

# CULINARY PROJECT SUMMARY

21<sup>ST</sup> February 2015

Monica Askay, Food historian

The Culinary Project has looked at traditional and current uses of orchard fruits and nuts from our own culinary heritage, and others. It is on-going and will continue with Orchards East. To date it has looked at fruit and nuts grown, old recipes, and cooking methods, from the Anglo-Saxon period (from the fall of the Roman Empire to the Norman Invasion) to the present day. It will also look at earlier uses.

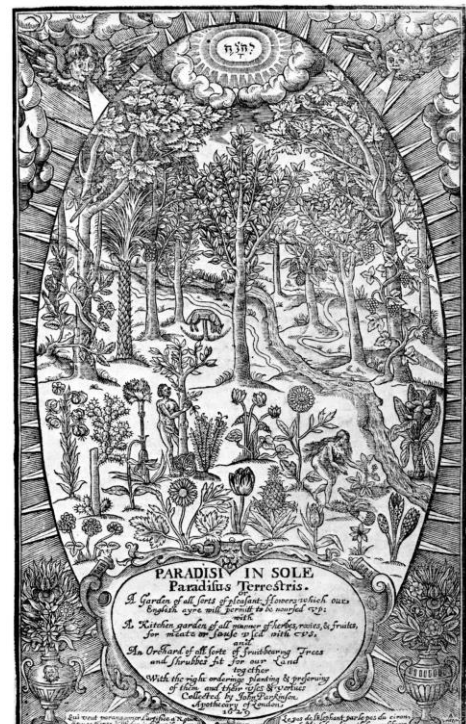
The culinary properties of different apple and pear varieties are being explored. Our ancestors would have stored some longer-keeping fruit so that there would have been some fruit available virtually until the start of the next year's season, without the intervention of refrigeration.

Culinary research has been a combination of academic research into old texts (including our earliest known cookery manuscript "The Forme of Cury" c 1390, the C16th writings of Thomas Tusser, and C17th writings of John Parkinson, John Gerard and John Evelyn) and experimentation with recipes of various periods.

Some attention has been given to culinary definitions. A pippin in culinary terms is a crisp-textured dessert apple with a certain amount of acidity. However, the botanical definition of a pippin is an apple grown from a pip, also sometimes (as in the case of Bramley) called a seedling. A codling is a cooking apple which collapses when cooked. A warden refers to hard cooking pears in general, rather than to a single specific variety. Eliza Acton, brought up in Ipswich, gives recipes in her 1845 "Modern Cookery for Private Families" for Biffins, and for Black Caps, both recipes using Norfolk Beefing apples. Both these recipes have been followed and written about in the STOG newsletter.



Monica Askay, food historian, at Redgrave & Lopham Fen Apple Day Oct 2014



Title page from John Parkinson's book *Paradisi in sole paradisus terrestris* published 1629

The project has covered a range of fruits and nuts as well as apples and pears ----- quince, plums, gages, damsons, cherry plums, medlars, mulberries and cobnuts. Main researches have been with fruit pastes (the origins of our marmalade), fruit leathers (not part of our culinary heritage but from places such as South Africa with warmer climates, where they would be dried in the sun), fruit gins, and the cooking property of various types of warden, as well as uses for mulberries and cobnuts. Verjuice has been another area of research, particularly verjuice made with crab apples. Verjuice was an ingredient much used in medieval cookery in sauces and dressings. It was made either from unripe grapes, or from crab apples, although there are recipes for summer versions using gooseberries or sorrel. In recent years it has seen a revival, thanks to Maggie Beer, a South Australian winemaker. She has produced a grape verjuice and has written a useful recipe book.

All researches are on-going. The more research / experimentation I do, the more it seems there is to discover! Culinary uses of cherries are yet to be explored. The researches have been written about in the STOG newsletter and will form an advice note / notes.

The Culinary Project has also involved input at various events, including Plum and Apple Days. The aim has been to promote the culinary use of orchard fruits and nuts in dishes both savoury and sweet. This has been approached in a number of ways. Cookery demonstrations with tastings have been the main way to achieve this. Many of the results of my experiments were taken to various events for tasting. This included a whole range of fruit leathers made using cherry plums, gages, damsons, medlars (not a success ---- I discovered that it was a very bad idea to use the medlar pulp



Monica Askay at the 'Plum Day' at Home Farm, Thrandeston  
16<sup>th</sup> August 2014.

uncooked as the resultant "leather" had extremely poor keeping qualities and was rather more like old carpet!), apricots, apples, pears and quince. Fruit gins were a popular item for tasting. Fruit gins I have so far experimented with have included various types of damson, and I also made a Quince Vodka which I took for tasting to the Suffolk Show. I did plan to make Mulberry Gin in the autumn but unfortunately was not able to source the necessary mulberries. A definite project for this coming autumn!

Items demonstrated and tasted included a range of savoury vegetable and apple soups, such as Beetroot and Apple, and Squash Apple and Ginger. Plums were also used in savoury recipes such as a salad of chicken with plums and flaked almonds. Other items taken to tastings were Biffins and Eliza Acton's recipe for Black Caps (I have come across other recipes, Hannah Glasse 1747, and Jane Grigson writing in the 1980s, which I have yet to try but will, I think, not be as good as Eliza Acton's which is truly delicious). Fresh cobnuts were fried in oil and sprinkled with salt and spices to serve with drinks. (Incidentally, toasted and

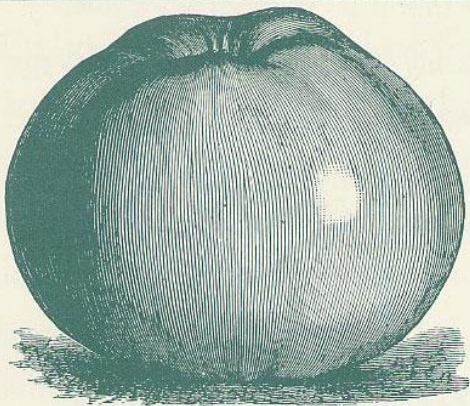
then ground with sage and hazelnut oil, and mixed with grated parmesan, cobnuts make a pesto which is particularly good served with wholemeal spaghetti.)

In the first year, people attending Apple etc Days were asked if they would like to share a favourite recipe. This was something which was rather abstract and people found it hard to come up with anything. This then led on to formal Recipe Swaps where people were asked to bring their favourite fruit or nut dish to share, along with copies of the recipe. This approach has had some success, particularly where volunteers (who ran the swaps, and who brought contributions) participated with enthusiasm. Items brought were mainly preserves and cakes, with a few puddings, and a savoury Cheese and Apple Loaf. Having different dishes to taste acts as an inspiration to people to share their food memories and recipe ideas.

Specific workshops on topics such as different aspects of preserving would seem to be a good way to carry the work forward. Some workshops aimed at children would also work well (I have in other settings run crumble-making activities with children, which worked extremely well).

I look forward to Orchards East and more research!

Monica Askay  
February 2015



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