

MYSTERIOUS AFAN CUDD

FOOD AND FEASTING

Food varied with how rich or poor you were. People had to eat what was local to them, unless they were very rich. Most people lived mainly on bread, made of barley or rye, sometimes wheat, and porridge of oats or barley, with stews of various kinds.

Food was often in short supply and if the weather was bad and the crops failed, people were often afraid of starving. If this happened people would grind acorns into flour, or eat “horse bread,” of dried peas, barley, and other foods made into a heavy, dark loaf.

The Church dictated what people could eat. Christians did not eat meat on Fridays, and there were special days and seasons throughout the year, like Lent, when even food like eggs, and butter were off the table. Shrove Tuesday at the beginning of Lent was when there was a grand celebration, eating up all the food one could not eat for six weeks. So we have the word: Carnival – in Latin, carne vale, goodbye to meat.



Peasants sharing a simple meal of bread and drink; *Livre du roi Modus et de la reine Ratio*, 14th century
https://www.reddit.com/r/museum/comments/1ct2uua/unknown_artist_peasants_sharing_a_simple_meal_of/

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Monks built fishponds as they could eat fish on the days in the a week, and during Advent and Lent, when the church forbad eating meat.

If people lived near the sea, they ate sea fish; others ate fish from rivers and lakes, such as the Severn for salmon or Llyn Tegid in Bala for its famous gwynad or gwyniad (a kind of freshwater whitefish).

Freshwater fish such as bream, roach and pike were only for the rich; salmon (*eog* and *gleisiaid*), trout (*brithyll*) and cod (*penfras*) are words often used in the poetry for the poet's wealthy Welsh patrons.

Medieval people also ate chickens, geese, ducks, beef, venison, and pork.



One of a series of tiered fish ponds: Titchfield Abbey. Photo: Rob Woodward

https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Fish_Pond_near_Titchfield_Abbey.jpg

Cooking on a fire

<https://medievalbritain.com/type/medieval-life/occupations/medieval-cook/>

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One of the favourites was mustard. Salt was expensive but essential for preserving meat and fish, for keeping it over the winter. At this time, rice and potatoes had not been brought to Britain.

People ate local vegetables when they were in season.

They liked cooked apples and pears for the end of the feast, sometimes roasted or boiled in wine or spices. There were different varieties of apples and pears during this period, such as the crab apple, quince, and warden (an old variety of baking pear).

In this period sugar was sprinkled on all kinds of food, often to conceal the bitter taste of some foods.

Like pepper above, sugar had been available in England since the 1100's, when it was a rare treat. By the 1400's it was more common, but people still had to rely for their sweet foods on bees' honey. The poet Guto'r Glyn compares a girl named Gwladus from the Vale of Neath to siwgr candi, 'sugar candy'.

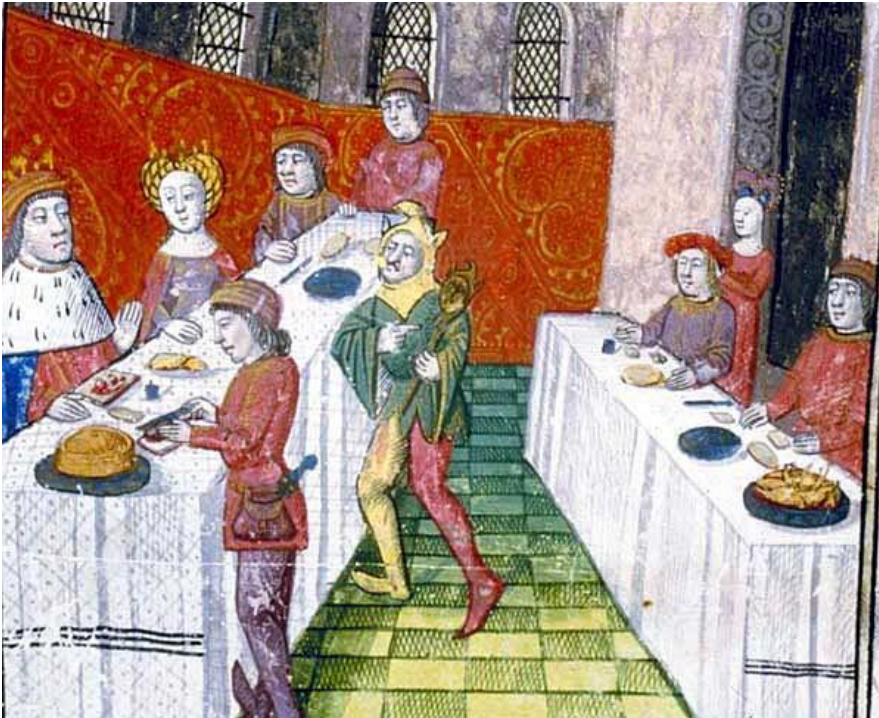
"Ei moliant oedd siwgr candi,
A mêl haid oedd ei mawl hi."

"Her praise was sugar candy,
and her eulogy was honey of the hive."



Living history demo, with Sally Pointer.
[https://museum.wales/blog/496/Finding-Hendrer-Ywydd/Amgueddfa Cymru.](https://museum.wales/blog/496/Finding-Hendrer-Ywydd/Amgueddfa-Cymru)

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15th C feasting

<http://expositions.bnf.fr/gastro/grands/131.htm>, Public domain, via Wikimedia Commons

Later in the Middle Ages, influenced by middle-eastern cooking, with the Crusades in Palestine, cooking became more refined, mixing sweet and savoury, as modern Indian and Middle Eastern cooking does today. This change introduced ingredients such as almonds, black pepper, saffron, ginger, wine, and vinegar.

Records from England show that pepper was a relatively cheap spice and that it was imported to Britain from a very early period. It is one of the spices mentioned in the Law of Hywel Dda and it may have been very common by the fifteenth century.

Text adapted from websites:

<http://www.gutorglyn.net/gutoswales/gwledd-bwyd-sbeisys.php>

https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_Welsh_dishes#CITEREFWebb2012