

## **Good Things in England**

*A Practical Cookery Book for Everyday Use*

*Containing Traditional and Regional Recipes suited to Modern Tastes contributed by English Men and Women between 1399 and 1932 and edited by Florence White*

### **Florence White:**

- Founded the English Folk Cookery Association (1928)
  - Many correspondents sent in recipes with the aim of defining a “national cookery”
  - The Association actively sought local and national recipes which were in danger of being lost
    - “No one had any idea that England possessed any national cookery beyond roast beef, Yorkshire pudding and Christmas plum pudding. It was perfectly sickening to hear nothing but these dishes mentioned as England’s cooking.” --White’s autobiography
  - Hired Alice Gomme, who was a founding member of the Folklore Society
- She was previously a schoolteacher and shop owner
- Lived in Paris for many years and was well-practised in French cookery, but wanted the English to feel sure they had something worth sharing

### **Why did traditional English cookery need to be rediscovered?**

- Industrialization and rapid urbanization disrupted the spread of more traditional farmhouse recipes
- Farmers and their wives were becoming a much smaller part of the population, and these were the people who were most likely to be cooking traditional recipes of the country
- Rising prices in the beginning of the century increased wage-laborers and may have made people’s intake more based on what was cheapest rather than what was traditional
- France, on the other hand, had a much less rapid decrease in agricultural workers and in 1968 still had 4x the proportion as Great Britain, and the speed of their urbanization and population growth was also less rapid and later -- making it easier to maintain its folk knowledge/cookery

### **Florence White on “A Practical Cookery Book for Everyday Use” :**

- “This book is an attempt to capture the charm of England’s cookery before it is completely crushed out of existence.”
  - A very strong first sentence, defensive and noble mission
- She says the recipes are simple, practical and convenient (and makes a Robert May reference!)
  - Later mentions the chosen recipes are “within the scope of modern economics” -- includes “plainer” and “quick” versions of some recipes
- Very proud of English heritage: “England does not know her wealth”
- Nostalgic, tells stories of where the recipes come from -- very similar to modern-day cookbooks!

- “Old ladies’ eyes have brightened at the memory of girlhood days when pies and stews were made of lambs’ tails in various ways”
- “A recipe for making Clotted or Scalded Cream comes from one who as a girl learnt to make it in the dairy of the Home Farm belonging to Knightshayes Court, near Tiverton.”
  - The place and farm matter -- these recipes are authentic and associated with real people and places
- “All food is inevitably linked up with home or places visited with our nearest and dearest, whether family, friends or lovers.”
  - Food is not just food, but the memories and experiences it creates and people you enjoy it with
  - Through this endeavor, she’s not just promoting English food, but a sense of country-wide pride and unity
- Doesn’t just talk about the food, but describes the life of the people who used to make and eat it
- Talks about how the book was compiled
  - Toured remote kitchens, talking to cooks and people who as children had eaten things which were no longer made
  - Travelled across England talking to people, “stirring up memories”
  - People dug up old recipes and records
  - Articles, advertisements and letters in newspapers
  - Money prizes
  - Covers many different counties, she says they each have their own specialties
- She is giving recipes collected from other people instead of her own because “one of my aims has been to prove that England had formerly a complete collection of national food preparations -- and none better.”
- Is very explicit that the English do not owe their cuisine to France
- Advises that England should learn from America, whose cooking came from the same foundation as England’s
  - She thinks England has something to learn from looking at how they developed English cooking in a new setting
- Also says to look to the commonwealth countries, Norway, Sweden, Denmark, and Holland
- She is polite about distancing England from France
  - “Personally I love France, have lived in Paris for years”
  - “But I could not love France as much as I do if I did not love England more.”
  - She thinks they should not be rivals, but rather that England should have its own developed, unique cuisine rather than be preoccupied with French cuisine

**Weights and Measures:**

- She is writing for an American audience as well -- as she says in her intro, the American kitchen has much in common with the English

- Includes lots of conversions: she understands that the world is becoming more globalized and people have likely heard of American recipes and American measures, and she's really trying hard to make it simple and straightforward
- You get the sense she is almost educating her readers (American and English) about the English way of doing things -- "A spoonful *in England* means..." or "the following *English weights* of..."

### **Taking the Guesswork out of Cookery:**

- Describes how to tell how hot your oven is
- Ovens are now manufactured and sold all over, many different makes, styles, etc require thermometers
- Tips for using thermometers
- These tips & tricks are reminiscent of motherly advice, making the cookbook accessible to a wide range of skill levels, including basic

### **The recipes in general:**

- Format
  - Have the ingredients and their exact quantities listed out beforehand
  - Has the time listed before hand
  - Has the steps in numbered order
  - This format is very reminiscent of modern-day recipes
  - She is clearly sticking to her "simple and practical" style in the way she writes the recipes
- Many of the recipes include...
  - Introductions describing the history of the recipe or where and how it might have been typically eaten
  - A quote (the person who gave the recipe, another source attesting to how good it is) -- makes it like a historical artifact (also includes version of certain recipes from different years and places)
  - The date associated with the original recipe
  - Who and/or where the original recipe was from
  - A short translation of the recipe name if might be unfamiliar (i.e. Ripon Spice Bread -- *Like Yule Cake* or Huffkins -- *An East Kent Tea-bread*)
  - "N.B": little tips like "Nut bread and fruit bread should be made and baked the day before they are required."
- The recipes themselves...
  - Are simple, an average of 10 steps
  - None of them take very long (excluding time to rise)
  - Have pretty simple ingredients (butter, flour, sugar, treacle, baking powder and soda, cream of tartar, eggs) that would be easy to get at a store -- and she also tells the reader where to get certain things
  - Lots of baking -- pretty much all recipes use the oven
- What does this tell us?
  - She is really trying to make what might seem like old, uncommon or inaccessible recipes accessible to a wide audience, many of whom may not

- be experienced chefs, with the simple, numbered steps, short cooking time, all the conversions and tips
- The simplicity and short cooking times are also important for the time: Colquhoun talks about how women wanted to reduce the work done in the kitchen (getting advice on dishes that eliminated carving, planning food to be made in separate portions, electric plates)
- Also indicates that this is more than just a cookbook -- it's almost a storybook, educating readers about English history and heritage
- Besides recipes, she also includes little excerpts about dishes: i.e. "how to serve muffins", or "oatmeal cakes", giving tips about the dishes and how to eat them

### **Home-made Bread, Currant and Spice Bread, Tea-cakes, Hot and Cold Scones, Whigs, Huffkins, Muffins, and Pikelets:**

- "Royal Yeast Cakes' (a Canadian product) can be sent anywhere, properly packed for tropical and semi-tropical climates, by the Army and Navy Stores"
  - Really embodies the times: food is becoming packaged and bulk-produced, with lots of foreign products
  - She's pointing out that these recipes are not inaccessible since you can now get these ingredients at stores
  - She isn't rejecting this industrialization, but rather saying that given that all these changes are happening, we should be not lose English pride & heritage
- Cites John Kirkland (Lecturer and Teacher of Bread-making, National Bakery School, London) on yeast foods and chemical aerating agents like baking powder: "what he does not know on this subject is not worth knowing."
  - Continuing the prevalence and importance science like we saw previously
  - Uses science to justify why she does certain things and uses certain ingredients
- She understands the change in the demographics and population of the country, and that many more people live in smaller homes or flats in the country, but says there is no reason why they can't make bread and scones at home, even once in awhile.
  - She's asserting that England should not let the changes that are happening erase English culture

### **Country and Schoolroom Teas:**

- An introduction filled with imagery and nostalgia -- reads like a prose piece
- These recipes carry with them the whole occasion of tea-time, which is so quintessentially English
- If time: page 281, the story about the electric whisker is very amusing
- She has a recipe by Eliza Acton
- "every kind of paper and cardboard equipment for packing sweets can be obtained from Mr. F. G. Kettle" in London.
  - She actually cites stores in London many times - targeting those people in urban areas who are ones losing touch with British traditions

### **Local and National Specialities:**

- Split up into counties of England

- Really giving English people something to be proud of: each county itself has their own traditions and culture
- Many sources and quotes for each recipe
- Long descriptions before had about the story behind the recipe, any traditions associated with it, quotes from the people it came from, explanations of the ingredients or methods
- “Laver” (pg 326): It is not too late to make this seaweed which is abundant in England a specialty that other people know about

Sources:

- *Taste: The story of Britain through its Cooking*, Kate Colquhoun (2007).
- *Good Things in England: A Practical Cookery Book for Everyday Use*, edited by Florence White (1931).
- *Romantic Moderns*, Alexandra Harris (2010).
- *A Fire in the Kitchen: The Autobiography of a Cook*, Florence White (1938).
- *All Manners of Food: Eating and Taste in England and France from the Middle Ages to the Present*

KENT

## Flead Cakes

### *A Kent Delicacy*

'In days gone by,' writes a friend who was the daughter of a farmer in the Weald of Kent, 'cakes and scones would be made from buttermilk, and the flour for them and the bread would be made from the farmer's own wheat sent to the mill to be ground. Bacon, ham, and sausages were all cured and made at my old home. Twice a year a pig would be killed, in March and October, cured and salted for home consumption. Lard also was put down; jams, fruit jellies and pickles were made. We were,' she adds, 'particularly noted for our pickled walnuts.'

This is her recipe for Flead Cakes:—

**INGREDIENTS:** Flead 1 lb. (this is called flare by London butchers); household flour 1½ lb.; a little salt; water to mix.

#### METHOD

1. Free the flead from all the skin and veiny pieces; cut in thin flakes.
2. Place the flour in a bowl, add the flakes of flead and the salt, mix all together.
3. Make into a stiff dough with a small quantity of cold water.
4. Turn on to a floured pastry board.
5. Take one end of a rolling-pin and then just beat as hard as you can, turning over as required, but handling as little as possible, and working quickly.
6. Let it rest about 15 minutes, then repeat; do this three times.
7. After the third beating and rest, roll out to about an inch in thickness, cut in any shape fancied and bake in a quick oven.
8. Have ready some kitchen paper 'rucked up' on a large dish, then turn cakes on to this, allow to cool in the warm kitchen. Then store in tins. They will keep a long time.

#### SECRETS OF SUCCESS

1. Use nice thick flead and allow it to hang as long as it will keep fresh and sweet.
2. Take plenty of time in making and bang well. 'My mother used to say,' adds the sender of this recipe, 'that the only time we might lose our tempers was when we were making flead cakes.'

[As a tiny girl of four in 1867 I remember helping my mother to make these cakes, my share being to bang a piece of dough with a wooden hoop stick. It was a pure joy. She was the daughter of a Weald of Kent yeoman who grew hops, but at that time we were living in London within 4 miles of Bow Bells.—Ed.]

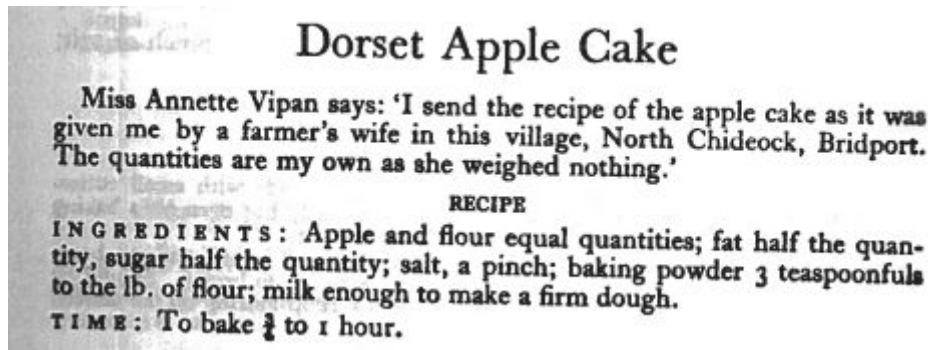
3. The flead and flour must be thoroughly incorporated, but on account must the cakes be rolled out more than once. This is important, as rolling out makes them too much like pie-crust. A properly made flead cake should be different from that, eating light and crisp. It should rise to twice the height it was before making. Care should be taken also not to open the oven door too soon; they are rather apt to go down a bit if cold air invades the oven during the raising process.

N.B.—'It is a very funny thing,' continues this lady, 'but it is not everyone who can make these delicious cakes; even good cooks fail miserably sometimes, and give up trying.' I never can understand why, unless the hand is too hot. Always as far as possible, keep the hands cool, and touch the paste as little as possible.

(Flead = inside fat of a pig)

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- Starts with a quote from someone authentic: "the daughter of a farmer in the Weald of Kent"
- Very nostalgic: "in days gone by"
- Specifies what "Flead" is called by London butchers -- her audience is the people in the cities who are the ones primarily losing touch with traditional English recipes
- The steps themselves are written very simply, and don't involve anything very difficult
- Includes "Secrets of Success" and "N.B." -- this is clearly a pretty uncommon dish, so she's really trying to provide the necessary tips to make it doable
- Cute quote from her mother and childhood story -- makes it personal, conjures images of happy mothers and children bonding over cooking food
- Associates feelings, people and places with the dish



#### METHOD

1. Rub the fat into the flour.
2. Add the salt and the baking powder.
3. Mix the sugar with the pared and chopped apple.
4. Stir into the flour mixture.
5. Make into a firm dough with the milk.
6. Make into a flat cake about  $\frac{3}{4}$  inch thick.
7. Bake in a round flat tin  $\frac{3}{4}$  to 1 hour.
8. Cut open, butter well, and eat hot.

[N.B.—Miss Vipan says: 'Some make it in a cake tin 2—3 inches deep and eat it hot or cold with butter or cream. Also I am told they make it with gooseberries instead of apple, but I have not met with it. Some put in currants, but I think it is nicest as a tea cake, and it heats up well the next day.'—ED.]

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- Includes who sent the recipe, and who it was given to her by: emphasis on the history of the recipe, where it came from
- Using the recipe “as it was given” to Miss Annette Vipan -- gives it the allure of authenticity, similar to how we are so taken by “vintage” things nowadays
- This recipe is a rare one that doesn’t actually use exact quantities, but just ratios, again, making it seem like it is being given directly from the farmer’s wife in North Chideock, Bridport
- The ingredients are simple and minimal, as are the steps
- The “N.B.” gives options and ways to eat it, so the reader can recreate something like what it may have been like to make and eat this back in the day -- emphasis on traditions

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