



MANX FARMING AND COUNTRY LIFE

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COOKING AND FOOD



Serving from Three-legged Pot.

It is very hard for us to imagine homes without a gas or electric cooker, even coal, homes without a fridge or freezer to keep food fresh. How did people manage when there were no convenient shops to go to whenever they were short of something? How was it possible to feed families with ten or more children or all the workers on a sizable farm without these things which seem essential to us? It was a case of making use of everything that was available from croft or farm, from the Island and the sea around it. To survive people had to provide almost everything for themselves and to prepare, preserve and plan ahead.

Winter stores were essential and salting or smoking were the only ways of keeping meat and fish for long periods.

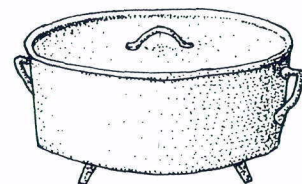
FUELS FOR COOKING

The main fuel continued to be turf until well into the nineteenth century. Pieces of turf from the thatched turf stacks outside would be brought in and placed in special store recesses by the 'chiollagh'. Gorse sticks from beneath the corn stacks provided an almost smokeless fuel for baking. Ling (heather) was another fuel good for baking and in some districts it was collected in large quantities and was almost as important as turf. Trees were very scarce on the Island in the eighteenth century and so gorse 'bons' were collected instead of logs. Straw, 'fearin' (bracken) and potato stems were all used under the griddle. Ripe briars also supplied extra heat for cooking.

COOKING UTENSILS

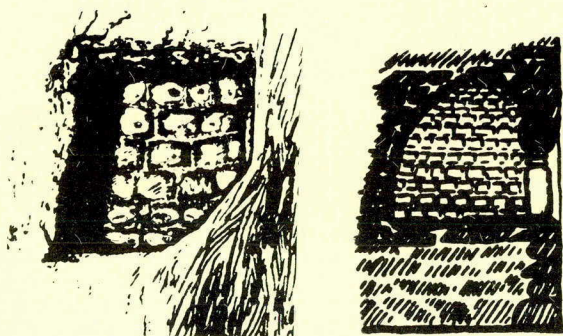


Griddle on Slouree.



Pot Oven.

The chief cooking utensils were the kettle, frying pan, three-legged pot, griddle and pot-oven. The three-legged pot was used for making porridge, broth and potatoes and herring. It hung from the 'slouree' in the chimney and was also used to boil small potatoes for the pig. The griddle was a flat circular metal plate, sometimes with handles, used for baking. It was placed on a metal tripod called the 'croe'. Two people worked together when baking, one attending of the dough and the other feeding small pieces of fuel under the griddle to make extra heat. Often it was a child or an old person who did the 'putting under'. The pot oven was a round pot with a flat lid. It was placed on the hot turf and a red hot sod of turf was placed on the lid. The pot-oven, was used to bake pies, puddings, even the goose at Christmas.



Wall Oven.

FIREPLACES & OVENS

The methods of cooking changed much between 1700 and 1900. In early times baking had been done on a baking stone or 'losh' and this was gradually replaced by the griddle. A primitive type of built-in oven was sometimes made in the thickness of the wall beside the 'chiollagh'. It was made of brick and either square or beehive shaped. This type of oven was first heated by burning gorse 'bons' and sticks inside it. These were raked out when it was sufficiently hot, then the oven was quickly brushed out and the cooking put in. The oven was sealed up with a well-fitting piece of slate. As the nineteenth century went on the 'chiollagh' began to disappear. First a metal grate made by a local blacksmith took the place of open fire on the hearth, then later on a small Yorkshire range, consisting of iron hobs, grate and oven would be put in. Spits and Dutch ovens were common on the larger farms.



Range.

CHANGES IN FOOD

Just as the cooking utensils changed over this period so did some of the foods. An important change in the early eighteenth century was the coming of potatoes to the Island. Before there were potatoes the staple diet of Manx people was bread made from barley or oatmeal, barley and oatmeal porridge, fish and meat, especially pork. Potatoes quickly became a very important part of the Manx diet and potatoes and herrings were eaten two or three times a week even on large farms. The potatoes were cooked in their jackets in the three-legged pot, with the herring laid on top of them.

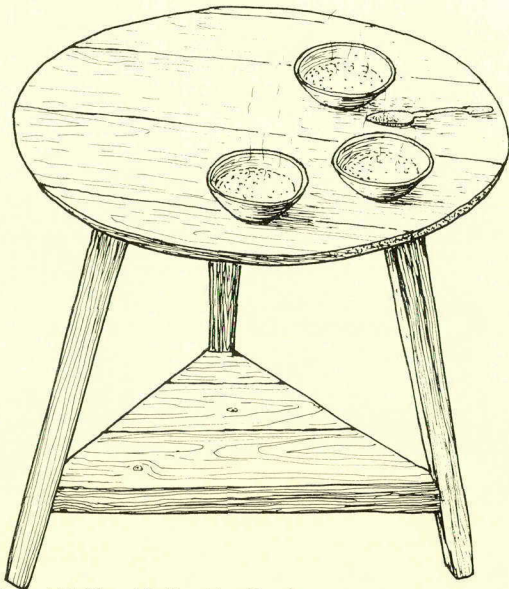


Potato Bruiser.

It was well into the nineteenth century before wheat flour came into general use. Thomas Quayle who wrote about Manx farming in the year 1812 remarked: "Even at this day it (wheat) has not entered into the ordinary food of the inferior orders of people dwelling in the towns, and still less of the peasantry.

With other English habits in towns especially they begin to relish the wheaten loaf". Later in the nineteenth century after wheat prices became lower wheat flour began to replace oat and barley bread. It was then that soda cake (called 'flour bread'), bonnag, and potato cakes became typical items of the Manx diet.

BREAD & PORRIDGE

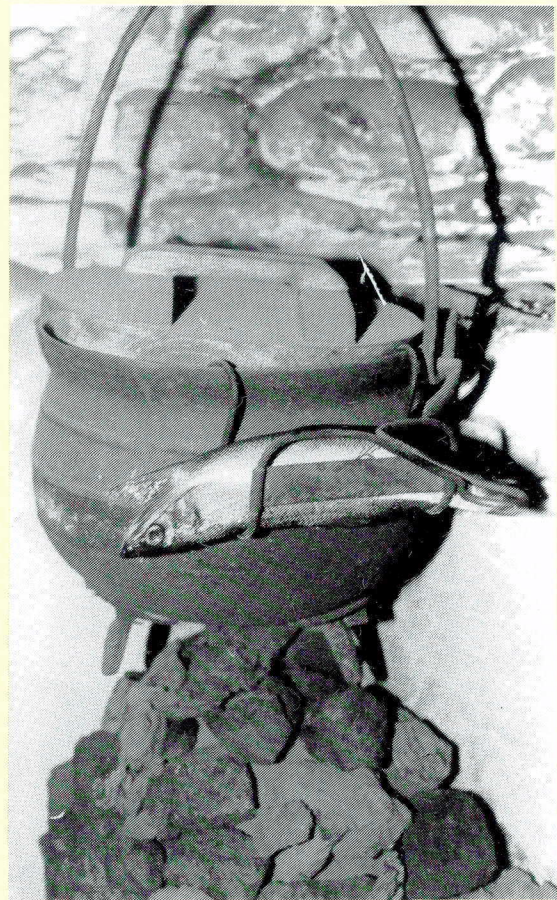


Round Table with Porridge Bowls.

Oatmeal and barley meal supplied both bread and porridge. All bread had to be made at home. Oat bread would keep longer than barley bread so it was made in larger batches. The oatcakes would be kept in a 'dollan' (a circular tray with sides) and placed on the 'latts'. The 'latts' were a framework of thin wooden strips nailed between the joists of the living room ceiling. Both oat and barley bread were made by mixing meal, salt and water together. Oat bread was hardened beside the fire before being scored. The circular barley cakes were about 40cm in diameter and 'as thin as paper'. They were always clapped by hand without the use of a rolling pin. Porridge could be made from either oatmeal or barley meal. A basin of porridge was often eaten both for breakfast and supper. The thickened cold porridge was often boiled up again with milk. Buttermilk was put on the porridge. Fresh milk was at times considered too precious to eat with porridge, and if there was no buttermilk ale might be put on the porridge. Pease porridge, made by putting peas, a little groats and water into a pan, adding a few sliced potatoes and boiling for a long time was common on farms where peas were grown.

PRESERVING FOOD

In winter much home-preserved food was eaten. Salted herrings from the barrel or crock were washed to remove the pickle, then roasted for breakfast or boiled with the potatoes. Other fish such as cod, conger, pollock and carp, from local fishing yawls were also important. 'Gibbins' (sand eels) harvested with a special sickle from northern beaches, were boiled, fried or salted. Fish were often dried and smoked in the chimney to be eaten later with butter and potatoes. Salted meat in the form of mutton was kept in a barrel for winter use. On larger farms a beef would be salted. When a pig was killed it was an important occasion. Brawn would be made from the head, pies from the ribs and hams would be salted. Hams and home-cured bacon could be seen hanging from hooks in the kitchen of croft and farm alike. The crock of salted butter was another part of the winter store.



Herring Roaster fixed to Three-legged Pot.

DRINKS

Buttermilk from the churning was the favourite drink. Tea was a luxury for most of

the nineteenth century. In 1878 a pound of tea cost 2s 6d, at a time when a farm labourer living on a croft would receive 12 shillings a week. Parents might have a cup of tea on a Sunday only, watering down what was left for their children. In earlier times 'crockans' of home-brewed ale with large earthenware plugs were common household items. Brewing pans were passed from house to house around the parish during the eighteenth century. Various herb beers were also made. Milk and water was commonly drunk.

BROTH & PUDDING

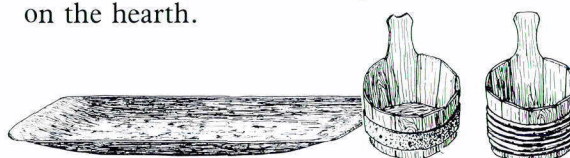
Broth, made in the three-legged pot, was a common dinner. Broth was made with a piece of mutton, pearl barley, leeks, parsley, thyme, turnip and carrots. Dumplings – one for each person – were cooked in the broth. In later times 'Spotted Dick' – a flour pudding with whole raisins or currants in – was frequently cooked in the broth pot, wrapped in a thick cloth. What remained of the 'Spotted Dick' was often eaten fried the next day.

SPECIAL MANX DISHES

Special Manx foods included 'Sollaghyn' and 'Couree'. 'Couree' was made by first soaking husks of oats and oatmeal, then sieving the husks off, boiling and stirring the white liquid left this until it thickened into a jelly. This was eaten either hot with skimmed milk, or cold with warmed milk. 'Couree' was left out in the kitchen at night for the fairies to eat. 'Sollaghyn' was a change from the usual oatmeal porridge. To make it oatmeal and water were heated until the contents of the pan were dried hard – it had to be stirred continually to prevent burning – then the fatty liquid from a pot of broth was poured on to it. The mixture then bubbled up and was supposed to be thick enough for the pot stick to stand upright in it.

Two special delicacies were 'Pinjean' and 'Groosniyuys' 'Pinjean', or junket, was made by adding rennet to warm fresh cow's milk to make it curdle. When the 'Pinjean' was cold it was eaten with sugar and cream. It was greatly appreciated after a hot day's work in the fields. 'Groosniyuys' (sometimes called 'Canoose') was a pudding made from a cow's second or third milking after calving.

There were also special foods for certain occasions. A goose was the usual Christmas Day dinner. When the pig was killed there would be haggis. The pig's stomach would be cleansed, stuffed with groats, onions, suet, dried fruit and some liver cut up very small. The traditional supper on Shrove Tuesday was meat, with a large pudding and pancakes made with both buttermilk and fresh milk. Good Friday was a day with a difference since no iron griddle was to be put in the fire on that day. A stick of mountain ash was used to poke the fire and because the iron griddle could not be used a large oat or barley cake was baked on the hearth.



Wooden Trencher.

Stave-built Porringers.

Some Manx Recipes

Soda Bread

1lb flour (2.2kg) 1 saltspoon salt buttermilk
1 level teaspoonful soda or sour milk

Sift dry ingredients, add sufficient liquid to mix to a rather soft dough, beat for a minute. Cut off about the size of an egg, toss on floured board. Roll and bake on well-heated but medium griddle. (For a beginner it is easier if the dough is rolled to 1/2cm.) If using sour milk, beat it well for a minute before adding. When it has risen and is slightly brown, turn the cake and let the other side brown slightly.

Barley Bread

Barley meal water to mix.
salt

Roll very thinly and cook on a hot griddle.

Oat Cakes

3 oz flour (85g) Salt
1 1/2 oz fat (43g) Buttermilk to mix
4 oz medium oatmeal (113g) 1 saltspoon soda

Rub fat in flour, add salt and oatmeal, sieve in soda. Mix rather soft (as it dries out), roll to one-eighth of an inch (4mm), and cut in desired size. Cook in hot oven. (Crisps as it cools).

Slim Cakes

1/2 lb flour (227g) salt
2 oz lard (57g)

Rub fat into flour and salt, mix to a stiff dough with sweet milk. Cut off small piece and roll as thinly as possible. Cook rather slowly. A little sugar improves it. Store in tin. Keeps.

Potato Bread and Scones

2oz flour (57g) half pound cold potatoes
half ounce lard (227g) salt

Rub the fat into the flour. Sieve into it the potatoes. Knead. Unless the potatoes are very dry, no liquid is needed. In any case not more than one tablespoon milk (cut off small piece, roll into ball). Roll very thinly. Bake on hot griddle.

For scones: Roll the dough about a quarter-of-an-inch thick (half a cm). Cut into rounds. Re-roll the pieces left, etc. Cook on a moderate griddle. Split, butter, and eat hot.