



Monday 17TH July 2023

Dear Customer,

Summer has left us and there's no sign of it in the forecast either, just rain as far as the eye can see. As boring as it is, I would rather 18C than 48C though. This global warming is terrifying and of course it snowballs – the hotter it gets, the hotter it gets.

Here are a couple tasty recipes you could try this week:

Apricot and Almond Crumble Muffins

6 apricots, stoned	1 tbsp caster sugar
150g butter or coconut oil	300g white spelt flour, plus 1 tsp
2 tsp baking powder	100g ground almonds
3 Hen Nation eggs	200g raw cane or demerara sugar
200ml milk (oat or almond milk)	1½ tsp vanilla paste
juice from 1 orange	
For the Topping:	
50g butter, cut into 1cm cubes	70g white spelt flour
40g raw cane or demerara sugar	zest of 1 unwaxed orange

Heat the oven to 200C / Gas 6, and grease a 12-hole muffin tray, or line with muffin cases. Cut the apricots into quarters and toss in a bowl with the caster sugar. Set aside to macerate. Make the crumble topping: put all the ingredients in a bowl and rub between your fingers until the mixture resembles rough crumbs then set aside.

Melt the 150g butter in a saucepan, pour it into a bowl and set aside to cool slightly. In a large bowl, combine the flour, baking powder, ground almonds and salt, and use a whisk to break up any lumps. In another bowl, whisk the eggs and sugar until they turn a smooth, light caramel colour. Slowly pour in the milk, whisking as you pour, then add the melted butter, the vanilla and the orange juice. Gently whisk the wet ingredients into the flour mixture. Fill the muffin cases or holes with the batter to just below the top, then press a few pieces of apricot into the top of each. Sprinkle the crumble topping over the muffins, making sure not to pack it too tightly on top of the apricot pieces, and bake for 20-25 minutes, until the tops of the muffins are golden, the apricots are burnished and a skewer inserted in the centre comes out clean. You can also use peaches or plums for this recipe, or a mixture.

Spicy French Bean Pancakes

450ml cold water	250g gram flour, sifted
2 tsp mustard seeds	1 tsp turmeric
1 tsp garam masala	3 tbsp vegetable oil, to fry
200g french or runner beans, cooked	3 green chillies, deseeded and sliced finely (optional)
1 bunch spring onions, trimmed and sliced	2 garlic cloves, peeled and finely chopped
2 tsp onion seeds	Indian pickles
lemon or lime wedges	yoghurt

Whisk the water into the gram flour and beat until smooth, then rest for at least 30 minutes. Add 1 tsp of salt, turmeric and garam masala to the batter. Heat ½ tbs of the oil in a pan over a high heat and add a sixth of the beans, chilli, spring onion, garlic, onion and mustard seeds. Fry the ingredients in the pan quickly, then give the pan a good shake to spread the ingredients out and evenly pour over a sixth of the batter. Allow to cook and colour for about 2 minutes. Flip the pancake over and cook on the other side for a further 2 minutes. Keep the pancakes warm in a low oven. Repeat with the remaining batter and ingredients and serve immediately with wedges of lime or lemon, yoghurt and Indian pickles.

I came home from the Dales cottage on thursday to my newly decorated living area, now bluer than my worst nightmare. The paint fumes, even today, are unbearable. I've had to have all the doors and windows open despite the wind, hail and torrential rain. Lainey has been curled up in a little ball, shivering so I've had to cover her with a blanket.

My backache has gone from bad to worse. The decorator left all my furniture in the middle of the room, paintings and ornaments in piles, lamp shades off. I spent 12 hours cleaning everything before it could go back in its place. All the stretching, pushing, pulling and shoving has taken its toll. I can't get out of my chair, I can't turn over in bed, a little cough gives me spasms of pain. I have to consider every move I make before I make it. And I've hurt one of my fingers, probably dislocated it heaving the sofa. House is looking lovely though.

The planning meeting to decide the fate of the field next to me has been postponed yet again. It was supposed to have been heard on 11th July, now moved to 10th August. The applicant, Lord Zetland, and his architect, keep needing more time to address the endless issues raised by my side. I'm in awe of all my neighbours and their lethal Oxbridge brains. He picked the wrong field. My own contribution has been paltry. They've drilled the detail, I've brought 'emotion'. I did do a fantastic A5 postcard that went through every door in the town and roused a lot of people to come to the cancelled meeting.

I wondered the other day where Zetlands got their money to buy the estate in the first place. It certainly wasn't a freebie from William the Conqueror. I did a bit of research. Just as I thought. Slavery. Sir Lawrence Dundas bought the Aske estate in 1763 . He owned two sugar plantations in the West Indies worked by slaves and was a large shareholder in the East India Company who transported slaves. So that field was bought using its proceeds, as was the land my house is on and most of the houses in Richmond. So here they are, about to make more millions from this tarnished land. Slavery....the gift that keeps on giving.

When I shared this revelation with our group it was met with...'Probably best not put that in the letter to the Council'.

'No', I said 'that wasn't my intention, that it was just a point of interest (throwing a whole new and dark perspective on our town, and all the 'monuments' and houses that bear the Dundas / Zetland name – and there are many).

But what I really would like to do (the plan is to put tape around all the preserved trees for when they come do the site visit a few days before the Planning Meeting) is hire black actors, dress them in loin cloths, and have them chain themselves around the trees instead.

Anyway, that one is likely to stay in my imagination and not be the front cover of the Darlington and Stockton Times. Sadly.

I hope you have a good week,.....Kind wishes, Isobel (It's Monday morning and 52C in China – hottest ever recorded !)