

# Wonderful Welsh Fare

By Sandra Phinney

**M**y sister and I just returned from Wales where we learned to say “Iechyd da.” Pronounced *icky da*, it means “Cheers!” or “To your good health!” Another common saying is “Mwynhewch eich bwyd” meaning “Bon appetit” but I’m still trying to figure out the phonetics on that one.

One of our tours was a five-day trek called “Fine Food & Fresh Air”. It originally was set up as a hiking and food tour but as we proceeded to eat our way across the country it became evident that it was all about food. No one complained.

Picture this: as soon as we landed, we were whisked off to The Crown in Whitebrook in the Wye valley for a six-course lunch that included goat cheese with beetroot, basil, and fig puree—followed by a baked pumpkin dish with pine nuts, fresh parmesan, and truffle ice cream—followed by a pan fried sardine with baby tomato, polenta, olive oil, and black olive tapanade—followed by maple smoked duck breast with salsify, artichoke, & spinach on

a bed of yellow lentils, with date puree and capers ... and that’s only half of the meal.

We feasted like that for five days. Mind you, we sometimes had pub food but it was always amazing. For example, at The Clytha Arms, a local pub in Abergavenny, the owner Andrew Canning and his daughter Sarah dished out hearty traditional soups, homemade breads and heady cheeses. Andrew is also famous for his apple and pear ciders. “If there’s no alcohol, it’s juice, not cider,” he says with a grin.

In between meals, we travelled through rolling expanses of field and stream featuring ancient hedgerows in lieu of fences. (Do you know there are 12 million sheep in Wales?) We dropped in to visit small specialty producers like Black Mountains Smokery in Crickhowell and Caws Cenarth Cheese, prize-winning artisans in Lancych. Between food stops we waddled around abbeys and castles, trying to shed a few calories while soaking in some fascinating history.



## Special chef, author and TV cooking hostess

One of many highlights was meeting Nerys Howell, a culinary expert and chef who hosts a nationally televised cooking show. Nerys gave us a cooking class inside a huge glass dome at the Welsh Botanical Gardens.

Until recently, there has been little written about Welsh cooking. It seems that the Welsh way of cooking has been denied on the grounds that it lacks sufficient distinction from the rest of Britain and Ireland. “There are also other reasons such as the effects of a self-denying Puritanical religion and much past hardship which understandably colour our attitudes to our native cookery,” Nerys says. As well, many of the traditional dishes were passed orally from mother to daughter and did not need to be written.

The good news is that Nerys has just published a book titled “Wales on a Plate: Traditional and New Recipes for Welsh Produce”. She gave each member of the tour a copy. It’s a gem of a book.

However, to keep the traditional recipes alive, Nerys points out that it’s essential to adapt to modern day palettes, cooking methods and ingredients. Some of her cooking tips include: reduce the amount of fat, oil, sugar and salt in the recipe; replace some of the ingredients with modern day such as dried cranberries or blueberries instead of currants or sultanas; and grill, stir fry or steam rather than fry, roast or boil.

Now it’s time to try a taste of Wales. Won’t you raise your glass and join me? “Iechyd da!”



## Welsh\* Cheese and Leek Soup

1.5 lbs leeks, washed and chopped  
1 onion chopped  
8 oz Welsh cheese, cubed (you can use more than one kind)  
2 oz butter  
2 tbsp flour

2.5 pints turkey or chicken stock  
½ c thick cream  
2 tsp Welsh wholegrain mustard  
salt and ground pepper

\* You can substitute your own top quality cheeses - soft or hard, including cheddars to blue and brie.

Melt butter in a large saucepan and add onions. Cook until soft. Add the leeks and cook for 15 minutes (stir from time to time). Add flour, mix until smooth then add the stock. Simmer for 15 minutes. Stir in cream and mustard. Add cheese in batches, allowing it to melt. Season and serve.

## Cockle (clam) cakes

Mix a cup or two of freshly cooked clams (canned if you must!) in a light pancake batter and fry spoonfuls in hot oil or butter. Great appetizers!

## Welsh Cakes

8 oz self-raising flour  
pinch of salt  
1 tsp mixed spice (e.g. allspice or 5-spice)  
4 oz butter  
3 oz icing sugar  
3 oz currants or sultanas  
1 large egg, beaten  
zest of half a lemon

Sieve flour, salt and spice into a mixing bowl. Cut in butter until crumbly. Mix in sugar and fruit then add egg and lemon. Make firm dough. On a floured board, roll dough ¼ inch thick. Use a 2 in. cookie cutter or cut in squares. Bake on medium hot griddle (lightly buttered large cast iron fry pan will do) browning on both sides.

## NEWS IN BRIEF...

### Facebook site

The Nova Scotia Co-op Council has a Facebook site which celebrates 60 years of Nova Scotia co-operatives through a collection of stories and photo memories of co-operatives strengthening communities.

### Home care co-op

NANY (Neighbours' Alliance of North York) is a community organization serving northern York County. This largely rural region has a high percentage of seniors who face challenges finding home care services and NANY is responding to this need by establishing a multi-stakeholder home care cooperative that will be jointly owned by the service's consumers, workers, and the community. The home care co-op will offer personal care, housekeeping, cooking, transportation and some home maintenance services. NANY has received \$15,000 from the Co-operative Development Initiative to conduct a feasibility study and prepare a business plan. Contact Sue Rickards selbyinc@nb.sympatico.ca for further information.

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