

Celebrating the Holidays

DOWNTON ABBEY STYLE;

an Interview with Annie Gray, Author of the Official Downton Abbey Cookbook



With the recent release of the new *Downton Abbey* movie *Downton Abbey* mania is alive and well. With an estimated 300 million viewers worldwide, the multi-award-winning *Downton Abbey* is the most successful British television series of all time. We had the rare opportunity to interview Annie Gray, one of Britain's leading food historians and author of the new *Official Downton Abbey Cookbook*. We asked what Christmas dinner would look like both upstairs and downstairs at *Downton Abbey*.

"Upstairs, the Edwardian-style dinner consisted of seven courses including soup, a fish course, roast beef and Yorkshire pudding, turkey or goose and sometimes rabbit or game. Christmas pudding as a centrepiece, and later, pudding, mincemeat tarts and ice cream would be served around the fire. Everything was made fresh and almost everything was grown or raised on the farm, such as chicken, pigs, dairy, and fresh vegetables came from their garden. Downstairs, the servants would eat a cheaper version of the main dinner plus pudding and Christmas cake made with less expensive ingredients."

The movie version showcases a visit from the Queen of England. Asked what Robert and Cora Grantham would likely serve the Queen, Gray answers: "I have looked at menus served to Queen Mary and King George and they are fairly plain and monotonous. Venison, game or pheasant and quail were a safe bet, and some jellies and cakes or sugar work. They

would have great hunting parties and put on quite a show. Or they would attend races like the Royal Ascot and travel with 10 to 15 cars with two cars filled with food for the day, such as Potted Cheese, Sausage Rolls, Veal and Ham Pie and more." (All recipes are found in the book)

During World War I, circumstances changed, and families were faced with food shortages and rationing. "Country estates could often hold their own as they raised their own meat and grew their own vegetables, but things like sugar were harder to find," says Gray.

There are more than 100 recipes in the book which showcase the cookery and customs of the *Downton Abbey* household, divided into "Upstairs" and "Downstairs" chapters. While upstairs, Robert, Cora, their daughters and guests would enjoy recipes like Kedgerree (dal, eggs and rice) for breakfast or Dundee Cake for Afternoon Tea, and Oysters au Gratin, Trout in Port Wine Sauce and Filets Mignons Lili, downstairs the fare was simpler, such as Beef Stew with Dumplings, Steak and Kidney Pudding and Gingerbread Cake.

The *Official Downton Abbey Cookbook* also features more than 100 colour photos, including many photos from the TV show of your favourite characters, along with a foreword by Gareth Neame, executive producer of *Downton Abbey*. This wonderful slice into the food, lifestyle, kitchen and dining room of *Downton Abbey* makes this book the perfect gift for *Downton Abbey* fans!

The Official Downton Abbey Cookbook by Annie Gray is published by WeldonOwen, excerpted with permission of the publisher through Simon & Schuster Canada. TV series photos; *Downton Abbey*/Nick Briggs. Food photography: Weldon Owen/John Kernick.



YULE LOG

The yule, or yuletide, log seems to have originated in France and reached Britain in the last years of the nineteenth century. It was never as popular as a proper weighty fruitcake, but it was a lightweight alternative for those who wanted something a bit different. This recipe comes from Frederick Vine's *Saleable Shop Goods for Counter-Tray and Window*, published in 1907 and aimed at professional bakers. It suggests making the cake as an enormous slab, which can then be cut up and rolled into many identical cakes. The author says they are by no means reserved for Christmas and will sell well simply as "logs" throughout the year.

SERVES 6

RECIPE NOTE

If you aren't keen on rum in the icing, you can replace it with another spirit or liqueur, such as Scotch whisky, kirsch, or Calvados. Alternatively, trade it out for milk and a bit of pure vanilla extract for flavor. The cherry preserves can, of course, be swapped out for any type of preserves you like.

INGREDIENTS

Butter, for preparing the pan
4 eggs
1/2 cup plus 1 tablespoon (115 g)
superfine sugar
1/2 teaspoon fresh lemon juice
3/4 cup (90 g) flour
Pinch of salt
Confectioners' sugar, for dusting
1/2 cup (140 g) cherry preserves
2 tablespoons water

FORTHEBUTTERCREAM
2 oz (60 g) dark chocolate,
chopped
1/2 cup (115 g) butter, at room
temperature
1 1/2 cups (170 g) confectioners'
sugar, sifted
Pinch of salt
3 tablespoons dark rum
1 tablespoon superfine sugar,
for finishing

Preheat the oven to 350°F (180°C). Line the bottom of a 10 1/2 x 15 1/2 x 1-inch (27 x 39 x 2.5-cm) jelly roll (Swiss) pan with parchment paper and butter the parchment and pan sides generously.

In a bowl, using a stand or handheld mixer on medium-high speed or a whisk, beat together the eggs, superfine sugar, and lemon juice until thick, creamy, and tripled in volume, about 10 minutes. Sift the flour and salt over the egg mixture, then fold in just until combined. Pour the batter into the prepared pan (it should be about 1/2 inch/12 mm deep) and smooth the top.

Bake until the surface is golden and the cake springs back when pressed with a fingertip, 15 – 20 minutes. Remove from the oven and let cool in the pan on a wire rack just until cool to the touch, 10 – 15 minutes. Use a blunt knife to loosen the edges of the cake from the sides of the pan.

Lay a kitchen towel on a work surface and dust the towel with confectioners' sugar (to prevent the cake from sticking). Invert the warm cake onto the prepared towel and carefully peel off the parchment. Starting from a long side, roll up the cake in the towel, then leave seam side down to cool completely.

While the cake is cooling, make the filling. Combine the preserves and water in a blender and process until smooth (or beat by hand).

Unroll the cooled cake and spread the filling evenly on the cake, making sure it extends to the edges. Now, starting from the same long side, roll up the cake as before and place it seam side down on a serving plate.

To make the buttercream, melt the chocolate in a small heatproof bowl over a pan of simmering water or in a microwave. Set aside. In a bowl, using a handheld mixer on medium speed or a wooden spoon, beat the butter until smooth and fluffy. Gradually beat in the confectioners' sugar and salt until incorporated. Add the melted chocolate (which should have cooled slightly by now) and the rum and beat until well mixed and a good piping consistency.

Frost the log with a thin layer of the icing. Transfer the remaining icing to a piping bag fitted with a star tip and pipe several lines onto the length of the log to look like bark. Just before serving, sprinkle the superfine sugar onto the icing so it glistens and looks like frost.

CHRISTMAS PUDDING

No British Christmas table would be complete without a flaming Christmas pudding. Originally called simply plum pudding (in the past, plum referred to any type of dried fruit), it was eaten throughout the winter and was so utterly associated with roast beef that the two were used as visual shorthand for Britishness in satires of the eighteenth century. They were served simultaneously and work very well eaten together. Roast beef and plum pudding were celebration dishes, which meant Christmas, among other occasions, and even in the Edwardian era, many people still served beef for dinner and plum pudding for afters on Christmas. The pudding had now changed its name to Christmas pudding, however, and it was rarely eaten apart from the holiday. We see stupendous puddings at every Downton Christmas, adorned, as was obligatory, with a generous sprig of holly. Puddings destined for the family table would generally have been cooked in an elaborate mold. Those for the servants would have been plainer, made in just a simple basin.

SERVES 8

INGREDIENTS

1 cup (225 g) cold butter, plus more for the mold and parchment	1/3 cup (60 g) chopped candied citrus peel
3/4 cup (90 g) flour, plus more for the cheesecloth	1/2 teaspoon mixed spice
3/4 cup (150 g) sugar	Pinch of salt
2 cups (90 g) fresh bread crumbs	1/2 cup (120 ml) brandy, plus
Scant 1 cup (160 g) raisins	1/4 cup (60 ml) for serving
3/4 cup (130 g) dried currants	3 eggs, lightly whisked
1 cup (115 g) peeled and chopped apple (about 1 apple)	1 holly sprig without berries, for decorating (optional)

Butter a 5-cup (1.2-l) steam pudding mold. If you are using a patterned mold, make sure to butter all the corners so the pudding does not stick. Cut a piece of parchment paper just to cover the top of the mold and butter one side of the paper.

Combine the flour, sugar, bread crumbs, raisins, currants, apple, candied peel, mixed spice, salt, 1/2 cup brandy, and eggs and mix together very well. Using a cheese shredder, shred in the cold butter while a helper stirs it into the batter, stirring until evenly mixed. Pack the mixture into the prepared mold. Place the parchment, buttered side down, on top of the mold. Cover the mold lid and clip into place, or cover with aluminum foil and secure with kitchen string.

Fill a saucepan large enough to accommodate the mold with water to reach about 1 inch (2.5 cm) below the rim of the mold once the mold is added. Bring the water to a boil and carefully lower the mold into the pan. Allow the water to come back to a full boil, cover the pan, and then turn down the heat so the water is still at a rolling boil but not bubbling so vigorously that it splashes over the rim.

Boil the pudding for 4 hours, keeping an eye on the water level and adding more boiling water as needed to maintain the original level. If the water level drops too much, the pudding won't cook properly.

After 4 hours, turn off the heat and carefully remove the mold from the water. Remove the covering, turn the pudding out onto a serving plate, and stick the holly sprig in the top, if using. (You can make the pudding several days in advance and store it in the fridge; when ready to serve it, cover it again with a fresh layer of buttered parchment and floured cheesecloth or foil and boil it for 1 hour to heat it through.) Just before serving, heat the 1/4 cup brandy in a small pan on the stove top, pour it over the pudding, and carefully ignite it with a long match. Enter the dining room bearing the warm flaming pudding to wild applause.

RECIPE NOTE

If you are lacking a steam pudding mold, the pudding can be baked in a regular Bundt pan using the same ingredients plus more flour (with the addition of baking powder) and eggs: Mix together all the ingredients except the sugar, butter, flour, and eggs, then set aside. Using a handheld mixer, beat together the sugar and butter (softened to room temperature) on medium-high speed until light and creamy, about 5 minutes. Beat in 6 eggs, one at a time, beating well after each addition. Sift 1 cup (115 g) flour with 1 teaspoon baking powder into the butter mixture. Using a spatula, fold in the flour mixture until incorporated, then fold in the reserved ingredients. Spoon into a buttered and floured 10-inch (25-cm) Bundt pan and bake in a 350°F (180°C) oven until a skewer inserted into the center comes out clean, about 40 minutes.



OYSTERS AU GRATIN

As exquisite as raw oysters are, they were also very popular cooked in the Edwardian era, and a large number of such recipes appear in cookbooks of the time (quite a lot involving Champagne). They were eaten as canapés and hors d'oeuvres and also made an appearance in the savory course at the end of the meal. They had once been so plentiful that they were eaten by everyone, and although they were becoming scarcer, and therefore more expensive, by the twentieth century, they were still eaten frequently. Oysters are on the menu at Edith's wedding breakfast in season 3, and are eventually consumed by the servants at a memorable servants' tea.

SERVES 6

RECIPE NOTE

For a simpler and quicker version of the sauce, use a mixture of 1 teaspoon each sweet chile sauce and heavy cream for each oyster.

INGREDIENTS

1/2 cup (120 ml) half-and-half
6 tablespoons (90 ml) dry white wine
4 tablespoons (60 g) butter
1 teaspoon cornstarch
2 anchovy fillets in oil, minced
Generous pinch of cayenne pepper

Grated zest of 1/2 lemon
24 oysters in the shell, scrubbed
2/3 cup (70 g) dried bread crumbs
1 cup (115 g) grated Parmesan cheese
Chopped fresh flat-leaf parsley, for garnish

Combine the half-and-half, wine, butter, and cornstarch in a small saucepan over medium heat and cook, stirring, until the butter melts and all the ingredients are well mixed and heated through. Add the anchovies, cayenne, and lemon zest, stir well, and bring to a gentle boil over medium-high heat. Boil, stirring constantly, until the sauce thickens, about 2 minutes. Remove from the heat and set aside.

To shuck each oyster, protect your nondominant hand with a folded towel and place the oyster, flat side up, on the towel. Locate the hinge in the pointed end, insert the tip of an oyster knife into the hinge, and turn the knife to break the hinge and loosen the shell. Run the blade along the inside surface of the upper shell, detaching the oyster from the shell, then lift off and discard the top shell. Run the knife along the inside of the rounded bottom shell to detach the oyster, lift out the oyster, and reserve the bottom shell.

Preheat the broiler. Stir together the bread crumbs and Parmesan in a small bowl. Arrange the bottom shells on a large sheet pan. Put a spoonful of the sauce in each bottom shell and lay an oyster on top. Sprinkle the bread crumb mixture evenly over the oysters.

Broil until the cheese is bubbling and the topping is crisp, 3 – 4 minutes. Serve hot, garnished with the parsley.

