

What's in the pot?

Magazine of the Lochac Cooks Guild

Guild Journal #7 August 2026

From the Guild Administrator

As you are all aware, my term as Administrator has come to an end. After consultation with several Guild members, the next Administrator will be Mistress Thomasina Coke of Bordescros. The official handover will coincide with Spring Crown in early September.

I have enjoyed being the Guild Administrator, and I'd like to thank everyone for their support and patience. I'm excited about the growth of the Guild in the future.

Mistress Leoba of Lecelade

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Henry, the Braythwayte oven, photo by
Baron Sympkyn of the Moore – see article p11

Ynys Fawr Baronial Succession 2026

By Sir Oze

I had the privilege of arranging the occasion of Ynys Fawr's recent baronial succession. We honoured the tenure of Baron David de Darlington and Baroness Arrabella de Darlington and celebrated the appointment of Baron Tosti Vicheroovich Bogolyubskiy and Baroness Sybil de Speresholt.

My Mum, known as Star of Malmsebury, headed the kitchen. We have worked together on a number of feasts.

Photos throughout are with permission from Lady Trinette Rodwell.

Hall

The hall was dressed with the field of the Ynys Fawr device as inspiration (azure a fesse Or). I utilised various props from the Theatre of Food Feast, some eight years ago, including some blue material with hand painted gold stars.

A harpist played in the background.

There was a fountain spilling mulled wine. This was red wine, cinnamon, brown sugar, cloves, and verjuice. It was warm and tasty and together with everything else going on across the weekend, added a little extra to the theatre of an occasion like a baronial succession.



Menu

David and Arrabella portrayed a Norse image for their tenure and Tosti and Sybil chose late period German for their investiture garb. So we based the food around the cultures of the 6th to 9th century Norse and the 15th century Swabian League. I mixed the dishes in each course.

Due to the regions and time periods, the food was dominated by what we would call soups and stews today, with a heavy reliance on hardy root vegetables, some fruit, grains and pulses with little meat and spices, except for the very wealthy.

I sought a richness of character and flavour in the dishes presented along with an appropriate mouthfeel through the addition of fats to many dishes as a finishing flourish. I am confident and arrogant enough to say that it was tasty.

This feast was not thoroughly researched. I used my food knowledge, fallibly accrued over years of commercial and SCA cooking, common sense, internet searches and the occasional flick through my collection of appropriately related recipe sources.

The menu is plausibly appropriate to the desired cultures and suitable to the venue facilities and the skills available in the kitchen.

For ease of transport, the tart cases were blind baked and the fillings made as "stews", sometimes being pureéd with a stick blender. Fillings can be reheated easily before filling the cases, without occupying the oven for way too long.

Allergies

There were various allergies and preferences, which required some interesting recipe tweaks.

Dietary and allergy preferences and requirements are a part of the landscape you have to deal with in stewarding a feast. I take it as a personal failure if I have to ask someone to go off-board because of their needs.

I cater for the most complex set of issues, to avoid having to make individual and "special" dishes in order to ensure people are well enough fed, thus minimising any extra work for a team already under pressure.

A recipe is a guide... unless you're doing pastry (in the modern concept) – that stuff is a chemical formula!

Lunches

A selection of items that are an easy bite or two, or can be easily combined in some way.

Onion tart - an extrapolation of Roman onions (Apicius) and Lyonnaise onions. Lyons would have been a major trading centre with the Swabian League. Onions finely sliced, caramelised in butter (Nuttlex) with thyme until soft and sweet.

Green tart - based on a spinach tart and a Genovese tart amongst others. Green leaves and soft herbs wilted lightly with softened onions and garlic; dairy was left out because of allergies.

Turnip tart - based on a turnip pottage, cut appropriately to make a tart filling. The turnip was grated for this edition; I think a small dice works better. Boil the turnips until soft in salted water (or a nage or stock), drain and combine with diced cheese while still hot and add sugar, cinnamon, nutmeg, salt and pepper. Don't overwork, keep the texture.

Tart of pounded chickpeas - a common staple throughout Europe, in this case based upon *Ciurons Tendres Ab Let De Melles*. Chickpeas covered with just enough almond milk, cooked until soft. Add too much kibbled black pepper and mash/blitz till coarsely smooth. Mix in a bunch of finely chopped sage.

Lothringen quiche - an older name for a quiche lorraine. Baked and served in a cob loaf as a viscous luscious dipper.

Maultaschen filling - there are various monastic references for this Swabian dish online. Usually, maultaschen are served in the form of a dumpling, the meat wrapped in pastry so as to be hidden from the sight of God, for Lent and other fasting days. I did it without the pastry as meat balls (I mean God sees all, right?!). Beef mince with onion, garlic and spinach and various aromatics. I used cinnamon, thyme, rosemary and salt.

Pickled cucumber - pickles were common for both cultures inspiring this menu. I did it as a "quick pickle". Equal parts by volume of water, sugar and vinegar (apple cider vinegar as it's allergy friendly and tasty) bring it to the boil and add prepared vegetables. Remove from the heat and allow to cool in the liquor, drain and serve.

Pickled onions - an easy add, following the riff of "ploughman's lunch" idea. Commercial.

Marinated olives - I laid these down after Easter last year for Jochen and Ariston's royal visit to Ynys Fawr. A selection of pitted olives (kalamata and spanish queens) olive oil, apple cider vinegar, cornichons, onions, pepper corns, cloves, capers, bay leaves, garlic, thyme, rosemary, lemon zest. Set aside for at least 6 weeks.

Sliced ham - freshly sliced off the bone. It's always popular.

Cheese: smoked cheddar and ricotta - again looking at the "ploughman's lunch" riff. Cheese is an easy nibble and the ricotta works well as a "dip".

Passed rote beete - originally valued medicinally, the leaves being the primary part utilised, the bulb formed a long-lasting accompaniment and flavour enhancer to other dishes, especially when pickled. Also, I love the earthiness of roasted beets in general. Roast beets until soft. Peel them. Add a little apple cider vinegar, salt and black pepper. Add butter (Nuttlex) for mouth feel and richness.

Sieved carrots - I'm not certain on the viability of this dish historically. Carrots or rather skirrets and their ancestors would have been available to both cultures. It's colourful, tasty and cheap. Chop carrots to reasonably equal chunks. Boil them until they virtually disintegrate. Drain them retaining the water. Add ginger, honey and cinnamon. Blitz. Adjust consistency with the cooking water. Mix through a generous amount of chopped parsley.

Springerle / anis-brödle - a traditional German holiday biscuit dating back to the 14th century.

They are a process and very nearly worth it. Make the dough, roll it and stamp it. Allow it to “set” for 24 hours. Bake very slowly. Store for at least a week before serving. If you’re serving these just on a week after preparation, up the amount of anise/fennel flavour. Apparently these mature and intensify the longer they are stored. I will be using these again in an appropriate menu; they generated a lot of positive feedback.

Spekulatius - I'm reasonably sure these fall just outside our usual time line. But they are tasty and their flavour complements the dips I had in mind.

Rice crackers - a gluten and spice free allergy-safe option. Commercial.

Course #1

As requested, we started serving food at 16:15. The first course was mostly cold, more akin to an afternoon tea than a dinner course.

Bread - commercial dinner rolls, 2 per patron

Herbed goats cheese - goat's cheese, generously scented with picked thyme and some sour cream to reduce the gaminess that people generally don't like about goat's cheese. Tasty and spreadable.

lðunnar epli - translates literally as "lðunn's apples" but refers to a gift associated with long life. A mix of hazel nuts and dried apple flavoured with honey, bound with enough flour, butter (Nuttelex) and eggs, pressed into a slice tin and baked.

Quark - a Norse and Germanic curdled milk cheese. I would describe it as a cross between cottage cheese and sour cream but funkier. (I used a commercial option.)

Root vegetable pottage - a heavily herbed vegetable broth. There are any number of variants abounding for pretty much any culture you'd like to look into.

Smoked salmon with cheese - commercial hot smoked sliced salmon, rolled into 'cigars' filled with cream cheese. Honestly, I misjudged the quantity on this and had to be stingy in the portioning.

Chicken farce - a chicken liver paté. A hit or miss dish depending on peoples' tastes and views on offal. Chicken livers, onion, apple, thyme, sage, garlic, cider and Nuttelex. A little looser than I would like generally because of the Nuttelex instead of butter, as the setting agent.

Pfeffer Rindfleisch - a cube roll (Scotch fillet) trimmed. Rolled in kibbled black pepper. Wrap the whole thing up tightly in cling film and let it 'set' overnight. Helps to hold its shape to make carving easier. Remove the wrap and roast until 50C internal (medium rare) and allow to rest/cool – ideally overnight. Slice and serve. This is simply a German translation for the classic boeuf au poivre.

with Rotweinsauce - red wine, apple cider vinegar, onions, some cinnamon, and brown sugar, reduced by about half and thickened with a gluten free roux/slurry and a few Massal beef stock cubes for a little extra depth. With time and resources, this is so very much better starting from a proper bone stock, and reducing it to a demiglace.

Seeds of wisdom - my high table presentation. Really an excuse to be pompous and create a little theatre, referring to the hazel nuts in lðunn's gift. These were pettinice and various fudges rolled, shaped and coloured to look like hazel nuts. Thank you to Noble Galerin Mori for finishing these.

“All leaders need wisdom, royalty and landed nobility especially. I hope these grant wisdom, and all know wisdom is mostly gained from experience... of course you won't know the lesson until you've eaten, and then it's too late”.

Course #2

With the second course, I was looking to give my patrons something tasty and filling. The dishes in courses 2 and 3 were designed to complement each other and the venison brewet in course 3.

Blancmanger – from recipes specifically from Germany from the 14th to 16th centuries. My version: cover chooks in water, boil removing scum from the top – leave a little of the fat. When chickens are falling apart, remove from the water, shred them and remove the bones. Return the shredded meat to the original water. Add almond milk, cinnamon, black pepper, salt and sugar. Bring back to the boil, add rice and aggressively simmer until the rice is almost done. Remove from the heat and allow to cool. Rice will soak up the remaining liquid.

Erbeßsuppen - pea and ham soup, or pease porridge. I deliberately left this a little thin, with no dairy, intending for it to be a reasonably light if flavourful broth. Ham hocks and ham rind boiled in water – 8 to 10 hours. Add any hunks of ham and peas, season with salt and pepper to taste. Split

peas and other pulses along with some cream, would have made this thicker and richly indulgent. Leaving the dairy out meant it fitted better with catering for dietary requirements.

Dyshe of rootes - roasted root vegetables. Cut to reasonably even pieces and roasted with thyme, rosemary, salt and pepper. Tossed in butter (Nuttelex) for service.

Savoury porridge - a staple food. This version is more of a Norse take on the dish. Fry off finely diced onion, thyme and rosemary. Add the oats and cover with water. Cook oats as normal. Add apple and season with salt to taste. To finish, mix through finely chopped parsley.

Fennel in soppes - though generally attributed as an English dish dating back to the 14th century, fennel is common as a German ingredient back to the 8th century. The idea of this dish was for the aniseed flavour to cut through and lift the other dishes in the course. I had to rely mostly on the fennel and the heavy wine (dry white) due to catering for allergies. Chop fennel and onions, cook off until onions are transparent. Deglaze pan with a generous amount of white wine, cook off the alcohol. Return fennel and onion to pan and just cover with water add Massel vegetable stock, simmer until soft. Remove fennel and onion. Thicken the liquid with a roux/slurry and season. To serve, cover the fennel and onions in just enough of the sauce, that they are coated.

I don't think my patrons appreciated the fennel that much. The original recipes call for a powder deuce and heavily lean on ginger and saffron. I think this dish caused the most wastage from the whole feast.

Course #3

This was my 'luxury' course. The special foods that hopefully leave a little bit of a wow factor. The Crown granted me let and licence for me to serve venison, for the nearly mystic sense of special that venison almost always evokes at a feast.

Venison brewet - juniper pairs excellently with any game and is common through Northern Europe and Scandinavia. Juniper flavoured spirits were known in Europe from the 11th century so I don't think this is too far from plausible. Dice the meat and brown it off. Deglaze the pan with gin, cook off the alcohol. Return the meat, add chopped vegetables and red wine. Cook off the alcohol. Add

bruised juniper berries, bay leaves and an overly generous amount of cinnamon. Fill the pot with water. Bring to the boil for 10-15 minutes and reduce to a gentle simmer. Cook for as long as possible. Add more water as necessary. Towards the end of cooking, allow the whole lot to thicken of its own accord (or with a slurry if pressed for time). Season to taste. This would usually have bacon in it to counter the leanness of the venison. Because I had a number of people who don't eat pork and they had already missed out on a few dishes I added duck fat to this version instead. I will do this again!

Mushroom broth - my favourite dish from the whole feast, flavour-wise. I started by heavily caramelising a bunch of finely sliced onions to a rich dark colour. To this was added roughly chopped mushrooms and the whole lot was covered with water (with some Massel beef stock cubes) with some cinnamon and cloves and it was left to simmer for a number of hours. Adjusted with salt at the end and a literal bunch of roughly chopped parsley stirred through to finish.

Spaetzle - a common German egg noodle and a quick search indicated its origins in Swabia... a little after the time period we normally look at. Unfortunately, by the time I actually did my shopping there were no Spaetzle noodles available locally. I substituted Fuseli pasta noodles instead as they have a very similar shape. The egg noodle Spaetzle might have been a little richer in flavour.

with Nussbutter - the pasta was served with a simple brown butter sauce. Butter cooked in a saucepan until the desired colour then strained and cooled. This is reheated for service, finished with a little lemon juice and a generous amount of finely sliced fresh sage. There was an allergy friendly Nuttelex sauce made. This classic combination did get a number of compliments.

Mixed legumes - pulses cooked with herbs in a nage/ vegetable stock until they are soft. Peas, lentils, chickpeas and green beans with rosemary and parsley. A little butter (Nuttelex) is mixed though the drained legumes to serve.

Barley frumenty - a common staple food for all levels of society throughout most of Europe by the 13th and 14th centuries. It's tasty and filling and the sweetness from the fruit complements the venison brewet very well. Barley, after being soaked at least overnight and drained, cooked in a vegetable stock. Once the barley is close to being

done, and liquid has been absorbed, add almond milk, currents and raisins. Simmer till done.

Hart pie - an opportunity for a little word play. I served High Table's venison brewet as a pie. Rulers need heart, after all. Be this through courage or through mercy and justice. A hart is a stag, which is venison... I'm sure you can see the thought process behind a bad pun.

Dessert Course

Although tasty, this dessert was a presentational failure due to a lack of testing, preparation and running with an idea that should work.

I acquired some rather cool chess piece moulds. Combined with some nicely flavoured and coloured leche and presented as a chess board, it should have had a reasonable impact.

As it was, the unmoulding process provided a level of hilarity for Baron Gershom and the rest of the prep team present, as various representations of demented phallic totems were revealed.

On Mistress Narin's suggestion, we ended up making trays of each leche and slicing them into cubes. The chess board was laid out and the chess pieces, with designs drawn on rice paper, by Noble Galerin, to denote their rank and status, laid out at either end. Lady Elizabeth Stumpe (my sister) completed the Herculean task of rescuing the presentation of this course.



The remainder of the leches that were not presentable as part of the chess board were served on trays so that patrons might at least enjoy the flavours even if they weren't completely wowed by the visual presentation envisioned.

Flavour wise I think this was nice. The subtle earthy, slightly bitter notes of the saffron with the floral notes of the rosewater, accompanying the rich, spiced, sweet dates and the hit of nutmeg and creaminess of the Konditorcreme.

Whyte leach - the "white" squares for the chess board. An Elizabethan sliceable jelly. Almond milk, sugar and gelatine (instead of isinglass or egg whites). I flavoured and coloured this with saffron and it was gilded with an edible gold spray.

Indigo leach - This was used to form the dark or "black" squares. Food was commonly dyed vibrant colours, violets and other floral ingredients were commonly used. This is the same recipe as the whyte leach, without the saffron and with the addition of rose water and blue food colouring.

Leche Lombarde - a traditional take on this tasty date dessert. You bring chopped pitted dates, sherry, cinnamon, brown sugar and nutmeg to the boil and cook until extremely soft. Add a little water if needed. Once soft, blitz in a food processor until smooth. Return to the pot, add cornflour and cook out, stirring vigorously. Allow to cool and add dissolved agar agar slurry and stir thoroughly, while bringing the mix back to a gloopy boil. This wouldn't set hard enough, even frozen. Thinking on it now, the mild acidic nature of the dates and the alcohol from the sherry probably impacted the effectiveness of the gelling agents.

Konditorcreme - a German crème pâtissier. flavoured with honey, cinnamon, cloves and a dominating amount of freshly grated nutmeg. I thickened this with gelatine as well as the traditional cornflour.

References (sources for ideas)

An Early Meal

Kuchenmaistrey

The Landsknecht Cookbook

The Viandier of Taillevent

Le Menagier de Paris

Forme of Cury

Livre Fort Excellent de Cuyssine

<https://greneboke.com/recipes/genovesetart.html>

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<https://www.medievalcuisine.com/culinary-journey/recipe-index/ciurons-tendres-ab-let-de-melles>

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Dietary Requirements

Crowdsourced from Lochac Facebook, compiled by Cristoval

This article is crowdsourced from Lochac Facebook. Usually, these articles are fun and fluffy. This one got serious very fast, and is written up accordingly. It reflects what came up in the discussion; see a link at the bottom for a more comprehensive article on the subject.

Introduction

There's a lot more people with special dietary requirements lately, which increases the workload and complexity of cooking for feasts.

Mostly that's because many groups now ask and didn't before, partly it's because of societal trends and possibly a general increase in allergy sensitivity. Maybe we didn't have enough dirt or dogs or peanut butter as children, but it doesn't really matter why.

Mistress Muirghein pointed out a related issue that doesn't get discussed much. The SCA has a high proportion of neurodivergent people, some of whom have issues dealing with complex or unexpected foods, but usually won't list this as a dietary requirement. She advocates having some simpler plainer dishes in the mix.

Capacity of cooks

Sir Oze wrote: *"All of the people who cater and run feasts are volunteers. They cook because they enjoy food and cooking. Generally stewards are not professionals and they are definitely not being paid to do a job. There is absolutely no real world restaurant that would deliver the quality and variety of food SCA cooks deliver for anything like the price we pay to attend SCA events."*

We have a limited number of volunteer cooks. How can we ease their load, and maximise the enjoyment of those with special requirements?

Our cooks range in experience – some are current or ex-commercial chefs, experienced in adapting to changing situations. At the other end, some are amateurs trying to navigate their first feast, because their local group needs volunteers. In the middle are some of us experienced SCA cooks, self-taught and with some capacity to adapt.

Most of us are happy to go some way to meet genuine needs, but for larger feasts it's a real challenge. **THL Lucia de Valle** said that she knows how to cater for some of the more extreme restrictions at home, but can't do it as a volunteer at a feast and still enjoy cooking. **Oze** takes it as a failure if he can't cater for someone.



Elinor Fettiplace's Pickled Mushrooms (vegan, GF)
Photo: Leoba.

Good data

Asking about allergies when booking is great, but currently we're not getting much information. Some people are simply listing which items they don't prefer, and are happy just to skip a dish.

For those with actual allergies, is it a risk of discomfort, or anaphylaxis that could kill you? Is "no dairy" a lactose intolerance which you're bringing tablets for anyway, or something else? If you're a vegetarian, are cream and eggs OK? If vegan, is honey off the menu for this person?

Lord Amos Aurelius prefers to separate into three distinct categories: Medical emergency allergy, Intolerance (i.e pain/discomfort but no epi pen), and Won't eat but no allergy (vegetarians, etc, come under this).

So:- if we're going to ask about dietary requirements, we should adjust the forms to ask for more detail about what the impact could be if they ingest the wrong thing.

Several cooks mentioned that they like to talk to all the special requirements people, to work out how they can best cater for them. Mostly, I cook in my little regional group, where I know that Lady X doesn't eat alliums and Lord Y prefers gluten-free

but will taste regular dishes. I can cater for that without much difficulty.

Sometimes I cook for the barony, where I might have 80 people of whom 20 have some special requirement. The complexity goes up exponentially with numbers.

Booking cutoffs

It really helps the cooks when those with special requirements book early, providing there's an efficient link between the bookings officer and the cook.

Lady Cecily de Montgomery says that things go smoother with a hard deadline for food bookings before the event, so cooks know what they are dealing with/can have conversations with particularly tricky situations. New Zealand seems to lean more to doing that. Many Australian groups keep bookings open as long as possible, for event viability and to maximise participation; but that does make it harder for the cooks. If you're subbing out dishes to others to cook, timeframes become really critical.

Lady Li Li-Hua says that for Dumpling Feast in Cluain, they close bookings two weeks prior to the event and inform people that late bookings may not cater to dietary restrictions. For some events, some allergies may not be able to be catered for at all: they can't avoid ginger and soy for Dumpling Feast, but have lots of options for vegetarians and gluten-free.

Personal responsibility

A number of commentators, including event attendees, made the point that it's not reasonable to expect every dish to have alternative versions for every preference.

Several commentators pointed out that many attendees understand the extra load they put on. **THL Alessandra di Fiore** respects that view, and it motivates her to wow them by catering for their particular requirements.

Mistress Muirghein is happy to pay to attend the feast and eat whichever items she can, and will bring some additional snacks to get by.

Mistress Branwen is happy to go off-board, and says that it's not fair to ask the kitchen to cater for her very specific diet.

If people are so allergic that they risk death or serious injury, they should always bring their own food to events. SCA kitchens have volunteers working often in unfamiliar facilities, and there are too many opportunities for miscommunication even with the best intentions.

As a cook, you can do your best for cross-contamination, but pots get swapped between burners and the assigned spoons can get mixed up. Something can slip off a spoon unseen, and your volunteer who pops in to chop some stuff might not understand or remember why you're working that way. In my view, we can only offer best endeavours, and no guarantees.

Allergy matrices

Some people use an allergy matrix, as championed by **Master Drake Morgan** (see link at the bottom) – he says he got the idea from **Mistress Rowan**.

I have done matrices myself for the larger events. This works well if one category is "6 vegetarians" and less so if lots of individuals have very specific needs, when it just resolves down to another list.

To use an allergy matrix, you need some time to do it, which again comes back to hard cutoffs so you have a few days to do the maths.

Variety vs budget

I was an SCA vegetarian in the 1980s, and mostly got to eat honeyed carrots, ember tart, boiled cabbage and mesclun salad. Meat cooks are just not attuned to vegetarian stuff, and the medieval cookbooks have just a few recipes which seem inherently odd to meat eaters.

The meat dishes kill the feast budget, and you don't know who's sitting where so end up serving enough meat for every attendee. The budget for vegetarian dishes is what's left over, so honeyed carrots it is.

As you become more experienced as a cook, you realise that there's infinite options, and even simple things like barley cooked in (vegie) stock, sprinkled with chopped herbs, can be a very acceptable dish, and the meat eaters are happy to have some too. Ideally you become attuned to what's in season, and you can still do cool vegie and special needs dishes within budget.

Strategy

Master Crispin likes to simply have a wide range of dishes so that everybody can find something. His aim is that every eater should get at least three dishes they can consume in a course of seven dishes. That gets harder to do for larger feasts, but by then it's worth making a few more dishes.

These days, I try to have it that the fanciest dishes have at least one alternative version. So, if I make a delicious-looking chicken pie, I'll try to have a very credible vegetarian alternative, maybe a leek-and-red-wine pie.

Mestrez Ysabeau Chanteuse likes to create a menu that caters for the most common dietary restrictions as standard practice. She says that the top six dietary requirements across the entire country are vegetarian, gluten, alliums, nuts, egg and dairy. She prioritises recipes that cover all the top six, such as a gluten-free cabbage strudel.

Lady Elizabeth Saunders sometimes organises a menu so that the main dish is vegetarian and gluten free, and people can choose to have meat and bread as sides. **Master Declan** recommends not mixing the sauces into the dishes, but letting people add these subsequently if they wish.

Another strategy I've seen is to do versions of the same meat dishes, with notionally-vegetarian Beyond Meat (or similar brands). That might work for those who are vegetarian for moral reasons, but those with a real preference for plant-based food may not be impressed. I presume it's pretty expensive, and there's only so much you can do with meatex mince and faux nuggets.



Goodman of Paris, Mushroom Pasties (vegetarian)
Photo: Leoba.

No hidden allergies

Mistress Angele commented that she's a fan of the no hidden allergens feast. If it's not bread, it doesn't have gluten in it, if it's not obviously butter or cheese, there's no dairy etc.

That means, for instance, thickening with rice flour rather than the more standard period way of using bread as a thickener. I do that, but every step away from regular period practice, you're drifting towards a caricature of the real thing.

I'll often use olive oil in cooking where I'd otherwise use butter, unless there's already dairy in the dish.

Lady Cecily points out that allergens can hide in unexpected places, like soy in commercial stock, and dairy in tubes of herbs for example. We can avoid that issue by making everything from scratch (and avoids GST in Australia!). I've still found myself trying to read 3-point green type with a yellow background on a mustard jar.

Angele likes it when people let her look at the packets herself. **Lady Ragnailt** appreciates that the very busy cooks never mind going over what's in the dishes with her or letting her read ingredient packets. That can mean having someone go through your bins when you're trying to get a course out.

Angele warns about plating meat on top of vegetables; fair enough, but when I'm sending out an oval silver tray with a pie on it, it's visually appealing to put your colourful vegies on the ends as a garnish.

Don't use allergenic ingredients

One approach is just not to use the problematic ingredients. **Oze** always uses Nuttex and lactose-free dairy items as standard, gluten-free flour as much as he can, and avoids nut dishes. He says *"I tend to try and cater for as many allergies/ intolerances as possible in the 'main' menu so as to avoid making 'special' dishes."*

Personally I would hate that, and would rather not cook. I've specialised in English historical dishes, and can't manage without almonds. So I do the special dishes, as close to my chosen feast theme as I can manage.

Serving

It's one thing to make alternative versions of dishes, and another to get them out to the scattered individuals in the hall.

If you simply ask people to come to the kitchen, most of the dishes never get picked up. There's plenty to eat anyway, and it won't hurt me just to have just a little taste of the regular food....

One time, I asked the special requirements people to come to the kitchen once the course had been served. That ended with a line of people clogging up the access after the first dish had come out, which made it harder to get all the other dishes served.

I've had a dedicated food co-ordinator in the hall, doing garnishes, adding serving gear and wrangling special foods. That can be good, but as soon as you get a sick kitchen crew or an injury, I've had no choice but to call them back in to help get the course out.

Wasted effort

Many cooks have added special dishes at some expense and additional work, to find that the people don't show up on the day and didn't actually pay for their tickets; it seems to be particularly an issue for vegans (my experience too!).

Or that the people don't collect their special food and just ate what everybody else had, because it looked tasty. Yes, I've had vegetarians say they made an exception because the pie looked so yummy!



Sabina Welserin's spiced lentils (vegan, GF)
Photo: Leoba.

Communication

I usually produce a menu or feast booklet for the tables, with the menu and coded letters or symbols for the major allergy groups. So my SCA New Year feast had *Batter pudding with sack sauce* (*Fettiplace, CDEG*) which gave the recipe source and that it contained currants, dairy, eggs and gluten. OK, but not everybody brings their glasses and some people just don't read stuff anyway.

I do an ingredients list in the hall and the kitchen, subject to hand written amendments when the fennel seed somehow didn't get packed and I substituted something else.

Lady Elizabeth Saunders recommends having the ingredient list at the gate too, as a regular practice, and I think that's a great idea.

Drake has complained that ingredients lists make it easy for somebody to guess his recipes, badly.

THL Annys Blodwell pointed out that the forger likely would have been given the recipe in full if he'd been asked! My view is that a decent cook can produce a version of anything given 30 minutes on the internet, probably 5 minutes with AI.

For a recent feast, I wrote to the special requirements people individually, at the event steward's request. Many of them wrote back to say they really appreciated it. This is more doable if you have a firm cutoff date; otherwise you're writing when you need to be actively cooking.

The discussion

www.facebook.com/groups/lochac/permalink/10163551151686677/

Further reading

[Feast Allergy Management in the SCA](#),
by Baron Drake Morgan.

Wood Fire Cooking for 100

The Kitchen at Cluain's Braythwayte Manor

By Melissa Wijffels, Rose le Taillor, Nathanael d'Avranches, Chantelle Gerrard, Mærwynn æt Mædwe, Llewelyn ap Dafydd, William de Cameron, Bess Braythwayte, Edward Braythwayte

Introduction

Braythwayte Manor is a lovely event site located in the Canton of Cluain, in the far eastern reaches of Lochac.

The Manor is stewarded by Ed and Bess Braythwayte, with events held there almost exclusively use wood fire for cooking food for 80-120 people; the site may be home to the largest wood-fire-only events in the Known World.

Over the past decade, our infrastructure has improved considerably, and our team has learned a lot about how to efficiently work with fire.

George, the first bread oven

An earthen bread oven was built onsite in 2014. It was small and inefficient. It did however teach us what not to do. In particular, do not build a bread oven at ground level - it's a pain to use!

Another lesson was that thermal mass and insulation are important factors to maintaining a reasonably even cooking temperature.

George did not see a lot of use because it was impractical to us so a plan was hatched to make a much better replacement.



Henry, the new bread oven

George was replaced in 2017 by a new brick oven, with a fire-brick interior of roughly one square metre – capable of baking 16 loaves of bread simultaneously. This was designed by Master Llewelyn ap Dafydd and built as a group project.



The cooking chamber was constructed on a layer of firebricks laid on an insulating concrete base.

More concrete and insulation was then added between the cooking chamber and the outer walls of the building to provide lots of thermal mass.



The chimney sits in front of the cooking chamber so that when the door is put in place and sealed with bread dough, the chamber is completely sealed.

This design works very well with the fire smoke drawing up the chimney efficiently.

On the first night of an event, we light a small fire in the bread oven to pre-heat it for baking the following day.

Because the chimney is outside of the oven chamber, it can sometimes be challenging to get the first fire going, but good fire building technique (and potentially some live coals) make it easier. Keep this fire small, but going for at least 4 hours.

At this time, we start the sourdough in a large wooden trough – usually using around 1kg of flour per 10 people to produce enough bread for lunch, dinner, and breakfast the next day. Around 60-70% of the flour and water is mixed the first night, with the remainder added the next morning.

A lunch-time bake

Starting around 9:30, add remaining flour to dough, and form into round loaves. Place on a floured board and cover with a cloth.

Around 10:15-10:30, start building a fire in the bread oven. Ensure it has a wide bed of coals.

As the oven heats, the walls and ceiling will first turn black with soot, and then white with ash. When walls and ceiling are entirely white, rake out the coals into a pan and transfer either to the hearth or into a metal-lidded cauldron to make charcoal for future cooking.

Cool off the oven floor with a wet rag wrapped around a metal fire rake. The floor is cool enough when flour strewn on it slowly toasts (versus charring immediately, or bursting into flames!)

Put the loaves in the oven. This should be around 11:00, close the door, and seal it with dough to prevent heat escaping. In our oven, the first bake usually takes 45 minutes or so – the bread on the door will be mostly cooked by this point.



Once the bread is out, you can immediately put in a second set of bread (will bake in 2-3 hours) or pies. It is critical that these are prepared beforehand and go in as soon as possible after the bread, or the cook time will be dramatically increased.

It is possible to have a third round of baking e.g. to set custards, in the remaining heat of the oven.

The camp kitchen

This beautiful slate-roofed outdoor building was constructed by Bess and Ed Braythwayte, with the purlins and slates hung by members of the Canton in early 2019.

It contains a hearth, prep tables, and an ambry for storage of mundane kitchen items. As the kitchen is in the centre of the site, the food prep team is able to remain in a medieval atmosphere while cooking.



Photo: Eleanor Hall

Good visibility of the kitchen from the rest of site makes it easier for event attendees to see if the kitchen is understaffed or things are going amiss, allowing spontaneous offers of help.

Our hearth has a welded grating above it, allowing for antique cast-iron cauldrons from 10-70L to be set atop it. For 100 people, having at least one 50L vessel for a soup, stew, or pottage is extremely helpful.



It is very easy to burn a lot of wood on such a large hearth. Pre-planning between the fire manager and the head cook how many cauldrons need to go on the hearth, and when, allows the pre-building small individual fires under each one rather than a continuous bed of coals, and the rotation of cauldrons on and off the fire as necessary.

These small fires can be individually managed to be burning as coals, or as bright fires for boiling, depending on the cook's needs.

For cooks who have never before run a kitchen on an open fire, it's critical that they are supported by an experienced fire manager from the beginning, as many things that are quick in a modern kitchen take quite a bit longer on the hearth fire.

Washing up

Hot water on-tap at a camping event - luxury! Thanks to Ed and Bess for the building and Rudiger Adler for the design and manufacture of the stainless steel annular tank that is the functional heart of Matilda, our site has hot water for washing-up since 2020.



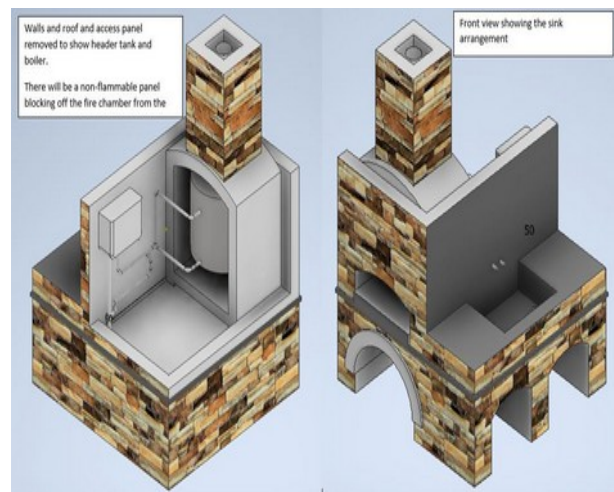
Matilda, wood-fired hot water and washing-up sink

Cold water is fed to a small header tank that maintains a constant level in the boiler tank. The water is heated by a wood fire beneath the tank. The boiler tank is annular so that the heat and smoke from the fire go up through the center, heating the water.

The water gets close to boiling (hot enough to make hot drinks directly from the tap!) so we always have to warn people at the start of an event not to put their hands directly under the tap.

This is a massive quality-of-life improvement for washing kitchen dishes, particularly large cauldrons, which take a reasonable amount of water to rinse out.

Having a stock of group aprons available (and someone to distribute them) reduces the number of people with black soot from cauldrons on their garb during washing-up. We have also discovered recently that a chainmail scouring pad makes cleaning 5+ large cauldrons go much faster.



General recommendations

Source dry hardwood for cooking – the drier the better! Splitting logs prior to an event helps them dry faster. If possible, getting wood that's been stored, covered, or standing dead for 2-4 years is much better than this season's wood.

Wet wood creates more smoke, which can cause respiratory issues for those near the fire, makes fires more difficult to light, and burns colder.

Have a separate person or team running the fires – these require frequent attention, and at this scale, it's very challenging for someone to both run the food preparation team and still tend fires.

Have a separate team of 2-4 people managing the bread oven, separate from, but in communication with, the cooks, particularly if the oven will be used for other cooking such as pies, roasting vegetables or reheating food.

Plan to start a fire at least 30 minutes before you need to cook on it as it takes time to build up a bed of coals.

Good communication and team-work are needed to ensure everything is served, leftovers stored, and cauldrons washed before dark.

Having someone in the kitchen dedicated to leading a small team to put away leftovers and ferry items to the washing up team helps, as does having a quantity of storage containers (or takeaway containers) to store leftovers if refrigeration is available.



Colouring food in English recipes

By Master Cristoval

At Rowany Festival, I took part in the “Laurel Prize Tourney” where aspiring laurels show off what they’ve been working on. One of my offerings was some heraldic marchpane biscuits. Several of the laurels felt that the use of food colouring was a bit much.



I’m not particularly contrite because (a) the plan was to get some attention to my work, (b) heraldry needs to be eye-catching, and (c) the biscuits were meant to be showing off my skill in cooking rather than in selecting the best shades of commercial colourings.

I was chatting with Mistress Kiriell about the limitations of period food colouring, and she challenged me to document what the period options were, and maybe which shades of commercial colours might be the most accurate. Hence this article, and some to follow.

My study was limited to English sources, as that is my core area of cooking interest. I’m looking for colours that will withstand baking temperatures.

The short answer

There was wildly more use of saffron for yellow than was ever sane.

There is plenty of use of parsley as a chlorophyll green colour, and some use of saunders (sandalwood) for an orangey red.

Then there’s a few weird and wonderful other colours, which are toxic or unobtainable or don’t work very well. I knew all that already, and this article just digs in a bit deeper.

Source manuscripts

The sources with the most detail on colours are from the 1300s. There’s a couple of related manuscripts in the British Library which date from the early 1300s, pretty much the oldest cooking manuscripts in England. One is in French, *MS Royal 12.C.xii*, and another in early English is *MS Add 46919*, which includes translations of many of the same recipes. *Forme of Cury* (c1390) has some unusual colours too.

After that, nothing really changes, but the interest in coloured food drops off gradually until Elizabethan times when (eg Elinor Fettiplace’s *Receipt Book*) the emphasis is instead on subtle pastel colourings from careful preparation of seasonal fruits and flowers.

The long answer

The rest of this article is a tour of the colour wheel, with a discussion of the known colours and how they can be obtained now. I used them for some marchpane biscuits as a test case.

WHITE

Amidoun (starch, basically wheaten cornflour) is sometimes used as a white, for instance in *lete lardes* previously mentioned.

YELLOW

Saffron gives a bright yellow, which becomes a bit orange in higher concentrations. It’s mentioned in all the cooking manuscripts I’ve seen. It was always expensive. Saffron is readily available in shops with a wide selection of spices, and online.

In an [earlier article](#), I found that **safflower** was the main yellow colour substitute in England, with **turmeric** coming in later. Dried safflowers can be obtained online with some hunting.

ORANGE

MS Add 46919 says of the Maumenee ground chicken dish “*pe colour schal beon inde*”. The French version of the recipe says “*sorré ou ynde*”.

Inde probably means orange or tawny. While we should be careful about assuming that words meant the same throughout period, there is [evidence](#) in the 16th century that this word then applied to **turmeric**.

Turmeric is widely available in supermarkets.

RED

Where a red colour is wanted in an English recipe pre 1600, it's nearly always **saunders**, which is ground red sandalwood.

This is still available from specialist suppliers, particularly Indian food stores.

In MS Add 46919 and one or two other sources, there is a reference to a colourant called **sanc dragon** (dragon's blood). It's possible this is the very toxic cinnabar ore, but much more likely that it was a crimson resin available from the Canary Islands. It shows up in medieval herbals including Gerard's. The resin is barely available online in Australia – look for [Dracaena draco](#) but *Dracaena cinnabari* is similar and probably more available in period too.

Alkanet is a member of the borage family, and the ground roots make a red colour. Interestingly, in alkaline environments it can make a blue or purple colour, but I don't know how practical that is for colouring food. This was the red originally used in Kashmiri cooking for Rogan josh and it is somewhat commercially available for that. It is a legal food colour in Australia, but banned in the EU for toxicity so take that into consideration. The seeds are readily available.

Actually I first bought alkanet powder which a website said was the real deal, which turned out to be labelled as common alkanet (*anchusa*) rather than dyer's alkanet ([Alkanna tinctoria](#)) which comes as roots. The powder gave a muddy reddy purple which didn't work in cooking. I queried with the company, they checked with their supplier and it turned out they were actually supplying *Onosma hispidum*, which is used as a substitute in India and also has toxicity issues.

I have ordered more genuine alkanet from a couple of suppliers.

Certain recipes between 1300-1600 use **red roses** as a colouring agent, but the colour appears to have been fugitive and limited in application. **Red wine** has certain colouring uses too.

Blood is sometimes used to get a red or pink colour.

PURPLE

The *Forme of Cury* (c1390) refers to a colour called “pownas” which is uncertain but generally understood as purple. The manuscript says to use **turnsole** to get this colour, for a multicoloured milk curd dish, *lete lardes*.

Turnsole is a dye made from the fruits of the annual turnsole plant, [Chrozophora tinctoria](#). It is pH dependent, like litmus paper or water you've cooked red cabbage in (a different chemical though). Turnsole is these days considered potentially toxic.

I gather you squeezed the juice out, and would get a blue or purple dye depending on what you mixed it with. You'd soak this into a linen rag and retrieve the colour later by soaking.

The period recipe states that for purple you get “a healthy man who has been drinking wine copiously to urinate on the earth” and dry the dye rags in the fumes. While I'm all for period techniques, and would volunteer for this component, I'm not sure people would be keen for my subsequent biscuits.

The immediate practical problem is that the display colour will be affected by the pH of the food you are trying to colour.

Turnsole does not appear to be available for purchase in Australia, even as the plants, though they are introduced weeds in certain drier parts, particularly around Horsham in Victoria, Griffith in NSW and north of Adelaide SA. I'm planning a road trip to look for some, in early 2027.

Violets are used for colouring certain recipes, eg *Vyolette* (c1430), a coloured custard. Note that references to violet “leaves” generally mean the flower petals, as that word was not in use.

Mulberries were sometimes used for a purple colour.

BLUE

See the aforementioned turnsole dye, which is apparently blue in less basic conditions (eg boiled with wine).

GREEN

There are many mentions, from 1300 to 1600, of using ground **parsley** (sometimes “herbs”) for a good green.

BLACK

Forme of Cury uses blood, boiled and fried, as a black colour.

Experiment

As my Festival display was of marchpane heraldry, for this experiment I used a single mix of marchpane (ground almonds, icing sugar, water) and then mixed in various period colourants. Ingredients of different origins, ages and strengths might give different colour tones.

The results of my experimentation are shown in Figure 1.

Results

Natural – a light buff colour.

White – I used non-wheaten cornflour, as much as I dared, and it came out whiter than the natural.

Yellow saffron – a credible yellow, could have made it brighter with more saffron but there are practical limits here!

Yellow safflower – a bit more golden, a nice colour.

Orange turmeric – darker than the saffron or safflower.

Red saunders – came out a mushroomy pink, and would have got browner with more powder. Maybe it needed to be freshly ground, or I was given a substitute.

Red dragon's blood – impressive orange red when ground in the mortar, very hard to

remove the resin afterwards! Gave a speckled reddy purple, maybe I need the real Canary Islands version, or resin lumps hand-pricked for the reddest, or maybe it was always an act of faith.

Red alkanet – watch this space, new roots ordered.

Purple or blue turnsole – watch this space for the road trip in summer!

Green parsley – gave a credible green colour, but it seems to have faded with a couple of days of storage. Might get a brighter colour by using young leaves in spring.

Black blood – I couldn't stomach that, sorry.

Conclusion

Marchpane biscuits are just one application, and no doubt results would vary with other materials.

There will be a learning curve on these natural dyes, and maybe some of them will respond to different extraction methods such as long boiling or alcohol or soaking in warm oil.

But in general, my conclusion is that you have viable yellows and green, but the others are a doubtful proposition. Going by the later recipes, the medieval recipe writers agreed.

Next steps

Next issue – using commercial food colours. How do they compare?



Guild Wardens

By Mistress Gabriella Borromei

At the 14 June guild meeting, there was lots of discussion on how we can best progress the guild, and the progression system. Mistress Gabriella has written up her guidance on making the most of local wardens.

Role of wardens

Guild wardens are local officers of the Cooks Guild, responsible for facilitating guild activities in a region. They are appointed by the Guild Administrator.

A warden can encourage local chapters to form, can promote things like cooking entries to kingdom competitions, participation in local A&S collegia, and things like that.

Wardens should collect information on local guild members to support their progression through the guild ranking system. There is a form that members can use to record their work, and now there are additional ways in which a warden can document members' cooking progress.

Wardens can locally approve members as apprentices and all the way to journeymen, by recording their ranks in the guild's shared GoogleDoc.

A warden can't approve mastery skills and the Master/Mistress rank, but their recommendation to the Guild Administrator will count for a lot.

Where ranks change, wardens will usually be the ones advising members of their new rank, in email or another written format.

Becoming a warden

If you'd like to be a guild warden, please contact the Guild Administrator (lochaccooks@gmail.com), and indicate which region you propose to be warden for.

If the Administrator supports the application, they will post a note on the guild forums asking for commentary. People might have thoughts on the boundaries, or may propose alternative candidates.

Once the Administrator is happy that the proposed warden has general guild support, the appointment will be announced on the forums.

The Administrator may remove a warden or re-advertise the role at any time, for instance if the warden becomes less active or there would be value in a fresh approach.

The Administrator will be putting out a general call for volunteer wardens shortly.

Stirring the Pot

Thoughts from the Chronicler

I became active in the guild because I'm passionate about medieval cooking.

The guild seemed an effective way to communicate my enthusiasm and that of likeminded others. I believe this magazine is working well at achieving that.

We still have work to do in refreshing the guild recognition system, and celebrating the excellent achievements of many in Lochac. Help us to do all that better!

Master Cristoval
Guild Chronicler



This is me cooking at *On Ilkla Moor* in 2010, run with my wife Mistress Alys Dietsch. We had a series of these in Okewaite, which largely used meat and vegetables and herbs from our farm at the time. Attendees all got to chop vegies, grind herbs, and as much as possible share in the food production. A different sort of event, which was fun for about 30 friends.