
Opening Extract from...

Scottish Baking

Written by Sue Lawrence

Published by Birlinn Ltd

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First published in 2014 by Birlinn Ltd
West Newington House
10 Newington Road
Edinburgh
EH9 1QS
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Photography by Alex Hewitt
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Design and layout by James Hutcheson and Tom Johnstone

ISBN: 978-1-78027-200-9

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

Typeset in Adobe Garamond Pro at Birlinn

Printed and bound by Hussar Books, Poland

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DEDICATION

For Mum, with love

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Thanks to Pat, Euan, Faith and Jess – for advising and eating.

And to Linda Dick, Sue Hadden, Margaret Horn, Claire Mckay, Isabelle Plews, Jess Plews, Alan Stuart and Jo Sutherland – for recipe ideas old and new, and for tasting!

Thanks as ever to Jenny Brown for her extraordinary patience and enthusiasm.

Introduction

'In Scotland, amongst the rural population generally, the girdle takes the place of the oven, the bannock of the loaf.'

F. Marian McNeill wrote this in her 1929 book *The Scots Kitchen*, and although it no longer rings true, since most kitchens nowadays have ovens, it perhaps explains the origin of some of our baking traditions. We have never had grand cakes or indeed many yeast-based breads or loaves, since the only way to bake bread with yeast (or brewer's barm as was often used) was to get a piece of bread-dough from the village baker, add some fruit and spices and ask the baker to bake it for you. Hey presto, the Selkirk bannock was born.

Our dependency on the girdle ('griddle' in countries other than Scotland) means that, to this day, we have a plethora of oatcakes and scones and pancakes baked upon the girdle. This is because the girdle, as well as the soup-pan, were probably the only pieces of equipment in a rural Scottish kitchen.

Nowadays, of course, we have many wonderful regional specialities that are not girdle based, and of course we have all our new-fangled imports, but in our nostalgic moments we still hark back to the old-fashioned bakes. There is a time and a place: sometimes only a tattie scone, warm from the girdle and dripping in butter, will do. At other times, a slice of indulgent millionaire's shortbread fits the bill just fine, thank you.

There is an old-fashioned little tea-shop along the road from me. Every time I pass, on the way to the bus stop, I have to stand still and sniff the air. For the smell coming through the door is so reminiscent of my childhood. It is sweet, sugary and buttery; it is shortbread being baked for tea, soda scones straight off the girdle,

border tart fresh from the oven. I can almost taste the crunchy sugar on top of the shortbread, the homely taste of the scone as the butter soaks into its warm soft dough and the buttery-sweet fruit mixture of the pastry-lined tart. There is no smell quite like it. In my opinion, you can forget the aroma of roasting coffee if you want to sell your house; get down and dirty with the flour and sugar and do some home-baking instead.

I have lived and breathed baking ever since I can remember. And in Scotland this does not mean fancy iced buns, cupcakes laden with piped icing or garishly decorated gateaux. No, for us in Scotland it is the homely smells of freshly baked scotch pancakes, treacle scones, jam and coconut tarts and of course shortbread – those things I smelled as I walked through the door after school that sum up Scottish baking. Nothing fancy – but oh so delicious.

The cake tins in my home – and everyone else's – were filled with baked goods such as sultana cake and fruit loaf for visitors popping in; it was all just part of growing up. And when my children were young, they too would come home to baking smells and to cookie jars filled to the gunwales.

The many church fêtes, school fairs and gala days of my youth featured home-baking stalls. And just like those today which are still allowed under the ludicrous health and safety legislation, the baking was and is always the first to go. There would be gingerbread, cherry and coconut slices, scones, home-baked biscuits and of course tablet wrapped in greaseproof paper, all laid out in serried rows, ready for the onslaught. The minute the doors opened, there was a rush, an unseemly surge towards the baking stall which was known to sell out in minutes. Heaven help anyone trying to reach the tombola stall if they were in the path of the baking fans, intent on their purchase.

Opposite: Dundee Cake and Dundee Cupcakes (p.51).

Scottish baking has evolved over the years, with old recipes adjusted to add less sugar and less of the unhealthier fats – but the traditional old favourites remain as popular as ever. Nowadays though, since baking has become the new hip pastime, there are many other baked goodies that we Scots love both to bake and devour. This book contains mainly traditional recipes, but also many new modern ones to tempt your tastebuds. There is always something – old or new – to satisfy our insatiable sweet tooth.

(** after the recipe name denotes contemporary recipes)

CHAPTER ONE

Bread and Bappery

Bappery is a wonderful word coined by the actress Siobhan Redmond when she described to me what her aunts used to love making when she was growing up in Glasgow; to her it meant scones, cakes and teabreads, all the home-baking that we Scots were brought up on. But bappery is such an iconic term, I like to use it to describe all yeasted Scottish baking, whether it is for a butterie, a Selkirk bannock or of course a bap.

Over the centuries the type of breads that have been enjoyed in Scotland has varied enormously, from medieval trencher breads and sixteenth century wheaten loaves to the healthy twentieth century Doris Grant loaf and of course a myriad of regional oatmeal or barley meal bread in between. In most rural homes, however, there would have been no oven and so girdle breads and scones were more traditional.

The important thing to remember when baking any yeast-based recipe is that, since Scotland is an inherently cold country, you can often ignore some recipe instructions that say 'Leave to rise for an hour'. In Scotland, unless you live in a modern house with triple glazing and central heating on full blast, you need to give the dough plenty time to rise. My Victorian stone house has an airing cupboard which I sometimes use for bread dough to rise. Otherwise, it's my heated floor in the kitchen – but I place the bowl of dough on a wire rack, so it never has direct contact with heat. And even then it usually needs a couple of hours, not one hour, certainly in midwinter. Besides, in the olden days, it would have been a long slow process. And you know what? The bread would have tasted even better for that.

Opposite: Oatmeal Loaf (p.16).

1

BAPS

makes 12

Baps – or morning rolls as they are often called throughout Scotland – are perfect for breakfast as they are soft, floury and unchallenging as the first food of the day. It is only later on that you feel ready for a well-fired or crusty roll, which is not only noisy to eat, it can also be hard work on the jaws. In Aberdeenshire, morning rolls are called 'softies' if they have no flour on them and 'floury baps' if they do.

My parents both remember, from their Dundee childhoods, being sent to the baker's for morning rolls before breakfast on certain days – not every day, as porridge was the daily staple. Just as we have the vision of every French household sending someone for the morning baguette, so the Scottish family sent a minion (usually the youngest child) to the bakers for breakfast rolls.

According to F. Marian McNeill, in the sixteenth century baps were known as 'bawbee baps', a bawbee being the sixteenth and seventeenth-century term for a Scottish halfpenny.

Baps are wonderful split and spread with butter and eaten with bacon, egg, sausage or, my favourite, black pudding and tomato.

500g/1lb 2oz strong white flour, sifted

1 heaped tsp salt

25g/1oz butter, diced

1 x 7g packet of easy-bake dried yeast

300–325ml/10–11fl oz milk and water (mixed), hand-hot (tepid)

flour, to sprinkle

Mix the flour and salt in a bowl, rub in the butter, then stir through the yeast. Make a well in the centre. Gradually pour in enough of the tepid liquid to form a stiffish dough. Then, using lightly floured hands, bring together to form a dough. (I use a claw shape in both hands to draw together the dough.) Turn this out onto a lightly floured board and

knead for about 10 minutes or until you can feel it change texture, from rough and nubbly to smooth and elastic. Place in a lightly oiled bowl and cover. Leave to rise somewhere vaguely warm for 1½–2 hours – or until well-risen.

Knock back the dough to punch out the air, then divide into twelve pieces. Shape each into a round by rolling lightly between the palms of both hands, then tuck any joins underneath, so that the top is convex. Place on a lightly oiled baking sheet and cover loosely. Leave for about 30 minutes – again in a vaguely warm place.

Then, using the heel of your hand, press down gently on each one to flatten slightly. Sprinkle lightly with flour. Bake at 220C/425F/Gas 7 for about 15 minutes, or until puffed up and golden brown. Eat warm.

2

SELKIRK BANNOCK

makes one large bannock

Reputedly a favourite teatime treat of Queen Victoria, this rich fruited sweet bread is a speciality of the Borders, having originated in the town of Selkirk as a means of using up spare bread dough. Selkirk bannock look-alikes are now made by bakers in other Border towns, such as Galashiels, Hawick and Kelso. Bakers nowadays do not, of course, make them as a means of using up a batch of basic dough by enriching with butter, sugar and sultanas, but it is interesting to read the basic guidelines for this method in F. Marian McNeill's The Scots Kitchen. *She writes:*

'Get two pounds of dough from the baker. Into this rub four ounces of butter and four ounces of lard until melted but not oiled. Then work in half a pound of sugar, three-quarters of a pound sultanas and a quarter pound of finely chopped orange peel. Put the dough into a buttered tin, let it stand for about thirty minutes to rise then bake in a good steady oven.'

Here is my more modern version (for those of us unable to buy two pounds of dough from the bakers!) for a magnificently bulging and moist bannock that is easy to make and all too easy to consume. Mine is a lot less

sweet than most traditional ones, which have some 200g/7oz sugar, but I think the inherent sweetness of the dried fruit more than compensates. You can easily add an extra 25g/1oz sugar if you like. Also, since I am not keen on peel, I prefer to leave it out and use only sultanas. Besides, according to Theodora Fitzgibbon's Taste of Scotland*, it was originally only made with finest Turkish sultanas. Orange or mixed peel seems to be a rather more recent addition but I do like to add a hint of citrus by grating in some lemon zest. I am not sure Queen Victoria would have been amused by this frippery, though.*

- 1kg/2lb 4oz strong white flour
- 175g/6oz butter, softened
- 2 x 7g sachets of easy-bake dried yeast
- 70g/2½oz golden caster sugar
- 500g/1lb 2oz sultanas and raisins (or just sultanas)
- grated zest of 1 lemon, optional
- approx. 500ml/18 fl oz milk and water (mixed), hand-hot (tepid)
- 1 free-range egg yolk, beaten, to glaze

Sift the flour and a pinch of salt into a bowl, then rub in the butter till thoroughly combined. Stir in the yeast and sugar, then add the dried fruit and lemon zest.

Now add enough of the tepid liquid to combine to a soft but not sticky dough. Bring together with lightly floured hands then turn onto a floured board and knead well for 10 minutes or so until smooth. This is hard work with such a large mass of dough, but just think what it is doing for your upper arms!

Place in a lightly oiled bowl, cover and leave somewhere vaguely warm for about 2 hours, or until well-risen.

Shape into a bannock: a round flattened dome about 28cm/11in diameter. Place on a buttered baking sheet and brush all over with half the egg yolk. Leave for about an hour or until well-risen, then re-brush with yolk and bake at 220C/425F/Gas 7 for 10 minutes. Next cover loosely with foil to prevent any fruit poking out becoming burned, and reduce to 190C/375F/Gas 5 and continue to bake for about 30 minutes. It is ready once golden brown all over and when the base sounds hollow if tapped underneath. Leave to cool on a wire rack, then, once completely cold, slice and spread with butter.