

# Hot Cakes and Treacle

Funny really how memories come flooding back to old people like myself whenever a particular word or long forgotten phrase drops into any conversation. More often than not that conversation is likely to be a reminiscence of times past. We all know the kind of thing I am talking about - do we not! My childhood was spent in Marsh Lane in Barton and it was that Lane and the then residents that set us off the other day. And I also ought to tell you it is usually at this point that I begin to wonder if I should carry on with these bits and bobs about Barton. I do, of course, because it is always up to the Editor of any Publication who cares to read it to bin it if the subject matter is a waste of space and time.

Inevitably I put some of what happened to me into these articles and perhaps what I have to say might not have too much interest for some. I know that those of or approaching my age have seen it, done it, and I am told like to be reminded of things as they were. I was once told, or read, that Man is the only animal who either laughs or cries because he is the only creature who knows the difference between things as they are and things as they ought to be. Maybe, maybe not!

But let me get back to Home Made Hot Cakes. We progressed from individuals and their idiosyncrasies on to food and how it was prepared and off we went into bread making and HOT Cakes in particular. Hot Cakes, those lovely, soft, fluffy, largish round beautifully baked breads. Mam would tear one open, no cutting, put some filling in, they couldn't be eaten with butter or fillings or spreads, such as Treacle or dipped in home made sausage gravy or, and some of you never heard of this, 'tea dip.' Funny how people remember the treacle spread.

The tea dip does demand an explanation. When the frying pan was in use for some bacon, home fed fat bacon was best, there was maybe an egg to follow, then a little of the tea in the pot was poured into the hot tasty residue in the frying pan after the bacon etc had been served. I don't doubt that some of your readers, if there are any left after this nonsense, would think it made for a peculiar mixture but in spite of a few tea dregs in it and attaching to the cake or slice of bread used to soak it up it was good. No wonder that as a lad when allowed to go on Earles sloops, a dinner or tea of some bacon with thick bread cake or bread loaf slice to dip up the pan contents was to be savoured and the whole trip made more enjoyable. In those days we boys were allowed in the brickyards, on sloops, did little tasks, ran errands and had never heard of doing wanton damage. Anyway we all knew what we would get if our parents had complaints about us.

Once I fell in Grimsby Dock when two of us, my future brother-in-law. Wilf. Towle and me, had the coggie and were taking a warping line out. The skipper of a little fishing boat dived in and pulled me to the top. I told everyone not to tell my Mam, she would have stopped me going. I sometimes wonder about lads today. In the 1920's-30's, for lads and lasses from the age of 14, the Ropery, Hoppers, the brickyards or some

such beckoned. I don't know what the present generation would have done with themselves before this or in their spare time? No hiding under hoods and baseball caps at that time. (This was written before the current hoo-ha about such head coverings.)

Shall we go back to bread making? In many households one day was set aside for bread making and baking. Yes, the best part of one day. There was no supermarket, no magic bread making gizmo, any bought bread had to come from such as Steamship Robinson's, or one of the shops supplied by such bakers as Tim Burkitt of Barton or Woolleys of Barrow. I have no doubt that the supply chain in Barton was no different to that of any other town, village or farming community.

As an example, up to WW II, Burkitts had three vans going. The bakehouse was across the passage next to the shop in the Market Place and I can remember at least three bakers, Arthur Parkin, Don? James and one other. They would be busy from 4.30 am each weekday turning out prodigious quantities of bread and then going on to other products. I have seen them at work when a boy and later, in 1949- 53. That was when I looked in when on nights as a Policeman on my beat. Being a baker was hard work. There was no mechanical help at that time. The tins were filled by hand. By the way, some other men fully engaged most or all of the night hours at that time, were Jim Durham making gas at the Dam Road gas works and the shift workers on the big ' stone' burning furnaces at Farmers Co. This was part of the lead chamber process of acid making.

Back to Tim Burkitt's vans. George Pilkington did Barton and around, Frank Hunsley the villages, farms etc to the west and my uncle, Alf Havercroft, the villages etc. to the east up to Killingholme. I sometimes went with him in school holidays and often the first and very early calls were to shops which wanted an early immediate supply of bread for a wide range of customers. The shop over the railway lines at Melton Ross comes to mind where I helped to take baskets of loaves in. After the most urgent calls there was maybe a quick return to Barton, a refill of bread and it was on to the serious business of loading trays of other breads. Milk Rolls, Hovis, Currant loaves, large sweet cakes, all sorts of penny buns, teacakes, deep, small apple pies, twopence, and much else. Some of this went into the shops of course but there was great deal of calling on regular customers at home. All these smaller items were very good I can tell you!

Just an aside - how times change can be gauged by the fact that several times I went on Good Friday mornings and by 5 am we were on our way to all the outlets with their orders for Hot Cross Buns. A van load. In those days the customer asked, the customer got. And isn't indicative of the changes wrought in our attitudes and way of living over the intervening years? Hot Cross buns and fish for dinner on that Holy Day and rolling coloured eggs in Horkstow Road Pit on Easter Day were very much part of the scheme of things. I wonder what significance, if any, would be attached to that today?

As far as baking bread in the household is concerned the time required depended on the size of the household and the needs of the individuals in it. Do not forget that bread was a staple, vital, filling a great part of the diet of most families. A good thick round was nutritious, unexcelled, plain or toasted on a fork in front of the fire, with dripping, jam, treacle or whatever came to hand. It was a filler for a hungry brood and it was no good making it in penny numbers. My wife was the eldest of seven children. Her father was a riverman, a sloop mate and captain who, in common with many others in Barton went off, usually on the early Monday morning train or catching the tide, as the case might be. He and they would take enough 'baking' to last through the week and home made bread kept good and sweet for the whole week away. When the eldest boy moved up to be mate on the sloop then it meant catering for two healthy appetites.

There were other rivermen in the Lane, also brickyard workers, furnace men at the Farmers Co., line men on the LNER and sundry others, all of who took substantial amounts of bread with them when they went off to work for the day. In the mid, to late 1930's I was a teenager in a Barrow Haven brickyard and Hoe Hill in Barton. In summer time, tile making time, the day was 6.30 am to about 4.30 pm depending on how the day had gone.

I took a 'packup' breakfast, taken about 8.am, and at Barrow Haven a midday meal, taken about 12.00, with me. Mam's bread with, maybe, boiled bacon shoulder meat or cheese, maybe half a large saucer size apple pie. Oh, and a bottle of cold, unskimmed, unsweetened tea, usually tea left from teatime the night before. Unless I was at a coal ship or brick ship, sweaty dusty work, I rarely drank it.

I had better get back to my theme, bread making at home, hot cakes in particular. In the lane Monday or Tuesday was usually set aside for washday. So on Wednesday or Thursday dough would be prepared and put to rise on the hearth, under a clean tea cloth in a big earthenware pancheon. Flour was bought from the family's regular grocer probably a 7 lb. bag. When times were bad for employment many a household was in debt to their sympathetic grocer.

He or she who would be paid off in shillings or half crowns, bit by bit as times improved. Yeast came in pennyworths from Ellerbys in Junction Square. The preparation began by putting the required amount of flour, estimated by guess and by god mostly, into the household's big earthenware pancheon. The necessary yeast with a 'seasoning', that was really a little sugar and a pinch of salt, would be mixed with water into a cup or similar and placed in a hollow made in the flour. The pancheon was then placed on the hearth near the fire and the hopefully, hot oven, covered with a clean tea cloth the yeast being left to do its work. The kitchen fire drawing under the oven had been carefully tended. It was not unusual to see in some houses that a little dough had been used to fill cracks in the iron range and the gap down the right hand side where the range had come away a little. A new range cost money and landlords were slow to respond to pleas.

When this was ready the yeast, flour and a little water would be mixed and kneaded, the more it could be kneaded the more air went into the dough and made for a lovely loaf. This was done in the pantheon for a start then the whole lump would be put on the paste board on the tabletop to be thumped and kneaded until the housewife was satisfied with the mix. Kneading the dough was hard work. The bread maker would tuck her thumbs in behind her clenched fingers to make a four knuckle fist and would then go work with a will, kneading, punching, turning, getting the desired aerated dough. One lady, somewhat lacking in height, was wont to put the bowl on the floor in front of the fire because she couldn't reach the tabletop height.

The next thing, when happy with the kneaded lump of dough, it was left in the bowl, covered with clean tea towel and the whole lot put to rise in front of the fire and range. Now Hot cakes. These were flat rounds of the dough, placed on the oven floor or on a baking sheet in the oven and left to get on with it whilst the bread tins were filled to the appropriate height from the remainder of the dough. These, or some of them went into the oven on any of the shelves that were left. Care was taken not to be frequently and carelessly opening the oven door and letting heat out.

When experience said the hot cakes were ready, not flat now but raised yet firm with a well baked top, these first ones came out and were put to stay warm in front of the fire or on the oven top. When the bread in the tins was adjudged to be properly baked, one would be dropped out the tin and a resounding knock on the bottom of the baked loaf would result in a hollow sound if all was well with that batch. All the dough would be used for cakes or loaves.

I suppose I was spoiled because I can remember my Mam used to put a little dough in one of the earthenware jars that jams or mincemeat came in. This would make a small round loaf with the top bursting out at the top. Beat that with butter on (if you had any that is). I know that nowadays various baps, buns, baguettes etc are all readily available with or without fillings but nothing, nothing that I have had or seen approaches Mam's wholesome Hot Cakes for texture and taste.

I mentioned sausages. Well, one very early morning in about 1950, I think, I was on duty in Ings Road when Harry Osgerby passed the time of day with me. He asked if was going back to the station, There was no big secret about what we did so I said I was going there then home for my breakfast. He went in his house and brought out about 1 lb.or more of home made sausages. They had been hanging up for a while, were a bit fuzzy and turning pinkie-red but they were from a home killed pig. I took them home where the eldest viewed them with suspicion and then after a couple of forks-full would have cheerfully made serious inroads in the whole lot. Oh my. If only some hot cakes had been on hand, Cordon Bleu or Sacre' Bleu, it would have made a gourmet sit up and enjoy.

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