FOOD, FARMING, & RATIONING

Upton Abbey: An Improvised Comedy of English Manors

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INTRODUCTION

Between a buffet style breakfast, a three course lunch, lavish tea, and an eleven course dinner, much of our family’s day was taken up with eating. This being said, food was scarce in Britain due to the lack of farms in the UK at the time. The annulment of the Corn Laws in 1846 brought free trade letting Brazil, Australia, and Germany dominate the British market (Stearman 4). By 1914, Britain was dependent on imports for 78% of their wheat and 40% of their meat (Stearman 8). This became especially problematic when, “by 1917, Germany [had] declared unrestricted warfare and sank one in four merchant ships in the Atlantic” (Stearman 4). The lack of farms and dangers of import meant that only the wealthy could afford to maintain the style of eating to which they were accustomed. While most of Britain was struggling with rationing, our noble family was enjoying the fruits of their self-sustaining estate.

RATIONING AND THE AGRICULTURAL SPHERE

Rationing in Britain was not introduced until January 1918 and was very unpopular. Each person was allotted 2lb of meat, ½ lb sugar and ½ lb total fats each a week, from the lowest scullery maid to King George himself (BBC). Since Upton has its own farms and dairies, only the rationing of sugar would affect our estate’s kitchen. Mrs. Ogmore would pool together all of the family and servant ration cards in order to make the estate’s meals.

BASICS OF UPSTAIRS DINING

- Guests would arrive at 7:30 for the hors d’oeuvres
- Style of dining was known as ‘Service a la Russe’
- 11 Courses
  - Hors d’oeuvres (often oysters or caviar)
  - Two soups (one thick, one clear)
  - Two kinds of fish (one boiled, one fried)
  - Entrée
  - Removes (side dishes)
  - Roast and salad
  - Vegetables
  - Hot dessert
  - Ice cream and wafers
  - Fresh and dried fruits
  - Coffee and liqueurs
UPSTAIRS MENUS

Breakfast
- Fruit, Eggs, Sausages, Kippers, Kedgeree, Devilled kidneys

Tea
- Scones (Served with Clotted Cream)
  - Sweet cream, Mixed berry, Etc.
- Sandwiches
  - Cucumber, Egg Salad, Salmon, Tuna, Watercress
- Savories
  - Gougères (cheese puffs), Goat Cheese and Fig Canapes on Raisin Bread, Salmon Mousse Pinwheels, Tarts (Stilton and Fig, Tomato, Truffled Wild Mushroom, etc.)
- Miscellaneous
  - Madeira pound cake, Battenberg cake, Crumpets, Shortbread, Custard creams, Chocolate digestive biscuits, Ginger nut biscuits, Petits Fours, Lemon curd, Chocolate covered strawberries

Dinner
- Hors d’oeuvres
  - Oysters, Potatoes with caviar, Stuffed mushrooms, Fig and bleu cheese tarts
- Soup
  - Cream of mushroom, barley, asparagus, etc., Brown Windsor soup, Turtle soup, Leek soup
- Fish
  - Poached Salmon, Baked Cod
- Entrée
  - Lobster Thermidor, Duck Confit, Seafood Crepes, Chicken Tikka Masala
- Joint and Roast
  - Leg of Lamb, Pork shoulder
- Roast/Game and salad
  - Veal Prince Orloff, Squab, Cornish Game Hen, Roasted Chicken, Crab and Celery Salad
- Vegetables
  - Potatoes Lyonnaise, Creamed Carrots, Roasted Parsnips
- Desserts
Special Occasions

- Outdoor Luncheon (Picnic)
  - Cold Roast Beef, Shoulder of Lamb, Cheese-cakes, Plain biscuits to be eaten with cheese or fruit, Champagne, bottled beer, lemonade

- Outdoor Tea
  - Loaves of bread, Sponge cakes, Potted fish, Fruit
**DOWNSTAIRS MENUS**

**Breakfast**
- Porridge (most common), Kedgeree, Deviled kidneys, Boiled beef tongue, Baked beans, Black pudding

**Lunch/Dinner**
- Cornish Pasty, Yorkshire pudding, Corned beef, Fish and chips, Bangers and mash, Salted cod cakes, Toad in the hole, Lancashire hot pot, Bubble and squeak

**DRINKS**

**Non-Alcoholic**
- Tea, Drinking Chocolate, Coffee (Americans only), Auld Man’s Milk (think Eggnog—only drink in the winter months), Lemonade

**Alcoholic**
- Wine, Champagne, Beer (have a pint), Gin, Brandy (strong—for soldiers or lower class), Pimm’s No. 1 (Pimm’s Punch, Pimm’s Cup—only drink in the summer/outside)

**COOKING SCHEDULE**

**Breakfast**
6:30-9:15 am -- Kitchen would work on breakfast
8:15 am -- Servant’s breakfast served
9:15 am -- Family breakfast served

**Lunch**
9:15-1:00 pm -- Kitchen would work on lunch
12:00 pm -- Servant’s lunch served
1:00 pm -- Family lunch served

**Tea**
11:00 am -- Servant’s tea served
5:00 pm -- Family tea served, though tea can be requested at any time

**Dinner**
1:00-7:30 pm -- Kitchen would work on dinner
7:30 pm -- Guests would arrive for the hors d’oeuvres

**WORKING IN THE KITCHEN: TECHNOLOGY AND TOOLS**
Cooking has remained similar throughout all of history, so anachronisms should be easy to avoid. The kitchen at Upton would have had a coal stove rather than a gas stove, but cooking with it would not have been much different than today. They also would have used an ice box rather than a refrigerator, though the refrigerator would have been invented if not in commercial use. These aside, much of cooking (preparing dough, cooking on a stove, dicing fruits and vegetables) would have been exactly like it is today and henceforth easy to mime.
REFERENCES/FURTHER READING