

## **Annie Gray: Lecture Synopses**

### ***Food and dining history talks***

#### **Mrs Beeton presents: Beeton's Book of Household Management in its culinary context**

Beeton's Book of Household Management is probably the most well-known cookery book ever published in England. In print continuously, running through tens of editions, since 1861, until recently it was a staple item in any self-respecting kitchen. However, while later editions are excellent, the 1861 original is deeply flawed, with plagiarism its major feature.

This lecture, which is delivered in costume, and starts in character, explores the context in which the BOHM was published, covering dining styles, the look, feel and taste of food, and the functioning of mid-Victorian kitchens. It looks at Beeton's remarkably short life (she died aged 28) and her rather more enduring legacy to the culinary arts.

Presented in costume.

#### **Table settings and the Victorian dinner**

The development of the formal dinner in England took place in the late nineteenth century, when it was codified and explained to an extremely detailed level. This lecture looks at the way in which the late nineteenth century dinner came into existence. It takes the audience from the eighteenth century *à la Française* dining style, to the nineteenth century *à la Russe*, using table plans, ceramics, flatware and depictions of dinner in action to consider the pros and cons of the later style as it developed, along with the reasons why it was promoted and how it was resisted.

Can be presented in Victorian costume.

#### **Wives and witches: the art of taking tea in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries**

Tea is a topic on which most people have an opinion: bags or leaves, pot or mug, milk, sugar or black (or green, or white, or herbal!). This lecture looks at the way in which tea was drunk in the past, from its introduction in the 1650s, to its acceptance as the national drink by the end of the nineteenth century. It looks at the accoutrements of tea-taking – cups and saucers, tables, trays and, of course, the teapot itself – and explores the way in which tea came, first to be accepted, and then popularised. It takes the view that women were crucial to the way in which tea was consumed, and looks at the relationship between women, tea and the home, hopefully changing the audiences' view of the beverage for a long time to come!

Can be presented in Regency or Victorian costume.

## **Christmas talks**

### **Christmas Dinner: from Edward I to Edward VII.**

To many people, Christmas wouldn't be Christmas without a turkey and trimmings, pudding and brandy butter and a feeling by the end of the day that movement is impossible. But where do our notions of 'traditional fare' come from, and when modern writers 'reinvent' the Christmas meal, are they really doing anything so very different?

This lecture charts the traditions of dinner, along with the specific foods consumed, from the high medieval to the Edwardian period. From the celebration of the twelve days under Edward I, to the masques and merriment of Elizabeth's court, Christmas has been a celebration. But it dwindled and nearly died under the Georgians, before being reborn under Victoria. Concentrating on dinner, this talk covers the way the English have celebrated Christmas through the medium of the table. It uses recipe books, literary description and illustrations, as well as experimental work on recipes from the everyday to the spectacular.

Can be presented in Tudor or Victorian costume.

### **Mrs Beeton's Christmas**

This Christmas-themed lecture looks at the mid-Victorian Christmas through the gaze of Isabella Beeton. Her *Book of Household Management*, published in 1861, contains a number of Christmas recipes, without going into depth on what the festival really meant. This reflects the mid-Victorian turmoil over Christmas: was it an excuse for drunken revelry, better off banned or at least forgotten? Or could it be an occasion on which to celebrate family, friends and to think of those less fortunate than the middle classes to whom Beeton addressed her writing?

The lecture addresses the way in which the customs we consider part of the 'traditional' Christmas were invented (or reinvented), promoted, or, indeed, not yet thought of in the mid-nineteenth century. It uses recipe books and depictions of dinner to think about the Christmas dinner, and cards, etchings and book illustrations to show the development of Christmas as we know it. It also covers ideal house decorations, and suggests some alternatives to the blockbuster film on the BBC in the after dinner lull...!

Can be presented in Victorian costume.

## ***Other talks***

### **The Baroque lifestyle**

The Baroque period is characterised by movement, excitement and change. Its buildings, such as St Pauls' Cathedral and Blenheim Palace, are well known, and its impact on the fine arts has been well documented. This lecture looks at the impact of the Baroque mentality upon everyday lives: on clothing, household objects and food. It considers, through a look at Hampton Court Palace, among other sites, how Baroque architectural change affected the people who lived in and visited its buildings. It also uses portraiture and satire to consider etiquette and leisure.

This lecture can be entirely focussed on Hampton Court Palace, with an alternative title in that case being 'Getting by at the Court of William III at Hampton Court Palace'.

Not presented in costume.