



Countrywise

by MARY BORROWS

GRANDMOTHER'S FRUMMITTY

The committee meeting had adjourned to the warmer regions of my kitchen and the plans for the Exhibition of Bygones were really steaming along in great form, under the influence of the hot chocolate.

We had got as far as the 'traditional dishes' section in our display and the discussion was 'all of a clack', just like the inside of a deep-litter-shed, deciding what could or could not be safely included in a two-day show, when I suggested, "Why not make some frummitti?"

The younger members pricked up their ears and wanted to know what frummitti was. "It's a sort of porridge with fruit in it," I ventured, but Mrs Betts insisted that it was much more interesting than that, the way her mother used to make it.

I got my 'Mrs Beeton's Book' out, trying to be helpful, but there was nothing in there about frummitti. I went all through the F's in the index but it was obvious that Mrs Beeton had never heard of frummitti.

"It's called frummenty where I come from," chipped in little Mrs Maples in her thick Yorkshire accent.

So we got out the dictionary and sure enough, there it was:

"Frummenty, food made of wheat boiled in milk."

"That doesn't begin to describe it," Mrs Betts insisted. "Why, when I was a girl frummitti was considered to be a delicacy. We always made it at Christmas and it was a tradition to eat frummitti on Christmas Eve."

Then the more senior members of the party began to reminisce. Old Mrs Gray said she could just remember the women going round the farms on St Thomas's Day, December 21st doing a bit of mumping or 'tommying' as it was sometimes called. "Whatever's that?" somebody else wanted to know.

"Cadging for wheat or potatoes or anything else they could get," Mrs Gray said, "only it wasn't looked on as begging on St Thomas's Day. They sometimes did a little turn, miming or singing carols, but they never came away empty handed. Mostly, though, they were given wheat for their Christmas frummitti."

"But how do you make frummitti?" one of the younger women asked.

"If I can find my grandmother's recipe book there is sure to be something about it in there," I said.

And sure enough, there in the faded much-thumbed exercise book, written in the spidery hand of my long-dead grandmother, was the information we had been looking for.

Take enough fresh whole wheat and soak in water for 24 hours, after bruising. Stir well to remove the outer husks. Cree slowly for 12 hours in milk, with added raisins, nutmeg, cinnamon, salt and honey to taste, until the whole sets like a jelly. Then add sugar, cream and a lacing of rum before serving.

"Very good it was an' all," Mrs Gray mused, "It used to be my father's favourite dish."

We decided to make the frummitti and then delved further into the yellowed pages of Gran's book to see what else we could find. It was like fingering through a treasure chest. We found recipes for puddings and cakes, game pies and rabbit pies . . . and how to cure the rabbit skin! There were cures for colds, cough mixtures, black oils, white oils, diarrhoea mixture, rubs for rheumatism and 'Mrs Wagg's advice on catching a chill'—'Take a basin of onion gruel before going to bed. Rub the soles of the feet well with mustard and water before getting into bed!'

We read on to discover the secrets of making our own furniture cream, tallow candles, harness blacking and metal polishes. Every page told a story of a bygone age when the well-being of the whole household seemed to depend on the skill and ingenuity of the wife and mother of the family. Not only did the country housewife have to be a good cook and bottle-washer, but also something of a herbalist, veterinary assistant, poultry keeper, diarymaid and cade-lamb attendant. She also had to be a good manager in those days of real hardship when many a woman had to keep the house on the few shillings a week she made from selling butter and eggs at the door.

At the end of the evening we had not only found more than enough recipes and items to furnish our display, but we had all had something of a salutary reminder of our own good fortune in being country housewives in the present day and age.

As I packed the supper things into the dishwasher and climbed the stairs to my cosy, centrally heated bedroom, I thought again of my grandmother who, despite constant childbearing and many hardships and without the aid of any domestic conveniences, yet managed to be the best housekeeper and finest cook that I have ever known.

RECIPES FROM GRANDMOTHER'S BOOK

FURNITURE CREAM

2oz of Bees Wax
1oz of White Wax
1oz of Casteel Soap
½oz of Turpentine

Cut all ingredients up finely, add the turpentine and let it stand until dissolved, then add ½ pint of boiling soft water, stirring until it becomes a cream.

COUGH MIXTURE

2oz of Spanish juice
½oz of Salt of tartar
1qt of water

Simmer the juice and when dissolved add the salts of tartar. One wine glass to be taken three times a day.