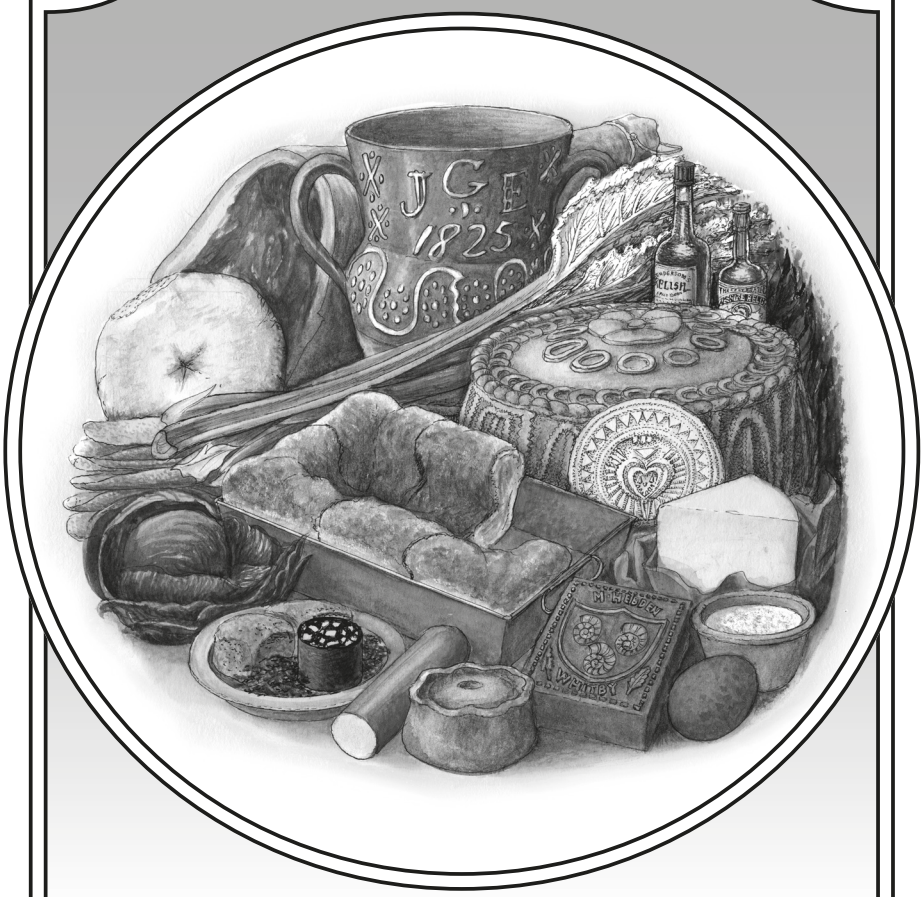
TRADITIONAL FOOD IN YORKSHIRE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Traditional Food in Yorkshire

PETER BREARS

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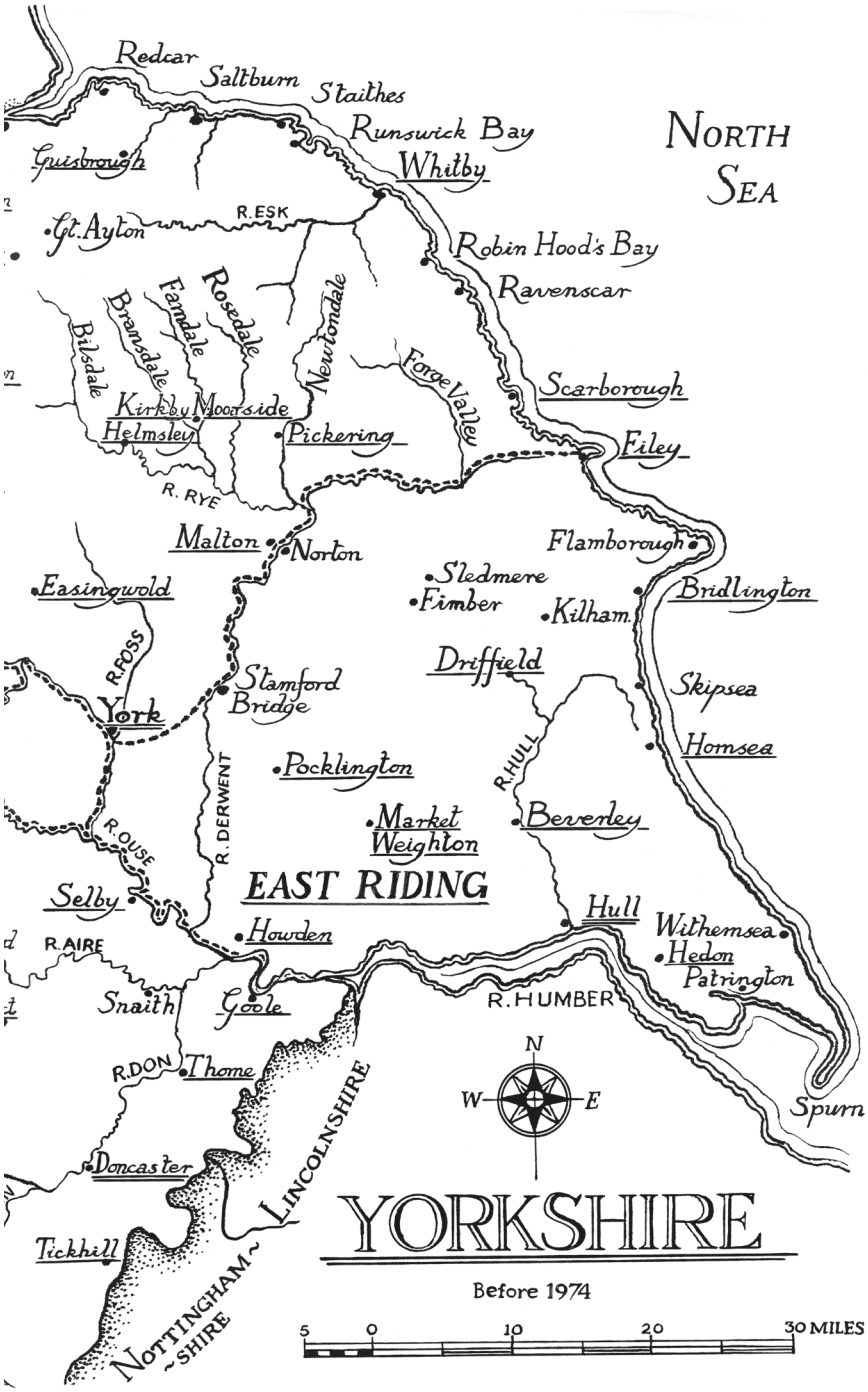
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Peter Brears

INTRODUCTION

This book tells the story of the life and food of the working people of Yorkshire between around 1800 and 1920. During this period most inhabitants of this massive 6,000 square-mile county experienced years of unprecedented changes. At its start, their lifestyles still followed many traditions and practices which had hardly changed since the Middle Ages. Most communities were long-established and static. They grew their own foods and cooked them to centuries-old recipes passed on from one generation to the next solely by means of practical experience. This created an intense relationship between each community and its particular environment, whether on the chalk Wolds, the limestone Dales, the gritstone south Pennines, the coal-measures of the West Riding or the Jurassic sea-cliffs of the North Yorkshire coast.

As vividly portrayed in Professor Moorman's *A Dalesman Litany*, the rapid transformation of the major towns of south and west Yorkshire into the world's major steel-working, engineering and wool-textile region, together with the development of Hull as a great international port, affected everyone. For the first time over a thousand years many people had to move as their traditional lifestyles became untenable, thousands being forced into the insanitary backstreets of the manufacturing towns, there to live in foul conditions and on starvation wages;

> It's hard when folk can't find their wark
> Wheer they've bin bred an' born,
> When I were young I awlus thowt
> I'd bide 'mong roots an' corn
> But I've bin forced to work i'towns
> So here's my litany:
> Frae Hull an' Halifax, an' Hell,
> Gooid Lord, deliver me!

As the century progressed, the quality and quantity of housing and food improved for some occupational groups, such as the East Riding farmworkers, and the coal miners and textile workers of the West

Riding. However, extreme poverty, bringing malnutrition, ill-health and early death, continued to be a common experience well into the twentieth century.

The first part of this book explores the lifestyles of six contrasting groups of Yorkshire's working communities, detailing their homes, routines, meal-times and foods. This illustrates the rich diversity of human experience to be found here at this period, a great contrast to the relative uniformity experienced both in our own lives, and in those of the standardised 'Victorians' etc. as they are often represented on television and in educational works.

Studies of individual foodstuffs follow next, detailing their histories, their soundly provenanced recipes, and the authentic utensils used in their preparation. Rather than giving transcriptions of the original recipes, which are often hand-written and can be difficult to follow, each is presented in a modernised form. The original ingredients, their relative proportions and methods of preparation have all been exactly retained, but their quantities have frequently been reduced to suit modern needs. Details of measures and oven temperatures are also given in modern form, after having actually cooked each dish, so that they may be authentically prepared and tried today. They are extremely practical, and make the best use of a wide range of raw ingredients, being the product of constant refinement by generations of Yorkshire housewives. They certainly lack the expensive ingredients, elaborate recipes and 'fine-dining' presentation of today's restaurant-style dishes, and are neither 'quirky' nor 'made with a twist' as favoured by many celebrity chefs. Instead, they represent some of the best of England's regional food. Using mainly local ingredients and straightforward methods, they produce a wide range of simple, economical and satisfying dishes ideal for family meals.

The final chapters describe the various foods particularly associated with traditional celebrations. These include the regular round of feasts, fairs and the various Christian festivals which marked the passage of each year, along with those which followed the life of each individual, from birth and marriage through to death.

It should be stressed that this is the story of food as cooked and eaten by ordinary Yorkshire people in their own homes, or for their own communities. It therefore omits most of the old-established but commercially produced specialities of the county, such as Doncaster Butterscotch, Harrogate Toffee, Yorkshire Relish, Fulford Biscuits, or Fat Rascals (the latter, in their present form, being a modern invention). However, it does describe those small-scale producers of

oatcakes, funeral biscuits etc., who supplied formerly home-made foods for those who lacked the necessary time, skill and equipment.

Unlike most books on food and cookery, this volume goes far beyond just recipes. Home-cookery was always far more than just a means of providing meals. It was perhaps the most significant and revealing aspect of domestic life, reflecting the physical, economic and social environment of each family within its community. Its history is that of all Yorkshire people, and through it we can more fully appreciate and experience the challenges and achievements of past generations.

As with many others, my family have lived here for centuries, including Dales farmers, rural craftsmen, girls who worked down the coal-pits, factory workers, and shopkeepers. Perhaps because of this background, I have spent over half a century in recording, preserving, exhibiting and publishing various aspects of Yorkshire's past in its major museums of social history. The greatest of these, both locally and nationally, was the Castle Museum in York.

Set up by the great collector Dr John Kirk of Pickering as the Folk Museum of Yorkshire Life, it had rapidly become accepted as the 'national museum' of all Yorkshire people. Many donated their treasured possessions for long-term preservation and display here for the benefit of all future generations. Continuing the tradition, I made it the most successful provincial museum in Britain, attracting some 900,000 visitors a year, and returning a clear annual profit of some 30 to 50% for the City Council. Since then, thousands of items relating to the life and work of the people of Yorkshire have been removed from display. Not surprisingly, this dog-in-the-manger policy has driven away some two-thirds of its visitors. As a small way of compensating for this loss, and as a means of informing Yorkshire people of their suppressed heritage, the opportunity has been taken to include illustrations of many objects from this and a number of other museum collections. In this way, this book also forms a virtual folk museum of Yorkshire life in miniature, but with the advantage that its accurately researched 'period rooms' and numerous provenanced artefacts will now be permanently available to everyone.

As the reader will discover, the provision and expectancy of good hospitality was of the greatest importance in almost every Yorkshire home. This was clearly expressed in various West Riding 'graces before meat', such as;

God bless us all, an' mak' us able
Ta eit all t'stuff what's on this table!

or;

Fill us guts wi' reet good stuff,
And punch us bums when we've had enough!

these being followed afterwards by;

We thank the Lord for what we've getten
But if more ha' been cutten
Ther' wod more ha' been etten.

To these may be added the West Riding Commandments

See all, hear all, say nowt,
Eit all, sup all, pay nowt,
And if ever tha does owt for nowt,
Do it for thissel'.

As with the county's traditional 'warfare' with neighbouring Lancashire, these graces were usually a source of good-humoured teasing between old friends, never being so blatantly greedy and selfish as they might appear when set down in print. However, they still confirm the need of Yorkshire folk to cook and serve the best food to their families, friends and guests. I hope that those who wish to follow this fine tradition will find plenty to interest them in the following pages.

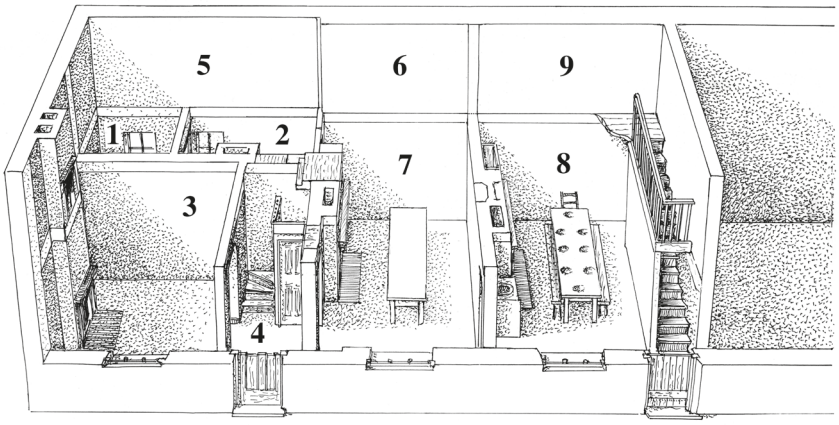
Peter Brears
Leeds 2014

CHAPTER 1

FARM WORKERS OF THE EAST RIDING

In the decades around 1800, the East Riding of Yorkshire rapidly developed into one of the richest agricultural regions of England as thousands of acres of the high chalk Wolds and the bleak flat lands of Holderness were enclosed and improved. As the population of this region was very sparse, and the villages spaced widely apart, it was difficult to assemble adequate workforces to man the new farms which now appeared across the landscape.[1] To solve this problem, the farmers found it most convenient to have many of their labourers living in the farmhouse where they were always readily available for work throughout every daylight hour, and frequently into the night time too.

At the age of eight or nine the East Riding children began to work in the fields, but usually only between spring and harvest, the months from November to March being occupied in daily attendance at school. Due to a chronic shortage of sleeping accommodation, most went into residential service with local farmers when twelve to fourteen years old, although some of the girls became servants in the households of craftsmen and traders in the towns.[2] They gained their employment by attending the 'stattis' or Martinmas hirings held in all the market towns on 23 November each year. Here they stood in the main street or market place while the farmers and their wives passed amongst them looking for suitable lads and lasses. If, after a brief interview, a mutually acceptable agreement was reached, the servant was paid a 'fest', 'God's penny', or earnest money, usually about half a crown, and was thus legally bound to work on the farm throughout the coming year. Although the servants could borrow from the farmer up to half of what they had earned, they only received their wages at the end of their year's service, just before the next Martinmas hirings. At this time they would pay off their outstanding tailors' and shoemakers' bills etc., and either remain with their current employer for another year's service or return to the hirings to try to find a new place of work. The week following the hirings was their only period of holiday, usually being spent at their own homes, where the greatest family reunion of the year took place. The Sunday of this week was celebrated as



2. In some East Riding farmhouses the servants' meals were served in hollows carved into the top of the table. At Vessey Pasture Farm on the Wolds Henry and Matilda Meggison and their family occupied the left end of the house:

1. Pantry
2. Scullery
3. Sitting Room
4. Hall & Staircase
5 & 6. Family Bedrooms
7. Farmer's Kitchen

while the four farm servants and a groom-lad slept in the dormitory (9) and took their meals along with three day-labourers in the men's kitchen to the right (8).

'Rive-kite-Sunday' – literally tear-stomach Sunday – when the mother prepared the best dinner in her power for her offspring. If possible, a goose might be roasted, and a hot ale posset prepared from spiced ale, sweetened with treacle, although some preferred gin, hot water and treacle.[3]

Having carried his box of clothing to his new place of work, the young farm servant found himself in a society where living conditions,

hierarchy and discipline were maintained with an almost military strictness. At the top of the structure was the farmer, master, or gaffer, who frequently appointed a foreman or hind to supervise the working of the farm. Depending on the size and wealth of the establishment, either the farmer or the foreman would provide accommodation for the farm servants.

Around 5 a.m. the men would rise and dress in their chamber, a large barrack room with scrubbed floors and a number of double beds, which was entered from the floor below by means of a staircase or a broad-tread ladder with a handrail.[4] After working the stable for an hour, getting the horses ready for the field, the men returned around 6 a.m. or 6.30 a.m. for breakfast in the farm kitchen. This room had a large cooking range at one end, and a long white-wood table with benches down each side. Early in the nineteenth century the thick table tops were carved out to provide a series of plate-sized hollows about two inches deep into which the broth, meat and vegetables were poured before being eaten with wooden spoons. The whole table was then well washed with hot water and soda, although in some houses wisps of straw were used for the rough cleaning. By the middle of the century these tables had been replaced by the usual plank-topped variety on which wooden trenchers were laid for each man.[5] White earthenware plates had come into use by the 1890s, but cutlery continued to be fairly rudimentary, the men using their own clasp knives at table in preference to the knives and forks used elsewhere.[6]

At breakfast, as at all meals, the head of the household occupied the head of the table, from where he carved and served the meat to the men in strict order of precedence; first, the head horseman, waggoner, or 'wag', then the third man or 'thoddy', the fourth man or 'fowaty', and finally their respective lads. If the carver was really skilful, he would flick the slices of meat from the point of his knife directly on to each plate in turn.[7] Along the table, there would be a number of curd tarts or fruit pies containing jam, apple, dates, figs, plums or prunes according to the season.[8] Each man helped himself to slices of pie, always finishing one pie before starting another, and always cutting the pie in the distinctive East Yorkshire manner. Holding the plate steady with two fingers on the edge of the pie, the first cut was made from the centre to the left side of the fingers, a second cut then being made from half an inch short of the centre to the right side of the fingers. Each succeeding cut was made in the same way, proceeding anti-clockwise around the pie, until the last slice was left with a hexagonal piece at the centre. This method ensured that everyone

3. These baking dishes, plates, mugs and milk-bowl of colourful sponge-ware were all used in the men's kitchen of a Wolds farmhouse.

had the same proportion of crust to filling, and also that no one ever handled anyone else's piece of pie. If a man failed to cut the pie in this way he would receive a sharp crack across the back of the knuckles with the flat slide of the table knife, together with a warning not to 'cut all't guts out o' that pie lad!' [9]

By 7 a.m. breakfast was finished and the men and horses were setting off for work in the fields, returning again at noon for dinner. This was a substantial meal of beef, vegetables and puddings, its actual content varying from farm to farm as may be seen in the table opposite.

In the eastern parts of Holderness a large dish of fried bacon or ham with plenty of rich brown gravy might be set in the middle of the table with a supply of hot 'light cakes'. Pieces of cake were then broken off and dipped into the dish before being eaten with the fingers, although spoons were being used for this purpose by the 1870s. For pudding there could be rice, plum duff or 'spotted dog' with custard, or a very large suet pudding into which a deep hole was cut and filled with treacle. This pudding was then cut into portions, leaving the hole containing the treacle intact so that each person could dip each mouthful into the hot molten syrup before carrying it to his mouth.[14] After working from 1 p.m. to 5:30 p.m. supper was served, this being a similar meal to breakfast. Then, once the horses had been fed, cleaned, and bedded down for the night, there might be a little

EAST RIDING FARM SERVANTS' DIETS

	General view of Agriculture, 1812[10]	Cooper Hall Farm, Skerne, 1840s[11]	Royal Commission Labour, 1893	Mr Jordan's Eastburn 1920[12]	Farm near Driffield, 1914[13]
Breakfast	Cold meat or fruit pies or cheesecakes, Milk.	Wheatmeal bread, beef bacon, Basin of Milk.	Boiled beef, bacon, bread, cheese, fruit pies and Milk.	Cold beef and bacon, fruit pie, Boiled Milk.	Cold beef, fruit pies, Basin of tea.
Dinner	Hot meat pie or boiled beef and dumplings, Small beer.	Sundays, Tuesdays & Thursdays: beef & bacon, hot rice & apple dumplings sweetened with treacle. Mondays, Wednesdays & Fridays: as above but with meat pies instead of beef & bacon.	Sundays: Soup, suet pudding and roast beef. Weekdays: Beef or meat pie, fruit pies.	Beef pie or boiled beef twice a week & roast beef on Sundays with potatoes, another vegetable, rice pudding & fruit pie.	1st course: basin of broth. Main courses: Sunday: Roast beef, potatoes and turnips, Yorkshire pudding with gravy or treacle. Monday: Cold beef, potatoes and turnips, plum duff and thin custard. Tuesday: Broth of beef, potatoes, turnips and dumplings, boiled together. Wednesday: Roast beef | with veg. etc.| Thursday: Bacon cakes | with veg. etc.| Friday: Beef | with veg. etc. | and duff. Saturday: Hash.
Supper	Cold meat or fruit pies or cheesecakes, Milk.	Wheatmeal bread, beef, bacon, & a basin of boiled milk.	Boiled beef, bacon, bread, cheese, fruit pies and milk.	Cold beef & bacon, fruit pie. Boiled milk.	Cold beef and fruit pies

time for conversation, a game of cards, darts, or nine men's morris, or, on summer evenings, some extemporised cricket or quoits before going to bed.[15] Even so, leisure time was almost non-existent, the men working virtually every daylight hour throughout the year.

As Charles Howard noted in 1835, 'there are few countries where [the farm servants] and the labourers work harder'. Long hours of strenuous work demanded a wholesome diet, even though one commentator noted rather peevishly that although 'one cannot grudge good and abundant food to young growing fellows working hard – yet one cannot disguise the fact that they are sumptuously fed and are frightfully dainty ...' [16]

The work of the farm girls was just as strenuous as that of the men. Between 5 and 6 a.m. perhaps twenty cows had to be brought up to the farmstead, milked and the dairy work of straining the milk, setting the cream and churning the butter commenced. The fires had to be lit and the ovens made hot enough to bake all the bread and pies required by the household, up to eight stone of flour, a stone of bacon and a whole sheep regularly being consumed each week, with some forty standing pies made at a single baking. Then the potatoes had to be washed and the 'fire-eldin' gathered to heat the copper in which they were boiled. On wash-day work might have to start as early as 1 a.m. in order to complete the laundry for the farmer's family and servants by late afternoon. These duties, together with housework, nursing the children and looking after the poultry were onerous enough, but the farm girls were also expected to play an active part in running the farm itself, pulling and topping and tailing turnips, raking 'wicks', weeding the young corn, and working in the harvest field. It would have been impossible for them to undertake such a formidable amount of sheer hard work without plenty of good, nourishing food, and for this reason they received a similar or identical diet to that provided for their male colleagues.[17]

One of the most important factors in the farm servant's life was the quality and quantity of food provided by his employer – whether he kept a 'good-livin' place' or a 'poor-livin' place'. In the latter, the servants might sing verses about the cook:

> We had an old cook, she was an old snake,
> She baked sike cakes as 'ne' er you c'n eat.
> Bread made of iron, and cakes made of bran,
> They rattled i' your guts like an old tin can
> To my wa-fa-la diddle-da-la-day.

or, about the quality of her standing mutton pies: [18]

Cold Stringy Pie

Down in Yorkshire a farmer did dwell,
They called him Yaddy 'Ughes, you all know him well.
He keeps four servants it aint any lie
He feeds them up on cowd stringy pie
Singing fal-de-diddle-i-do, fal-de-diddle-dee.

He has nine hosses and they're that thin
You can count every bone as it ligs in their skin
There's four thick in't leg and five swung in't back
And he drives them along with a wharve-gee-back
Singing fal-de-diddle-i-do, fal-de-diddle-dee.

He gets lads up at half-past five
To gan to't stable to see if they're still alive
He feeds 'em on oats, an he feeds 'em on bran
And it rattles in their guts like an old tin can
Singing fal-de-diddle- i-do, fal-de-diddle-dee.

One day I hear him to't shepherd say
We had an old ewe died three weeks today
Fetch her up, Bullocky, fetch her up on't sly
It'll make these lads some rare mutton pie
Singing fal-de-diddle-i-do, fal-de-diddle-dee.

They fetched her up and they boiled her in't pot
She came on't table reeking hot
Mawks craw led ower her inches thick,
Owd Yaddy had a lad knocking em off wi' a stick
Singing fal-de-diddle-i-do, fal-de-diddle-dee.

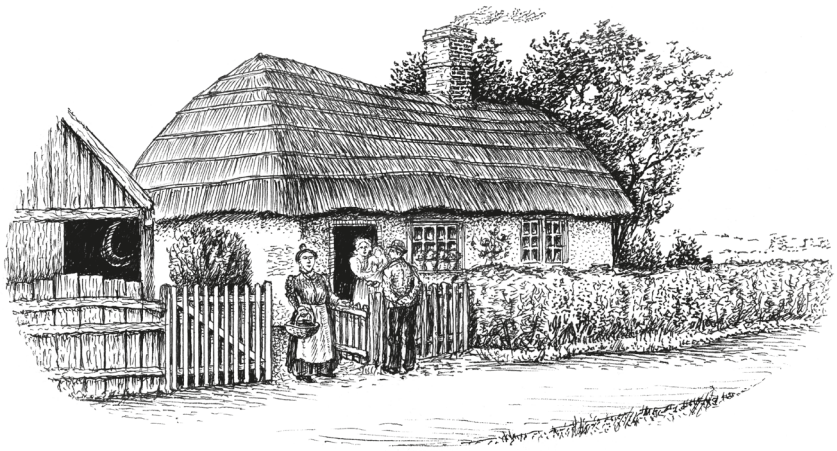
How if any of you lads 'ud like to learn how to plough
Gan to bold Yaddy's he'll soon show you how
He keeps you at it the live-long day
He expects you to plough forty acres every day
Singing fal-de-diddle- i-do, fal-de-diddle-dee.

The farm servants who lived in were usually young men and women in their late teens and early twenties. When they married they left the farmhouse and set up new homes in cottages situated either close to the farm or in one of the villages. The men now became labourers, being paid by the day, by the week, or, at harvest, by piecework.[19] If they lived near the farm they might go home for their meals, or carry their food to work wrapped first in a white cloth and then in a red handkerchief.[20] Since many could only find cottages some miles away from their work, the farmers arranged to provide all their meals after deducting about a third of their wages. Where necessary, they could also stop overnight, one Neswick farmer stating that he 'provided beds for the men if they want them, they usually go home on Wednesday and Saturday'.[21]

At harvest time, when a greatly enlarged labour force was required, day-labourers from the North and West Ridings, particularly from Richmond, Knaresborough and the western dales, travelled to Malton, where they were hired for work in the Wolds and Holderness.[22] During the harvest, when long hours were worked in the fields, 'lowance' was carried out from the farm around 9.30 a.m. and 3.30 p.m. It could include currant pasty, sad cake, very short, hot, and running with butter, bread and cheese, and bacon or ham cake which was really a kind of pasty.[23]

This was all washed down with home-brewed beer carried into the field in two-gallon stoneware bottles sheathed within neat wicker cases. The usual allowance was 1½ pints for each man, two men sharing a pint mugful in the following manner. The first man drank until he could just see the bottom of the mug, after which he passed it to his colleague, who finished the draught. The mug was then refilled, the second man now drinking first, and so on, until they had consumed three pints between them.[24]

The cottages or 'nooks' occupied by the married farm labourers and their families could be basic in the extreme, being described as very uncomfortable and unwholesome hovels not fit to put cattle in.[25] The older examples were simple cruck-framed structures, with whitewashed walls of mud or chalk blocks and steeply sloping thatched roofs. They were 'subject to rapid decay, unless more time and attention are given to them than the generality of farmers is willing to bestow'. As a result the cottagers at Warter had to 'put up with mossy, mouldy thatch, with bulging walls, uneven floors, windows that don't open, and doors which won't shut'. Half the area of their single rooms was occupied by a hearth large enough to accommodate the whole family



4. An East Riding farm labourer's cottage at Routh near Beverley.

around a fire of wood and coal. The wide timber-framed smoke-hood rising above their heads allowed them to amuse themselves by betting odds as to who could see the most stars out of the chimney without rising from their seats.[26]

The later cottages, built from around the mid-eighteenth century, tended to have substantial walls made of brick or sea-cobbles and roofs of thatch or pantiles. From the outside, they presented an aspect of idyllic rural charm, with red-painted woodwork, white-painted window-leads, yellow-ochred doorsills and steps, and bright, colourful flower gardens resplendent with tulips, hyacinths, geraniums and fuchsias.[27] Within, the living room or 'house' and the parlour were floored with brick or a deep layer of beaten cement suitably marked out in rectangles to resemble freestone slabs.[28] The interior decoration and furnishings of one such cottage of the 1840s have been described in some detail by the Rev. Henry Woodcock, who, as a Primitive Methodist minister, frequently lodged with the labourers: 'The house floor, though rough and broken, was washed with rud-coloured water, and tastefully sanded through a cullender, so that beautiful patches, a quarter of a yard apart, adorned the floor, and woe betide the youngster who set his foot on one of these before six p.m. The hearth-stone was as clean as a new pin, and on the whitewashed walls hung pictures of ... Bunyan fighting with Appollyon; Dick Turpin, on his famous mare 'Bess', leaping a five-barred gate; The Rev. William Clowes; Sir Tatton Sykes; a pack of hounds; St Peter holding the keys; James Hall, esq., of Scarbro'. There was a deal dresser, with a shelf above it, on which

5. Elizabeth Brocklebank's depiction of 'A little bit o' baakin!' in a farm kitchen in the Settle area shows apple pies being made on the table, tarts about to go into the oven, and bread rising in pancheons warmed by the fire.

all sorts of crockery, ancient and modern, were tastefully arranged. A set of chairs, with high backs and awkward legs, were arranged around the room; a polished chest of drawers, covered with a bright cloth, with two or three plaster images and glass vases. An eight-days' clock, seven foot high, an heirloom for three generations, told exact time the week round. Right overhead were suspended from the rafters bunches of herbs, mint, garlic, sweet marjoram, sage, sides of bacon, a ham (there was a porker fattening in the sty). The table was covered with a cloth of alabaster whiteness and the knives and forks shone in their polished brightness. Upstairs there was one bed.'[29] Additional accommodation was frequently provided by flooring across the upper part of the roof-space to make a 'cockloft' just large enough to house one or two small beds for the youngest members of the family.[30]

Outside many of the cottages lay an allotment. Here the labourer and his family could grow fruit and vegetables, especially potatoes, in addition to keeping a pig or a cow. The pig provided the family's main source of meat, as well as giving a good cash return if the hams were sold off, while the cow gave a considerable level of support, enabling them to 'live much better than such as are unfortunately compelled to be contented with the washings of the tea-pot, rendered palatable by

treacle, and perhaps a little gin'.[31] The allotment might also be used for keeping poultry, but this could mean that some of the farmer's corn would be 'borrowed' to provide their feed. As Mr Burton of Linton-on-Ouse commented, 'if they get a little corn out of me to feed them, well, I know nothing about it, but I know that anyone who wants to keep a good man must overlook such small leakages.'[32]

The 1812 General Account of the Agriculture of the East Riding records that 'The labourers who supply food for themselves and their families live comfortably in general comparison with those of many of the southern counties. Their bread comprehends the whole of the wheat, except the coarse bran, and is home-made; this they eat with butter, or bacon and potatoes, and they have commonly one meal in the day of fresh meat, or meat-pie. Barley-cake, or a mixture of barley and wheat, is sometimes adopted when wheat is very dear; this is a very wholesome, nutritive, and not unpleasant food.'[33] Later in the century the labouring family's diet became much poorer, the fresh meat and much of the bacon disappearing from the table completely. In some cottages the family had tea, bread and butter for both breakfast and tea, dinner being either: potatoes or bread, with bacon only on three days during the week. In order to sustain his strength, the labourer himself had milk and bread for breakfast and bacon for dinner every day.[34] If any fresh meat was cooked, he alone would eat it at Sunday dinner.

In many East Riding households there was an enormous difference in the quality and quantity of food consumed by the labourer, and that which he could provide for his family. The farmers knew that it was cost-effective to have well-fed labourers, and so kept back six shillings (30p) a week from the man's wages to pay for the food he had at the farm, thus leaving him with only eight shillings (40p) a week to feed, clothe, and house his dependants. As the son of a labourer working on this basis at Nafferton in the 1840s, William Blades could clearly remember his poor and monotonous diet.[35] For breakfast there would be some kind of brown or barley bread and treacle, a basin of water, and possibly an occasional sup of milk. Tea was at a prohibitive price; the nearest approach to it they could ever achieve was when the landlord of the neighbouring inn would give his mother the used tea leaves which produced a drink with the faintest flavour of tea, and might be likened to water 'bewitched' or tainted with smoke. For the children's dinner there would be a kneading bowl on the floor in which were mixed the broth which they got from the farm three days a week, mashed potatoes with pepper and salt, with perhaps a dumpling or two in addition; the children sat round on the floor with wooden spoons and

ate away as quickly as they could, and when the meal was ended their mother would come to them with the words 'Say your grace, and away you go'. The evening meal was similar to breakfast, except that they might have a bit of cheesecake or apple pie in addition.

The Rev. Walter Turner recorded the experience of a similar family living in a cottage at Towthorpe in the middle of the Wolds. The husband had to walk five miles to the farm each morning, arriving there by 5 a.m. and leaving twelve or more hours later, while his wife hoed turnips, tended the corn and kept one of the sickliest of pigs begged from the farmer. She and her children also picked stones from the land, being paid at the rate of a shilling (5p) a ton, with a sad-cake for dinner. With a wage of eight shillings (40p) a week plus his food at the farm, and a wife and six children to support, he could just afford to buy two stones (8.4 kg) of flour each week to feed them largely on bread. All the boys looked forward to getting a job on a farm, where, for the first time in their lives, they would be well fed.

> Hungery? Say ye? i' t'good awd tahmes,
> Aye, bairn, Ah was hungery, allus, at yam [home] when Ah was a lad;
> Bud efter Ah went te farm-pleeacin', ye knaw, things wasn't se bad,
> At ten year awd, i' t'good awd tahmes.
>
> That was salvation i't good awd tahmes,
> We reckoned nowt aboot wark, if we nobbut had plenty te eeat;
> Suet pudden, an' broth, an' baacon, or butcher meat;
> 'Twas grand, was that, i' t'good awd tahmes![36]

Even though the later nineteenth century saw the gradual improvement of the farm labourer's diet, it still remained comparatively plain and simple up until the recent post-war decades when it finally approached the national norm.

CHAPTER 2

FARMWORKERS IN CRAVEN

Craven, the north-western corner of the West Riding extending eastwards from the county boundary across the upper parts of the Ribble, Wharfe and Aire valleys, has a very distinctive character. Its landscape includes the famous three peaks of Ingleborough, Whernside and Penyghent and the Great Scar limestone countryside featuring Malham Cove, Goredale Scar, and Kilnsey Crag. Here thousands of acres of grassland provide probably the finest upland grazing in the whole country, while its glaciated dales are floored with richer soils and clear rivers. These lower areas, with their warmer temperatures, were ideal for settlement and the production of crops to feed people, and hay to feed livestock over the cold months of winter.

As with most farming regions, Craven had been largely self-sufficient for all its foodstuffs through to the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, its farmers earning their living from the sale of cattle, sheep and wool to dealers who travelled to its major markets. Oats, bigg (a kind of barley) and rye were grown on many of the lower fields, where mixed teams of four or six long-horned oxen and one or two horses pulled the ploughs. After being ground at the local mills, these crops provided the local population with all the bread-corn needed to provide a good diet. As Eden reported from Skipton in 1797, their;

> Oatmeal is made into bread, and, sometimes into hasty-pudding [crowdy or porridge] this wholesome and nutritious diet is, however, falling into disuse.

A few years later Dr T.D. Whitaker's *History of Craven* of 1805 similarly confirmed that;

> they all grew oats, which formed the principal article of their subsistence ... Of oatmeal their bread was invariably made, and most of their puddings; and this, mixed with milk, or water when milk was scarce, supplied their breakfasts and suppers.[1]

Rye bread was also made here, being baked in the form of low-domed round loaves, as demonstrated by the name of Rye Loaf given to the flattish rounded hill rising just to the east of Settle. These breads, eaten alongside the plentiful beef, mutton, bacon, butter, cheese, vegetables and honey produced in this idyllic, fresh and verdant landscape, should have continued to keep all the local communities healthy and well-fed. However, this expectation was about to be crushed by development elsewhere.

From around 1800, Lancashire's cotton industry and Yorkshire's woollen industry were rapidly moving from small-scale domestic production up to mechanisation in huge water or steam-powered mills. These in turn promoted coal mines, engineering works, canals, railways and vast new industrial populations who relied on others to produce their food. Lying just north of the major manufacturing towns of both counties, and with huge areas of fertile grazing land, Craven was ideally placed to supply all their beef and mutton. The traditional long-horned cattle of the region were therefore replaced by those of the improved 'Craven' or short-horned breed, the most famous being the Craven Heifer bred by the Rev. W. Carr of Bolton Abbey. When shown in London in 1811 she measured 11 ft 4 in (3.45 m) from nose to rump and weighed a remarkable 178 stones as 'the largest and fattest of her age'.[2] Black Scottish cattle were also fed here, being driven down from the Highlands and Hebrides each year up to the late nineteenth century, by which time most of them were being brought in by rail, Skipton station opening in 1847.

As a result of this trade in breeding and fattening cattle, most Craven farmers were able to enjoy a good standard of living. Early in November they would take a bull or a cow of their own herd, a Scottish beast bought at one of the May or July fairs and fattened up, or else a recently-purchased ox, and slaughter it for their own use. The leg joints and boned and rolled ribs were pickled in brine as a preservative, and then hung up to dry in a beef loft. As found around Ingleton and Langstrothdale, these were open-bottomed boxes measuring about 8 ft by 4 ft 6 ins (2.13–1.37 m) by 1 ft 8 ins (51 cm) high, rising through the ceiling just in front of the chimney breast. Here the beef, along with bacon and hams from a home-killed and cured pig, were hung from twenty to thirty hooks in order to dry out. The bacon and hams were then removed to a cooler place on a ceiling hook or a hanging wooden rack known as a creel much further away from the fireplace. Throughout the winter pieces of the salt beef weighing about a stone, along with pieces of bacon with fat several inches thick, were boiled

in the pot to provide the farmer and his family with hot, nourishing meals. When cold, these joints then reappeared on the table either sliced, or converted into hashes etc.[3] Mr Foster of Beckermonds really enjoyed these meals, recalling how 'It maks mi mouth watter to think on't.' Other families roasted their beef, Mrs Edith Carr of Langcliffe recalling big lumps of it being cooked slowly so that it was really tender, then being put into a dish to keep warm before the fire so that its tin could be used to make the Yorkshire pudding. Then:

> We had a right good do at Sunday dinnertime. What was left was brought out for supper and served as sandwiches. On Monday we ate cold meat and pickles or piccalilli, with mashed potatoes and cabbage. Tuesday, if we'd owt left, it was cut into inch cubes [and stewed] as 'hash'. On Thursday the remnants would be chopped up for a meat and potato pasty. I'd put the bits o' meat in the bottom, with chopped onion, mashed potatoes and turnip on top, well-seasoned and with dots of butter. There'd be nowt left for Friday.

Her baking included loaves, oven bottom cakes, fruit cakes, sponge and oatmeal parkins, and pastries filled with jam, dates, damsons, or raisins, or of currants with chopped mint.[4]

When enjoyed alongside home-grown potatoes, vegetables, cheese, bought-in groceries and preserves, and oatmeal, served as oatcake, crowdy or porridge, the farmers were admirably sustained for their outdoor life on the fells. However, it was not the same for many of their employees.

Since the best profits were to be made from grazing, major landowners such as the Earl of Thanet banned the tenants on his Skipton Castle estates from ploughing their fields.[5] Growing corn here was no longer profitable. Up to this time oats, barley and rye had been grown on most farms, as is shown by the ridge-and-furrowed surfaces which can still be seen today along the lower slopes and bottoms of each valley. Their cultivation required a staff of several full-time farmworkers. Around 1800 each man earned 2s–2s 6d (10–12p) for a 12-hour day, or £10 10s a year (equivalent to 8d a day) if living-in with the farmer and receiving all his food, board and lodging.[6] By converting to grazing most of these workers could be sacked. The use of only one man and a couple of horses now enabled the farmer to manage a seven- or eight-hundred acre farm without any further help,

except for the hay harvest, when he could hire in men as required. As a result of this change, the populations of Austwick, Cracoe, Burnsall, Threshfield, Kettlewell and Starbotton fell by almost half between 1800 and 1891 as former farm staff moved out to work either locally in the lead mines, or left to more distant mills or factories.[7]

As the Rev. Boyd, vicar of Litton, later confirmed, there was now not a single acre of arable land anywhere in his extensive parish.[8] As in most of Craven, all the cereals required for everyday use now had to be bought in, Skipton developing as a major corn market by the 1830s. Some came from the Vale of Pickering and the Wolds by way of the Derwent Navigation from Malton, up the Aire and Calder Navigation to Leeds, and along the Leeds-Liverpool Canal which had reached Skipton in 1773. More came in from the recently enclosed Forest of Knaresborough, over 200 cartloads arriving at the New-market Street market each Saturday.[9] From here the corn was purchased by the town's provision merchants and millers, ground, and distributed up the dales, since most of the local mills stopped grinding after the farmers ceased growing crops.

It might have been expected that the farmworkers who remained in Craven would have benefited from these changes, but this was not to be the case. Their main foods, oatcakes and porridge, being more expensive, since oatmeal had now to be bought in, as were their vegetables, none being grown here as field crops. Even more depressing was the fact that, in this land entirely devoted to the production of beef and mutton, they very rarely tasted any. The livestock they tended was raised for sale, not to feed those who could not afford it. When the Rev. Boyd distributed joints of fresh mutton to local labourers, the response was 'Thank you sir. I haven't had none since that bit you gave me last Christmas'.[10]

This shortage of basic foods in the upper reaches of the dales continued into the 1920s, as described by the Rev. J. Crompton Sowerbutts. He found that although rabbits were plentiful, most were snared by warreners for despatch to the towns, while most of the poultry and pigs raised by the cottagers were sold off to raise cash, only the fat bacon joints and offal being kept for home use. There was a plentiful supply of cheap milk, since transport costs made it unprofitable to send it down to the towns. A few farmers made this into butter and cheese both for their own use and for sale, but most farmworkers lacked sufficient income to buy anything more than the basic hard cheese. Most of the butter, cheese, ham and bacon sold in the villages was relatively expensive, having been brought in

from elsewhere. The same applied to the fruit and vegetables, which had to be bought from the greengrocer's carts which came round once or twice a week.[11] The only free foods available locally were the springtime nettles and the bilberries and mushrooms of late summer and autumn.

Their regular daily diet started with a breakfast of crowdy or porridge, a dinner of bacon, oatmeal or barley pudding and veg, and suppers of either oatcake and tough skim-milk cheese, or roasted potatoes. Around 1915 Martha Hesseltine of Gordale still remembered how her family used to sit around their peat fire on cold, frosty nights; 'we could roast taties in't, mony's the time we've sat i't inglenook and made oar supper o' tatties and buttermilk.'[12] Butter, lard and dripping were frequently in very short supply. Even in the early 1900s Robert Lambert, better known as 'Bob at t'Cam', since he lived at the remote Cam Houses high above the headwaters of the Wharfe, was only able to use a little fat in his oatcakes 'if he could afford it'.[13] For the same reason there were few everyday pastries in Craven, only small semicircular pasties of whole raw egg, perhaps with chopped fried bacon, or of chopped onion.[14] Cheesecakes made with curds, eggs, sugar and currants remained a luxury, only made for special events. When rashers of the fat, dry-salted bacon had been fried, some of the lard might be poured off and used for such bakery. However, the usual practice was to keep it in the pan with the bacon and stir in coarse or medium oatmeal, either on its own or made up as a batter, and continue frying to produce a crisp, nutty-flavoured 'stirabout'.[15]

Such hardship and plain-living was not restricted to the countryside, but was even more severe in Skipton, the capital of Craven. The huge crowds which now come into its shops, market stalls and numerous inns and cafés to enjoy the best of traditional fare, have little concept of the poverty which once existed here. For centuries the marketplace was regularly filled with great herds of cattle and flocks of sheep which rapidly produced profits for the farmers and dealers, but left seas of stinking dung throughout the town. Some of the income generated here was spent on provisions and services provided by local shopkeepers and craftsmen, but little of it came into the hands of the town's poorer inhabitants.

When John Byng came here in 1792, he took 'a stroll about this nasty, filthily-inhabited town, for I never saw more slatterns; or dirtier houses,' in his extensive tour of England. On returning to his inn, the Black Horse, he found only 'a vile supper, for neither bread nor pastry are eatable'.[16] The deprivation of many families was extreme, one

typically having 'only two beds for the whole family of ten, only three sheets and no blankets in the house. The children are about without clothing, being in nothing but rags ... clogs bad, quite through at the bottoms ... nothing to eat in the house but a bit of dry bread.'[17] In 1812 it had been necessary for the local landowners, clergy and gentry to raise a subscription 'for the purpose of providing corn, potatoes, and other provisions, to be sold out, at reduced prices, to the inhabitants of Skipton.'[18] It was not until the rapid expansion of the cotton mills around the middle of the nineteenth century brought in hundreds of new jobs that such poverty began to disappear.