

Suffolk Food Hall commemorates World War One with recipes from the Home Front



Monday, July 28th, marks the centenary of the outbreak of World War 1 and, to commemorate the momentous impact the event had on our society, Suffolk Food Hall is recognising the culinary changes that occurred as a result of the Great War. Having rediscovered a number of dishes, the Food Hall at Wherstead would like the public to bring in their own war-time recipes this Saturday 26th, and they will endeavour to reproduce a selection to try on Saturday 2nd August.

Suffolk Food Hall's starting point was a food economy campaign supported by the Ministry of Food during WW1 which published a pamphlet called 'The Win-The-War Cookery Book'. This carried the message: *'Women of Britain ... Our soldiers are beating the Germans on land. Our sailors are beating them on the sea. You can beat them in the larder and the kitchen'* and is one example of the vital role the Home Front played in the war effort. The book contains waste-reducing advice (which has relevance to some of the excessive consumption of today), substituted versions of traditional recipes, and ingredients that are clearly out of vogue such as cow heel, maize meal and dripping. One example the Food Hall plans to recreate is the Fish Sausage which, by all accounts, tastes better than it sounds as it's like a fishcake croquette.

The system of rationing in Britain was in fact first introduced during WW1, to share food more fairly. Even King George and Queen Mary had ration books showing how much food they were allowed to buy including sugar, meat, flour, butter, margarine and milk. Some of the poorest families, however, found rationing left them better-fed than before the war. The First World War also produced some new foods: the first 'cuppa-soup', tinned tuna, custard powder and corned beef (that came with the advice; 'if it hisses when you pierce the tin, it's gone off' !

During World War 1 the first Victory Gardens were encouraged in Britain as a means of producing food when German U-Boats were cutting normal supply routes of imported food and men were being sent from the farmland to the Western Front. This Home Front model was recreated in World War 2 as the 'Dig for Victory' campaign. The army also organised the growing of food just behind the battle lines and medals were awarded for the best vegetables grown on the Western Front. (An exhibit at the Garden Museum in Lambeth has such medals on display this year along with photos and recreated battleline gardens.)

Andrew Robertshaw, curator at the Royal Logistic Corps Museum, has produced a guide to the food eaten by British soldiers of the First World War, complete with recipes. "Feeding Tommy" contains many now largely forgotten dishes, such as beef tea, mutton broth, brawn, potato pie and duff pudding, but also chronicles that British soldiers often had a better diet when fighting. Due to the mix of cultures in WW1, cuisines from across the Empire became more common. With influence from the Indian Army, curry made stews more palatable (particularly when cold) and other variations were produced for the Chinese, the Egyptian and the Fijian Labour Corps.

Suffolk Food Hall has discovered that some of the recipes must have been very plain, which is why cooks were taught to look for nettles, sweet docks, wild mushrooms and marigold flowers with which to season dishes. Other tips were promoted such as not boiling cabbage with a lid on to concentrate food into a soup; pricking sausages and plunging them into boiling water for five minutes before frying to make them more digestible; and adding a piece of fat to prevent greens from boiling over. Army cooks were also taught to make bacon go twice as far by dipping the rashers into flour or oatmeal, to prevent too much fat being lost.

Although there were interesting recipes, records show that the men were able to supplement army offerings with food sent from at home and behind from the front line. Soldiers also frequently ate at '*estaminets*', a combination of cowshed and a café. Such establishments helped change our language with terms such as *plonk* from *vin blanc* and also popularised staples such as the humble egg and chips; cheap food not widely on offer in the army.

Robert Paul, a director at the Suffolk Food Hall, commented 'that these little pieces of history had such a profound effect on our culinary culture that they must be collected and remembered, so we do hope that people will bring snippets to the Food Hall this weekend and we'll see how we can compile them'. Further details are at www.suffolkfoodhall.co.uk/events

[The Win-The-War Cookery Book](http://www.pinterest.com/greatfoodmag/1918-win-the-war-cookery-book/) ~ www.pinterest.com/greatfoodmag/1918-win-the-war-cookery-book/

[More about the Suffolk Food Hall](http://www.suffolkfoodhall.co.uk) ~ www.suffolkfoodhall.co.uk

Since opening in May 2007, the Suffolk Food Hall has quickly established itself as an exemplar for local food. The business was started by Suffolk farmers who became frustrated that friends often had limited access to much of the fresh and locally produced food. The Suffolk Food Hall brings together the best local food and drink specialists and has a wide selection including an artisan bakery, traditional butcher, fishmonger, delicatessen and much more.

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