsp lukewarm water  
550g plain flour  
½ tsp salt  
115g unsalted butter  
115g sugar  
3 eggs, beaten  
300ml milk  
175g raisins  
175g sultanas  
50g candied peel  
50g cherries, chopped  
½ tsp ground cinnamon  
¼ tsp grated nutmeg (optional)  
Glaze:  
2 tbsp sugar  
2 tbsp boiling water

Put the yeast, sugar and water in a cup or small bowl. Mix well and set aside until frothing. Sieve the flour, salt, and spices if used, add the sugar. Cut and rub in the butter, until the mixture resembles fine crumbs. Grease two 900g loaf tins or one 18cm round cake tin. Make a well in the centre of the dry ingredients, add the beaten eggs, the yeast and enough milk to make a firm dough. Knead by hand for 10 minutes, or 5 minutes with a dough hook. Grease or oil the bowl, turn the dough in the bowl to coat it with oil. Cover with clingfilm or a teatowel, and set in a warm place to rise, about 1½ hours. When the dough has doubled in size, knead lightly and work in the fruit. Shape into a round or two oblongs, and put in the prepared tin or tins. Cover and put to rise again, for about ½ hour. After about 15 minutes, set the oven to 400°F, 200°C, gas mark 6. When the dough is well risen, check over and press down any pieces of dried fruit that aren't covered. Bake for about 45 minutes, until the bread is loose in the tin when shaken and sounds hollow when tapped underneath. Put back in the tin, brush over with the warm glaze and return to the oven for 3 minutes to set the glaze. Cool on a wire rack and serve with butter, or store for a few days in an airtight container until required. A ring and charms wrapped in greaseproof paper "make" the Hallowe'en Barmbrack. Fewer eggs can be used to make a lighter mixture.

#### Quick Tea Brack

675g plain flour  
1 tbsp. baking powder  
225g butter  
225g brown sugar  
450g currants  
25g mixed peel  
1 tsp mixed spice  
2 tsp caraway seeds (optional)  
2 tsp honey

Rub the butter into the flour. Add to the other dry ingredients and moisten to a soft dough. Knead briefly. Bake in two well-greased tins for 1½ hours at 325°F, 170°C, gas mark 3. Brush tops with honey and return to the oven for a few minutes. Cool on wire rack. Best eaten fresh. (A mixture of raisins, sultanas and currants and currants may be used instead of currants alone).



The Barm Brack recipes change from 1939 to 1970 - getting plainer!

Barm Brack (1939)	Barm Brack (1970 ish)
575g plain flour	450g flour
125g butter	50g butter
125g sugar	60g sugar
125ml tepid milk	300ml milk
20g yeast	15g yeast
1 egg	3 eggs
125g sultanas	375g currants or raisins
250g currants	25g candied peel
50g candied peel	

Beat the yeast with 1 tsp sugar until creamy. Melt the butter and add the milk to make it lukewarm. Pour over the yeast and add this and the beaten eggs to the flour. Mix well to make a soft dough. Set to rise for about 1 ½ hours until it has doubled in size. Add the fruit, candied peel and sugar. Knead well, adding more flour if necessary.

Put into a well-greased tin, allow to rise again for about ½ hour. Bake in a pre-heated moderately hot oven 400°F, 200°C, gas mark 6, reducing the heat to 350°F, 180°C, gas mark 4 after half an hour. Allow about 1 ½ hours until cooked through.

### Cherry Loaf

175g butter  
175g sugar  
3 eggs, beaten  
275g self-raising flour  
A pinch of salt  
½ tsp vanilla extract  
175 to 225g halved glace cherries

Soften the butter and beat to a cream with the sugar. Add the vanilla and the eggs. Sift some of the flour over the cherries and add the remainder gradually to the creamed mixture. Fold in the floured cherries and divide the mixture between two greased loaf tins. Bake in a pre-heated oven for 1 ½ hours at 375°F, 190°C, gas mark 5 or until ready when tested with a skewer. Turn out and leave to cool on a wire rack.



### Cherry buns

6oz munge  
12oz sugar

creamed

add 3 eggs

12oz flour

1 tsp B Powder

4oz chopped cherries

8oz suet

in a mill

few drops vanilla

15-20 mins

510° - 1/2 cup self

### Soda Bread

1 1/2 lb flour

1 heaped tsp salt

1 " B. soda

about 1/2 pt buttermilk

190°-200° C

40-45 mins

312° = middle

shelf

### Brown Soda Bread

2 lb 2 oz

2oz munge + 2oz b sugar

(= 1/2 lb. white flour &

1/2 lb. wheaten meal)

roll bread well, roll out 1/4 in. thick, put onto  
baking tray at 6/10 about 20 min.

CHAPTER 4

BREADS

## Chapter 4: Breads

The traditional white Soda Bread, which was cooked every day on the griddle or later on a heavy frying pan, may well be considered Ireland's answer to the flat yeast breads of the Mediterranean. Curiously, it is only about 150 years since our traditional "soda breads" became popular following the discovery that there were other ways of raising bread than using yeast or "barm" – the use of a mixture of bicarbonate of soda (Bread soda or baking soda) and cream of tartar or tartaric acid is mentioned in Eliza Acton's books, including an "Excellent Dairy Bread made without yeast". Having worked on her own recipe, she found that this bread was common in many remote parts of England and Ireland and she had worked out for herself that you had to let the buttermilk become sour before you used it in breadmaking. Also, the bread should go into the oven as soon as it is mixed or it would be heavy. The invention of "Baking powder", a combination of baking soda and cream of tartar, with added starch which helps to keep the mixture from becoming lumpy, soon followed. Eliza Acton also mentions a "Plain Pound or Currant Cake" made with 10 eggs (1 lb in weight), 1 lb each of sugar, butter and flour. To turn this into a plum cake she creamed the butter and sugar, beat in the egg yolks, then the stiffly beaten egg whites, 1 lb currants and some candied peel, then the flour by degrees, with a glass of brandy when it is liked. She adds that "To convert the above into the popular Irish 'speckled bread' or 'Brawn Brack' (stet) of the richer kind, add to it three ounces of caraway seeds: these are sometimes used in combination with the currants, but more commonly without! The mind boggles at the quantity of caraway seeds – or even the use of any. Novelist and Playwright Maura Laverty was also a dedicated cook: she prefaced the chapter on bread making in her book "Full and Plenty" with the tale of the Domestic Economy Instructress who said to her future mother-in-law's delight "It's in the cooking of plain food that a real cook proves herself. Take sweet cakes, now. Any

child could make a sweet cake that will pass but there's no way of disguising badly-made soda bread!" Maura's book "Full and Plenty" sponsored by the Irish Flour Millers, was probably the first cook book to reach a mass audience in Ireland, after the Department of Agriculture's handbook which was used in the Munster Institute as well as Loughrey College.

### **Traditional Maltbread**

225g plain flour  
1 tsp baking powder  
½ tsp baking soda  
¼ tsp salt  
75g lard or margarine  
100g caster sugar  
100g sultanas  
1 egg  
3 tbs milk  
2 tsp treacle

*Pre-heat oven to 350°F, 180°C, gas mark 4. 1 lb loaf tin greased and floured.*

*Sieve flour, salt, baking powder and baking soda into a bowl, rub in the margarine to make fine crumbs. Mix in the sugar and sultanas and moisten with the egg, treacle and milk, using more milk if necessary to give a soft mixture. Turn into the prepared tin and bake for about an hour on the centre shelf of the oven. Cool slightly before turning out and wrapping in a tea-towel. Cool on a wire rack.*

*Note: Try with half the sugar / buttermilk.*

The traditional Irish griddle breads, like the French baguettes, are best eaten fresh unless they are destined to accompany breakfast, fried in the dry cured bacon and sausage drippings. For obvious reasons, fried soda bread or potato bread has become a rare treat – for visitors – but at a pinch it can be used to make a base for a pizza which obviates the necessity for lighting the oven!

By the time I went to Loughrey, the N.I. agricultural college, I had learned the art of making soda farls, the flat "cakes" of soda bread that were preferred in the North of Ireland. The dough was rolled out into a neat round, about ¾ inch/ 2cm thick, then



cut into four triangles or farls and placed on a hot griddle to cook. The bread needed 5 to 7 minutes on each side, until only just coloured. The farls had to be springy and feel light, and it depended on the heat of the griddle and a light hand. Experienced cooks, like my mother and mother-in-law, who baked bread every day, could tell almost by instinct, when the griddle was at the right temperature and they never weighed anything. If the cooked bread still felt heavy when it was browned, you had to set the farls up on the griddle, on each edge in turn, until it was completely cooked through. To keep the crusts soft, you wrapped the farls in a clean tea-towel before setting them on a wire rack to cool. They were best served fresh and warm, generously spread with butter – or with butter and jam as a “Piece” given to children coming in hungry from school in the days when “bars” weren’t a part of everyday life. Day-old soda farls and potato bread, fried in bacon fat still make part of the traditional breakfast, the “Ulster Fry”, which is now promoted as a tourist attraction.

### **Plain soda bread**

500g plain flour  
1 tsp salt  
1 tsp baking soda  
300 ml buttermilk.

*Put a griddle or a large heavy frying pan to heat slowly: if using an electric griddle, heat to 350°F, 180°C, gas mark 4.*

*Mix the flour, salt and soda, rubbing any lumps out of the baking soda in the palm of the hand. Add enough buttermilk to mix to a soft elastic dough. Turn out on a slightly floured surface and quickly knead into a round. Flatten with a rolling pin to about 2 cm thick and cut across at right angles to make four triangles or “farls”. Lift the farls on to the griddle and leave to cook for about 7 minutes until lightly coloured underneath. Turn farls over and cook on the other side. Lift a farl in the hand: if it feels light, wrap all the bread in a teatowel and leave to cool on a wire rack. If the breads still feel heavy, balance them up on each edge in turn until they are cooked through, serve warm with butter or split each farl across in two and*

*then split each in half before frying in bacon drippings.*

*Note: This deceptively simple recipe needs quick mixing and shaping, plus experience to judge the correct temperature of the griddle. I used to make a batch of buttermilk pancakes first and when they were bubbling and browning merrily, and not burning round the edges or stubbornly remaining pallid, the heat was right for the bread, or a batch of buttery raisin scones.*

Sam's father made a tall cast-iron griddle for me when we moved to Dublin. It was attached to the gas cooker, and could be spun around to control the heat. It was large enough to bake batches of soda farls or drop scones, and these were very popular at the church or school “bring and buy” sales.

To turn the split soda farls into pizzas, spread them lightly with garlic flavoured oil, then with tomato puree or sauce. Top simply with sliced tomatoes, olives and grated cheese or your preferred mixture, and cook under a hot grill for 5 to 8 minutes, until the cheese has melted and is bubbling.

Aunt Kitty specialised in serving several varieties of soda bread at high tea, accompanied by everyone's favourite jam, with a sponge cake and a fruit cake as well, in case anyone would still be hungry. There would be “Curranty Cake”, soda bread with butter and raisins, treacle bread, potato bread, and, of course, white and brown bread. Kitty had the knack of making good brown bread on the griddle – most of us take the easy way out and use the oven. Some even make it in a big Le Creuset casserole, saying it gives the same texture as the bread baked in the pot oven with the coals of turf piled on the lid. Then there's the Donegal favourite, “Yellow Meal Bread”, – not one of Aunt Kitty's specialities: it probably didn't get as far down The Ards Peninsula as Portaferry. From South Armagh and Leitrim, there was boxty bread and pancakes and one unusual loaf made with pinhead oatmeal, soaked overnight in buttermilk, which was even more indigestible

than "Rozel", that combination of mashed potato and pinhead oatmeal, plus a little salt that appeared in Co. Antrim. I don't remember ever being offered it by any of the Ballymoney cousins.

The milk of the Jersey cows was so rich that Aunt Meta used to go out to her dairy on mornings when she was expecting visitors for Afternoon Tea, and skim off enough cream to fill quite a sizeable jug, saying that a little Jersey cream was so rich that it would never be missed. We, on the other hand, saved the cream to make butter and buttermilk for breadmaking. When we were down to one cow, the butter tended to be rather strongly flavoured, particularly in winter, but the people who had regular orders for eggs, chickens or boiling fowl and butter seemed to like the winter butter. The income from the sale of farm butter, eggs and poultry traditionally went to the woman of the house and it would have been mistake to judge the wealth of many of the farmers' wives by the tattered raincoats they wore when cleaning out the henhouses!

On farms where cows were kept and butter made, bread was usually baked every day – with a double batch on Saturday – with the buttermilk. At one Kinsale Food Forum there was a local bread baking competition. It had at least 30 entries, every one slightly different. The basic ingredients were much the same – wholemeal, plain flour, salt, baking soda and buttermilk. Some ladies enriched their bread by rubbing in butter or margarine, others mixed the wholemeal with bran and wheat germ, or oatmeal. That was one competition when I was very glad that I hadn't been asked to be a judge, they were all so good!

### **Basic Brown Bread**

*2 or 3 cups coarse or fine wholemeal  
2 cups plain flour  
1 small tsp. salt  
1 tsp (level) bread soda, (baking soda,  
bicarbonate of soda)  
Buttermilk or soured milk to mix (about 300ml)*

*Sieve the salt and soda with the flour, rubbing out any lumps in the soda. Mix with the wholemeal and then add sufficient buttermilk or soured milk to mix to a fairly stiff dough. Knead on a surface dusted with wholemeal into a round, about 5 cm thick.*

*Mark with a cross, put on a floured baking tray and cook at 400°F, 200°C, gas mark 6 for about ¾ hour. Test by tapping on the base of the bread: if it sounds hollow it is ready. Wrap in a teatowel and cool on a wire rack.*

This is only the beginning! The simplest variant adds 25 to 50g butter or margarine, rubbed into the dry ingredients for a "keeping" bread. Alternatively use 2 tbsp olive oil. The most popular variations use a mixture of grains from 1 tbsp each of bran, wheat germ, flakemeal or pinhead oatmeal to 25g each of fine or coarse wholemeal or wheat-en meal and plain flour, plus the usual tsp each of salt and soda, and buttermilk to mix. Some recipes suggest a tbsp each of treacle and brown sugar, or 1 tbsp honey.

Then there is the problem of the oven temperature. This used to be an unpredictable beast, dependent on the direction and strength of the wind and the skill of the stoker – not to mention the child who invariably left the back door open, causing a draught. So when thermostatically controlled ovens arrived, people tried to imitate the technique of the range – putting the bread into a well heated oven, knowing that it will probably lose heat over the next hour even if coal is added correctly. No wonder that bread baking was considered a greater accomplishment than making cakes.

The advent of pasteurisation meant the end of naturally soured milk, as anyone who has left a carton of milk in the fridge past its "best by" date knows – it just turns rotten. My Dutch friend Erneste presented me with a Buttermilk Plant, a yeast culture that solves the problem and, with a little care, lasts for ever, growing and increasing in size. Erneste used her "buttermilk plant" as a refreshing drink, especially when her children had tummy upsets. Florence Irwin, in her

book, "The Cookin' Woman" describes how she first came across a buttermilk plant in a hotel in Co. Down. A group of nuns fleeing from Central Europe in 1938 had presented it to an Irishman, as thanks for his assistance on their journey to safety. A suggestion that the "plant" was yeast based set Florence to experimenting and she produced her own version which can be used when buttermilk is not available. I haven't tested it as a cure for tummy upsets, but it makes lovely bread.

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### **Yeast Buttermilk Plant**

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25g fresh yeast  
2 teaspoons sugar  
450ml skimmed milk  
150ml boiling water

Combine the milk and boiling water, and if necessary, allow to cool until it is lukewarm. Add the yeast and sugar, pour into a large sterilised Kilner jar. Cover and store in a warm dark cupboard, shake the jar 2 or 3 times a day for 2 days, or 6 days in winter (they had cool pantries then) until the milk thickens. Open carefully and strain into a jug or bowl. Rinse the contents of the sieve with lukewarm water— to rescue the plant. Wash out and sterilise the jar, return the plant to the jar and fill two-thirds full with a lukewarm mixture of milk and water. The thick liquid is only slightly sour at this stage and makes a pleasant drink. It can be set aside for a day or two and used for bread-making instead of cultured buttermilk. Elizabeth David, in her "English Bread and Yeast Cookery" mentions a "formula" published in "The Baker's ABC" in 1927 using the natural wild yeasts in the atmosphere. I must admit I never sterilised anything to do with the buttermilk plant and it kept for years without "going off".

On one occasion when I was going to interview Chef Raymond Blanc, I went out and bought his book "Cooking for Friends". His mother's bread recipe took three days to prepare so I took him a couple of farls of fresh soda bread that had taken little more than three minutes to get on to the griddle, sadly he didn't taste it there and then, when it would have been at its best. He did point out that French flour differs from English or Irish flour and more especially from Irish flour

which is made from soft Irish wheat. It is more suitable for bread making with the mixture of buttermilk and bicarbonate of soda (usually called baking soda or bread soda), or sweet milk, baking soda and cream of tartar to make the mix of alkali and acid that causes the bread to rise. Leavening dough with barm or yeast was known further back than the days of the Israelites in Egypt, but surprisingly the combination of soda and cream of tartar for bread making only became popular about 150 years ago.

Potato bread was another favourite for breakfast but Boxy, potato bread made with grated raw potato and flour, seems to have been unknown in Co. Down although it, in its various forms, was popular in Armagh and the border counties, especially in Leitrim and Cavan. I sometimes wonder if the Huguenots might not have brought their recipe for "Rosti" with them, along with their skills in weaving linen, when they fled persecution on the Continent, as the recipes for Boxy pancakes and Rosti are somewhat similar with their combination of potatoes and flour.

### **Traditional Potato Bread**

Take some old potatoes of the floury kind and steam or boil them in their jackets until they are just tender. Drain the boiled potatoes well, return them to the pot and cover with a clean teatowel and the lid. Let them sit over the heat for minute or two to dry out. Peel as soon as they are cool enough to handle. (The peel, of course, goes into the bucket for the hens or pigs, but not into the compost bucket as cooked vegetables attract rats!) Put a good heap of sifted flour on to a pastry board and mash the potatoes with a ricer on top of the flour. Sprinkle reasonably generously with salt and leave to cool before kneading flour into the mixture to give a pliable dough. Divide into balls about the size of a medium Swede turnip and roll out about 1 cm thick in a round, cut in 4 and cook on a heated griddle or heavy frying pan until lightly coloured on both sides, turning once. No weighing was needed when making this everyday bread, but indeed,

now that home breadmaking is almost a lost art, we might need a little practice to perfect it.

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### **Potato Bread (4 farls)**

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225g cooked mashed potato  
½ tsp salt  
About 50g plain flour  
25g melted butter (optional)  
Extra flour if necessary

I was asked, a while back, to demonstrate the making of genuine Irish breads as part of the entertainment for the wives of a group of Americans (surgeons, I think) attending a conference in one of the hotels near the Gap of Dunloe, in Killarney. It was a far cry from Julia Childs' demonstration kitchen – just a longish table with a griddle on top of my two-burner camping gas stove, a couple of bowls and a pastry board. The surprising success of the morning was the Potato Apple Cake made with Bramley cooking apples and the minimum of fuss. You just took two rounds of uncooked potato bread, put peeled, cored and thinly sliced apples in a shallow heap in the centre of the smaller round, (about the size of a saucer) put the larger round on top, and pressed the edges together and cooked them on the griddle until the bread was done and the apples soft. Then you cut a cross in the top of the potato cake, peeled back the points and sprinkled the apples with sugar, and served them.

These were the most exotic potato cakes I had encountered until I saw the last one of a batch of savoury potato breads being snatched up from under my nose at a Middle Eastern take-away in the Borough Market in London. They seemed to be stuffed with a mixture of diced red and green peppers, finely chopped chillies, herbs and seasonings. My first attempt at replicating them was a disaster – possibly too early in the season for good floury potatoes – at least, that was my excuse at the time. Then the penny dropped: as a rule, the English prefer waxy potatoes which don't make good potato bread, so what if these savoury potato cakes had been made with powdered potato? Back to the drawing board!

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### **Savoury Potato Bread**

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1 sachet powdered potato  
275ml boiling water  
1 medium egg, beaten  
3 streaky rashers, chopped  
1 tbsp vegetable oil  
4 spring onions, trimmed and chopped  
1 small red pepper, seeded and diced  
Small clove of garlic, crushed  
½ chilli pepper, de-seeded and finely chopped  
1 tbs chopped fresh parsley  
1 tsp mixed dried herbs  
100g plain flour  
Salt and freshly ground black pepper

Blend the potato powder with the boiling water and set aside to cool. Fry the rashers until crisp, add the onion and peppers to the pan and cook until soft. Stir in the garlic and mix the vegetables, bacon, parsley and herbs into the potatoes. When the mixture has cooled, beat in the egg and work in the flour and seasonings. Knead the dough lightly on a well-floured surface, divide in two and roll each piece into a round about 1 cm thick. Divide each round in four and cook on a hot griddle or heavy frying pan, until lightly coloured on each side. Serve warm from the griddle, or cool until required and warm through in a microwave oven or on a lightly oiled pan. Small rounds of this savoury potato bread could be topped with chutney to make party nibbles. The chilli pepper and garlic can be omitted if you wish, while you can omit the bacon and add some lightly cooked peas and sweetcorn, plus a few quartered cherry tomatoes, to make vegetarian snacks.



## CHAPTER 5

# THE BIG HOUSE

## Chapter 5: The Big House

One of Sam's aunts worked in Mount Stewart House, the Irish home of the Londonderrys, and she kept a notebook with recipes for many of the dishes cooked there. Lady Londonderry is reputed to have had Scрабо Tower built in an "anything you can do, we can do better" gesture in reply to Lady Dufferin's "Helen's Tower" at Clondeboye, which was a gathering place for the literary set. Lady Londonderry hosted a salon for the powerful, in the political sense, in her London town house and they visited Mount Stewart frequently. She had the "Tower of the Winds" built close to the Lough, with a hidden sunken path to the entrance so that when she invited her guests to bring their drinks upstairs to admire the view of the Strangford Lough in the moonlight – or something – this was a signal for a troop of servants to bring in and set out an elaborate supper in complete silence to surprise her guests when they came downstairs.

She decorated one of the gardens close to the house with statues of the members of her "set" - in topiary – disguising them as fanciful beasts. The Londonderrys hosted a visit by Herr Ribbentrop that was not particularly popular with local people unlike another guest, the then Prince of Wales who became Edward the Eighth briefly. Every precaution was taken in advance of his visit so that he would get a favourable impression of his hosts and their estates. Unfortunately they forgot to check one thing – the time of the tides in Strangford Lough. As the royal party passed down the shores of the Lough for the five miles to the gates of the Londonderry estate the tide was completely at its lowest ebb, and the smell of sewage was at its height. The local Newtownards town council had passed a resolution, in about 1905 that they should build a sewage treatment plant for the town as soon as it was financially possible – it was not built until after the Second World War ended... Now oysters and mussels flourish round the edges of the Lough and it is noted for its fishing, and safe beaches for swimming.

Curiously we had a connection with the Dufferins (by the back stairs of course) - Aunt Kitty's brother-in-law was Land Steward at Clondeboye, so I had permission to ride my pony through the estate – provided, of course, that nobody saw me. Now they welcome visitors, particularly to the Poacher's Arms pub, the hotel and a restaurant on the golf course, all in the grounds. The Mount Stewart gardens, the Tower of the Winds and the House itself have been given to the National Trust. Visitors can still admire the magnificent Stubbs' painting of the racehorse "Hambletonian" that hangs on the half-landing. The picture was commissioned by the 3rd Marquess' father-in-law, the owner of the stallion. Another picture – of King William on his white horse at the Battle of the Boyne (after Wyck) has drawn the comment from one of the tour guides: "King Billy would have had more sense than to go into battle on such a conspicuous horse."

The Christmas table at Mount Stewart, according to Sam's aunt, always included a "Spiced Round", traditional dry spiced beef, weighing 14 pounds, about 6 ½ kg. Unlike the Ballymaloe spiced beef, it did not start off with a piece of corned brisket or silverside but rather the more expensive piece of fresh round, a leaner but not necessarily a better cut for spicing. The spiced beef recipe includes saltpetre which is not now recommended for a long and healthy life, but if eaten only at a couple of meals around Christmas-time and a few times with salad during the summer, spiced beef probably won't shorten your life appreciably.

### **The Mount Stewart Spiced Round**

14 lb Beef (6.36kg)

1 lb salt (450g)

¼ lb / 350g brown sugar

1 oz / 25g powdered saltpetre

¼ lb / 115g whole allspice

¼ lb / 115g whole black pepper

*Rub salt on both sides and leave for 24 hours. Mix other ingredients well together and then*

rub into both sides of the beef, turning and basting night and morning for a fortnight. Cook for a little over 4 hours— 2 hours on each side, covered well with liquid when cooking, until it is completely tender, replenishing the cooking water as it simmers away.

Traditionally, spiced beef was made from a piece of brisket as the fat in this cut made it tender and also held the flavour of the spices. Now it is made with pieces of prepared "corned beef" and sold in summer as well as at Christmas, to be served cold, with salad. It can be completely prepared at home, making up a brine by dissolving 110g sea salt and 150g brown sugar in 2 ½ litres of hot water, plus 4 bay leaves. Bring to the boil, simmer for 5 minutes. Leave to cool and when completely cold stir in 1 level tsp saltpetre (potassium nitrate). Put the beef (boned brisket or silverside, about 2 ½ kg in weight) into a Pyrex or earthenware casserole into which it fits fairly snugly. Strain the brine over the meat, cover and leave in a cool place, turning it every day— for 7 to 8 days. Whether or not you pickle your own beef, rinse the meat well: bought spiced beef can be soaked for 2 or 3 hours with several changes of cold water for a less salty result. Make up a spice mixture by combining, in a mortar, 110g soft dark brown sugar, 1 tbsp each of whole black peppercorns and whole allspice with 1 dessertspoonful each of whole cloves and juniper berries. Grind fairly smoothly with a pestle or use a very clean coffee grinder. Mix the spices with the sugar in a small bowl. Wipe the beef with kitchen paper and then rub in some of the spice mixture, pushing it into any crevices. Put into a Pyrex or pottery bowl, cover and then over the next seven days, rub the remainder of the spice mixture into the meat.

If you are going to do your own spiced beef, consult your butcher well in advance and he or she will be most co-operative and interested, and may even bone it out and tie it neatly with string — and see that you get well hung piece of beef so that it is tender. You can, if you have got a really cool pantry or similar hidey-hole continue rubbing the beef daily with the spice mix for up to 3 weeks.

To cook the beef, rinse under the cold tap, put in a saucepan, cover with cold water, bring slowly to the boil, cover and leave to simmer, barely bubbling, allowing 30 minutes per 450g/lb plus 30 minutes extra, or until the beef is tender. When it is ready, set the beef

on a large plate, place another plate on top and weigh it down with a couple of full cans of fruit or whatever, if you don't have any weights lying around. Remove any strings used to tie the meat in shape, if you are bringing it to the table to be carved in thin slices.

You can vary the spicing using ¼ tsp each of dried thyme and mixed herbs, a dash of cayenne pepper, ¼ tsp each ground mace, ground cloves and grated nutmeg, with ½ to 1 tsp ground black pepper. A very finely chopped shallot can be mixed with the sugar and spices for extra flavour, half way through the cooking time. Some people swear that the addition of a bottle of Guinness brings out all the flavours, others favour the addition of an onion stuck with 2 or 3 cloves, a piece of celery and a carrot, a wedge of turnip, a bunch of fresh herbs and ½ tsp whole peppercorns to the saucepan.

I usually use a variation of a recipe from Josceline Dimbleby, whose great-great aunt was a famous lace-maker from Newry. You start by removing the bones (if any) from a piece of flank, brisket or round, trimming any excess fat, and putting it into a large bowl. (Boned weight 2 ½ to 3kg). Make up a brine in a saucepan with 115g sea salt and 175g Demerara sugar evenly mixed with 1 tbsp coriander seeds and black peppercorns, 2 tsp whole cloves, 3 sticks of cinnamon and 20 to 25 juniper berries all roughly crushed together. Blend in 2 ½ litres of hot water, mix well and bring to boiling point, simmer for 5 minutes. Cover and leave to become completely cold. Stir in 1 tsp saltpetre. Pour over the beef, cover and set aside in a cool place for 7 to 8 days, turning at least once a day. Drain well, discarding the brine. Using a pestle and mortar, grind together 2 tbsp black peppercorns and whole allspice, 1 tbsp juniper berries and ½ level tbsp whole cloves, mix with 115g soft dark brown sugar and rub evenly into the surface of the beef. Tie into shape and wrap in foil. Put into a casserole into which it fits neatly. Cover with a lid, and leave in a cool place for 12 to 24 hours. Bake at 275°F, 140°C, gas mark 1, for 4 ½ to 5 hours until completely tender. Open the lid and foil, pour off the juices, wrap in the foil, place on a board with a weighted plate or flat tin on top. Leave until completely cold. Store in the fridge for up to 2 weeks, or freeze until required. Serve hot or preferably cold, thinly carved, with salads.

The traditional dishes of my childhood, Colcannon and Irish Stew, were never served often enough to be boring. Colcannon was a Lenten standby as were eggs, of course. Those were the days when Lent was observed strictly: both Friday and Wednesday were fast days and we children all had to give up sweets, cake and biscuits. Annie gave up milk in her tea, sugar and butter, making Lent a particular penance for her!

Fortunately the hens had usually started laying again after the post-Christmas lay-off. At the time very good laying hens had only just notched up 200 eggs in a year but they went on laying for five or six years before they were destined for the pot, with the eggs from the best of them of any age, going into the incubator to provide the next generation of fluffy chicks. These were ringed before they left their particular space in the incubator so that we could trace them back to their parents and cull any which didn't live up to their parents' record. My mother, when she was walking across the field where the hens were, sometimes stopped and announced "That hen doesn't look if she's been laying for a while!" She'd stoop down and pick it up, run her hand over the hen's body to confirm her suspicion, pop the victim into a separate cage to be disposed of later in time for Sunday lunch! (the technique was to simmer them gently for an hour or so, drain them well and roast briefly, making a big pot of flavoursome soup from the chicken stock and extra vegetables from the garden.) Sometimes when I was cleaning out the birds, I would come across a handful of embryonic eggs but not often fully formed ones, proving the accuracy of her "feel". Needless to say, the partially formed eggs ended up in pancakes, scones or even cakes as you couldn't sell them – or probably even give them away.

Colcannon, surprisingly, can be one way of getting children to eat cabbage! Some swear by curly kale, others Savoy cabbage, even Bok Choi can be used. Floury potatoes are a must.

## Colcannon

1 kg peeled cooked potatoes, riced or mashed  
Curly kale, about 500g, washed  
½ bunch spring onions or scallions  
or 1 medium onion, chopped  
½ cup whole milk  
25g butter, or more, as desired  
1 to 2 tbsp cream  
Salt and black pepper to taste

Tear up the kale, discarding the tough stalks. Blanch in boiling water for 2 to 3 minutes. Drain well and rinse with cold water to keep the green colour fresh. Cut or tear into small pieces. Trim the spring onions and chop, including the green part. Cook in the milk for a minute, add half the butter, the drained kale, the cream and a little seasoning. Beat in the mashed potatoes, mixing evenly and heat through, stirring well to keep the mixture from sticking. Serve topped with plenty of butter.

Note: If the cabbage is not very green, add 2 tbsp chopped parsley for colour. "Old" potatoes must be used for mashed potato dishes such as Colcannon, Champ, Coddle, and for baked potatoes.

## Champ

1 kg potatoes  
2 bunches of spring onions  
100ml milk  
60g butter  
Salt and freshly ground black pepper

Scrub the potatoes, and cook in boiling salted water until tender, about 25 minutes.

For a more floury result you can boil the potatoes for 10 to 15 minutes, depending on size. Scoop them into a steamer for the next 15 to 20 minutes. Meanwhile chop the spring onions and simmer them in the milk for 5 minutes. Set aside. Peel and mash the potatoes. Tip in half the butter, the hot milk and spring onions, mix well and season to taste. Serve topped with the rest of the butter.

This traditional dish is also made with the tips of fresh spring nettles – use gloves when picking and preparing the nettles! – or a mixture of chopped chives and parsley.



After Fifth form somebody apparently decided I was growing up uncouth, so I was sent for a year to a boarding school in Derry. About which it is sufficient to say, that I survived it. As I had a year to put in before I could go to the Home Economics Training College, I was sent to the Agricultural College in Cookstown to keep me out of mischief. After three years learning to be a Home Economics teacher, it took me less than a year to discover that my talents – if I had any – lay elsewhere. I did a year in a Gibraltarian evacuee camp, which was educational, and longer as a Restaurant and Welfare Officer with NAAFI (the Navy, Army and Air Force Institutes), having added a year or two onto my age.

The Gibraltarian Evacuee Camp consisted of Nissen huts plus a large dining room, kitchen and pantries. We were plagued by mice – one morning I was sorting out bread for breakfast when I found a loaf complete with a nest of baby mice; the bread had been delivered the night before and it hit the dust

bin rather quickly. One of the problems was a shortage of sugar, as it was strictly rationed. I had a row with a Maltese gentleman who was demanding extra sugar when I was pulled back from the counter by the chef and told that he carried a knife, and had been known to use it when annoyed – and that the reason we were particularly short of sugar that morning was that it was he who'd already stolen it...

One evening we had a real treat – we got a delivery of rabbits, forty or fifty of them. Four of us settled down after supper to skin and gut them before cutting them into pieces for next day's dinner. The chef instructed us to separate out the livers and hearts. When we had all the rabbits prepared, the chef cooked all the hearts and livers for the helpers, and we had a feast. Sadly we were never offered rabbit again. In spite of the strict meat rationing, rabbit was never particularly popular in the North of Ireland except as pets.





## CHAPTER 6

# DRIVING

## Chapter 6: Driving

Learning to drive a car took years – I must have been all of eight or nine when I started leaning over in the front seat to grasp the steering wheel and steer my Uncle Bertie's car up Bradshaws Brae on the way to the family quarry on Sundays. My uncle had to check that all the locks were secure – especially those on the shed housing the gelignite and those holding tools. While that was going on, my brother John and I went fishing for sticklebacks in a large pool there or to see that the horses had water when they were stabled in winter.

Amongst other things at the NAAFI, I got three or four lessons in driving a car properly, but unfortunately my experience in steering a car made my army teacher think I was able to drive and he put me in a car to drive to Omagh where I was going to be stationed. I got about three-quarters of the way there when the lights went off and the car stopped. I pushed it to the side of the road as I could see lights round the corner. I walked to the nearest small village, reported to my future boss and blagged my way into a bed for the night – the first time I'd slept a feather bed. Unfortunately, it had been slept in by a very much larger lady so there wasn't much room for movement. In the morning I went to pay my debts and to find a convenience. I met the lady of the house, hanging out washing in the back yard, and asked her where to go and she pointed, I thought, to a large upturned biscuit box in the middle of the yard. To my relief the car that was picking me up appeared – the problem was simple – the battery wasn't charging! The driver jump-started mine and I drove the three or four miles to Omagh rather quickly. Next day I was told to drive my senior officer to the local German prisoner-of-war camp. I pulled in as I was directed, on a slope opposite the flower border, which was the camp commandant's pride and joy. I made to get out of the car – which kept on rolling down. Fortunately my boss, sitting in the front seat, re-

alized what I had done and pulled on the brakes. I confessed I had never been shown how to use the brakes and I got a lecture on the necessity for using them. Later on, when I was working in public relations for the Avoca Mine, the mine manager insisted that whenever I stopped in a mine I not only put on the hand brake, but also left the car in gear every time I stopped anywhere – in the case the hand brake slipped when I was parking – especially when I was near the edges of a quarry. He never knew about a much more tricky incident down the mine: I had gone with a photographer down to where miners were drilling holes and inserting sticks of gelignite, preparing to blow up a sheet of rock. When he had set up his lights and was preparing to set off the camera, the photographer asked what exposure was used to set off the explosion. It was the same rating as the one that worked on the camera. I have never seen anyone work so fast or so methodically take down a camera. We apologized and retreated to a safe distance until the blasting was finished. On another occasion, we were trying to get pictures of the entrance to the underground mine at Tynagh, when it was a question of getting the helicopter angled so that the photographer could take pictures. It tilted as it passed over the edge of the opencast pit: something I wouldn't recommend to anyone with a queasy stomach. Later that same afternoon when we'd just landed at the Gortdrum mine, a Garda car arrived and four guards surrounded us. They were looking for Rose Dugdale who had stolen the Beit pictures a few days earlier: my helicopter pilot had apparently not realized that the Tynagh pictures could be taken so quickly, giving time to cross over the hills and get some pictures in Gortdrum. That wasn't the original plan, and he hadn't checked in the Gortdrum trip with the authorities. As a result, I was

given the task of making sure that he was following the road from there to Dublin.

I stayed in Omagh for a few months and the most famous story of the canteens in the area was of a new supervisor who went into a camp, by the kitchen door as usual, and

ess's office only to see that she was pregnant too. The American army had just left. In another camp in the area, I saw one unfortunate Belgian soldier being escorted to church by the bride's father - he wasn't wielding an actual shotgun, but you had a distinct impression of its presence.

**COOKERY HINTS**

### Gingerbread

By "Housekeeper"

**A** MALONE reader asks for a recipe for a good, dark, moist gingerbread. The recipe which I usually use myself can be enriched with a second egg. I find buttermilk more satisfactory for mixing than sweet milk, although either can be used. For "special occasions"—1 to 2 oz. chopped crystallised ginger, 2 oz. chopped walnuts, and 4 oz. sultanas can be added. Those who like dates in gingerbread could add 4 oz. finely chopped and rolled in the measured flour to prevent them from sinking.

**Ingredients**—4 oz. margarine, 4 oz. sugar, 2 oz. treacle, 2 oz. syrup, 8 oz. flour, 1 egg,  $\frac{1}{2}$  teaspoonful of baking soda, 1 teaspoonful of ground ginger,  $\frac{1}{2}$  teaspoonful each of mixed spice and cinnamon, a pinch of ground cloves or nutmeg, a pinch of salt, and buttermilk or sweet milk to mix.

**Method**—Sieve the flour with the spices, salt and baking soda. Melt the margarine with the sugar, treacle and syrup, and cool slightly. Make a well in the centre of the dry ingredients; add the beaten egg and the syrup mixture, and sufficient buttermilk to give a fairly soft dropping consistency. Put into two large or three small greased and lined sandwich-tins, and bake in a moderately hot oven (375 deg. F.).

This reader asks for a gas cooker setting. If the cooker she is using is a fairly modern one, the setting will be No. 5, but in the older cookers it may vary, according to the make, from No. 4 to No. 6, or Letter E or F. The cake should be set on the fourth shelf from the top of the cooker, and will take 25 to 30 minutes to cook. It is a safe rule, when baking a new recipe, to try fairly rich mixtures such as this, made in sandwich-tins, at the same temperature

## MARCH

**COOKERY HINTS**

### Pineapple Rice

By "Housekeeper"

**W**HERE this rice pudding is being made for children, the first recipe is the more suitable, as it uses milk and not water.

**Pineapple Rice Pudding**—Cook  $1\frac{1}{2}$  oz. rice in 1 pint of milk, either in a greased pie-dish in the bottom of a slow oven, or in a double saucepan, until the rice has absorbed most of the milk, and the mixture is creamy. Stir occasionally, or cover the pie-dish, if the oven is used. Beat in an egg, if available, and re-heat, to cook the egg. Add sugar, syrup or honey to sweeten. Put the boiled pudding into a greased pie-dish. Drain a tin of pieces of pineapple, add sufficient water to give a cupful of liquid, bring to the boil, and thicken slightly with 2 teaspoonful of cornflour or arrowroot. Add the pieces of pineapple, and pile on top of the rice. Decorate with small pieces of glace cherries, and serve hot or cold.

**Pineapple Rice Meringue**—Drain a tin of pineapple pieces, and make up the juice to 1 pint, adding the juice of a lemon and water. Cook  $1\frac{1}{2}$  oz. of rice in this liquid until it is thick and creamy; beat in the pieces of pineapple, sweeten to taste, and put into a greased pie-dish. Make a meringue from the whites of one or two eggs, adding 1 oz. sugar per egg white, and beating until the meringue is stiff and dry. Pile on top of the rice, and bake in a slow oven (300 deg. F.) until the meringue is crisp and coloured a pale fawn. Serve hot

### Potato Soup

By "Housekeeper"

**P**OTATO soup is economical and beginning to a man avoid serving it without a touch of chopped parsley, colouring, as plain white not appeal to the eye.

**Cream of potato** potatoes, 1 large or 2 small stalk of celery, salt and  $\frac{1}{2}$  teaspoonful of flour, a milk, a bunch of herbs if 2 pints of stock or water and chop the celery, peel the potatoes and onion, in a seasoned water or salt they are tender. Rub through a sieve, and mash or beat smooth with an egg white. Blend the flour with the soup, and cook for five minutes. Taste for salt. Just before serving, stir in well-washed and finely chopped parsley or watercress, some cheese, or a well-beaten egg to improve the colouring. Bacon dripping is available in small pieces of the dripping in a soup-pot, and allow the fat to cook gently in it until absorbed all the fat; but allow them to brown, as they darken the colour of the soup.

A grated raw beetroot cooked in this soup, add the other vegetables, potato and beetroot so flavour is improved by bay leaf to the bunch of some may like to add a good of caraway seeds either beetroot or potato soup. soup made with fish bones, skin and trimmings boiled in salted water, and can be flavoured with nutmeg.

Serve potato soup with or dice of toast instead of more usual bread, or with bread.

saw that the chief cook was pregnant, also the two assistant cooks and two waitresses. She hastily beat a retreat to the manager-

After a few months working round Omagh and Enniskillen, I was in Banbridge when peace with Germany was declared and I

was transferred to the south of England for further training with NAAFI. I didn't expect that my most hair-raising experience there would also involve driving a car. I walked into a canteen kitchen for the first time to discover that one of the waitresses was brandishing a large knife and declaring that she would kill anyone who tried to take it from her: she had apparently had a row with her boyfriend who'd said that he couldn't marry her as he already had a wife. She was waiting until he appeared in the canteen, where she proposed to deal with him as he deserved. I don't remember how we persuaded her to leave the knife in the kitchen and get into the back of my car, while the Welfare Officer whom I'd been going to meet for the first time for a briefing got into the front seat to guide me to the nearest place where we could leave the waitress to be calmed down professionally. My colleague thought it was safer to put her in the back seat behind me. I assume the lady thought we were taking her to meet the boy-friend but we had a twenty mile journey so it was something of a scary trip. Every time she moved I got ready to duck and brake, all the time talking to her in the sort of tone I would have used to a spooky horse that couldn't understand words, but liked the reassuring tone of my voice. It was a hair-raising drive even without the knife!

Aunt Bessie sent lots of sweet and cake recipes from New York, but in the early 1950s in Dublin with Robert just two, Michael just one and Patsy on the way, complicated cakes and puddings were out, unless something had to be tested for inclusion in my Belfast Newsletter column. There was also the problem that pumpkins, cranberries and cantaloupe melons had not arrived in the vegetable shop in Ranelagh and would have been even less likely to have arrived in Northern Ireland with rationing still in operation there. I did regret not having tried one cake recipe that required 12 eggs, peach juice, cream and a glass of blackberry, currant or grape jelly. Bessie had sent me a complete set of American measuring cups and spoons when

she realized that British measuring cups and spoons were different from American ones.

Sam and I had moved to Dublin in the early 1950s as he got a job with the Irish Times and I wrote a daily column called "The Housekeeper" for the Belfast Newsletter. My copy was put into the letter box every evening and usually arrived on time next morning.

At weekends when the weather was good we packed all the children into the car and drove up to the Wicklow Mountains or to the beach for a picnic of sandwiches, biscuits and Sydney Specials. At Easter there was the addition of hard-boiled eggs coloured with onion peels, spinach or beet-root. Holidays with seven children were rare, but once we rented a house in Clifden for a month. Sadly it rained almost every day and the highlights of the holiday were watching a cow giving birth and finding a dead porpoise on the beach.

### **Sydney Specials**

175g butter or margarine  
150g flour  
25g cornflakes (lightly crushed)  
50g desiccated coconut  
150g sugar (brown or white)  
1 tsp cocoa  
½ tsp baking powder  
Pinch salt

Pre-heat oven to 325°F, 160°C, gas 3. Mix dry ingredients, melt butter or margarine and stir into dry ingredients. Press into a greased baking tin, approx. 17 x 26 cm. Bake for 20-25 minutes. Leave to cool in tin. Pour over with icing made from 125g icing sugar, 1 tbs cocoa and some boiling water, or coat with 200g melted chocolate. Cut when cold.

### **Shah (ginger) Biscuits**

225g flour  
225g brown sugar  
125g butter or margarine  
¼ tsp baking powder  
Pinch salt  
1 tbs golden syrup  
1 tsp ground ginger

¼ tsp cinnamon  
¼ tsp mixed spice  
1 small egg

Beat butter or margarine with the sugar to a cream, add lightly beaten egg and syrup. Beat well. Sieve all dry ingredients and add to make a soft dough. Roll into balls the size of walnuts and put onto greased tins.

Bake for 15-20 minutes at 375°F, 190°C, gas 5. Cool on a rack.

### No-Cook Chocolate Squares

100g dark chocolate  
200g white chocolate  
Grated rind of ½ orange  
4 tbsp golden syrup  
175g butter  
175g digestive biscuits  
125g raisins  
100g glacé cherries, quartered  
75g dried apricots, chopped  
50g flaked almonds or walnuts

Break up the chocolate and put into a heatproof bowl set in a saucepan of warm water. Add the orange rind, golden syrup and butter. Melt slowly. Stir until smooth. Crush the biscuits and mix with the raisins, cherries, apricots and nuts. Tip into the melted chocolate mixture and spread in a well lined 8 inch square shallow tin. Leave to cool, then chill well in the fridge. Turn out and cut into small squares.

### Chocolate Marshmallow Crisps

Yield 24 bars  
100g miniature marshmallows  
50g butter or margarine  
100g chocolate  
25g chopped nuts  
25g chopped apricots or dates  
75g Kellogg's rice krispies

Melt the butter over a low heat. Add the broken up chocolate. Stir well and add the rest of the ingredients. Press the mixture evenly into a lined and greased 18cm/ 12 inch square tray. Chill until firm and cut into small squares.

When my husband Sam died in 1965, we had gone down to Kerry for the children's holiday leaving him in hospital, as we'd been assured there was nothing much the matter with him, and if we went ahead I could get

the children settled in down in Glenbeigh, with him following in a few days. Sadly he had a massive heart attack the morning after he joined us.

I was earning about 12 or 14 pounds a week at the time, writing cookery, which didn't seem adequate to feed seven children. At this stage I had listened to Sam talking about PR problems involving his clients – and regularly brought down the vacuum cleaner to clean the office in St. Stephen's Green. After two or three days I was called in to make decisions and take over the office, if I could.

At the time, one of the most tedious accounts involved assessing the quantity of footwear made by the factories in Ireland: There were about 30 large and small ones ranging from a major Clarks factory in Dundalk, one making wellington boots in Dublin plus lots of small specialist shoemakers around the country. Each of these sent us – and the relevant government department – the details of each type of shoe they had produced every month and we had to sort and total them quickly and accurately. This was the job that fell to me as I worked myself into public relations, then in its infancy. Having to concentrate on the figures kept me from lapsing into pity for myself and probably saved my sanity.



Amongst the most straightforward accounts we were working on was Expo in Montreal – a question of sending out press releases and holding the occasional press conference in conjunction with the Irish exhibit there – all done at a distance. The Mayor of Montreal came over to Dublin to encourage the Irish to visit the exhibition and we all learned how proud he was of his country and city. A year or two later I had two men landed on me, an Englishman and a French/Canadian who were proposing to sail from Ireland to Canada in the spring. They had berthed just off the Liffey and then sailed down to Kerry, setting off after a few days. It was suggested that they had a date by which they must set off or they would lose their sponsorship. So they left, but unfortunately they ended up shipwrecked off the West coast.

Curiously, when I went to Canada a couple years later, I met a man who remembered that the Frenchman had been famous for swimming down the Fraser river. He saw him being picked up and dried off after swimming very publicly through a town there and getting a lift to the next town. It was several years after I met the sailors that I heard this tale. But the next man that Canada landed on me was peaceably asleep in his own bed, when he was awakened one night by the telephone – the editor of the paper he worked for in Toronto asking if he knew that Nelson's Pillar had been blown up, and if he hadn't done it himself why hadn't he reported it to them.



### **Honor's seven good reasons for courage**

How does a woman, who has been very happily married, face life when her beloved husband, and father of seven, suddenly dies. I asked the advice of Mrs. Honor Edgar, who runs her own public relations business and is now left to bring up her seven children alone.

...She says simply: "To live through each day, or even each hour, at a time . . .  
"Don't listen to those who tell you not to go back to work. And don't be surprised at the speed with which young children accept the fact of death."



## CHAPTER 7

# THE BIG STEW / THE PERENNIALS



## Chapter 7: The Big Stew / The Perennials

The Kinsale Food Forum had, as usual, been fascinating, with "futuurologists" predicting that kitchens would be a thing of the past: all we would need would be a microwave or two to heat up the instant meals we would all be enjoying – and a larger waste bin to hold all the unnecessary wrapping papers and plastics. We would all be breakfasting in our cars on the way in to work, doing all our shopping on the Internet and probably eating genetically modified food that would cure all our ills before we knew we were going to develop them. By the time we had digested or spat out all this information and much more, we were all in a state of suspended animation. I, for one, was not in any humour to argue when Tom Doorley came up and asked if I would be willing to join him in a TV series – I blithely said "Yes" in the firm belief that it would never come off. Months later, when I'd forgotten all about it, came a call looking for suggestions for a trial programme and seven follow-up scripts of the Irish farmhouse cooking, from a simpler age. The series turned out in the end to be an interesting experience – and it apparently went down well in Australia! My contribution to each programme consisted of two dishes, one savoury and the other either bread or a dessert, but they were not necessarily intended to be served together at the same meal. We started out with the classic Dublin Coddle, a dish I had never actually made, until the day I found myself cooking up three different coddles on a single gas hob, in a hidey-hole behind one of the halls at the RDS for a competition organised by the Irish Master Butchers.

The "Moore Street Coddle" came from a woman whose father had a passion for coddle, but whose wife refused to cook it, so whenever she went to off to visit her relations down the country, father got out the coddle pot and daughter went off to Moore Street for "the makings" – onions, sausages, jowl rashers and potatoes – plus a few ripe

tomatoes in season. This was the only coddle that mentioned tomatoes, which were a contribution from the ladies of Moore Street who reckoned that a feed of coddle had its uses on Saturday nights: "T'would sober himself enough to get safely up the stairs but not enough to give him any ideas". The butchers were afraid there wouldn't be enough coddles to give their star some real competition, so I was asked to make Theodora Fitzgibbon's special Coddle, using prize-winning sausages and best back bacon from Donal Hick of Dalkey and vast quantities of onions, with chopped parsley to add a bit of colour to the finished dish. Bidy White Lennon had planned her traditional coddle with a twist – sausages and best streaky rashers from the Ed Hicks' butcher's shop in Sallynoggin, with the sausages on top browned under the grill to make them look more appetising before serving the Coddle. Unfortunately an accident with a lawn mower and a flying stone left Bidy in no humour to stand round waiting for her coddle to cook, and her ingredients and instructions landed in my kitchen accompanied by Ed and Donal's father, Jack Hick – in case I needed any advice.

### Dublin Coddle

*450g bacon bits or streaky bacon  
450g good meaty sausages  
3 large onions, chopped roughly  
1.5 to 1.8 kg potatoes  
A handful of fresh parsley, chopped  
Salt and freshly ground black pepper to taste.  
Water or stock*

*Trim the skin off the bacon and put it into the base of a large heavy saucepan, fat side down. Cut the remaining bacon into chunks. Halve the sausages and brown them quickly in a little oil in a frying pan. Peel the potatoes and cut into large chunks. Put a layer of onions in the pot on top of the bacon skin, then layer in the potatoes, sausages, bacon and onions, dusting the potato layer lightly with pepper. Repeat the layers at least once more, ending with a layer of potatoes. Add no more than two cupfuls of water, or stock and bring to boiling point. Cover and either cook over a very low heat for about 2 hours, or preferably cook in a*

low oven, 250°F, 120°C, gas mark ½ for 2 to 3 hours, until the potatoes and bacon are tender. Stir in the parsley and, if you wish, fresh herbs of your choice. Serve with a glass of Guinness. Note: Traditionally the sausages are not browned, but the competition showed that this improves the appearance of the dish. When cooking on top of the stove, extra water may be needed. Irish exiles in London have been known to smuggle in "the makings" of a mammoth coddle, on the grounds that it makes a substantial breakfast.

The joke of the coddle competition was that the one that was intended to win had been prepared at home by one of the butchers, so that it just had to be heated up. Unfortunately he forgot that it had to be stirred quite often - it burned and was disqualified. Bidy White Lennon's Coddle came first, as befitted a true Dubliner and Theodora Fitzgibbon's Coddle came second. Wexford woman, Florence Campbell of the Farmers' Journal, made her first ever Coddle to come third, and my "Moore Street Coddle" with award-winning sausages from Moira, Co. Armagh, came fourth. It did prove one thing, that coddle is a most forgiving dish, when you consider that three of the coddles were cooked by rotating them on a single gas burner, fortunately out of earshot of the judges!

### **Irish Stew**

This is another traditional dish that can start a small war. There are those who will insist on adding carrots or parsnips to the mixture, and even those, mainly chefs, who prefer to use cutlets instead of the customary neck or other cheap cut of lamb, now that mutton has vanished from the butcher's counter.

675g neck of lamb or gigot chops  
 1 ½ kg floury potatoes, peeled and halved  
 2 large onions, thinly sliced  
 A generous bunch of parsley, chopped  
 1 or 2 sprigs of thyme  
 Salt, pepper and water  
 Optional additions: carrots, parsnips, pearl barley, leeks, dumplings

Trim most of the excess fat from the meat. Cut any large chops into smaller pieces and drop all the meat into a saucepan. Cover with cold water, bring to boiling point. Skim off and discard the scum, drain and rinse the meat. Now layer the meat, onions and potatoes in a heavy saucepan or casserole, seasoning each layer with salt, pepper and thyme. Barely cover with water and bring to boiling point, cover with a tight fitting lid and either simmer on top of the stove or cook in a slow oven, 300°F, 150°C, gas mark 2 for 2 ½ to 3 hours, until the meat is tender. Check the seasoning and serve generously sprinkled with chopped parsley.

Note: This version of Irish Stew comes from the Tyrone/Donegal borders and is thought to be the inspiration of Lancashire Hotpot. The use of parsnips and carrots mainly occurs in the south-west. Irish Stew should never be made with new potatoes nor with lamb cutlets - the practice of one or two French chefs working at one time in Dublin.

### **Phyl O'Kelly's Moussaka with Chilli Bread**

675g minced lamb  
 1 clove of garlic  
 1 tsp salt  
 1 tsp sugar  
 A dash of black pepper  
 Two 225g tins tomato puree  
 75g butter  
 335g aubergines  
 6 scallions (spring onions)  
 1 cup yoghurt  
 225g cottage cheese  
 Cheese Sauce:  
 25g butter  
 25g plain flour  
 100g Cheddar cheese  
 300ml milk  
 A little mustard

Slice the aubergines thinly, spread them out on a tray and sprinkle with a little salt. Leave for a few hours or overnight. Pour off liquid and fry slices in 50g butter. Heat remaining butter and fry the minced lamb until brown. Add the seasonings, sugar, tomato puree and crushed garlic. Cook until the meat is tender. Beat the cottage cheese and yoghurt together and stir in the chopped scallions. Butter an ovenproof dish and place a layer of aubergines in the bottom, cover with a layer of minced lamb.

Follow with a layer of the cottage cheese mixture. Continue in this way, ending with a layer of aubergines.

Make the cheese sauce by melting the butter in a saucepan and stirring in the flour. Cook for 2 minutes, without browning. Remove from the heat and gradually add in the milk. Return to the heat and bring to the boil stirring all the time. Add the mustard and simmer for 1 minute. Remove from the heat and stir in 75g of

the cheese. Continue stirring until the cheese melts and pour the sauce over the top of the Moussaka, sprinkling with the remaining cheese. Bake for about 1 hour at 350°F, 180°C, gas mark 4, until the top is golden brown. Serve with a crisp green salad with French dressing, and the chilli bread.

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## CHAPTER 8

# CHRISTMAS

## Chapter 8: Christmas

There was story in the family, possibly apocryphal, that when it came to the making of the Milecross Christmas cake, my mother would make up the mixture and put it in the oven, before harnessing up Queen Victoria, our tough little black pony, and setting off for Newtownards, 1 ½ miles away, to do her Christmas shopping. Before she left, she warned everybody in the house to leave the fire in the range alone. Shopping done, she'd come back, take the cake out of the oven, stoke up the fire and cook supper for the family. True or not, Queen Victoria was reputed to be over 30 years old when I met her, put out to grass and still enjoying life.

### Turkeys

I have mixed feelings about turkeys. For one thing, they don't have enough sense to come in out of the rain. And if you stupidly insist on their going in to the house to avoid getting their deaths of cold, you would imagine they could see monsters behind the door, ready to pounce on them. Aunt Meta always kept a clutch of turkeys for Christmas and, as they survived the various dangers that Fate conspired to throw in their way, Meta picked out individual birds for her regular customers. One year she had earmarked a particularly magnificent cock turkey for one particular customer, when the damned beast decided to spear himself in the eye with a dirty great stick. The wound promptly turned septic and the vet was sent for. I was instructed to catch the turkey and sit on it, so that the vet could administer a new wonder drug that had just come out, M & B 693. I was left with a tiny tube of the stuff and instructed to apply to the turkey's eye socket three times a day until the wound healed or the turkey died. By which time, and looking at the state of his trousers where he had slipped in our efforts to catch the bird, I gathered that he didn't much care whether it survived or not. The turkey didn't appreciate being shut in on its own for the next ten days, but it survived and I wrote a letter describing the capture and treatment of the bird,

with my opinion as to its ancestry, to my new friend, Sam, who had been posted to New Delhi from a signals base in Blackpool. By the same post came another letter from a WAAF girlfriend, on posh pink perfumed notepaper, proposing matrimony. The earthy tale of the turkey won hands down.

We never kept turkeys ourselves - plenty of hens, the occasional bantam and one lone black and white Muscovy drake: he had a mate at one stage, but I think the fox got her and that put paid to the duck eggs that my mother liked to use for sponge cakes.

I first used natural gas as a cooking fuel one Christmas in Holland, when I was staying with my daughter Berta at an RAF camp in Germany. Berta's husband Mal took me across the border to buy vegetables at a local farmers' market, where in addition to the usual vegetables, we got a big bag of chicory for next to nothing, enough for trying out braised chicory, stuffed chicory and salads, as well as several bags of blanched chicory to put in the freezer. After a few days we went to visit the girls' Dutch school friend Erneste, who had kept a small turkey for me to cook - in case I was feeling bereft away from the kitchen. Small turkey, about 2 ½ kg, small oven, natural gas and the turkey should have come out of the oven at least half an hour earlier than I thought proper. A few years ago when I was testing timings for various meats wrapped in black-lined foil, I at last invested in a meat thermometer to supplement the timer that I had been given at a demonstration in the McDonnells Good Food Kitchen in Sheriff Street years ago, so now I have no excuse for overcooked birds!

Note: Most stuffings can be prepared in advance, kept overnight in the fridge and preferably brought to room temperature before using.

### Classic Stuffing

110g fresh breadcrumbs  
25 to 50g streaky rashers  
50g butter or margarine  
½ tsp chopped fresh thyme or ¼ tsp dried mixed herbs  
1 tbs chopped parsley  
Grated rind of ½ lemon

Salt and pepper

1 egg

Optional: 1 small onion, finely chopped

If using the onion, melt the butter and cook the onion until soft, with the chopped bacon. Cool and mix with the dry ingredients, seasoning lightly. Moisten with beaten egg and use to stuff the breast end of a chicken, or a boned-out joint of lamb or pork. Double quantities may be needed to stuff a turkey breast or make stuffing balls to accompany it. For sausage meat stuffing, add 250g sausage meat to the sautéed onions. The streaky rashers may be included or omitted as desired.

After having lived in Germany for a number of years, Patsy introduced us to chestnut stuffing as a change from the old-fashioned "forcemeat".

### **Chestnut Stuffing**

40g butter

1 large onion, chopped

450g can unsweetened chestnut puree

400g pre-cooked chestnuts (roughly chopped)

55g fresh white breadcrumbs

3 tbsp lemon juice

Salt and freshly ground black pepper

A good pinch of caster sugar

A little grated nutmeg.

Soften the onion in melted butter, cool and mix with the chestnuts, chestnut puree, breadcrumbs, seasonings and lemon juice. Use to stuff turkey breast just before it goes in the oven or make into small balls and arrange on an oiled baking sheet. Spray with a little oil. Bake for 25 to 30 minutes at 400°F, 210°C, gas mark 6, above the turkey, or prepare in advance and cook when convenient, reheating for 15 minutes when the turkey is "resting" before carving.

### **Stuffing with Apricots**

40g butter

1 large onion, chopped

110g ready-to-eat apricots, chopped

110g raisins

Grated rind and juice of 1 orange

1 Bramley apple, peeled and grated

50 g white breadcrumbs

2 tbsp chopped parsley

Salt and pepper to taste.

Soften the onion in the butter, stir in the apple and orange juice, then mix in the other ingredients. Use to stuff turkey or a boned and rolled joint of pork.

### **The Stuffing Loaf**

1 pack rinded streaky rashers

1 large onion, finely chopped

25g butter

500g sausage meat or skinned sausages

4 large potatoes, steamed, peeled and mashed

50g cranberries if available

2 tbsp chopped parsley

1 tsp chopped mixed herbs

1 large egg, beaten

Salt and pepper to taste

Cook the onion until soft, in the melted butter. Beat into the sausagemeat until evenly mixed in, then add the beaten egg. Stir in the potato and cranberries with the herbs. Try out by frying a teaspoonful of the mixture on a hot pan. Season the mixture to taste and set aside. Brush a 900g loaf tin lightly with oil. Stretch the rashers on a flat surface, using the back of a knife, and use to line the base and sides of the loaf tin, letting the ends overlap the edges of the tin. Spoon in the sausage meat mixture, making it level. Overlap the ends of the bacon over the filling to cover it completely. Cover with foil and bake at 400°F, 200°C, gas mark 6 for about 20 minutes. Remove the foil and return to the oven until cooked through, about 25 minutes more. Cool for about 10 minutes, shake to loosen it in the tin and turn out. Serve hot or cold.

### **Christmas Puddings and Cakes**

Christmas puddings involved considerable advance preparation: buying suet from the butcher, and chopping it by hand. (You had to dust it with flour to stop it sticking, then discard all the stringy bits before you weighed it out.) Then all the fruit had to be washed and dried, picked over to get rid of small stones, the fat muscatel raisins had to be stoned and the candied peel chopped. A batch loaf was specially purchased and left for three or

four days to dry out before being made into breadcrumbs. The actual mixing was always done on a Thursday, Annie's afternoon off, because although she loved the Christmas cake and mince pies, she wouldn't have touched them had she known that Father's therapeutic whiskey bottle had been raided to add to their keeping qualities.

Aunt Bessie was the one who specialised in sponge cakes after she discovered that she couldn't make her favourite American Angel cake successfully with Irish flour. She stayed with us for nearly a year when my mother had been diagnosed with cancer, leaving her husband and two sons to cope on their own in New York. We had a balance scales for weighing out butter, so you put a bowl on one side of the scales and added pennies to the other side until they were level. Then you added 3 eggs to the pennies and sufficient sugar to the bowl to make the scales level again. After that you weighed out the flour against two of the eggs. The eggs were cracked one a time into the well washed and dried bowl, then whisked by hand until light and fluffy with the caster sugar beaten in until the mixture was thick enough to hold the trails from the whisk before a dash of vanilla essence or grated lemon rind was added. Then the flour was sifted and folded into the eggs. The sandwich tins were lined with rounds of margarine paper – both my mother and my aunts were of an economical nature – the string on every package and parcel was carefully un-knotted, rolled up and stored in the string box. We did buy special white string to use when trussing chickens for sale!

The most difficult thing about the sponge cake was getting the oven to the right temperature, especially when the wind was in the wrong direction. Much later, the arrival of an electric stove made cake-baking much more reliable in theory, as wartime rationing made cakes a luxury. Over the years since then, I have tried many different recipes for rich fruit cakes, Christmas cakes and wedding cakes. After I was married, Sam's

Aunt Erna used to send us a superb Texan style Christmas cake, and for years I used to try and replicate it - in vain. I finally found an Australian recipe that did the trick for a couple of years and then somebody borrowed that copy of the Australian Women's Weekly "Christmas" and although we're not exactly back to square one, making that cake is a interesting exercise. It had the distinct advantage that it was baked in a ring tin and didn't have to be iced or decorated.

Then when I had almost forgotten how it was, my daughter Jackie found the original Texas cake when she was working in America. The company Collin Street Bakery, was still in business and posting cakes all over the world. Later Delia Smith produced a recipe in her Christmas collection which used candied fruits and nuts, plus three or four different liqueurs used to soak the fruit for about a week.

### **Tropical Fruit Cake**

175g dried apricots, chopped  
175g glacé cherries, chopped  
125g glacé pineapple, chopped  
125g crystallised ginger, chopped  
125g candied peel  
125g pecan nuts, chopped roughly  
70g angelica, chopped  
6 tbs brandy  
250g butter  
250g caster sugar  
Rind + juice ½ lemon  
70g ground almonds  
4 large eggs, beaten  
250g plain flour  
Pinch salt

Mix first 8 ingredients, cover, leave 2 hours or overnight.

Set oven to cool, 300°F, 150°C, gas 2. Cream butter, sugar, lemon rind + juice until light and fluffy and pale in colour. Beat in ground almonds, then the eggs gradually. Sift in flour and salt, fold them into the creamed mix, add soaked fruit and any remaining juice. Mix well. Put into a 20 cm round tin. Bake 1 hour, reduce temperature to 275°F, 140°C, and bake for further 1 ¼ to 1 ½ hrs.

The cake can be decorated with dried fruit and nuts, and glazed with a mixture of apricot jam and brandy heated together.

**Aunt Bessie's Sponge Cake**

4 eggs  
 4 tbsp sugar  
 5 tbsp flour  
 ½ tsp vanilla or grated lemon rind

Whisk the eggs in a bowl. Add the sugar gradually and continue whisking until the mixture is light and stiff. Fold in the flavouring, then the sieved flour, very gently. Turn into two greased and base-lined sponge cake tins and bake in a pre-heated oven at 350°F, 180°C, gas mark 4, for about 35 minutes. Turn out and cool on a wire rack. Strip off the lining paper when cool, spread with raspberry jam or lemon curd and whipped cream, if desired.

When I arrived at the Ulster Dairy School in Cookstown, a day late, I was shown into the dormitory, my bed was pointed out and I was introduced to Mary McMullan and Gertie McNally, who were to be occupying the beds next to me for the next eight months— and left to get on with it. Mary married a Canadian Air Force pilot and went to live in British Columbia, at first on a University campus as Andy was entitled to a student scholarship. As with today's students, the allowance didn't allow for cakes and caviar — more meat loaves and potatoes. Mary introduced me to her favourite Canadian cookery books produced by the two local flour companies, and I still use a variation of one of their recipes for mincemeat. The original used butcher's suet which had to be chopped by hand until it became available in a packet neatly chopped. Now packet suet is a vegetarian option and never saw the inside of a cow.

Cromwell was particularly insistent on banning mince pies when he was abolishing the heathen festivities that surrounded the Christmas Winter Solstice. It is doubtful if he would have heard of Good King Wenceslas, but he wouldn't have approved of him either.

Although I sometimes make mincemeat using suet, my daughters who were living abroad asked if I could send an alternative

recipe, as suet was not available. So this recipe, which uses butter, is very popular.

**Mincemeat with butter**

450g each raisins, sultanas, apples  
 225g chopped apricots  
 250g currants  
 125g candied peel, chopped cherries,  
 450g demerara sugar  
 250g butter  
 ½ tsp cinnamon  
 2 tsp mixed spice  
 A little grated nutmeg  
 Grated rind and juice of 2 oranges and 1 lemon  
 ½ cup port — or whatever  
 ½ cup whiskey or brandy

Cook the apples with the sugar, adding a little water or orange juice to keep them from sticking. Take off the heat and stir in the butter until melted. Add orange and lemon rind, juice and spices. Mix well before adding the dried fruit. Stir over a gentle heat, then add a glass of whiskey or brandy if you want it to keep well. Cover and set aside for 24 to 48 hours, then put into jars, cover and store in a cool place.

Chopped walnuts can be added — about 100g, if liked.

**Festive Treats**

All over Europe people have made their cakes and desserts for special occasions and some of them, like the German and Swiss "Stollen", a fruit loaf, have reached our supermarkets as well as American Muffins! My Stollen recipe is in the German tradition. In theory the dough is sufficient to make two Christmas loaves, and perhaps German ovens are larger than Irish ones, but I find this makes at least four large Stollen. Frau Steinbauer, whose recipe this is, said that you always had to make plenty of Stollen. Her friends in Cologne loved them as Christmas presents and they are now popular in Dublin. Well wrapped, they keep in the freezer for 6 months or more.



### **Frau Steinbauer's Stollen**

2 kg plain flour  
¾ litre lukewarm milk  
120g fresh yeast (60g dried yeast)  
350g sugar  
1 or 2 eggs, beaten  
600g melted butter and lard  
Grated peel of 2 lemons  
20g salt  
Nutmeg and cardamom as desired  
200g almonds or walnuts, roughly chopped  
20g bitter almonds (optional)  
300g raisins  
300g sultanas  
200g currants  
150g candied peel  
100g glace cherries, chopped  
125ml rum  
Few drops vanilla  
About 500g almond paste, preferably home-made

Put the dried fruit, nuts, rum and vanilla into a bowl. Cover and leave overnight to soak. Put the yeast into a cup and add 2 tsp. sugar and about ½ cup lukewarm milk. Set aside until it froths up. Meanwhile sieve together the flour, salt, and spices if used. Mix with the sugar. Make a well in the centre. Tip in the yeast mixture, and the eggs. Begin to stir in the flour. Then stir in the lukewarm butter and lard, followed by the milk to make softish dough. Knead lightly on a floured surface, turn into an oiled bowl, cover and leave to rise until doubled in bulk. Knock down, then knead in the dried fruit, soaked in the rum. Divide the dough into about four balls and the almond paste into the same number of pieces. Knead each piece of dough lightly and flatten into an oval. Place a sausage of almond paste lengthways down the dough and fold over, brushing the edges with milk to help them to stick. Transfer the loaves onto greased baking sheets, cover with teatowels and put to rise again. When doubled in size, push in any raisins that are sticking out of the dough. Brush over with milk and put into a pre-heated oven. Oven temperature: Pre-heat to 450°F, 220°C, gas mark 7, and as soon as the Stollen go into the oven, lower the heat to 400° F, 200° C, gas mark 4. Bake for about 55 min., changing the trays up and down the oven as the loaves colour. Brush with melted butter when they are almost cooked and return to the oven for 5 min. more. Cool on wire racks and store surplus in the freezer, well wrapped.

### **Chocolate and Apricot Panforte**

Panforte ("Strong bread" in Italian,) is a traditional Tuscan spiced fruit bread from Siena with a long and romantic history, which was originally made with very expensive pepper.

250ml liquid glucose  
170g sugar  
220g blanched almonds, toasted and roughly chopped  
250g dried apricots, chopped  
185g cream flour, sieved  
40g cocoa  
1tsp ground cinnamon  
180g dark chocolate  
Also  
Icing sugar to dust.

Pre-heat the oven to 350°F, 180°C, gas mark 4. Grease a small loaf tin and set aside. Put the glucose and sugar in a saucepan and heat gently until the sugar melts. Bring to boiling point, then simmer for 3 minutes or until the syrup has thickened slightly. Add the chocolate and stir.

Put the almonds and apricots in a bowl. Sieve the flour, cocoa and cinnamon over them, and mix. Add the syrup and chocolate, mixing well. Pour into the prepared tin and bake for 20 minutes, or until the panforte is spongy to the touch. Leave to cool before cutting into pieces and dust with sieved icing sugar before serving.

### **Orange, Fig and Pecan Muffins**

1 orange  
125ml orange juice  
120g dried figs, chopped  
125g butter, melted  
1 egg beaten  
180g flour  
1 tsp baking soda  
1 tsp baking powder  
½ tsp salt  
150g sugar  
125g pecan nuts or walnuts

Pre-heat the oven to 350°F, 180°C, gas mark 4, grease 8 deep muffin pans, or line them with paper muffin cases. Wash and roughly chop the orange, discarding the pips. Put the orange, and orange juice into a food processor and pulse until the orange is finely chopped.

Add the figs, egg, and butter and pulse to combine them. Sieve the flour with the baking powder, baking soda and salt and add to the processor, then add the sugar and mix until moistened. Stir in the pecans or walnuts gently. Divide the mixture between the muffin tins or cases, filling them three-quarters full. Bake for 20 minutes or until cooked through and remove from the muffin tins. Leave to cool on a wire rack. If you like, wrap fancy paper or cellophane round the muffins and decorate them with ribbons.

There was one famous Christmas when we were planning to sit down seven or eight to table, including my vegetarian daughter-in-law, for whom we had planned to try making a Spanakopitta, plus an array of seasonal vegetables. Late on Christmas Eve my son

Michael rang to ask if I knew of any hotel or restaurant which would take a late booking for Christmas dinner as his brother-in-law had

promised to take his mother out and save her the chore of cooking and washing up on Christmas Day, but had forgotten to book a table. Two more for the table! Fortunately I don't subscribe to the theory that you should buy a turkey that is just large enough to go round so that you only have the bones to get rid of next day, like one of Jackie's bosses who didn't approve of left-overs. Funnily enough, it is Jackie who likes diving out late on Christmas Eve to see if she can buy a bargain bird in case we'd run short.





## CHAPTER 9

### DUBLIN LAWYER

## Chapter 9: Dublin Lawyer

Understandably, up till now, my acquaintance with lobsters has been brief: I may have seen one cooked during my teacher-training course – certainly once when I was given a couple on holiday in Curracloe. I managed to deal with them to the amazement of the owner of the holiday cottage on the beach where we were staying - she had never seen lobsters crawling round her kitchen floor. She thought we were mad to be eating them but we all survived. The next one I encountered was in Ballymaloe, cooked by Myrtle Allen herself and the third one, Dublin Lawyer, was also in Myrtle's company at a Kinsale food festival. It wasn't that I didn't like lobster, but that it soared out of my price range!

The kindest way to set about cooking a lobster is to put it in the freezer – in a plastic bag, with the claws tied for at least two hours so that it hibernates, becomes stiff and eventually dies. Take it out and lay it out on a board, cover the tail with a thick cloth, grasp it firmly and plunge a sharp heavy knife through the cross at the back of the head – consult your fishmonger if necessary! – turn the lobster over on its back and split it in half. Remove the gritty stomach sac from the head and the long thin black intestine and discard them. The green “coral” and “tomalley” or liver will turn pink when they are cooked. Allow about 450g of live lobster per serving.

### Dublin Lawyer

*1 fresh lobster (about 1 kg.) prepared as above  
150ml cream  
50g butter  
4 tbsp Irish whiskey  
Salt and pepper to taste*

*Remove the meat from the tail, claws and head of the lobster. Set aside the shells. Cut the lobster flesh into pieces. Heat the butter without letting it colour, in a shallow saucepan. Add the pieces of lobster including the coral and tomalley and cook for a few minutes. Take off the heat. Warm the whiskey in a ladle and pour over the lobster. Let it flame up and die down.*

*Put the saucepan back over the heat and pour in the cream, letting it warm through over a very low heat. Season to taste with sea salt and freshly ground black pepper. Do not allow the mixture to boil. Spoon the creamy mixture into the lobster shells and serve at once with freshly cooked long grain rice or a green salad.*

As I have suggested above, my family cooking at that time was more likely to be based on lamb lap, pork belly, shin of beef or mince than lobster or even chicken which was free range at the time and another luxury. The routine “shop” was augmented when I was commissioned by some public relations agencies to create recipes for their clients, then set them up for photography. Needless to say, the dishes were chilled on the spot and frozen to add variety to the basic fare. You can imagine my horror when one photographer suggested I brighten up one dish of steak with the application of some engine oil. Fortunately the nearest shop was minutes away and I was able to shut up about the “perks” involved in creating and testing dishes. After all, you had to taste the dishes to make sure they were appetising!

By this time we had progressed from a meat safe outside the kitchen door to a small freezer, so we could buy larger quantities of meat and part-prepare it ready to be turned into different dishes in a few minutes. I had found a butcher in Benburb Street who sold meat to the army barracks opposite and whose “lamb lap” which their cooks didn't use came at a truly bargain price – about a shilling a pound. Admittedly you had to bone it out before you could stuff it and roll it. If you removed the excess fat you could do a lamb stew or casserole, or put it through the mincer and use instead of minced beef. Mixing it with sausage meat and onion to make burgers and meat balls is another option.

### The Kookoo

I don't know how I landed myself with the task of making a “Kookoo” for Brush Sheils to bring to Gay Byrne's “Late, Late Show”, a his favourite vegetarian dish. Nor do I know

where I got the inspiration from - except that it sounded like a good idea at the time. A Kookoo is like the classic Spanish Tortilla or potato omelette. It is cooked slowly until it is coloured underneath and then turned over carefully by covering it with a plate and then sliding it back on to the pan upside down to cook the other side. You can cheat and brown it under a hot grill instead. You don't get the same texture but it's better than having the omelette sliding onto the floor.

### **Kookoo with Herbs in the Persian style**

*About 250g mixed parsley and coriander*  
*½ bunch spring onions*  
*2 lettuce leaves*  
*1 tsp plain flour*  
*½ tsp baking powder*  
*Salt and pepper to taste*  
*5 medium eggs*  
*Olive oil for frying*

*Wash and spin dry the lettuce, coriander and parsley, or double the quantity of parsley alone. Chop finely with the spring onions. Mix in the flour, baking powder and seasoning. Beat the eggs until light. Heat enough oil to make a*

*thin layer in a heavy frying pan. Whisk the herb mixture into the egg and pour at once into the frying pan. Lower the heat immediately, cover the pan and leave to cook for 15 to 20 minutes until a crust forms on the base. Turn over carefully using a large spatula, and continue to cook until lightly coloured underneath. Or, pop the frying pan under a pre-heated grill and cook until browned. Serve cut in wedges, with a rice dish or a salad.*

*Turn this into a vegetarian main meal for four by adding a small cauliflower, about 500g in weight. Steam the florets until they are barely tender, cool and chop roughly. Heat 2 tbs oil in a frying pan, add 2 or 3 chopped cloves of garlic, 2 trimmed and sliced spring onions and heat together for ½ minute. Add the cauliflower and season generously with black pepper, adding salt to taste. Set aside. Whisk 7 large eggs well and beat in ¼ tsp baking soda and 2 tbs chopped parsley, stir in the cauliflower mixture and 2 tbs chopped parsley. Heat 1 tbs oil or unsalted butter in the frying pan, pour in the cauliflower and egg mixture and cook as above.*

## CHAPTER 10

## BARBECUES



## CHAPTER 10

# BARBECUES

## Chapter 10: Barbecues

The first barbecue I attempted was a trifle fraught. Of course I knew the theory but as I reckoned you needed a proper barbecue which I didn't have, I just enjoyed other people's barbecues. Then came a friend who was giving a party to introduce everyone to her new house out in Dalkey and decided nothing would do her but a barbecue party and that I should do the chicken and her husband the burgers. She turned up in my kitchen with a sackful of chicken legs and wings and dumped them on the floor.

I washed them in batches, boiled them up and arranged them on roasting tins. After a thorough cooking to make sure that any potential bug had turned up its toes, they were basted with a barbecue sauce, and carefully transported to Dalkey to be heated up – in the oven, and nobody suffered any ill effects! Since then, I have learned more of the techniques from the experts at the Barbecue Championships in Lisdoonvarna, but we drew the line at tasting Barbecued Scotch Eggs which had been sitting, raw, in the sun for several hours before being cooked.

The Barbecue championships ran for one week in September and the Bachelor Festival for the whole month. A group of us had been invited by Jim White to become judges at his World Barbecue Championships held during the first week of the September Bachelor Festival. As it counted as a qualification for several American contests, there were competitors practising their teamwork and their "spiel" to impress the judges – we were allowed to ask general questions, but not to ask for recipes. That would have been pointless for many of the "amateur" barbecuers brought their own sauces and marinades with them from America.

One of the Americans insisted that everybody in the ballroom stood and saluted the American flag and pledged our loyalty to it before the winners were announced. He

later ran one of the restaurants in the Parisian Disney World. We found out that others successfully patented their sauces for sale – usually the hotter the better. One of the Irish-based competitors offered us slices of cake doused with a superb lemon sauce: sadly it also remained a secret!

The cooking of Spare Ribs was special and had a whole afternoon devoted to it: Local butchers were delighted as the orders came in early and latecomers could find that they were sold out. One poor South African contestant was saddled with very lean bacon ribs which were very chewy indeed. This was before the days when you could walk into your butcher's shop and see trays of marinated ribs ready to bring home and put straight onto a disposable barbecue and serve with salads and lots of garlic bread.

### Spareribs

1 ½ kg meaty pork spareribs

*Basting Sauce:*

1 tbsp mild or medium hot chilli sauce

4 tbsp tomato puree

5 tbsp water

3 tbsp sherry or cider vinegar

2 tbsp vegetable oil

1 tbsp Worcestershire sauce

1 tbsp soft brown sugar

2 tsp wholegrain mustard

1 tsp paprika

1 large clove of garlic, crushed

Freshly ground pepper to taste

*Have the ribs cut into single pieces and arrange cut sides up in a shallow dish or roasting tin.*

*Sprinkle with water, cover with foil and bake at 325°F, 170°C, for 1 ½ hours. Combine all the other ingredients adding the juices from the dish or tin. Baste the ribs with the sauce and either return to the oven uncovered, raising the temperature to 375°F, 190°C, gas mark 5, for about ½ hour more or until the ribs are tender, turning them and basting several times with the remaining sauce, or finish cooking on the barbecue, brushing often with the sauce, until cooked through.*

*Note: This is a very mild basting sauce, extra chilli sauce can be added if desired.*

**Mary's Chicken Wings**

675g chicken wings  
 6 spring onions, chopped  
 120ml soy sauce  
 120ml red wine  
 Salt and freshly ground pepper

Cut the chicken wings in half and remove the tips. Season well. Place in a greased roasting tin. Sprinkle with the onions and pour over the soy sauce and red wine. Bake at 400°F, 200°C, gas mark 6 for ½ hour. Turn the wings and baste with the juices. Return to the oven, lowering the temperature to 300°F, 150°C, gas mark 2 for 45 minutes more, or until the chicken is cooked. Baste again after half an hour and check to make sure that the sauce is not dried up. (About 8 servings)

**Grilled Chicken Drumsticks**

1 ½ kg / 3 lb chicken drumsticks  
 4 cloves of garlic, peeled  
 3 shallots peeled  
 1 bunch of chives, trimmed  
 1 green pepper, seeded and chopped  
 1 or 2 jalapeno chillies  
 1 stalk of celery, chopped  
 3 tbsp flat leaf parsley  
 2 tsp fresh thyme, chopped  
 2 tbsp lime juice  
 2 tbsp soy sauce  
 2 tbsp olive oil  
 Salt and freshly ground black pepper

Place the chicken pieces in a baking dish and cover with the marinade: Combine the garlic, shallots, chives, green pepper, celery, chillies, parsley and thyme in a food processor and blend to a smooth paste. Add 2 tbsp lime juice, the soy sauce and oil. Process to blend. Taste for seasoning and add more lime juice if required. Pour over the chicken pieces, cover and leave to marinate in the fridge for 4 to 12 hours. Pre-heat the grill, oil the grill grid, drain the chicken pieces and arrange on the grid. Cook until browned, turn over and cook on the other side. Brush the chicken with the reserved marinade as it cooks, to keep it moist. Transfer the chicken to a serving plate and serve with a dish of stir-fried vegetables or oven chips.

**Spare Ribs South African - style**

1 kg pork ribs  
 Marinade:  
 50g butter  
 1 tbsp vegetable oil  
 1 large red onion, finely chopped  
 250ml tomato ketchup  
 2 tbsp Worcestershire sauce  
 4 tbsp Demerara sugar  
 5 tbsp lemon juice  
 5 tbsp honey  
 2 tbsp cider vinegar  
 250ml water

Heat the butter and oil in a fairly large saucepan or frying pan and add the onion. Stir over a moderate heat until soft but not coloured. Add the remainder of the marinade ingredients and bring to boiling point. Lower the heat at once and simmer for about 10 minutes until the marinade thickens slightly. Leave to cool to lukewarm. Separate the ribs into one or two rib sections depending on size and arrange in a dish which fits them comfortably. Pour on the marinade, cover and leave to soak up the flavours as long as possible – at least two or three hours, or overnight in the fridge. Allow to come to room temperature, if necessary, before draining off the marinade and reserving it. Cook the ribs on a moderately hot barbecue, or in the oven at 375°F, 190°C, gas mark 5, turning them several times. Meanwhile stir ½ cup of water into the reserved marinade, simmer, stirring occasionally, until it thickens slightly and pour over the ribs. Serve with rolls or garlic bread, and lots of paper napkins. You may find it advisable not to add all the honey at once, but rather add about three-quarters of it, boil it up and taste it, to see if it is too sweet, before adding the rest of the honey or a little more lemon juice.

**Brian's Sauce for Tortellini**

1 large onion  
 300ml / ½ pt stock  
 Small tin of tomato puree  
 1 carton plain yoghurt.  
 2 or 3 cloves of garlic  
 Marjoram, basil, thyme  
 Pepper and salt  
 Tabasco  
 Worcestershire sauce  
 1 lemon  
 Oil  
 Ginger, paprika, nutmeg



Chop onion and brown in oil. Add the stock, tomato puree and yoghurt. Add a pinch of this and a sprinkle of that, then stir in the tortellini and cook for 25 minutes on a low heat or until the tortellini is soft.

Note: Stir the chopped garlic into the fried onion and cook for a few seconds





## CHAPTER 11

### CAKES

## Chapter 11: Cakes

### Anne O'Neill's Boiled Fruit Cake

Put into a saucepan:

335g mixed dried fruit  
100g chopped cherries  
300ml cider or milk  
150g margarine or butter  
5 tbsp honey or golden syrup

Heat together gently for 5 minutes, stirring occasionally. Stir in  $\frac{1}{2}$  tsp baking soda and leave to cool slightly.

Sieve together:

335g plain flour  
 $\frac{1}{4}$  tsp grated nutmeg  
 $\frac{1}{4}$  tsp mixed spice and add the melted mixture alternately with 2 beaten eggs and, if desired, a few drops of gravy browning.

Put into greased and lined loaf tins and bake at 300°F, 155°C, Gas mark 2 for 2  $\frac{1}{2}$  to 3 hours. Allow to cool for 5 minutes before turning out. Do not cut until next day.

### Gur Cake

350g stale bread, crusts removed  
75g cream flour  
1 tsp baking powder  
25g brown sugar  
50g butter or margarine  
2 tsp mixed spice  
225g mixed dried fruit  
1 large egg  
150ml milk  
Grated rind of 1 lemon  
350g short crust pastry

Crumble up the bread roughly, and soak in cold water. Set aside for an hour. Squeeze dry. Meanwhile sieve the flour, mixed spice and baking powder, add the sugar and rub in the butter, then add the fruit. Stir in the bread and beat the mixture until well mixed.

Use half the pastry to line a 10 by 12 inch baking tin. Spread with the bread mixture, and top with the remaining pastry. Prick the top of the pastry well and bake at 370°F, 190°C, gas mark 5 for 1  $\frac{3}{4}$  hours. Cool in the tin, dust with sugar and serve cut in squares as a dessert. Or use an after-school snack.

### Mother Dominic's Porter Cake

125g chopped mixed peel  
225g currants  
225g raisins  
225g sultanas  
225g sugar  
225g butter or margarine  
1 to 2 tsp mixed spice  
1 bottle of Guinness (275ml)  
4 eggs, beaten  
450g plain flour  
1 tsp bread soda dissolved in  
1 tbsp milk

Simmer the first eight ingredients together gently for  $\frac{1}{2}$  hour and leave to cool. Drop in the eggs and beat well. Then add the flour gradually, stirring until well mixed. Turn into a large cake tin and bake in a moderate oven, 350°F, 180°C, gas mark 4, for about 2 hours until cooked through. Beer, or even pineapple or orange juice can be used instead of Guinness, although neither the colour nor the flavour will be the same!

### Mrs Pettit's Chocolate Cakes

Makes four 9 inch or six 7 inch round cakes. A favourite for birthdays and ideal for school or other cake sales. A second pair of hands makes the icing less hazardous.

900g plain flour  
900g caster sugar  
450g hard margarine  
100g cocoa  
8 medium eggs  
600ml buttermilk  
12 tbsp hot water  
1 rounded tsp baking soda  
1 tsp salt  
1 tsp vanilla essence

Icing:  
250g soft brown sugar  
250g margarine  
6 tbsp cocoa  
9 tbsp water  
 $\frac{1}{4}$  tsp vanilla  
675g icing sugar

Sieve the flour with the cocoa, mixing well, then cut and rub in the margarine. Add the sugar and salt. Make a well in the centre and add the lightly beaten eggs gradually, followed by

the milk and vanilla. Dissolve the baking soda in the water and stir in to give a smooth dropping consistency using more water if necessary. Bake for 25 to 30 minutes in a pre-heated oven at 400°F, 200°C, gas mark 6, until firm to the touch and cooked through. Use four 9 inch or six 7 inch tins. Switch the cakes round in the oven about half way through the cooking time so that they cook as evenly as possible. Cool slightly and turn out on wire racks.

To make the icing: Put the brown sugar into a saucepan and mix evenly with the cocoa and then the water. Bring to the boil, stirring, and cook gently for 1 minute to get rid of the raw cocoa flavour. Add the vanilla. Cut the cakes in two and arrange in pairs on a flat surface. Have the icing sugar sieved into a bowl and add the cocoa mixture gradually, beating all the time. Cool slightly. Quickly spread some icing on the base of each cake and top with the other halves. Spread icing over the top of the cakes and add any decorations before the icing sets. An assistant is virtually essential at this stage although it is possible to do this icing single-handed if you do one cake at a time and keep the icing warm as you work - and use the simplest decorations possible!

Posh Variation: substitute 1 to 2 tbsp liqueur for the same amount of water in the icing and omit the vanilla, if desired.

These cakes can be open frozen wrapped and stored for a month or so.

### **Biddy's Cheesecake (6 to 8 servings)**

Base:

175g unsifted plain flour  
110g butter, cut into small cubes  
Cold water to mix

Filling:

225g soft fresh cheese (Goat cheese or Philadelphia)  
2 medium eggs, beaten  
90g caster sugar  
Grated rind and juice of 1 lemon  
2 tsp cornflour  
60g raisins (soaked for 10 minutes in hot water, then drained)\*

Topping:

1 tbs icing sugar.

Rub the butter into the flour until it resembles

breadcrumbs (if using a processor, do not over-mix). Add the water a tablespoonful at a time, using only enough to give a firm dough. Turn out onto a floured surface and knead lightly until smooth and silky. Cover with cling-film and chill for 20 to 30 minutes. Roll out thinly on a floured surface to fit a greased 23cm/9 inch fluted-edged tart or flan tin. Prick the bottom of the pastry with a fork. Line the top and sides of the pastry case with baking parchment and fill with crusts or baking beans. Bake for 15 minutes at 375°F, 190°C, gas mark 5, or until the base is firm. Remove the beans or crusts and the lining paper and return to the oven for 5 minutes.

\*If preferred, to give it a kick, soak the raisins for several hours or overnight with about 2 tablespoonfuls of whiskey, rum, brandy or cream liqueur. Do not drain before adding to filling.

Meanwhile blend the cornflour with 2 tbs of the lemon juice and set aside. Beat the soft cheese, caster sugar, eggs, lemon rind and remaining juice together with the melted butter, into the cheese mixture. Either tip this mixture into the pastry case and scatter with the drained raisins, or if using liquor, stir the soaked raisins and any remaining liquor into filling and spread evenly into pastry case. Bake at 375°F, 190°C, gas mark 5 for 30 to 35 minutes until the filling has set and lightly browned. Cool in the tin, and when cold remove to a serving plate and dust with sieved icing sugar.

Note: instead of the pastry base, you can use a crumb crust or a richer sweet flan pastry: ready-rolled frozen short pastry is to be avoided.

### **Kate's Strawberry Cheesecake: No Cooking (8 servings)**

Base:

200g crushed digestive biscuits  
100 unsalted butter, melted

Filling:

3 level teaspoons powdered gelatine\*  
142ml carton single cream  
300ml full-fat soft cheese  
100g golden caster or caster sugar  
3 tbs lemon juice  
Finely grated rind of ½ lemon  
300g strawberries, hulled and copped  
142 ml carton double and whipping cream  
1 medium egg white.

Decoration:

200g halved or quartered strawberries

Combine the melted butter and crushed biscuits and press into the base of a greased loose-bottomed 24cm round tin, at least 5 cm deep. Chill in the fridge. Put the single cream in a saucepan and bring just to boiling point. Add the gelatine, soaked if necessary (check with the packet), cool to lukewarm. Beat the cheese in a bowl with the sugar, lemon rind and juice until smooth and creamy. Mix with the cream and gelatine and the chopped strawberries. Whisk the double cream until it stands in soft peaks and fold into the strawberry mixture. Pour onto the crumb base, smooth over the top and chill until set, 2 ½ to 3 hours or overnight. Remove from the tin, running a knife round the side of the cake tin to loosen it. Decorate with the remaining strawberries. Can be made 24 hours in advance and kept the fridge. Can be tricky to freeze. Other fruits in season can be used –blackberries, blueberries, a mixture of raspberries and redcurrants, and a pack of frozen mixed fruits, can be folded while still frozen.

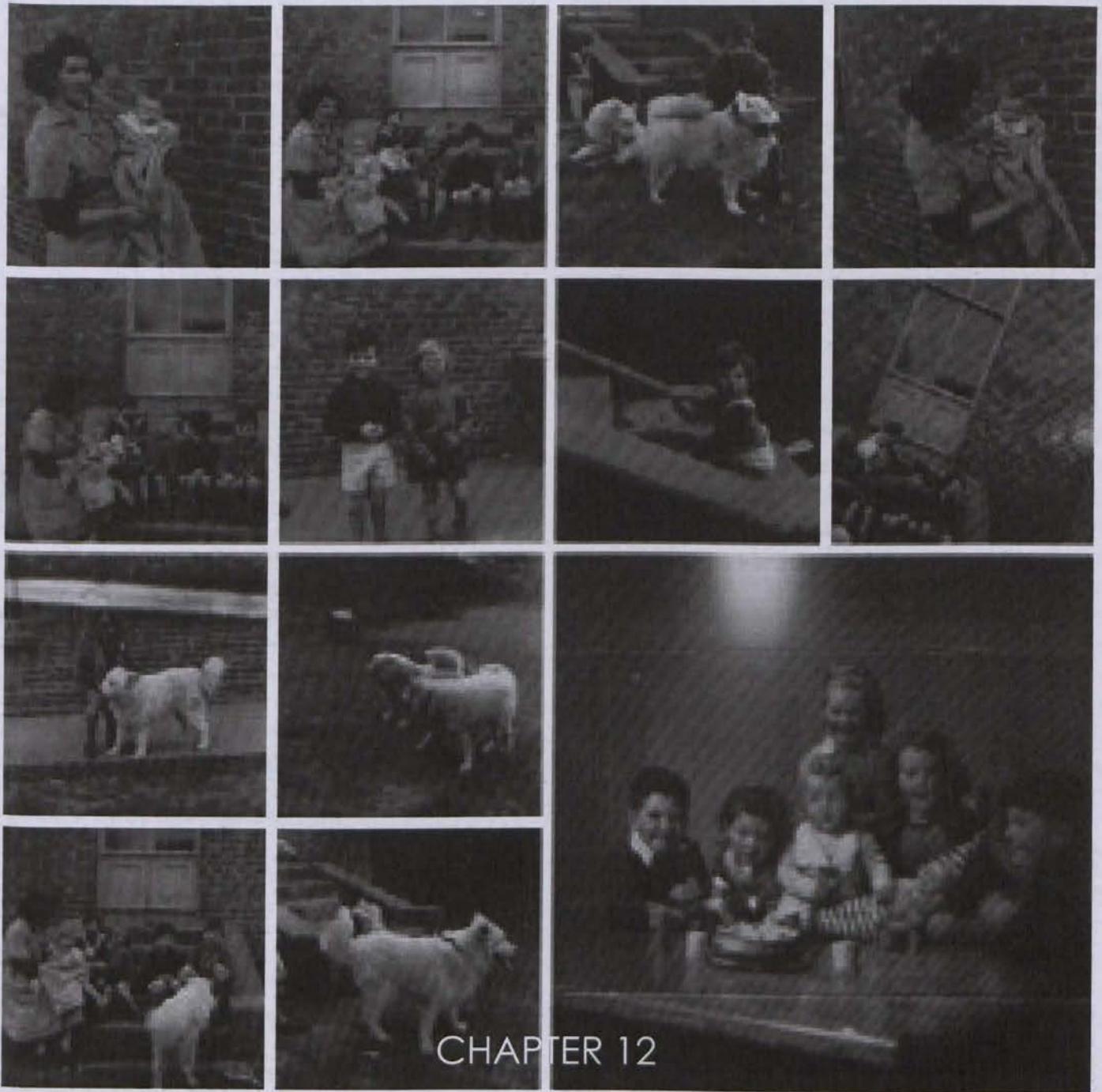
She used leaf gelatine but I find the powdered version easier to handle – the old-fashioned Davis gelatine needed to be soaked in lukewarm water for 10 minutes before heating it in the cream, or other liquid, to melt it. Sophie suggests serving a sauce with her cheesecake. Buzz in a blender 250g hulled strawberries, the grated rind of ½ lemon, 3 tbs lemon juice and 2 tbs caster sugar or more to taste. Kate says tis gilding the lily!

### **Granny Moore's Slim Cakes**

Sieve 8 rounded tablespoonfuls of flour with 2 rounded tablespoonfuls of sugar, ½ level teaspoon of baking soda and a pinch of salt. Rub in 125g butter and mix to a soft paste with 1 beaten egg and a little buttermilk. Roll out a good ¾ inch/ (1 cm) thick, cut into triangles or rounds and bake on a moderately hot dry griddle or heavy frying pan, until browned. Serve warm or cold.

\*This is based on Sophie Grigson's Strawberry Shortcake for the BBC "Good Food".





CHAPTER 12

# TO EACH HIS OWN PUDDING

...the first time I saw her, she was sitting on the porch of the house that was once my home. She was looking at me with a sad expression, and I knew that she was the same woman who had once been my mother. I had been looking for her for so long, and now she was finally in front of me. I walked towards her, and she stood up, her hands clasped in front of her. She looked at me for a moment, and then she smiled. It was a smile that I had never seen before, and it made my heart melt. I reached out and took her hand, and she squeezed it tightly. I knew that this was the moment that I had been waiting for, and I was finally home.

...the first time I saw her, she was sitting on the porch of the house that was once my home. She was looking at me with a sad expression, and I knew that she was the same woman who had once been my mother. I had been looking for her for so long, and now she was finally in front of me. I walked towards her, and she stood up, her hands clasped in front of her. She looked at me for a moment, and then she smiled. It was a smile that I had never seen before, and it made my heart melt. I reached out and took her hand, and she squeezed it tightly. I knew that this was the moment that I had been waiting for, and I was finally home.

## **Chapter 12: To each his own pudding**

In my childhood, puddings were uninspired – a range of milk puddings – rice, tapioca, sago, ground rice, semolina and custard – served with stewed apple, pears, damsons, or a spoonful of jam. At the weekends there would be an apple tart perhaps. Steamed puddings or bread puddings that had not changed for a generation or two in the farming community filled all the corners in the winter. These were the basics in the agricultural college too, enjoyed by everybody. Instead of the classic apple tart, try an apricot or peach tart instead, using 14 or 15 fresh apricots, halved and stoned, drained and patted dry to top an almond filling. When fresh apricots or peaches are out of season, the canned variety may be used – very well drained and patted dry.

### **Apricot and Almond Pie (8 servings)**

350g puff pastry  
100g unsalted butter, softened  
100g caster sugar  
2 medium eggs  
Vanilla extract  
100g ground almonds  
14 ripe apricots or two 410g cans  
75g flaked almonds  
2 tbsp icing sugar

Pre-heat oven to 190°F, 170°C, gas mark 5. Roll out the pastry to a 12 inch / 30cm square and use to line a baking sheet, making a neat rim all round. Chill while preparing the filling. Put the softened butter into a bowl or mixer with the sugar and whisk until smooth. Beat in the eggs one at a time, add a few drops of vanilla and the ground almonds. Beat until combined and spread over the pastry. Arrange the apricots, cut side down, on top of the almond mixture, then sprinkle with flaked almonds. Bake for 20 to 25 minutes, until the pastry is cooked through and the flaked almonds begin to colour. Dust with the sieved icing sugar and serve.

A slightly richer version of this uses a pastry made from 125g butter, 3 egg yolks, 75g sugar, 200g flour and 1 tsp baking powder, with a filling of a large jar of peach halves, 3 egg whites, 200g caster sugar, 250g ground almonds and the zest of 1 lemon. Cream the butter and sugar, beat in the egg

yolks and work into the flour sieved with the baking powder. Knead, chill and use to line a 9 inch tin. Beat the egg whites stiffly with the sugar, add the lemon zest and fold into the almonds. Arrange half the peach slices in the pastry, spread with the almond mixture and bake in a pre-heated oven at 350°F, 180°C, gas mark 4 for half an hour. Arrange the rest of the peaches carefully on top, cover with foil to prevent burning and cook for ½ hour more. Serve hot or cold with whipped cream or ice cream.

A Bread Pudding that used up stale bread was always popular: we didn't get around to the steamed version that used suet which had to be obtained from the butcher and tediously chopped by hand. We only made one kind of suet pudding – the one for Christmas! Once in a while we made a "Queen of Puddings" for a change, but, curiously we never encountered Summer Pudding, although we had plenty of strawberries and raspberries and even a few red currants in the garden.

### **Bread Pudding (4 servings)**

5 or 6 slices buttered bread  
75g raisins or sultanas  
1 tbsp sugar  
600ml milk  
1 egg  
Flavouring to taste

Cut the bread into triangles and arrange a layer in a buttered pie dish. Sprinkle with half the dried fruit, put in another layer of bread, then the rest of the dried fruit, and top with the rest of the bread. Bring the milk to boiling point, add the flavouring – ½ tsp vanilla essence, or ½ tsp grated lemon or orange rind, then the sugar. Add gradually to the beaten egg, pour over the bread, and set aside for about half an hour before cooking for about half an hour in a moderate oven until set and lightly browned, 350°F, 180°C, gas mark 4.

### **Summer Pudding (4 to 6 servings)**

800g strawberries  
40g raspberries  
600g blackcurrants or redcurrants (if liked)

300g sugar  
 Juice of ½ lemon  
 150g white wine  
 300ml water  
 12 slices bread, crusts removed,  
 To serve: Whipped cream.

Put half the fruit into a saucepan and add the water, lemon juice, wine and sugar. Bring to simmering point and cook for about 5 minutes. Scoop up the fruit into a bowl. Simmer the juice for 20 to 25 minutes until the mixture thickens. Strain about 200ml of the syrup into a bowl and set aside, leaving the remainder in the saucepan. Stir in the raw and cooked fruit and leave to cool. Line a pudding bowl with two sheets of clingfilm and then with overlapping slices of the bread. If liked, paint the outer sides of the bread with the syrup before putting into the bowl. Fill with the fruit, top with a layer of bread, brush all over with fruit juice, cover with the clingfilm, put a plate on top, weigh it down and chill overnight. Turn out and paint any uncoloured bread if necessary. Serve with cream

Note: All the fruit can be simmered together first, though you may prefer the flavour of the mixture of raw and lightly-cooked fruit.

### Jackie's Chocolate Shortbread

100g flour  
 25g cocoa  
 25g fine semolina or ground rice  
 100g margarine  
 75g sugar  
 ¼ tsp vanilla essence  
 Water

Rub fat into mixed dry ingredients, add sugar and vanilla. Mix to a stiff dough with water. Roll out and cut into rounds. Place on a greased tray and bake in a moderate oven at 400°F, 200°C, gas mark 6, for 15 minutes. Ice with glacé icing made with a melted bar of dark chocolate and icing sugar

On one of my visits to the huge food fair in Cologne, "Anuga", I saw a beautifully arranged Plum Tart on one of the stands and tasted freshly unwrapped Parmesan cheese on another. I didn't get to taste the Plum Tart - they were waiting for a photographer and couldn't cut it. The "new" Par-

mesan seemed quite tasteless but when I went back an hour later for another taste it had regained its full distinctive flavour. Patsy had gone out to Cologne as an "au pair" and then found herself a job there when she had acquired sufficient German to work in a grocery chain on the front desk translating letters and conversations from German into English, and vice versa. She suggested that I should come over and see the fair and possibly write about the Irish participation. She even accompanied me on first day there to get my entrance tickets, maps and press releases and acted as translator when I wanted to ask questions about various unusual (to me then!) vegetables and fruits. Amongst other things, it was the first time I'd seen canned colcannon - on an American stand, of course. I remember finding the Irish fish stand empty one lunch time with a German buyer inspecting some fish which he didn't recognize and wanted to taste. I promptly cooked him some fish and presented it to him just as some of the Irish top brass turned up to see what was going on. I got the impression that they were not particularly pleased to see me there...

### Plum Tart

(Serves 8)  
 125ml milk  
 300g plain flour  
 1 tsp dried yeast  
 ¼ tsp salt  
 50g castor sugar  
 30g butter, melted  
 1 medium egg, beaten  
 1 tsp cinnamon (optional)  
 8 tbsp caster sugar  
 1 kg plums or apricots.  
 Extra sugar and butter

Warm the milk to tepid, stir in the yeast and set aside for 10 minutes until the yeast starts to bubble. Sieve the flour and salt into a bowl. Add the melted butter to the milk and yeast and pour into the flour. Add the beaten egg and then mix to a soft dough. Knead well. Oil the bowl lightly, turn in the dough and leave to rise in a warm place for an hour or so. Butter a non-stick tart tin with loose base (or lined with greased paper). Prick the base all over. Mix





the plums or apricots with the 8 tbsp of sugar. Arrange them, standing nearly upright in the flan. Set aside for 30 minutes to let the base rise. Bake in a pre-heated oven at 425°F, 220°C, gas mark 7, for 20 to 25 minutes until the dough

browns and the plums are cooked through. Sprinkle with about 4 tbsp extra sugar and let the sugar melt before serving it.



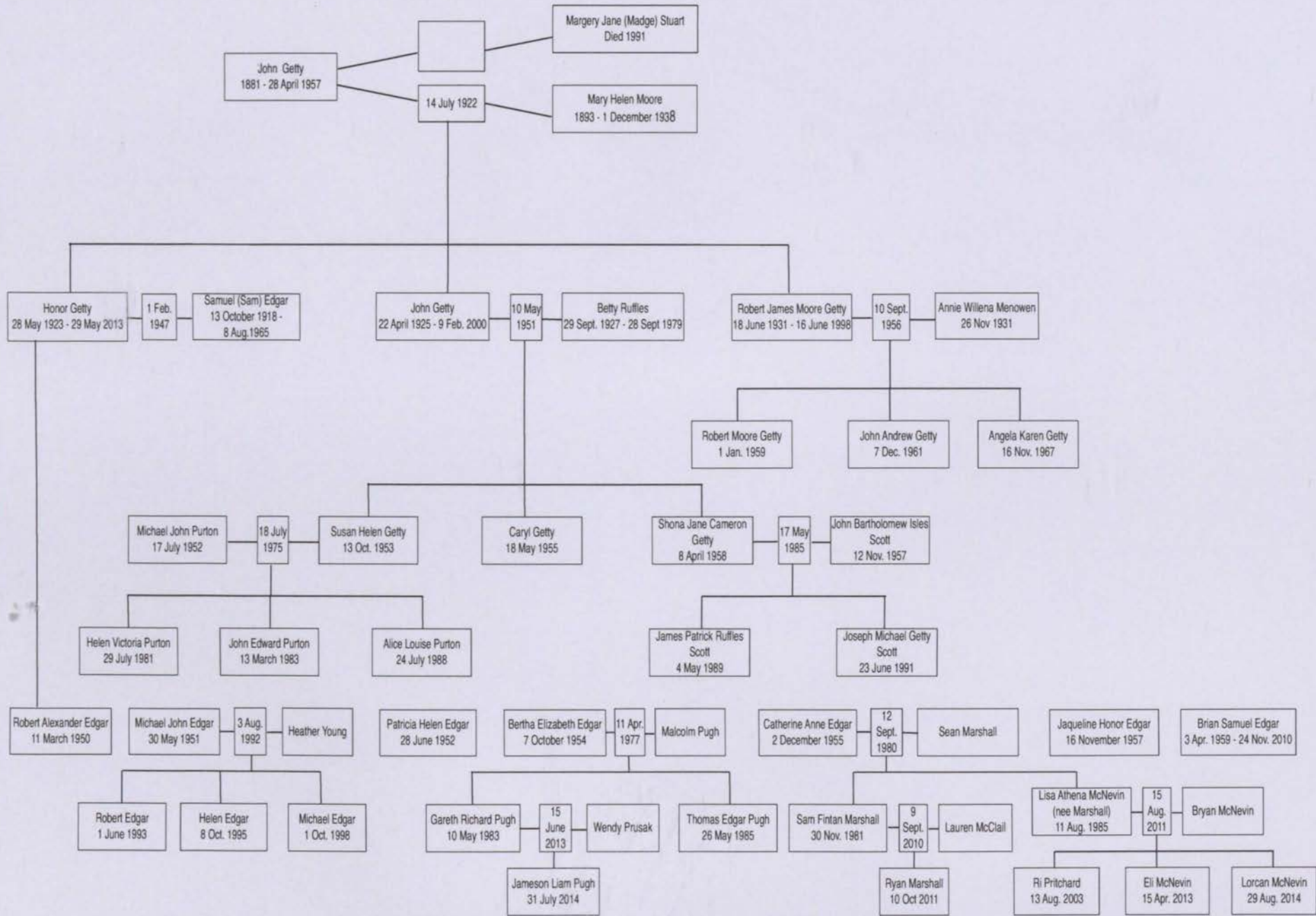


p. 15, top left, Glenbeigh, Aug 1964

© p. 27, RTE, Dublin, Gay Byrne with Honor Moore on the Late Late Show 1970s

p. 45, Milecross, 24 May 2008 from l to r:  
Patricia Moore/Coey, Annie Getty, Honor,  
Patsy, Betsy, Angela Getty, Roberta, Kate,  
Jackie.

p. 76, © Eurotoques Ireland, Honor Moore  
receiving Lifetime Contribution Award, 23  
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