

Past Times Final indd 1 12/12/2018 11:48



Past Times Final.indd 2 12/12/2018 11:48

Past Time

Exploring the history of prison food

CONTENTS

Overview - Saul Hewish and Hilary Marland
Historical Facts and Recipes
Feedback from audiences
Case Studies
Evaluation - Natalie Quinn-Walker
Modern Prison Recipes
Acknowledgements and Thanks

Past Times Final.indd 3 12/12/2018 11:48



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Past Times Final.indd 4 12/12/2018 11:48

Overview

In the spring and summer of 2018, prison arts specialists Rideout (Creative Arts for Rehabilitation), in partnership with historians from the University of Warwick, facilitated two unique food and theatre residencies at HMP Hewell, exploring the history of prison food. Developed as a public engagement project of the five-year Wellcome Trust Senior Investigator Award, "Prisoners, Medical Care and Entitlement to Health in England and Ireland, 1850-2000", **Past Time** offered a rare opportunity for prisoners to become 'creative researchers', exploring how policies about food in prison have changed over the last 160 years. This document offers an insight into some of the outcomes.

The design of the **Past Time** was originally conceived by Rideout in association with healthy living and safer custody staff at HMP Hewell who were keen to see how such an approach might be beneficial to prisoners considered to be at risk of self-harm and/or suicide. Inspired in part by Dutto and Marziani's 2005 book, Il Gambero Nero (The Black Shrimp), a collection of photos and recipes collected from prisoners in an Italian prison, Rideout's Director Saul Hewish was keen to find ways of bringing the experience of food in the past to life through theatre and taste. Working closely with Professor Hilary Marland and Dr Margaret Charlerov from the University of Warwick. this led to the creation of a mix of drama-based workshops, sessions with historians examining and interpreting historical source materials, cookery sessions, and training in food hygiene and nutrition.

The culmination was two original performances showing how shifts in Government thinking about the purpose of imprisonment, and the growing recognition of the effects of food and nutrition on physical and mental health led to significant changes in prison diet. Furthermore, these performances gave audience members the opportunity to taste a range of prison food cooked to original recipes, if they dared!

An external evaluation of the project was commissioned through the Institute for Community Research and Development at the University of Wolverhampton, summary details of which are included herewith.

Past Time is a strong example of a high quality arts project developed and delivered by a truly multi-disciplinary team. Of course, it would not have been possible without the crucial support provided by Governor Sands and staff at HMP Hewell. In particular Senior Officers Chris O'Sullivan and Marcus Gilks deserve special recognition for their exceptional commitment to the goals of the project.

Saul Hewish & Hilary Marland

Past Times Final.indd 5 12/12/2018 11:48



Gruel Recipe (1901 Prison Cookery Manual)
To make one pint of gruel

Ingredients

2 oz (50 gr) coarse oatmeal 1 pint (564ml) cold water 1/4 tsp salt

Method

Mix the oatmeal in a pan with sufficient cold water to form a paste.

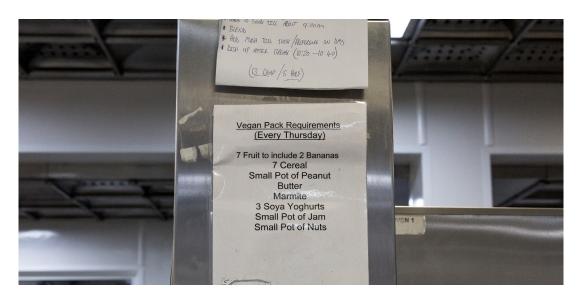
In another pan, heat the remainder of the water until it boils, and stir in the oatmeal paste, add the salt and allow it to simmer for at least 20 minutes stirring the mixture often.

"It was a very good learning experience and very entertaining, however, I will not be eating gruel in the future".

Past Times Final.indd 6 12/12/2018 11:48



During Week One, participants took part in a mix of drama, history and cooking sessions. These included delivery of food hygiene and nutrition qualifications.



"Really funny and creative. Loved the audience participation with the food "

Past Times Final.indd 7 12/12/2018 11:48



Rochester Prison Kitchen 1912, National Justice Museum Nottingham

Historical Food Facts

During the early and mid Victorian era, prisoners' food was based on dietary scales that determined what and how much people should receive based not on need but rather the length of their sentence. An example of such a scale from Warwick Gaol in 1872 included the following classifications:

Class 1 (up to 7 days) 2 pints of oatmeal gruel and 1 pound of bread, daily

Class 2 (8-31 days) 2 pints of oatmeal gruel and 11/2 pound of bread, daily

Class 3 (2–3 Months) 2 pints of oatmeal gruel and 11/4 pound of bread, daily with 1 pint of soup on 2 days 3 oz meat (off bone weight) and 8 oz potatoes on 2 days, and 1 pound of potatoes on 3 days weekly

Food was one of the first issues that prisoners were given the legitimate right to complain about. They had a right to demand that their food be weighed to conform to the scales in use at that institution. However, they did not have the right to see that food being weighed, and persistent complaints about underweight or poor quality food ended up with more punishment, that would, of course, include reduced quantities of food...

"What a wonderful way to experience the history of food in prisons. I've learnt lots of new information about the historical and contemporary prison system. And experiencing this in a working prison makes this so much more compelling and engaging".

Past Times Final.indd 8 12/12/2018 11:48



Bread Recipe

(taken directly from the 1935 Prison Cooking Manual, which was a revision of the 1901 manual)

Overnight Sponge Method – makes 420 one pound loaves!
420 pounds of strong flour 6 pounds of salt
10 ozs of fresh yeast 24 gallons of water

Put 105 pounds of flour into one end of a dough trough. Add about 6 gallons of water, using 3 pints to dissolve the yeast, and make into a dough.

Cover the trough until morning.

Dissolve the salt in the remaining 18 gallons of water and pour this into the trough with the sponge.

Break up the sponge into smaller pieces and work until a batter consistency is achieved. Make sure all the sponge is mixed in. Now add the remaining 315 pounds of flour. Make a firm piece of dough. Knead it from one end to the other until it is thoroughly clean. Pin it up with the pin board and let stand for one hour.

After this the dough is ready for scaling off into loaves which are placed on baking trays side by side and left to prove for half an hour when they will be ready for baking.

"The comparison between past and present practices was very effective and the experiential learning from tasting the food made the topic really approachable and current. I learned a lot today, thank you".

Past Times Final.indd 9 12/12/2018 11:48



In Week Two, the focus was on exploring ways to bring the history to life through drama and the creation of a show that included both drama and cooking.



Past Times Final.indd 10 12/12/2018 11:48



"Vegetable" Soup

To make 3 (1.5l) pints of soup:

1½ pounds (750 gr) of beef shoulder (or shin) 30z (75 gr) of pearl barley 60z (150 gr) of fresh vegetables (equal amounts of carrot, celery, and swede) 30z (75gr) of onion ½ ounce (3 tsp) of flour Salt &Pepper 1½ pints (750ml) of beef stock **Method**

If necessary, bone the meat, and cut it up into thick pieces.

Put the meat into the cooking vessel with 11/2 pints of water.

When it boils removes the scum, then add the pearl barley (previously washed) and the vegetables (previously prepared and chopped up finely), also I ½ pints beef stock. Cook gently for about four hours.

Mix the flour with enough cold water to make a paste or batter, and stir it into the soup.

Mix the flour with enough cold water to make a paste or batter, and stir it into the soup.

Season with salt and pepper and cook for another 30 minutes

The soup must be stirred frequently whilst cooking. The cooking vessels must be closed as much as possible

"Thought provoking, showed extreme teamwork and dedication, great achievement.".

Past Times Final indd 11 12/12/2018 11:48



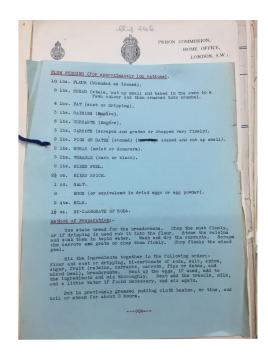
Prisoners as Historical Researchers

Working with the men of HMP Hewell on our historical research was a new and exciting initiative for our project team at Warwick (Margaret Charleroy, Hilary Marland and Flo Swann), and we were keen to locate engaging historical materials for them to work with. In the end, we took in a wide selection of resources, including architectural plans showing prison design in the past, historical images of prison kitchens and cookery, dietary tables drawn from parliamentary reports and the archives of individual prisons, a selection of prisoner memoirs on prison diet and its deprivations, and a rich collection of historical prison recipes, for items such as bread, stew, gruel, and even plum pudding. The men took quickly to the idea of becoming historical researchers and many already knew a great deal about prison history. Not surprisingly, given its importance in any institutional setting but especially the closed environment of prison, they had strong views on prison food.

The workshops lasted several hours (longer than the average undergraduate seminar) and the men were full of ideas and had many questions, including several that involved us heading off to do further research and checking, especially on the conditions of prisoners during World War II. We were delighted at how much of the historical material and themes were incorporated into the two drama pieces at the end of the projects, with the performances touching upon nutrition in relation to hard labour in Victorian prisons, parliamentary debates on food reform, the sorts of food available to prisoners through the ages, and the role of the prison medical officer in attending to the health of prisoners. Using theatrical techniques and music, the men presented historical themes in creative, humorous and engaging ways that are not (more's the pity!) usually available to academic researchers.

"It was funny, but had a serious and informative underlying meaning. The food was great too".

Past Times Final.indd 12 12/12/2018 11:48



Plum pudding Serves 8

1 ½ pounds (625 gr) of plain flour 1 pound (450gr) stale bread ½ pound (225 gr) vegetable suet 6 oz (180gr) raisins 12 oz (340gr) currants 6 oz (180gr) grated carrot ¼ pound (100gr) figs or dates (stoned & soaked) 6 oz (180gr) treacle ¼ pound (100gr) Demerara sugar ¼ pound (100gr) chopped mixed peel 1 ½ Tsp mixed spice 1 Tsp salt 1 Egg ½ Pint (300 ml) milk 1 Tsp bicarbonate of soda

Method

Cut up small the stale bread and bake in the oven to a fawn colour and then crush into breadcrumbs.

Grate the carrot if not grated — Soak dates and raisins as necessary

Put flour, suet, bicarb, salt, spice, sugar, fruit and breadcrumbs in large mixing bowl

Beat up the eggs and add to ingredients and mix thoroughly Next add the treacle, milk, and a little water if necessary and mix again Put into a well-greased roasting tin, cover with baking parchment, lid and clingfilm.

"Extraordinary in its breadth and sensitivity to the topic. The play was very interesting as a blend of performance and history".

Past Times Final.indd 13 12/12/2018 11:48



In Week Three, all sessions were taken up with rehearsals and refinement of the show, with two performances being presented on the Thursday. A final session on the Friday allowed for celebration and reflection on the achievements of those taking part.



"Very interesting project that helps give a lot of important context to contemporary conditions and problems in prisons. Prison food is a significant indicator of wellbeing in prison and also says a lot about how the prisoner is seen in different periods".

Past Times Final.indd 14 12/12/2018 11:48

Case Studies

Jimmy* is 34. He was given an IPP (Indeterminate sentence for Public Protection) for an offence involving violence, with a minimum tariff (time to be served in prison) of 3 years. Early on in his sentence he completed all courses expected of him but soon after got into a fight with another prisoner. For a "fixed sentence" prisoner this might have resulted in time in the segregation unit and loss of earnings and/or privileges. However, for Jimmy it meant that his tariff came and went, and he has now been in prison for over 11 years.

By his own admission, prior to doing Past Time, he was disengaged with the prison regime, and his state of mental health was poor. Jimmy's engagement at the beginning of the project was respectful but reserved. He didn't really know any of the other participants in the group and so was, understandably, anxious and guarded in his responses. However, as time went on, he quickly became more positive and became an essential member of the group. Despite some further ups and downs since finishing the project, he will finally be getting released in 2019 to a hostel where they will provide the specialist support he needs for his mental health issues.

"In the past I have always given up on things. With this I was going to say no, especially after one session when I thought the others weren't taking the work seriously enough. But I didn't, and I saw it through to the end. This showed me the importance of staying motivated and it is an experience I can return to in the future."

Andy* is 32 and serving a 5 year sentence for domestic violence. At the time of the project he'd been remanded in custody for about a month and was awaiting trial. It was his first time in prison and he was "a wreck". Prior to coming to prison, Andy had been involved in quite a lot of performing arts projects and even at one point had auditioned for drama school. However, over the years, for various reasons, he had lost a lot of personal confidence and increasingly he turned to alcohol to overcome his anxieties. In prison, other than his cellmate (who also did the project) he didn't talk to anyone and felt isolated and very alone.

He too was initially quiet in the group and at times emotionally vulnerable due to the uncertainty about his pending court case. However, with the support the group, he started to engage with the workshops and demonstrated a significant flair for performing, particularly comedy. Since finishing the project Andy's confidence has continued to build and he is currently employed as an 'Insider', with a special emphasis on supporting and helping prisoners who are in prison for the first time.

"For that time in the room you just felt human, making something special. It made me realise I can do things without alcohol and to be honest, if I had not done that project when I did, I don't know what I'd be doing now, but it definitely wouldn't be being an Insider."

Past Times Final.indd 15 12/12/2018 11:48

^{*} Names have been changed to protect identities



The final performances were seen by over 150 audience members. The style of each show was quite different. The first was a comparison of prison food now with prison food from the past, whereas the second focused more on telling the story of how the prison diet has evolved over the last 150 years.



"Commitment, effort, teamwork and hard work all came together in an informative and thought provoking show.

I loved seeing the cast talking to their families afterwards".

Past Times Final.indd 16 12/12/2018 11:48



Mackerel Salad (Prison Cell Recipe)

½ cucumber, sliced and cut into matchsticks
½ each of red and yellow pepper, diced
1 can smoked mackerel in tomato sauce
1 Tsp chilli pepper Pinch of salt and pepper
Prepare vegetables, add to a bowl with mackerel.
Add chilli and seasoning and mix well.

Whilst prisoners receive breakfast, lunch and dinner in prison, many supplement their diet with food bought via their canteen sheets which list these additional items that can be ordered and purchased with their own money. The number of items on the canteen sheets vary from prison to prison but generally includes quite a wide range of foodstuffs.

"A really clever (and tasty) way to look at really important issues, and the confidence and teamwork was inspiring to watch, Well done! (and I'm making that trifle when I get home)".

Past Times Final indd 17 12/12/2018 11:48

Evaluation by Natalie Quinn-Walker BSc (Hons) MPH FRSPH

Research Assistant in the Institute for Community Research and Development at the University of Wolverhampton

Extracts taken from the Executive Summary

Tackling mental health in prisons is not only beneficial for individual prisoners whilst incarcerated but improves their coping skills upon release back into the community, and ultimately has an impact on reducing reoffending.

This evaluation focused on whether there had been any improvement in participants' coping skills, following engagement in the project. A total of 22 prisoners were included in the research process, and a mixed-methods approach was used to assess impact. Questionnaire and interview questions developed specifically for this project were used alongside Lazarus and Folkman's COPE inventory, both before and after the project.

Whilst there were differences in responses between the first and second groups, selected highlights from across both groups include:

- Decreased mental disengagement, suggesting the participants' mental health had improved
- Participants reduced their focus upon venting their emotions through violent or aggressive methods
- Decrease in relying upon families and friends for instrumental support (financial support)
 due to the availability of work placements following the completion of the project
- Participants increased acceptance of their situation and coming to terms with their environment
- There was a dramatic decrease in the use of substances such as drugs and alcohol as participants began
 to focus on positively reinforced coping skills
- Participants explained they had found a new supportive group, who they could engage with and felt they
 had developed new friendships with people they previously would not have engaged with
- All participants expressed their desire to engage in future drama or musical projects if available

The full text of this evaluation is available upon request from admin@rideout.org.uk

Past Times Final.indd 18 12/12/2018 11:48



1 KETTLE RECIPE

Rice with Creamy Mushroom Sauce

1 packet pre-cooked rice 1 onion, diced
2 cloves garlic, diced fine 5 mushrooms, sliced
3 restaurant style packs of butter
(saved from your breakfast pack)
1 carton UHT milk 1 chicken stock cube

1. Fill your kettle and bring to the boil.

Place the bag of rice, unopened, on top of the kettle and let it steam for 5 minutes.

- 2.Empty kettle of water and add butter, onion, garlic, mushrooms. Turn on kettle, sweat vegetables till soft.
- 3.Once all vegetables are soft, add milk and crumble in stock cube.
- 4. Simmer for 5 /10 minutes.

To serve, pour sauce over rice.

Cooking Tips: Keeping your finger pressed down on the 'boil' switch will trip the internal thermostat. To avoid this, bring to the boil, let it shut off, fry for a bit on residual heat of the plate and then press the switch again. NB: Only use a new style kettle with a flat bottom. Do not use an old style kettle.

2 KETTLE RECIPE Noodle Food

2 packets dried noodle ½ red onion, diced fine 1 tomato, chopped

2 hard boiled eggs (from servery), chopped

2 Tbs vegetable oil Chilli powder

Garlic powder Water Salt & pepper

1.Heat oil in kettle and fry onion for about 10 mins until soft.

2.Add tomato along with chilli powder, garlic powder, salt and pepper, all to your own taste.

3.Add water to make a good sauce.

4. Whilst this is cooking, use your second kettle to boil your noodles.

5.Mix sauce and noodles in a lunch box and add the eggs.

Serve

Disclaimer: these recipes are included as examples of recipes shared by participants during the workshops. We do not suggest you use a kettle for anything other than the purpose for which it was originally intended...

Past Times Final.indd 19 12/12/2018 11:48



CAST

Alex Ben Brett Dale Darren Fran John Marc Rob Tim Wayne Aaron Anthony Daniel Harry Harry Jason Michael Ryan Tyrone

"Past Times" Production Team for Rideout

Saul Hewish
Natalie Quinn-Walker
Natalie Willatt
Leah Gallagher
Emily Andrews
Hilary Hughes

For University of Warwick

Professor Hilary Marland Dr Margaret Charleroy Flo Swann

For HMP Hewell

Chris O'Sullivan Emma Collis
Marcus Gilks Michel Gaud
Matt Richards Jane Icke
Iain Geddes Donna O'Keefe

THANK YOU

To everyone who has funded this project, to B arts for catering and production assistance, to the chaplaincy for allowing us to work and perform in the chapel, and to Governor Sands who believed in us all and allowed the project to happen.











Past Times Final.indd 20 12/12/2018 11:48



"Interesting, fun, can't wait to be on the next course".

Past Times Final.indd 21 12/12/2018 11:48



Past Times Final.indd 22 12/12/2018 11:48