

‘whiche thynges ye welchmen heryng ran out of heuyn a gret pace.’¹
How food stories construct a national identity, or how roasted cheese lured the
Welsh out of heaven.

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¹ A. C. Mery Talys (London, 1526)

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Dedication.

For my wonderful dad - Tony Linsell. I have loved your stories since ‘Alfred and Judy’ and you have inspired me to tell my own.

Introduction

“... the present work is intended for the especial benefit of those of *gentle birth* who may not have any very extensive knowledge of economy in domestic practice.”²

Food matters: at its most basic form it is the means to survive, but more than this, food has been woven into culture ever since humans transitioned to a society of production. Historians have tucked food into their presentations of the past, but for enthusiastic scholars, food warrants considerably more attention. Food culture allows the historian to uncover hidden levels of meaning in social relationships and arrive at new understandings of the human experience; clearly such a captivating subject deserves serious consideration. This dissertation seeks to explore how a national narrative can be shaped around food. Scholarly Welsh food historiographies are lacking and examining the legitimacy of Wales’ culinary heritage will both add to this and challenge the actuality.

Wales has a notable history of invasion, immigration, puritanical religion and industrial hardship; and as a cultural artefact food can bridge this divergence and unite those who consider themselves Welsh. Whether any nation can claim a base ingredient to be unique or even indigenous is debatable, and the prevailing geographical and climatic pattern of many countries results in a similitude of raw materials. The claim to ownership lies in the preparation and social significance of these foods. National cuisines are dynamic; progress alone changes cooking methods or the availability of ingredients, and the national branding of

² Augustus Llanover, *The First Principles of Good Cookery -with an Introduction by Bobby Freeman* (Tregaron,1991), p.ix

a cuisine must manage a relationship between past and present whilst still claiming authenticity.

As the field of Food History has grown, research broadens, with the aim of interpreting the meaning of culinary habits. A thematic approach is found in the series of essays that make up *The Oxford Handbook of Food History*.³ Many contributors are historians, with the aim of consolidating food history as an academic field and establishing areas for further research. Other publications aiming at comprehensive contributions include *The Cambridge World history of food*⁴ and Spencer's *British food: an extraordinary thousand years of history*⁵ which dismisses the culinary limits of geographical isolation by exploring one thousand years of conquest, colonisation and immigration. The concern with encyclopaedic attempts at food histories is that, with such a broad scope, they risk echoing widely held opinions without testing verisimilitude. Food historian Reay Tannehill wrote a slimmer tome in 1973, succinctly picking out relevant history from prehistoric to a more contemporary age⁶, likewise Clarissa Dickson Wright provides an abundance of absorbing facts with a *History of English Food*⁷, much of which is also applicable to Wales. Welsh food specifically occupies just a fraction of the literature on British food history. Bobby Freeman's excellent guide to Welsh food and its history is the main publication appertaining to Wales and the author reveals that previously nothing similar had been attempted, and she was chastised for the 'frivolity' of her proposition⁸

³ Jeffrey Pilcher, *The Oxford Handbook of Food History*. (Oxford, 2012).

⁴ Kenneth Kiple, and Ornelas, Kriemhild Coneè' *The Cambridge World History of Food*. (Cambridge, 2007)

⁵ Colin Spencer, *British food : an extraordinary thousand years of history* (London: Grub street, 2002)

⁶ Reay Tannahill, *Food in History* (London,2008)

⁷ Clarissa Dickson Wright, *A history of English food* (London,2012)

⁸ Bobby Freeman, *First catch your peacock* (Talybont, 1996), p.6

Cookbooks can be the humble literature of complex societies and are neglected as information sources.⁹ For early recipes *The Forme of Cury* is a rare example of a fourteenth-century collection of British food, however looking earlier still and specifically at Welsh food, a cross-disciplinary approach is necessary.¹⁰ Mentions of regional food can be found in the 12th century accounts of Giraldus¹¹, and Enid Roberts' *Food of the Bards* reveals the secrets of the medieval kitchens in the great houses of Wales between 1350 and 1650.¹² The herbal lore of Meddygon Myddfai represents a loosely collected list of medieval restorative recipes incorporating magical formulas and incantations which suggest a syncretism with pagan rituals.¹³ Tudor writers bolster the image of a customary Welsh love of cheese including revelations in Andrew Boorde's 'introduction of knowledge'¹⁴ and *A. C. Mery Talys*.¹⁵ George Borrow's *Wild Wales*¹⁶ is a Victorian dialogic text rich with moments of insight into the social eating habits of the Welsh and Lady Llanover's *The First Principles of Good Cookery* is an authentic if eccentric nineteenth-century Welsh cookbook with the author notable for her willingness to express views diametrically different from her peers.¹⁷ These primary sources are useful to showcase the written literature available for a chronologically wide-ranging overview of food throughout Welsh history, and for general commentary. They are not all exclusively food journals but add to a review on food origins when studied in their social context, although basic family foods are frequently neglected.

⁹ Arjun Appadurai, 'How to Make a National Cuisine: Cookbooks in Contemporary India', *Comparative studies in society and history*, 30(1),(1988) pp. 3–24. <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0010417500015024>.

¹⁰ Glyn Hughes, *The Forme Of Cury*. (Derbyshire, 2016)

¹¹ Giraldus. *The Description Of Wales*. Project Gutenberg, (NetLibrary, 2000).

¹² Enid Roberts, *Food of the Bards*, (Cardiff, 1982).

¹³ Charles Wagner, Jillian De Gezelle, and Slavko Komarnytsky, 'Celtic Provenance in Traditional Herbal Medicine of Medieval Wales and Classical Antiquity', *Frontiers in pharmacology*, 11,(2020) pp. 105–105.

¹⁴ Andrew Boorde, *The Fyrst Boke Of the Introduction Of Knowledge Made By Andrew Borde ... A Compendyous Regyment Or a Dyetary Of Helth Made In Mowntpyllier, Compyled By Andrew Boorde ... Barnes In the Defence Of the Berde: a Treatyse Made, Answerynge the Treatyse Of Doctor Borde Vpon Berdes*, (Dublin, 1870).

¹⁵ *A. C. Mery Talys* (London, 1526)

¹⁶ George Borrow, *Wild Wales: its people, language, and scenery* (London, 1872)

¹⁷ Llanover, *The First Principles of Good Cookery*.

Re-dressing the balance, the 1928 Welsh Eisteddfod award-winning entry by Mati Thomas, is a written remembrance of recipes passed down over centuries.¹⁸ Similarly, Minwel Tibbott travelled through Wales in 1969 talking to the older generation of women and recording recipes harking back to the 1800s¹⁹; both are a reminder of the importance of oral testimony. The archivists at the National Museum Wales provided helpful additional details, via personal correspondence, regarding the fieldwork of Tibbott, including sound-bites from the original interviews. Website resources such as St Fagans and Taste Wales have information on the history of Welsh fare, and cross-disciplinary research can unearth mentions of Welsh foods and culinary practices, even if incidental to the main body of text.²⁰ There has been a further body of Welsh cookery books in recent years, and in keeping with contemporary fashion, the authors have often included a brief synopsis of the provenance of a dish; in contrast to the earlier primary sources, there is now an emphasis on every-day or working-class foods. The challenge has been to pinpoint those foods that were worthy of mention in earlier historical materials and have remained well-known throughout the early twentieth and twenty first- centuries. There is a range of uncommon curiosities, from the medieval sugared-swan to the twentieth-century goose blood pudding, but by reading into social context, noticing frequent mention, and deciphering unwitting testimony, a common theme can often be found.

The value of oral testimony and use of memory in the shaping of tradition has been examined extensively. Schwyzer²¹ examines how the Welsh have used the repertoire of

¹⁸ Mati Thomas, *Ryseitiau Coginiol*, (Newquay, 1928).

¹⁹ Minwel Tibbott, *Welsh Fare* (Wales, 1991), Minwel Tibbott, *Domestic Life in Wales* (Cardiff, 2002)

²⁰ St Fagans National Museum of History <https://museum.wales/stfagans/>, Taste Wales <https://www.tastewales.com/>. See also National Museum Wales <https://museum.wales/collections/>

²¹ Phillip Schwyzer, *Literature, nationalism, and memory in early modern England and Wales*. (Cambridge, 2004).

collective memory to make up for a shortage of surviving written history and Said ²²examines the concern of memory creating a desirable past and a manipulated national narrative. Further secondary sources will focus on exploration of food as cultural heritage²³ and include an anthropological approach²⁴. These are general studies, often focussing upon European experiences but are applicable to the development of the Welsh national identity. The relationship between food and national identity has been studied in numerous academic articles looking at the discourse of authenticity and the emotion evoked by foodscapes. ²⁵ In recent years the Welsh government have used the concept of traditional food to support tourism and heritage, and commercial or policy choices provide useful context for contemporary accounts²⁶.

The scarcity of literature devoted to the notable interrelation between Welsh food and Welsh national identity suggests a research gap for this dissertation. There is not the scope to reprise the specific notions around gender issues allied with domestic fare, or fully explore social and ceremonial rituals around Welsh culinary culture, and these topics warrant future research. The limits of capacity also necessitate the discussion of a only a selection of Welsh foods: the abundance of the country has been plentiful, and there are regional particularities, so inevitably favourites have been omitted; there is undoubtedly opportunity for future comprehensive works. For the sake of clarity, this dissertation is divided into two parts. Chapter 1 considers historical representations of Welsh food to establish what might be considered authentic Welsh cuisine. This is, necessarily, an extended review, and does not

²² Edward Said, 'Invention, Memory, and Place', *Critical inquiry*, 26(2), (2000) pp. 175–192. doi:10.1086/448963.

²³ Ronda Brulotte and Michael Di Giovine, *Edible identities: food as cultural heritage*. (Farnham, 2014).

²⁴ For example, Sidney Mintz and Christine Du Bois, 'The Anthropology of food and Eating', *Annual review of anthropology*, 31(1), (2002) pp. 99–119.

²⁵ Anita Mannur, "Culinary Nostalgia: Authenticity, Nationalism, and Diaspora." *Melus*, vol. 32, no. 4, (2007), pp. 11–31, <https://doi.org/10.1093/melus/32.4.11>.

²⁶ *Welsh Food and Drink*. Available at <https://www.welshfoodanddrink.wales/> Accessed: 2 April 2022.

confine itself to a particular historical period, led instead by the availability of literature. The eligibility of the foods as authentic is open to dispute and influenced by the bias and background of the sources but evidenced as far as possible. Chapter 2 looks at the purpose of collective and cultural memory in creating this identity and the value of oral history and remembrance. It will consider how history can be used for commercial purposes with nostalgia employed to solicit a memory of loss never actually experienced, what Appadurai characterises as 'armchair nostalgia'.²⁷ From this initial exploration of culinary kinship, the conclusion will consider whether Welsh food heritage is a manipulated or imagined concept or whether it is naturally shaped and maintained by repurposing the past.

²⁷ Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at large cultural dimensions of globalization*. (Minneapolis, 1996) p.78

Chapter 1. *Bwyd y Beirdd*, Food of the Bards.

‘How’s it above? ... Is there rum and laverbread?’²⁸

The Welsh have not provided an abundance of literature pertaining to their food and historically there was probably no urgency; for the poor, the primary concern was to conquer hunger, and for the pious to prove abstinence, making food necessary for survival but not noteworthy. By its nature, much of the food described in earlier periods was essentially aristocratic and correspondingly the enthusiasm of the Welsh bards for the feasts of their time have provided what Bobby Freeman encapsulates as a ‘Welsh ‘good food’ guide to the halls of the castles and mansion of the day’.²⁹ According to these medieval poets, meat was an essential part of every spread and an astounding array of beasts, fish and fowl littered the table, including ‘Comely peacocks and beautiful swans.’³⁰ Spices, sugar, flowers, and mead scented and flavoured a variety of courses, and fruit and vegetables were offered in abundance, washed down with wine and ale.³¹ This fine fare of the wealthy was a display of power more than an homage to good food. The food of the medieval majority was eaten by farming folk and peasants and remained relatively intact throughout the following centuries.

Hardship and locality limited the breadth of food available, although this did not subdue the generosity of the householder. Medieval travel accounts such as that written by Gerald of Wales in the late twelfth-century, described the Welsh as sober people, who fasted from morning to evening, eating only a simple and scanty meal a day; the more pressing

²⁸ Dylan Thomas, *Under Milk Wood* (Project Gutenberg, 2015).

²⁹ Freeman, first catch Your Peacock, p.281

³⁰ Roberts, Food of the Bards, (Y Rug, Raff ap Robert)

³¹ Roberts, Food of the Bards

employment being the slaying of hostile marauders.³² However, the arrival of the weary stranger would invariably pre-empt entertainment, and the offer of food, even if the host had to go without.³³ Centuries later in 1872, George Borrow discovered that this hospitable welcome towards the friendly stranger persisted. Arriving in a rural hamlet, a local miller invited him in to share a meal. Borrow was served a very sparse fare of tea, bread and butter, and some thin slices of ‘brown, watery cheese’³⁴. Despite the obvious hardship and no kinship to their unfamiliar guest, Borrow recalls the miller’s wife taking a basin out of the cupboard and proudly presenting him alone, with two precious lumps of sugar. The generosity and welcome of the family, rather than the contents of the meal, is the more remarkable detail of the account, and a reminder of the extraordinary power of food to traverse social boundaries.

The traditional diet of the poor was based upon bread, in particular barley, and oats; a home grown crop of oats was invaluable to every farmer and the staple crop of rural Wales.³⁵ After the oats had been dried and hulled, the kernels were crushed finely and sifted to remove any husks; the material left on the sieve was known as *sucan* meal.³⁶ *Sucan* was a dish prepared by the women and then commonly eaten with milk during an early twentieth-century harvest midday meal. Once the *sucan* had been boiled to a specific consistency, ‘the *sucan* must drop from the stick like a cow’s tail’,³⁷ it was set to cool in large tin pans whilst the cook solicitously observed the surface of the dish. A smooth surface was testimony to her skill, and warranted praise, but a cracked surface invited mockery and meant the maiden who cooked it was destined to ‘marry an ugly fellow!’³⁸ Tibbott tells of a similar dish known as

³² Giraldu, *The Description of Wales*. p.10

³³ Giraldu, *The Description of Wales* p.11

³⁴ Borrow, *Wild Wales*, p.103

³⁵ Spencer, *British Food*, p.199

³⁶ Tibbott, *Welsh Fare*, p.54

³⁷ ‘rhaid l’r *sucan* ddisgyn o’r pren fel cwt buwch’ Tibbott, *Welsh Fare*, p.54

³⁸ Tibbott, *Domestic Life in Wales*, P.7

llymru ,made in the counties of North Wales, with the common addition of buttermilk during the cooking process; llymru was economical and filling, although the pallid fare was ‘good for nothing, But to fill the belly and suppress hunger’.³⁹ With oats, alongside barley, being the primary crop of rural Wales, a succession of oat-based dishes were monotonous but inevitable. Oat gruel, consisting of milk, water, salt, and sugar was used both as invalid food, and for mothers of new-born babies for its milk producing qualities, likewise sucan with added ginger, butter and sugar was accorded with similar virtues in Carmarthenshire.⁴⁰ The humble oat made a regular appearance across Wales with a few regional variations in name, texture, and flavourings. According to Lady Llanover, whose watch word was economy, its thrift and versatility rendered it the ‘staff of life’⁴¹ to rural Wales.

For coastal dwellers there was an aquatic source of nourishment. Shellfish gathering, along with the collection of seaweed, is one of the oldest of human foraging activities, and Wales is blessed with a long-ranging coastline. Remains of a Palaeolithic man, first mistakenly thought to be female and named ‘The Red Lady’,⁴² were found in the Paviland Caves on the Gower’s south coast. Analysis showed that his diet contained significant aquatic protein such as fish, molluscs and seabirds, and further isotopic data in South Wales has shown that Mesolithic humans there also had predominantly marine diet⁴³ If a nation’s cuisine was based solely on the earliest known food to be consumed in a local region, then this would be a strong contender. Much of the prehistoric British coastline is now submerged,

³⁹ Tibbott, *Welsh Fare*, p.53

⁴⁰ Tibbott, *Welsh Fare*, p.57

⁴¹ Llanover, *The First Principles of Good Cookery*, p.306

⁴² "Paviland Cave, Gower, Wales." in The Concise Oxford Dictionary of Archaeology. [online]<https://www-oxfordreference-com.libezproxy.open.ac.uk/view/10.1093/acref/9780199534043.001.0001/acref-9780199534043-e-3031> . [accessed 11 May 2022]

⁴³Adrienne Milner and others, ‘Something fishy in the Neolithic? A re-evaluation of stable isotope analysis of Mesolithic and Neolithic coastal populations’, *Antiquity*, 78(299), (2004) pp. 9–22.

Nicky Milner, ‘Mesolithic consumption practices: food for thought.’ *Journal of Nordic Archaeological Science* 16 (2009), pp.49-64.

but what is clear is that coastal resources have sustained human life over long periods. Certainly, by the medieval period if not much earlier, the distinctive figures of the shellfish women emerged on the Welsh coast; they were often assisted by their children, and after foraging for shellfish, they either sold them on the shore or travelled inland for considerable distances with their wares.⁴⁴ The writer H.V. Morton happened upon the cockle women of Gower in 1932, sitting with their wares in Swansea market, ‘looking as though they were waiting for Rembrandt to come and paint them’⁴⁵, these foragers were later described by Dylan Thomas as ‘webfoot cocklewomen’⁴⁶ These ‘cocklewomen’ would walk from Penrhyndeudraeth to Porthmadog to sell cockles, knocking on doors and dancing, they would sing ‘Cockles and eggs, Thin oat cakes, The girls of Penrhyn, Doing the shakes!’⁴⁷

In the early twentieth-century during summer months, it was not uncommon to see whole families on the beaches in the moonlight, digging for sand eels.⁴⁸ There was an unwritten rule that neither winkles should be eaten, nor limpets collected, if the letter *r* was not included in the name of the month in English; in reality this incorporates fair ecological practice to allow for spawning and seasonality.⁴⁹ As befits a country with miles of coastline and fast-running rivers, the fishing industry has been well-established and renowned in Wales for centuries. In an unflattering cartoon published by William Dicey of London in 1747, a caricature of a Welsh man with a leek in his hat is depicted riding a goat, closer inspection shows there to be a herring tucked into his saddlebag.⁵⁰ Indeed, until the first decade of the

⁴⁴ Kaori O’Connor, “Imagining and Consuming the Coast: Anthropology, Archaeology, ‘Heritage’ and ‘Conservation’ on the Gower in South Wales.” In *Imagining Landscapes*, ed. by Monica Janowski and Tim Ingold (Farnham, 2012) pp.121–142.

⁴⁵ O’Connor, *Imagining and Consuming the Coast*, p.134.

⁴⁶ Dylan Thomas, *Under Milk Wood*.

⁴⁷ ‘Cocos a way, Bara cerch tena, Merched y Penrhyn, Yn ysgwyd ‘u tina!’ Minwel Tibbott, *Welsh Fare*, p.68.

⁴⁸ Tibbott, *Welsh Fare*, p.66.

⁴⁹ Tibbott, *Welsh Fare*, p.67.

⁵⁰ Pritchard, Annette, and Nigel Morgan. “Representations of ‘Ethnographic Knowledge’: Early Comic Postcards of Wales.” in *Discourse, Communication and Tourism*, ed. by Adam Jaworski, and Annette. Pritchard (Clevedon, 2005), p.62.

twentieth-century, herring fishing, was a vital industry in the coastal villages of Cardigan Bay.⁵¹ It usually began in September as soon as the arrival of the herring shoals had been signalled by the cry of a bird known as Guto Gruglwyd, and it continued until late November when the herring would be cured by the fisherman's wives who would chop salt off big blocks and scatter it between the layers of herring in casks.⁵² The resulting salted herring were said to be particularly good served with bread and butter or baked potatoes.⁵³

Salmon and sea trout have also always been a highly regarded feature of Welsh food. The trout is still widely referred to as the 'Sewin': an old Welsh name possibly meaning 'the silver or shining one'⁵⁴ Prior to the twentieth-century, sea birds and their eggs were considered fair game for coastal foragers, and puffins continued to be much prized for their meat in North Wales into the later nineteenth-century, either eaten fresh or pickled⁵⁵. A nineteenth-century account of egg collection from cliff tops affords a glimpse into a world before health and safety, and a fair indication of why this practice no longer takes place. A man would tie a rope around his body, fasten this to a stake he had knocked into the cliff top and dangle over the summit of the rockface. It was duly noted that 'This is a dangerous employment, and there are several instances on record, where from the rope slipping... lives have been lost, and the mangled bodies buried in the sea'.⁵⁶

⁵¹ Geraint Jenkins, 'The Customs of Welsh Fishermen', *Folklore*, 83(1), (1972), p.2.

⁵² Jenkins, The customs of Welsh Fisherman, p.2, Peter Williams, *The Herring run*, (2019) <https://www.peoplescollection.wales/story/1251216/>

⁵³ Tibbott, *Welsh Fare*, p.70

⁵⁴ Carwyn Jones, Opening Address 1 Sea Trout: A Welsh Perspective in *Sea Trout: Biology, Conservation and Management*, ed. by Graeme Harris and Nigel Milner (Oxford, 2006) p.xiii-xvi. This may also be a reference to the silver colour of the trout once they reach an age when they can cope with both salt and fresh water. See *Sea Trout* <https://www.wildtrout.org/content/sea-trout> for example.

⁵⁵ John Baldwin, 'Harvesting Seabirds and their Eggs on the Irish Sea Islands (Part 1: The Welsh Islands, Lundy and Scilly)', *Folk life*, 47(1), (2009) p.92

⁵⁶ Baldwin, 'Harvesting Seabirds and their Eggs' p. 92

Despite the coastal bounty, Welsh society is by tradition ‘essentially a pastoral one’⁵⁷ and there was a thriving market for Welsh livestock.⁵⁸ Anglesey cattle swam the Menai strait in the Middle Ages as part of their journey to Barnet Fair, Welsh lamb and beef were well-known for their quality as ‘the best native breeds in Great Britain’⁵⁹ and Lady Llanover sang the praises of real Welsh mutton ‘admitted by all epicures...to be the very finest flavour’⁶⁰ With the confidence of her rank and status, she also expressed concern about the mistreatment of farmed animals in particular ‘the evils of artificial fattening of cattle’.⁶¹ The easy-to-keep animal of the poor was the pig; slaughtering was carried out as a community activity with the tradition of a large glass of brandy from the local pub provided to the butcher prior to each kill⁶². Every part of the pig was used and faggots, traditionally made from the pig’s liver are still a popular dish. Tibbott describes a typical plate of faggots as ‘swimming in gravy’⁶³, and this humble sauce is frequently mentioned in accounts of Welsh food and thus deserves a place in this appraisal. Lady Llanover, in particular, is keen to ensure her readers are aware that a ‘great deal of extra gravy’ is a necessary part of Welsh cookery⁶⁴

Native cattle, goats and sheep allowed for an abundance of dairy products. Cheese was a prominent part of the Welsh diet, to the point of Tudor merriment and literal notoriety. Andrew Boorde, an English Tudor Physician, mentions the Welsh fondness for roasted cheese in his *First Booke of the introduction of knowledge*; ‘I am a Welshman and do dwel in Wales ... I do loue cawse boby, good rosted chese’⁶⁵ This passion for dairy runs further than

⁵⁷ Freeman, *First Catch your peacock*, p.35

⁵⁸ Spencer, *British food*, p.204

⁵⁹ Llanover, *The First Principles of good cookery*, p.205

⁶⁰ Llanover, *The First Principles of good cookery*, p.204, Spencer, *British food*, p203

⁶¹ Llanover, *The First Principles of Good Cookery*, p. 314.

⁶² Freeman, *First catch Your Peacock*, p.115.

⁶³Tibbott, *Domestic Life in Wales*, p.14.

⁶⁴ Llanover, *The First Principles of good cookery*, p.397

⁶⁵ Boorde, *The First Booke*, p.126

fondness though, as suggested in ‘Tale 78’ of *A. C Mery Tales*, a Tudor book of comedic anecdotes.⁶⁶ Accordingly, God had allowed a great many ‘Welchemen’ into heaven, who had behaved in a generally disorderly manner; exasperated by this disturbance, God set St Peter the task of evicting them. St Peter, in full knowledge of the weakness of the Welsh palate, stood outside the gates of heaven loudly calling out ‘Cause bobbe’.⁶⁷ A stampede of Welshmen exited heaven in search of their preferred delicacy, at which point St Peter went back inside and ‘locked the dore’.⁶⁸ Whether this revered food is the provenance of Welsh Rarebit is unclear, but this again is another cheesy contrivance of some infamy, not least the debate over its etymology. The earliest cited use of the term ‘Welsh rabbit’ was in 1725, with its alternative form ‘*rarebit*’, which ‘has no meaning aside from this dish’⁶⁹, first appearing in 1785. The Oxford English Dictionary refers to the word *rarebit* as ‘short for ‘Welsh Rarebit’’,⁷⁰ the association with Wales being definitive. A popular narrative suggests that the name was an intentional slur on the Welsh, since the dish contains no meat, and so was considered inferior.⁷¹ A less controversial explanation might simply be that the dish was attributed to Wales because her people are notoriously fond of cheese. There is no definitive proof the dish originated in Welsh, but there is an accepted likelihood and the Welsh government website, Welsh Food and Drink, describes Welsh Rarebit as ‘perhaps the most famous Welsh dish of them all’.⁷²

With its simplest form being roasted cheese and bread, Welsh rarebit was not only a favourite but a frugal dish. Lady Llanover had a motto hanging above her kitchen doorway

⁶⁶ *A C Mery Tales*, Tale 78.

⁶⁷ ‘roasted cheese’ *A C Mery Tales*, Tale 78.

⁶⁸ *A C Mery Tales*, Tale 78

⁶⁹ Laura Siciliano-Rosen, "Welsh rarebit" in *Encyclopaedia Britannica* [online] <https://www.britannica.com/topic/Welsh-rarebit> . [Accessed 11 May 2022].

⁷⁰ "rarebit, n." in Oxford English Dictionary [online] www.oed.com/view/Entry/247451. [Accessed 11 May 2022].

⁷¹ Eric Troy, ‘Welsh Rabbit versus Welsh Rarebit: Which Name is Correct?’ (8 Nov 2013) <https://culinarylore.com/food-history:welsh-rabbit-versus-welsh-rarebit/> [Accessed 30 April 2022]

⁷² Welsh Food and Drink <https://www.welshfoodanddrink.wales/welsh-rarebit/> [Accessed 10 May 2022].

which read ‘Thrift is beneficial to all and is the father of wealth’⁷³. In keeping with this sentiment, remembrances of traditional Welsh food have an underlying theme of wasting nothing, and some of Wales’s best known dishes originate from this principle. Cawl is a broth or soup with no direct translation, but a meal within itself and an ‘unspoken part of life, so much so that nobody could say, consciously, how it was made’; ⁷⁴ a paradox for any food-writer who wants to share an authentic Welsh recipe. Jane Grigson claims that to give a recipe for cawl is an ‘artificial thing to do’⁷⁵ because each cook used whatever was to hand to make their own variation. Spencer describes it as a moveable feast that improved in flavour over the course of a few days.⁷⁶ Plainly, cawl is the essence of a much loved, and economical family dish and mentioned frequently in oral remembrances of Welsh food.⁷⁷ This prudent attitude towards making a meal out of leftovers, extended into baking. A common baking day custom was to keep a small quantity of dough and use it as a base for a currant loaf cake, such as Bara Brith, although economy necessitated just the addition of a ‘little lard, sugar and a few currants to make this treat’.⁷⁸ Basic, versatile cakes, such as Teisen Lap, were baked for miners as a tuck box staple, their moist texture preventing them from crumbling.⁷⁹

Colin Spencer attempted to make a list of traditional Welsh foods but admitted it could not possibly be comprehensive after he had detailed over one hundred.⁸⁰ The dishes described although familiar, are not necessarily remarkable. They are mainly store-cupboard foods, and the ingredients are not found solely in Wales, and could be replicated with commonly grown ingredients in another geographical area. Nature was in charge in the

⁷³ Freeman, *First Catch Your Peacock*, p.17

⁷⁴ Freeman, *First Catch Your Peacock*, p.106

⁷⁵ Jane Grigson, *The Observer Guide to Food From Britain*, (London, 1984), p.67.

⁷⁶ Spencer, *British Food*, p.205

⁷⁷ See for example Thomas, *Ryseitiau Coginiol* and Tibbot, *Welsh Fare*.

⁷⁸ Tibbott, *Welsh Fare*, p.45

⁷⁹ Tibbott, *Welsh Fare*, p.37

⁸⁰ Spencer, *British Food*, pp.352-354

earlier days, and the food available was local and seasonal; the ingredients tell us about the construction of a society at a particular point in time, but the provenance of heritage dishes begins in the preparation of the food, and the social rituals behind this. There are scant records of written recipes before the mid eighteenth-century, and household books contained mainly medicinal remedies and domestic instruction. Historically cookbooks were restricted in their audience to an elite segment of society that was literate and could access the printed word.⁸¹ Hannah Glasse attempted to write a book of domestic recipes suitable for the lower sort and with thrift in mind *The Art of Cookery, Made Plain and Easy* in 1747, but was subject to a vitriolic attack by a contemporary cook and author, appropriately named Ann Cook, who found this new approach unseemly.⁸² However, books alone can neither contain the essence nor guarantee the survival of national life. “Texts are fragile things, vulnerable to flames, bookworms, and appropriative readings”⁸³, so there needs to be another way.

⁸¹ Ellen Barka, *Cookbooks as historical literature: a comparative study of 19th century cookbooks* (Norway, 2009). P. 11

⁸² Andrew, Monnickendam, “Ann Cook Versus Hannah Glasse: Gender, Professionalism and Readership in the Eighteenth-Century Cookbook.” *Journal for Eighteenth-Century Studies*, vol. 42, no. 2, (2019) pp. 175–91.

⁸³ Schwyzer, *Literature, nationalism, and memory*, p.95.

Chapter 2. Hiraeth

‘in fact, one symptom of homesickness is an irrational and hopeless craving for a plate of bacon and bara lawr.’⁸⁴

Schwyzler suggests that for sixteenth-century Welsh scholars, their nation’s history had the ‘appearance of a succession of bibliocausts’⁸⁵. The humanist William Salesbury suggests that the bards saw a bright side to this destruction of books, as the ‘phantasticall vanities of theyr prophecies’⁸⁶ could not be challenged and this allowed them to shape the narrative over the Welsh historical memory. By happy chance, in the *Historiae Brytannicae defensio*, Price reassures his readers that historical testimony will not be forgotten, referring to the remarkable skill of the Welsh for preserving their past and praising their specific arts of memory⁸⁷. In actuality, any written form of culinary history may have been peculiarly untranslatable; common cooking ingredients and techniques were so rarely transcribed that a best guess had to be taken for some of the more unusual language and dialects.⁸⁸ The translation of recipes thereby raises unique problems with each editorial decision likely to have a drastic effect on the finished product.

⁸⁴ John Mansel Thomas, ‘The Weed of Hiraeth’, *Gower journal of the Gower Society*. Vol. 12 (1959) <https://journals.library.wales/view/1272866/1273542/28#?xywh=-1863%2C-108%2C6072%2C4005>

⁸⁵ Schwyzler, Literature, nationalism and memory, p.81

⁸⁶ William Salesbury, *A briefe and a playne introduction, teachyng how to pronounce the letters of the British tong, (now co[m]menly called Walsh) wherby an English man shal not only w[ith] ease read the said tong rightly: but markyng ye same wel, it shal be a meane for him with one labour and diligence to attaine to the true and natural pronuncation of other expediente and most excellent langauges* (London, 1550)

⁸⁷ ‘semper colere non cessarunt, qui & maiorum res gestas & recentiorum genealogias, atque Heroum laudes tum carmine tum prosa celebrarent, ac scriptis pariter & memoria conservarent” John Price and others, *Historiae Brytannicae defensio, Ioanne Preiseo Equestris ordinis Brytanno auctore.* (London, 1573) pp. 9–10

⁸⁸ Hughes, *The Forme of Cury*, introduction.

Holtzman compares the use of memory to establish authentic testimony with its more objective but “older, frumpier sibling ‘history’”⁸⁹ suggesting the latter may be preferred in academic circles with its reputation for empiricism. The subjective ways in which the past is remembered may result in debate about the limits of legitimacy of the historical testimony.⁹⁰ In contrast it could be asserted that oral history offers a validation of memory considered more true and reliable than other records; the authority of the attestant lies in the sense that they must know what it was like ‘because they were there’.⁹¹ Welsh labour historians had a particular fondness for this testimony because the frequent involvement of the working classes complemented the trend for ‘history from below’.⁹² The narrative from those whose voices have not always been heard, can add balance to the educated hypothesis of historians or add detail to unwitting testimony, even the tone and intonation of an account may lend clarity to a textual version of an event.⁹³ The end result is influenced by how the interviewer approaches the dialogue in terms of question and rapport, but this avenue of collaboration has made it possible to maintain a connection with an authentic past. There are obvious chronological and observational limits to the experiences of an individual but taken together a social or collective memory may emerge and be recorded, especially if sustained by social context.

The sensuality of food causes it to be a particularly intense and compelling medium for memory and can stimulate additional recollection of surroundings and associated emotion. This stimulus by context is, indeed, what Proust recalled when describing the embedded

⁸⁹ John Holtzman, ‘Food and Memory’, *Annual review of anthropology*, 35(1), (2006) doi: 10.1146/annurev.anthro.35.081705.123220. p.363

⁹⁰ Holtzman, Food and Memory, p.363

⁹¹ Sara Jones, ‘Mediated immediacy: constructing authentic testimony in audio-visual media’, *Rethinking history*, 21(2), (2017) p.136.

⁹² Andy Croll, “‘People’s remembrancers’ in a post-modern age: contemplating the non-crisis of Welsh labour history’, *Llafur*, 8(1), (2001) pp. 5–18.

⁹³ Alessandro Portelli, ‘What makes oral history different’ *The Oral History Reader*. Routledge, (2016) pp. 68–78.

memories which assailed him whilst in bed eating a Madeleine dipped in tea. ‘Weary after a dull day, with the prospect of a depressing morrow’⁹⁴ this plump little cake transported him into a delight that covered many pages with reminiscence of sunlit childhood memories. How people remember hunger allows us to see how they had once lived and understood themselves amongst the background of earlier deprivations or desires. There is also a particular gendered theme which is central to some analyses of food and emphasises its relationship to a specifically feminine form of memory in context to the historical period examined.⁹⁵ Thus, a wide body of literature emphasises memory structured through what is construed as women’s special relationship to food, providing access to histories and memories not found in other types of accounts. Bajic-Hajdukovic sees the passing down of recipes from mother and daughter as a vital means of preserving their maternal identity; ‘in our mother’s kitchens we don’t just combine eggs, milk and flour, we also hear tales and participate in an oral ritual.’⁹⁶ In keeping with this, the overwhelming majority of the contributors to Minwel Tibbott’s oral history fieldwork were female.

Mati Thomas prefaces the collection of old Welsh recipes in her 1928 National Eisteddfod of Wales entry with the declaration that ‘she would like to make a record of the dishes from the latter part of the 18th century, whilst the people who could remember them were still alive to recall them’⁹⁷. She mentions that the foods that had been described to her were simple, with plenty of variety through the seasons and cleanliness in the kitchen was of prime importance; the brass and copper pans were polished to mirror perfection⁹⁸. The

⁹⁴ Marcel Proust, ‘The Madeleine’ in *The Taste Culture Reader: Experiencing Food and Drink*, ed by Carolyn Korsmeyer (London, 2017) p.294.

⁹⁵ Holtzman, *Food and Memory*, p.370

⁹⁶ Linda Murray Berzok, *Storied Dishes What Our Family Recipes Tell Us About Who We Are and Where We’ve Been*. (Praeger, 2010), p.19

Ivana Bajic-Hajdukovic, ‘Food, Family, and Memory: Belgrade Mothers and Their Migrant Children.’ *Food & Foodways*, vol. 21, no. 1, (2013), <https://doi.org/10.1080/07409710.2013.764787>. P.57

⁹⁷ Freeman, *First Catch Your Peacock*, p14

⁹⁸ Freeman, *First Catch Your Peacock*, pp.25-26

infamous Welsh roasted cheese is amongst this collection of recipes, consisting of a piece of sheep or cow's cheese, baked both sides in front of a fire and served on barley bread at least an inch thick.⁹⁹; there are also many recipes for cawl in various forms, confirming its versatility. Whilst discussing beverages, Thomas mentions that tea was a special treat and shares an anecdote whereupon the lady of the house had ensured that her children and any workers were out of sight before indulging in a cup.¹⁰⁰ Thomas provides a valuable historical testimony, but the work is frustratingly brief and lacks the detailed context of Minwel Tibbott's project. Tibbott's field work was undertaken whilst she was an Assistant Keeper in the Welsh Folk Museum's Department of Oral Traditions and dialect, during the 1970s. Unlike Thomas, she benefited from the luxury of a tape recorder and modern transport.¹⁰¹

When Minwel Tibbott began working for the Museum in 1969, the study of traditional foods in Wales was a new area of research and she realised that the written literature available was sparse. Travelling around all parts of Wales, she interviewed, recorded, and filmed the older generation, the majority of whom were women in their eighties, documenting memories from as far back as the end of the 1800s.¹⁰² Archivist Mienwen Ruddock-Jones at the National Museum Wales reveals that Tibbott's interviewees were found in a number of ways.¹⁰³ She explains that adverts were posted on village noticeboards, in post offices and on church community pages, and as knowledge of the project spread, people would write to the museum and Tibbott, or a colleague, would follow up on their letters. During her visits, the people interviewed would recommend that she visited someone else they knew in the village, and a trip to see one person could lead to

⁹⁹ 'Caws wedi ei bobî, caws llaeth defaid a gwartheg . Taffell o fara barlys modfedd o drwch o leiaf' Thomas, *Ryseitiau Coginiol. Sheet 7.*

¹⁰⁰ Thomas, *Ryseitiau Coginiol. Sheet 14*

¹⁰¹ Tibbott, *Domestic Life in Wales*, Foreword.

¹⁰² Tibbott, *Domestic Life in Wales*, Foreword.

¹⁰³ Meinwen Ruddock-Jones, Archivist, National Museum Wales. Telephone conversation interview with Sally Linsell about the work of Minwel Tibbott and Anne Elizabeth Williams, 17 May 2022.

additional recordings.¹⁰⁴ The interviews were carried out in the home and Ruddock tells of the charming testimony of background noises from the museum's collection of tape-recorded interviews. She recounts an occasion when a man was being interviewed; there are the background sounds of his wife bustling around carrying out domestic tasks nearby, apparently to try and overhear the conversation- the sounds get closer and closer until finally she is unable to resist participating in the interview and 'chips in' to correct her husband's version of events!¹⁰⁵

Although Tibbott did have a loose script to follow, the style of interview was informal and conversational, with the questions acting as a prompt, which then allowed the participant to shape the discourse. The exchange is familiar and comfortable; Lorna Rubbery is asked by Tibbott if she could remember some favourite meals she would have in the week-day when she was a child, and Rubbery replies 'Well there was broth, cawl, erm, carrots, parsnips, everything in it, leeks, parsley, turnips, made out of very little meat probably', and this leads into a story of how she used to visit a person in the village who had a 'big garden' and they'd give her 'all sorts of things' for the broth for three pence, such as carrots, parsnips, 'everything but potato'.¹⁰⁶ It is a compositionally different testimony to the more formal structure of a cookery book, or an academic summary of social history, and an invaluable addition. Even the emphasis and pitch of the voice changes the context, alongside a natural tendency to clarify and self-correct. Tibbott's recordings remain in the archives at the museum of Wales, many of her recipes are to be found on St Fagan's website and she

¹⁰⁴ Ruddock-Jones

¹⁰⁵ Ruddock-Jones

¹⁰⁶ Lorna Rubbery from Rhyd-y-car, Merthyr, *Contents of Cawl*, recorded by Minwel Tibbott. MP3 soundbite, provided for personal use, by Meinwen Ruddock-Jones. Available at National Museum Wales Archive, accessed 17 May 2022

published several books in which she transcribed this primary source evidence into collections of recipes and anecdotes regarding traditional Welsh food and domestic life.¹⁰⁷

Whilst carrying out her research, Tibbott found that there was a distinct overlap between home-remedies and kitchen recipes, and the medicinal qualities of foods became a subject worthy of separate record. She transferred this endeavour to a fellow researcher, Anne Elizabeth Williams, who continued this work with similar methodology, although focussing on restorative remedies.¹⁰⁸ There is not the remit within this dissertation to transcribe these illuminative findings, although they showcase an abundance of kitchen ingredients, but in testimony to the potential of memory scholarship, it is notable that some of the remedies remain virtually unchanged since the fourteenth-century. The hereditary physicians at Myddfai, Carmarthenshire, are described in folklore as descendants of a union between a lake fairy and a mortal and offered practical treatments for a variety of everyday conditions.

¹⁰⁹These have been translated by Diana Luft from collections of medieval Welsh medical texts in manuscript ¹¹⁰ The physicians original remedy for ear problems required a bedtime dose of baked onion in the affected ear, and extraordinarily a version of this is recounted to Williams by Olive Evans of Rhos, six hundred years later under the guise of a home-remedy.¹¹¹ Intriguingly twenty first-century studies have shown that the juice of Welsh onions specifically, has anti-inflammatory and pain-relieving properties, so perhaps more attention should be paid to medieval physicians and Welsh mams.¹¹² Bobby Freeman drew

¹⁰⁷ St Fagans National Museum of history. *Welsh Fare*

¹⁰⁸ National Museum Wales.

¹⁰⁹ Robin Gwyndaf, "A Welsh Lake Legend and the Famous Physicians of Myddfai." *Béaloides*, vol. 60/61, *Folklore of Ireland Society*, (1992), pp. 241–66, <https://doi.org/10.2307/20522409>.

Diana Luft, *Medieval Welsh Medical Texts*, (Wales, 2020)

¹¹⁰ Luft, *Medieval Welsh Medical Texts*.

¹¹¹ Luft, *Medieval Welsh Medical Texts*, p.242 Text also states further additions of boar's urine, henbane, and eel fat may be advantageous.

Lowrie Jenkins, *Traditional medicines* (2020) <https://museum.wales/articles/2160/Traditional-Medicines/>

¹¹² "Welsh mam, The." *The Welsh Academy Encyclopaedia of Wales*, (Wales, 2008).

Al-Snafi, Ali Esmail Al-Snafi. "Pharmacological effects of *Allium* species grown in Iraq. An overview." *International Journal of Pharmaceutical and health care Research* 1, no. 4 (2013): pp.132-147.

widely from the work of Tibbott and Mati Thomas in order to establish authentic recipes, and praised the utility of their fieldwork. She also visited the elderly people of Wales to try and capture more detail for her studies and found that her passport to a productive conversation was a ‘bottle of proper buttermilk from a farm churning of butter’ which both ensured a welcome and opened up memories.¹¹³

Using historical insight to establish an acceptable national cuisine, requires co-operation between social, political, and commercial interests. To sculpt the food to fit a specific policy may involve the adjustment or invention of ‘traditions’ that have no historical background, thus emerging as not completely authentic but undoubtedly useful.¹¹⁴ Johnes observes that ‘romantics searched the past to find things they could use for their own purposes of sustaining Wales’¹¹⁵ during the late eighteenth and nineteenth-centuries. In a period of diffuse and mass societies, there is now a search for roots and a past in which people can call their own, secure from the turbulence of time and Said contends that the desire for connection with an image of the past is a ‘specially freighted late twentieth-century phenomenon that has arisen at a time of bewildering change’.¹¹⁶ Few activities involve so many senses as eating, and the foods of ‘home’ have a particular cultural saliency. This emotional connection is also used and misused by commercial interests; when food is described as heritage, it takes on even greater emotional weight, imparting value claims that transverse social structures and histories.¹¹⁷ This emotional association may create what Appadurai calls ‘armchair nostalgia’, a hunger for a past never personally experienced that

¹¹³ Freeman, *First catch your peacock*, p.14

¹¹⁴ Laura Di Fiore, “Heritage and Food History: A Critical Assessment.” *In Food Heritage and Nationalism in Europe*, ed by Laura Di Fiore and Ilaria Porciani 1st ed., vol. 1, Routledge, 2020, p.10

¹¹⁵ Martin, Johnes, “History and the Making and Remaking of Wales.” *History*, vol. 100, no. 5 (343), Wiley, 2015, <https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-229X.12141>. p.668

¹¹⁶ Said, ‘Invention, Memory and Place’, pp.3-5

¹¹⁷ Ronda Brulotte and Michael Di Giovine *Edible Identities: Food as Cultural Heritage*. (Ashgate, 2014.) p.2

appears once “the merchandiser supplies the lubricant of nostalgia”¹¹⁸ and the literature on food is filled with such longing.

Laverbread serves to exemplify a food that has been cast into multiple roles and currently occupies a position of hegemony in public representation of a traditional Welsh dish. Its Welsh historical pedigree is impeccable, and Robin Turner suggested that it is as ‘Welsh as our unspoilt rolling moorlands, mellifluous male voice choirs and long place names’.¹¹⁹ J. Mansel Thomas, described laver as the ‘Weed of Hiraeth’¹²⁰; hiraeth being described as an unattainable longing for a time or place, a bond with a homeland, or ‘a distinct feeling of missing something irretrievably lost’.¹²¹ Thomas surmised that ‘To many a South Walian, laverbread is what a Rhine wine is to a German, or a whiff of garlic to a Frenchman’¹²². Additionally, and less sentimentally, Welsh laver was partially responsible for the development of one of the most valuable aquaculture industries in the world. Dr Kathleen Mary Drew-Baker, a British scientist, solved the puzzle of the life cycle of *Porphyra* through studying laver from Wales in 1949, thereby laying the scientific foundation for rational and sustainable farming of *Porphyra* for nori production.¹²³ In terms of terroir, history, and heritage, laverbread appears to have it all, along with a respectable reputation as a health food and links with ecological sustainability.¹²⁴

¹¹⁸ Arjun Appadurai (1996) *Modernity at large* cultural dimensions of globalization. (Minneapolis,1996), P.78

¹¹⁹ Robin Turner, ‘Welsh Laverbread (PDO)’, (no date) <https://businesswales.gov.wales/foodanddrink/how-we-can-help/new-uk-geographical-indication-gi-schemes-0/welsh-laverbread-pdo> [accessed 12 May 2022]

¹²⁰ Mansel Thomas, ‘The Weed of Hiraeth’, p.26

¹²¹ Lily Crossley-Baxter ‘The untranslatable word that connects Wales’ (15 Feb 2021)

<https://www.bbc.com/travel/article/20210214-the-welsh-word-you-cant-translate#:~:text=A%20blend%20of%20homesickness%2C%20nostalgia,of%20missing%20something%20irretrievably%20lost>. [Accessed 20 April 2022]

¹²² Mansel Thomas, ‘The Weed of Hiraeth’, p.26

¹²³ Ole Mouritsen, ‘The science of seaweeds: marine macroalgae benefit people culturally, industrially, nutritionally, and ecologically.’, *American scientist*, 101(6), (2013), p.458.

¹²⁴ Rhianna Rhees, *Seaweed is sexy* (Uppsala,2019)

Ann Garibaldi and Nancy Turner have identified what they call cultural keystone species, ‘plants and animals that are central to diet, identity, and ritual, to the extent that they become cultural icons’.¹²⁵ Laver is one such icon, and Swansea, with its close proximity to the cockle beds of Burry Port, became the ‘laverbread mecca...and the food that fed the people as part of the industrial revolution’.¹²⁶ However as the mining communities declined during the mid-twentieth-century, accompanied by the availability of convenience food, the demand for laverbread fell to the extent that the BBC Radio 4 Food and Farming program predicted it would become just another chapter in Welsh history.¹²⁷ Despite its fame, laverbread was elusive and tourists may have concluded it existed only as a memory and nostalgia¹²⁸. When Jane Grigson visited Swansea market in the 1980s she was told that the laverbread she was purchasing came from Scottish laver, because local supplies were not always enough and could not be counted upon. Laverbread looked set to be disregarded, yet in the summer of 2007, Tesco supermarket considered removing laver from its South Wales branches, there was ‘an outraged howl of public protest that made the national UK news.’¹²⁹

The demise of laverbread was belayed when it captured the attention of a British government initiative to increase the status of British foods and increase the number of foods with Protected Designated Origin (PDO) status. Within this program, producers of “traditional” food applied to receive a specialist European Union sponsored food label to designate their products as possessing certain unique characteristics.¹³⁰ The PDO foods were

¹²⁵ Ann Garibaldi, and Nancy Turner. “Cultural Keystone Species: Implications for Ecological Conservation and Restoration.” *Ecology and Society*, vol. 9, no. 3, Resilience Alliance, 2004, pp. 1–1, <https://doi.org/10.5751/ES-00669-090301>.

¹²⁶ Jonathon Williams, ‘A (very)brief history of Laver seaweed and Laverbread in Wales’,(2021) <https://beachfood.co.uk/blogs/about-seaweed/laver-and-laverbread-in-wales> [Accessed 29 April 2022]

¹²⁷ Rhees, *Seaweed is sexy*, p.18

¹²⁸ Rhees, *Seaweed is sexy*, p.18

¹²⁹ Kaori O’Connor, The Secret History of ‘The Weed of Hiraeth’: Laverbread, Identity and Museums in Wales *Journal of Museum Ethnography*, no. 22 (December 2009), p.89

¹³⁰ Bernice Hurst, ‘Much more than a name: The pros and cons of PDO and PGI status’ (4 Nov 2002) <https://www.just-food.com/analysis/much-more-than-a-name-the-pros-and-cons-of-pdo-and-pgi-status/>

required to be exclusive in origin to a particular place, a local culinary tradition and upheld by an official institute.¹³¹ Currently ‘Welsh Leeks’ are also being considered as a Protected food name with Protected Geographical Indication, under a similar scheme.¹³² In 2017, after laverbread gained its PDO status, the Cabinet Secretary for Environment and Rural Affairs, Lesley Griffiths, extolled the reputation of Welsh cuisine, mentioning laverbread as an icon of Welsh food, bringing to mind its ‘historic origins on the beaches of West Wales’.¹³³ The protection of the heritage of laverbread subsequently enhanced its marketability, in what Leitch calls a commodification of tradition, where the nostalgia becomes the commodity sold.¹³⁴ Although a protected designation is useful for the purposes of marketing and identification, DeSoucy warns it can also be exclusionary, and inappropriately infer ownership.¹³⁵ The supplier of Carmarthen Ham had applied for a PDO status in previous years, but joked that he had been beaten to it, claiming that "when the Romans conquered most of Wales, they settled in Carmarthen, pinched our recipe and took it back to Italy where they called it Parma ham".¹³⁶ It is true that the movement of people and commodities have influenced the indigenous food culture. Italian ice-cream has been part of the Welsh food culture for over one hundred and thirty years, and Laudan claims that most traditional foods were invented within the last two hundred.¹³⁷

¹³¹ Hurst, Much more than a name.

¹³² ‘Welsh Leeks’ Protected food name with Protected Geographical Indication (PGI) *Department for Environment, Food & Rural Affairs* <https://www.gov.uk/protected-food-drink-names/welsh-leeks>

¹³³ David Higgs, ‘This Welsh seaweed delicacy is now considered as prestigious as champagne’, *Wales Online*, 17 May 2017, Available at <https://www.walesonline.co.uk/whats-on/food-drink-news/welsh-seaweed-delicacy-now-considered-13051222> Accessed 17 May 2022

¹³⁴ Alison Leitch, “Slow Food and the Politics of Pork Fat: Italian Food and European Identity.” *Ethnos*, vol. 68, no. 4, (2003), p.448 <https://doi.org/10.1080/0014184032000160514>.

¹³⁵ Michaela DeSoucy, “Gastronationalism: Food Traditions and Authenticity Politics in the European Union.” *American Sociological Review*, vol. 75, no. 3, (2010), p. 442 <https://doi.org/10.1177/0003122410372226>.

¹³⁶ Anon, ‘Welsh laverbread among foods considered for protected status’ *BBC News*, 28 July 2015, Available at <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-wales-33691215> Accessed 15 May 2022

¹³⁷ Rachel Laudan A Plea for Culinary Modernism: Why We Should Love New, Fast, Processed Food, *Gastronomica* Vol. 1, No. 1 (Winter 2001). <https://doi.org/10.1525/gfc.2001.1.1.36>. p.39

In the late 1980s, the Slow Food movement emerged to demand a protection to local culinary traditions; this movement also relied heavily upon the inducement of nostalgia for marketing purposes¹³⁸ Lauden questions this militant nostalgia, calling the resistance to industrialised food ‘culinary Luddism’.¹³⁹ In her opinion, the insistence traditional food should always be fresh and natural is an ‘article of faith’ rather than of scholarly enquiry.¹⁴⁰ She observes that to make food safe and digestible, our forebears had to ‘beat it into submission’¹⁴¹ and verifiably a number of traditional Welsh dishes go through significant procedures before becoming acceptably edible. Laverbread requires picking, washing, simmering, draining, seasoning, and frying- preferably with the addition of bacon fat - and oats are milled, crushed, sifted and soaked for days. Historically, extensive culinary preparation was not for the pleasure of labour, but out of necessity, especially before the arrival of electricity to domestic properties that revolutionised cooking and cold storage. Lauden also suggests that far from being the preferred option, local was the food of the poor who had been condemned to monotony, whereas the rich ‘bought, stole, wheedled, used and ran off with appealing plants and animals wherever they could find them’¹⁴². This requires consideration, and those investing in nostalgia to elevate the status of traditional foods must remain ‘cognizant of their potential to promote a romanticized past that ignores the travails of peasants, farmers, and the poor’.¹⁴³ Tradition is deeply associated with an idealisation of the past and shaped by language such as ‘authentic’ and ‘traditional’, which suggest an unmoving

¹³⁸ DeSoucey, ‘Gastronationalism: Food Traditions and Authenticity Politics in the European Union’ Alison Leitch, *The social life of Lardo: slow food in fast times*. *Asian Pac. J. Anthropol.* 1(1): (2000)pp. 103–18

¹³⁹ Laudan, *A Plea for Culinary Modernism*, p.36.

¹⁴⁰ Laudan, *A Plea for Culinary Modernism*, p.36.

¹⁴¹ Laudan, *A Plea for Culinary Modernism*, p.38.

¹⁴² Laudan, *A Plea for Culinary Modernism*, p.38.

¹⁴³ DeSoucey, ‘Gastronationalism’, p.449.

past linked to antiquity¹⁴⁴ The problem of using these terms lies in their vague definition and powerful semantics evoking ‘sepia hued images’,¹⁴⁵. In essence, traditional is nostalgic.

¹⁴⁴ Di Fiore, *Heritage and Food History*, p.10.

¹⁴⁵ Elise Billiard, ‘Searching for a national cuisine.’ *Journal of Maltese History*, 2(1) (2010). P.54

Conclusion

'Caws wedi'i Bobi – Welsh Rarebit

Cheese

A slice of bread

Toast a slice of bread. Bake a large slice of cheese and place on top of the toast.' ¹⁴⁶

Of all forms of material culture, food comes closest to a universal commonality; whilst attempting to avoid broad generalisations, the inevitable truth is that every person must eat if they are to stay alive. Food cultures are part of a narrative that will not stand still, traversing the public and private, and constantly being re-invented through new symbolic value. To establish what may be authentic, historical analysis is essential, and some inter-disciplinary form of dialogue would be welcomed, if for no reason but to interrupt versions of the past that bears little resemblance to the actuality. Historical testimony has been used as evidence that a recipe or a method of creation should be frozen in time, whereas in reality, a degree of modernisation was appreciated by our ancestors. The guidance behind food heritage labelling sources this rigidity, and through this may come an unintentional form of xenophobia, excluding difference, and claiming ownership of an 'authentic' national dish. This diminishes the long history of food cultures, with their connections and diversity.

If a national cuisine is to be defined purely by climate or geography, then it should be simple. Wales could lay claim to oats, for example, but then so could a great number of other

¹⁴⁶ Tibbott, *Welsh Fare*, p. 22 (Banwy Uchaf, Montgomeryshire)

countries, so it would no longer be distinct. If a national dish must be unique, it may eventually be too remote from what is usually considered edible, resulting in form of neophobia and only provided for the novelty value. Part of the claim to a national cuisine comes from the preparation and subsequent transformation of the food, and this is a realisation of the hybrid entangled nature of all culinary identities. National cuisines are perhaps best understood as collections of dishes created to preserve the memory of a nation and introduce it to the outside world.

There is a clear link between food and memory, so these memories need to be good ones. No nation is going to want to present its national dish as a pauper's plate; the image portrayed is of prime importance. National food discourse invariably recalls popular home-made food, and this is where the flair of the individual makes itself known - and why it is so difficult to pinpoint a recipe for a traditional dish. The study of oral history shows how the general ingredients may vary, but the emotions associated with a dish conjure up a common purpose and kinship. Even if the cook was particularly unskilled, the intimacy of a family recipe is often the food of home and referred to as comfort food. These comforting dishes tend to be easy to prepare, filling and familiar. Roasted cheese on toast, or cawl, would fit this description nicely. This is also where the inalienable nature of a national cuisine arises, it is the emotions that the food evokes, and the relationship to it, rather than the dish itself.

The discourse of nationalism is based on a mystification, reflecting not the social reality but what its nationals wish it to be. Images of Welsh mountain lamb, salty butter and home-pulled toffee may not suit those who wish to market a particular image of plant-based foods for example or promote health. On the other hand, these regional foods fit well with a notion of sustainability and support for the local economy -and they sound delicious. There may be 'official' foods of Wales which have, in part, been crafted to accommodate an authorised narrative of the Welsh identity, but there is also an 'unofficial' but inherent commonality to

foods which are associated with home; everywhere you go in Wales there are stories linked to food. Whilst Bobby Freeman was writing her seminal history of Welsh food, she was told by all manner of people that there was ‘no such thing as Welsh food’¹⁴⁷; of course there is, but just like Welsh history, it is fabled, contested, and reconstructed. To attempt to determine a definitive and ‘authentic Welsh cuisine’, means negotiating hiraeth; both terms exist, but each are singularly indefinable.

¹⁴⁷ Freeman, *First Catch Your Peacock*, p.8

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