

**Ffesty pen – End of Harvest Feast  
A Welsh Feast Day and Eisteddfod  
A study of food and custom in Wales from the 13<sup>th</sup> to the 15<sup>th</sup> century**

**Mistress Charis Accipiter**

Welsh food and feasting practices prior to the mid-sixteenth century were based on a culture of herding and the movement of flocks between mountain and lowland pastures. (21) After the Act of Union in 1536, English law and practices became predominant throughout the country.(9,27) Very few extant texts covering food and cooking in Wales are available prior to the mid-sixteenth century. For this reason the study of food and feasting in early Welsh history requires the study of historical texts such as Gerald of Wales wrote of his journey to recruit men to fight in the Third Crusade in 1178.(18) Early sumptuary laws such as the Laws of Hywel Dda or poems and songs from the period are also useful for supporting evidence of custom.

This project started as a simple interest in cooking a feast in the time period of my thirteenth century Welsh persona, and grew into a themed event when the lack of available material presented the opportunity for further research into what was eaten and how custom differed from other areas at that time.

Feast days in Wales at this time most commonly celebrated seasonal changes (25), local Saint's Days (40), and also regional celebrations such as the Eisteddfod(7,27,31). Feasts at this time were not only a time to gather and celebrate but were also used as a opportunity to demonstrate wealth and power for a Lord, Prince or Chief.(20) The variety of dishes as well as the number served showed the importance of both the host and their guests. ( 13,30,39) Some customs were distinctly Welsh in origin, such as serving guests in groups of three (to represent the trinity.) (39) Also, the timing of meals and the number eaten differed from the custom in England and Scotland. The main meal of the day was generally eaten in the later afternoon or evening (depending on the season) with only a light meal taken to break the fast in the morning. In the winter months, when less hard labor was done, only two meals a day were taken. From Saint Dafydd's Day (March 12<sup>th</sup>) to Michaelmas (September 29<sup>th</sup>) three meals a day were taken with a second light meal often eaten in the field or at work. (25, 28)

Ffesty Pen, a fall harvest festival was often celebrated after Michaelmas, in mid-October when the last harvest was in and all the flocks were in their winter range. (27, 40) For the purposes of the event, this was chosen to accommodate the set dates of traditional Settmour Swamp events. To encourage a wealth of music and storytelling at the event, as was common practice at any celebration in Wales (7, 18, 25) the celebration will also include the Eisteddfod, a traditional Welsh bardic competition. There will also be period dance throughout the day.

The first recorded Eisteddfod was held in 1176 at the court of Lord Rhys ap Gruffydd. (25, 17) The festival celebrates the Welsh bardic tradition with the prize of an ornate chair (in more recent times a silver chair) going to the winner. (17) There are traditional formats for the poems and songs and more study of this topic will be shared at the event.

Finally, though feast days were large celebrations, most often hosted by the lord of the cantreff, where the villeins and their families had a day of rest, many important tasks were still accomplished on these days. Often a lord would give his officers their entitlements on a given feast day such as garments of wool or linen or the cloth to make them. (30,40) The lord would provide rushes and wax for households

to make rushlight candles for the season (28,40) and women would gather and spin the wool collected during the shearing. (25)

For this event we hope to incorporate as many of the practices and customs as were found in a traditional feast day as possible.

### **Food at the Celebration**

Though there are few extant texts devoted to the food of the period in Wales there are records of what was commonly eaten in song and recorded histories. Feasts in the twelfth century consisted of a single large meal served in the evening. (18, 39) This meal often consisted of dishes of meats, oats, and cheeses with ale or cider. (39) Songs reference meals that consisted of almonds, filberts, chestnuts, chicken, water fowl, and pork, served with a wealth of spices at the tables of the nobility. (1,9, 42) Fruit was also present, quinces, bilberries, apples, pears and cherries were common and at noble houses some citrus fruits were raised. (5, 16, 38)

Though travel, marriage, and joint military expeditions, such as the crusades, allowed for some crossover of culinary ideas, due to the remoteness of northern Wales, some foods and cooking customs took much longer to become common. Clay ovens, for instance, were not common in Wales until well into the seventeenth century and then only in the south east areas along the English border. Bread at this time was made on breadstones or griddles. (25, 28) Also, due to the wet, cold climate of Wales wheat was not common until it began to be regularly imported in the sixteenth century. (42) Bread was commonly made from oat flour often mixed with rye or nut flours such as filbert or walnut flour. (9,27,38,42) Other foods that were uncommon in England and Scotland at the time such as cockles and laverbread (a local seaweed) were a common part of Welsh cuisine.

### **The Recipes thus far**

Creating the recipes for the celebration has been a challenge and has comprised of researching what types of foods were commonly available, how they were eaten or presented, and historic receipt books from nearby regions that might have similar recipes. Taking all that information, as well as more modern recipes and food customs, and putting it all together I have tried to recreate something documentable in period as well as distinctly Welsh.

Bread:

Original modern recipe for traditional Welsh bakestone bread

*Bara planc*

*2 lbs flour*

*1 oz yeast*

*1 oz lard*

*1 teaspoon salt*

*1 teaspoon sugar*

*1 breakfastcupful milk and water*

*Warm the flour and put into a large bowl, which should have been warmed. Rub the lard into the flour.*

*Put the yeast into a jug with the sugar, and mix with the milk and water, which must be just tepid.*

*Make a well in the center of the flour and pour in the liquid. Make a soft dough, cover with a warm cloth and leave it to rise for 1 hour in a warm place, out of the draught. Mould into a large flat cake, kneading and pressing with the hands towards the sides. When shaped it should not be more than 1 inch or 1 ¼ inches thick. Leave to rise for 15 minutes.*

*Place carefully on the planc, which should not be too hot. Bake for no minutes on one side, then turn over and bake for another 20 minutes on the other side.*

*Recipe from Bobby Freeman, Traditional Food from Wales (sited as from an Anglesey recipe, from Farmhouse fare)*

To try to approximate a more period bread I substituted out honey for sugar as sugar would have only been used for more elaborate dishes, and I added oat flour and oat bran. The oat flour was the more common flour and the oat bran to give the bread more texture as modern flour is more finely ground than that of stone milled flour. This recipe went through several iterations before it was both flavorful and workable. Though I started with straight oat flours in the end I added spelt flour, a period wheat flour which would have been available in a noble household or manor, for cohesion.

Redaction:

½ cup Oat bran

1 ½ cup oat flour

2 cups spelt flour

1 teaspoon salt

2 teaspoons yeast

¾ cup milk

¾ cup water

2 tablespoon honey

2 tablespoons butter

Mix dry ingredients. In a small pot warm milk, water, honey and butter until tepid.

Add liquids to dry mix and knead until dough is slightly sticky and elastic. Place dough in a large bowl coated with oil, roll dough so that all sides are oiled, cover with damp cloth and put in a warm place to rise for one hour. When dough has doubled in size, knead dough gently and shape into two flat disks about 1 inch thick. Cook on warmed bakestone or griddle over a low flame for 20 min, flip over and cook second side an additional 20 min.

## Cawl Cennin – Leek Soup with cabbage

For this recipe I used a period recipe from *Form of Cury* with the addition of parsnips and turnips for added flavor. I also used vegetable stock though in period a meat broth was probably more likely, so this dish would accommodate vegetarians.

### *Caboches in Potage IIII*

*Take caboches and quarter hem and seeth hem in gode broth with oynouns y mynced and the whyte of lekes y slyt and corue smale and do per to safroun an salt and force it with powdour douce.*

#### Redaction:

1 head cabbage chopped rough	Pinch nutmeg
3 leeks – whites only sliced thin	1 tsp sugar
1 parsnip – peeled and rough chopped	Pinch of saffron
1 turnip – peeled and rough chopped	2 quarts good vegetable stock
1 tsp cinamon	
¼ tsp ginger	

Put all ingredients in a large stock pot, bring to a boil, reduce to a simmer and cook one hour or until root vegetables are fork tender.

## Pastai katt – Pork tart

This recipe is a redaction from *Forme of Cury*. Hand pies, often made from leftover meat from the previous supper, were a common morning or afternoon meal as they were portable and could be enjoyed cold. (28, 38)

### *Tartlets. XX. VIII. IX.*

*Take veel yside and grinde it smale. Take harde eyrenn isode and yground & do perto with prunes hoole. Dates. Icore. Pynes and raisouns coraunce. Hool spices & powdour. Sugar. Salt, and make a litell coffyn and do pis fars berinne & bake it & serue it forth.*

#### *Forme of Cury*

#### Redaction:

To incorporate a more Welsh taste to the dish I have used pork as they did not use veal or beef regularly until later in period. (9, 42) I have also used filbert nuts in place of the “pynes” as they did not commonly have pine nuts but frequently used filberts.

1 lb ground pork	¼ tsp ground cloves
¼ cup rough chopped filbert nuts	Pinch ginger
¼ cup dates – pitted and chopped	2 tablespoons honey
¼ cup prunes – pitted and chopped	1 egg
¼ cup raisins	Short crust
½ tsp cinnamon	

Cook pork in skillet let cool. Mix all ingredients (save crust) in large bowl until well blended. Roll crust out to 1/8 inch thick (like pie crust) cut into 3 inch round circles. Place tablespoon full of mixture on each circle, fold in half and seal. Bake at 400F for 20 min or until brown on edges.

## Flummery

Oats were served as part of the meal often with roasted meats (31) This recipe is still in research stages. My best Welsh reference comes from *Food of the Bards* though there is no actual recipe there. Currently I am working from a combination of two recipes one, a period recipe from *Curye on Inglysch* and the other a more modern recipe from *The Tudor Kitchen*.

## *Frumenty*

*To make frumente. Tak clene whete & braye yt wel in a mortar tyl the holes gon of: sethe it til it breste in water. Nym it up & lat it cole. Tak good broth & swete mylk of kyn or of almand & tempere it therwith. Nym yelkys of eyren rawe & saffroun & cast therto; salt it; lat it naught boyle after the eyren ben cast therinne. Messe it forth with venesoun or with fat motoun fresch.*

## *Curye on Inglysch*

## *Frumenty*

150g pearl barley  
500ml single cream  
2 tablespoons honey  
¼ tsp ground cinnamon  
¼ tsp nutmeg

*Place pearl barley in a saucepan with enough cold water to cover it. Bring to a boil. Reduce the heat and simmer gently until just cooked – it should still have some bite to it. Drain through a sieve and refresh with cold water to stop it cooking further.*

*Place all other ingredients into a pan and heat gently to a simmer. Add the cooked barley and stir well until heated through.*

*The Tudor Kitchen*

## Redaction:

1 cup groats  
2 cups boiling water  
½ cup cream  
2 tablespoons honey  
Pinch cinnamon  
Pinch nutmeg

Cooked sliced venison or mutton (or steak)

Cook groats in boiling water until tender but not mushy and water is evaporated. Set aside in a small bowl. Warm cream, honey and spices in pot until simmering, add groats back in cook additional 5 to 10 min at the simmer. Serve with slices of meat (cold or warm)

## Tarten lus ac afalau - Quince and bilberry tart

Recipe in progress. Again this recipe is in the research stages. All ingredients in recipe have been researched to period and references in song refer to tarts of quince and berry. (16,31,38). The current recipe is an adaptation of a modern recipe from *Welsh Heritage Food & Cooking*.

### *Whinberry and apple tart*

*2 cooking apples*

*2 tsp cornstarch*

*3 cups whinberries*

*3 tablespoons sugar*

*Milk for brushing pie crust*

*Pie crust (2)*

*Place one crust in bottom of pie tin. Peel apples, core and chop roughly. Toss apples with cornstarch until evenly coated and place in bottom pie crust. Scatter bilberries on top of apple mixture and sprinkle with sugar. Place top pie crust on and seal. Bake at 375F for 30 – 40 min or until crust is golden.*

*Welsh Heritage Food and Cooking.*

Redaction:

2 quinces

2 tsp oat flour or hazelnut flour

1 cup whinberries (bilberries) – blueberries work here

3 tablespoons honey

Pie crust

Line pie plate with one pie crust. Peel, core and rough chop quinces. Toss with flour and put into pie plate. Top with whinberries and honey. Top with second pie crust and seal. Bake at 375F for 30 – 40 min.

For this recipe today, due to availability and cost I have substituted dry pears for the quinces and blueberries for the bilberries.

**Cy iar mewn potes – chicken with root vegies in cream (good cookery)**

Chicken  
Turnips  
Carrots  
Veg stock  
Thyme  
Rosemary

Sautee turnips and carrots with a bit of oat flour  
When well coated add veg broth and cook until tender  
Add cream and chicken and continue to cook until chicken is warm

Pwdin caws – cheese and bread pudding

1 C mixed shred cheese  
6oz bread crumbs  
1 pint milk  
Dry mustard  
4 eggs

Separate eggs beat yolks lightly  
Warm milk, add eggs and mustard  
Mix well then add breadcrumbs and most of cheese  
Whip egg whites and fold into mixture  
Sprinkle with remaining cheese  
Bake at 350 – 30 min

Cramwythen cregyn – welsh pancakes with mushrooms and leeks

Pancakes – 300 ml milk  
2 eggs  
100 flour  
1 tablespoon melted butter

Filling  
Fry the mushrooms and leeks until just tender

Make pancakes thin, layer with mushroom and leek alternating with cheese