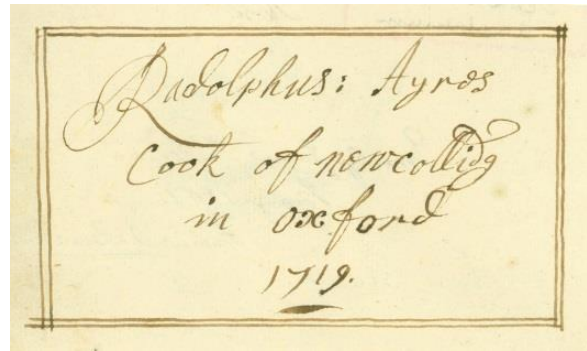


A Taste of the Eighteenth Century

Hidden away in the archives of New College is a small eighteenth-century cookbook with a cover of cartridge paper over thin pasteboard, patterned with an elegant design of swirling green acanthus leaves. The recipes contained in it originate from Radolphus (or Ralph) Ayres, and the cartouche on the verso of the first leaf indicates that Ayres was a cook at New College in the early eighteenth century. The recipes range from such dishes as *Oxford Sausages* and *Collar'd Beef* to *Queen Cakes* and *A quaking Puding*.



Cover of NCA 962
(Photo: Jennifer Thorp)



Cartouche in NCA 962 f. 1v
(Photo: Jennifer Thorp)

I first encountered Ralph Ayres's cookbook while I was Librarian of Oriel College from 2002 to 2017. During this time, I hosted biennial events named 'Edible Exhibitions' in the Oriel SCR, by baking English dessert recipes from past centuries (translating them from Middle English where necessary), writing modern adaptations of them, then circulating these so that others could also contribute baked goods to the event. The recipes I used dated from the fourteenth century (when Oriel was founded) to the early twentieth century.

By the time I was ready to start sourcing eighteenth-century recipes in 2014, one of my friends had kindly given me the beautifully presented modern version of Ralph Ayres's recipes taken from the Bodleian edition of his manuscript cookbook, published in 2006 with an introduction and glossary by Jane Jakeman, and a foreword by David Vaisey.

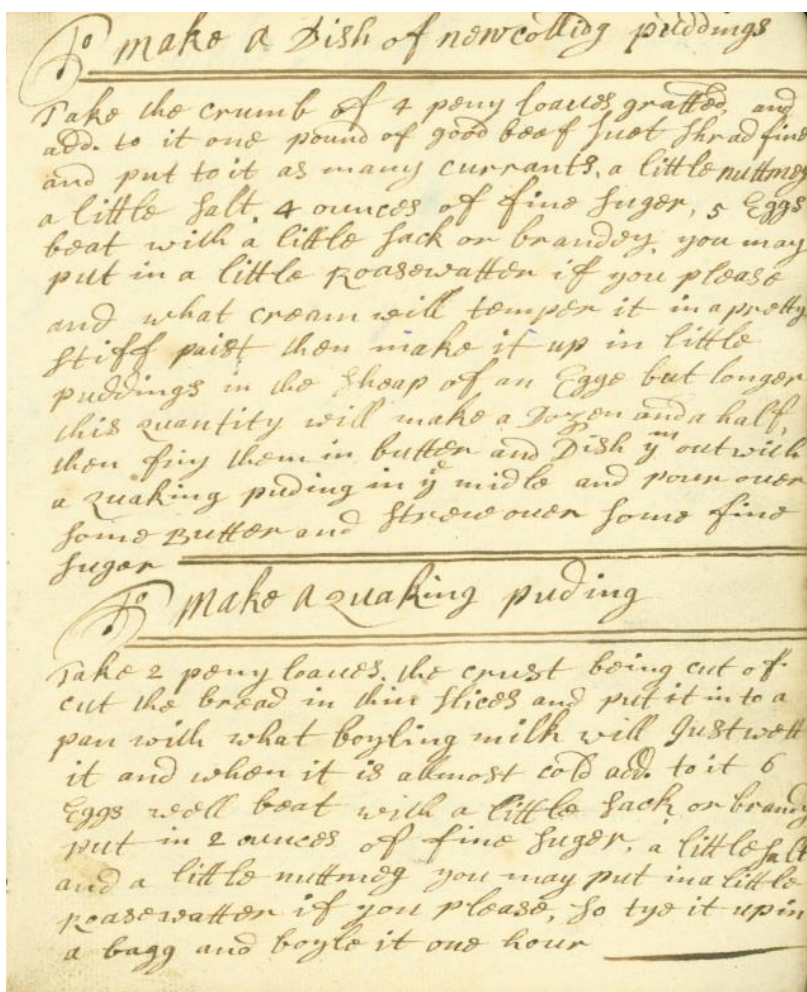
The recipes Ayres recorded were for dishes which would have been served to the members of New College at the time, and would have been similar to those served in Oriel, so I couldn't resist including his little suet puddings (called *Newcollidge puddings*) and *Ginger bread* in the eighteenth-century Edible Exhibition, and we baked batches of them to be enjoyed along with other eighteenth-century sweet dishes.

It seems that there were at least three similar manuscripts of Ayres's recipes believed to have been written around the same time—one at the Bodleian (MS Don. e. 89), with an inscription on the title page reading: 'Radolphus Ayres Cook Oxford 1721'¹; another edited in 1922 by L. G. Wickham Legg and printed for private circulation with the title *A little book of recipes of New College Two Hundred Years ago* which is in the Library of New College (OX1/AYR), and New College's own manuscript NCA 962 which primarily concerns us here.

It was only in the summer of 2018, when I was writing about these recipes, that I had the time to view the New College version of the manuscript. I found that there were several slight differences between the text of this New College version and that of the Bodleian version which I had been consulting, and that there were about a dozen additional recipes written on the verso of ten of the leaves of the New College edition. These textual differences intrigue me, and I would

¹ Ralph (Radolphus) Ayres, *Ralph Ayres' Cookery Book*, with an introduction and glossary by Jane Jakeman (Oxford: Bodleian Library, 2006), p. [6].

be interested in pursuing them when I have more time, but for the present, I shall concentrate on the two recipes I used in the Edible Exhibition at Oriel in 2014.



NCA 962 f. 19r
(Photo: Jennifer Thorp)

To make a Dish of newcollidg puddings

=====
Take the crumb of 4 peny loaves gratted, and
add to it one pound of good beef suet shrad fine
and put to it as many currants, a little nutmeg
a little salt, 4 ounces of fine suger, 5 Eggs
beat with a little Sack or brandey, you may
put in a little Roasewatter if you please
and what cream will temper it in a pretty
stiff paist, then make it up in little puddings
in the sheap of an Egge but longer
this quantity will make a Dozen and a half,
then fry them in butter, and Dish ym out with
a Quaking puding in ye midle and pour ouer
some Butter and strew over some fine
suger =====

Ingredients:

4 oz/ 110g shredded suet
4 oz/ 110g white breadcrumbs
2 oz/ 50g sugar
1 tsp grated nutmeg
A pinch of salt
4 oz/ 110g currants

3 eggs (beaten)
1 fl oz/ 25ml brandy or sherry
1 fl oz/ 25ml cream for mixing
1 tsp rose-water for mixing
2 oz/ 50g butter for frying
Caster sugar for sprinkling

Method: In a bowl, mix together the suet, breadcrumbs and salt with the currants then stir in the beaten eggs, sugar, nutmeg, sherry/brandy, cream and rose-water. Knead this with your hands to form a stiff dough. Make 5-6 slightly flat egg-shaped balls. Heat the butter in a pan to a fairly high heat, and fry for about 6 minutes until brown, turning once. Serve hot, sprinkled with caster sugar.

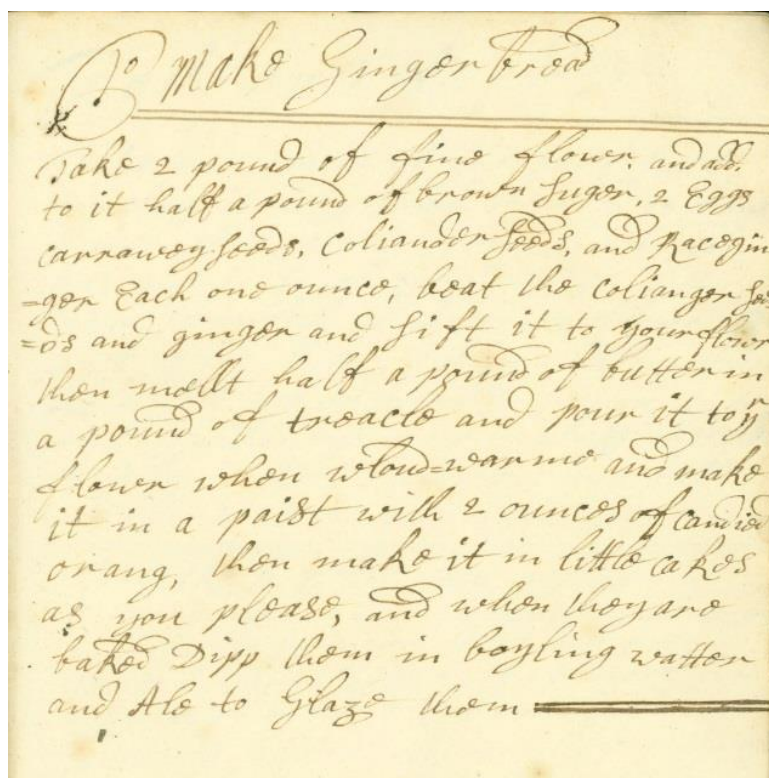
Notes: Suet (beef fat from around the kidneys) has a high melting point, and can make pastry very light, but it must be kept refrigerated and used within a few days of purchase. To avoid sogginess and heaviness, it must be baked or fried at high temperatures, and not handled too much or over-cooked. Vegetarian suet (made from fat such as palm oil combined with rice flour) can be used as a vegetarian substitute in the recipe.

The New College puddings are very good when they come out of the pan steaming hot, but if there is no means of keeping them warm, they tend to become a little heavy. On the other hand, those who have been given suet puddings from their earliest days in the nursery, or from school days, have a great fondness for them, and enjoy them hot or cold.²



New College Puddings with dates and almonds
Made and photographed by Marjory Szurko

² Marjory M. Szurko, *Sweet Slices of History* (London: Prospect, 2018), pp. 132-33.



NCA 962 f. 27r
(Photo: Jennifer Thorp)

To make Ginger bread

=====
Take 2 pound of fine flower, and add
to it half a pound of brown suger, 2 Eggs
Carraway seeds, Coliander seeds & racegin=
=ger Each one ounce , beat the Colianger see=
=ds and ginger and sift it to your flowr
then mellt half a pound of butter in
a pound of treacle and pour it to yr
flowr when wleud=warme* and make
it in a paist with 2 ounces of candied
orang, then make it in little cakes
as you please, and when they are
baked Dipp them in boyling watter
and Ale to Glaze them =====

*The Bodleian MS renders 'wleud=warm' as 'lukewarme', and the Middle English forms *lbeuc* and *leuk* appear to point to a derivation of the Old English adjective *bléow* meaning 'warm' and is now obsolete.³ This means that 'lukewarm' actually translates as 'warm-warm', but this sort of redundancy is common when obsolete words are carried over into modern usage. If we trace *bléow* back a bit further, we find the Latin word *calor* meaning 'heat'. *Calor* gave us 'calorie' (a measure of heat), 'cauldron', and, from the derivative word *calere* (to be hot), the word *nonchalant*, describing someone who stays cool.⁴

³ *Oxford English Dictionary*.

⁴ <https://www.phrases.org.uk/bulletin_board/6/messages/628.html> (Accessed: 12 November 2018): *Luke warm* (posted by Nigel Eddis, 4 November 2000).

Ingredients:

4 oz/ 110g treacle or black molasses

4 oz/ 110g golden syrup or honey

1 Tbsp chopped mixed candied peel

2 tsps each ground ginger (raceginger means 'root ginger'), crushed coriander, caraway seeds

12 oz/ 340g plain flour

7 oz/ 200g butter (melted)

Method: Blend the treacle, syrup and cooled melted butter together in a bowl, (or use a food processor), then knead in the dry ingredients. Roll out onto a floured board, cut into shapes with a metal pastry cutter, press patterns onto the shapes if desired, and bake for about half an hour at 300 F, 150 C, Gas Mark 2. The gingerbread can then be painted with edible gold food paint/powder after it has cooled.

I made small gingerbread biscuits for the eighteenth century Edible Exhibition at Oriel, but in the following year, I was asked to plan an event at the London Guildhall Library to celebrate Mrs Beeton and her contemporaries, and realised that Ralph Ayres's recipe for gingerbread would be extremely effective in creating the mountains for the landscape of the cake I was making (below), featuring a meringue pagoda from a recipe by Alexis Soyer, within a Chinese landscape of my own devising.



Meringue pagoda in a Chinese landscape (after Alexis Soyer)
Created by Marjory Szurko and photographed by Christian Szurko

Ralph Ayres's recipes seem very rich and calorific to us today, but this reflects the fact that throughout the eighteenth century, the price of sugar in Britain was low, and this led to the food containing far more of this sweet substance than ever before.⁵

Unfortunately, Ralph Ayres does not include the recipe for Warden Pies in his book, as tastes had changed since those sixteenth century sweetmeats were so popular, so I could not make Warden Miles Young the kind of pie he was writing about in *New College Notes* 9 (2018)⁶, and using New College Warden pears from a New College cookbook; but I do have the modern equivalent of a fifteenth-century recipe for 'Quynces or Wardones in Paast' if he would like to look at pages 65-67 of my new book *Sweet Slices of History* in order to make them!

Marjory Szurko
Librarian, St Stephen's House, Oxford

⁵ Sidney W. Mintz, *Sweetness and Power: The place of sugar in modern history* (New York: Viking Penguin, 1985), pp. 66-7.

⁶ Miles Young, '[A New College Pun Revisited](#)', *New College Notes* 9 (2018), no. 4.