

CHAPTER FOURTEEN

Leaches

Derived from the Old French *lesche*, the medieval leach was simply a slice. It might be cut from a joint of meat, but there were numerous recipes for binding various ingredients into a solid mass which could then be sliced, dished, coated in a piquant sauce, and garnished ready for the table. Some recipe manuscripts have whole sections dedicated to these ‘Leche Vyaundes’ or ‘sliced foods’, some being of meat or fish set with their own juices, or combinations of various foods set with eggs, rice flour, breadcrumbs, curds, cheese, or blood.¹ For the cook, they had the great advantage of being able to be prepared well before a meal was to be served, most being cold dishes, sometimes ‘revived’ with a hot sauce just before being sent to the table. For the diner, meanwhile, they provided a whole range of well-flavoured, delicate dishes, all easy to cut, masticate and digest, even with poor teeth. The following recipes include meat, fish, egg and cereal leaches, those for posset and curd leach being in the dairy chapter (p. 84) and for sweet leaches and gingerbreads in the confectionery chapter (p. 343).

MANGE MOLEYNNE²

This title probably comes from the French *manger*, ‘food’, and *moleine*, ‘soft’, which describes its consistency, when compared to that of cooked meats.

<i>8oz/225g raw chicken, finely chopped/minced</i>	
<i>2tbs ground almonds</i>	<i>1tbs lard</i>
<i>3tbs rice flour</i>	<i>1tbs sugar</i>
	<i>9 blanched almonds</i>

COOKING AND DINING IN MEDIEVAL ENGLAND

Grind the almonds with $\frac{1}{4}$ pt/150ml water, strain off the almond milk, mix with the chicken, the rice flour and lard, and simmer gently for 10 minutes, while stirring continuously.

Remove from the heat, stir in the sugar, pour into a rinsed dish, and leave to set.

Cut the pâté into slices, and stud each with three almonds fried golden brown.

BLANCHE BRAWN³ [PORK PÂTÉ]

<i>1lb/450g pork shoulder</i>	<i>1tbs sugar</i>
<i>2oz/50g ground almonds</i>	<i>1tsp salt</i>

Grind the almonds in $\frac{3}{4}$ pt/450ml water, and strain the almond milk through a cloth into a pan.

Finely mince the pork, stir into the almond milk along with the sugar and salt, then simmer for some 30 minutes, stirring continuously until it is so stiff that if pushed against the side of the pan, it will not flow back again. [Two teaspoonsful of gelatine sprinkled in with the pork helps to compensate for the lean, tender nature of modern pork.]

Press into a freshly-rinsed bowl, leave to cool and set, then slice and serve.

BRAWN IN CONFITE⁴ [SPICED PORK PÂTÉ]

Follow the above recipe, but simmer the pork for $1\frac{1}{4}$ hours, before mincing it. Add $\frac{1}{2}$ tsp ground clove and 1tsp each of ground cinnamon and ginger at the same time as you add the sugar. After that, hang up in a muslin to drain for a few hours before slicing.

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CHARLET FORCED⁵

<i>8oz/225g cooked pork</i>	<i>5tbs ground almonds</i>
<i>1pt/600ml milk</i>	<i>1tbs rice flour</i>
<i>4 eggs, lightly beaten</i>	<i>1tbs sugar</i>
<i>pinch of saffron</i>	<i>2tbs parsley, finely chopped</i>

Grind the almonds with $\frac{1}{2}$ pt/300ml water, strain off the almond milk, and mix a little of this with the pork, before grinding it to a smooth paste.

Thoroughly mix the pork, milk, eggs, saffron and parsley in a pan, bring to the boil while stirring continuously, simmer for 5 minutes, then leave to cool a little, before hanging up in a cloth until completely drained, cold and set firm.

Slice the charlet, arrange in a dish, and pour over it a sauce made by simmering the rest of the almond milk, rice flour, sugar and saffron together for a few minutes.

CHARLET COUNTERFEITED OF FISH⁶

<i>8oz/225g cooked haddock or cod</i>	<i>2tbs white wine vinegar</i>
<i>8oz/225g ground almonds</i>	<i>2tbs [sweet white?] wine</i>
<i>2tbs sugar</i>	<i>$\frac{1}{4}$tsp mixed ground ginger,</i>
<i>pinch of saffron</i>	<i>mace and cinnamon</i>

Grind the almonds with 1pt/600ml water, and strain off the almond milk through a cloth.

Beat the fish to a smooth paste, having removed all bones, stir in $\frac{1}{2}$ pt/300ml of the almond milk, 1tbs sugar and the saffron, and heat to boiling, stirring continuously.

Remove from the heat, stir in the vinegar, leave to stand for 10 minutes, then pour into a piece of muslin, and hang up in a cool place to drain for an hour or two, then press it into a deep dish, and leave for a further hour.

Turn the charlet out of its muslin onto a clean board, cut across into slices, and arrange in a dish.

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Heat the remaining almond milk and sugar with a little more saffron. Bring to the boil, remove from the heat, stir in the wine, and pour this sauce over the sliced charlet.

Mix the spices into a further 2tsp sugar, and sprinkle on top just before serving.

POTTAGE WASTERE [WHELK LEACH]⁷

<i>8oz/225g cooked whelks</i>	<i>a few drops red food colour</i>
<i>2tbs ground almonds</i>	<i>(for sanders)</i>
<i>1tbs honey or sugar</i>	<i>2tbs rice flour</i>
<i>pinch of saffron</i>	<i>a little ground ginger & sugar</i>

Grind the almonds with $\frac{1}{4}$ pt/150ml water, then strain off the almond milk.

Grind the whelks to a smooth paste with the almond milk, and stir in the sugar or honey, saffron, red food colour and rice flour, then bring to the boil, stirring continuously, until quite thick.

Press the mixture into a freshly-rinsed basin, leave in a cool place until cold and firmly set, then turn out onto a board, and slice with a freshly-rinsed knife.

Arrange the slices on a dish, sprinkle with a little ground ginger mixed into sugar, and a few red comfits, if available.

HAGGIS

Haggis was made in England from at least the 1420s through to the middle and late nineteenth century. Its supposedly unique Scottish character was invented as part of that country's Romantic revival in the reign of George IV. Traditional English versions recorded from the seventeenth century onwards are based on oatmeal, mutton-suet, dried fruits and herbs such as parsley and thyme all cooked in a sheep's stomach, and it is probable the medieval peasant versions were of similar composition.⁸ Those appearing in fifteenth-century recipe books contain richer and more delicate ingredients, such as eggs, breadcrumbs, cream and ground

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pork. To make them could apparently be a full-time occupation, the *Catholicum Anglicum* of 1483 translating 'An Hagas maker' as a *tucetarius* (sausage-maker). Texts such as the *Liber Cocorum* and *The Noble Boke of Cookery* describe chopping sheep's hearts, parboiled gut and the like for their haggis, but since these ingredients are now generally unavailable, the following medieval recipes are more suitable for today's use. The sheep stomachs originally used may be replaced by fine linen or muslin pudding-cloths or bags as specified in the ffraunt hemelle and leach Lombard recipes below. These are of particular interest, since they show that the pudding-cloth was of early fifteenth century date, if not even earlier, rather than being a late-Tudor English invention, as often stated.

FFRAUNT HEMELLE⁹

[AN EGG, MEAT AND BREADCRUMB PUDDING]

<i>4 eggs, lightly beaten</i>	<i>pinch of saffron</i>
<i>5oz/140g minced cooked meat</i>	<i>¼tsp mixed ground pepper,</i>
<i>5oz/140g white breadcrumbs</i>	<i>ginger and clove</i>

Mix the dry ingredients, make a well in the centre, pour in the eggs, and stir to make a smooth mixture.

Take a piece of fine linen or muslin, rinse it, squeeze it, shake it out flat, and dust with plain flour.

Heap the mixture in the centre, draw up the cloth around it, tie tightly, plunge into a deep pan of boiling water, and simmer for 45 minutes.

Drain the pudding, turn out, and grill or broil to give the exterior a light colour just before serving.

AN ENTRAIL [A PORK, CHEESE AND EGG PUDDING]¹⁰

<i>1lb/450g lean pork, finely ground</i>	<i>pinch mixed spice</i>
<i>4oz/100g grated cheese</i>	<i>¼tsp salt</i>
<i>4 eggs, lightly beaten</i>	

Cook as above, simmering for 1 hour.

LEACH LOMBARD¹¹

<i>1lb/450g lean pork</i>	<i>4 dates, stoned & chopped</i>
<i>3 eggs</i>	<i>¼tsp ground pepper</i>
<i>2tbs sugar</i>	<i>¼tsp ground cloves</i>
<i>4oz/125g raisins</i>	<i>¼tsp salt</i>
<i>2oz/50g currants</i>	

Finely mince the pork, mixing in the beaten eggs and other ingredients, tie in a cloth which has been scalded, squeezed, shaken flat, and dusted with flour, and boil for 30–40 minutes, until firmly set and cooked.

Turn the meat out onto a board, carve in the manner ‘of a peskodde’, and arrange on a dish.

To make the accompanying sauce take:

<i>4oz/125g raisins</i>	<i>pinch of saffron</i>
<i>¼pt/150ml red wine</i>	<i>a few drops red food colour</i>
<i>¼pt/150ml almond milk</i>	<i>(for sanders)</i>
<i>pinch of ground pepper & clove</i>	

Grind the raisins to a smooth paste with the wine, add the remaining ingredients, and simmer for 2–3 minutes.

Stir in:

<i>¼pt/150ml red wine</i>
<i>¼tsp mixed ground ginger and clove</i>

Bring almost to the boil, pour over the leach, and serve.

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PUDDINGS

Medieval ox and sheep puddings were made by enclosing their fresh blood, chopped internal fat and oatmeal groats in short lengths of their large intestine, these being boiled until cooked. They were virtually identical to today's black puddings, except that the groats may now be replaced with pearl barley, or omitted completely. They were broiled [grilled] just before being served, and probably eaten with mustard.

EGG LEACHES

Eggs were particularly useful for making leaches. At their simplest, they merely enriched thick starchy cereal leaches, but many leaches were either very thick egg custards, or pressed masses of enriched scrambled eggs.

CUMIN¹²

<i>2oz/50g ground almonds</i>	<i>1 raw egg yolk</i>
<i>6tbs cornflour (for amydon)</i>	<i>1 hard boiled egg yolk</i>
<i>1tbs ground cumin</i>	<i>1tbs sugar mixed with pinches</i>
<i>2tbs sugar or honey</i>	<i>of ground ginger, mace</i>
<i>½tsp salt</i>	<i>and clove</i>

Grind the almonds with $\frac{3}{4}$ pt/450ml water and strain off the almond milk into a pan.

Slake the cornflour in a little cold water then stir it into the almond milk with the cumin. Simmer slowly for 10 minutes, stirring continuously, before removing from the heat and beating in the raw egg yolk, sugar or honey, and salt, and pouring the mixture into a freshly-rinsed dish.

When cold, slice the leach into a dish, and sprinkle with the crumbled hard-boiled yolk, the sugar and the spices.

CREAM BOIL¹³ [A SLICED BOILED CUSTARD]

½pt/300ml single cream
4 egg yolks
[1tbs cornflour]

pinch of salt
borage flowers for decoration

Beat the yolks, salt and cornflour into the cream [the original recipe has no cornflour, but its presence will help the inexperienced cook to produce a smooth custard, rather than a mass of hard egg curds].

Heat the mixture gently, stirring continuously, until just boiling, then dip the base of the pan into cold water, and pass the custard through a sieve into a freshly-rinsed bowl. Leave to set in a cool place.

Wet the top surface of the custard, turn it out onto a freshly-rinsed dish, cut into slices with a wet knife, and decorate with the flowers.

MILK ROASTED¹⁴

Follow the above recipe, replacing the cream with milk, and omitting the cornflour, boiling the mixture until curdled, then hanging the curds in a piece of muslin until they have drained and set into a solid mass.

Cut the curd into thick slices, grill on a greased grid-iron, and serve.

LET LARDES¹⁵

This was similar to the above recipe, except that the egg curds were enriched with small cubes of fat cut from boiled bacon joints, and usually built up in layers of different colours and flavours, perhaps just green, red and yellow, or, as here, with black, white and purple too. The coloured curds might also be mixed to give a marbled effect. The curds were probably pressed firm

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and dry in a small wooden or pottery curd mould lined with muslin, but a similar utensil may be obtained today by drilling a number of holes around the sides and base of a plastic box some 4 inches/10cm across, similarly lined with muslin.

<i>12 eggs, beaten</i>	<i>2tbs chopped parsley</i>
<i>2pt/1.2l milk</i>	<i>2tbs fried black pudding</i>
<i>1tsp salt</i>	<i>a few drops of red and purple</i>
<i>2oz/50g fat from boiled bacon</i>	<i>food colour (for sanders</i>
	<i>and turnsole)</i>

Chop the fat very finely, beat into the milk with the eggs and salt, and divide this mixture into six separate pans. Mix the saffron into one, grind the parsley into another, the black pudding into the third, the red and the purple into the fourth and fifth respectively, and leave the sixth plain.

Heat each pan in turn, stirring the contents until they have formed a firm curd, pour off the whey, and pack each coloured curd in turn into the box, finally putting a weight on top, and leaving them to set into a solid mass.

Turn the curds out onto a board, cut into thick vertical slices to show stripes of all the colours, and either arrange on a dish, or grill or fry and serve hot.

VIAND DE LEACH¹⁶

These recipes are characterized by the mixing of a soft posset-curd of milk with ale or wine with rather firmer egg-curd or fresh curds from the dairy.

<i>1pt/600ml white wine</i>	<i>1pt/600ml full cream milk</i>
<i>8 egg yolks, beaten</i>	<i>½pt/300ml ale</i>
<i>pinches of ground clove, ginger,</i>	<i>2tbs sugar</i>
<i>cinnamon and saffron</i>	

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Beat the yolks, clove, ginger and saffron into the wine and gently heat, while stirring, until it forms a curd. Strain off the whey through a fine cloth.

Heat the milk almost to boiling, pour in the cold ale from a height, leave for a few minutes to cool, then strain off the whey through a fine cloth.

Mix both curds together with the sugar, cinnamon and ginger. Tip into a muslin bag, hang up to drain, then press to firmness under a weight.

Turn out the curds, slice and arrange on a dish.