

# PARKIN

A Ginger Cake  
To Remember



Anne Fencott



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# Introduction

I have written this book as a tribute to my Mum, Ivy Whiteley, and my other relatives who contributed to the tradition of home baking, both in the making and eating of its products. When my Mum died in 2011 we included her recipe for Chelsea tarts in the commemorative booklet we produced for her funeral because it was fairly unique to her and because we love to make Chelsea tarts and eat them ourselves. Parkin (a ginger cake or gingerbread, traditionally made with oatmeal, and black treacle and/or golden syrup) is another of those cakes which brings back memories of childhood, baking in the kitchen and, in particular, devouring it on bonfire night.

This book seeks out the origins of parkin and why my Mum's recipes are a bit different from more traditional ones. I will begin with an account of my Mum's recipes and where they might have come from. This leads me to tell you about another of my relatives, Auntie Hilda, who also had parkin recipes. Then I will explore the history of parkin, which goes back to Guy Fawkes and even earlier: to our Pagan ancestors. The next section will discuss regional variations to this predominantly North of England delicacy. Parkin for special diets might be useful for some readers, too. Sponge parkin is the name given to several of the recipes I have found. I will attempt to define this parkin variant. I also need to find out about the ingredients of parkin, which help to explain why it is mainly a North Country product. Methods for making parkin vary, and these are next to be analysed. Baking parkin can be tricky because it is usually cooked for a long time and can easily become hard. I have provided some tips to help bake the perfect parkin. Many of the recipes suggest that parkin improves over time. Why does parkin keep so well without drying out or going mouldy? The next section will attempt to answer this question. Finally I will return to my Mum's recipes to sum up my findings and provide three of my own recipes, including a modern, spicy parkin, developed from the best traditional and sponge parkins I have trialled. In amongst all this I will tell some family

history and anecdotes, particularly regarding my Mum.

An appendix gives conversion tables for the measurements used in this book, and there is an extensive bibliography of references from the text of the book. Many of the citations are from the Internet, and since the initial stages of writing this book, some are no longer available. As far as possible I have rewritten these sections but occasionally decided to include the information from those websites where I could not find an alternative source or where a particular recipe had already featured in my analysis of recipe ingredients.

I have tried to credit every recipe I have used in this book, but I apologise if I have offended any recipe originator by including their recipe.

I (sometimes with the help of my husband, Clive) have attempted to bake a lot of the recipes in this book. I have included descriptions of these “trials” following the recipes themselves. If the results were not always completely successful it was almost certainly my fault and not that of the recipe because I have occasionally changed some of the ingredients, depending on what I have had to hand or for personal preferences (such as using Trex instead of lard because I find lard repulsive); used the wrong size of cake tin; left the parkin in the oven too long. I think I have improved my baking skills the more trials I have completed, but the reader may not notice this because I didn't systematically go through the recipes in the order they are in the book. Also, one of my early reviewers of this book suggested that I should have another go at making some of the failed attempts, following the recipes more closely and being more careful. This I have done (but never using lard!), and I have included these re-trials alongside the less successful trials. Interestingly, this reviewer suggested that one reason why there are so many different recipes might be because, like us, people used whatever they had in their cupboard/fridge when making a parkin.

# My Mum and Parkin



*Illustration 1: My Mum, Ivy Whiteley, on holiday in Scarborough, North Yorkshire, in 1978.*

My Mum often made parkin. In fact it was one of our family's favourite cakes when I was a kid. We probably ate it hot from the oven, or on the same day, but it actually improved with age: if we could make it last long enough! It would develop a thick sticky top and general gooiness. It made a great supper (“supper” being that light snack you had just before bedtime, not the full blown meal that others call “dinner”, or, in Yorkshire, “tea”). As children we would have it with a mug of hot, milky cocoa or a cup of tea. Lovely!

My memory of helping my Mum make parkin recalls a coffee-coloured batter, so delicious to taste when cleaning out the bowl – sweet and syrupy. I don't remember where my Mum got her parkin

recipe from but I do remember the main ingredients: flour, fat, golden syrup, sugar, milk, ground ginger and bicarbonate of soda. There may have been an egg, too. Now in the course of researching parkin recipes I have found that most are based around oatmeal and black treacle. I have no memory of my Mum using either of these ingredients. I don't remember her ever even buying black treacle. Our "treacle" toffee (or "plot" toffee, as we knew it, which was always produced for the 5th of November, bonfire or "plot" night) was made with golden syrup. Perhaps we didn't like black treacle, or maybe it was expensive, or had been unavailable during rationing and her recipe had been adapted to accommodate that. Regarding oatmeal, we would have had rolled oats in the cupboard to make porridge, but they never went into her parkin.

My Mum, Ivy Davies, was born in Mostyn, North Wales, on 11th January 1913 but as a young child her family moved to Bootle, a suburb of Liverpool, Lancashire – probably for my Granddad to get work. He had a watch repairing business and my Mum's first job was "helping him in the shop". She did not like it at all ("it was boring") and when an offer came to stay with a lonely Aunt in Halifax, West Yorkshire (or the West Riding of Yorkshire as it was then) she jumped at it. She remained in Halifax for most of the rest of her life, working as a weaver, marrying one of her bosses and bringing up a family.

Illustration 1 shows my Mum on holiday in Scarborough, North Yorkshire, in 1978. The two of us went there for a week, staying in a guest house and doing lots of walking along the very long promenade, round the town and shops. In the evenings we went to see the famous violinist, Max Jaffa, who was resident for the season at the Spa Grand Hall, play Vaughan Williams and Johann Strauss (amongst other things); to the Stephen Joseph Theatre in the Round to see *Travelling Hopefully*, a play by Ken Whitmore; to the Floral Hall Theatre to see Jimmy Tarbuck, Les Dennis and Kenneth McKellar.



*Illustration 2: My Dad, Ronald Whiteley (back row, first left), on the occasion of the visit to his workplace, Ladyship Mills, Halifax, West Yorkshire, by Edward, Prince of Wales, in 1926 (Souvenir of the visit of H.R.H. The Prince of Wales, K.G., etc. to Standeven & Co. Ltd. ..., 1926).*

How she came to marry her boss is an interesting story. My Mum worked as a weaver at Ladyship Mills, Mixenden, Halifax. She was very good at her job. She was an attractive women who was particular about her appearance without being vain or flashy. Even at work she probably looked smart, with her hair nicely done. Well, she came to the notice of Ronald Whiteley, one of the textile designers. He suggested to the managers that Mum be promoted to “Pattern Row”, which was the part of the woollen mill where new patterns were tried out in small samples before going into major production. The weavers in this shed had to be meticulous. Pattern Row was also near the textile designers' office because there had to be liaison between the designers and weavers. My Mum always



*Illustration 3: The weaving shed, Ladyship Mills, Halifax, festooned with streamers, in honour of the visit by Edward, Prince of Wales, in 1926 (Souvenir of the visit of H.R.H. The Prince of Wales, K.G., etc., to Standeven & Co. Ltd. ..., 1926).*

claimed she was moved to Pattern Row because my Dad fancied her, which he obviously did, but I'm sure he also admired her weaving skills, too. My Dad asked my Mum to go out with him but she refused because she thought he was "too good" for her, by which she probably meant too well educated and too high up in the firm. Actually my Dad was from a working class background - his Dad, Benjamin Whiteley, had been a weaver, and later an overlooker (a supervisor of weavers) - but he had worked his way up in the firm by going to evening classes (or "night school" as it was then called) and getting qualifications in textiles and weaving. Illustration 2 shows him as a nineteen year old office worker on the occasion of the visit by Edward, Prince of Wales to his workplace, Ladyship Mills, Mixenden, Halifax in 1926. Illustration 3 is a



*Illustration 4: My Mum (on the left) with two friends.*

photo of the weaving shed, where my mum would later be employed, on the same occasion, decorated with streamers in honour of the Prince (Souvenir of the visit of H.R.H. The Prince of Wales, K.G., etc., to Standeven & Co. Ltd., Ladyship Mills Halifax, England, October 15th, 1926, 1926).

Now every summer the firm closed down for one week (known as “Wakes Week” - an unpaid holiday in which maintenance work would be carried out in the mill) so that all the staff could go on holiday at the same time, and traditionally many would go off to the seaside. Illustration 4 shows my Mum (on the left of the picture) on holiday with two friends. The woman on the right is Annie Holroyd (I think this is her married name) but I don't know who the other person is, or when or where the photo was taken. One Wakes my Mum went to Blackpool with friends and some time during the week she bumped into Ronald - maybe at a dance



*Illustration 5: My Mum and Dad at Richmond Castle, North Yorkshire.*

or perhaps walking on the seafront. They had a chat and Ronald told my Mum he hadn't been feeling very well. She expressed sympathy but nothing more came of it. When she went back to work the next week Ronald wasn't there and she found out he was in hospital with a duodenal ulcer. Well, that was it. My Mum was round there as soon as she could, probably with flowers. Ronald recovered but that was the start of their romance. She always said of him that "he was a lovely man", and he was a very good father to me and my sister, Jean and brother, David, despite being quite strict in some respects.

As children we were well looked after without being spoilt, but we did get treats - sweets at the weekend, summer picnics, and we always had an annual holiday. Illustration 5 is a photo of my Mum



and Dad on a day out, possibly at Richmond Castle, North Yorkshire in the late 1960s or early 1970s. Is my Mum wearing a leather skirt?

But back to my Mum's parkin. My Mum's recipes may have been tinged with her Welsh/Lancashire/Yorkshire heritage. There were very few books in our house (my Dad was a library devotee and my Mum only read magazines and *The Courier*, our local evening paper) and hardly any cookery books, apart from *Mrs Beeton's everyday cookery* (Beeton, 1923) which was rarely used. (I also have inherited 2 booklets which include parkin recipes, and which I will discuss later under Yorkshire and Lancashire parkin respectively, but I doubt that these had any effect on my Mum's choice of recipes). All baking was done from memory, and as the same cakes, buns and pies were made on a regular basis then it is not surprising that no books were needed and nothing was written down. This could have been sad for me as I sought to recreate those recipes, now that my Mum is no longer with us to ask. Luckily, when I left home and had to cook for myself I asked my Mum to tell me some of her recipes and I wrote them down in an exercise book and on slips of paper for when I might need them. So I know how she roasted lamb, beef, chicken and turkey, made stuffing, gravy, roast potatoes and Yorkshire pudding. I can recreate her fish pie, meat and potato pie, braised steak, and chops. I can even make her version of mushy peas and potted meat. But the most important recipes for me are her "sweet stuff": rice pudding, buns, cakes, biscuits, wonderful Chelsea tarts (but that is another story!) and, of course, parkin.

These are my Mum's parkin recipes:

### *Mum's Parkin Recipe 1*

*8 oz self-raising flour*

*2 oz sugar*

*2 oz margarine (or could be lard)*

*2 tbsp golden syrup*

*½ tsp bicarbonate of soda*

*1 tsp ground ginger*

*milk*

*Rub fat into flour, sugar, ginger and bicarbonate of soda. Put in syrup and add milk and mix well. Put into greased tin. Bake gas mark 2 for ¾ – 1 hour.*

Clive and I made this recipe but we included an egg. We weren't sure how much milk to add but I remembered the mixture as being quite loose. We also added twice as much ginger as the recipe stated because we wanted it to be more spicy. Also we eventually raised the oven temperature to gas mark 4 as the parkin was not cooking and we needed to use the oven for something else. The result was nice, but not delicious. It could have used more syrup as it was not very sweet, and more ginger, too. Also, on keeping for a few days, instead of maturing to a sticky goo, it was rather dry. Whilst this could have been because we had over-baked the parkin, it still left me wondering if this was actually the recipe my Mum used or had she not remembered some of the quantities involved? It struck us as a very austere recipe, maybe due to the wartime rationing of sweet ingredients. Of course, it could be that my memory is wrong and that the parkin I ate as a child was not the sweet, luscious cake that I would like to think it was. But I don't think so. My sister agrees that this was a truly sticky, yummy delight.

After making lots of other parkins I decided to try this recipe again, following the instructions more closely. I will let you know what happened when I return to my Mum's parkin recipes later in the book.

I also have another parkin recipe, attributed to my Mum, which I have found written on a slip of paper.

*Mum's Parkin Recipe 2*

*2 cups of self-raising flour*

*1 cup of sugar*

*5 oz margarine*

*¾ cup of boiling water*

*1 tsp ground ginger*

*1 tsp bicarbonate of soda*

*1½ – 2½ tbsp golden syrup*

*1 egg*

*Put flour, sugar, ginger, bicarbonate of soda, syrup and margarine into a bowl. Add boiling water and mix. Add the egg. Bake for at least 1 hour at 350°F (gas mark 4).*

Was this my Mum's recipe or was it from a magazine? I can't imagine my Mum using “cups” of ingredients. The cup, as a unit of measurement, isn't any old cup but one of a very specific volume. In the United States, where the cup is a standard method of measurement, it is 240 ml or ½ an American pint (which is 20% smaller than a British or imperial pint). The metric cup is used in Australia and some other Commonwealth countries, but here it measures 250 ml. To add to the confusion there is also the imperial cup, no longer in common use but which might appear in some older recipes: 284 ml or ½ a British or imperial pint. Not to mention the Japanese cup ... (“Cup (unit)” at *Wikipedia*). How do

you fill a cup with a dry ingredient – do you pack it in and press it down or do you spoon it in gently? No doubt that the method you use will affect the weight of the ingredient. (See the Appendix for a more detailed discussion of the cup as a unit of measurement.) My Mum used good old-fashioned weighing scales based on pounds and ounces. But this recipe does share much of the same ingredients as the previous recipe, albeit in different quantities, centring on flour and golden syrup rather than oatmeal and black treacle, so it is definitely another non-traditional parkin recipe.

Clive and I made this recipe (see cover illustration), using 4 tsp of ginger because we like a strong flavour. I was very dubious about how it would work - pouring boiling water onto all of the unmixed ingredients, apart from the egg, which, when added, might easily scramble in the heat. Well, it did work. The boiling water melted the margarine and the syrup and a good stir brought it all together. We let it cool a bit (but not too long, because the bicarbonate of soda, and baking powder in the self-raising flour, would have started a chemical reaction to produce the carbon dioxide, which would make the parkin light) before adding the egg (which did not scramble). We baked the parkin for 50 mins. and it rose a lot and was really spongy, like a steamed pudding. It was truly moist and delicious. It kept for three weeks and became very sticky on the top. This could have been the parkin I remember from childhood had it not been for the use of cups and the strange method by which it was made. I know my Mum had a fruitcake recipe in which boiling water was used, but I seem to think this was a later addition to her baking repertoire, after I had left home.

I have already mentioned that my Mum owned a copy of *Mrs Beeton's everyday cookery* (Beeton, 1923) and I have to consider the possibility that this was the source of her parkin recipe. Here is Mrs Beeton's parkin recipe:

## *Parkin*

*2 lb fine oatmeal*

*1½ lb treacle or golden syrup*

*3 oz butter or lard*

*2 oz brown moist sugar*

*½ oz ground ginger*

*milk*

*Let the treacle warm gradually by the side of the fire until it becomes quite liquid. Rub the butter or lard into the oatmeal, add the sugar and ginger and stir in the treacle with a wooden spoon. The vessel which held the treacle should be rinsed out with beer, but milk may be substituted. This is added gradually until the right consistency is obtained. The mixture must be smooth, but not drop too easily from the spoon. Have ready 1 or 2 greased Yorkshire pudding tins, pour in the mixture and bake in a steady oven until the centre of the parkin feels firm. As the mixture improves by being allowed to stand, each cake should be baked separately when the oven is a small one. Let the parkin cool slightly and cut into squares, remove them from the tin and when cold place them in an airtight biscuit tin. The parkin may be kept for months. Time to bake, from 1-1½ hours. Sufficient for 2 cakes.*

Notice the very large quantities involved here – obviously needed for big households. No flour nor any leavening agent (such as baking powder, bicarbonate of soda or egg) is used – unless you can count the beer, but even that is optional. This parkin must have been quite a solid affair. My Mum definitely did not use this

recipe!

Another possible recipe source might be a family member. This could have been my Mum's mother, her sisters (one of whom had worked as a cook, the other I know little about because she died suddenly when she was a young woman and my Mum was so upset that she never talked about her) or an aunt, or my Dad's mum or one of his aunts, who were all great at baking. Unfortunately I cannot research this properly because they are all long gone, but I do have one piece of written evidence: Auntie Hilda's *Memo book*.

## Auntie Hilda's Memo Book



*Illustration 6: Auntie Hilda (3rd from left) with (from left to right) Uncle Stanley, Auntie Lilian, Uncle Fred, Granny and Granddad Whiteley.*

My Great Aunt Hilda (or Auntie Hilda as we all called her) was my Dad's aunt (his Mum's sister). When I was young she lived in Heckmondwike, West Yorkshire (or the West Riding, as it was then) with her husband Fred Ibberson. They had no children. Illustration 6 shows Auntie Hilda and Uncle Fred (centre couple) with my Uncle Stanley (my Dad's brother) and his wife Lilian (to the left of the photograph) and my Granny and Granddad, Whiteley (Ellen and Benjamin) outside Auntie Hilda and Uncle Fred's house, probably in the late 1950s or early 1960s.

Later, when Auntie Hilda was widowed, she moved to a small, terraced house a few minutes walk from our family home on Burnley Road in Halifax. My Mum used to do her shopping on a Friday, along with her own and that of another housebound Aunt, Mary Alice.

I remember Auntie Hilda as a small, sharp-featured woman, with a quick wit and no-nonsense approach to life, but also kind and



*Illustration 7: Auntie Hilda and I outside her house, Burnley Road, Halifax, West Yorkshire.*

generous. Her house was immaculately clean and tidy and she was always neatly dressed. Illustration 7 is a photo of Auntie Hilda and I outside her house on Burnley Road, probably taken around the late 1960s or early 1970s. I can remember the occasion: it was a Saturday or Sunday morning and there was snow on the ground. My Dad and I had gone to her house to see if she was OK and if she needed anything. I expect my Dad had cleared the snow from her drive, too. He took this photo and there is a similar one of him and Auntie Hilda which I had taken. I have included the one with me in it because, coincidentally, Auntie Hilda and I are dressed the same, albeit my skirt is a bit shorter! I think that my skirt was green, brown and mustard and that my cardigan, which I had knitted myself, was mustard. I don't recall the colour of Auntie Hilda's outfit, but she was very fond of heathery colours: purple, green and dark red, as well as blue.



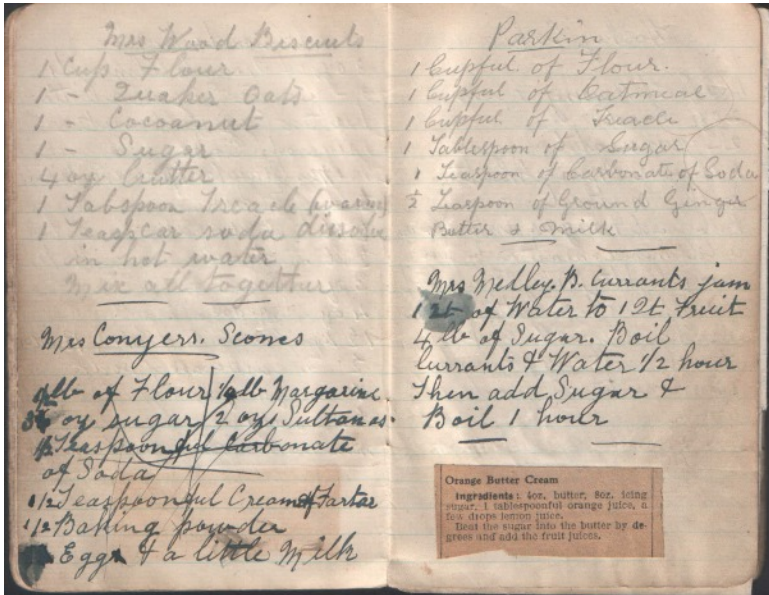


Illustration 8: Auntie Hilda's Memo Book - Parkin recipe (Ibberson, unpublished).

Auntie Hilda was always baking and somehow I have ended up with her personal recipe book. (Ibberson, unpublished). It is a red 4x6 in. "Memo Book", completely full of hand written recipes and those cut out of newspapers. Her handwriting is a beautiful copperplate script and she sometimes used a pencil and other times an ink pen. A lot of the recipes are attributed to the owner, as in "Ada's Coconut Biscuits" and "Mrs Conyer's Scones". Recipes range from "A Rich Birthday or Xmas Cake (very dark)" to "A Stain Remover for Glass Ware, Vases, etc."; from "Pickled Damsons" to a recipe for waterproofing a raincoat (the latter being highly toxic as it contains "sugar of lead" - lead acetate). The book was obviously well used as the pages are dog-eared and stained, and some are loose. All are browning with age and the pencilled recipes are fading.

Auntie Hilda had 2 recipes for parkin. The first is shown in Illustration 8. As the writing is faint I will transcribe it:

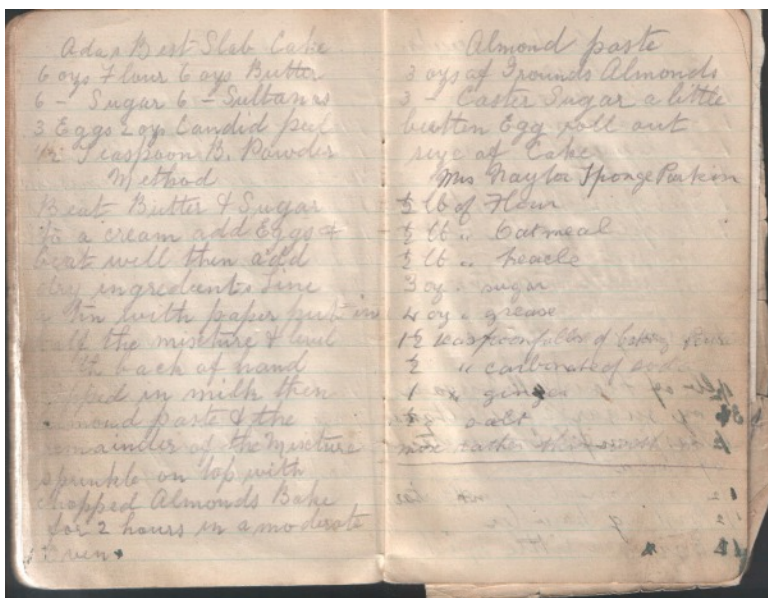


Illustration 9: Auntie Hilda's Memo Book - Mrs Naylor's Sponge Parkin recipe (Ibberson, unpublished).

### Parkin

1 cupful of flour

1 cupful of oatmeal

1 cupful of treacle

1 tablespoon of sugar

1 teaspoon of carbonate of soda

1/2 teaspoon of ground ginger

butter and milk

There is no method given and it is notable that there are no

quantities stated for butter or milk, so it is impossible for me to replicate this recipe. Did Auntie Hilda use this recipe? I'm fairly sure she made parkin - most Yorkshire home bakers did in the sixties and before. Possibly this was her recipe, which she knew so well that she did not need to describe the method. But we are back to the thorny issue of the "cup". I'm sure Auntie Hilda would have preferred to use her trusted weights and scales, being the precise person she was.

The second recipe is pictured in Illustration 9. Here is a transcription:

*Mrs Naylor's Sponge Parkin*

*½ lb flour*

*½ lb oatmeal*

*½ lb treacle*

*3 oz sugar*

*4 oz grease*

*1½ tsp baking powder*

*½ tsp carbonate of soda*

*1 tsp ginger*

*½ tsp salt*

I can't quite read the sentence below the recipe but, since there is no liquid included, my guess is "make rather thin with milk".

Now I can't remember what my Auntie Hilda's parkin tasted like so I don't know if she would have included oatmeal and treacle, but

this recipe is a possible contender for one she might have used, having the reliable pounds and ounces measurements. I love the term “grease” - I expect this would have meant lard or dripping.

Clive and I made this recipe, using Trex for the “grease” element. We increased the ginger to 5 tsp. Since there are no baking instructions we chose gas mark 4 for 40 mins. This was a very good, nutty-textured parkin, with a strong treacle flavour. We were still eating it after a month and it remained moist even then.

Neither of the recipes in Auntie Hilda's *Memo book* are the same as my Mum's recipes. It seem that my Mum's “non-traditional” parkin needs further investigation, but first I need to look into the definition and history of parkin.

## A Social History of Parkin

*The shorter Oxford English dictionary* (1978) defines parkin as follows: "*northern dialect*. 1828. [Of local origin; perhaps from proper name *Parkin*, *Perkin*, diminutive of *Per*, *Peter*.] A kind of gingerbread made of oatmeal and treacle."

What is gingerbread? *Wikipedia* ("Gingerbread" at *Wikipedia*) describes it as "A sweet food-product flavored with ginger and typically using honey or molasses (treacle) rather than just sugar". It can be in the form of a cake or a biscuit. Do you know about "gingerbread men" - people-shaped ginger biscuits? In the same article *Wikipedia* tells us that these were attributed to Queen Elizabeth I of England who allegedly served them to foreign dignitaries, but today they are generally associated with Christmas.

Many countries and regions have their own form of gingerbread. In England the Shropshire town of Market Drayton is famous for its version, which was first recorded there in 1793, but probably originated much earlier, as it is known that ginger was on sale in its shops from the 1640s ("Gingerbread" at *Wikipedia*).

Meg Pybus, on a BBC regional food website (Pybus at *BBC: Shropshire*) points out that "gingerbred" is "the oldest cake bread in the world and arrived in this country with the Crusades. The earliest recipe dates from 1390".

In my book the emphasis is on parkin, "a soft form of gingerbread cake made with oatmeal and treacle which is popular in the north of England" ("Gingerbread" at *Wikipedia*), and not other types of gingerbread.

Where does the name "parkin" come from? One theory is that it was named after a Mrs Parkin, a Yorkshire woman famed for her baking (Richard Aslan, on the *Miniature Lion* website). Whilst there is no evidence for this, the *British Food: a History* website informs us that "Parkin" is a very common surname in Yorkshire ("Yorkshire parkin" at *British Food: a History*). This latter website

also cites an early mention of parkin - in 1842 "a certain Richard Oastler wrote a letter to Sir Thomas Thornhill (who would later become High Sheriff of Suffolk and a Tory MP) telling him that he'd received one on the 1st day of March from Mrs John Leach of Huddersfield".

Another account of the origin of the name “parkin” comes from a legend about Filey Brigg, a rocky outcrop which extends into the North Sea for almost a mile to the north of Filey, a small seaside resort in North Yorkshire. There are several legends concerning how Filey Brigg came to be formed but the one that interests me is this. A long time ago a dragon was terrorising the people of Filey. No-one knew how to stop it until Mary Parkin, the wife of Ralph Parkin came up with a clever idea. She baked a sticky cake and offered it to the dragon. He liked it very much and ate rather a lot of it, causing his jaws to stick together. What could he do to unstick them? Ha – he could run into the sea and wash the treacle away! Which he did, and with dire consequences. The townspeople jumped on him and drowned him, his bones forming the feature which is Filey Brigg. The sticky cake was named “parkin” after Mary and Ralph Parkin. (Filey Bay Research Group, “The Filey dragon” at fileybay.com). Funnily enough, in 2001, Nigel Armstrong, an amateur fossil hunter, discovered an almost complete skeleton of a pleisiosaur (a prehistoric marine reptile) in the Speeton Clay Cliffs to the South of Filey. (Filey Bay Research Group, “Filey's Jurassic coast” at fileybay.com). Could this animal be the Filey dragon?

*Wikipedia* ("Parkin (cake)" at *Wikipedia*) informs us that “perkin” used to be an alternative name for “parkin” and describes how the word “parkin” appeared in a 17th century ballad “The Song of Arthur O'Bradley” (also quoted in Carr, 1828) which tells the story of a wedding from the time of Robin Hood (the 14th century), and includes the lines:

*When Arthur, to make their hearts merry*

*Brought ales and parkin and perry.*

This same article provides one of the earliest published references to parkin: in the 1728 West [Riding of?] Yorkshire Quarter Session report Anne Whittaker was accused of stealing oatmeal to make parkin.

The *Foods of England Project* website cites another early, and not the most pleasant, written record of parkin: "The name 'parkin', is strangely, known at least since reports of the court case of *Rex v Jagger* at the Yorkshire Assizes of 1797 where a husband attempted to poison his wife with 'a cake of parkin laced with arsenic'" ("Parkin" at *Foods of England Project*).

On the 6th of November 1800 Dorothy Wordsworth, the sister of William Wordsworth, wrote in her journal: "A very rainy morning & night - I was baking bread dinner & parkins" (Wordsworth, 2002, her punctuation, also partially cited in *The compact Oxford English dictionary*, 1992).

William Carr in his glossary: *The dialect of Craven in the West Riding of the County of York. Vol.2* (1828) describes parkin as: "A cake made of treacle and oat meal, commonly called a *treacle-parkin*" [his italics].

Other recorded mentions of parkin are given in *The compact Oxford English dictionary* (1991):

- In Mrs. G.L. Banks' *Sybilla and other stories* (1884) there are the lines: "Bribed by a cake of parkin from Dame Dorothy's capacious pockets".
- The word "perkins" is defined in the Addenda to the 1887 *Supplement to Jamieson's Scottish dictionary* by David Donaldson (Donaldson, 1887): "A species of gingerbread formed into thin round cakes like biscuits, with a piece of almond in the centre of each".

- In *Allbutt's Sys. Med.* I , 404 (1896) is the following: "The diet should be varied and should include wholemeal bread, 'parkin', gingerbread and molasses".
- Ernest Buckler's *Ox bells and fireflies* (1968. XIX, 268) includes this: "Two women had brought oatmeal parkins on plates which were exactly alike".
- *New Society* (20 Dec. 1973, 709/3) writes about the rebirth of interest in regional specialities like parkin, which it describes as "a rich dark gingerbread eaten with cheese".

Carol Wilson, on the *The BBC Good Food* website, (Wilson at *BBC Good Food*) informs us that ginger was the cheapest spice and therefore the most affordable. Black treacle was introduced into the United Kingdom in the 17th century, imported from the West Indies through the ports of Lancashire, perhaps explaining how parkin gained popularity in the North of England. Dripping would have been used instead of butter, and eggs (which were expensive) would not have been included in the recipe.

Richard Aslan on his *Miniature Lion* website (Aslan at *Miniature Lion*) gives us more information: parkin is a "cut and come again" cake. The treacle, which had hardened during the baking, took time to soften, so you had to "come again" as it got stickier and more enjoyable over time.

Aslan goes on to say that it is generally associated with Bonfire Night ( 5th Nov.), a fact I can confirm from experience – I have already mentioned that my Mum always made parkin for this occasion (along with "plot toffee") and this would have been handed round at the communal bonfire held by one of our neighbours. This hot spicy cake would have been comforting and warming on a cold autumn night as we waited for the next rocket to go off. Guy Fawkes was born in York (in Stonegate, 1570) and educated there at St Peter's School ("Guy Fawkes" at *Wikipedia*). This leaves me wondering if the name of the school is related to the name "parkin", as a diminutive of "Peter", but it is unlikely.





*Illustration 10: York Minster, as seen from the City walls, February 2014 (photo courtesy of Maureen Impey).*

Illustration 10 is a photo of York Minster viewed from the City walls, photographed by Maureen Impey in February 2014.

Charlotte Burne (cited in Roud, 2008) recorded her grandmother's

recipe in the 1820s: "Another local delicacy was 'parkin', or oatmeal gingerbread, which was made for the Fifth of November, and which my grandmother continued to have made within my own memory, long after she had moved away from Lancashire". This is the recipe she used:

*Parkin*

*3 lbs of sifted meal*

*1 lb of butter*

*1 lb of treacle*

*lb [sic 1 lb?] of brown sugar*

*1 oz of ginger*

*a few caraway seeds*

*a little candied lemon*

*Bake in a shallow tin, and, when cold, cut into narrow oblong pieces.*

The Hospitality Information Centre, on its website ("Parkin" at *Hospitality Information Centre*, no longer available) told us that the origins of parkin go back to the "Feast of Thor", the God of Thunder, which was celebrated by the Vikings in the winter, and in a similar way to the Fifth of November – with bonfires - and that "thar cake", an early form of parkin, which was baked on a hot stone, would have been eaten then.

Carr, (1828) defines "thar-cake" as follows:

*A heavy unleavened cake. Tim Bobbin is inclined to consider it as a corruption of hearth-cake from its being baked on the hearth. It is made, he says, of oatmeal unleavened, mixed with butter and treacle. It is much more probably a corruption of tharf-cake from the A.S. [Anglo Saxon, also known as Old English] word "theorf" [meaning unleavened].*

“Unleavened” means that no raising agent, such as yeast, baking powder or bicarbonate of soda, is used. Tim Bobbin was the pseudonym of the Lancashire-born, 18th Century, caricaturist and satirical poet, John Collier. ("John Collier (caricaturist)" at *Wikipedia*).

Addy (1888) in his *A glossary of words used in the neighbourhood of Sheffield* describes how parkin might have its origins in tharf-cake. Here parkin is defined as: "a cake made of oatmeal, treacle, sugar and butter. It is used as a synonym for tharf-cake and is eaten on the 5th of November". His definition of tharf-cake is: "a circular cake made with oatmeal, butter and treacle. It is eaten on the 5th of November in Sheffield".

He goes on to give a fascinating account of how it relates to “soul mass” cake, which was distributed to the poor on All Souls’ Day, the 2nd of November, and, it being a coarse, hard cake, may be associated with “Little Lent” or “La Petite Carême Quadragesima S. Martini”, an autumnal fast similar to Lent. He suggests that people were "ashamed" of tharf-cake (because of its relationship with poverty) and started to call it “parkin” instead. I have already mentioned that the word *theorf* in early English literature means “unleavened”. Aslan tells us that it is derived from the Anglo Saxon word *þeorf* (where “þ” is pronounced “th” as in “think”) and the Old Icelandic word *þiarfr*. But the Anglo-Saxon word *þearf* means “need” and *þearfa* means “poor man”. Thus tharf-cake may be a “poor cake” or a “poor man's cake” instead of an “unleavened cake”, which would account for the stigma it represented.

Joseph Wright's *The English dialect dictionary. Vol. VI* (Wright, 1905) has an entry for “thar-cake” which, the book explains, is

“short for tharf-cake”, a cake found in Northumberland, the West Riding of Yorkshire, Lancashire, Derbyshire, Cumberland and Durham. There are other versions of the name depending on the county to which it belongs: “thaaf-cake” in Northumberland; “thaff-cake” or “thaugh-cake” in Durham and Northumberland; “tharth-cake” in Northumberland and Cumberland; “thauf-cake” in the North Country. Wright gives two definitions:

1. *An unleavened cake of flour or meal mixed with milk or water, rolled out thin and baked.*
2. *A kind of cake made of oatmeal, butter and treacle; “parkin”.*

He provides a quote from Langland's *The vision of Piers the Plowman* written c.1370-90, which shows that “tharf-cake” was known in the Middle Ages: “A few cruddes and creyme and a tharf-cake”. Langland's poem was “done into modern English” by Skeat (Langland, 1905) and this line here reads: “Some curds and some cream and an oaten cake”.

The 5th of November was a time to share tharf cake. The website *h2g2* (“Parkin - the cake” at *h2g2*) calls this tradition “joining”, and it was particularly important in Derbyshire. The community would contribute money towards paying for the ingredients of the cake and the ceremony would be held in a different home each year so that everyone took a turn at being the host. Sometimes a piece of cake would be kept from one year to the next. Also “joinings” were held in South Yorkshire “where thar cake would be divided between family members”.

Cox (Cox, 1907, also cited in Arthur Robinson Wright, 1940, and Bladey at *cbladey.com*) also writes about “joinings”, specifically in Bradwell, Derbyshire, where one man would ask another, “Have you joined yet?”, meaning: “Have you made your thar cake?”. Here it was also a celebration for children on November 5th. They would ask someone to make the cake for them in return for a

payment towards the ingredients. Coffee would be served with the cake, and, at the time of Cox's writing (1907), the Primitive Methodist Church in Bradwell would hold a tharf cake supper on the Saturday nearest to the 5th of November.

Tharf cake is also associated with Halloween. The Celtnet website ("Celtnet Halloween recipes and Halloween party foods homepage" at *Celtnet*, no longer available), in discussing the origins of Halloween, linked this festival to "Samhain", a Gaelic festival of the dead, and described the custom of "souling" in England, whereby soulcakes (originally baked as offerings to the dead) were given out to children who came "souling". This is perhaps the origin of the modern day "trick or treat". I will return to soulcakes later on.

Wikipedia ("Samhain" at *Wikipedia*) provides us with some information about Samhain (pronounced "sow in" or "sah win"). Variants of the name mean "November" in the Gaelic languages of Ireland, Scotland and the Isle of Man, where this festival was celebrated from the pre-Christian era to about the 19th century, between sunset on 31st October and sunset on November 1st. Similar festivals were held in the Celtic regions of Cornwall, Wales, and Brittany. It marked the beginning of winter, when livestock was brought down from the high pastures and slaughtered for winter food. Bonfires were lit and various rituals would be performed, such as walking between two fires (a cleansing ritual) and casting bones of slaughtered animals into the fires. Samhain was thought to be a time when a door to the "Otherworld" would be opened and souls of the dead would be able to come into our world and attend the feasts that were being held. In the 19th century Samhain merged with All Saints' Day to become Halloween, but today Celtic Neo-Pagans and Wiccans still observe Samhain. In the Southern hemisphere it is held between 30 April-1 May, since this is the equivalent time for the arrival of winter.

The *Wheel of Magic* website ("Tharf cake" at *Wheel of Magic*, no longer available) explained how tharf cake was traditionally eaten on Samhain night and for a week afterwards, and gave the following recipe:

## *Tharf Cake*

*100g oatmeal*

*300g plain flour*

*200g sugar*

*3 tsp baking powder*

*1 tsp bicarbonate of soda*

*1 tsp ground ginger*

*¼ tsp ground mixed spice*

*¼ tsp sea salt*

*70g black treacle*

*70g honey*

*170g butter*

*optional - 70g chopped mixed candied peel*

*Preheat the oven to 190°C. Grease a 4cm. deep baking tray with softened butter. Add all the dry ingredients to a mixing bowl. Add the optional candied peel. In a saucepan add the butter, black treacle and honey. Gently heat through until everything is melted and mixed. Pour this into the dry ingredients and mix it in thoroughly with a wooden spoon. It should be a firm batter, add extra oatmeal if needed. Gently put this batter into the greased baking tray, level it off. Bake the tharf cake for about 15 to 20 mins. at 190°C - until baked but still moist in the centre. Do not over bake. Remove the tharf cake from the oven and allow to cool for 5*

*mins. Carefully turn out and cut it into slices or squares.  
Either serve straight away or mature in an airtight tin for  
up to a week.*

I have given some more recipes for tharf-cake and its other name variants in the different regional parkin sections of this book which now follow.

## Some Regional Variations of Parkin

The *h2g2* website, already mentioned, describes parkin as "a rather filling ginger cake made with oatmeal and treacle" and most commonly associated with Yorkshire and Lancashire, although still eaten in other parts of the United Kingdom ("Parkin - the cake" at *h2g2*). Since most regions of the country (and indeed many regions of the world) have their own gingerbread recipes, in this section I am concentrating on the areas which make a product which resembles parkin, either in name or in content.

At the end of each regional description I will then attempt to characterise that parkin, but do not claim to be completely scientific about it because the number of recipes I have for each type varies from two to twenty-one. Where there are a lot of recipes I have given my results in the form of percentages, for example, of recipes using black treacle and no golden syrup. Please note that these percentages do not always add up to 100% as I have rounded the figures up or down to the nearest whole number. Also I cannot be sure of the origins of many of the recipes, particularly the ones which are just called "parkin", but which appear in a booklet published, for example, in Lancashire. Recipes get passed between families and friends in different parts of the country, and, over time, get modified.

In my analyses of regional parkin I include the methods used in making parkin: "melting", "rubbing in" and "creaming". Whilst these are described in much more detail in a later section of my book, here I will give a brief explanation of each:

- The "rubbing in" method is the one used in making short-crust pastry. The fat is cut or broken into pieces and, using the fingertips, is gently rubbed into the flour/and or oatmeal at the same time as lifting it above the bowl in order to incorporate more air. When the mixture resembles fine breadcrumbs it is ready to have the other ingredients included. Quite often the treacle and/or syrup is warmed before adding.



- The “melting” method is one in which the black treacle and/or golden syrup, and the fat are warmed in a pan before adding to the dry ingredients, thus increasing their viscosity and making them easier to combine with the other ingredients. Occasionally the sugar, and/or the milk, is also warmed with the treacle/syrup.
- The “creaming” method is chiefly used in making Victoria sandwich cakes and fairy cakes. It is rarely used in making parkin, which is not normally known for its light texture, but I have found one instance in a recipe for “sponge” parkin. Here, the fat and sugar are beaten together until light and fluffy before adding the other ingredients. Beating causes more air to be included in the mixture.

I sometimes refer to “traditional” parkin. By this I mean the parkin which is defined in *The shorter Oxford English dictionary* (1978) and *Wikipedia* ("Parkin (cake)" at *Wikipedia*), with an emphasis on oatmeal over flour and black treacle over golden syrup. It is often made with an animal fat (butter or lard) but some recipes may use margarine. It probably has a raising agent (in the form of self-raising flour, bicarbonate of soda and/or baking powder) and no spices other than ginger.

## ***North Country***

By “North Country” I mean the North of England as a whole. In *The Farmhouse Kitchen*, Norwak (1979) tells us that every part of the North Country makes its own special parkin and it is often eaten around Bonfire Night. She gives us the following recipe but does not specify where it is from. I would suggest it might be a Yorkshire or Lancashire parkin because she says “it is very good eaten with a piece of cheese”. A lot of Yorkshire people like to eat anything sweet with a piece of cheese: from apple pie to Christmas or fruitcake! *Wikipedia* suggests it should be Wensleydale cheese ("Wensleydale cheese" at *Wikipedia*): its salty flavour goes well

with something sweet, and there is a saying in Yorkshire: "Apple pie without cheese is like a kiss without a squeeze". Lancashire people also enjoy this sweet-savoury combination. The Regional dishes of North-West England website ("Regional Dishes of North-West England: parkin", no longer available from *Manchester2002-uk.com*) describes parkin as "sometimes served with a thin sliver of Lancashire cheese". I have already mention the article in the periodical *New Society* (1973), which suggests parkin is a regional speciality "eaten with cheese".

*Special Parkin for Guy Fawkes Night*

*450g/1 lb fine oatmeal*

*225g/8 oz plain flour*

*100g/4 oz dark brown sugar*

*2 tsp ground ginger*

*1 tsp baking powder*

*225g/8 oz black treacle*

*75g/3 oz melted butter or dripping*

*This is a rich dark gingerbread which should be soft and sticky, and is very good eaten with a piece of cheese. Keep it for several weeks to mellow before eating, if possible in an old-fashioned bread crock. Mix all the dry ingredients together, make a well in the centre and pour in the treacle and melted butter. Beat thoroughly and bake in a buttered rectangular tin at 325°F, 170°C, gas mark 3 for 1½ hours.*



*Illustration 11: Norwak's North Country Parkin.*

Before I even started to make this parkin I doubted that it would be successful, because the recipe does not include any liquid. I was proved right. I made half the quantity and I did use medium oatmeal instead of fine, and margarine in place of butter, but I don't think this would have made much difference. Also my tin was a 7 in. square and not a rectangular one. I baked the parkin for about 55 mins. and on cooling it was like a rock – not in the least “soft

and sticky". Its saving grace was the flavour, which was very deeply treacly. Served with custard this parkin almost worked but wouldn't quite combine to make a delicious pudding. Perhaps I should have treated the mixture as a traybake but I don't think I'll be making this again.

The next recipe is also from Norwak (1979), and it is very similar to a recipe on the *Ladyshrike* website, submitted by Astrid Bear, as Lancashire parkin (Bear at *Ladyshrike*, no longer available) the only difference being that Bear's recipe uses  $\frac{3}{4}$  pint of milk. I have included this recipe in my analysis of Lancashire parkin, as well as in the North Country analysis.

### *North Country Parkin*

*175g/6 oz plain flour*

*1 tsp salt*

*1 tsp ground ginger*

*2 tsp cinnamon*

*1 tsp bicarbonate of soda*

*300g/10 oz medium oatmeal*

*175g/6 oz black treacle*

*150g/5 oz butter or dripping*

*100g/4 oz dark soft brown sugar*

*125ml/ $\frac{1}{4}$  pint milk (Bear uses  $\frac{3}{4}$  pint milk)*

*1 egg*

*Sift together the flour, salt, spices and soda. Add the oatmeal and toss lightly, to mix. Warm the treacle, butter, sugar and milk together until the butter has melted. Cool slightly, add egg and beat well. Pour into the centre of the dry ingredients and stir rapidly until smooth. Turn into a greased and lined 17.5 cm./7 in. square tin. Bake at 350°F, 180°C, gas mark 4 for 1 hour. Store in an airtight tin for at least 2 weeks before using.*

Clive and I made this recipe (see Illustration 11) using half Trex, half margarine, 5 tsp ginger, oatbran instead of oatmeal (we couldn't get any oatmeal) and no cinnamon or salt. The result, though tasty, was a little dry and hard on the top. It could probably have done with less time in the oven.

Knowing that we had not made this parkin properly the first time I decided to give it another go, following the recipe more closely. I choose butter rather than dripping and I just used a pinch of salt. I baked it for 40 mins in an 8 in. square tin as there seemed to be too much mixture for my 7 in., rather shallow tin. The result this time was a very dark, cinnamony parkin with a crumbly texture. After a couple of days the top became quite sticky. This was a very good parkin, with an unusual flavour.

## **Analysis of Two North Country Parkin Recipes**

Both contained oatmeal and flour, with an emphasis on the former.

Animal fats (butter in one and a choice of butter or dripping in the other) contributed to a heavier cake, particularly in one of the recipes, which contained neither milk nor eggs.

Both included a raising agent, though.

Black treacle, brown sugar and ginger, used in both recipes, would have produced a dark, spicy cake and one recipe brought out the flavour with a little salt and also included cinnamon - twice as

much as the ginger.

The melting method was preferred by both recipes.

North Country parkin is a “traditional” parkin, apart from the cinnamon used in one of the recipes.

## **Yorkshire**

"Yorkshire parkin is normally baked in a rectangular tin and cut into squares. It is this type of parkin that is known throughout Britain" ("Parkin - the cake" at *h2g2*).

Regarding the baking tin, some recipes suggest that parkin should be baked in a Yorkshire pudding tin (e.g. Beeton, 1923), and this is generally square or rectangular. Individual Yorkshire puddings, made in bun tins or larger round tins, are probably a modern invention. We have occasionally used a round cake tin for baking parkin, because our square tin is too big for some of the recipes, but it does not feel right! Parkin needs to be cut into squares or rectangles and not triangular slices.

*Wikipedia* ("Parkin (cake)" at *Wikipedia*) informs us that parkin is most commonly associated with Yorkshire, particularly the Leeds area, and that parkin is generally sticky and moist here, but much drier and biscuit-like in Hull and East Yorkshire. The principal ingredients of Yorkshire parkin are: flour, oatmeal, black treacle, fat (lard would have been used in the past, but now margarine or butter might be preferred) and ginger. Now I have to say that I have come across quite a lot of recipes which either call themselves “Yorkshire parkin” (but sometimes “sponge” parkin - more about that later) or whose creators are from or living in Yorkshire and which omit oatmeal and/or favour golden syrup over black treacle. My Mum's recipes come into this category and I will include some others later in this section.

In 1860 schoolboys in York were given parkin for their tea and it is still on sale there today (“Parkin – the cake” at *h2g2*).



*Illustration 12: Leeds market in April 2014 (photo courtesy of Maureen Impey).*

Carol Wilson, on the *BBC Good Food* website (Wilson at *BBC Good Food*) informs us that in Leeds in the 19th century, November 5th was called “Parkin Day”. Illustration 12 shows Leeds market in April 2014, photographed by Maureen Impey.

In the West Riding of Yorkshire the first Sunday in November was known as “Parkin Sunday”. In Ripon, the 1st of November was known as “Cake Night” and in Sheffield it was called “Caking Day” (“Parkin (or perkin or tharf cake)” at *Baking for Britain*).

Brears (1987) provides the following information (quoting also from Easter, the headteacher of Almondbury Grammar School, 1883):

*On November 5th in Nidderdale schools (Lofthouse and Middlesmoor) the master was barred out by the scholars until he granted a half-day holiday; a collection was then taken among the scholars for parkin ingredients, and a parkin party followed, an equal number of small parkins being allotted to each child. In Huddersfield the headteacher of Almondbury Grammar School was given presents of parkin by parents and others. At Midhope near Sheffield the schoolmaster received so many parkins he was still eating them behind his desk lid the following May.*

Andrew Webb (Webb at *food journalist*, no longer available) remarked on the popularity of parkin in Yorkshire during the Victorian era and early 20th century: Mary Milnes Gaskell's *A Yorkshire cookery book*, written in 1917 (Gaskell, 1917) gives 17 parkin recipes. Each family matriarch would have had her own recipe and it would be passed down through the generations.

Atkinson and Holroyd in *Practical cookery: a collection of reliable recipes* (1919) give a recipe for Yorkshire Parkin:

### *Yorkshire Parkin*

*1 lb fine oatmeal*

*1 lb treacle*



*¼ lb butter*

*½ oz ground ginger*

*½ tsp bicarbonate of soda*

*2 tbsp Demerara sugar*

*1 tbsp milk*

*Rub the butter into the oatmeal, add the ginger and sugar. Melt the treacle, dissolve the soda in the milk. Mix all together and bake in a flat tin lined with paper in a moderate oven about 1 hour.*

The following recipe from Ayrton's (1977) *The cookery of England* also does not use any flour. She describes this parkin as: "traditional in Yorkshire and in much of the north of England".

### *Parkin*

*1 lb (½ k) fine oatmeal*

*2 tsp baking powder*

*¼ lb (120g) lard*

*2 tsp ground ginger*

*1 tsp mixed spice*

*½ lb (240g) golden syrup*

*Rub the lard into the oatmeal and mix in the spices and baking powder. Warm the syrup and mix it into the oatmeal*

*until you have a stiff mixture. Grease a flat tin, pour in the parkin and bake for 1-1¼ hrs. at 300°F, gas mark 2.*

In *Yorkshire Cookery* by Mrs. Appleby (Appleby, 1977) there is this recipe:

*Yorkshire parkin*

*½ lb flour*

*½ lb medium oatmeal*

*¼ lb soft brown sugar*

*½ tsp ginger*

*1 egg*

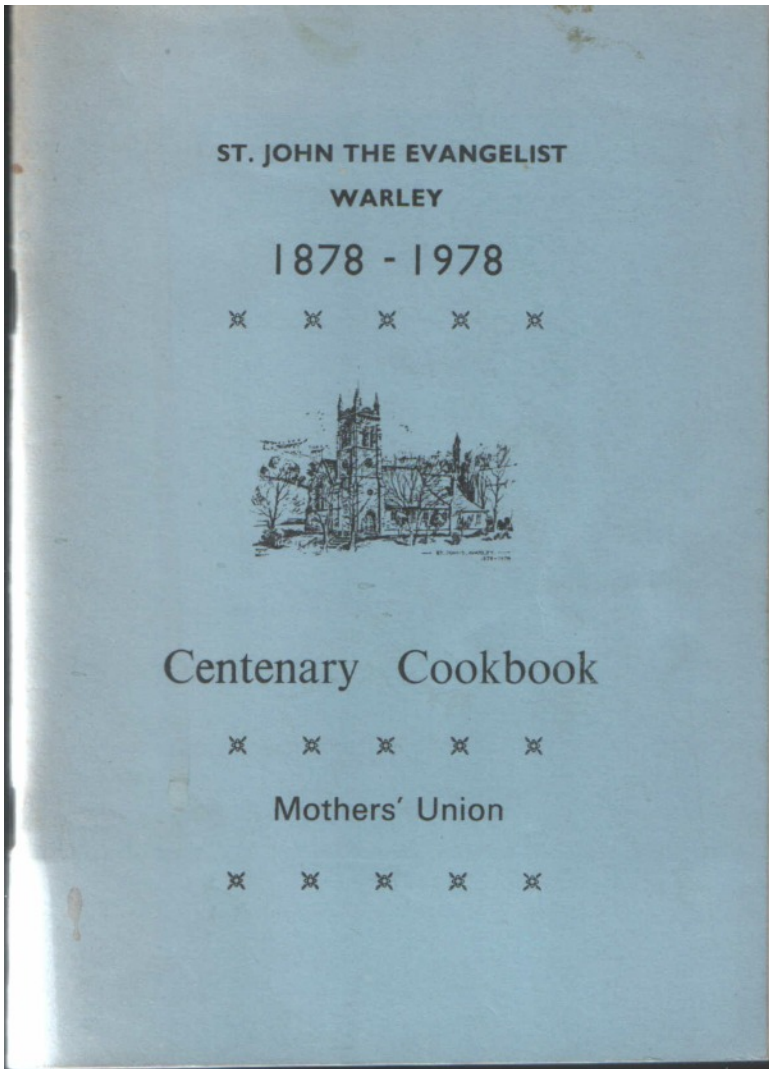
*8 oz treacle*

*4 oz lard*

*about ¼ pint of milk*

*½ tsp bicarbonate of soda*

*Mix together flour, oatmeal and ginger, melt the sugar, lard and treacle and add a little of the milk and the egg, well beaten. Put this mixture into the flour, etc., and mix to a stiff batter. Add the bicarbonate of soda dissolved in the rest of the milk. Mix quickly, pour into a shallow [greased] tin 11 in. x 9 in. x 2 in., and bake for about 1 hour or until firm in a moderate oven.*



*Illustration 13: Cover of the St. John the Evangelist, Warley Centenary Cookbook: 1878-1978, compiled by the Mothers' Union.*

I made this parkin and it was very good. I used Trex instead of lard and a whole teaspoon of ginger. I baked it in an 8 in. square tin at gas mark 4 for 50 mins. The result was moist: an excellent “traditional” parkin.

OVERNIGHT CAKE

1 lb plain flour  
 8 ozs margarine or lard  
 8 ozs raisins  
 2 teasp. bicarb of soda  
 8 ozs sugar  
 8 ozs currants  
 Nutmeg  
 1 cup milk

Rub fat into flour, mix in rest of ingredients.  
 Put into 2 greased loaf tins. Leave overnight.  
 Bake the next day at Reg. 2 for two hours.

Mrs. E. M. Wood : St. Hilda's, Halifax  
 M.U.

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PARKIN

8 ozs self raising flour or 6 ozs and 2 ozs oatmeal  
 6 ozs sugar  
 2 teasp. ginger  
 Salt  
 2 ozs lard  
 2 ozs margarine  
 2 tablesp. black treacle

Mix all dry ingredients. Melt treacle, lard and margarine. Add to flour, etc. using a little water if needed. Then add 2 beaten eggs. Allow to stand in tin for 45 minutes before baking. Moderate oven for 45 minutes.

Mrs. W. Parkinson : Warley M.U.

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*Illustration 14: Mrs. W. Parkinson's recipe for Parkin, taken from the St. John the Evangelist Centenary Cookbook.*

In the previous recipes oatmeal was an important ingredient. However, in the following recipes for "Parkin" and "Sponge

SPICE CAKE (To be eaten with Lancashire Cheese)

4 lbs. flour  
 1 tablesp. baking powder  
 1 dessertsp. bicarb-soda  
 4 teasp. allspice  
 2 teasp. salt  
 6 ozs ground rice  
 1½ lbs currants  
 1½ lbs raisins or sultanas  
 1 lb lard  
 2 lbs raw sugar  
 4 ozs candied peel  
 8 ozs butter  
 6 eggs  
 Juice of lemon  
 4 ozs cherries  
 1 quart milk  
 Nutmeg

Mrs. H. Dennett : Warley M.U.

My mother devised this recipe herself and it was passed on to her daughter in law, grand-daughter, wives, etc. but the cakes they made were never as good as hers which were made in a fireside oven and the only way she could tell the correct heat was by touching the door handle.

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SPONGE PARKIN

8 ozs self raising flour  
 2 ozs sugar  
 2 ozs margarine  
 6 ozs treacle  
 1 egg  
 1 teasp. ground ginger  
 Salt  
 Pinch of carb soda  
 Mix with milk.

Mrs. Anderton : St. Hilda's M.U.

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*Illustration 15: Mrs. Anderton's Sponge Parkin recipe, taken from the St. John the Evangelist Centenary Cookbook.*

Parkin”, taken from the *St. John the Evangelist, Warley Centenary Cookbook: 1878-1978*, compiled by the Mothers' Union (Warley being a district/parish of Halifax, W. Yorks.), in the recipe for

“Parkin” there is a choice of using just self-raising flour or self-raising flour and oatmeal but in the “Sponge Parkin” recipe self-raising flour alone is used (St. John the Evangelist, Warley, Mothers' Union, 1978). Illustrations 13-15 are taken from this booklet.

Clive and I made Mrs. W. Parkinson's parkin (recipe in Illustration 14), using flour and oatmeal, Trex instead of lard, extra ginger, and almond milk instead of water. Because there wasn't a lot of mixture we decided to cook it in a 2lb loaf tin. The oven temperature was set at gas mark 4 and we ended up baking it for 55 mins. The result was rather dry round the edges. I think we should have used a cake tin (the mixture was quite deep in the loaf tin) and baked it for less time, and also added a bit more liquid than we did. But the flavour was excellent and the parkin definitely improved with keeping.

I attempted this parkin (the oatmeal version) a second time, using Trex instead of lard but otherwise being true to the recipe – even allowing for the 45 min. resting time before baking for 40 min. at gas mark 4 in an 8 in. square cake tin. The result was a slightly risen, moist parkin, with some texture from the oatmeal. After a few days it was still moist but never became really sticky.

I made Mrs. Anderton's sponge parkin (recipe in Illustration 15), although I had to improvise the method and the quantity of milk. I rubbed the margarine into the sieved flour, ginger, bicarbonate of soda and salt. I then stirred in the sugar and the treacle, which I had warmed. I added a beaten egg and about 3 fluid oz of milk. The mixture was neither really stiff nor very sloppy. I baked it in a greased and bottom-lined 8 in. square tin for about 30 mins on gas mark 4. This was a very tasty parkin: moist, sticky and strongly flavoured but not as light as some sponge parkins because black treacle tends to give a heavier texture than golden syrup. It was particularly good eaten with vanilla ice cream.

Regarding this lovely little booklet, it might have been given to me or my Mum by my friend, Jane Smith (née Williams) whose Mum was a member of this Mothers' Union. Alternatively it could have been bought from a church fête or other such event. I was a



*Illustration 16: A Trefoil Guild bring and buy sale. Left to right: Jane's Cousin Angela, unknown woman, Jane Smith (née Williams), Jane's Auntie Jessie, Mrs. Williams, my Mum, unknown woman. I don't know the little girl in the centre.*

member of St John's Church for many years, until I went away to college.

My Mum, though never a member of the Mothers' Union, was an occasional church-goer, if someone (usually me) went with her. I have fond memories of sitting at the back of the church during Sunday's Choral Evensong, which I always found quite melancholy and up-lifting at the same time. I might add that I am no longer religious but when I was young the Church of England played an important part in my life.

Jane's Mum, Phyllis Williams, was also my Mum's friend. They would have first met at the Warley Road Infant and Primary School's gates, through which both Jane and I passed every weekday, or on the way there, as the Williams' lived en route. Later, when I was allowed to go to school unaccompanied, I would go through Jane's long garden, which backed on to the "rough road" at the back of our house, to call for her.

Illustration 16 shows my Mum with Jane and Mrs. Williams at what looks like a tombola stall at a Trefoil Guild (a sort of Girl Guides for adults) bring and buy sale. My Mum is standing second from the right. Mrs. Williams is third from the right. Jane is third from the left. Peering over Jane and her Mum's shoulders is Jane's Auntie Jessie (her Mum's sister). Jane's Cousin Angela (Jessie's daughter) is on the far left. I don't know who the other people are.

My Mum was also a friend of Jessie and Angela. When I was a child my Mum went to a regular Friday coffee morning meeting, held in a cafe in Halifax. Traditionally my Mum and other housewives would go food shopping in "town" on a Friday morning, so the chance of a treat - a coffee and a natter - was a welcome break. Other attendees were: Mrs. Williams, Jane's Auntie Jessie and Cousin Angela, and Mrs. Winifred Bell (a neighbour of Mrs. Williams). In school holidays there would also be children present: myself, Jane, and Angela's two sons. Initially it took place in the cafe at Webster's grocery, in Silver Street, Halifax, shown in Illustration 17 (Yarker at *Malcolm Bull's Calderdale Companion*). This was a marvellous shop. Downstairs, amongst other wonderful, expensive grocery products, coffee beans were sold and ground to order. The smell was amazing. I have always found that the taste of freshly ground coffee never quite lives up to its aroma. The Mikado Cafe was upstairs. I can't remember much about it, although Bull (Bull at *Malcolm Bull's Calderdale Companion*) tells us that it had a Japanese theme, was a no-smoking establishment and (in 1957) became one of the first self-service outlets. Unfortunately it closed in 1961. Webster's went out of business in 1963 and the building was demolished shortly afterwards to make way for a new block of shops and offices.

The coffee morning then moved to Harveys, a small, rather expensive, department store in Halifax. The cafe here was also upstairs. My sister, Jean, remembers that it was waitress service. I loved coffee mornings. It was a chance to drink grown-up milky coffee and there was always a plate of assorted Club biscuits, with their thick chocolate coating and the problem of choosing between the original milk version, the orange, the fruit and the mint (I don't





*Illustration 17: Webster's Grocery, Silver Street, Halifax. The Mikado Cafe, where my Mum went to her Friday coffee mornings, was upstairs (photo contributed by Graham Yarker to Malcolm Bull's Calderdale Companion website).*

think I liked the plain chocolate one). It was also fun eavesdropping on the adult conversation - what so-and-so said to so-and-so, etc. Afterwards we would look round the store but rarely buy anything unless it was a packet of nylon stockings or something in the sale.

Eventually things changed: Harveys refurbished their cafe and no-one liked it anymore. The meeting moved to the Beefeater Cafe in George Square; some members became unwell and unable to attend; the children grew up and some left home. In the end it was just my Mum and Mrs. Williams meeting fairly infrequently for a quick coffee and a chat. If I was visiting home I sometimes went too. It was not the same, sitting with a frothy coffee and a Kit-Kat, hearing about other people's ailments, but I did like the coffee and it did feel more modern.



*Illustration 18: Scarborough, South Bay and Foreshore (from a postcard, published in the 1950s or 1960s).*

Time to get back to parkin! James Martin's recipe for “Yorkshire Parkin” (Martin at *BBC Food: Recipes*) is very similar to my Mum's in that he doesn't include oatmeal, just self-raising flour, and he uses golden syrup instead of treacle. He describes it as "a classic Yorkshire ginger cake". Interestingly, Martin was born in Malton, North Yorks. and trained at Scarborough Technical College in North Yorkshire. Illustration 18 is taken from a postcard of Scarborough's South Bay and Foreshore, probably dating around the 1950s or 1960s.

### *Yorkshire Parkin*

*225g/8 oz self-raising flour*

*110g/4 oz castor sugar*

*1 tsp ground ginger*

*1 tsp bicarbonate of soda*

*1 egg*

*200ml/7 fluid oz milk*

*55g/2 oz butter*

*110g/4 oz golden syrup*

*Preheat the oven to 150°C/300°F/gas mark 2. Line a 22cm./8 in. cake tin.*

*Sieve the flour, sugar, ginger and bicarbonate of soda into a large bowl.*

*In a small pan heat butter and syrup until melted. Beat the egg into the milk.*

*Gradually pour the butter and syrup into the flour and stir. The mixture will be thick. Pour in the egg and milk and stir until smooth and pour into a lined tin. Bake for about 1 hour until a skewer inserted into the centre comes out clean. Make this a few days in advance to mature.*

I made this parkin, following the instructions as closely as possible but using a 7 in. baking tin instead of an 8 in., thinking that there would not be a large amount of mixture. But the batter was very sloppy and, because it contained egg, self-raising flour and bicarbonate of soda, it rose a lot and overflowed from the tin. Yet, despite this minor disaster, this was a very good parkin: light in colour and texture, sticky and spongy.

The following recipe, taken from *Old Yorkshire recipes* by Joan Poulson (1974), uses beer as its liquid ingredient. Poulson tells us that this is a very old recipe, passed on to her by a lady in her eighties. It would make several cakes, but can be halved.

*Yorkshire Parkin*

*1 lb fine oatmeal*

*1 lb medium oatmeal*

*6 oz butter*

*6 oz lard*

*1 lb flour*

*2½ lb treacle*

*3 small tsp baking soda [bicarbonate of soda]*

*2 eggs*

*½ oz ground ginger*

*beer*

*Sift the flour and ginger into a basin, then mix in the oatmeal. Rub in the butter and lard then stir in the warmed treacle. Lastly dissolve the soda in half a glass of beer, then mix it into the other ingredients. The dough should be dry enough to fall in drops. It must not run. Turn into well buttered cake tins, but only fill them three-quarters full. Cook slowly until firm.*

Clive and I made this recipe but reduced the ingredients to one quarter, used medium oatmeal only, Trex instead of lard, margarine instead of butter, one egg (not a half), one tsp bicarbonate of soda, 4 tsp ginger and about 3 in. of beer in a tall glass. We baked it in an 8 in. cake tin for 40 mins. We managed to leave the parkin for ten days before cutting into it. The result was a very intensely flavoured parkin, almost like liquorice from the treacle, with a

bitterness from the beer. It had a good texture - the gases from the beer had given it a lightness, and it was moist and sticky. This is an unusual parkin, well worth baking.

Poulson (1974) also explains that "treacle is used in many traditional Yorkshire foods, such as parkin, gingerbread and plot toffee. A treacle posset was often drunk at night in country areas". She provides another recipe for Yorkshire parkin:

*Yorkshire Parkin*

*8 oz plain flour*

*8 oz medium oatmeal*

*8 oz treacle (or treacle and syrup mixed)*

*4 oz soft brown sugar*

*4 oz lard and butter mixed*

*1 egg*

*¼ pint milk*

*1 level tsp ginger*

*½ tsp bicarbonate of soda*

*Melt the sugar, lard and treacle over a low heat. Beat the egg well and add to the treacle mixture with some of the milk. Put the oatmeal, flour and ginger into a large bowl and pour in the treacle, etc. Beat well then add the bicarbonate of soda, dissolved in the remaining milk. Stir well then pour into a well greased tin, about 11 in. by 9 in. and 2 in. deep. Cook at once in a moderate oven until firm, about 1 hour.*

Clive and I made this parkin, using extra ginger, Trex instead of lard, all black treacle and oatbran instead of oatmeal. The result tasted nice but was rather dry and crumbly, not sticky. Over-baking might have been the reason.

A similar recipe appears in *Favourite Yorkshire Recipes*, compiled by Amanda Persey (Persey, no date), but with the addition of cinnamon:

*Sticky Parkin*

*8 oz flour*

*2 level tsp baking powder*

*2 level tsp ground ginger*

*1 level tsp ground cinnamon*

*8 oz medium oatmeal*

*6 oz black treacle*

*4 oz margarine*

*6 oz soft brown sugar*

*1 egg, beaten*

*¼ pint of milk*

*Heat the oven to 350°F or gas mark 4. Grease and line with greaseproof paper the base and sides of a 9 inch square cake tin. Sieve the flour, baking powder, ginger and cinnamon into a large bowl and stir in the oatmeal. Put the treacle, margarine and soft brown sugar into a pan over a low heat and stir occasionally until the margarine has just*

*melted. Make a well in the centre of the dry ingredients and gradually add the treacle mixture and then the egg and milk. Beat well until smooth. Pour into the tin and place in the oven for approximately one hour. Cool slightly in the tin and then turn onto a wire rack. Store in an airtight tin. Serve on its own or with butter.*

Persey tells us that “Sticky Parkin is best kept in a tin for about a week before eating to allow it to become really moist; hence the name 'sticky’”. Clive and I made this parkin, omitting the egg but using self-raising flour for extra rising potential. We used half margarine and half Trex. We increased the ginger to 5 tsp and left out the cinnamon. Though tasty, it was a bit on the hard side - probably over-baked, as usual.

We then made a vegan version of our version for our son, using non-dairy milk (almond milk, in this case). We baked it for less time and it was very delicious.

The following two recipes also include extra spices. The first is from Elaine Lemm at the *About.com: British & Irish food* website:

### *Yorkshire Parkin*

*8 oz soft butter*

*2 oz black treacle*

*7 oz golden syrup*

*5 oz medium oatmeal*

*7 oz self-raising flour*

*4 oz soft brown sugar*

*1 tsp baking powder*

*4 tsp ground ginger*

*2 tsp nutmeg*

*1 tsp mixed spice*

*2 large eggs, beaten*

*2 tbsp milk*

*Heat the oven to 275°F/140°C/gas mark 1. Grease an 8" x 8" / 20cm x 20cm square cake tin. In a large heavy-based saucepan melt together the butter, sugar, treacle, golden syrup over a gentle heat. Do not allow the mixture to boil, you simply need to melt these together. In a large, spacious, baking bowl stir together all the dry ingredients. Gradually add the melted butter mixture stirring to coat all the dry ingredients and mix thoroughly. Gradually, beat in the eggs a few tablespoons at a time. Finally add the milk and again stir well. Pour the mixture into the prepared tin and cook for 1½ hours until firm and set and a dark golden brown. Remove the parkin from the oven and leave to cool in the tin. Once cool store the parkin in an airtight tin for a minimum of 3 days if you can resist eating it, you can even leave it up to a week before eating and the flavours really develop and the mixture softens even further and becomes moist and sticky. The parkin will keep up to two weeks in an airtight container.*

This is an excellent parkin. When I made this I didn't have enough butter so I substituted 1½ oz of margarine for the remainder. I also baked it on gas mark 3 for 1 hour because I haven't had much success with very low temperature cooking. The resulting parkin was spicy and sticky – definitely one to make again.

The second is from *Pot-luck; or, The British home cookery book* by May Byron (Byron, 1914):



*Yorkshire Parkin*

*½ lb flour*

*½ lb fine oatmeal*

*2 oz lard*

*2 oz butter*

*½ lb treacle*

*2 oz sugar*

*1 tsp ground ginger*

*1 tsp mixed spice*

*1 tsp baking powder*

*pinch of salt*

*a little milk*

*Rub the lard and butter into the flour, add all the dry ingredients, warm the treacle, and add with a little milk, mix well, pour into a flat tin, well greased. Bake in a very moderate oven about 40 mins.*

Readers of *The Guardian* newspaper sent recipes for Yorkshire parkin for the Saturday edition which fell near Bonfire Night 2013. Here they are:

*Yorkshire Parkin*

*from Diane Kitchen of Ilkley. Readers' recipe swap. The Guardian Cook. 02/11/13 (Kitchen, 2013):*

*You can't have bonfire night up here in Ilkley without Yorkshire parkin! You make it now because it is best left in a tin for at least a week (if not two) so that it develops a lovely chewy consistency. Don't worry if it sinks in the middle when you take it out of the oven - it's normal.*

*Makes 16 slices*

*½ tsp bicarbonate of soda*

*285ml milk*

*100g butter, plus extra to grease*

*8 tbsp golden syrup*

*8 tbsp dark treacle*

*450g flour*

*250g medium oatmeal*

*1 level tsp salt*

*50g soft brown sugar*

*1 level tsp ground ginger*

*1 egg, beaten*

*Preheat the oven to 180°C/350°F/gas mark 4. Butter a 23cm. square cake tin. Dissolve the bicarbonate of soda in the milk and melt the butter with the syrup and treacle over*

*a low heat. Mix the dry ingredients in a large bowl. Make a well in the dry ingredients and stir in the butter mixture. Add the egg, milk and bicarbonate of soda; stir well. Turn into the tin. Bake for 45 mins. Turn out and cool before storing in an airtight container for at least a week. On the big night, cut into slices and enjoy whilst watching the fireworks*

This sounded so delicious that Clive and I decided to make it ourselves. We halved the quantity but used the full amount of sugar by mistake (mine!), 1 whole egg and 3 tsp ginger. The bicarbonate of soda hadn't properly dissolved in the milk so some of it was left in the bottom of the jug. We could only get fine oatmeal. The result was lovely and gingery and very chewy but a bit dry underneath. We may have over-baked it (again!).

I made this parkin a second time, more carefully: the full quantity - and it was huge. I definitely didn't over-bake it, and eaten slightly warm from the oven it was lovely and moist and sticky, though it could have used more ginger for such a big parkin. Ten days later it was rather dry underneath the still sticky top, and probably best heated up and served with custard.

### *Auntie's Yorkshire Parkin*

*from Lisa Fisher. We love to eat. Family Saturday Guardian. 02/11/13 (Fisher, 2013):*

*Every bonfire night, when I was a child, we used to fatten ourselves up with layers of clothes, pull on our wellies and stomp to the end of the cul-de-sac where our friends lived. They had a sprawling back garden on two tiers and with a steep bank down to the main road below; this was where the big bonfire used to burn.*

*We'd gather on the top tier for the firework display, watching the Catherine wheels spitting and fizzling out on the tree trunks, sparklers dancing in our hands. Then it was time for the food: the crisped, blackened shells of jacket potatoes full of fallen fluff and melting butter, the brittle, dark bonfire toffee and my mum's sticky, grainy parkin.*

*This was Auntie Kath's recipe - my children love it and we don't wait for bonfire night to bake it!*

*2 cups medium oatmeal*

*1½ cups plain flour*

*¾ cup sugar*

*1 tsp ground ginger*

*1 tsp baking powder*

*6 oz margarine (170g)*

*12 oz (340g) golden syrup*

*2 eggs, plus a drop of milk*

*Mix together the dry ingredients in a big mixing bowl. Spoon the syrup into a small pan (be generous: the stickier the parkin the better). Add the margarine, heat until melted, then pour on to the dry ingredients, along with the beaten eggs and milk. Combine to a sloppy mixture, turn into a greased and lined 9 in. square tin and bake at gas mark 3/360°C for 1-1¼ hours. The parkin is ready when the top is firm to the touch and a glorious golden brown.*

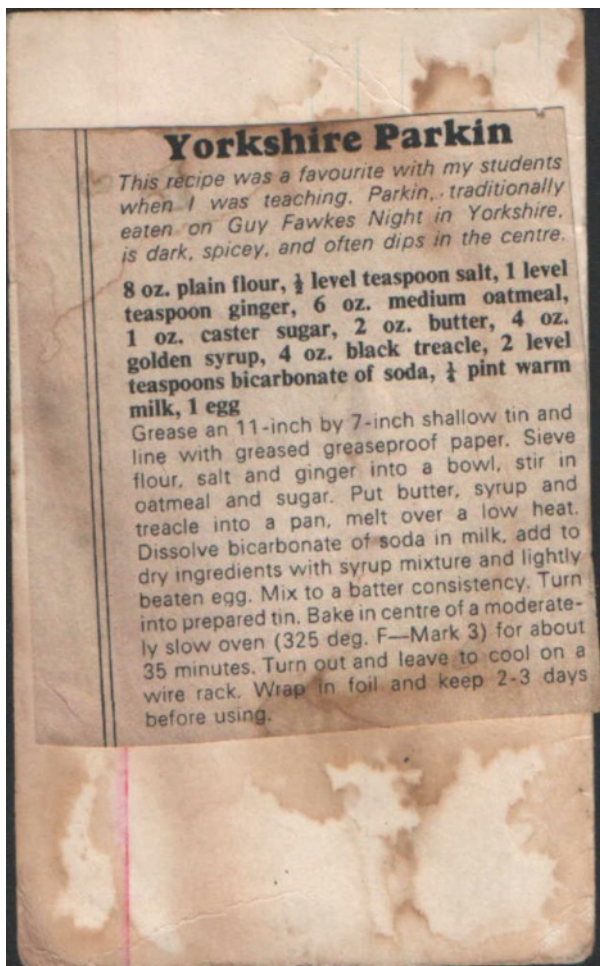
We also made this parkin. The recipe is curious in that it uses both cup and imperial measurements. Also there is an awful lot of syrup! We used fine oatmeal, as that was all we could get, and 3 tsp ginger. We cooked it for just over an hour. It was a pale parkin and very firm on the top. As this was a very large parkin, and there were only two of us to eat it, it had the benefit of being kept for more than 2 weeks. It certainly improved with age, becoming quite sticky from the syrup, but not particularly moist, with a lovely gingery, syrupy flavour. I think we might not have added enough milk to the mixture.

I made this parkin again, this time following the recipe more closely, but baking it in an 8 in. tin (I haven't got a 9 in. tin) for 1 hour and 10 mins. I used 2 fluid oz. of milk, hoping this would make a moister cake. The long baking time meant that the edges were quite dry by the time the middle was cooked. After a week the parkin was still good but not really sticky. Because this was a big parkin, had I used the recommended 9 in. tin and baked it for less time it would have been better. Also it would have benefited from including more ginger. Nevertheless it was still very good served with custard!

I found the recipe in Illustration 19, which looks like something cut out of a newspaper, amongst some old magazine cuttings. It was stuck to a 5x3 in. index card and I've no idea where it came from.

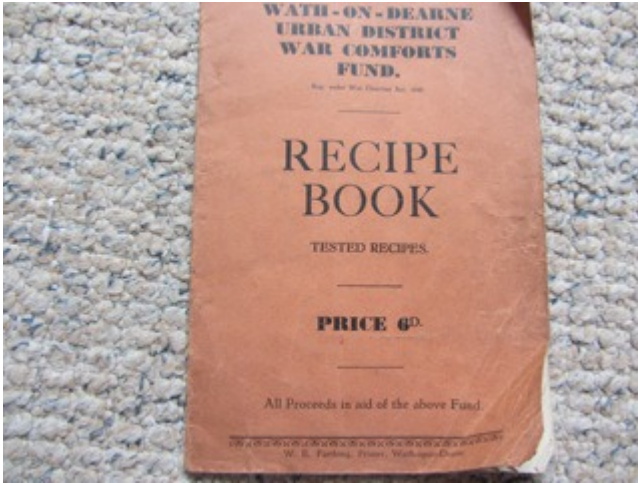
We made this parkin, using margarine instead of butter. It was quite light in texture but did not have a strong flavour - more ginger would have been an improvement for our taste. We kept it for about a month and it was still good, though a little dry underneath, but nice and sticky on the top.

My friend, Val Lidster, has sent me some parkin recipes which she had found in the *Wath-on-Dearne Urban District War Comforts Fund Recipe Book* (Wath-on-Dearne Urban District War Comforts Fund, no date, see Illustration 20), which had belonged to Mrs Hilda Lidster, Val's husband, Philip's mother, who lived in Wath-on-Dearne, a village now in South Yorkshire (formerly in the West Riding of Yorkshire). These recipes show the variety of methods



*Illustration 19: Yorkshire Parkin recipe (from a newspaper cutting of unknown origin).*

that can be used in making parkin.



*Illustration 20: Cover of Wath-on-Dearne Urban District War Comforts Fund Recipe Book.*

*Sponge Parkin*

*1 lb self-raising flour*

*pinch of salt*

*2 tsp ground ginger*

*8 oz castor sugar*

*2 oz margarine*

*8 oz treacle*

*1 egg*

*a little milk*

*Mix dry ingredients, warm margarine & treacle; beat together. Add milk & egg, mix well, put in well-greased shallow tin & bake one and half hours. Cut into squares.*

The above recipe was contributed by Mrs Arrowsmith, 18 Sycamore Crescent. I made this recipe but, by mistake, used golden syrup instead of black treacle. I baked it at gas mark 4 for 50 mins. Unfortunately this was one of the rare occurrences of under-baking! The parkin looked well risen and golden in colour but when I took it out of the oven it immediately sunk. I could have put it back in the oven but I thought I would avoid the “over-baking” problem, so I didn't. The outer parts were really sticky and spongy; the centre, when served with custard, had the caramel fudginess of a sticky toffee pudding, quite delicious in a very unparkin-like way.

I decided I should have another go at making Mrs Arrowsmith's recipe. This time I halved the quantities of ingredients, apart from the egg, which was quite small. I used 3 fluid oz. of milk and baked the mixture in an 8 in. tin at gas mark 3 for 35 mins. The result was very good: spongy, treacly and sticky – an excellent parkin.

### *Parkin*

*1 lb flour*

*1 lb oatmeal*

*½ lb sugar*

*1 lb treacle*

*¼ lb lard*

*1 tsp baking powder*



*1 tsp bicarbonate of soda*

*2 tsp ginger*

*milk*

*Bake in slow oven.*

The above recipe was contributed by Mrs W. Parkin, 2 North Side Road. I made a vegan version of this parkin, using Trex instead of lard and 10 fluid oz of almond milk. As there is no method given I had to improvise it. I rubbed the Trex into the flour before adding medium oatmeal and the other dry ingredients. I warmed the treacle and stirred it in, followed by the almond milk. The batter was fairly stiff. I baked it in an 8 in. square cake tin for an hour and 20 mins. at gas mark 3, covering it with baking paper for the last 20 mins. to stop it from getting too brown. This was a massive parkin which I gave to our son to serve at a party he was giving. Apparently everyone enjoyed it.

*Parkin*

*8 oz self-raising flour*

*¼ pint milk*

*8 oz oatmeal*

*1 tbsp ginger*

*4 oz margarine*

*2 tbsp sugar*

*½ lb treacle*

*½ tbsp bicarbonate of soda*

*Rub margarine, flour & oatmeal [together], add sugar, ginger & bicarbonate of soda, warm treacle and milk. Mix and put in shallow pudding tin, bake slowly 1 hour.*

The recipe above was contributed by Mrs Hooks, 8 Riley Road. I made this recipe, using almond milk in place of cow's milk. I baked it in a greased and bottom-lined 8 in. tin at gas mark 3. This was a really excellent “traditional” parkin: moist, sticky, nutty and full of treacly flavour.

*Parkin*

*1 lb oatmeal*

*¼ lb lard*

*½ lb treacle*

*1 cup flour*

*½ cup of sugar*

*1 egg*

*3 tsp baking powder*

*1 tsp ginger*

*Warm treacle and fat, mix dry ingredients and beat together. Add egg and put in a well-greased tin.*

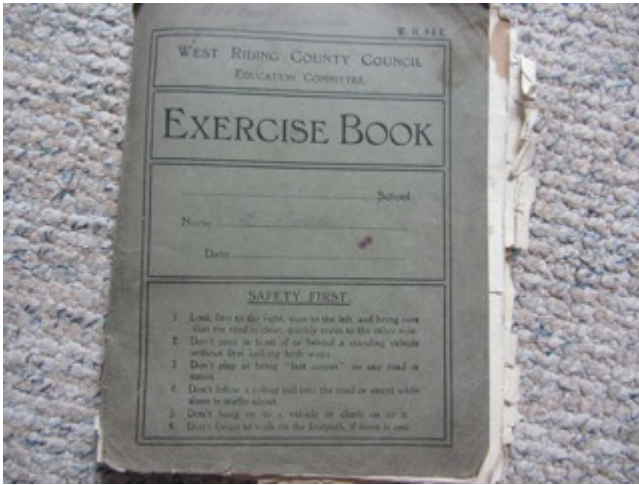
The above recipe's contributor is anonymous. I made a half-

WATH URBAN DISTRICT WAR COMFORTS RECEIPTS AND PAYMENTS ACCOUNT, YEAR ENDING, FEBRUARY 22nd, 1941	
INCOME.	
Donations	150 0 0
Entertainments	
Whist and Bridge Drives	64 15 9
Raffles and Competitions	24 10 0
Sale of Flowers etc.	7 11 0
Racing and Wrestling Contests	60 8 6
Concerts	184 7 2
Shows	127 9 6
Ladies Refreshments Committee	
Theatrical Exhibitions	74 10 6
Advertisements	1 15 0
Home to Home Appeal	596 17 5
Collection Boxes	67 10 0
Bank Interest	70 5 1
	0 1 0
	564 14 4
To Balance in Asset	
Cash at Midland Bank	273 0 10
Cash in Treasurer's Hand	0 15 9
	273 16 7
EXPENSES.	
Grants to H.M. Forces	300 15 0
Wool	140 11 10
Entertainments	
Hire of Halls, Printing etc.	75 3 10
Entertainment Tax	9 1 3
Whistling and Boxing Expenses	14 12 6
Whist Drive—Printing, Hire of Hall, etc.	10 15 7
Dance—Printing, Hire of Hall, etc.	9 7 0
	139 0 2
General Expenses	
Stamps and Postage	2 3 10
Petty Cash	4 0 0
Bank Charges	0 17 0
Rates	1 16 4
Light and Heat	0 16 4
Blackout Expenses	0 12 3
W.R.C.C. War Charities Reg. Fee	10 5 9
	0 5 0
	590 17 9
Cash at Midland Bank	273 0 10
Cash in hands of Treasurer	0 15 9
	273 16 7
	564 14 4
I certify that the above Receipts and Payments Account is in my opinion a true summary of the Secretary's Cash Account in the Cash Book I have examined with the Minute Book, the counterfoils receipts, vouchers and Bank Pass Book.	
R. W. ALLOTT, Chartered Accountant, White Hart Buildings, Rotherham.	
3rd March, 1941.	

*Illustration 21: A page of accounts from the Wath-on-Dearne Urban District War Comforts Fund.*

quantity version of this parkin, using Trex instead of lard, but using a whole egg. I also included 2 fluid oz of milk as the mixture was very stiff. I baked the parkin in an 8 in. square cake tin for 40 mins. at gas mark 3. The result was quite nice but a bit dry. If I made it again I would add a bit more milk to the mixture.

As a matter of interest, Illustration 21 shows an accounts page of the Wath-on-Dearn War Comforts Fund in 1943. "War Comforts Funds" were set up in both World War I and World War II by local communities, firms and the armed services, for civilians to contribute money and goods to make the service personnel's and prisoners of war's lives more comfortable. Food parcels, cigarettes and hand knitted socks, balaclavas and other "extras" could then be provided for the troops. Whist and bridge drives, raffles and dances would provide income, whilst costs included entertainment tax and blackout expenses.



*Illustration 22: Cover of Mrs. Hilda Lidster's Exercise Book containing recipes from her West Riding County Council cookery course.*

The following recipe was also given to me by Val Lidster, and it had been found in a West Riding Education Committee exercise book which had belonged to Mrs Hilda Lidster (Lidster, no date). Mrs Lidster had enrolled on a cookery course run by the Council and this recipe formed part of her notes (see Illustration 22). Unfortunately the page giving the method and cooking time was missing, but some indication of the method is included within the list of ingredients.

### *Sponge Parkin*

*One and a half ounces margarine, 2 tbsp sugar (cream together). 1 cup oatmeal, 1 cup flour, 1 tsp ginger, half pound warm syrup, 1 tsp bicarbonate of soda dissolved in a cup of warm milk.*

The interesting thing about this recipe is that it is the only one I



*Illustration 23: Hilda Lidster's Parkin.*

have found that uses the creaming method: beating the margarine and sugar together before adding the other ingredients. All other parkins have been made by first rubbing the fat into the flour or melting the fat, usually with the treacle and/or syrup (and sometimes the sugar as well). Since this last recipe is for a sponge parkin the creaming method makes sense; many sponge cakes (for example, the Victoria sandwich cake) are made using this method because creaming incorporates a lot of air into the cake for a lighter textured result. I will discuss the sponge parkin and the methods of making parkin in more detail in later sections of this book. Yet, it was my opinion, until we made this parkin, that this was not a “true” sponge parkin as it contained oatmeal, which would make it quite heavy, and it did not include any eggs, although there was a raising agent: bicarbonate of soda. Making the parkin didn't quite go to plan because when we added the milk and bicarbonate of soda combination the mixture became extremely sloppy. I thought that we may have measured some of the ingredients incorrectly. Anyway, to remedy the situation we added another cup of oatmeal and one of flour and the mixture became more as we would have

expected it - a thick batter. The parkin rose in the oven and was quite light in colour and texture - a true sponge parkin despite the oatmeal. It didn't have a strong flavour (even though we had added extra ginger) and it became dry on keeping (a month is probably too long for any parkin!) but it was a lovely parkin to eat with a cup of tea (see Illustration 23).

Some time after making this parkin I decided that I should give it another go. Several subsequent parkin batters have been very loose but had turned out okay, perhaps with extra time in the oven, covered with a sheet of baking parchment (see, for example, A. Maden's Sponge Parkin from the *Bethel Baptist Church Centenary Bazaar Recipe Book* (Christian Endeavour Society, 1954) in my later section on Lancashire parkins). In this trial my only change to the original recipe was to use almond milk instead of cow's milk - because I wanted to give it to my vegan son and his friends. Again the mixture was extremely thin but I persevered. I baked it in an 8 in. square tin at gas mark 3-4 for 50 mins. Although it did not rise much it came out fine and had a definite spongy texture. The tasters told me it was very good.

On a third occasion, fancying a sponge parkin, I made Hilda Lidster's parkin again. This time I used the original ingredients. I creamed the margarine and sugar together, added the oatmeal, followed by the warmed milk and bicarbonate of soda, which I alternated with the sieved flour and ginger. Finally I included the syrup, which I had also warmed. I baked the mixture (which was sloppy, as I had expected) in an 8 in. cake tin for about 50 mins. at gas mark 3. The parkin rose quite a lot but it had a strange pale frothy texture on the top, which I took to be related to the bicarbonate of soda. Nevertheless this was a lovely light parkin, but also sticky on top, and really good served warm with vanilla or toffee icecream.

*Yorksgen Recipes'* website, compiled by June Ridsdale, (Ridsdale at *Yorksgen Recipes*) gives several recipes for Yorkshire parkin but also includes Yorkshire moggie cake, attributed to Mrs P. Hirst of Halifax (Hirst at *Yorksgen Recipes*). Also known as moggy, this seems to be a close relative of Yorkshire parkin, which sometimes



*Illustration 24: Foods of England Project's Moggie Cake.*

resembles sponge parkin, at other times is more like a tray bake and can also be bread-like, served sliced and buttered.. Unlike traditional parkin it does not usually contain oatmeal, but it does contain black treacle (and/or golden syrup) and sometimes spices, such as mixed spice or ginger. The Foods of England Project website describes it as a "Raised cake, now made with a substantial admixture of treacle (or golden syrup). The name and receipts are widely known, but the origin is obscure. It is not in dictionaries, such as Hargrove's [*Specimens of Yorkshire dialect*, 1908]. The *Yorkshire Magazine* of October 1871 has 'their tea included at times by way of a treat a piece of moggy which is a cake made of proportions of flour, meal, potatoes and fat'" ("Moggie cake" at Foods of England Project).

The following recipe is given:

### *Moggie cake*

*12 oz plain flour*

*4 oz sugar*

*3 oz lard*

*3 oz butter*

*3 fluid oz milk*

*2 tbsps treacle*

*1½ tsp baking powder*

*½ tsp salt*

*1 tsp mixed spice*

*Heat an oven to 170°C. Sieve the dry ingredients and rub in the fats. Add the sugar and treacle. Mix in enough milk to form a stiff dough. Roll out into a circle 1½ ins. thick. Bake on a greased tray for about 35 mins. Cut radially when cool.*

I made this moggie cake (see Illustration 24) using Trex instead of lard and margarine instead of butter. I baked it for 40 mins. but it could probably have had a bit longer in the oven as it was very soft in the bottom of the centre, although the top was quite crusty. The general texture was rather like a rock cake or a scone and the flavour was spicy. I thought this moggie cake was quite nice and I would make it again.

Poulson, in *Old Yorkshire recipes* (1974) suggests that the name “Moggy” is derived from the Old Norse word “Mugi” which means a heap of corn. Also the Early English word “Muge” and later “Muga” also refer to corn. Since there are no corn products in the recipe for moggie, it is unclear why these derivations might be true. She gives us the following recipe:



## *Moggy*

*1½ lb plain flour*

*3 tsp baking powder*

*6 oz lard*

*6 oz margarine*

*8 oz syrup*

*8 oz sugar*

*salt*

*milk*

*Mix together the flour, salt and baking powder. Rub in the fats, add the sugar and syrup. Mix to a stiff dough with milk. Shape into two pieces 1½ ins. thick. Place on a greased baking tin and bake in a moderate oven for about 25 mins. until firm and light brown. Cut and serve thickly buttered.*

Before I return to Yorkshire parkin I will digress a little and tell you about the Crow Wood Park Bowls Club cup final, and annual tea, where parkin might well have been on the menu. But first I must explain how my Mum came to marry Stanley Whiteley, my Dad's brother.

When my Dad died in 1974 my Mum was only 61 and very much at a loss. Not only did she miss his company but my Dad had been responsible for the finances of the family and all the DIY and driving. My Mum hadn't worked since her marriage. Yet she picked herself up and went on to join the WRVS (Women's Royal Voluntary Service), volunteering to help make and serve tea at



*Illustration 25: Gifts of flowering plants for the volunteers at the Willowfield Darby and Joan Club, Halifax, West Yorkshire. My Mum is 2nd from the right on the back row.*

Willowfield Darby and Joan club (a social club for elderly people), in a sheltered housing block near her home on Burnley Road, Halifax. She made lots of friends there and was eventually awarded a medal for long service. Illustration 25 is a photo of the volunteers receiving plants as tokens of appreciation. My Mum is second from the right on the back row. To her left is Margaret Senior, a neighbour of Uncle Stanley. To Margaret's left is Clarice Hartley, who became a good friend of my Mum's. The man is Mr Helliwell, a church warden at St John's Church, Warley, who was responsible for buying the tea, milk and biscuits etc. for the meetings. I can't remember the names of the the other women, although I think I have met some of them on the odd occasion I went to help, too. The club took place on a Tuesday afternoon and there was always a guest speaker or performer. After tea there was bingo.

My Mum also became part of Uncle Stanley and Auntie Lilian's card-playing sessions, which were held on Friday afternoons, and sometimes on Sundays. They were joined by Lilian's sister, Winifred Garland and occasionally her other sister, Dorothy Sands.



*Illustration 26: Auntie Lilian (on the right) with her 2 sisters - Dorothy Sands (on the left) and Winifred Garland (centre).*

Illustration 26 shows Auntie Lilian (on the right) at the seaside with Dorothy (left) and Winifred (centre). The photo was probably taken by Uncle Stanley. I don't know where or when it was. Stanley and Lilian were fond of the East coastal resorts of Yorkshire, so it might have been Scarborough, Whitby, Flamborough or Bridlington, possibly in the late 1960s.

The card games were mainly whist and rummy and my Mum was rather a good player, being a very capable bluffer and able to remember which cards had already been played. On Fridays these would have been followed by tea and, on Sundays there would have been a roast dinner, whether eaten before or after the cards, I don't know.

Then things changed. I'm not sure who died first: Dorothy or Auntie Lilian. Stanley nursed his wife through a long illness, doing the housework and learning to cook. After Lilian and Dorothy's deaths Stanley resumed the card sessions for my Mum and Winifred as a way of coping with loneliness. He even cooked Sunday dinner for his guests: being adept at roast beef and



*Illustration 27: Veteran's Cup Final, Halifax and District Amateur Bowling League. Uncle Stanley is 2nd from the left and Horace, his partner is bowling.*

vegetables, followed by rice pudding.

One day my Mum had a phone call from Winifred: Stanley had had an accident and broken his wrist, could she help? Of course she could. My Mum virtually moved into Stanley's house. Realising how much they cared for each other, they were married in 1979.

Now, Stanley's obsession was crown green bowls. He was in the Crow Wood Park Veterans' Bowls Club, which played in the local league. The bowling green was in the park at the bottom of his garden, and in the summer he spent as many afternoons as he could down there (much to my Mum's irritation - she would have liked to have gone out for a "run" in the car), playing both friendly and league matches. He was a good player and had won the league cup on several occasions. One time when Clive and I were staying with



*Illustration 28: My Mum (on the right) with an unknown woman serving tea at a Veteran's Cup Final, Halifax and District Amateur Bowling League.*

Mum and Uncle Stanley it coincided with the pairs' cup final and Stanley asked us to take some photos of the game (see Illustration 27). Stanley told us this was a difficult game: he and his partner, Horace, were taking on Barraclough (or possibly Murgatroyd - I can't quite remember his name, but it was weighty), a titan amongst bowlers, and his partner (possibly Taylor). I think they might have been from Hove Edge Bowling Club (Brighthouse) and the game was to be played at Hill Crest Bowling Club, Sowerby Bridge. For Clive and I one of the exchanges on the green was the highlight of the game. Stanley had just bowled a rather poor wood (the balls are called "woods" for obvious reasons) and Horace, a real character and the one who is bowling in this photo of the match, being an over-optimistic fellow, said, holding up three fingers, "You're on three, Stanley". A voice from the crowd was immediately heard: "Daft b----r, he's on one if he's lucky!" Needless to say, Stanley and Horace were not victorious that day.

After a cup final there was always a tea laid on by the host club - probably provided by the wives and female relatives and friends of

the resident team. In Illustration 28, my Mum, on the right, looking as smart as she always did, and an unknown woman preside over the teapot, on one of these occasions. I recognise the small iced cakes (known as “buns” to us) with cherries as ones which my Mum might have baked. I still bake them myself.

But let us not forget about parkin! Before ending this section on Yorkshire parkin I must include something about the “parkin pig”. Growing up in Halifax, I remember the parkin pig as a pig-shaped ginger biscuit, with a currant for an eye, and which was available in bakers around Bonfire Night. Baker Mike, writing in *Keithley News* (Baker Mike at *Keithley News*, no longer available) explains:

*The parkin pig is traditional and local to us Keithley folks. He falls within the Leeds, Bradford and Halifax triangle of Yorkshire where he originated generations ago.*

*Back then rich folk had their bonfires and ate spit boar, while the poor had biscuit in the shape of a pig. God help anyone with the name “parkin” as they were taunted in the school playground! The parkin pig has been granted special name protected status from the EU commissioners which means that this unique delicacy can only be made in Yorkshire and if produced outside of Yorkshire it will have to be labelled “parkin-style pig”.*

On his *Facebook* page Baker Mike (Baker Mike at *Facebook*) gives the following recipe:

*A Firecracker of a Piggin Good Biscuit!!*

*100g unsalted butter*

*50g brown sugar*

*150g golden syrup*

*225g plain flour*

*10g bicarbonate of soda*

*2 tsp ground ginger*

*currants for eyes*

*Yields 9 large 12 small*

*In a large mixing bowl sieve the flour, ginger and bicarbonate of soda well. Using a large pan slowly melt and stir with a wooden spoon the brown sugar, golden syrup and butter to just melt and not boil. Add the wet to the dry, mixing well until combined and a sticky consistency, Allow the mixture to cool down in a fridge for 30 mins. before rolling the pig dough out. Roll out using a dusting of flour to the thickness of £1.00 coin. Stamp out your parkin piggies, placing on to a well buttered or papered baking tray, placing a large currant as an eye. Bake in a preheated oven middle shelf rotating for an even bake 190°C/170°C fan assisted/gas mark 6 for 10-15 mins. until golden brown. Leave on the baking tray to cool completely before eating.*

I managed to buy a pig-shaped biscuit cutter from a shop in Whitby and I made parkin pigs to this recipe. They were very good.

*Halifax Courier*, on 16 March 2010 (“What makes us tykes tick” at *Halifax Courier*) also celebrated the EU status of the name of the parkin pig, quoting Hamer Ormonroyd of an old established

Mytholroyd bakers: Elijah Ormonroyd and Sons: “This is the news we have been waiting for ... People will not want to be fobbed off with second best”. What will happen to the unique status of the parkin pig after Brexit only time will tell.

The *Halifax Courier* article also informs us that food historians claim to have found a manuscript, dated 1485, in a house in Halifax, which contains a recipe for “A Pigge that is mayde from ye sweetmeat named Parkin in ye Countie of York”.

It is now time to analyse Yorkshire parkin recipes.

## **Analysis of Twenty One Yorkshire Parkin Recipes**

In this analysis I have excluded recipes which are related to parkin, such as Thor cake, moggie cake and the parkin pig. I will now attempt to characterise Yorkshire parkin, based on ingredients and methods.

Only 10% of recipes used oatmeal and no flour, whereas 14% used flour and no oatmeal, with the rest containing a combination of these two ingredients, tending to be in equal proportions but occasionally preferring more flour (19%) and sometimes less (10%). Flour would give a lighter texture than oatmeal on its own.

62% used black treacle and no golden syrup, whilst 19% contained golden syrup alone. The others included a mixture of the two. Black treacle would give the parkin a deeper colour, and a more liquorice-like flavour than golden syrup.

52% of the recipes used “sugar” which I would take to be granulated, because my Mum always used that for everything. Adding in those recipes which preferred caster sugar meant that 64% of the recipes used white sugar. 10% of the recipes had no added sugar, with the rest employing brown or Demerara sugar (29%). Obviously white sugar is less flavourful than brown sugar and would give a lighter colour to the cake. I did think that white sugar might have been used to balance the flavour and colour of



black treacle, or, alternatively, make a less intensely dark and spicy parkin when combined with golden syrup, but I could see no relationship between the type of sugar employed and the choice of black treacle or golden syrup.

Regarding fats: butter alone was used in 29% of the recipes, with margarine favoured equally often. “Grease” (which I would take to mean lard or dripping) or lard on its own appeared in 24% of recipes. The other recipes combined different fats, but lard was very popular, appearing in 43% of all recipes, either alone or in combination. My Mum used a lot of lard in baking: her pastry was always made with half lard and half hard margarine.

43% of the recipes were eggless and the rest included one egg (43%) or two eggs (14%).

The liquid of choice was milk for 81% of the recipes, but water and beer were both used in 5% of instances, with 10% not including any extra liquids.

All recipes included a raising agent, such as bicarbonate of soda, baking powder or self-raising flour.

Ginger was used in all recipes, and of the few other spices listed: 5% were cinnamon, 10% were mixed spice and 5% were mixed spice with nutmeg as well. The only other extra ingredient to be included was salt, used in 33% of recipes. Perhaps Yorkshire people like a lot of salt in their food. My Mum and Uncle Stanley were very heavy handed with the salt cellar, particular when roasting meats, and my Mum always put salt in her pastry, too.

Regarding methods for making parkin, this analysis was based on 17 recipes only, since the other 4 did not provide a method. 29% of the recipes employed the rubbing in method, whilst the creaming method was used in 6% - one instance, and this was the only occurrence of this method that I have found in all the parkin recipes I have come across. The melting method was chosen by the rest (65%).

Yorkshire parkin is thus quite a traditional parkin, generally preferring black treacle to golden syrup, with few ingredients other than the basics, although very occasionally extra spices were included, and salt featured in a third of the recipes. Animal fats, particularly lard were often preferred over margarine. The melting method predominated and made for a sticky, dark parkin.

## *Lancashire*

Lancashire parkin may have its origins in “tharf cake” (also named “tharf cake” or “Thor cake”), mentioned earlier. The *Baking for Britain* website tells us that, in Lancashire, the Monday after 31st October, was called “Tharcake Monday” (“Parkin (or perkin or tharf cake” at *Baking for Britain*).

Another early form of Lancashire parkin is “harcake”. In Norwak's (1979) *The Farmhouse Kitchen* we are told that it was named “harcake” or “soul hars cake” after the Norse god Odin or “Har” (one of his many names), who was the father of Thor, and it was eaten on All Souls’ Day (2nd November).

The *Foods of England Project* website suggests that har cake is synonymous with “soulmass cake” (also known as “soul-masse cake”, “somass cake”, “soumass cake” or “souling cake”) which I discussed earlier: a type of thin parkin made from oatmeal, sugar, butter, ginger and brown ale, which (judging by its seasonal nature and name similarity) is probably related to tharf cake (“Harcake or soul-mass cake” at *Foods of England Project*).

Thomas Blount's *Glossographia* dictionary of 1656 (cited in “Harcake or soul-mass cake” at *Foods of England Project*) states: “Soul-Masse-Cakes are certain oaten cakes which some of the wealthier sort of persons in Lancashire [in 1674 it adds Hertfordshire, etc.] use still to give to the poor on All-Souls-Day”.

In the Midlands, “soul cake” is another name for this traditional confection. The *Foods of England Project* describe soul cakes as:

"small unraised dense cakes of enriched dough with dried fruit and sweet spices. Commonly coloured with saffron and marked with a cross on top, they were associated with free distribution at certain festivals, especially Halloween. Though clearly related to this tradition, these differ from the Northern form of Soul-Mass cake" ("Soul cakes" at *Foods of England Project*).

The following recipes for Lancashire harcake have a lot in common with tharcake but also parkin as we know it today.

Here is an old Lancashire recipe from the *Great British Kitchen* website ("Great British cookbook: harcake" no longer available from *Great British Kitchen*), probably sourced from Jones' and Deer's (1987) *Cattern cakes and lace*:

### *Lancashire Harcake*

*50g (2 oz) butter, softened*

*450g (1 lb) fine oatmeal*

*350ml (12 fluid oz) golden syrup*

*15g (½ oz) ground ginger*

*1 egg beaten*

*brown ale*

*Preheat the oven to 180°C/350°F/gas mark 4. Grease and base-line a 25x20 cm. (10x8 in.) baking tin. Rub the butter into the oatmeal with fingertips, then add the syrup and ginger and combine well. Add the egg and sufficient ale to make a thick, smooth batter. Pour into the prepared tin and cook for 1-1½ hours, until firm and springy, covering the top with foil if it browns too quickly. Cool in the tin for 5*

*mins. then turn out onto a wire rack. When completely cold cut into squares and store in an airtight tin.*

The *Kingsdown, Lynsted and Norton Newsletter Recipe Column* ("Harcake (Thor cake)" at *Kingsdown, Lynsted and Norton Newsletter Recipe Column*) tells us that harcake (or Thor cake) was traditionally eaten on either bonfire night or All Souls' Day (2nd November) and that it needed to be made at least a week and preferably three weeks in advance to allow its flavour to develop. There are lots of regional variations of this cake but a recipe for Lancashire harcake is given. It was traditionally served sliced and buttered along with mugs of hot milk for the children and spiced elderberry wine for the adults. The recipe contains an amusing "Cook's note".

### *Lancashire Harcake*

*4 oz lard*

*4 oz golden syrup*

*4 oz black treacle*

*4 oz sugar*

*8 oz plain flour*

*5 fluid oz milk*

*8 oz medium oatmeal*

*4 level tsp ground ginger*

*2 level tsp ground cinnamon*

*1 level tsp bicarbonate of soda*

*1 egg beaten*

*Preheat the oven to 180°C/355°F/gas mark 4. Grease and line a 9 in. square cake tin. In a saucepan melt the lard and add the syrup, treacle and sugar. Warm over a low heat until the sugar begins to dissolve. In a large mixing bowl, mix the dry ingredients and make a well in the centre. Gradually beat in the lard mixture and add the beaten egg. Add as much milk as necessary to form a soft consistency. Pour the mixture into the tin and bake towards the bottom of the oven for 1-1¼ hours. Allow to cool a little in the tin. Turn out and cool on a wire rack. Once cool, wrap in foil and keep in an airtight tin for at least a week. [Cook's Note from the website: "This may require hiding the container, attaching an alarm, telling lies as to where you have hidden the cake or other methods of subterfuge. My Official Taster felt it necessary to try a slice every day to ensure the quality did not pass the optimum".]*

Clive and I made this recipe, using Trex instead of lard, all syrup as we had no black treacle, and leaving out the egg. We baked it for one hour but it could have done with less time in the oven as it was rather hard at the edges. It had a very good flavour from the cinnamon (which I didn't used to like, and have omitted from some earlier trials, but am definitely coming round to).

Bridgeman and Wilson's (2004) *Porters English cookery bible* adds that harcake or soul cake was traditionally baked on a bakestone by the hearth and was known as “tharve (hearth) cake”.

“Tharf”, “Har”, “Thor”, “Tharve” - these names are all pretty similar but would appear to mean different things, yet they are all associated with All Souls' Day festivities.

Regarding the ingredients of Lancashire parkin, *Porters English cookery bible* (Bridgeman and Wilson, 2004) informs us that treacle, when introduced into England from the West Indies in the 17th century, was easily obtained by those who lived near the ports

of Lancashire and thus incorporated into parkin recipes.

Wikipedia explains that the Lancashire version of parkin often uses golden syrup and sugar in preference to treacle ("Parkin (cake)" at *Wikipedia*).

The *Baking for Britain* website suggests that Lancashire parkin has a larger proportion of oatmeal to flour than Yorkshire parkin ("Parkin (or perkin or tharf cake" at *Baking for Britain*), but contrast this with Carol Wilson, on the *BBC Good Food* website (Wilson at *BBC Good Food*) and *Porters English cookery bible* (Bridgeman and Wilson, 2004) who both say the opposite. In my own analysis of ingredients I tend to agree with the latter authors, but there are so many different recipes for both types of parkin that I would not like to commit to this idea. The following recipe from *Pot-luck; or, The British home cookery book* by May Byron (Byron, 1914) shows why:

#### *Lancashire Parkin*

*Four pounds of oatmeal, four pounds of treacle, half a pound of butter, ginger and candied lemon peel according to taste.*

This would suggest that treacle and oatmeal are used in abundance.

In the introduction to this book I mentioned the booklet *Centenary Bazaar Recipe Book* compiled by the members of the Christian Endeavour Society, Bethel Baptist Church, Waterfoot, Lancashire. (Christian Endeavour Society, 1954). This was probably acquired from my Dad's cousins, Hilda (Cunliffe) and Maude (Sunderland), and his Aunt Alice, who lived in Bacup, Lancashire, which is near Waterfoot. As a child we did not see much of them but my Mum, Dad, Uncle Stanley and Auntie Lilian kept in touch. I remember going to Aunt Alice's 90th birthday party which took place at her home. Illustration 29 shows a family get together at Great Aunt



*Illustration 29: Family get together in Bacup, Lancs., probably in the 1960s. Left to right from back: Unknown man, Auntie Hilda (Ibberson), Great Aunt Alice, Granny Whiteley, Uncle Stanley, Auntie Lilian, Aunt Hilda (Cunliffe), Aunt Maude (Sunderland).*

Alice's house, probably in the 1960s. Illustration 30 is a very similarly posed photograph, taken by me, on the occasion of Great Aunt Alice's 90th birthday party in the mid-late 1970s, but with a few new faces and some that are missing. The unknown woman in this photo is probably a neighbour and the unknown man in both is either Hilda Cunliffe's husband or the brother of Hilda Cunliffe and Aunt Maude. Uncle Stanley looks the same in both photos.

Bethel Baptist Church was built in 1869 but demolished in 1996 due to declining congregations. The Sunday School building still



*Illustration 30: Great Aunt Alice's 90th birthday party, Bacup, Lancs., in the mid-late 1970s. Left to right from back: Aunt Hilda (Cunliffe), my Mum, unknown woman, Aunt Maude, Uncle Stanley, unknown man, Great Aunt Alice (seated).*

stands and is now the Millennium Theatre, home of the Rossendale Players ("Bethel Baptist Church, Burnley Road East, Waterfoot" at *Rossendale - Lancashire Family History & Heraldry Society*).

The *Bethel Baptist Church Centenary Bazaar Recipe Book* (Christian Endeavour Society, 1954) (shown in Illustrations 31-36) has a whole section devoted to "Parkin Recipes" which includes flapjacks, wholemeal raisin loaf and gingerbread with fruit, alongside sponge parkin, parkin, "family" parkin and ginger parkin cake. Interestingly, A Maden's Sponge Parkin recipe does not appear to be much different from traditional parkin recipes,



BETHEL BAPTIST CHURCH,  
WATERFOOT.

1854 - 1954

**CENTENARY  
BAZAAR**

OCTOBER 1954

**RECIPE BOOK**

Compiled by  
**THE MEMBERS OF THE  
CHRISTIAN ENDEAVOUR  
SOCIETY**

*Illustration 31: Cover of the Bethel Baptist Church Centenary Bazaar Recipe Book: 1854-1954, compiled by members of the Christian Endeavour Society.*

## THANKS

The Christian Endeavour Society wish to thank all those who have contributed by way of recipes, donations or in any other way in the compilation of this Book.

We do not accept any responsibility for all the advice given in the Book but believe all have been tried and proved successful and may be used with every confidence.

Please recommend this Centenary Recipe Book to your friends so that our Bazaar Funds may be greatly benefitted by our efforts.

THANK YOU

## TELL IT

THERE ARE BETTER WAYS OF DOING THINGS  
IF PEOPLE DID BUT KNOW,  
AND AS ITS LITTLE "HELPS" WE NEED  
AS THROUGH THE WORLD WE GO.  
IF YOU HAVE UNSURPASSED SUCCESS  
WHY, TELL YOUR SISTERS SO,  
DON'T HESITATE TO MAKE IT KNOWN  
'TIS WHAT THEY WANT TO KNOW.

## CONTENTS

PUDDINGS  
FRUIT LOAVES  
BISCUITS  
CAKES  
PARKINS  
SUNDRIES

*Illustration 32: Inner cover of the Bethel Baptist Church Centenary Bazaar Recipe Book.*

### SUPERB CHOCOLATE CAKE.

#### INGREDIENTS...

1 $\frac{1}{2}$ CUPS SELF RAISING FLOUR	$\frac{1}{2}$ CUP MARGARINE
1 $\frac{1}{2}$ CUPS SUGAR	1 TEASPOON VANILLA ESSENCE
1 TEASPOON SALT	$\frac{3}{4}$ CUP MILK

#### METHOD.

MIX ALL THE ABOVE INGREDIENTS TOGETHER AND BEAT FOR TWO MINUTES EXACTLY, SCRAPING SIDES FREQUENTLY. ADD TWO UNBEATEN EGGS, BEAT THE WHOLE MIXTURE FOR ONE MINUTE MORE. ADD  $\frac{3}{4}$  CUP OF CHOCOLATE MADE INTO A PASTE WITH BOILING WATER. BEAT FOR ONE MINUTE, POUR INTO TWO PAPERED SANDWICH TINS AND BAKE IN A HOT OVEN FOR 30 TO 35 MINUTES. WHEN COLD PUT TOGETHER WITH BUTTER ICING OR ORDINARY ICING.

MRS. N. CROPPER.

### COFFEE NUT CAKES.

#### INGREDIENTS...

2 OZS. BUTTER	$\frac{1}{2}$ TEASPOON BAKING POWDER
2 OZS. CASTOR SUGAR	2 TEASPOONS COFFEE ESSENCE
1 Egg	1 OZ. CHOPPED NUTS
2 TABLESPOONS MILK	COFFEE ICING
3 OZS. FLOUR	WALNUTS

#### METHOD.

CREAM THE BUTTER AND SUGAR. BEAT UP THE EGG IN THE MILK, AND ADD TO THE BUTTER AND SUGAR WITH SOME OF THE FLOUR. BEAT WELL. ADD THE REST OF THE FLOUR PREVIOUSLY MIXED WITH THE BAKING POWDER. THEN ADD THE COFFEE ESSENCE, CHOPPED NUTS AND A PINCH OF SALT. DIVIDE THE MIXTURE INTO BUN TINS. BAKE FOR 15 MINUTES AT REGULO 5. WHEN COLD COVER WITH COFFEE ICING AND PLACE HALF A WALNUT ON TOP OF EACH.

MRS. PARSON.

### PARKIN RECIPES

### FLAP JACK.

#### INGREDIENTS...

4 OZS. QUAKER OATS	1 $\frac{1}{2}$ OZ. MARGARINE
2 OZS. SUGAR	HEAPED TEASPOON OF GOLDEN SYRUP
	DROP OF VANILLA ESSENCE.

#### METHOD.

MELT MARGARINE, SYRUP AND SUGAR. POUR ON TO OATS. ADD ESSENCE AND MIX TO A VERY DRY CONSISTENCY. BAKE IN A MODERATE OVEN UNTIL GOLDEN BROWN. CUT UP WHILST STILL HOT AND LEAVE TO COOL IN THE TIN.

MRS. J. A. BURNETT.

*Illustration 33: Mrs. J. A. Burnett's Flap Jack recipe in the "Parkin Recipes" section of the Bethel Baptist Church Centenary Bazaar Recipe Book.*



WHOLEMEAL RAISIN LOAF.

INGREDIENTS...

1 LB. WHOLEMEAL FLOUR (ALINSONS)	
5 OZS. SUGAR	2 TEASPOONS BAKING PDR.
2 OZS. BUTTER	$\frac{1}{2}$ PINT COLD WATER
$\frac{1}{2}$ LB. SEEDLESS MUSCATEL RAISINS	

METHOD.

SIEVE DRY INGREDIENTS, RUB IN FAT, ADD FRUIT AND MIX WITH WATER. TURN INTO GREASED LOAF TIN, AND BAKE FOR 1 HOUR IN A MODERATE OVEN. WHEN COLD, SLICE AND SPREAD WITH BUTTER.

MRS. J. BISHOP.

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GINGERBREAD WITH FRUIT.

INGREDIENTS...

8 OZS. FLOUR	1 LEVEL TEASPOON BAKING PDR
2 LEVEL TEASPOONS GROUND GINGER	$\frac{1}{2}$ LEVEL TEASPOON BI-CARB
$\frac{1}{2}$ NUTMEG GRATED	OF SODA
4 OZS. SUGAR	3 OZS. DRIED FRUIT
3 TABLESPOONS SYRUP	1 OZ. CANDIED PEEL
3 OZS. LARD	$\frac{1}{8}$ PINT MILK
1 Egg	$\frac{1}{8}$ PINT HOT WATER

METHOD.

SIEVE FLOUR, GINGER AND NUTMEG. RUB IN FAT. ADD SUGAR AND FRUIT, SYRUP AND BEATEN EGG AND MILK. MIX WELL TOGETHER. DISSOLVE BAKING POWDER AND BICARBONATE OF SODA IN HOT WATER AND STIR INTO MIXTURE. TURN INTO TIN LINED WITH GREASED PAPER, LEVEL ON TOP. BAKE IN CENTRE OF MODERATE OVEN FOR  $\frac{3}{4}$  HOUR.

MISS M. HEYS.

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SPONGE PARKIN.

INGREDIENTS...

8 OZS. FLOUR	$\frac{1}{2}$ TEASPOONFUL GINGER
4 OZS. SUGAR	2 OZS. LARD
2 OZS. OATMEAL	2 OZS. BUTTER
	1 Egg

METHOD.

WARM 3 TABLESPOONSFUL OF SYRUP WITH THE BUTTER AND LARD. MIX 1 TEASPOONFUL BICARBONATE OF SODA WITH ONE GILL OF MILK AND BEATEN EGG AND DRY INGREDIENTS. BAKE 1 HOUR.

A. MADEN, NEWCHURCH.

*Illustration 34: A. Maden's Sponge Parkin, and other recipes in the "Parkin Recipes" section of the Bethel Baptist Church Centenary Bazaar Recipe Book.*

PARKIN.

INGREDIENTS...

2 CUPSFUL FLOUR	1 TEASPOONFUL BICARBONATE SODA
1 CUPFUL MEAL	1 GILL MILK
1 CUPFUL SUGAR	1 TABLESPOONFUL OF SYRUP
2 OZS. MARGARINE AND LARD (TOGETHER)	
1 TEASPOONFUL GINGER	

METHOD.

WARM MILK AND POUR ON BI-CARBONATE OF SODA AND THEN PUT IN THE SYRUP, AND BAKE IN SLOW OVEN.

MRS. MELLOR.

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"FAMILY" PARKIN.

INGREDIENTS...

½ LB. BUTTER (OR MARGARINE 10 OZ.)	
2 LBS. LYLES GOLDEN SYRUP	1 LB. SELF RAISING FLOUR
1 LB. FINE OATMEAL	1 TEASPOONFUL OF GINGER.

METHOD.

WARM TREACLE AND BUTTER. ADD GINGER TO MEAL AND MIX THIS WITH TREACLE AND BUTTER. ADD FLOUR. BAKE IN A "SLOW TO MODERATE" OVEN FOR 1 HOUR.

MRS. ARNOLD.

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GINGER PARKIN CAKE.

INGREDIENTS...

8 OZS. FLOUR	1 TABLESPOONFUL GOLDEN SYRUP
2 OZS. OATMEAL	1 TEASPOONFUL BROWNING
2 OZS. MARGARINE	½ TEASPOONFUL GROUND GINGER
2 OZS. SUGAR	1 TEASPOONFUL BI-CARBONATE OF SODA
	1 TEACUPFUL OF WARM MILK

METHOD.

MIX THE FLOUR, OATMEAL, SUGAR AND GINGER TOGETHER IN A MIXING BOWL. WARM SYRUP, BROWNING AND FAT UNTIL MELTED, THEN ADD TO DRY INGREDIENTS. DISSOLVE BI-CARBONATE OF SODA IN WARM MILK AND QUICKLY STIR INTO THE DRY INGREDIENTS. THE MIXTURE SHOULD BE OF A DROPPING CONSISTENCY. BAKE IN A MODERATE OVEN 40 TO 45 MINUTES. SEE THAT THE TIN IS WELL GREASED.

MRS. TWIGGER, 5 GREENBRIDGE SOUTH.

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*Illustration 35: Mrs. Mellor's Parkin recipe, Mrs. Arnold's "Family" Parkin recipe and Mrs. Twigger's Ginger Parkin Cake recipe, in the "Parkin Recipes" section of the Bethel Baptist Church Centenary Bazaar Recipe Book.*

MELTING MOMENTS.

INGREDIENTS...

2½ OZS. LARD	5 OZS. SELF-RAISING FLOUR
1½ OZS. MARGARINE	½ EGG
3 OZS. CASTOR SUGAR	1 TEASPOONFUL VANILLA ESSENCE
	SCOTTS OATS.

METHOD.

CREAM FATS AND SUGAR IN THE EGG. WORK IN FLOUR AND ESSENCE, ROLL INTO BALLS WITH WET HANDS AND COAT WITH OATS. BAKE IN A MODERATE OVEN FOR 15-20 MINUTES.

MRS. ASHWORTH.

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CAKES

MADEIRA CAKE.

INGREDIENTS...

½ LB. SELF RAISING FLOUR	2 OR 3 EGGS
½ LB. BUTTER	1 TABLESPOONFUL MILK
5 OZS. CASTOR SUGAR	PINCH OF SALT.

METHOD.

CREAM BUTTER AND SUGAR, ADD UNBEATEN EGGS WITH A TABLESPOON OF FLOUR WITH EACH. ADD MILK AND FLOUR. BAKE IN A MODERATE OVEN FOR 1½ HOURS.

MRS. H. GREENWOOD.

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CREAM BUNS.

2 EGGS, 4 OZS, CASTOR SUGAR CREAMED TOGETHER, THEN ADD 2 OZS. MELTED MARGARINE AND 2 OZS. SELF RAISING FLOUR. BAKE IN PAPER CASES IN A MODERATE OVEN.

MISS A. HUTCHINSON

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SPONGE PARKIN.

INGREDIENTS...

14 OZS. FLOUR	1 TEASPOON BAKING POWDER
4 OZS. SUGAR	1 " CARBONATE SODA
4 OZS. LARD	1 " GINGER
1 OZ. MARGARINE	½ " SALT
PINCH OF ALLSPICE.	½ GILL SYRUP
	½ GILL MILK WITH 1 EGG

METHOD. MELT FAT AND SYRUP TOGETHER, MIX WITH DRY INGREDIENTS AND MILK. BAKE IN A MODERATE OVEN.

MRS. TAYLOR.

*Illustration 36: Mrs. Taylor's Sponge Parkin recipe in the "Cakes" section of the Bethel Baptist Church Centenary Bazaar Recipe Book.*

including oatmeal and syrup (though not black treacle) in its ingredients. In the “Cakes” section of the book there is another recipe for sponge parkin (Mrs. Taylor’s) which seems to have escaped the “Parkin Recipes” section, and is much more as I would have imagined a sponge parkin to be, i.e. not to include oatmeal.

Clive and I made A. Maden's Sponge Parkin ( from the “Parkin Recipes” section), using Trex instead of lard, margarine instead of butter and lots of extra ginger. I had to find out what a “gill” is - ¼ pint. The resulting batter was worryingly sloppy. We baked it in an 8 in. cake tin at gas mark 4 for about one hour, placing a sheet of baking parchment over the top for the last 15 mins. Despite my doubts, this was a lovely parkin and it very much reminded me of the one my Mum used to make (except she would not have included any oatmeal) - very spongy with a really sticky top. A week later it was still moist and even stickier. Three weeks later we finished it off as you might a ginger sponge pudding, by warming it in the oven and serving it with vanilla ice cream. Clive and I agreed it was one of the best.

Mrs. Mellor's Parkin recipe is a bit sparse on method. Also the quantities of margarine and lard to be used are confusing. I decided to go for 1 oz. of margarine and 1 oz of Trex, instead of lard. I rubbed the fats into the flour, oatmeal and ginger, before adding the rest of the ingredients. The mixture was quite stiff. I baked it in an 8 in. tin, at gas mark 3 for about 50 mins. This parkin was very nice. It was not particularly light but had a nutty texture and did become sticky on the top. The flavour, though not intense, was gingery.

I made a half the quantity version of Mrs. Arnold's "Family" Parkin, using butter rather than margarine and a whole tsp of ginger. The smell of the melting butter and syrup reminded me of when my Mum used to make the "plot" toffee I mentioned earlier. The mixture itself was quite stiff, there being no extra liquid ingredients. I baked it in an 8 in. tin for 55 minutes at gas mark 3 and it still seemed quite soft on the top but it hadn't risen much. When it cooled it became quite solid. It still smelt like toffee and I would liken it to a caramel shortbread rather than a parkin, and this

perhaps shows the range of different goods we know as parkin.

In making Mrs. Twigger's Ginger Parkin Cake, I omitted the browning. The batter was quite sloppy. I baked it in an 8 in. tin for 30 mins at gas mark 4. This was a very pale parkin. It had a slightly rubbery texture and was not very sweet. Unfortunately it did not keep very well: it went mouldy after 9 days, perhaps because of the relatively low sugar content.

Notice how recipes from this booklet, the other Centenary recipe booklet I discussed in the Yorkshire parkin section, and Auntie Hilda's *Memo book* are very short on method. They assume a lot of baking knowledge. They do not always tell you: the size of the tin; that you must grease it; to be careful not to overheat the melted ingredients; how much mixing to do. The above recipe for Ginger Parkin Cake does not even tell you the precise oven temperature or how long to bake the parkin. Women thirty years ago and more (and it would be women - as a rule men did not bake in the home) would have had the experience to work out the missing bits of the recipe.

In the section of my book on North Country parkin I mentioned Astrid Bear's recipe (Bear at *Ladyshrike*, no longer available), for Lancashire parkin, which is very similar to one for North Country parkin but that the Lancashire parkin recipe includes more milk. I will not repeat that recipe here but will give another of Bear's recipes, which is flourless and eggless.

### *Lancashire Parkin*

*1½ lb oatmeal*

*1 tsp ground ginger*

*8 oz brown sugar*

*8 oz butter*



*1 lb treacle*

*1 tsp allspice*

*Mix together the dry ingredients. Heat the treacle and butter; add to the dry mixture and leave to stand overnight. Place in a well-greased shallow baking tin and bake in a moderate oven for about 2 hours. It is done when the parkin springs back when touched.*

Kirkpatrick's (1963) *500 Recipes for Cakes & Pastries* is very dear to my heart as it was one of the first cookery books I bought for myself. I was about 12 years old. I collected as many of the “500 Recipes” series as I could afford. Kirkpatrick gives us this Lancashire parkin recipe, which is unusual in that it is made with vegetable oil instead of solid fats:

*Lancashire Parkin*

*4 oz flour*

*1 level tsp baking powder*

*4 oz fine or medium oatmeal*

*3 level tsp ground ginger*

*4½ fluid oz (9 tbsp) blended vegetable oil*

*4 oz black treacle or syrup*

*4 oz Demerara sugar*

*1 egg*

*4 tbsp milk*



*Illustration 37: Kirkpatrick's Lancashire Parkin.*

*Grease a shallow 7-inch square tin. Line the bottom with greaseproof paper. Sieve the flour, baking powder, oatmeal and ginger into a large mixing bowl. Heat the oil, treacle or syrup and sugar gently, until the sugar dissolves. Beat the egg and milk together. Make a well in the centre of the dry ingredients, pour in the syrup, then the egg mixture, stirring well until the mixture is thoroughly blended. Pour into prepared tin and bake at 335°F/ Mark 3 for 1-1¼ hours. Leave on a wire tray until cold. Store in a tin for 3-4 days before cutting.*

Clive and I made this parkin (see Illustration 37) using oatbran instead of oatmeal and 5 tsp of ginger. Our tin was bigger than it should have been so we baked it for 45 minutes only. It was delicious - very moist and went really sticky after a few days.

The *Foods of England Project* website mentions “Preston Parkin” (“Preston parkin” at *Foods of England Project*). Preston is a city in Lancashire. The website describes this parkin as a: “Heavy, moist, soda-raised cake made with wheat flour and oats, with dark sugars. Differs from other parkin with the addition of nutmeg”.

Tess Baxter, in her food blog, wrote about “Preston Gingerbread”, which also contains nutmeg, along with mixed spice, although it does not include oatmeal. She explained that the extra spices and the Demerara sugar, which gives it a crunch, similarly, makes it different from other gingerbreads. It improves with keeping (Baxter at *Tess Baxter: Recipes and Food*, no longer available).

### *Preston Gingerbread*

*250g/9 oz plain flour*

*2 tsp ground ginger*

*½ tsp nutmeg*

*½ tsp mixed spice*

*85g/3 oz butter*

*85g/3 oz Demerara sugar*

*170g/6 oz black treacle*

*1 large egg*

*60ml/4 tbsp milk*

*1 tsp bicarbonate of soda*

*In a bowl, sift together the flour and spices, then rub in the butter. Beat together the milk, egg and bicarbonate of soda*

*in a separate jug or bowl. Stir the sugar into the dry ingredients, then beat in the treacle and the egg mixture. Put into a greased and lined 25x18cm., 10x7in. tin, smoothing over the top. Bake at 180°C/350°F/gas mark 4 for 30 mins., or until firm to the touch. As with all gingerbread, the flavour and texture will improve by keeping for a few days in an airtight container before eating.*

I made this recipe, using a little extra milk as the egg was quite small. I warmed the treacle before adding it. I baked the mixture in an 8 in. tin for about 40 mins. This was a lovely, sticky, gingerbread – akin to a sponge parkin.

Sam, in his *Sam's Preston Blog: All things about Preston in Lancashire* ("My favourite parkin cake recipe for bonfire night" at *Sam's Preston Blog*) gives us his mother's recipe for Lancashire Parkin, which was always made for bonfire night. Notice that it also contains nutmeg and mixed spice:

### *Lancashire Parkin*

*8 oz/220g soft butter*

*4 oz/110g soft dark brown sugar*

*2 oz/55g black treacle/molasses*

*7 oz/200g golden syrup/corn syrup*

*5 oz/120g medium oatmeal*

*7 oz/200g self-raising flour*

*1 tsp baking powder*

*4 tsp ground ginger*

*2 tsp nutmeg*

*1 tsp mixed spice*

*2 large eggs*

*2 tbsp milk*

*Put butter, sugar, treacle and golden syrup into a pan and melt over a low heat until the sugar has dissolved. Allow to cool slightly. Beat the egg well with half the milk and stir into the syrup mixture. Sieve the flour, ginger, [nutmeg] and mixed spice into a mixing bowl and add the oatmeal. Pour the syrup mixture into the dry ingredients. Dissolve the bicarbonate of soda in the rest of the mixture. Mix well together. Pour into a 7-inch greased baking tin. Bake for one hour in the centre of a preheated oven (180°C, 350°F, gas mark 4) until firm. Allow to cool before removing from the tin. When cold cut into squares.*

We made this recipe, using margarine instead of butter, and baking in an 8 in. square cake tin for about 50 mins. It was extremely light in texture, fairly pale in colour but rich in flavour from all the spices, and extremely soft and sticky. One of the best!

The final recipe in this section is from Sylvia Barnes, on *The Cake Recipe* website (Barnes at *The Cake Recipe*, no longer available), and is described as a traditional Lancashire parkin and “ginger sponge”, passed down through the generations and eaten on bonfire night.

*Lancashire Parkin (Ginger Sponge)*

*10 oz self-raising flour*

*6 oz sugar*

*4 oz margarine*

*1 egg*

*½ tsp bicarbonate of soda*

*1 tsp ginger*

*1 dessertsp syrup*

*1 dessertsp treacle*

*6 fluid oz milk*

*Mix the flour, sugar and ginger. Rub in the margarine. Beat the egg and add. Warm the milk, treacle and syrup in a pan and add the bicarbonate of soda. Mix into the flour, etc. Put in 2 lined loaf tins. Bake at 175°C/gas mark 3 for about 45 mins. Leave to cool for 10 mins. Remove from the tins and place on a cooling rack to cool completely*

I made this recipe, using an 8 in. cake tin instead of loaf tins (I have never had much success with loaf tins). The result was a lovely, spongy, well risen parkin. This was a very good, true sponge parkin.

It is now time to analyse Lancashire parkin and identify its unique features.

## **Analysis of Thirteen Lancashire Parkin Recipes**

I have excluded from my analysis parkin's close relatives: harcake and tharf cake, but I have included Preston gingerbread, since it resembles sponge parkin.

No flour, only oatmeal was used in 23% of recipes, whilst no

oatmeal, only flour was included in another 23%. The rest employed a combination of these ingredients, with the same amount of each in 15%, more flour in 31% and more oatmeal in 8%.

Golden syrup was preferred to black treacle in 38% of cases, with black treacle alone appearing in the same percentage of recipes. The rest used a combination or gave a choice, with golden syrup being dominant in 8% of these.

“Sugar” (granulated?) was listed in 38% of recipes and another 46% opted for brown or Demerara. 15% did not include any type of sugar. Interestingly, 80% of the recipes which preferred black treacle also opted for brown or Demerara sugar and the same percentage of recipes which chose golden syrup also included white sugar. It seems that Lancashire parkin has a dark, treacly version and a lighter syrupy version.

Butter was the chosen fat in 38% of recipes, whilst margarine alone appeared in 15%, with 8% giving the baker a choice of the two and the same percentage allowing either butter or dripping. Lard was never used on its own, but lard or dripping featured in 31% of recipes (compared to 43% of Yorkshire parkin recipes). 8% of recipes used vegetable oil (this was one recipe, and a very good one too).

No eggs were included in 46% of recipes, whilst the same percentage featured one egg, with 8% having two eggs. Raising agents were present in 77% of recipes. 69% of recipes included milk, but the rest (31%) had no liquid ingredient and there was no relationship with the inclusion of eggs to provide extra moisture - all the liquidless recipes were eggless.

Ginger was the only spice used in 54% of parkins, but ginger and cinnamon featured in 8%, ginger and allspice in 15% , ginger, nutmeg and mixed spice in 15% and caraway in 8%. 69% of recipes had no other extra ingredients, but 8% included salt (much less than for Yorkshire parkin, which was 33%) and 15% added candied peel. Browning was used in 8% of recipes.

Of the eleven recipes providing a method for making the parkin: 73% used the melting method with the rest being based on the rubbing in method.

Thus, Lancashire parkin has many forms: from dark and spicy to light and syrupy. Extra spices (as well as ginger) were used in almost half of the recipes.

Before leaving this section on Lancashire parkin I would like to write a little more about my Mum's family. My Mum's mother and father, Eliza and Robert Davies, and their children, moved from the Wrexham area of North Wales to Bootle, a district of Liverpool, Lancashire, in about 1914. I have already mentioned that Robert Davies was a watch repairer, and he had had his own shop until it was bombed in the Second World War. I never knew him as he died before I was born. When I was a child we used to spend Easter at my Granny Davies' home. I remember the two hour drive there, sitting at the back of the car, between my older sister and brother, Jean and David, and feeling very sick as we went round all the roundabouts along the East Lancs Road (the A580). When we arrived my Granny would have cooked us a roast dinner, with boiled potatoes which we would mash into her spectacular dark, thick, meaty gravy. Other memories include sterilised milk in tall bottles which tasted foul in tea, and delicious pink, cone shaped penny (old pennies, which were half the value of new pennies) ice lollies which we bought from a shop round the corner. I would play whip and top, and jacks in her back yard and on Saturday Dad would take us into Liverpool by bus or on foot so that we could go to Woolworths to spend our pocket money on cheap toys to keep us occupied. Then there were the Easter eggs. I used to share a bed with Jean and David. I was in the middle, of course, and one night, after I had eaten too much chocolate, I suddenly vomited over everyone. I have never seen two people move so quickly.

My Mum had two sisters: Elizabeth Ann (always known as Queenie or Ann), who was the eldest child, and Mair, whom I think was younger than my Mum. She also had a brother, John





*Illustration 38: Possibly the day of a street party (Queen Elizabeth II's Coronation?) in Bootle, Liverpool, Lancs.: Granny Davies, seated on the right, Auntie Ann seated in the middle and (I think) her 2 sons: Brian (right) and Philip sitting on the grass. I don't know the other people.*

(always known as Jack), who was the youngest in the family. Auntie Ann had been in service and then became a cook, working in various large houses and institutions around Northern England, but always returning to Bootle to be near to her Mum. She married Herman Sunderland and they had two sons: Brian and Philip. In her widowhood and old age Auntie Ann ended up in a small flat at the top of a new shopping mall, in New Strand, Bootle. She had taken all her furniture with her so in her sitting room you couldn't move for two three-piece suites. It was very strange going downstairs and straight into the mall. She was a lovely person. She was short and plump, and had that broad Liverpool accent and wit. She only had to open her mouth and you were in stitches - like a female Tommy Cooper. Once Auntie Ann came to stay with my Mum for a few days. I was there too, and we would all sit by the fire, talking (she could talk!), she sometimes eating her favourite supper of bread and warm milk (not very appetising, in my opinion) or reading our tea leaves. One day she went shopping and came back with a duck to roast - something I had never had before.

I don't think I was that keen, nor on the fishy tasting duck eggs, which were another discovery. But she was endlessly kind and kept us laughing with her natural humour. Illustration 38 was possibly photographed on the day of a street party in Bootle in the 1950s, since I have another photo taken on the same day showing the same people seated round a table outside. It might have been a celebration of the Coronation of Queen Elizabeth II in 1952. The photo shows Granny Davies (seated on the right), Auntie Ann (seated in the middle), and, I think, but am not certain, her 2 sons: Brian (front right) and Philip. I don't know the other people.

I have mentioned before that I never knew my Auntie Mair but she came to Halifax too. She married a Mr. Foster and they had two children: Joyce (married name: White) and Geoffrey, whom we saw occasionally. Uncle Jack also came to live in Halifax, where he met his wife Dorothy Heap. They had a son, Adrian, and we would see them now and again before they eventually moved to Chippenham, Wiltshire.

### ***North East England/Northumbria***

I could not find much information about a North East England version of parkin but there is something on our old friend the tharf cake. Bill Griffiths (2006), in his book *Stotty 'n' spice cake: the story of North East cooking*, (citing *Bell/White MS 12*) defines tharf cake as "a girdle cake made of flour and water", and (citing Brockett, 1825), as "a cake made of unfermented dough - chiefly of rye and barley – rolled very thin and baked hard (for keeping)". Other accounts (citing Heslop, 1893-4) describe the cake as "an unleavened cake made of barley-flour and wheat-meal with milk". We already know that in Old English, "tharf" means "unleavened" (Griffiths, 2006).

The *Baking for Britain* website ("Parkin (or perkin or tharf cake" at *Baking for Britain*) also suggests that the parkins of Northumbria and Southern Scotland are more of a griddle-baked variety.

## *Derbyshire*

Tharf cake, or Thor cake, is also found in Derbyshire. I have already described its importance during the November 5th celebrations. Julia England, on the *Taste the Seasons: Derbyshire's Food and Drink Magazine* website, (England at *Taste the Seasons*, no longer available) explains: "Villagers would club together to bring the ingredients and all bake Thor cake together – then feast as a community on this treacly treat". [A note from me: treacle would only have appeared in later recipes as it was not available until the 17th century. Before that honey would probably have been used instead.] She gives us the following recipe:

### *Thor Cake*

*225g oatmeal (I used porridge oats)*

*225g self-raising flour*

*225g brown sugar*

*½ tsp ginger*

*½ tsp salt*

*½ tsp ground allspice*

*50g candied peel*

*225g butter*

*175g black treacle*

*Preheat oven to 190°C (350°F, gas mark 5). Mix all the dry ingredients together in a big bowl and then add the candied peel. Next, melt the butter and treacle together in a pan before pouring the melted mixture into the dry ingredients.*

*Now stir with all your might with a wooden spoon until you get a thick loose, dough-like mixture. Place the mixture in a well-greased loaf tin and bake for 40-45 minutes. Leave to cool before slicing and eating at will. Warning: this cake will sink but don't worry, that's the nature of the mixture.*

Shewhomust (Shewhomust at *Shewhomust Live Journal*) gives a recipe from Tideswell, Derbyshire, for thar cakes, which are more like ginger biscuits or parkins than parkin, the cake.

### *Thar Cakes*

*4 oz oats*

*4 oz flour*

*2 oz butter*

*2 oz brown sugar*

*1 tbsp black treacle*

*½ tsp ground ginger*

*candied peel*

*pinch of salt*

*Melt sugar, butter, treacle. Add to dry ingredients. Form into walnut-sized balls. Bake for 10 mins. in a moderate oven. Cool on a tray.*

I decided to make twice the amount of this recipe as the quantities seemed quite small. I (mistakenly) used oatmeal instead of oats and I included about 2 tablespoons of candied peel. I set the oven at gas

mark 4. My mixture was quite stiff and made about 28 walnut-sized thar cakes. I expected the thar cakes to melt in the oven and spread out but they didn't, so after the allotted 10 mins. I took them out, flattened them a bit, and, as they were still quite soft, put them back in the oven at a higher temperature (gas mark 5-6) for about 10 more mins. By this time the ones nearest the edge of the tray were looking a bit burnt, although still soft, so I took them out of the oven. Very quickly the thar-cakes hardened up to a teeth-breaking brittleness. The only way to eat them was to dunk them in a hot drink. Having said that, the flavour was delicious: treacle toffee with a hint of lemon sharpness from the candied peel. Once softened by tea or coffee they had a nutty and chewy texture. I think I would make these again but flatten them out first and only bake them for 10 mins. at gas mark 6.

The *Foods of England Project* website ("Derbyshire parkins" at *Foods of England Project*) describes Derbyshire parkin as: "A type of small oatmeal and treacle cake" and gives the following recipe, taken from Byron's *Pot-luck, or The British home cookery book* (Byron, 1914) mentioned previously:

### *Derbyshire Parkins*

*One pound of fine porridge oatmeal, half a pound of butter or beef dripping, six ounces of brown sugar, almonds (a few), half an ounce of ground ginger, nine ounces treacle, pinch of salt. Mix all the dry ingredients well together, rub butter into meal, add treacle last and make stiff enough to roll out, half an inch thick, on a floured pasteboard. Cut out in rounds, place half an almond in centre of each. Place immediately in slow oven to cook half to three-quarters of an hour.*

Clive and I made this recipe with curious results. We only had medium oatmeal and we didn't have enough butter so we supplemented it with soft margarine. Also we didn't fancy trying to

weigh ground ginger so we guessed about 5 tsp. Rubbing the butter and margarine into the oatmeal and sugar proved very difficult: the butter was straight from the fridge and very hard, whilst the margarine was very soft. The end result of this was a paste, a bit like shortbread or even a creamed mixture. When the treacle was added it was impossible to roll out so we just put blobs of it on a lined baking tray and hoped for the best. We set the oven at gas mark 4. The blobs of mixture merged into a sheet and after 15-20 mins. we decided that it should be cooked, although still soft. We were frightened it might burn and the colour being so dark from the treacle and brown sugar it was hard to tell. One way to describe the slab of parkins was brandysnaps: crinkly and bubbly. I tried to cut it into squares but it would have none of it and I ended up with strange shaped pieces. Tastewise: delicious. The parkins were sticky and chewy: a bit like very thin flapjacks with an extremely treacly flavour, although the ginger was a bit lost because of the treacle. I put them in a tin and feared they would all stick together which they did to some extent. Another way to describe how they looked would be small pieces of tar such as you might use to mend a road.

I made these again, using all butter, which I rubbed into the flour before adding the other ingredients. Again, it was impossible to roll out the dough (perhaps I shouldn't have warmed the treacle?). I baked them at gas mark 3 for 30 mins. As before, the blobs of parkin turned into a molten mass. The parkin at the edges of the baking tray was quite firm but the centre was very bendy. I cut up the parkins as best I could. A cross between brandysnaps and toffee would be the best way to describe them, and they were particular good served with vanilla icecream.

John Dunstan, in *Old Derbyshire desserts* (2008), refers to Doris E. Coates (1975) book *Tupenny rice and treacle* in telling us that every English county and market town had its own version of a treacle and ginger cake and its present day popularity in the North is because the people who live there like strong flavours. Here is Coates' recipe for Derbyshire parkin, which, incidentally, does not include ground ginger:

*Derbyshire Parkin*

*1 lb flour*

*1 lb oatmeal*

*4 oz brown sugar*

*1 tsp bicarbonate of soda*

*milk to mix*

*6 oz butter or lard*

*6 oz syrup or treacle*

*1 tsp baking powder*

*pinch of salt*

*Mix flour and oatmeal, rub in the lard or butter and add a few raisins or candied peel if desired. Add soda, salt and baking powder and mix well then add sugar and treacle and enough milk to make a stiff batter. Butter and line a square baking tin with baking parchment, pour in the mixture and smooth the surface. Bake at 140°F for 1¾ hours. Cool in the tin, then store in an airtight tin for at least a week. It will keep indefinitely.*

I very much doubt the assertion that "It will keep indefinitely", but it certainly would have a good shelf life. We had a three week old parkin and it still tasted very good. Coates tells us that the longer it is kept the more moist and treacly it becomes and it is therefore a useful store cupboard cake to have for when friends pop round unexpectedly!

She also tells us that this is quite a light coloured cake and if we

want a darker one we should add some ginger. Personally I would add ginger for flavour but not necessarily for colour. Using all treacle (no syrup) gives a much darker cake than syrup or syrup and treacle mixed. One of the recipes, “Ginger Parkin Cake”, from the Bethel Baptist Church booklet (Christian Endeavour Society, 1954) uses gravy browning to darken the cake. I will discuss this ingredient in a later section of this book.

I made half the quantity of Coates' Derbyshire parkin, using butter and treacle and including quite a lot of raisins and a handful of mixed peel. This was a very stiff batter: I should have added more milk than I did (6 fluid oz.). I baked it in an 8 in. tin for about 50 mins., but I raised the temperature of the oven from gas mark 1 to gas mark 3 as it didn't seem to be cooking at all. This was a rather dry parkin. It was not very sweet and without the raisins and mixed peel it would not have been very tasty at all, there being no ginger included in the recipe.

## **Analysis of Two Derbyshire Parkin recipes**

This is a very small sample of recipes, but nevertheless I will analyse Derbyshire parkin.

Oatmeal alone was used in one of recipes, with the same amount of oatmeal and flour being needed in the other.

Black treacle on its own was used in one, with a choice of black treacle or golden syrup required for the other recipe. Both recipes used brown sugar, thus giving a good colour and toffee-like flavour, especially when combined with the black treacle.

Neither recipe contained eggs.

Fat for one recipe was a choice of butter or lard, with the other asking for butter or dripping. Animal fats give a denser texture than margarine.

One recipe included milk but the other had no liquid ingredient.



Raising agents were used in one of the recipes only.

Only one recipe included ginger, and no additional spices were required in either.

Extra ingredients were salt in both recipes, with optional raisins and/or candied peel in one, and almonds in the other.

The method of choice was rubbing in for both recipes.

The recipe which did not include flour or any liquid ingredient was used to make biscuits, rather than a type of cake. The other recipe required a “stiff batter” and made quite a dry parkin.

## ***Cheshire***

Cheshire, as will be noted later in the ingredients section of this book, is one of the counties which had, in the past, a high oats crop yield. I have found two recipes for Cheshire parkin.

The first recipe is from the *ifood.tv* website ("Cheshire parkin" at *ifood.tv*) :

### *Cheshire Parkin*

*8 oz coarse oats [sic oatmeal]*

*3 oz wholemeal flour*

*2 oz Demerara sugar*

*1 tsp ground ginger*

*½ tsp bicarbonate of soda*

*pinch of salt*

*8 oz golden syrup/black treacle*

*4 oz margarine*

*2½ fluid oz milk*

*Grease an 8 in. round tin or 7 in. square cake tin with oil, butter or baking spray. Line the base with grease proof paper, this will help unmould the cake. Preheat the oven to 350°F, 180°C. In a large bowl, sift the flour, ginger, bicarbonate of soda and salt to remove lumps and aerate it. Stir in the sugar and oatmeal. In a small saucepan, melt the syrup and fat over a low flame. Stir in the milk. Gradually pour the liquid into the dry ingredients and stir in using a wooden spoon or a spatula to blend into a smooth batter. Pour the batter into the prepared cake tin and smooth out to evenly cover the tin. Tap the tin lightly on a flat surface. Place the tin in the middle level of the preheated oven and bake for for 70-75 min. or until the the cake is springy to touch and is lightly brown on the top. Remove tin from the oven, gently invert the cake on a wire rack and allow it to cool. Dust the cake with icing sugar and ginger powder using a fine mesh tea strainer. Cut into pieces and arrange on a platter. Serve with tea or as a dessert with custard sauce, ice-cream or cream if desired.*

I made this parkin using medium oatmeal, golden syrup and almond milk, baking it in an 8 in. tin for about 55 mins. The batter was very loose, which usually results in a moist parkin, unless it is overbaked. If the mixture is sloppy it is often difficult to judge when to take it out of the oven. As the parkin cools the top hardens (from the baked sugars), so a parkin that appears just firm to the touch can quickly become like concrete. This parkin had a crunchy top with a nutty texture which wasn't too dry. It matured very well, too, becoming quite sticky, and is well worth making again.



*Illustration 39: History Services' Cheshire Parkin.*

The second recipe, which is quite similar to the one above, is from the Cheshire-based *History Services* website ("Traditional Cheshire recipes" at *History Services*):

*Cheshire Parkin*

*8 oz oatmeal*

*3 oz self-raising flour*

*2 oz sugar*

*1 tsp ginger*

*8 oz golden syrup*

*4 oz margarine*

*3 fluid oz milk*

*Mix the oatmeal, flour, sugar and ginger. Melt the fat and add to the mixture. Add the milk and syrup and mix together. Put in an 8 in. tin. Cover the top with baking paper. Cook at 180°C/gas mark 4/5 for about 75 mins.*

The instruction to cover the cake with baking paper is probably to prevent it drying out whilst cooking. I will discuss the successful baking of a parkin in my later section on methods.

I made this parkin (see Illustration 39), using extra ginger and baking it for about 50 mins. The batter going into the cake tin was very thin and I feared it would not cook properly, but it did and the parkin was quite light in colour and texture, almost like a sponge parkin. I would not recommend keeping it for a long time, as it tended to become a bit dry, but after a week or so it was still good served warm with ice cream.

## **Analysis of Two Cheshire Parkin Recipes**

Both of these recipes used oatmeal and flour, but more of the former than the latter, and one recipe contained wholemeal flour, giving a dense, nutty texture.

One recipe preferred golden syrup whilst the other allowed a choice of golden syrup or black treacle or equal quantities of each. Sugar (probably meaning granulated) was used in the golden syrup recipe (this would result in a lighter coloured, less intensively spicy cake) whilst the other recipe chose Demerara sugar.

Margarine was the fat of choice for both recipes.

No eggs were required in either recipe but both included milk and a raising agent.

Ginger, but no additional spices were included in all cases.

Salt was used in one recipe and both employed the melting method, although one recipe melted the fat and not the syrup.

Cheshire parkin is therefore fairly traditional, apart from the possible emphasis on golden syrup.

## **Cumbria**

Cumbria came into being in 1974 under local government reorganisation legislation. It was formed from the counties of Westmorland and Cumberland and parts of the counties of Durham, Lancashire and North Yorkshire. At its heart is the Lake District, an English national park. It is also the home to several parkins and parkin-like gingerbreads.

The *Foods of England Project* website describes Westmorland Parkin as a "Heavy, moist, soda-raised cake made from wheat flour, oats with dark sugars. Differs from other parkins with the addition of allspice" ("Westmorland parkin" at *Foods of England Project*). The following recipe is given:

### *Westmorland Parkin*

*1 lb porridge oats*

*8 oz flour*

*8 oz Demerara sugar*

*2 tsp ground allspice*

*1 tsp salt*

*2 tsp baking powder*

*2 tsp ground ginger*

*1 lb black treacle*

*8 oz butter*

*1 tsp bicarbonate of soda*

*1 small egg beaten*

*3 oz milk, warm*

*Mix the dry ingredients. In a small saucepan, gently heat the treacle and butter until melted and stir the mixture into the bowl. Add the egg and milk and stir until combined. Transfer the mixture into a lined and greased tin and bake for 1-1.5 hours at 180°C. Stand for 2 days before cutting.*

I made this parkin. For once I was trying to follow the recipe as faithfully as possible (albeit making half the quantity) but I quickly stumbled on one of the ingredients: ground allspice - I thought I had some but I didn't, and had to use mixed spice instead. In a later section of the book, where I describe the ingredients of parkin, it will become clear that allspice and mixed spice are not the same but they share some of the same flavours. Apart from that hitch the recipe went well. I baked the parkin for about 50 mins, covering it with baking parchment for the last 15 or so. This was a lovely dark, spicy, chewy, parkin. The oats gave it the texture of flapjacks and it became quite sticky over time. Family members really loved this parkin.

The town of Grasmere lies in the centre of the Lake District and has given its name to a gingerbread which has many of the qualities of parkin, although it is more biscuit-like than most of the Lancashire and Yorkshire parkins.

The *BBC Food: Recipes* website describes Grasmere gingerbread as "A gingerbread in a class of its own, flavoured with heaps of

ground ginger and given texture by oatmeal" ("Grasmere gingerbread" at *BBC Food: Recipes*, no longer available).

The *Foods of England Project* website adds the following definition: "Semi-hard flapjack-like slabs about ¼ in. thick and 3 in. square, each marked into 4 sections and dusted with oatmeal" ("Grasmere gingerbread" at *Foods of England Project*).

William Wordsworth and his sister, Dorothy, lived for a time in Grasmere. I have already mentioned that on 6th November 1800 Dorothy wrote in her journal that she had baked "parkins" (Wordsworth, 2002). On 16th January 1803 she describes how "Wm had a fancy for some gingerbread", so she went to buy the ingredients to make gingerbread from some neighbours: Matthew Newton and his family. She writes, "They took their little stock of gingerbread out of the cupboard, and I bought 6 pennyworth. They were so grateful when I paid them for it that I could not find it in my heart to tell them we were going to make gingerbread ourselves. I had asked them if they no thick - 'No', answered Matthew, 'there was none on Friday, but we'll endeavour to get some'. The next day the woman came just when we were baking and we bought 2 pennyworth" (Wordsworth and Wordsworth, 1978; Wordsworth, 2002).

The *Baking for Britain* website explains that the local gingerbread came in both thick and thin types. ("Grasmere gingerbread from Cumbria" at *Baking for Britain*).

The *Baking for Britain* website also gives a good account of the origins of Grasmere gingerbread. The ports of Whitehaven and Milnthorpe lie to the west of Grasmere and in the 16th and 17th centuries both were important for trade with the Caribbean: spices, unrefined sugar and rum were landed here. In the 18th century Whitehaven was the third largest port in Britain, behind only London and Bristol. These commodities became the ingredients of local food products, gingerbread being one of them.

This website goes on to explain how in Grasmere, in the 19th century, gingerbread was used as a payment for rushbearers

(mainly children) who covered the unpaved floor of St Oswald's Church with rushes. Eventually the floor was paved so the rush laying wasn't needed any more, but rushes continued to be used as decorations on certain church festivals, and gingerbread too became associated with them, such as the Feast of St Oswald on August 5th.

In 1854 a woman from Grasmere, Sarah Nelson, started to make her own version of gingerbread based on Lancashire recipes, to sell as a source of family income. This gingerbread is still available today at the Grasmere Gingerbread Shop. The shop's website ("Grasmere gingerbread" at *Grasmere Gingerbread Shop*) gives us a fuller account of Sarah's life. Born Sarah Kemp in Bowness-on-Windermere, in 1815, she grew up in poverty but from going into service she worked her way up to becoming a cook. In 1844 she married Wilfred Nelson, a farm labourer and part-time gravedigger, from Morland, near Penrith. Two children followed, but since the family was having trouble making ends meet Sarah did washing and baking for Lady Farquhar of Dale Lodge, Grasmere. Around 1850 the Nelson family moved into Gate Cottage, Grasmere, a former school, and from here, due to the encouragement of Lady Farquhar, she opened a cake shop. Her gingerbread, wrapped in pure vegetable parchment, became legendary, and, as I have already said, the shop is still going strong today, selling this unique gingerbread made from a secret recipe.

The *Baking for Britain* website ("Grasmere gingerbread from Cumbria" at *Baking for Britain*) provides us with 2 recipes for Grasmere gingerbread, taken from Jane Grigson's (1974) book *English Food*, and compares the two. The first is probably quite an old recipe since it uses oatmeal, which featured in the earliest known recipes. Since both recipes use metric measurements they have obviously been updated.

### *Grasmere Gingerbread*



*250g plain flour or fine oatmeal (or 125g of each)*

*125g pale soft brown sugar*

*1 tsp ground ginger*

*¼ tsp baking powder*

*150g lightly salted butter*

*Preheat the oven to 180°C/350°F/gas mark 4. Line an oblong tin, 19.5x29.5cm., with baking parchment. Mix the dry ingredients together. Melt the butter and add to the dry ingredients. Spread the mixture over the tin in a thin layer, pressing down lightly. Bake until golden brown - about 30/35 mins. Mark into squares/rectangles as soon as you have taken the tin out of the oven, but allow to fully cool in the tin before removing the gingerbread. The biscuits will harden as they cool.*

The second recipe uses golden syrup, which would not have been available until the 1880s, when it was first produced as a by-product of sugar refining.

### *Grasmere Gingerbread*

*250g wholemeal flour*

*½ tsp each of bicarbonate of soda and cream of tartar*

*3 generous tsp ground ginger*

*175g butter*

*150g soft dark brown sugar*

*1 dessertsp golden syrup*

*Preheat the oven to 160°C/325°F/gas mark 3. Line a square (21cm.) tin. Sift the flour, bicarbonate of soda, cream of tartar and ground ginger into a bowl. Rub in the butter, then add the sugar and the golden syrup. Press the mixture into the tin. Bake for 45-50 mins. until golden brown. Mark into squares or rectangles as soon as the tin comes out of the oven but then leave to cool. The biscuits will harden as they cool.*

The *Baking for Britain* writer described the biscuits from the first recipe as being very buttery, with a subtle ginger flavour, crisp with an open crumbly texture. The biscuits from the second recipe were denser and slightly chewy in the centre, with a deeper more fiery flavour from the ginger. The biscuits near the edge of the baking tin were drier than those in the middle and may have needed less baking. The writer prefers the “bite” and simplicity of the first set of biscuits.

I made the first recipe with very good results. I used a Swiss roll tin and baked the gingerbread for about 30 mins. The gingerbread biscuits tasted something between shortbread (because of the butter) and flapjacks (because of the oatmeal). They were truly delicious.

For the second recipe I used vegan margarine instead of butter, for a dairy-free version. I baked the gingerbread in a 18 cm. x 29 cm. oblong tin for 50 mins. It had a nutty texture and a good, spicy flavour.

Here is a recipe from the *BBC Food: Recipes* website ("Grasmere gingerbread" at *BBC Food: Recipes*, no longer available):

### *Grasmere Gingerbread*

*125g/4 oz oatmeal*

*125g/4 oz plain flour*

*4 heaped tsp ground ginger*

*1 tsp bicarbonate of soda*

*1 tsp cream of tartar*

*175g/6 oz lightly salted butter*

*150g/5 oz soft dark brown sugar*

*1 tbsp golden syrup*

*Preheat the oven to 180°C/365°F/gas mark 4. Grease and line an oblong baking tin with greaseproof paper. Mix together the oatmeal, plain flour, ground ginger, bicarbonate of soda and cream of tartar in a bowl. Melt the butter over a low heat in a small saucepan, then add to the dry ingredients and mix well. Mix in the sugar and golden syrup until well combined. Pour the mixture into the tin in a thin layer and press down lightly with the back of a spoon. Bake for 30-40 mins., or until golden brown. Allow to cool slightly, then mark into 3 cm/1½ inch squares. Leave to cool before slicing into squares.*

I made this recipe and it was a disaster. I used all the correct ingredients and the resulting mixture was quite fatty and very similar to one you would expect when making flapjacks. This should have been a warning. I decided to use a loaf tin as no tin size was specified. Also I didn't press the mixture down. After 30 mins. I checked the oven only to find that the mixture had risen to the top of the tin and was bubbling up like a volcano about to erupt. We quickly put an oven tray underneath the tin but it did not overflow - simply burnt round the edges and, when taken out of the oven, immediately sunk in the middle. It was very greasy and the

only place it could go was in the bin. In retrospect I should have read my own book more closely and realised that this Grasmere gingerbread was like the “hard” parkin that Dorothy Wordsworth wrote about in her journal (Wordsworth, 2002), and consequently treated the mixture as a traybake: using a larger tin and firming it down. Also the cream of tartar I used was a bit old - whether this was a factor in the outcome I'm not sure.

## **Analysis of Four Cumbrian Parkin Recipes**

I have included the Grasmere gingerbread recipes in my analysis of Cumbrian parkin, since they bear some similarity to parkin, although they tend to be more like biscuits or flapjacks than cake.

One recipe used wholemeal flour and no oatmeal, one used porridge oats and a smaller amount of flour, one used the same amount of flour as oatmeal, with the other recipe giving a choice of oatmeal or flour, or half and half.

Golden syrup alone was used in two of recipes, with just black treacle in one recipe, and neither syrup nor treacle in the remaining recipe. Interestingly it was the three Grasmere gingerbread recipes that preferred golden syrup, or did not include syrup or treacle at all. All recipes included brown or Demerara sugar (adding colour and flavour), butter and a raising agent.

None of the recipes used any eggs and only Westmorland parkin had a liquid ingredient: milk, making a dry mixture in most cases.

Ginger was the sole spice in three cases (Grasmere gingerbread recipes) whilst ginger and allspice were used in one (Westmorland parkin). Salt was included in one recipe (Westmorland parkin).

The melting method was employed in three recipes, whilst the remaining one used the rubbing in method.

The recipe for Westmorland parkin was quite traditional (apart from preferring porridge oats to oatmeal and the inclusion of

allspice) but the Grasmere gingerbread recipes were rather like the Scottish “parkins” which will be described in the next section of this book.

## *Scotland*

Three years after my Dad had died I took my Mum for a weeks holiday in Oban, Scotland. We went by train from Halifax and I will never forget the wonderful scenery as we travelled up the west coast of Scotland - I kept running from one side of the carriage to the other so as not to miss any of it. We had a lovely holiday, which included a coach trip to various Lochs, and a sea and coach trip visiting the Isles of Mull and Iona. Illustration 40 is a photo of my Mum on the Island of Iona. The only drawback with the holiday was the carrying of luggage. My Mum had been used to holidaying by car and being able to take lots of clothes with her. I did what I could to help her with her case as well as my own more modest baggage. One highlight of my Mum's holiday was in Leeds Railway Station when a smartly dressed man offered to carry her case to the connecting train. She talked about that for years!

It's not surprising that Scotland has its own versions of parkin: broonie and parkins. Oats are grown extensively here and form the basis of many traditional Scottish recipes: from porridge to oatcakes, haggis to cranachan.

I'll start with broonie. This is an Orkney (and perhaps Shetland) gingerbread. The Orkney and Shetland islands are in the far north east of Scotland. Norse people settled there from about the 8th century and the islands were part of Norway until 1468, when they were pawned to the Crown of Scotland by Christian I of Denmark (Denmark was in union with Norway) as a dowry for his daughter Margaret's marriage to James III of Scotland. The money was never paid so that the islands remained under the Crown of Scotland. ("Orkney" at *Wikipedia*).

The *Baking for Britain* website ("Broonie (Orkney gingerbread)" at *Baking for Britain*) describes the broonie as a pale gingerbread,



*Illustration 40: My Mum on a day trip to the Isle of Iona during a week holidaying with me in Oban, Scotland in 1977.*

whose primary ingredient is oatmeal but it also includes black treacle, butter, brown sugar, wheat flour, egg, ground ginger and buttermilk. The writer of the website quotes F. Marian McNeill's (1929) *The Scots kitchen*: "Correctly Brni, a thick bannock (Orkney and Shetland)", brni being a Norse word for thick bannock, which was an early form of bread and a precursor of the scone. Bannocks were traditionally cooked on a griddle but more recent recipes prefer to bake them in the oven. The writer goes on to compare McNeill's broonie recipe with that of Julie Duff (2003), in *Cakes - regional and traditional*. Both recipes oven-bake the broonie, and, apart from Duff using self-raising flour and McNeill choosing plain with baking powder, they contain the same ingredients but in different quantities. McNeill uses less butter and ginger than Duff, and equal amounts of flour and oatmeal, whereas

Duff uses much less oatmeal than flour. McNeill omits to state how much sugar is needed so it is not possible to replicate her broonie, and thus the Duff recipe alone is given on the website. Here it is:

*Broonie*

*225g self-raising flour*

*2 level tsp ground ginger*

*115g medium or pinhead oatmeal*

*115g butter (cubed, at room temperature)*

*115g pale brown sugar*

*2 tbsp black treacle*

*1 egg*

*150ml buttermilk*

*Preheat the oven to 160°C/325°F/gas mark 3. Prepare a 900g/2 lb loaf tin (grease and line). Sift the flour and ginger into a bowl and stir in the oatmeal. Add the cubed butter and rub in using your fingertips until you have the texture of fine breadcrumbs. Add the sugar and stir well. In a small saucepan gently melt the treacle over a low heat and set aside to cool slightly. Beat the egg into the treacle and then add to the dry ingredients together with the buttermilk. Mix all the ingredients together thoroughly. Pour into your prepared tin and bake for approximately one hour (until well risen and a skewer comes out clean). Leave to cool.*



*Illustration 41: Duff's Broonie.*

The recipe recommends that you wrap the broonie in foil, put it in an airtight tin and leave for a few days before eating, but the *Baking for Britain* writer decided to try a few slices first. He/she found the broonie quite light but a bit dry in texture, best eaten buttered or with a cup of tea, and surmised that keeping for a few days would be a good idea.

I made this broonie (Illustration 41) but I didn't have quite enough butter so I made up the quantity with 20g of margarine. I had never used buttermilk before and it was not what I had expected. I thought it would be more watery, like whey but it was quite viscous, akin to yoghurt, having a slightly sour smell. The broonie mixture was fairly stiff. I baked it for 65 mins., covering it with baking paper for the last 10 to stop it from burning. It rose quite a lot in the oven, perhaps because there was a strong reaction between the acidic buttermilk and the raising agent in the flour (this will be discussed further in a later section of my book, on the science of baking). This broonie was very good. It had a strong



treacly flavour, a nutty texture and was surprisingly light for a more “traditional” set of ingredients. The buttermilk gave it a distinctive, sour taste, which cut through the sweetness of the cake.

The "Broonie" web page on the *Recipewise* website ("Broonie" at *Recipewise*, no longer available) informed us that the broonie or brni, though originating in Orkney, was soon produced in the other Scottish islands and then in mainland Scotland. Its distinguishing feature as a gingerbread is the inclusion of buttermilk. The following recipe was given:

*Brni (Broonie)*

*250g plain flour*

*150ml buttermilk*

*3 level tsp baking powder*

*2 level tsp ground ginger*

*120g pinhead oatmeal*

*120g butter (diced)*

*120g pale brown sugar*

*2 tbsp black treacle*

*1 egg*

*Put the pinhead oatmeal in a small bowl with buttermilk to soak. Prepare a 900g/2 lb loaf tin - grease and line with baking parchment. Sift the flour, baking powder and ground ginger into a mixing bowl. Add the diced butter and rub this in using your fingertips, until you have the texture of fine breadcrumbs. Add the sugar and stir well. In a small*

*saucepan gently melt the treacle over a low heat and set aside to cool slightly. Beat the egg into the treacle, when cooled, and then add this to the dry ingredients, together with the buttermilk and oatmeal. Mix all the ingredients together thoroughly to make a stiff batter. Preheat the oven to 160°C. Pour the batter into the prepared loaf tin and bake for an hour, until the broonie is well risen, and a skewer when pushed into the centre comes out clean and hot. Leave to cool in the tin, and when cooler carefully turn out. A traditional broonie is best left wrapped in baking parchment in an airtight tin for about 5 days to mature. Serve in slices with butter and jam.*

On the *Food.com* website ("Orkney broonie" at *Food.com*), Amanda from Aberdeen describes the broonie as "a lovely light gingerbread" and tells us that in Shetland it is called 'brunnie'. She gives us this recipe:

### *Orkney Broonie*

*175g medium oatmeal*

*175g self-raising flour, sifted*

*pinch of salt*

*85g unsalted butter, diced*

*1 tbsp ginger, heaped*

*85g light muscovado sugar*

*2 tbsp black treacle*

*1 free range egg, beaten*

*150ml buttermilk*

*Preheat oven to 170°C. Combine oatmeal, salt and flour. Rub in butter, stir in sugar and ginger. In a small saucepan heat treacle gently, stir in egg. Pour onto dry ingredients, add buttermilk and stir thoroughly until all are well combined. Pour batter into a buttered 900g/2 lb loaf tin. Bake for 60-70 mins. until a knife inserted in centre comes out clean. Cool on a wire rack and cool completely before turning out.*

I made this recipe, baking the broonie for about 65 mins. Like the other broonie I made, it rose quite a lot in the oven. This was a very moist and tasty cake, very similar to Duff 's version, having that unusual buttermilk flavour.

The following broonie recipe is taken from *Traditional Scottish recipes*, written out in manuscript form by George L. Thomson, scribe (1976). This is a beautiful book, which was given to me by my friend Maureen Impey (who took several of the photos in my book) for my 26th birthday. At the time we were both taking evening classes in calligraphy and this book, with its wonderful italic script, was a good source of inspiration and material to copy.

### *Broonie*

*6 oz flour*

*6 oz medium oatmeal*

*4 oz sugar*

*2 oz butter*

*1 egg*

*2 tbsp treacle*

*buttermilk*

*1 tsp baking soda*

*1 tsp ground ginger*

*salt*

*Mix together the dry ingredients, using just a pinch of salt, and not too much baking soda. Rub in the butter. Heat the treacle to make it more fluid, and mix in the beaten egg with a little buttermilk. Mix this in with the flour, adding enough buttermilk to make a dropping consistency. Pour into a greased loaf tin, and bake in a moderate oven 1¼ hours. Allow to cool in the tin for a while when baked, and put on a wire rack to finish cooling overnight. This is an Orkney gingerbread.*

## **Analysis of Four Broonie Recipes**

All the recipes contained both oatmeal and flour, 50% in equal quantities with the rest preferring more flour than oatmeal.

All used black treacle, butter, an egg, buttermilk and a raising agent.

Three of the recipes included brown sugar whilst the other used “sugar”.

Ginger was the only spice to be added and two of the recipes contained salt.

The rubbing in method was employed in all recipes.

Thus, the broonie is almost like a traditional parkin, with its oatmeal, flour, black treacle, brown sugar (usually) and ginger, but

the addition of buttermilk (which is described in my later section on ingredients) makes it unique.

Now let us turn to parkins or “perkins”, as they are sometimes known. These are more like ginger biscuits than gingerbread. The *Electric Scotland* website ("Scotch parkins" at *Electric Scotland*) describes Scotch parkins as a suitable dish for Burns night (25th January) and provides the following recipe:

*Scotch Perkins*

*2 tsp cinnamon*

*2 tsp mixed spice*

*3 oz lard*

*1 tbsp treacle*

*1 tbsp syrup*

*4 oz plain flour*

*1 tsp bicarbonate of soda*

*pinch of salt*

*2 oz castor sugar*

*1 tsp ground ginger*

*4 oz medium oatmeal*

*Pre-heat oven to 180°C/350°F/gas mark 4. Brush a baking sheet with oil. Melt the lard, treacle and syrup together. With a fork stir the dry ingredients together. Add the melted mixture and mix well. Roll into balls with your hands and set them on the baking tray, allowing for a little spread. Flatten them a little with the back of a fork. Bake for 20*



*Illustration 42: Electric Scotland's Scotch Perkins.*

*mins. The biscuits crisp as they cool. Makes approximately 15.*

These are lovely spicy biscuits. I made them (see Illustration 42), using Trex instead of lard and allspice in place of mixed spice, which I had run out of. They weren't too sweet and had a nutty texture.

Thomson's (1976) *Traditional Scottish recipes*, already mentioned, also has a recipe:

*Parkins*

*1 lb oatmeal*

*1 lb flour*

*¾ lb demerara sugar*

*½ lb butter*

*2 eggs*

*4 tbsp syrup*

*3 tsp baking soda*

*2 tsp cinnamon*

*1 tsp ginger*

*1 tsp spice*

*Rub the butter into the dry ingredients. Add the beaten eggs and syrup to make a fairly stiff dough. Roll into small pieces, about the size of a walnut. Put on greased tins with a split almond on top of each and bake in a moderate oven.*

When I made this recipe I decided that half the quantity would be enough, but, as usual, I forgot I was not making the full amount so I had double the amount of spices and bicarbonate of soda and had already beaten 2 eggs before I remembered what I was supposed to be doing. The eggs were rather small and I found I needed some of the extra liquid they provided in order to stick the dough together. I didn't have any split almonds. I had to guess the oven temperature and the baking time. I started on gas mark 4 but raised it to gas mark 5, and baking took about 20-25 mins. Nevertheless this recipe was a triumph. It produced 25 biscuits, rather like cookies, which were highly spiced (by accident) and crispy on the outside but chewy in the middle. They were very nice dunked in coffee. I shall be making these again.

### **Analysis of Two Recipes for Scottish Parkins**

Both contained equal quantities of oatmeal and flour, but one

recipe preferred black treacle and the other golden syrup.

The syrup recipe opted for Demerara sugar, whilst the black treacle one used castor sugar - perhaps evening out the colour and flavour of the parkins to some extent.

Both used animal fats: lard in one, butter in the other. This, and the fact that there was no liquid ingredient, apart from a couple of eggs used in one of the recipes, would give the parkins a firm mixture.

The distinctive feature of the recipes was that both used ginger in combination with cinnamon and mixed spice.

Split almonds decorated one batch of parkins, whilst the other brought out the flavour with a pinch of salt.

The melting method was employed in the treacle recipe and the rubbing in method in the golden syrup.

Both recipes treated the mixture as you would for biscuits: placing small pieces of the dough on a baking sheet before baking.

Despite the similarity between the name and ingredients of parkins and parkin I think I can discount parkins in my search for the origins of my Mum's parkin.

## **Wales**

Wales is not normally associated with parkin but gingerbread is. Since my Mum was born in North Wales, of Welsh parents, it might be an idea to look at Welsh gingerbread as a source of her parkin recipe. Surprisingly, the original recipes did not contain any ginger.

As a child we spent several summer holidays in Wales: Colwyn Bay, Llandudno, Prestatyn, Towyn and Pwllheli. Often we would collect Granny Davies, from her Liverpool home, on the way. The weather was usually atrocious. You could always tell what it would be like when you skirted Mount Snowden and it was shrouded in





*Illustration 43: On holiday in Towyn, North Wales, in 1958. Left to right: Jean, David, me, Granny Davies, my Mum. It looks a nice day for once.*

mist. In the earlier years we would stay in a guest house where you would be chucked out after breakfast and not allowed back until teatime. We would traipse along the prom, calling in at amusement arcades to play the penny slot machines and bingo (or “housey housey” as it was then called). There might be something to see on the pier, perhaps a variety show matinee. Sometimes Dad would take us for a run in the car, hoping that the sun would shine in the next resort. The “high tea” in the guest house was not comforting: often consisting of a salad with bread and butter, followed by tinned fruit and whipped sterilised cream. On one holiday both courses were laid out together on the table and my Dad managed to smear cream over the sleeve of his jacket every time he reached for the bread and butter. It became a family joke. On another holiday one by one we all caught Asian flu and were just well enough on the last day for a stroll on the prom before going home. On one occasion my sister, Jean, brought along a school friend, Midge, and also two other less welcome guests: Jean's tortoises: Spartan and Trojan. The rest of the family had no idea about this latter

development until a maid, having made the grim discovery, burst into the restaurant whilst we were having breakfast and threw a fit. I can't remember what the final outcome was but I think we were all allowed to stay. Illustration 43 is a photo, taken by my Dad, on a sunny day(!), of the rest of the family, with Granny Davies, outside our guest house in Towyn, North Wales in 1958.

Now back to the business of parkin, or, in this case, Welsh gingerbread. The following recipe is given in *A taste of Wales in food and in pictures* by Theodora Fitzgibbon (1973). Fitzgibbon points out that, although no ginger is used, it tastes as if it has been. This might be because of the spicy flavour of the black treacle. It is not explained why Welsh gingerbread does not contain ginger. Perhaps it was too expensive for most households but the baker did not want to admit that she could not afford it. Here is the recipe:

*Bara Sinsir*

*6 oz. (½ cup) black treacle*

*¼ pint (½ cup) milk*

*1 level tsp bicarbonate of soda*

*1 level tsp cream of tartar*

*12 oz (3 cups) plain flour*

*4 oz (½ cup) butter or margarine*

*6 oz (¾ cup) Demerara sugar*

*2 oz (½ cup) chopped mixed peel*

*Warm the milk and treacle together, then sift the flour with the bicarbonate of soda and the cream of tartar. Rub the butter into this until it is like fine breadcrumbs, mix in the*

*sugar and peel, and finally stir in the milk and molasses. Mix very thoroughly, then grease and line a tin about 8 in. long and 3 in. wide and pour in the mixture. Bake in a slow to moderate oven (approx. 300°F) for about 1½ hours, or until a skewer can be inserted and come out clean. If liked, halved almonds and slices of crystallized ginger can be put on top half way through cooking time.*

The *Celtnet* website ("Torth Sinsir Hen Gymreig (old Welsh gingerbread)" at *Celtnet*, no longer available) had this recipe, which was served at Winter fairs:

*Old Welsh Gingerbread (Torth Sinsir Hen Gymreig)*

*350g plain flour*

*½ tsp bicarbonate of soda*

*1 tsp cream of tartar*

*175g Demerara sugar*

*110g butter*

*50g mixed peel,*

*175g black treacle*

*150ml milk*

*Stir together the flour, bicarbonate of soda and cream of tartar. Add the butter and rub in. Add the sugar and mixed peel and mix. Add the milk and treacle to a pan and heat until the treacle softens and combines with the milk, and add to the dry mixture. Put into a greased loaf tin and bake at 170°C for 45 mins.*

Clive and I made this recipe, using margarine instead of butter. It rose a lot in the oven but then sank back. It took longer to cook than stated in the recipe (over an hour) and we ended up raising the temperature of the oven a little. The flavour was intensely liquoricy from the black treacle, and, yes, you could almost have imagined it contained ginger, although the heat was lacking. The mixed peel gave it little burst of tanginess. It was very good, and even stickier, after three weeks. We will be making this again.

## **Analysis of Two Welsh Gingerbread Recipes**

Both recipes used flour, but no oatmeal, and included a raising agent, thus contributing to a less densely textured cake than traditional parkin.

Black treacle and Demerara sugar, preferred in both recipes, would give the gingerbread a dark colour and a rich taste, making up for the curious lack of ginger or other spices, although candied peel provided an extra flavour dimension. One recipe also suggested the optional addition of halved almonds and crystallized ginger as decoration.

One recipe preferred margarine and other gave a choice of butter or margarine.

Milk was included in both recipes and neither contained eggs.

The rubbing in method was employed in both recipes.

Welsh gingerbread is similar to some of the recipes for sponge parkin (which I will discuss later), in that it does not contain oatmeal, but the lack of ginger rules it out as a true parkin, although it is an interesting cake.

# Parkin for Special Diets

## *Vegan Parkin*

Since a vegan diet excludes any foods which are derived from animals: meat, fish, dairy products, eggs, honey etc. it becomes more difficult to make traditional cakes. These recipes often include butter, milk and eggs, the latter contributing to their stable texture, lightness and ability to rise. It is easy to substitute a vegan margarine or shortening for butter or lard, and vegan “milk” can replace real milk, but making a cake rise and stay risen without eggs is a bit more problematic. Luckily parkin is not noted for being light: in fact density is one of its endearing properties. The use of oatmeal gives parkin its structure, too. Many of the older parkin recipes do not include eggs and are thus easier to adapt to a vegan form. Bicarbonate of soda, an alkali used in many vegan cake recipes, and a component of baking powder, reacts with any acid used in the recipe (such as cream of tartar, lemon juice or vinegar) to produce carbon dioxide which causes a cake to rise. Heat also aids this process. Since parkin does not need to rise very much, a raising agent, such as baking powder, bicarbonate of soda or the use of self-raising flour, particularly in combination with a warmed ingredient to set the reaction going immediately, may be sufficient to prevent the parkin turning into a biscuit. Some parkins, such as the Scottish parkins already mentioned, are biscuit-like anyway. Ground flax seeds, when mixed with water, are sometimes used in vegan cake recipes as an egg replacement. They bind the mixture together, although they are not a raising agent.

On his *No Bread is an Island* website, Paul Youd (Youd at *No Bread is an Island*), gives a fascinating account of his attempt to create a simple vegan version of the delicious parkin he ate as a child. After comparing several recipes he comes up with the following, which forms a starting point for his journey of discovery:

*100g oatmeal [he might mean ½ porridge oats and ½ oatmeal]*

*100g self-raising flour*

*1½ tsp baking powder*

*4 tsp mixed spice*

*100g sugar*

*100g blackstrap molasses, warmed and added after the oil and water*

*80g oil*

*220g lukewarm water*

*Mix the dry ingredients and then add the warmed molasses, followed by the oil and then the water. Bake the parkin for 40 mins. at 170°C. [He used a lovely star-shaped tin.]*

He says, "I forgot to mention in the original recipe I ground half the porridge oats, thinking the baking powder would react better. Next time I'll leave them whole. It's also very "treacly" which is no bad thing, but it tends to dominate and drown out the flavour of the ginger. Next time I might use 50g of syrup and 50g of molasses". He finds the parkin a lot lighter than he expected but still "claggy". After a couple of days he thinks the parkin has improved but decides to use wholemeal flour (with baking powder) instead of self-raising flour to make it a bit denser.

His definitive recipe (after trying out a few versions with minor adjustments) is as follows:

*100g porridge oats*

*100g wholemeal flour*

*2½ tsp baking powder*

*4 tsp ground ginger*

*1 tsp mixed spice*

*100g sugar*

*100g blackstrap molasses (or treacle if you can't find molasses)*

*80g vegetable oil*

*220g lukewarm water*

*Preheat the oven to 180°C. Measure the oats, flour, baking powder, ginger and mixed spice and stir to distribute the ingredients. Gently heat the molasses and water together to approximately blood heat and add to dry ingredients. Add the oil to the mixture and stir - initially with a large spoon or spatula, then with a whisk. Pour into an oiled and lined 20cm. (8 in.) cake tin. Put in the oven and cook for 35-40 mins. until a skewer comes out clean. Leave on a cooling rack in the tin for 10 mins. Turn out onto the cooling tray.*

Paul Youd mentions that traditionally parkin should be kept for several days to mature before eating, but he hasn't managed to do this (a common problem with parkin) as it is too tasty to wait that long.

I made this parkin for our vegan son and his housemates. I was surprised that it came out of the oven rather flat despite all the baking powder used in the recipe, but it was deemed a success by the testers.

Paul Youd suggests a gluten-free version: using Dove's gluten-free

flour instead of the wholemeal flour.

He also gives a microwave version: 3-5 mins. in a 800w microwave. A photograph on his website shows that the microwaved parkin has risen more than the oven baked one. I would note: be careful not to use a metal baking tin if you are microwaving.

Heather Parry, on her *The Everyday Veggie* website (Parry at *The Everyday Veggie*) gives the following recipe, which includes ground flax seeds, soya and coconut “milks”. If you do not have soya or coconut “milk” she suggests using any vegan milk-substitute you like.

### *Vegan Parkin*

*1½ cups plain flour*

*1½ tsp baking powder*

*½ cup caster sugar*

*1 tsp ground ginger*

*1 tsp baking soda (bicarbonate of soda)*

*¼ cup vegan margarine*

*⅓ cup golden syrup*

*1 tbsp ground flax + 3 tbsp water*

*3/5 cup of soya milk*

*2/5 cup coconut milk*



*Preheat your oven to 150°C and line an 8x8 in. baking tray with parchment paper. In a large mixing bowl, sieve together the flour, baking powder, castor sugar, ground ginger and baking soda (bicarbonate of soda). Stir well to combine. In a pan over a medium-low heat, stir together the vegan margarine and golden syrup until they are melted and combined. Pour this mixture into the flour mixture and stir to combine. The mixture will be very thick. This is Okay. Quickly whisk together the flax and water in a small bowl, then add it to the flour and syrup mixture along with the milks. Whisk well to ensure a smooth batter with no flour pockets. Pour the batter into the lined baking tray and place in the oven. Bake for 1 hour or until a fork comes out clean. Allow to cool fully and then cut into medium cubed pieces. This cake tastes better after a day or two in a cake tin, but you can eat it right away if you must!*

I made this recipe using almond milk instead of the soya and coconut milks. When I mixed the flax seeds with the water I may not have whisked it enough as the mixture stayed very speckley. This parkin didn't rise, despite all the baking powder and bicarbonate of soda, although it did have a firm texture, which I would have expected if I had used an egg in the recipe. I didn't sample this parkin myself but gave it, along with two other parkins, to our vegan son and his friends, and they served it as part of a "parkin board", which seems a fun way to serve different parkins. They seemed to like them all as everything went very quickly.

## ***Gluten-Free Parkin***

Gluten is a protein found in grains such as wheat, barley and rye. Some people are intolerant to gluten and need to follow a gluten-free diet. Since ordinary self-raising and plain flour are made from milled wheat then a substitute flour must be used. Also some baking powders contain gluten and must be avoided.

The Clandestine Cake Club, whose website proclaims: "190+ clubs worldwide and counting! We gather in secret locations and bake, eat and talk about cake. Not like any other club. It's all about cake", has this recipe on its website, submitted by Durham Dales member, Charlie ("Gluten free spicy treacle ginger parkin" at *Clandestine Cake Club*, no longer available):

*Gluten Free Spicy Treacle Ginger Parkin*

*150g rice flour*

*150g gram flour*

*3 tsp gluten free baking powder*

*4 tsp ground ginger*

*2 tsp cinnamon*

*1 tsp salt*

*¼ tsp chilli powder*

*175g brown sugar*

*150g treacle or golden syrup*

*150ml milk*

*2 eggs beaten*

*[100g butter - I'm guessing this amount, as it has been omitted from the ingredients' list]*

*Syrupy Topping*

*100g butter*

*200g treacle or syrup*

*200g castor sugar*

*2 tbsp double cream*

*Grease a large roasting tin or 3 or 4 loaf tins (you don't need to line them). Preheat the oven to 170°C/gas mark 3. Combine the flours, baking powder and spices in a mixing bowl. Melt the butter, sugar and syrup in a small pan. Pour this mixture into the dry ingredients. Add the eggs and milk to the cake batter and stir until fully incorporated. Pour into the prepared tins and bake for 30-45 mins., or until a skewer inserted into the centre of a cake comes out clean. Take the cakes out of the oven and leave in their tins, using a skewer poke holes in the cakes. Melt the butter, syrup and sugar together, bring to the boil, then add the cream. Stir well, then pour over the cakes. The cakes will soak up this mixture as they cool.*

Charlie tells us that the darkness of the cake depends on whether you use treacle or syrup. The chilli brings out the heat of the ginger very well and you can add more if you like that. The cake is large and will serve about 20 portions. It is a great favourite with the Durham Dales CCC members.

I made half the quantity of this parkin but did not include the syrupy topping and I used ordinary baking powder as I did not have any gluten-free. The gluten-free flours used in this recipe meant that the parkin had a fudge-like texture. It was very spicy, and the chilli was noticeable as an after taste: a burst of heat. I think I would add a little more chilli another time. It was a really unusual parkin, well worth making even if you are not gluten intolerant, and particularly good served warm with ice cream.

For another gluten free recipe take a look at the previous section of this booklet: Vegan Parkin, where Paul Youd from his *No bread is an island* website gives a gluten-free vegan parkin recipe (Youd at *No Bread is an Island*).

## Sponge Parkin

In researching parkin I have come across several recipes which are called “sponge” parkin. Now *The shorter Oxford English dictionary* (1978) defines a sponge cake as: "A very light sweet cake made with flour, milk, eggs and sugar." Bee Nilson (1964) describes sponges as "light cakes made with eggs, sugar, and flour, sometimes melted butter being added as well. The name is also used for other light cakes and puddings, e.g. Victoria sandwich and steamed sponge puddings which are usually creamed mixtures." She explains the “sponge method of mixing” (sometimes called the “whisking method”). All ingredients should be at room temperature. Eggs are beaten until light and then the sugar is added and beating continues until there is a thick batter. The other dry ingredients are sifted, and gently folded into the mixture, and melted fat (in the case of Genoese sponge) and other flavourings are added last. The “creaming method” also involves a lot of beating: this time the fat with the sugar, before adding beaten eggs and sifted flour.

I have not found a single parkin recipe which uses the sponge method and only one which employs the creaming method (the latter is Mrs Hilda Lidster's “Sponge Parkin” recipe, in the Yorkshire parkin section of this book (Lidster, unpublished)). Traditional parkin does not lend itself to this light, airy confection that is the sponge cake. Oatmeal gives a coarse texture, and black treacle and golden syrup are heavy, as is brown sugar. Though most recipes incorporate a raising agent, a lot do not include eggs. Nevertheless the sponge parkin exists and I have analysed the seven sponge parkin recipes which I have included in this book. Three of them are for Lancashire parkin (Barnes at *The Cake Recipe*; Maden, in the *Bethel Baptist Church centenary bazaar recipe book* (Christian Endeavour Society, 1954); Taylor, also in the latter; and the other four are for Yorkshire parkin (Anderton in the *Centenary cookbook* (St. John the Evangelist, Warley, Mothers' Union, 1978); Arrowsmith, in the *Recipe book*, (Wath-on-Deerne Urban District Council War Comforts Fund, no date); Lidster (unpublished); Naylor, in Auntie Hilda's *Memo book*, (Ibberson, unpublished)).

## Analysis of Seven Sponge Parkin Recipes

57% of the recipes used flour and no oatmeal, whilst 27% had equal amounts of flour and oatmeal, and 14% (one recipe) had more flour than oatmeal. The flour only recipes would obviously result in a lighter cake than the others.

Black treacle alone was used in 43% of recipes, with golden syrup on its own preferred by 43% of recipes as well. Equal amounts of black treacle and golden syrup were used in 14%. Golden syrup is probably less dense than black treacle and would give a lighter-coloured parkin.

87% of the recipes used “sugar” (probably granulated) with one recipe employing castor sugar. Again, white sugar is less heavy than brown or Demerara sugar.

Eggs were omitted from 29% of recipes and the rest used one egg only.

Milk was included in every recipe.

All parkin recipes contained at least one raising agent, whilst 57% combined two: such as self-raising flour and bicarbonate of soda; plain flour with bicarbonate of soda and baking powder.

Regarding fats, 57% preferred margarine, whereas one recipe (14%) used “grease”, which I imagine to be lard or dripping, and the other two (14% each) specified lard and butter, or lard and margarine. Soft margarine would give a lighter textured parkin than those which used animal fats, but only hard margarine would have been available for older recipes.

All recipes contained ginger and one recipe included allspice too. Salt was included in 57% of recipes (75% of which were for Yorkshire parkin).

Regarding method, two recipes did not provide any. Of the remaining five, 60% used the melting method and 20% each used

the creaming method and the rubbing in method. As I have already mentioned, the creaming method is one of the best methods to use when making a sponge cake (the other is the sponge or whisking method) as it incorporates lots of air. The rubbing in method is probably better than the melting method for lightness of texture.

Looking at these seven recipes from another perspective - ingredients used in individual whole recipes, rather than comparing ingredients between recipes - I would suggest that four of them conformed to a “true” sponge parkin: they contained flour, “sugar” (probably granulated) or caster sugar, egg and milk, but no oatmeal. These are Barnes’ and Taylor’s Lancashire sponge parkins, and Anderton’s and Arrowsmith’s Yorkshire sponge parkins. Two of these (both the Yorkshire parkins) included black treacle and one Lancashire parkin (Taylor’s) preferred golden syrup, whilst the other (Barnes’) included a mixture of the two. Three out of the four (both Lancashire parkins and Anderton’s Yorkshire parkin) had two raising agents each. Arrowsmith’s had one. Barnes’ parkin recipe used the rubbing in method, whilst the others used the melting method. Taken together, these four recipes would result in much less dense cakes than the other three of the seven, which all contained oatmeal, and two of which (Naylor’s and Lidster’s Yorkshire parkins) did not include an egg. Maden’s (Lancashire) parkin and Lidster’s used only one raising agent, although Lidster’s did specify the creaming method. .

Taylor’s Lancashire parkin (because of the golden syrup) was the most similar to my Mum's recipes, which I would now consider to be for sponge parkin rather than a traditional parkin. James Martin's recipe for Yorkshire Parkin (Martin at *BBC Food: Recipes*) did not contain any oatmeal and used golden syrup rather than black treacle. To me, this was also a sponge parkin, as were similar recipes, which may not have used the word “sponge” in their name. I suppose that sponge parkin could also be called a type of gingerbread as it has a lot in common with some of the gingerbread recipes in this book: Preston gingerbread, Welsh gingerbread (although this does not include any ginger), but not Grasmere gingerbread, which tends to be biscuit-like.

# Some Notes on the Main Ingredients of Parkin

## *Oats and Oatmeal*

Wikipedia provides us with an account of oats ("Oat" at *Wikipedia*). The oats we use today originated from wild oats which grew in the Near East and which were eventually domesticated in Bronze Age Europe, firstly as a secondary crop and then as a primary crop. (A secondary crop is derived from a weed of the primary crop: in this case wheat and barley. Given the right growing conditions, a secondary crop can dominate the primary crop.) Cultivation spread across North West Europe, where the cool wet summers are more suited to its needs, compared to wheat, rye and barley which prefer hotter, drier conditions. Scotland is particularly important for the growing of oats. It was here that the first oatmill was founded in Britain in 1899.

In the *Archoevidence* website, Jennifer Baker tells us that there is evidence of oat food products being consumed in two sites in York, England and one in Freswick, Caithness, Scotland, in the Viking period of history (about AD 700-1100) (Baker at *Archoevidence*).

Cultivation of oats in England and Wales, between 1869 and 1970, is shown in the Farm Censuses on the *A Vision of Britain Through Time* website. ("Agriculture and land use" at *A Vision of Britain Through Time*). There were considerably more oats grown in most of the main "parkin counties" (Yorkshire, Lancashire and Cheshire) in this period than, for example, the West Midlands, Central England, parts of South East England and South Wales, although, Durham, Devon, Cornwall and Hampshire ("non-parkin counties") were also very productive. One parkin county, Westmorland, had low production throughout the period, but because it is very mountainous, this was not surprising, and its neighbour, Cumberland made up for this by being a very high producer. Derbyshire (another parkin county) had moderate production between 1869 and 1930 but this increased from 1940-1960. North Wales, renowned for its gingerbread, had a relatively

high cultivation rate in some areas, although oatmeal is not generally included in those recipes. Oat production in England and Wales as a whole peaked in 1920 and then declined, apart from another rise in 1940, perhaps because of the Second World War, but for the parkin counties the most productive areas were the East Riding of Yorkshire and Cheshire, whilst in general the West Riding of Yorkshire and Derbyshire were the least, with Lancashire, the North Riding of Yorkshire and Yorkshire as a whole (before reorganisation) somewhere in between. By 1970 only East Yorkshire was a major producer for these counties, and, for England and Wales as a whole, production had fallen by 400% from the rate in 1920, with most of the oat cultivation taking place in the east of England.

Government statistics, published on the Internet by the Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs (Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, 2013) show that the area of land for oat production had increased by 53% between 2012-2013. "This is the largest area of oats grown for thirty years and may be due to cereal farmers choosing to plant oats when they were unable to plant wheat and winter barley." Perhaps the cold, wet weather in Spring 2012 was a factor, but also there may have been an increased demand for "healthy" cereal crops.

*Wikipedia* ("Oat" at *Wikipedia*) informs us that oats are used as a food crop when milled into rolled oats, oatmeal, oatbran and oat flour. Well known food products include: porridge, haggis, oatcakes and, of course, parkin! Oats are also used as an animal feed, particularly for horses, but also for cattle. Other uses include, oat straw, green fertilizer and winter ground cover, medicinal purposes, and in the beverage industry, particularly for beer-making.

Oatmeal, also known as white oats, is made by grinding "groats" (or grains). Porridge is sometimes called "oatmeal". To make oatmeal (the ground oats, not porridge), the husks are removed from the oats and then the seeds or "oat groats" are heated and cooled. This process stabilises the groats and gives them their characteristic nuttiness. Afterwards they can be processed in



various ways: rolled to produce rolled oats, suitable for porridge, muesli and other baked goods; small and broken oats can be steamed and flattened to make quick-cook rolled oats; steel-cut oats are chopped to a particular size according to requirements; milling produces oatbran (the outer coating of the groat, which is rich in fibre) or oatmeal flour, which can be fine, medium or coarse ("Oatmeal" at *Wikipedia*).

The nutritional benefits of oats are well known. 100g. (3.5 oz.) provides: 389kcal; 66.3g carbohydrate (10.6 g. of which is dietary fibre, a figure higher than for any other grain); 16.9g protein (which is of a high quality, equivalent to soy, meat, milk and egg protein); B vitamins, which are water soluble vitamins that play a role in cell division, amongst other important bodily functions ("B vitamins" at *Wikipedia*), including 66% of our daily requirement for B1 (also known as thiamin); 50% or more of our daily requirement of magnesium, manganese and phosphorus; around 38%, or slightly more, of iron and zinc; smaller amounts of potassium and calcium ("Oats" at *Wikipedia*).

The soluble fibre type, beta-glutan, found in oats helps to lower bad cholesterol in the blood stream. Fibre also aids the movement of waste food through the body. Another benefit is that oat products do not contain gluten, a protein found in wheat and some other grains, so are suitable for people who are gluten intolerant, although a minority of people are allergic to the protein, avenins, found in oats ("Oats" at *Wikipedia*).

## ***Flour***

*Wikipedia* informs us that whilst there is evidence that wheat flour has been produced from 6000BC, by crushing wheat seeds between millstones, the problem with availability has been that of preservation. Fatty acids in the wheat germ oxidise during the milling process and turn the flour rancid. In the late 19th century it was discovered that removing the germ from the wheat stopped this happening, and made flour production a better commercial venture ("Flour" at *Wikipedia*).

Flour enrichment, with iron, niacin (nicotinic acid or vitamin B3), thiamin (vitamin B1), and riboflavin (vitamin B2) started in the 1930s but became standard in the 1940s. In the 1990s folic acid (folate or vitamin B9), particularly important for pregnant women in that it aids in the prevention of birth defects, was also included in this ("Enriched flour" at *Wikipedia*).

In the USA flour can also be bleached and/or treated with a maturing agent to affect the colour or gluten content. Typical chemicals used in these processes would be chlorine (bleaching and maturing), ascorbic acid (maturing), potassium bromate (maturing) and benzoyl peroxide (bleaching). In the UK all chemical bleaching and maturing treatments, apart from ascorbic acid (which is a chemical name for vitamin C), have been banned ("Flour" at *Wikipedia*).

Flour consists mainly of starches which are forms of carbohydrate. There are also two protein components: glutenin and gliadin (Cakie Morag, "The science of baking") which, when they come into contact with a liquid, join together to form gluten. Gluten is responsible for the chewy texture which is found in bread but which is not very welcome in cakes. Kneading strengthens and elongates the gluten. Some flours have a higher protein content than others. "Strong" flour has the highest (11.5-15%) and is the best flour for bread-making. "Plain" (or "all-purpose") flour has 10-11.5%, whilst "soft" flour (the best for cake-making) has 7-9%. "Self-raising" flour is a form of fairly soft flour with added baking powder. In making cakes it is important to treat the flour gently so as not to make the gluten elastic. I will write more about baking methods in a later section of this book.

Some people are gluten intolerant and need to use other flours such as gram flour (made from chick peas), oatmeal and almond meal flour, instead of wheat flour ("Flour" at *Wikipedia*).

The flour used in making parkin is usually plain or self-raising, rarely wholemeal (although there are instances). A lot of recipes do not specify "plain" flour but, in general, the term "flour" refers to

plain flour whereas self-raising flour is normally stated in full. If plain flour is used then a raising agent is generally required. This is often baking powder, which was invented in the 19th century. It is a mixture of an alkaline substance (usually a carbonate or bicarbonate, such as sodium bicarbonate, sometimes called bicarbonate of soda or baking soda), and an acidic powder, such as cream of tartar, on a starch (neutral) base. When baking powder becomes warm and moist there is a chemical reaction between the alkaline and acidic components, and carbon dioxide bubbles are formed, which lighten and raise the product ("Baking powder" at *Wikipedia*). Most parkin mixtures are quite dense (an exception being sponge parkin) and may need an extra raising agent: bicarbonate of soda can be added. Milk and buttermilk are both slightly acidic (containing lactic acid) and can thus act as an agent in the chemical reaction ("What is the acidity or pH of milk?" at *About.com*; "Buttermilk" at *Wikipedia*). Bicarbonate of soda can cause a bitter taste, but parkin is so sweet that this would not normally be apparent. The starch base, which may be cornflour, wheat flour, rice flour or potato starch, is there to give the baking powder more volume for ease of measurement, and also to absorb moisture which might cause a premature reaction ("Baking powder" at *Wikipedia*).

## ***Sugar, Honey, Black Treacle and Golden Syrup***

There are 2 types of sugar: sugar cane and sugar beet. Sugar cane is grown in hot countries and it wasn't until international trade became important that we in Britain could begin to enjoy it. It was imported from the West Indies, Brazil, Cuba and Mexico. Before that, honey was our chief sweetener. Bladey (Bladey at *Milton-L*) explains that honey was relatively expensive and was often associated with sacred food and food for special occasions. It also has healing properties. One of my included recipes for tharf cake, a parkin precursor, uses honey as a sweetener.

The *Sugar Nutrition UK* website gives us a history of cane sugar (*Sugar Nutrition UK*). It came into use here at the end of the 13th and early 14th centuries, and even then it was only for the very



*Illustration 44: A sugar plantation in St Kitts (photographed by me whilst on holiday in 2003).*

rich, being extremely expensive. *Porters English Cookery Bible* (Bridgeman and Wilson, 2004) explains that by the 18th century sugar had become a lot cheaper and more widely available.

Of course the growth in the importing of sugar was very much tied up with the slave trade. The Caribbean island of St Kitts was very important in the early sugar cane production industry using slave labour. Illustration 44 is a photo of a sugar plantation in St Kitts, taken by me whilst on holiday there in 2003. Much of the information in this section of my book is taken from Hubbard (2002). The slave trade on St Kitts started in the 17th century with “indentured servants” from Europe. Indentured servants were people who had migrated across the Atlantic to run small tobacco (or sometimes ginger or indigo) farms, but who had to pay ships' masters the cost of their fares over a period of 2 to 7 years. These “indentures” was sold to landowners on arrival and the indentured servants were effectively slaves, since few lived long enough to repay the indenture, succumbing to illnesses such as malaria and yellow fever, and many were treated badly by their landowners. Other farm workers included prisoners, brought over from

England, and Irish people who had been sold into slavery following the invasion of Ireland by Oliver Cromwell. The high price of sugar in Europe at this time made it a very desirable crop to grow and the small farms on St Kitts, were procured by entrepreneurs and turned into large sugar plantations making their owners very wealthy. These plantations needed a big labour force of workers, who, unlike the Europeans, could withstand the hot climate, and hence African slaves were imported by Dutch traders to replace the indentured servants. Many of the indentured servants then joined the military and became defenders of St Kitts from invasion but also from slave rebellions. In the United Kingdom the Slave Trade Act of 1807 made the slave trade illegal in the British Empire, but not slavery itself. That came with the Slavery Abolition Act of 1833, although this had some exceptions: the territories in possession of the East India Company, the island of Ceylon (now called Sri Lanka) and the island of St Helena. The 1843 Slave Trade Act eliminated these exceptions ("Slavery Abolition Act 1833" at *Wikipedia*). In St Kitts sugar cane production continued: former slaves could now work for wages, if they wanted to, but many didn't. In 1976 sugar production was nationalised, but the plantation system continued, albeit that the workers demanded higher wages. The price of sugar in Europe kept declining and in 2005, due to lack of profitability, but also the growing tourist industry, the Government of St Kitts announced the end of the sugar industry on the island ("St Kitts" at *Wikipedia*).

In 2015 the top three producers of sugar cane were Brazil, India and China ("Sugar cane" at *Wikipedia*).

Sugar beet, a temperate crop, was consumed just as a vegetable and as an animal feed until, in 1747, the German chemist, Andreas Marggraf, found a way to extract sugar from it. Even then cane sugar was the main source of sugar in the United Kingdom. But during the naval blockades of the Napoleonic Wars (1793-1815) beet became much more important, and by 1880 it became the main source of sugar in Europe. The abolition of slavery also had an impact on cane sugar prices. During the First World War British farmers were encouraged to grow sugar beet, because of the



*Illustration 45: Modern day Liverpool: a mixture of old and new architecture (photo taken by me on a visit to friends: Patricia, Robert and Steven in the Summer of 2014).*

difficulties faced by merchant ships from German attack (*Sugar Nutrition UK*, no longer available). Today British Sugar is the sole processor of sugar from UK beet, all of which is grown in East Anglia and the East Midlands (*British Sugar*).

I have already mentioned that *Porter's English Cookery Bible* (Bridgeman and Wilson, 2004) tells us that black treacle was imported into England from the West Indies from the 17th century through the ports of Lancashire and was easily obtained by those living near to these ports. It quickly became a substitute for honey in baking.

The history of the company Tate & Lyle, from its website, (*Tate & Lyle*) leads us into the development of golden syrup. Henry Tate was born in Chorley, Lancashire in 1819, and he started out in the grocery business, but in 1859 went into sugar cane refining in partnership with John Wright, a sugar refiner in Liverpool.

(Illustration 45 shows Liverpool in 2014, with its mixture of old and new architectural styles). When the Tate-Wright partnership ended, Tate was joined in business by his two sons. Wanting to extend their market opportunities, in 1878 Tate & Sons opened the Thames Refinery in Silvertown, East London. Abram Lyle, born in 1820 in Greenock Scotland, was a cooper (barrel maker) and shipowner. Since he was already transporting sugar he decided to go into the processing industry and in 1883 Abram Lyle & Sons' factory was opened in Plaistow, East London. Treacle syrup was a waste product of the refining process but Lyle realised it could be made into something delicious, which he called "Goldie". He started selling it in wooden casks to friends and local people but it soon became very popular so he re-packaged it, as golden syrup, in the tin we are familiar with today. In 1921 the two firms merged to form Tate & Lyle.

Molasses and black treacle are also bi-products of the sugar refining process. Molasses is the least refined product, followed by black treacle and then golden syrup. As you might expect, the less the refinement the greater the nutritional benefit. *Wikipedia* ("Molasses" at *Wikipedia*) tells us that blackstrap molasses, made from cane sugar, contains calcium, magnesium, potassium and iron. One tablespoon provides 20% or more of our daily requirements of these minerals. It also contains 35% of our vitamin B6. Sugar beet molasses are mainly used in animal feed, being unpalatable for human consumption. According to the Tate & Lyle's tin, 100g black treacle contains 62% of our recommended daily allowance (RDA) of calcium, 100% RDA of iron, 43% RDA of magnesium, 66% RDA of iodine. One hundred grams of black treacle is quite a lot to eat at once (290 kcals) but even taken in smaller amounts the health benefits are more substantial compared to golden syrup and sugar, which do not contain enough of any vitamin or mineral for it to be listed on their packaging.

## ***Ginger***

*Wikipedia* ("Ginger" at *Wikipedia*) informs us that fresh root ginger is a rhizome of the plant *Zingiber Officinale* which has many

culinary, nutritional and medicinal benefits. It was originally grown in South Asia but cultivation spread to East Africa and the Caribbean. Jamaican ginger, from 1585, was the first oriental spice to be imported into Europe. In 2008 India was the leading producer. Other major producers included China, Indonesia, Nepal, Thailand and Nigeria.

Ground ginger is made from the dried root. *Porters English Cookery Bible* (Bridgeman and Wilson, 2004) explains that in the past ginger was the cheapest spice available but it was still very expensive for ordinary people. I have noted that many of the parkin recipes contain very small amounts of ginger and that they benefit in flavour if the quantity is increased. This may be as a result of our modern taste for spicier foods, but most people in days gone by would not have been able to afford this luxury. It is also interesting that the traditional Welsh gingerbread and one of the Derbyshire parkin recipes given in this book do not include any ginger but rely on the complex flavour of black treacle as a substitute.

Both raw and ground ginger contain many vitamins and minerals, but you would have to consume quite a lot (100g at least) to make a big difference to your diet. The B vitamins are well represented: B1, B2, B3, B6 and B9. There are traces of vitamins C and E. The minerals found are: iron, magnesium, manganese, calcium, potassium, phosphorus, zinc and sodium.

There is some scientific evidence to support ginger as a treatment for seasickness and morning sickness. There is also research on the anti-cancer properties of ginger, although this is more controversial. Gingerol, an anti-inflammatory compound found in ginger, appears to reduce the pain caused by osteoarthritis and rheumatoid arthritis. In folk medicine, a tea made from ginger has often been used as an aid to digestion and as a cold and cough remedy ("[Ginger at Wikipedia](#)").

## ***Other Ingredients***

Milk is the most common liquid ingredient used in parkin recipes.



It turns the mixture into a batter-like consistency, although Scottish parkins (and some of the other recipes) require a stiff mixture and they are more like biscuits or flapjacks than cakes. The recipes for broonie, the Scottish version of parkin, use buttermilk. *Wikipedia* ("Buttermilk" at *Wikipedia*) gives us information about buttermilk. Traditional buttermilk is the product left over after churning cream into butter. Cultured buttermilk has been pasteurised, homogenised and then inoculated with bacteria to simulate the ones found in traditional buttermilk. Buttermilk contains lactic acid which would react with bicarbonate of soda to produce carbon dioxide. Vegan parkin recipes include non-dairy "milk", such as soya or almond "milk".

One of my Mum's recipes includes boiling water. Our trial of this recipe found that this melted the fats and syrups and made a very light textured parkin, as it set off a very strong reaction with the raising agent.

Egg is also a leavening agent, trapping air into the product. Many of the older recipes do not contain eggs, probably because they were expensive. It is notable that many of the recipes for parkin which were written during or just after the World Wars do not contain eggs either, as they were in short supply, and some do contain extra bicarbonate of soda to compensate.

The fats used in the recipes differ greatly. Older recipes use lard (sometimes dripping) and butter. Margarine became important during the World Wars when there was a shortage of animal fats. Today butter has become the fat of choice for many bakers, although vegans use non-dairy products, and some recipes use vegetable oil.

Additional spices include allspice, nutmeg, cinnamon and mixed spice. I will briefly describe each of these.

Allspice (also known as Jamaica pepper, myrtle pepper, and pimenta, amongst other names) is the dried berry of the *Pimenta dioica* tree, which is native to the Greater Antilles, Mexico and Central America but is now grown in many other warm countries,

although its main producer is Jamaica. It was given its name in England in 1621 (documented in *The shorter Oxford English dictionary*, 1978) because it was thought to taste like the combined flavours of cinnamon, nutmeg and cloves. It was introduced into Europe in the 16th century ("Allspice" at *Wikipedia*).

Nutmeg is the seed of the tree species *Myristica*, native to the Banda Islands of Indonesia. Today the main producers are Indonesia and Grenada, but India, Malaysia, Papua New Guinea, Sri Lanka and some of the Caribbean Islands also contribute. It has been used in Europe since Medieval times, being imported by Arab traders, but it was very expensive. In the 17th century the Dutch East India and the East India Company controlled its production ("Nutmeg" at *Wikipedia*).

Cinnamon is derived from the bark of several species of tree. In ancient history four types of cinnamon were known and these came from Arabia and Ethiopia, Sri Lanka, China, and North India. Trade in cinnamon goes back to 2000BC when it was imported into Egypt by Arab traders. It is also mentioned in the *Hebrew Bible*, and it has been imported into Europe since Medieval times by Venetian traders who bought it in Egypt, and later by the Dutch East India Company and the East India Company. The main producers now are Sri Lanka, the Seychelles, Indonesia, Madagascar, China, India and Vietnam ("Cinnamon" at *Wikipedia*).

Mixed spice (or pudding spice) is a British invention which was first documented by Gray in 1828, (in his *A supplement to the pharmacopoeia, and treatise on pharmacology in general*), but which was probably around before then ("Mixed spice" at *Wikipedia*). Gray's 5th edition of this book (Gray, 1831) gives the following definition of "English spice": "The roots of *Cyperus longus*, root of *Calamus aromaticus*, leaves of sweet willow, *Myrica gale*, or root of avens, *Geum urbanum* and *G. rivale*, ground together; for in all cases a mixture of several spices is more agreeable than any one used singly" [my italics]. *Cyperus longus* is also known as sweet galingle; *Calamus aromaticus* is also called sweet sedge, sweet myrtle or cinnamon sedge; the common names

of *Myrica gale* include bog myrtle and sweet gale; *Geum urbanum* is also known as herb bennet, wood avens, city avens and clove root; *Geum rivale* is commonly called water avens. I can imagine people collecting these herbal ingredients when their knowledge of the countryside was much greater than ours is now. The names of some suggest the intended flavours: cinnamon and cloves. Others have the word “sweet” in their names, implying that they can be used in cakes and desserts. Today mixed spice consists of cinnamon, nutmeg and allspice, but may also contain cloves, ginger, coriander seed, caraway or cayenne pepper. (“Mixed spice” at *Wikipedia*). I remember that when I was young, apart from ground ginger and ground white pepper, mixed spice was the only spice my Mum ever used. I suppose it was a very convenient way to buy spices: all those perfectly balanced flavours in one small jar. Cheaper than purchasing individual spices, which would eventually deteriorate in the back of the cupboard. In our house I know mixed spice went into Christmas and birthday cakes but not much else.

Alcohol features in several parkin recipes: usually beer but also rum. Alcohol would probably act as a preservative as well as flavouring the parkin. The gas in beer would also help to make the parkin rise. The following recipe, from Atkinson and Holroyd (1919), contains rum, and has a rather lovely name:

### *Parkin Superbe*

*3 lb oatmeal*

*1 lb butter*

*1 lb brown sugar*

*a little baking powder*

*1 lb flour*

*4 lb treacle*

*1 oz ground ginger*

*a wineglassful of rum*

*Rub the butter into the flour, add meal, sugar, ginger and treacle. Allow to stand overnight, then add 2 tsp baking powder and a wineglass of rum.*

Some recipes require a pinch or more of salt. Salt is particularly common in Yorkshire parkin.

A rare addition to parkin is “browning” also known as “gravy browning”. The *BBC Food* website ("Gravy browning recipes" at *BBC Food: Ingredients*) tells us that gravy browning is made from caramel, molasses and spices and was very popular in England in the first half of the 20th century for giving gravy a “brown appetising” colour. It consists of a powder or liquid and is not to be confused with gravy powder, which is meat flavoured. I remember that my Mum would always used gravy browning when preparing the gravy for our Sunday roast. She would remove the joint of meat from the ridged, enamel, oval roasting tin (you've probably seen one of these - they are quite fashionable again now) and set it to rest whilst she added a good spoonful of flour to the meat juices and fats remaining in the tin, along with a smaller spoonful of gravy browning. This would be stirred vigorously over a low heat, which was often my job, and very satisfying it was too, to combine all these ingredients to make a smooth brown paste, rather like a roux. I loved the sound of the spoon scraping over the ridges of the tin. Then boiling water from the cooking of the vegetables (including the potatoes) would be gradually added until the gravy was the right thickness. This was proper gravy! The *BBC Food* website adds that today it is much more difficult to get hold of gravy browning but it may be found online and in some shops and would probably be labelled “browning”. Besides gravy, it could be used to colour soups, stews, cakes, icing and home-brewed beers. As already mentioned, the recipe for Ginger Parkin Cake, in the Bethel Baptist Church booklet, includes 1 tsp browning. The *BBC*

*Food* website suggests that a good substitute, to be used in a cake, would be caramel food colouring.

# Methods

Looking through the recipes for parkin I found that there was a great variety of methods. On closer inspection it was apparent that, whilst small details were not the same, there were two major methods: rubbing in and melting, and one minor one: creaming.

## *1. The Rubbing in Method*

Nilson (1964) describes the rubbing in method as a way of incorporating fat into flour. The fat is cut into pieces and dropped into the flour. Using fingers and thumbs, the fat is rubbed into the flour at the same time as lifting the fat and flour out of the bowl and letting them fall back into the bowl before picking up fresh fingerfuls. The rubbing in is finished when the mixture looks like fine breadcrumbs. I was taught at school that gently shaking the bowl brings any remaining large lumps of fat to the surface. Air is incorporated into the mixture by the lifting process - I always try to lift the fat and flour as high as I reasonably can.

Silvana de Soissons, writing on *The Foodie Bugle Journals* website (de Soissons at *The Foodie Bugle Journals*) adds that rubbing in causes the flour to be coated with fat and thus prevents the gluten from developing (which, you may remember, is a good thing in cake making).

The Stork Cookery Service's *The New Art of Cooking* (Stork Cookery Service, no date) suggests that the rubbing in method can be used when there is half, or less than half, fat to flour. Many parkin recipes fall into this category. If the proportion of fat to flour is greater than half it is very difficult to produce a breadcrumb-like consistency rather than one which resembles shortbread, a high-fat biscuit with no added liquid.

I have found a number of variations on the rubbing in method used in the parkin recipes given in this book. Some involve the melting method described in the next section:

- Rub the fat into the dry ingredients, excluding the sugar. Add the sugar, egg (if used), black treacle/golden syrup and milk (or other liquids) and mix well.
- Rub the fat into all the dry ingredients, including the sugar. Add treacle/syrup, egg (if used), milk (or other liquids). Mix well.
- Rub the fat into all the dry ingredients. Warm the black treacle/golden syrup and add. Add the egg (if used) and milk (or other liquids). Mix well.
- Rub the fat into the dry ingredients, excluding the bicarbonate of soda. Warm the milk, black treacle/golden syrup and add the bicarbonate of soda. Put this mixture into the dry mixture, with the egg (if used) and stir well.
- Rub the fat into the dry ingredients. Add egg and treacle/syrup to make a stiff dough. Roll into small pieces and bake on a baking tray.
- Rub the fat into the flour, add the oatmeal, sugar, ginger and treacle. Stand overnight. Add the baking powder and rum.
- Rub the fat into the flour and raising agent. Warm the milk with the treacle/syrup and add to the flour mixture along with the other dry ingredients, mixing well.

## ***2. The Melting Method***

Nilson (1964) explains that the melting method is often used for gingerbreads and cakes which contain treacle, syrup or honey. The treacle, syrup or honey is gently heated, often with the fat (and sometimes the sugar and/or milk) until they are melted and combined together. This mixture is then added to the dry

ingredients, followed by any eggs and liquid ingredients. Care must be taken not to over-heat the treacle etc. as it would cook the flour to a porridge (and also scramble the eggs).

Cakie Morag, on her website (Cakie Morag, "Whisked genoese, melted sticky prune cake & Delia's lesson 3 part 1"), adds that treacle and syrup are quite difficult to work with when they are at room temperature but easy to mix in once melted. Very little air is incorporated into a melted mixture (unless used in conjunction with the rubbing in method - see some of the methods in the previous section). It must not be stirred too much as the gluten would develop and ruin the texture. Thus chemical raising agents are generally a feature of parkins made using this method.

Here are some variations on the melting method, excluding those discussed in the previous section, which I have found in my research:

- Put all the dry ingredients, excluding the sugar, into a bowl. Warm the sugar, treacle/syrup and fat until the sugar and fat have melted. Add to the dry ingredients, along with the milk (or other liquids) and the egg (if used). Mix well.
- Put all the dry ingredients into a bowl. Warm the treacle/syrup and fat until the fat has melted. Add to the dry mixture, along with the milk (or other liquids) and egg (if used). Stir well.
- Mix the dry ingredients, except the bicarbonate of soda. Warm the treacle/syrup and fat until the fat has melted. Dissolve the bicarbonate of soda in the milk. Add the treacle mixture and the milk mixture with the egg (if used) to the dry ingredients. Stir well.
- Put all the dry ingredients into a bowl. Pour on boiling water and beat. Add the egg. Mix well.
- Put all dry ingredients into bowl. Heat treacle and water.



Add to dry ingredients and add oil. Mix.

- Put all ingredients into bowl. Melt fat and treacle/syrup. Stir in. Roll into balls and put on baking tray and bake like biscuits.
- Put all the dry ingredients into a bowl. Melt the fat and add. Then add the syrup and milk. Mix.

### ***3. The Creaming Method***

I have already briefly described this method in the section on sponge parkin: the fat is stirred vigorously into the sugar to incorporate as much air as possible. Beaten eggs are added, and then the flour is folded in - gently, to avoid knocking out the air and developing the gluten.

Cakie Morag, on her website (Cakie Morag, "The science of baking"), provides a bit more of the science behind this method. The beaten fat and sugar become paler as more and more air is incorporated into the mixture. The eggs form a layer around these air bubbles and the heat from the oven causes the eggs to coagulate, keeping the air inside the bubbles. Gently folding the flour into the mixture prevents the air from being knocked out and also the gluten from developing.

Only one recipe in this book uses this method: Mrs Hilda Lidster's Sponge Parkin, in the Yorkshire parkin section. I have already discussed why I think this recipe is not a "true" sponge parkin, despite using the creaming method, since oatmeal and black treacle are included, which would make it heavy, and there are no eggs, although there is a raising agent: bicarbonate of soda, but having made this recipe I did find it a lot lighter in texture than I had expected, and it is a very good parkin.

### ***Baking the Parkin***

It is very easy to over-bake a parkin - I have frequently done it

myself. Carol Wilson, on the *BBC Good Food* website (Wilson at *BBC Good Food*) describes how parkin was traditionally under-baked to keep the centre sticky. Most recipes recommend quite a long cooking time - anything from 45 mins. to 1½ hours, in a moderately cool oven. All ovens are different and rarely does the recipe specify which shelf of the oven to use. Also, although baking tin size and shape is often specified, bakers do not always comply - either because they do not have that type of tin or because they don't bother to measure their tin. The depth of mixture will obviously affect cooking times. Even after making lots and lots of parkins I still can't always get the baking right, but here are a few ideas I have come across which might help.

I never leave the parkin in the oven for the amount of baking time given in the recipe without looking at it a bit sooner, say after 40 mins. I gently open the oven door a slit and if the parkin looks pale and seems very runny I quickly, but gently, shut the oven door and check again in another 10 minutes. When it starts to look a darker brown and appears firm I put a skewer in the centre and if this comes out clean (or almost clean) I take the parkin out of the oven. I agree with the traditionalists that it is better to under-cook a parkin than over-cook it. The *Recipewise* website suggests taking the parkin out of the oven whilst the centre of the parkin is still moist in the middle ("Yorkshire parkin" at *Recipewise*, no longer available). Use your judgement – I have on at least one occasion ended up with a raw parkin middle.

The *Baking for Britain* website ("Parkin (or perkin or tharf cake)" at *Baking for Britain*) has some good tips in the readers' comments section. Covering the cake with foil for the last 15 minutes is one, and another is to put wet strips of paper round the sides of the tin to stop the edges from drying out. Taking the parkin out of the oven before it shrinks away from the sides of the tin is a third.

Cakie Morag, on her website (Cakie Morag, "Whisked Genoese, Melted Sticky Prune Cake & Delia's Lesson 3 Part 1"), suggests similar measures: using a high-sided cake liner and a covering of foil with the shiny side uppermost (to reflect the heat).

The History Services website ("Traditional Cheshire recipes" at *History Services*) recommends covering the parkin with baking paper. I have tried this during the last 20 minutes, when baking my Mum's second recipe. The parkin was lovely and moist, but this could also have been because it was a very good recipe or that I was very vigilant during the cooking time. I remember that my Mum always covered the baking tin of her Christmas cake with brown paper, both round the sides and on the top, to prevent the cake from drying out or burning because it was in the oven for three hours or more.

One final thing I have found is that a moist mixture usually results in a moist parkin (if baked correctly), so make sure you add enough liquid.

## Why Does Parkin Keep So Well?

You may have noticed that much of the folklore and many of the recipes write about how well parkin keeps and how it improves with time. One recipe even suggests that it keeps indefinitely (Derbyshire parkin in Coates (1975)), and Mrs Beeton (1923) states that it may be fine for months. Now a typical sponge cake is best eaten on the day it is baked because it gets drier. Other plain (and moister) cakes may even develop a mould if kept too long.

I will now attempt to answer the question: why does parkin keep so well? The information in this section comes mainly from “The Last Word” feature of *New Scientist*, 19 April 2014. In “The Last Word” readers pose questions, usually relating to the science of everyday life, and other readers submit answers. One of the questions asked in this particular issue was: “Why does a fruitcake last so long?” Obviously parkin isn't a fruitcake but there are quite a few similarities.

One reader, E.A. Smith (Smith, 2014), explains that the high sugar content of a (rich) fruitcake (both the sugar itself and the sugar content of the dried fruit) is one of the main factors. Sugar is a major preservative (jam is made with a higher proportion of sugar to fruit). It draws the water out of the surrounding matter, including from any bacteria or fungi, thus preventing mould from forming. Parkin also has a high sugar content, both in its pure form and from the addition of black treacle and/or golden syrup. Also I would suggest that oatmeal might absorb a lot of moisture, too. Many of the recipes for parkin (particularly the older ones) do not contain a liquid ingredient at all.

Another reader, Jan Horton (Horton, 2014) agrees with the sugar argument but adds some other factors. Fruitcakes are typically baked in the oven for a long time and reach high temperatures throughout, killing off any bacteria, whereas sponges are not in the oven long enough to do this. Parkin is one of those cakes with a fairly long baking time.

The density of a fruitcake (and also a parkin) prevents it from drying out. Sponge cakes have a lot of air pockets and therefore cannot retain moisture for very long.

The addition of alcohol helps to sterilise a cake. Rich fruitcakes often include brandy, sherry or other such beverages and may be “fed” with alcohol after they have been baked. Whilst most parkins do not include alcohol I have come across a few which do: usually beer, but also rum.

In a previous section I cited Richard Aslan's discussion of parkin as a “cut and come again” cake, consisting of very little fat and often eggless thus making it an economical product which keeps for a long time. The treacle, which hardens during baking, takes time to soften, so you have to “come again” as it gets stickier and more enjoyable (Aslan at *Miniature Lion*).

I would suggest that the traditional parkin has a good long shelf-life and may improve with age, but I would be a bit more cautious with the “true” sponge parkin. The latter does not usually contain oatmeal or as much sugar as the traditional parkin. It often has liquid ingredients and it spends less time in the oven, so it may develop a mould. Its lighter texture lets in the air and its moist environment may encourage bacteria to multiply.

A final thought on keeping parkin – where should you keep it? Most recipes recommend an airtight tin but in the past it would have been stored in special wooden parkin box (Bladey at *Cbladey.com*).

## Conclusions: Mum's Parkin Revisited

I have almost come to the end of my exploration of parkin. I started out by considering the recipes for parkin which my Mum had given me and noticing that they were not like other parkin recipes I had come across which usually contained oatmeal and black treacle. I wondered where she might have got hers from. One idea was that a relative might have given her the recipes. This led me to examine an old *Memo book* belonging to my Auntie Hilda which contained recipes, including parkin.

This *Memo book* did not provide the answer so I then turned my attention to definitions of parkin and delved into its history, taking in its association with feasts and festivals such as Bonfire night, Halloween, All Souls' Day, and ancient Pagan traditions, particularly in its early manifestations: Thor cake, tharf cake, harcake and moggie etc.

It became obvious that there are lots of regional variations in parkin recipes, but parkin is found mainly in the North of England, the North Midlands and Scotland. Other regions of the United Kingdom have their own gingerbreads but they are unlike parkin, generally because they do not contain oatmeal. Welsh gingerbread does not even contain any ginger.

I next considered parkin recipes for special diets: vegan and gluten-free. Many recipes can be adapted to cater for these diets.

One parkin, the sponge parkin, kept making an appearance. I went on to describe and analyse it in detail and found it not to be all it seemed: many recipes were of a traditional nature, being dense with oatmeal and black treacle and lacking eggs. The "true" sponge parkin ought to be made with flour, no oatmeal, preferably with the lighter golden syrup rather than black treacle, and contain extra raising agents and an egg.

I have also researched the ingredients of parkin and found that, historically, some of most important ones were to be had more

easily in the parkin-producing counties and regions: oats grew best in these areas, and the ports of Lancashire were very favourable for importing ginger and black treacle.

I then turned to the three methods used in making parkin: rubbing in, melting and creaming, with the latter being an exception - I only found one recipe which used it. In this section I offered some tips on oven baking a perfect parkin.

Finally I examined the science of why parkin keeps so well and in fact improves with age.

Along the way, I have told a bit about my family, particularly my Mum, and so I would now like to return to the topic I started out on: my Mum's two parkin recipes. Firstly I will make an analysis of them as I have done for other parkins.

## **Analysis of my Mum's Two Parkin Recipes**

Both recipes used self-raising flour and neither included oatmeal.

Both recipes used golden syrup rather than black treacle.

Both recipes specified margarine, but one suggested that lard could be used instead.

Both recipes included “sugar” which I would take to mean granulated sugar.

Both recipes had bicarbonate of soda as an additional raising agent.

One recipe needed an egg.

The liquid ingredient for one was milk, whilst the other used boiling water.

Both recipes included ground ginger.

One recipe used the rubbing in method whilst the other used the melting method, but in rather an unusual way: boiling water was poured directly onto the flour, sugar, margarine and syrup; then all were beaten together before adding the egg.

## *Decision Time*

I have decided that my Mum's parkin recipes are of the sponge parkin type. This may come as no surprise as I have hinted at this a few times in the course of my book. They do not contain oatmeal or black treacle. They use self-raising flour and an extra raising agent (bicarbonate of soda). One includes an egg, too. They are thus much lighter in texture than the traditional parkin and have a lot in common with one of the sponge parkin recipes I wrote about earlier: Mrs. Taylor's recipe for Lancashire sponge parkin from the *Bethel Baptist Church, Waterfoot, Centenary Bazaar Recipe Book* (Christian Endeavour Society, 1954). I noted earlier that some written sources claim that Lancashire parkin is more likely to favour golden syrup over black treacle and to prefer less oatmeal to flour than Yorkshire parkin. My own findings have been less clearcut.

James Martin's recipe for Yorkshire parkin (Martin at *BBC Food: Recipes*) is very similar to my Mum's too, and ought to be called "Yorkshire sponge parkin". I mentioned earlier that as a child my Mum lived in Lancashire but later moved to Halifax, West Yorkshire, which is not very far from the Lancashire border. I have already suggested that recipes are passed between family and friends and may be adapted in the process. Thus it is very difficult to conclude the regional origin of my Mum's recipes.

Another factor is that it was not long after the period of rationing, introduced during the Second World War, when, as a child, I was eating my Mum's parkin. I have already stated that the first of my Mum's recipes was not as delicious as I had hoped when Clive and I recreated it. It includes very little sugar and syrup compared to some of the other recipes I have come across. There is not much fat either, nor is there an egg.





*Illustration 46: Mum's Parkin Recipe 1.*

When I made this recipe again (see Illustration 46), following the instructions more closely and having gained the experience of many parkin trials, I found a different parkin altogether. I used  $\frac{1}{4}$  pint of milk to create a sloppy batter and I was quite generous with the syrup spoons. I baked the parkin in a 7 in. tin for about 55 mins. The result was the parkin I remember from childhood: light in colour and texture but with a sticky topping, which got stickier with time, and a delicious flavour, despite using little ginger. This could well have been the original recipe after all!

The second recipe (see the illustration on the cover of the book) has a higher proportion of sugar, though less syrup than the previous one. There is more fat, too, and also an egg. The second recipe turned out to be very good to eat. Both recipes used very little ginger, but I have found this to be the case for many of the recipes in this book. Today there is a tendency for people to prefer spicier food than in previous decades. The spices themselves are now relatively inexpensive and easy to come by, too, as are ingredients such as sugar, golden syrup and black treacle.

The post-war period may be a reason why the sponge parkin suddenly made its appearance: as a reaction to the constraints of the war. Normally much of our wheat is imported, but blockades during the Second World War meant there was a shortage. The Ministry of Food decreed that the only bread bakers were allowed to bake was the “National Loaf”, made with whole grain flour in order to maximise the productivity of the wheat that was available. Also the bread had to be sold the day after it was made because it would be drier, and therefore easier to slice more thinly, and also less appetising to eat, causing people to eat less of it. Between the wars people had been used to fresh, white bread and consequently the National Loaf was not popular, being rather grey in colour and grainy in texture (Powick at *The Home Front Housewife*). My point here is that traditional parkin is also grainy in texture. Black treacle gives it a dark colour too. The sponge parkin was probably invented after the Second World War as a reaction to the end of austerity in order to enjoy that sticky, gingery cake, without the dark colour and grittiness of the traditional version, in the same way that sliced white bread became very popular at this time.

## ***My Parkin Recipes***

Finally I will put into practise what I have learnt about parkin and give some recipes which I have developed myself, based on the best I have come across in the following categories: traditional parkin, sponge parkin, but also a modern parkin which reflects present day taste by some (but not all) people for a spicier flavour. All my recipes are vegan but can be modified for the non-vegan: using butter instead of margarine, cow's milk for almond milk and including an egg in place of a little of the liquid.

### **My Traditional Parkin**

Mrs Hooks' Parkin, in the Yorkshire recipe section of this book (Wath-on-Deerne Urban District War Comforts Fund, no date), has

inspired my own recipe for a traditional parkin. Though her original recipe was quite flavoursome and sticky I have used Demerara sugar and included slightly more ginger and liquid to make it even more moist and spicy, but less bicarbonate of soda, which can be quite bitter.

### *Traditional Parkin*

*8 oz self-raising flour*

*8 oz medium oatmeal*

*4 oz non-dairy margarine*

*2 tbsp Demerara sugar*

*8 oz black treacle*

*4 tsp ground ginger*

*½ tsp bicarbonate of soda*

*7 fluid oz almond milk*

*Sieve the flour into a bowl and add the oatmeal, ginger and bicarbonate of soda. Rub in the margarine and add the sugar. Warm the black treacle with the almond milk and stir into the dry ingredients. Bake in a greased and bottom-lined 8 in. square tin for 50 mins. at 180°C/350°F/gas mark 4.*

### **My Sponge Parkin**

This recipe is not based on any particular sponge parkin recipe but an amalgam of those I have come across. The addition of a little



*Illustration 47: My Sponge Parkin.*

boiling water reflects my Mum's second recipe and also one or two others (see Illustration 47).

*Sponge Parkin*

*8 oz self-raising flour*

*3 oz non-dairy margarine*

*3 oz golden caster sugar*

*5 oz golden syrup*

*3 tsp ground ginger*

*1 tsp baking powder*

*6 fluid oz almond milk*

*1 tsp boiling water*

*Rub the margarine into sifted flour, baking powder and ginger. Stir in the sugar. Warm the syrup and add to the dry ingredients, followed by the milk and the boiling water. Bake in a greased and bottom-lined 8 in. square tin for about 45-50 mins. at 180°C/350°F/gas mark 4.*

## **My Spicy Parkin**

This recipe is loosely based on Mrs Appleby's Yorkshire Parkin (Appleby, 1977) in the Yorkshire recipe section of this book. As well as increasing the spicing I have added some chopped preserved ginger but included slightly less sugar than she did as the ginger is in a syrup. I have used half golden syrup and half black treacle as I have found that black treacle on its own can overwhelm the flavour of the ground ginger and other spices. I have omitted the egg and used a little more milk. I have also taken a tip from the *Clandestine Cake Club's* recipe for Gluten Free Spicy Treacle Ginger Parkin ("Gluten free spicy treacle ginger parkin" at *Clandestine Cake Club*): provided a little more heat with a pinch of cayenne pepper (that recipe included chilli powder). I was very pleased with this parkin: though a little crumbly, it very soon developed a sticky topping. The flavour was excellent and that small amount of cayenne really gave it a kick. You could, of course, vary the amount of preserved ginger and cayenne to suit your own taste. Here is the recipe:

### *Spicy Parkin*

*8 oz self-raising flour*

*8 oz medium oatmeal*

*3 oz soft brown sugar*

*4 oz black treacle*

*4 oz golden syrup*

*4 oz margarine*

*6 fluid oz almond milk*

*3 tsp ground ginger*

*1 tsp mixed spice*

*½ tsp cinnamon*

*¼ tsp grated nutmeg*

*large pinch of cayenne pepper (more or less to taste)*

*2 tsp preserved ginger (more or less to taste)*

*½ tsp bicarbonate of soda*

*Set the oven at 180°C/350°F/gas mark 4. Grease and bottom line an 8 in. square baking tin. Sift the flour into a bowl and add the oatmeal and dry spices. Mix together. Gently melt the margarine, sugar, black treacle and golden syrup in a small pan. Add a little of the almond milk to the pan and combine with the melted mixture before stirring into the dry ingredients. Warm the rest of the milk slightly and use it to dissolve the bicarbonate of soda. Add to the bowl along with the preserved ginger and mix quickly before pouring into the prepared baking tin. The mixture should be fairly loose. Bake for 50 mins. or until a skewer inserted into the centre comes out clean, but do not overbake.*

Well, I have come to the end of my parkin story. Now all that

remains is for the reader to experience parkin for him/herself, if he/she hasn't already done so. Go forth and bake and eat parkin. Keep those old recipes alive!

## Appendix: Weights and Measures

Note: these conversions are approximations and have been rounded up or down. Other conversion sources may give different values. It is not advisable to use both metric and imperial measures in one recipe.

**Abbreviations:** C = Celcius; cm = centimetre; dessertsp = dessertspoon; F = Fahrenheit; fl oz = fluid ounce; g = gram; in = inch; kg = kilogram; lb = pound; mm = millimetre; oz = ounce; pt = pint; tbsp = tablespoon; tsp = teaspoon.

### *Oven Temperatures*

*from: onlineconversion.com*

Note than fan ovens cook at lower temperatures so need to be set at a slightly lower temperature than a non-fan electric ovens. It is best to follow the conversion charts provided by your own fan oven.

<u>Gas Mark</u>	<u>Electric ° F</u>	<u>Electric ° C</u>	<u>Description</u>
¼	225	110	Very cool, very slow
½	250	130	" " " "
1	275	140	Cool or slow
2	300	150	" " "
3	325	170	Very moderate
4	350	180	Moderate
5	375	190	"
6	400	200	Moderately hot
7	425	220	Hot
8	450	230	"
9	475	240	Very hot

### *Measurements*

*from Smith, Delia. Delia Smith's Complete Illustrated Cookery*



Course. New ed. BBC Books, 1989.

<u>Imperial</u>	<u>Metric</u>
1/8 in	3mm
1/4 in	5mm
1/2 in	1cm
3/4 in	2cm
1 in	2.5cm
1 1/4 in	3cm
1 1/2 in	4cm
1 3/4 in	4.5cm
2 in	5cm
2 1/2 in	6cm
3 in	7.5cm
3 1/2 in	9cm
4 in	10cm
5 in	13cm
5 1/4 in	13.5cm
6 in	15cm
6 in	16cm
7 in	18cm
7 1/2 in	19cm
8 in	20cm
9 in	23cm
9 1/2 in	24cm
10 in	25.5cm
11 in	28cm
12 in	30cm

## ***Weights***

from Smith, Delia. *Delia Smith's Complete Illustrated Cookery Course*. New ed. BBC Books, 1989.

<u>Imperial</u>	<u>Metric</u>
1/2 oz	10g
3/4 oz	20g

1 oz	25g
1½ oz	40g
2 oz	50g
2½ oz	60g
3 oz	75g
4 oz	110g
4½ oz	125g
5 oz	150g
6 oz	175g
7 oz	200g
8 oz	225g
9 oz	250g
10 oz	275g
12 oz	350g
1 lb (16 oz)	450g
1½ lb	700g
2 lb	900g
3 lb	1.35kg

## *Volume*

*from Smith, Delia. Delia Smith's Complete Illustrated Cookery Course. New ed. BBC Books, 1989.*

<u>Imperial</u>	<u>Metric</u>
2 fl oz	55ml
3 fl oz	75ml
5 fl oz (¼ pt)	150ml
½ pt	275ml
¾ pt	425ml
1 pt	570ml
1¼pt	725ml
1¾ pt	1 litre
2 pt	1.2 litre
2½ pt	1.5 litre
4 pt	2.25 litre

A gill is 5 fl oz (150ml or ¼ pt).

## *Some Other Useful Weights and Measures*

Some recipes use teaspoons, tablespoons, dessertspoons and cups as units of measurement. I have already mentioned the imprecise nature of the “cup” (see page 11), and the same applies, to a lesser extent, to the spoon measures. Unless otherwise stated (e.g. “rounded”, “heaped”, “scant”), all these measures refer to a level container of the ingredient (“How to use measuring spoons and cups” at *Wikihow*) – but even this is controversial (see “Spoon measures” at *SIMetric*, where a “spoonful” is defined as “rounded” or “heaped”). I was taught at school to use the straight edge of a knife to level off a spoonful of a dry ingredient.

The cup is particularly problematic for several reasons. Firstly, cups come in different sizes and rarely is the size of cup specified in the recipe: be it the imperial cup, the American cup, the Australian cup, etc., or just any old cup. Since parkin is a British, mainly English, confection, older recipes may refer to the now defunct imperial cup, but more modern recipes may require the American cup, as this is the type which can be bought in the shops. Yet it is possible that old recipes are based on some generic “teacup”, and, provided you always use the same teacup for every ingredient, then the parkin will usually turn out fine.

Secondly, how do you fill your cup: lightly or packed in? This might not matter so much for some fine grained ingredients, such as flour and sugar, but for others, such as dried fruit or chopped ingredients, it can make a big difference. An article by Sue Quinn, (Quinn, 2015) in the *Daily Telegraph* highlights this (and the previous) problem, when she is trying to measure cupfuls of chopped cucumber. This difficulty is further highlighted in that cup-to-weight conversion websites cannot agree on what a cup of a particular ingredient weighs. In my research I have found that an American cup of flour can vary from 110g to 150g, and a cup of butter from 225g to 240g.

Quinn also points out a third problem with cups (and spoons): unless you have lots of cups and spoons available you are

constantly having to wash them before measuring the next ingredient. On the other hand, some modern scales can be recalibrated to zero between weighings, so that all the ingredients can be weighed straight into a mixing bowl, which is placed on the scales, thus saving washing up. She calls for Americans to abandon the cup in favour of scales.

In the meantime, the spoon and the cup have to be accommodated.

Teaspoons (tsp), tablespoons (tbsp) and cups are generally level unless otherwise stated in a recipe, for example: “rounded” (“How to use measuring spoons and cups” at *Wikihow*). A modern cup is the equivalent of 10 fl oz (248 ml or ½ pt). In old recipes this may not be the case. The Imperial tablespoon is no longer a standard unit of measurement, but such spoons are still commonly found and may be referred to in older recipes.

## ***Spoons***

*from: “Cooking conversions” at allrecipes.*

1 dessertspoon = 2 teaspoons  
3 teaspoons = 1 tablespoon

## ***Metric Equivalents of Spoons***

*from: “Cooking conversions” at allrecipes.*

1 teaspoon = 5ml  
1 tablespoon = 15ml  
[1 Australian tablespoon = 20ml]  
[1 Imperial British tablespoon = 17.7ml (Nilson, 1964)]

## ***Tablespoons to American Cups***

*from: “Cooking conversions” at allrecipes.*

4 tablespoons =  $\frac{1}{4}$  cup

5 tablespoons =  $\frac{1}{3}$  cup

8 tablespoons =  $\frac{1}{2}$  cup

10 tablespoons =  $\frac{2}{3}$  cup

12 tablespoons =  $\frac{3}{4}$  cup

16 tablespoons = 1 cup

## ***American Cup Metric and Imperial Equivalents of Selected Products***

Note that other conversion websites might differ

*from: “Cooking conversions” at allrecipes.*

<u>Product</u>	<u>Conversion</u>
1 cup plain flour	125g/4.5 oz
1 cup sugar (castor or granulated)	200g/7 oz
1 cup soft brown sugar	220g/7.75oz
1 cup butter/lard/margarine	225g/8 oz
1 cup black treacle/golden syrup	340g/12 oz
1 cup porridge oats	85g/3 oz

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