

► FOOD GLORIOUS FOOD ◀

In very early times cooking was in its simplest form. Everything was probably eaten raw. Then fire was discovered, possibly from accident when from flint and iron pyrites was struck together producing a spark which turned into a flame. Food such as meats and fish would have been placed on or near the flames to either grill or roast it. Again this may have been accidental when food was dropped into the fire and people realized that it tasted better cooked. Boiled meat was another method of cooking when the food to be cooked was placed in a container of sorts with water, placed in the ground and then hot stones dropped in.

After grain was discovered edible, by trial and error it was discovered how tasty it could become when ground into a meal, moistened with water to make very simple bread. This loaf would have been cooked spread thinly on a hot bakestone. Very similarly to what is now called a bannock.

Bronze, an alloy of copper and tin was used to make cooking equipment as well as knives, beakers, fish hooks and etc. Cauldrons were a valuable piece of kitchen equipment, easier to use than the earlier pot-boiler method. Baking was still a primitive method compared to now-a-days, as most 'ovens' were a hole in the ground, lined with stones which were heated by lighting a fire over them. The fire would then be raked out, food placed in, possibly well wrapped in leaves, and the hole covered with a stone and then a layer of turf or sand.

When Rome invaded England the Romans caused changes to happen. Up until then the kitchen or cooking part of the house was separate from the rest of the dwelling. However the Romans incorporated the kitchen or (culina, hence the word culinary), to be part of the house or villa. Cooking was now done on a raised structure, situated in the middle of the room. This structure contained the fire held in by metal supports, known as fire-dogs. Wood and charcoal were used, as well as peat and coal. At this time common day utensils were known to have been used. Items such as saucepans, frying pans, round stewing pots, jugs, strainers, ladles, as well as tripods, gridirons and hangers for suspending pots over the fire. Pewter, silver, bone and iron were used to make knives, spoons and other utensils. Pottery was just coming into its own.

In Anglo-Saxon and Norman times England followed this pattern closely. Most dwellings had a large hall where all the community ate together. Huge quantities of food were often required and cooking was done outdoors (modern day BBQ) as well as inside. It was around this period that many changes started to take place. Many different designs and usage of equipment happened and the number of dishes started to increase. Probably the biggest change was the moving of the cooking fire from the middle of the room to the wall. This occurred around the 17th century but it was much later before a chimney was built to remove the smoke. This happened because people started to use coal which gave off an offensive smoke, more so than wood,

The cauldron was a most handy piece of equipment as many different types of food could be cooked at the one time e.g. cloth bags for puddings and jars to hold other types of food. Spit roasting was for meats, birds and fish which could be kept in a constant rotation by either some small boy turning a wheel or by various ingenious inventions such as Marnier's piece of string which slowly wound itself up and then unwound itself, this motion going for some considerable time.

The Salamander, used to brown tops of pies and tarts was a metal ball or plate about 1 foot (30cm) in diameter on the end of a long rod. This was then heated till red hot and then placed on top of the food. Ovens started coming into their own but this would be a brick oven in the wall beside the fireplace and independently heated by a fire inside. This would then be raked out and the food placed into the hot oven. Town folk often took their food to the local bakeshop and returned when it was cooked, eating either in the bakeshop or carrying it home to be eaten there. Usually the lunch eaten in the middle of the day was the only hot meal of the time. The other meals usually consisted of bread, cheese ales, beers, cold meats, pickled vegetables and pickled fish.

In Good Queen Bess' time food was considered more than just something to keep one alive. Great care was taken to produce many and varied types of food all usually elaborately decorated. Peacocks, hares, rabbit, sturgeon, other fish, swan, as well as beef, chicken and pork, roasted, made into pies, or soups were all usual fare. Often swans or peacocks would be carefully decorated with their own feathers. Image being at a gala dinner and watching servants bearing aloft a huge platter with what seemed to be a live peacock nestling there splendid in all its glory. Sweets were often made to resemble anything but what it was made from. Fancy tucking into what looked like a chicken pie and finding from the first mouthful that it was a sweet and I mean sweet, Elizabethans loved sweetness.

Variety increased and the menus expanded and by 1662 Pepys tells us "we had a fricassee of rabbits, and chickens, a leg of mutton boiled, three carps in a dish, a great dish of a side of lamb, a dish of roasted pigeons, a dish of four lobsters, three tarts, a lempery pie, a roast hare pie, a dish of anchovies, good wine of several sorts and all things mightily noble to my great content."

Parson Woodford relates in 1784 how "we had a very genteel Dinner, Soals and Lobster Sauce, Spring Chicken boiled and a Tongue, a Piece of Roast beef, Soup, a Fillet of Veal roasted with Morells and truffles and Pigeon Pye for the **FIRST** course. (Writer's emphasis) Sweetbreads, a green Goose and Peas, Apricot Pye Cheesecakes, Stewed Mushrooms and Trifle." Apparently the kitchen by this time was totally different to the simple one of many years ago. By Victorian Times a 'modern' (in those times) kitchen was to be seen and Mrs. Beeton came onto the scene with her elaborate recipes. The range, with an oven and cooking or boiling top heated firstly by coal and then later by gas and electricity was a grand contribution to cooking. When water and drainage was added all the necessities were in place for the beginning of what we now know as a kitchen.

Morells: two meanings both to do with cooking.

- 1) Any edible discomycete fungus of the genus *Morchella*, a mushroom.
- 2) A dark-red cherry, much used in cooking and in Cherry Brandy.

Soals: Think this is the old way to spell the fish, Sole.

Lempery: Closest I could find: Lampery: a river fish, whose mouth is always open. If anyone can assist with these explanations, I'd be grateful – Helen Kindt.

This bulletin was inspired from an article in 'Home Management' Vol 1 c1959.