



CHOCOLATE

FROM STATUS SYMBOL TO CUPBOARD STAPLE

BY CATHERINE BECK

Chocolate is one of the most loved ingredients in modern baking and it has long been one of our favourite luxuries. In the past it was reserved only for royalty and the privileged few. Having a dedicated chocolate kitchen and chef was the ultimate status symbol.

Chocolate has been consumed in Central America for thousands of years and was so prized that it was even used as a form of currency. It was also used by the Mayans and Aztecs as part of their religious rituals.

THE HISTORY OF CHOCOLATE IN BRITAIN

It first arrived in England in the early 1600s and by the reign of Charles II drinking chocolate had become a part of court life. It was an expensive habit, which is why we only see it consumed

by European royal families at this time. By 1682 Charles had employed his own chocolate maker, so it was obviously a pleasure he considered important. Following the English Civil War (1642-1651) and the Restoration of the Monarchy (1660), showing off his power and status was arguably vital to Charles' stability. Perhaps to Charles, the expensive luxury of chocolate in part represented his power and status.

This was a tradition continued by subsequent Stuart monarchs. William and Mary had dedicated chocolate kitchens built at Kensington Palace, Windsor and Hampton Court. Mary loved anything exotic and William drank chocolate every day with his friends.

Social drinking used to be limited to alehouses, it wasn't until the arrival of coffee that this started to change. Around the 1650s the coffee house became an alternative venue for male society. The coffee houses began to offer chocolate and in the 1690s we start to see the first Chocolate Houses appearing in

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Hampton Court Palace's chocolate recipe book 'Chocolate fit for a Queen'

London. These attempted to emulate the chocolate drinking at court, to the point that one was even run by the wife of the King's chocolate chef.

The Georgian Kings also consumed vast amounts of chocolate and employed specialist chocolate makers, despite being required by Parliament to cut back their expenses. Again this was to exhibit an outward display of wealth. Although the health-conscious George III favoured tea over chocolate and it was under his reign that the tradition of chocolate makers was dismissed. With Royal power diminishing and chocolate becoming more readily available, it no longer held such an allure as a status symbol.

As the industrial revolution swept across Britain during the nineteenth century, chocolate production became quicker and easier. Joseph Fry was the first person to use steam powered equipment to produce chocolate, and his family went on to create the first chocolate bar in 1849. Other families such as Cadbury followed suit and now chocolate was big business and available to the masses. In 1853, Queen Victoria named

Cadbury as her purveyor of chocolate and the Royal tradition of enjoying chocolate continued.

THE CHOCOLATE KITCHEN AT HAMPTON COURT

As mentioned previously, William and Mary installed chocolate kitchens at their palaces and one rare survivor of this time was recently discovered at Hampton Court. For many years the original location of the kitchen itself was unknown, however in 2013 an inventory document was found in the archives. This located the kitchens to the Fountain Court, part of William and Mary's ambitious and opulent extension to the Tudor Palace.

The kitchen was reopened after extensive research. Close attention was paid to every detail, even down to craftsmen making tools and serving implements using traditional methods. What you see at Hampton Court is as close to an original chocolate kitchen that you will get. I spoke to chocolate historian and curator Polly Putnam, who worked on the Chocolate Kitchen at Hampton Court.

"The significance of the Chocolate Kitchen to the visitor coming Hampton court, is that it gives them a chance to see a kitchen, which is something that is easily recognisable and yet bizarre, 'who on earth has a kitchen, and indeed another room that's just dedicated to making and serving chocolate?' Then and now, it's an extraordinarily decadent thing to do. It says a lot about how important making an impression was to the Stuart and Georgian Kings and Queens but also shows quite clearly the work it took to make it happen."

CHOCOLATE INTO THE PRESENT DAY

Into the 20th century, chocolate was becoming more and more easy to mass produce. Products such as milk chocolate and bars containing other ingredients, reduced the costs of production. With lower prices came a larger market and this gave birth to the level of popularity chocolate sees more than ever today.

Chocolate has long been a staple part of British cookery and throughout the 20th century it features heavily in recipe books. From cakes to biscuits and even set desserts. Here are some recipes that take us on a journey through time using chocolate.

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GEORGIAN - DRINKING CHOCOLATE

This delicious spicy drinking chocolate recipe is inspired by recipes from the Georgian era.

You will need:

1 tsp dried chilli flakes
 5 cardamom pods
 2 cinnamon sticks
 Half a grated nutmeg
 1 star anise
 1 pint of whole milk or port
 250g dark chocolate (at least 80% cocoa solids)
 Sugar to taste (golden caster sugar is ideal)

How to make:

Toast the dry ingredients in a pan for a few minutes until the aromas become strong, then remove from the heat and allow to cool.

Pour the milk or port into the pan and simmer gently. Add the chocolate until it has fully melted and add sugar to taste.

Strain and serve.

1920s - CHOCOLATE FRUIT CAKE

This has always been one of my favourite vintage recipes. This cake is ideal for tea time and keeps well when stored in a tin.

You will need:

110g butter
 110g caster sugar
 2 eggs
 170g plain flour
 1 tsp baking powder
 2 tbsp cocoa powder
 50g currants
 50g sultanas
 Almond essence
 Milk

How to make:

Preheat the oven to 190c and grease a cake tin. Cream the butter and sugar together until pale. Add each egg separately beating into the mixture well. Stir in the dry ingredients and fruit alternately, with a little milk as required. Stir in a few drops of almond essence. Pour into the cake tin and bake for 40-45 minutes. Turn out and cool on a wire rack.

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1930s - CHOCOLATE SHAPE

This was a really common dessert right up until the 1960s, its very easy to prepare and doesn't require many ingredients.

You will need:

1 pint milk
 1 tbsp cocoa powder
 2 tbsp sugar
 4 leaves of gelatine
 70ml water
 Vanilla Essence

How to Make:

Mix the cocoa and a little of the milk into a paste. Boil the rest of the milk and pour onto the cocoa paste. Return the mixture to the pan and boil for one minute, place to one side to cool. Soak the gelatine as the instruction on the packet direct. Then melt in the pan with the water on a low heat. Add to the cooled cocoa mixture and add a few drops of vanilla. Stir occasionally until it begins to set and then pour into a jelly mould. When firm and fully set, turn out onto a plate.

1950s - CHOCOLATE FINGERS

These delicious biscuits are filled with chocolate buttercream for the ultimate vintage biscuit.

You will need:

225g butter
 55g icing sugar
 200g plain flour
 30g cocoa powder
 Chocolate buttercream icing
 Melted chocolate

How to make:

Preheat oven to 190c and grease a baking tray. Cream the butter and sugar together until fully combined. Gradually beat in the flour and cocoa. Pipe the mixture into fingers. Bake for 10-15 minutes and allow to cool on a wire rack. Sandwich together with buttercream and drizzle with melted chocolate.

Find out more about the Chocolate Kitchens at Hampton Court on the HRP Website www.hrp.org.uk/hampton-court-palace/

Their book *Chocolate Fit for a Queen* is available online.



Catherine Beck has had a passion for the past, which began as a child helping in her Grandparents antique shop. She enjoys spending her free time at vintage events and museums with her two daughters. She writes about all things vintage on her blog vintage-frills.com.