

The Pudding Club



It was while I was visiting my aunt and uncle in Gloucestershire that I first heard of the Pudding Club. As we drove through Mickleton, a small, picturesque Cotswold village, my uncle pointed out the Three Ways House Hotel and told me that he'd recently been there to take part in the 'Pudding Club'. Intrigued, I wanted to find out more.

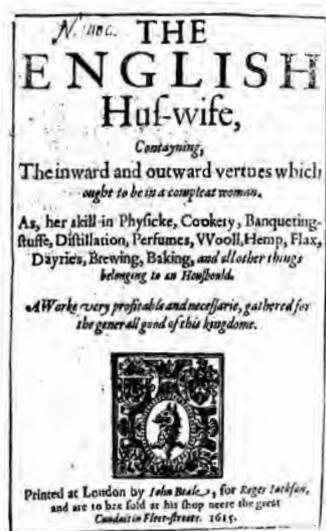
It turns out the Pudding Club was thought up in 1985 by the then-owners Keith and Jean Turner, who felt that British puddings were disappearing and all that was offered after a meal was cheesecake and black forest gâteau. They wanted to bring back traditional British puddings that were starting to fade in to history, puddings such as: spotted dick, treacle tart, summer pudding, college pudding and many more. It proved to be a huge success and now, 34 years later, the Three Ways Hotel hosts a club every Friday where guests can enjoy a main course before being offered a

choice of seven puddings (hot and cold). At the end of the evening, they then vote for the best pudding of the night.

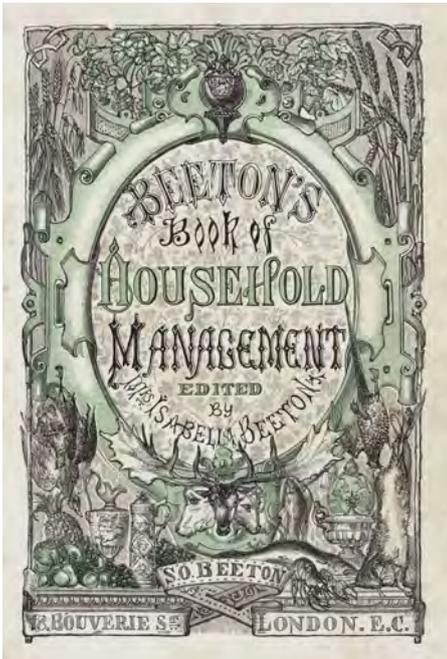
Puddings date back to medieval times in Britain. Steamed puddings, bread puddings and rice puddings are all listed in one of

the earliest recipe books: *The English Huswife, Containing the Inward and Outward Virtues Which Ought to Be in a Complete Woman* by Gervase Markham, which was first published in 1615. Back then, puddings often meant a dish in which meat and or sweet ingredients, often in liquid form, were encased and then steamed or boiled to set the contents, these were often savoury dishes such as: black pudding, haggis, steamed beef pudding or Yorkshire puddings; and it has only been in the past century (around 1950) that it came to mean any sweet dish at the end of the meal. I imagine it must be somewhat confusing for first time visitors to the United Kingdom to look at a menu where they could be served a black pudding at breakfast, a Yorkshire pudding for lunch and a sponge pudding for supper, and not have any idea what they may get on their plate.

Sweet puddings may be at peril once



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again as we all become more health conscious. However, it is well worth sampling these unique creations that often involve bread, sugar, dried fruits and suet. Suet is the hard white fat on the kidneys and loins of cattle, sheep and other animals, often used to make traditional puddings, pastry and mincemeat (the sweet dried fruit filling you find in mince pies served at Christmas), it gives a melting quality and richness to the dish. In *Mrs Beeton's Book of Household Management*, published in 1861 and a book still revered by cooks today, Isabella Beeton extols the virtues of fat and butter in her puddings. She wrote: "Good fresh butter, used in moderation, is easily digested; it is softening, nutritious and fattening, and is far more easily digested than any other of the oleaginous substances sometimes used in its place."

Mrs Beeton's book contains recipes for many puddings that remain popular to this day: jam roly-poly, baked custard pudding, rice puddings and apple tart. Her recipe for baked bread and butter pudding is the basis for many modern bread and butter pudding recipes and includes currants, vanilla flavouring and nutmeg. There are many of Mrs Beeton's puddings though that have already faded into history and are no longer made: Herodotus pudding (breadcrumbs, figs, suet, sugar, salt, eggs and nutmeg); Empress pudding (a kind of rice pudding, interlayered with jam and topped with puff pastry); Delhi pudding (cooked apples and currants in a pastry case, which is then boiled for two hours); Royal Coburg pudding; Barbary tart; and Macaroni pudding.

It would be a sad day if our children did

not get to sample some of the delightful puddings that are still available. Often puddings are quick and easy to make and are a good way of using up leftovers: stale bread can be transformed into treacle tart or bread and butter pudding; milk and eggs that need using up can be quickly whipped up into a custard; lingering raisins can be thrown into a spotted dick; normal rice, as well as pudding rice, can be used for a rice pudding; fruit can be used for crumbles and summer fruits are perfect for a summer pudding.

For those looking for healthy alternatives, simply substitute ingredients to make the dishes less fat and sugar heavy. Coconut butter can be used instead of suet or butter (or you can buy vegetarian suet) and simply reduce the quantity of sugar needed in some recipes by a quarter; you often won't notice the difference.

Alternatively, replace the sugar with healthier sugars, for example use agave syrup instead of golden syrup or coconut blossom sugar instead of caster sugar.

My two personal favourite puddings I would recommend you try are a traditional steak and ale pudding, which is hard to find now in restaurants but I have seen that some traditional pubs and restaurants do serve it in September as part of British Food Fortnight. I would then have a slice of clootie dumpling afterwards, a Scottish steamed pudding that you may need to go to Scotland for.

As for equipment, the key is a good pudding bowl, they come in all sizes from small to large; Mason Cash is a great place to start. You will also need string and muslin to tie over the top of the bowl if

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you are steaming a pudding, however greaseproof paper works just as well. Otherwise an oven-proof dish and a pastry tin are also useful to make crumbles and tarts.

When it comes to recipes, there is one website dedicated to puddings called Great British Puddings (www.greatbritishpuddings.com) which has a wonderful array of recipes, some of them dating back to the 17th century such as: sago pudding, a lovely syllabub or, less appealing, liver pudding which looks like a mixture of sweet and savoury ingredients ranging from cream, currants and sugar to breadcrumbs and chopped liver – it's not a dish I'll be rushing to make. The BBC Good Food site (www.bbcgoodfood.com)

has a great range of puddings, which can be found under 'traditional pudding recipes' as do 'olive' and 'Delicious' websites. Or look for traditional cookery books and authors such as: Mary Berry, Delia Smith, Jamie Oliver, Leiths Baking Bible, Good Housekeeping and the Pudding Club has their own recipe book, too.

Of course, if cooking a pudding seems too much trouble and you simply want to taste some puddings without having to make them, most supermarkets stock a range of traditional puddings or you can head to the Pudding Club (www.puddingclub.com), it is a great way to sample a range of puddings and it is a lovely excuse to visit the Cotswolds.



Doone Mackenzie-Francis trained at Ballymaloe Cookery School in Ireland before becoming head of PR and marketing at Leiths School of Food and Wine. She is available to help teach you some cooking tips and tricks in your house. If you would like know more email: dounemac@hotmail.com



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