

Authentic Victorian Cook Book Discovered And Returned To Audley End House

13:07 - 22 October 2009



Robert Stride with 'Avis Crocombe', who is featured in the current Service Wing presentation at Audley End House
Picture: SUBMITTED

A COOKBOOK compiled by one of the Victorian cooks at Audley End House has been discovered and returned to the stately home.

The book of fascinating recipes belonged to Avis Crocombe, a cook at Audley End between 1880 and 1884, and who coincidentally is featured in the current Service Wing presentation. Now visitors to the mansion can see a team of costumed servants re-creating many of her recipes as part of a series of regular events, including a 'Game Week' at October half-term.

Robert Stride, 68, of Southend-on-Sea, and the great great-nephew of Mrs Crocombe, discovered the cookbook tucked away at the back of a drawer while going through his family memorabilia.

He leafed through the pages of the book to notice references to Audley End. And, after paying the English Heritage property a visit, Mr Stride formally donated the cook book to the house.

He said: "I felt it was only right that my great great-aunt's cookbook should be returned to the place where she relied on it most.

"Many of the pages are marked with the sweat and grease of the kitchen and I can just imagine her pausing, wiping her brow and checking a detail in a favourite recipe.

"Looking through the cookbook, you get glimpses of a way of life and cooking that has all but disappeared today. And yet, visiting the wonderful kitchen at Audley End and seeing the 'servants' preparing the Victorian dishes, that time suddenly comes alive.

"I hope our family's cookbook will help the Audley End team match my great great-aunt's culinary skills."

Dr Hann, properties historian at English Heritage, welcomed the donation, adding: "At the heart of our restoration of the Service Wing are the real lives of the army of servants who ensured the smooth running of this great mansion.

"It is such an amazing coincidence to discover the cookbook of the very cook, Avis Crocombe, who features in our exhibition. We will now be able to re-create dishes that would actually have been served up to Lord and Lady Braybrooke in the 1880s. And if anyone else believes their family had a connection with Audley End, we would love to hear from them."

During half-term (October 24 and 25, and October 28 to November 1) visitors to Audley End will see many of the dishes out of the newly-discovered cookbook while Mrs Crocombe's recipes will continue to inspire the kitchen team every weekend throughout October, November and December.

For further information visit www.english-heritage.org.uk/events

A sample recipe from Avis Crocombe's cook book:

Ginger Bread Cake

1 lb of flour, 1/2 lb of butter, 1/2 lb of coarse sugar, 1 lb of treacle, 1/2 oz of ginger, a teaspoonful of carbonate of soda and a little warm milk.

Work the butter in a basin then add the sugar and spice and 2 or 3 eggs then treacle, a little warm and then flour by degrees then milk and soda. Stir in just before you put in the oven.

Sponge Cake

14 eggs 1lb 1/2 sifted sugar, 1lb of flour dried and sifted.

Whisk the eggs till quite thick then add the sugar, mix it well together, add the flour, and a little orange flower water, a little volatile salts [a precursor to baking powder] and bitter almonds, have ready your molds well butter'd and sugar'd. Pin bands around the Top and bake in an moderate oven.