

tastes
of
sunday

the great yorkshire debate



Tony Greenway
tucks in his napkin
and readies his knife and
fork to tuck into that great
British stalwart of Sunday
lunches, the Yorkshire pud

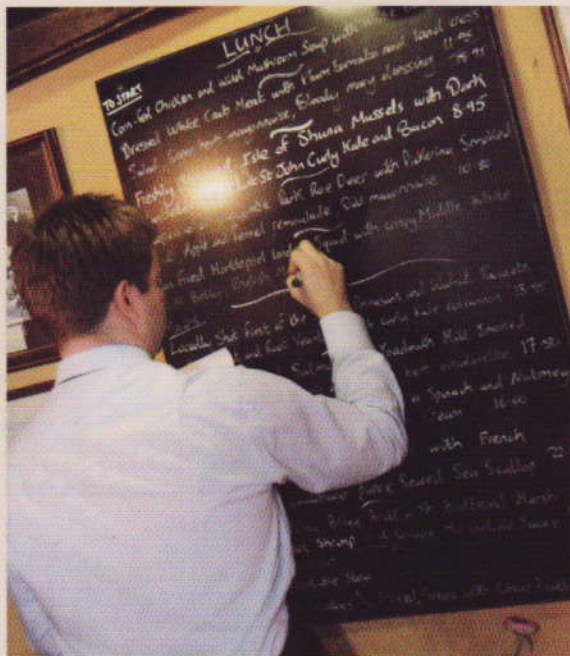


photo: James Redman

Here's a question for you: Who makes the best Yorkshire puddings in Britain? Well, whoever it is, it must be someone in Yorkshire, right? The big clue is in the name, after all.

So, I rang Yorkshire food historian Peter Brears to get names and numbers, because if anyone will know, it's him.

Peter 'umms' and 'ahhs' for a while, admits that this is a tough question, avoids answering it and tells me a story instead. "There used to be a very droll traffic warden in York called George," he says. "Everybody knew him, and tourists would stop him to find out where the famous landmarks were.

"One day, he was approached by a group of Americans who asked him: 'Where can we find the best Yorkshire puddings in the county?' And George said, very deadpan and in a broad Yorkshire accent: 'My 'ouse on t'Sunday. But you're not invited'."

Peter wheezes with laughter. "That was an unfair question, because when it comes to Yorkshire puddings, everyone thinks that the best ones are made at home – their home. Especially if they live in Yorkshire." This dish is, on paper, no big deal – just eggs, flour, milk and a pinch of seasoning – but it inspires fierce local passions.

The first Yorkshire pudding recipe can be traced back to the 1730s (although people were almost certainly eating it centuries before that); but it was 18th century food writer Hannah Glasse – the Nigella of her day, but without the pouting – who printed the first-known recipe in her book, *The Art of Cookery made Plain and Easy*, in 1747.

It wasn't what you'd call 'fancy'. "In fact," says Peter, "Yorkshire pudding used to be a poor man's meal. It was eaten before the main dish, and generally by people who didn't have access to much meat. What you were looking for in those days was sheer bulk to take the edge off your appetite."

And you can forget those dainty individual round numbers that come with your beef and roast potatoes in pub carveries today. The original Yoriky pudding was a big, substantial affair, cooked in a rectangular pan (under the juices that were dripping off the meat) and cut into large squares. You'd be chewing through it for ages. Go to the more traditional establishments in the county, and you'll still get a chunky slab of batter as a starter. Others serve up whopping big oval puds, whose sides act as a sort of dam to hold in a boiling mixture of gravy, mincemeat and veg.

Over the years, Yorkshire pudding has evolved somewhat. Serve it up with jam and you have a cheap dessert. Cook some sausages in the batter and – voila! – toad-in-the-hole. Peter Brears even talks about a Yorkshire recipe made with forced rhubarb.



Andrew Pern of
The Star Inn, Harome

sage and onion yorkshire pudding...

This is such an easy way of creating a substantial Yorkshire pudding – with a twist, writes Clare Jaques of VegBox recipes. It's a variation on the traditional Yorkshire pudding mix, with the addition of some chopped herbs and onions. That's it! It's best made in an ovenproof dish, rather than traditional Yorkshire pudding tins, because it's less fiddly and looks more impressive.

Ingredients: (serves 4 as a side dish)

150g plain flour • 1 level tsp baking powder • 2 eggs
1 medium onion (red or white) • a handful fresh sage leaves
2 tbsp vegetable oil • 100ml milk (dairy or soya) • pinch of salt

Method:

- Pre-heat the oven to 200C/390F/Gas 6. Put the oil into an ovenproof dish and put in the oven.
- Sieve the flour, baking powder and salt into a bowl. Add the eggs and mix well.
- Add the milk and whisk until you have a smooth batter.
- Chop the sage roughly and add to the mixture.
- Peel the onion. Chop it in half and slice. Separate out the slices as you add it to the Yorkshire pudding batter and mix well.
- When the oven is heated and the oil in the dish is hot, pour in the batter mix and cook for up to 40 minutes, until well risen and lightly browned.

Variations:

- If you don't have sage, you can use parsley or thyme leaves. It works best with fresh herbs, but dried will do if that's all you've got.
- You might like to serve with roast potatoes, nut roast and roast parsnips.



When we ask a variety of (professional) Yorkshire people who they think make the best puds, their fingers all point at Andrew Pern, owner and head chef of The Star Inn at Harome, situated two miles from Helmsley. This is one of the most acclaimed fine-dining experiences in the country with a Michelin star to its credit, and a reputation that has enticed the rich, famous and critically well-informed to book a table: Gwyneth Paltrow, Michael Caine, and Princess Anne, to name but three. And it turns out that Andrew doesn't make just one kind of Yorkshire pudding. He makes lots.

"We do a Yorkshire pudding with a foie gras toad-in-the-hole," he says. "We make that with dark ale and sweet onion juices. That's your Premiere League Yorkshire pud – it makes a nice starter when we have shooting parties coming in who don't want a big meal but who do enjoy a Yorkshire pudding on a Sunday.

"We also do a mini Yorkshire pudding with a rolled oxtail terrine, with a thin onion soup. We use Yorkshire puds for canapés, too, with horseradish; and we serve them as petit fours with homemade jam, golden syrup and honey from the village. Kids love anything like that – it's not dissimilar to clafouti, a batter pudding which the French make with fruit." And, of course, Andrew serves up individual Yorkshire puddings alongside his roast sirloin of Kilburn beef.

"People want a pudding that's light, airy and looks appetising," he says. "I'm always being asked: 'How do you make your Yorkshire puddings rise?' Which makes me think that the original idea – which was for a stodgy, doughy, floury, filling meal – has been bastardised to a certain extent."

The Yorkshire puddings at The Star Inn are very popular, and fall somewhere in between 'light' and 'filling'. "I think that's why people enjoy them so much," says Andrew. "Our batter is quite an eggy mix. We use local free-range eggs, so the puddings are a lovely golden brown colour. And we use old-fashioned beef dripping from our butchers in Helmsley."

The mistake most people make when cooking their Yorkshire puddings is so fundamental it's laughable. No, it's not getting the batter consistency wrong. It's not overcooking them, either. It's opening and closing the oven door too much. "They're like a soufflé," says Andrew. "You need a hot oven – but then it's a different process for a home chef. Here, we have commercial ovens working at higher temperatures, which are more consistent than smaller, domestic ovens. At home, you'll have two or three things in your oven at once – the joint of beef cooking, your veggies warming, your puds rising – and it all take its toll on the Sunday lunch."

So, are Yorkshire puds difficult to get right?

"No," says Andrew, simply. "It's not rocket science."

But then he would say that. He's a Michelin-starred chef but, more importantly, he's a Yorkshireman. "My mum taught me how to make them," he says. "Sunday lunch was always a big deal in our house. I'm a farmer's son, and ate a lot of game, lamb and beef, so it all went hand-in-hand."

Essentially, says Andrew, you need to get your oven hot and keep it that way, and have plenty of eggs in the mix (at The Star Inn, they use eight eggs to the pint) with as many whites as that it can't fail to rise. Make a thin batter that coats your finger – think the consistency of a milkshake – add your seasoning... and away you go.

But back to the original question: who makes the best Yorkshire puds? Well, Andrew's are first-class – that's undeniable – but if push comes to shove, I'd have to say that Mrs Greenway's take some beating. In fact, she's rustling up a tray of Yorkshire puddings this Sunday.

Sadly, you're not invited.

for more information...

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www.thestaratharome.co.uk