

IT'S ALL IN THE NAME

From Eton Mess to Bury Black Pudding, Olivia Greenway discovers the origins of our favourite foods

THE majority of people living in the Middle Ages and up to the Industrial Revolution worked in the countryside and were uneducated. So, the recipes that proved popular and were made regularly would be passed on from a mother to her daughters and down through the generations. Produce was seasonal, with usually a surplus in summer and a shortage in winter. With no refrigeration, eggs, milk and butter would have to be cooked in recipes to prevent spoilage. Until the advent of the railways, from the mid 19th century onwards, travel was difficult and expensive; most people stayed around their home, perhaps only venturing to a summer fair to buy and trade once a year, so recipes remained regional for years. Often it was local circumstances that determined the foodstuff; other

times it was down to one individual's creativity or serendipity.

Melton Mowbray Pork Pie

Waste (whey) from the cheese-making in Leicestershire was in ample supply for pig food, so relatively cheap pork meat was chopped, made into a pie, and eaten cold out in the fields.

Using hot water crust pastry, the Melton Mowbray pie is baked loose on a tray. This results in a slightly bowed out shape. The pork meat is always chopped, and natural bone stock jelly added when the pie has cooled; it solidifies and then helps to keep the pie moist. The Melton Mowbray pork pie was granted PGI status in 2009. This means it has to be made within a certain geographical area. Authentic pies

are made from uncured pork with a high meat content.

Mary Dickenson made the first pork pies; she died in 1841. Ten years later, her grandson opened his pork pie shop, using her recipe. **Where to buy:** *Dickenson & Morris, Nottingham Street, Melton Mowbray LE13 1NW. porkpie.co.uk*

Eton Mess

Tradition has it that this popular dessert was first made at the famous English public school. But why? One account suggests a pavlova was knocked over by a Labrador on the loose – the results were scooped up and served in individual bowls. However, pavlova was named after the Russian ballet dancer Anna Pavlova – the meringue representing her tutu – and the Eton Mess predates this period. The first record of the name Eton

Mess in print was in 1893. It was said to have been first served at the annual cricket match between Eton and rival school Harrow. Former Tory minister William Waldegrave argues that Eton Mess doesn't exist and should be called Strawberry Mess. Wherever it comes from, it's a delicious, easy to prepare dish.

Kendal Mint Cake

My biggest disappointment as a teenager was to discover that Kendal Mint Cake is not a cake at all, but a peppermint slab. Once I had a nibble of the imposter, however, I was hooked. The recipe is said to have been discovered by accident. Boiling sugar, intended to make sticks of rock, was mistakenly left on overnight and the mixture turned opaque.

The precise recipe is secret, but it involves boiling water with sugar and stirring to give the mixture its characteristic cloudy quality. Then peppermint oil is added before the mixture is poured into moulds and cooled. It's enjoyed by hikers and outdoor sports enthusiasts who need an energy boost. Edmund Hillary took mint cake on his ascent of Mount Everest in 1953.

Where to buy: *Quiggin's claims to be the oldest supplier, established in 1870 in Kendal. originalkendalmintcake.co.uk*

Maid of Honour Tarts

These tarts date back to Tudor times. Henry VIII observed the

queen's maids enjoying some pastries. Intrigued, he ordered some to be made for him, and declared they should be baked regularly. The tart has a flaky pastry base and is filled with sweet curd cheese. Henry named them Maid of Honour tarts. It is said he kept the recipe to himself, but years later in the 18th century, the Original Maids of Honour tearoom was set up and still exists, not far from Hampton Court Palace.

Where to buy: *Newens The Original Maids of Honour, 288 Kew Road, Kew Gardens, Richmond-upon-Thames TW9 3DU. theoriginalmaidsofhonour.co.uk*

Sticky Toffee Pudding

It's hard to imagine a world without sticky toffee pudding, so popular it is on British menus. However, it was only invented in the 1970s. Sharrow Bay Hotel was one of the first country house hotels in the UK and it was here that owner Francis Coulson developed his date-filled sponge recipe, smothered in a rich toffee sauce. There are many imitations; but to taste the best you have to dine there. Their recipe is a closely guarded secret; staff have to sign a non-disclosure agreement!

Where to buy: *Cartmel sticky toffee pudding has been made in small batches for 20 years. It can be bought in Fortnum and Mason, Waitrose, Booths, farm shops and online. cartmelvillageshop.co.uk*

Bakewell Pudding

This pudding is not well known outside Derbyshire, where it originated. Legend has it that, once again, the pudding was the result of a mistake. Around 1820, the cook from the White Horse Inn left written instructions for her assistant to make a jam tart. Probably her assistant could not read; in any case she got the recipe wrong, but the result was so delicious, the Bakewell pudding became a regular on the menu. A flaky pastry base is covered with jam, and then a mixture of eggs, butter and ground almonds are spread on top and baked. A variation – Bakewell tart – is a more modern interpretation which has an icing sugar topping. **Where to buy:** *buy in-store, learn to make it, or order online. bakewellpuddingshop.co.uk*

Cumberland Sausage

It's said the Cumberland sausage has been made in the area for over 500 years. Now part of Cumbria, during the 18th century the port of Whitehaven used to import spices from the West Indies. Black and white pepper and nutmeg worked well in flavouring the sausage. In 2011, the Cumberland sausage was awarded PGI status and sausages with this accreditation have to be made in Cumbria from at least 80% meat and sold in a long coil. **Where to buy:** *Sillfield Farm, in Barrow-in-Furness, Cumbria sells >*

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Melton Mowbray Pork Pie



Eton Mess



Kendal Mint Cake



Sticky Toffee Pudding



Eccles Cakes

> *PGI Cumberland sausages made from their own free-range pigs at the local market and online. sillfield.co.uk*

Eccles Cakes

Known by local children as “squashed fly cakes”, these pastries originated in Eccles, now part of Manchester. It’s not known who invented the recipe, but the first known commercial outlet was opened in Salford town centre in 1793. The pastries are individual round cakes made with flaky pastry and butter, and filled with currants. Currants are a variety of black dried grapes and slightly tart in flavour. Nowadays, the finished item is sometimes dusted with caster sugar.

Where to buy: *Real Lancashire Eccles cakes are handmade and the most well-known brand. The company has been making them to a family recipe since 1979. Available in most supermarkets, they are sold in packs of four.*

Coventry Godcakes

Unsurprisingly Godcakes have a religious connection. These triangular puff pastry tarts, filled with mincemeat and sprinkled with sugar, have three slashes on the top said to represent the Holy Trinity. In Coventry, they are given by godparents to their godchildren in the New Year. Godcakes have been produced in the city since the Middle Ages, but the practice died out with the last bakery that made

them. That is, until they were revived in 2008 by a local guide, and keen home baker. Unfortunately, despite the businesses’ success, the effect of the coronavirus on trading conditions caused it to close in March 2020.

Parkin

Parkin is a ginger cake from the north of England, dating back to the Middle Ages. The key ingredients are black treacle and oats. Black treacle is a by-product of sugar refining, and became increasingly common from the 16th century. Parkin keeps well – it has no eggs – and tastes even better if it’s been matured for a while, as it gets sticky and the flavours intensify. The cake is associated with Guy Fawkes Night, as this is when the first oat harvest is expected, and fresh oats make the best parkin. It was originally cooked over an open fire and made at home.

Where to buy: *Lottie Shaw carries on a baking tradition started by her aunts in Yorkshire a century ago. Her parkin won a Great Taste award in 2018. lottieshaws.co.uk*

Bury Black Pudding

Black pudding is a type of early sausage made using animal blood. It is associated with the Black Country and north west England, especially Bury, where it is still sold in the famous open-air

market. Fat and rusk are added to the pork blood, along with spices and local herbs such as pennyroyal, which has a slight minty flavour. Beef intestines would be filled with this mixture and then boiled. Black pudding is best sliced and fried to complement a full English breakfast. It is a good source of protein and high in zinc and iron.

Where to buy: *Bury Black Pudding Company products can be bought at major supermarkets and online. They also make a vegetarian and vegan version. buryblackpuddings.co.uk.*

Grasmere Gingerbread

Grasmere gingerbread – like a thick biscuit or shortbread, is baked daily and sold in a 17th century former school that was once the home of the original maker of the gingerbread, Sarah Nelson. Sited next to St Oswald’s church (where William Wordsworth is buried), the tiny premises can only hold a few people at a time. In keeping with its Victorian origins, staff wear dress from the period. The gingerbread keeps for about a week, but it’s hard to resist eating on the spot!

Where to buy: *This product is produced to a secret recipe (said to be kept in a bank vault in the village) and only available at the shop, or online. Church Cottage, Grasmere, Ambleside LA22 9S. grasmeregingerbread.co.uk*



Coventry Godcakes



Parkin



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