GRANNY FENWICK'S RECIPES AND REMEDIES

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GRANNY FENWICK'S RECIPES AND REMEDIES:

Together With Some
Handy Household Hints

Edited by
Steve Rudd

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AND REMEDIES

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Gran holding my cousin Irene, outside Elloughton Dale Cottages, 1947

To my Grandmother,
not forgetting my *other* Grandmother,
my *honorary* Grandmother,
and to all Grannies
and scullery-drudges
everywhere.

A Note on the Editorial Method

Most recipe books group together recipes by type, eg baking, meat, savouries, desserts, etc. This practice has been deliberately avoided in this book, so that the reader can re-create the experience of rummaging through the biscuit-tin,, looking for a recipe scribbled on the back of a particular envelope!

Ovens and Heat

In a small concession towards making these historical recipes in some way more suitable for modern cooks with modern cookers, the following conversion table is offered:

Temperature	Electric Deg F	Electric Deg C	Gas Mark
Very Cool	225	110	0-¼
	250	130	½
Cool	275	140	1
	300	150	2
Very Moderate	325	170	3
Moderate	350	180	4
Moderate to Moderately Hot	375	190	5
	400	200	6
Hot	425	220	7
	450	230	8
Very Hot	475	240	9

How this book came to be written

"Granny Fenwick" was my mother's mother, born Sarah Jane Walker in 1887 in Hailgate, Howden, in the old East Riding of Yorkshire. She had an interesting, albeit peripatetic, childhood, as her father, John Jackson Walker (1852-1925) was a policeman, starting out as a "Bobby" in the East Riding Constabulary, and retiring in 1910, with the rank of Superintendent. As he was posted around the Riding, as part of his duties, he took his family with him, and they lived at a variety of "Police Houses" in places such as Escrick, and Molescroft, near Beverley.

By the time of his retirement, he was incumbent at Welton Police Station, ten miles west of Hull, a delightful village with a medieval church dedicated to St Helen which sits picturesquely behind a mill-race with a stone bridge. Welton also has (probably mythical) associations with Dick Turpin, of all people. I recall being shown, as a child, the narrow little window (boarded up now, high under the eaves) of the Green Dragon Inn, (which faces the church across the village green in a quintessentially English grouping) where Dick Turpin is supposed to have wriggled through and escaped his pursuers. He dropped down, to land in the saddle of his faithful mare, Black Bess, who happened, fortuitously, to be grazing just below, thus enabling him to make his escape to York from the pursuing Redcoats. Like all legends, it really ought to be true!

Gran had connections with Welton all her life. It was there, in the years leading up to the First World War, that she met Jim

Fenwick, whose father, Albert, was a master bricklayer in the village, the latest manifestation of a line of Fenwick plumbers, bricklayers and glaziers in that place, stretching back into the 1700s. Sadly, as a householder, I have inherited none of their genes, which seem to have gone elsewhere in the family. Anyway, the General Register of Births, Marriages and Deaths says that the couple were married in the Summer of 1911, in Howden. Over the next 20 years, she gave birth to eight children, the youngest of which was my mother, Barbara Isabel Fenwick, born 18th July 1928.

Something must have gone wrong with the marriage, though, because at some time after 1928, Gran and her children who were still at home had moved to Elloughton Dale cottages, only a mile or so away from Welton, but much more remote, set back amongst the trees off a neglected country road that led off up over the Wolds towards Riplingham and Beverly. By the time my mother fled the family nest in 1954, when she married my Dad, Gran had already given up Elloughton Dale cottages and moved back to Welton, where she lived with my Mum, her last remaining child at home, at number 9, Ladywell Gate, just up the hill from St Helen's Church.

During this time, my mother was working at the Flying School attached to Blackburn's aircraft factory in Brough, and was often offered "flips" in various planes, including one day when a daredevil pilot offered to take her up in a DH Rapide, and then proceeded to "buzz" the tower of Welton church at a very low altitude. When my mother called round to see Granny Fenwick that evening, she said "Eeeh, honey, you should have been here today, some bloody fool in an aeroplane nearly hit the church tower!" to which my mother replied, "I know. I was inside the aeroplane!"

It was there, to Ladywellgate, Welton, as a child, that I was taken to visit her by my mother, and – if I was on my best

behaviour – occasionally be given a ten shilling note. A long bus-ride from Hull, 10 miles out into the country, it seemed like a whole day's adventure in those days, courtesy of East Yorkshire Motor Services. It never occurred to me, during those visits, to ask what was in the old biscuit tin on her mantelpiece, over the black lead range where she used to sit, her chair resting on one of the many rag-rugs she used to make from old scraps of cloth; at the time, I was more preoccupied with being allowed to play in the garden and climb on top of the solid, substantial, brick-built air raid shelter that still stood there. That in itself was a risky business in short trousers, often resulting in skinned knees or grazed shins, not to mention incurring the wrath of my mother for messing up my best visiting clothes.

It seems incredible to think that she lived in that manner, as recently as the 1950s. The cottage had no running water, and one of my tasks when I visited was to go and fill up a galvanised zinc bucket from the public tap in the cobbled street near to the old post office, by the churchyard wall. The other sanitary arrangements were no better, the loo being an old "four-holer" in a privy shed up the garden. But, of course, concepts such as "luxury" and "poverty" are all relative, and shift from generation to generation. As a child, as recently as the early 1960s, my favourite toys were a stuffed rabbit, made out of old socks and scraps of cloth by my mother, and a knitted teddy bear called Lumpy, who was created by Granny Rudd, using rags as stuffing. These days, Social Services would be knocking on the door, and demanding why I hadn't got an X-Box. The words of J. B. Priestley in his book *The Edwardians*, continued to ring down the years long afterwards:

Their lives were narrow, but somehow they managed to bring to them a great deal of zest, humour, and innocent excitement. If they had not cars, washing machines, holidays on the Costa Brava, they were not

worrying about how to pay for cars, washing machines, holidays on the Costa Brava.

By the time I was old enough to take an intelligent interest in family history, and sit and talk to Gran, rather than climbing on her air raid shelter, she had moved from Ladywell Gate, into a purpose-built complex of old people's flats in Springfield Close, Welton, complete with a day-room and warden. It was there that I first heard from her the stories of the old days in Welton, things such as standing and watching with her sister the first motor-car driving through the village. For a while, she was briefly the village's oldest inhabitant, and she died in her 91st year, in 1980.

This book really started when I cleared out the old camper van over the summer of 2012. The old camper van in my driveway, when it ceased to be driveable, was used over many years as a sort of auxiliary shed: a repository of boxes of "stuff" from my old house. However, that description might give you the slightly misleading idea that the boxes of "stuff" had been opened and inspected as recently as 1996, when I moved here. In fact, some of them were boxes of stuff from my Dad's house, in Brough, when it was cleared out after his death in 1992, and some of *those* boxes were boxes of "stuff" from my Gran's flat, when it was cleared out after her death, in 1980, and they had never been opened since.

So, in a sense, it came as no surprise to me when I opened one of the boxes and found, along with a hoard of old photographs, the familiar old brown biscuit tin that used to sit on the mantelpiece at her old house in Ladywellgate, Welton, when I used to go and visit her as a kid. Now, I was holding the very same biscuit tin in my hands, wondering what was in it, and turning it round curiously. I prised it open. At first, I thought it was full of letters, but as I removed each piece of paper, I realised what I had were in fact, dozens of empty envelopes, most of

which had things scribbled on the back in Granny Fenwick's handwriting.

I read a few of them, and realised they were her *recipes*! Much, much better than a tin of old white fivers, which had been my first thought. I remember her cooking with great fondness. She used to make wholesome, delicious food, particularly her baking, savoury and sweet, from bacon and egg pie (which today would be called a quiche, I guess) to the traditional Yorkshire curd cheese cake. I have been blithely telling people all these years that my Granny was a great cook, and she used to make things up as she went along, and just throw stuff together and it all worked, when in fact here was the evidence that she noted things down meticulously and always went by the book.

I have no way of knowing where she got the recipes from: they may have been handed down by her mother, the redoubtable Great-Grandma Walker, or they may have been noted down from other books, or off the sides of packets and tins of ingredients, or out of magazines. Or, more likely, both. Judging from the dates on the readable postmarks, they were from the time after 1928 when she had separated from Grandad Fenwick, and was living in Elloughton Dale Cottages with such of her daughters as remained unmarried, a dwindling number, as three of them were to become wartime brides, leaving only my mother (the youngest), who didn't marry until 1954.

There were, in addition to the recipes, various household hints, remedies and superstitions – if a cat washes over its ears, it is going to rain; badly smeared glass can be cleaned with a burnt cork dipped in salt, and many others in a similar vein. We laugh at such fancies these days, when we can waltz down to the supermarket and buy a spraygun full of Cillit Bang (whatever that might be) but they are a reminder of times when people did perhaps live in a more harmonious way with nature, observing its times and seasons, and in their make-do and mend philosophy, of

using old socks to make covers for new shoes to prevent them being scuffed (or a toy rabbit for your child) and the like, they presage the 1970s attitudes of concern for self-sufficiency and the environment. Sadly, I doubt very much that anyone in the future will be picking through notes found in a biscuit tin dating from 2012, and finding handy hints on how to recycle your broken I-pod as a door-wedge.

Much of the "make-do" was a product of wartime, of course, dipping your legs in gravy browning to look as though you were wearing stockings and the like. I doubt there was much in the way of a social life in Elloughton in the 1940s, and most of Granny Fenwick's gravy browning probably went to making gravy, though at least the household were spared the attentions of the Luftwaffe, who used to make sure they jettisoned any unused bombs on Hull on their way back to base, after a long night spent bombing the crap out of the West Riding. There *was* an anti-aircraft site at Riplingham Crossroads, though, intended to defend Blackburns' aircraft factory and the flying school, a manifestation of war which must have been near enough to have rattled Granny Fenwick's windows while she was busy helping defeat Hitler by making plum jam in the only saucepan that hadn't been turned into a Spitfire.

It would have been too neat an outcome to have had my father manning it, though; at the time, *his* anti-aircraft gun was 250 miles away, on top of the cliffs at Fairlight, and he was more concerned with the welfare of *his* mother, Granny Rudd, back home in Hull, who was rendered homeless in March 1941 when a German parachute mine took out the family home, and most of Bean Street, just off Hessle Road, killing sixteen people and injuring a further twenty-two.

Maybe we could do with re-discovering some of that wartime ingenuity, though, the ideals of "Dig For Victory" and of S. P. B. Mais and *The Kitchen Front*, to make things go further and

last longer, to reverse, or at least slow down, the relentless cycle of consumerism and demand. Anyway, my purpose here isn't to preach, but to offer these recipes and remedies for what they are – a fascinating time-capsule, and a window into times when they did things differently. If you derive any practical use on them, so much the better, but just bear in mind that some of them are incomplete, in that there is a list of ingredients but no "method", or vice versa, and of course in this litigious age, I have to issue the usual dreary statutory warning that this book is a work of historical curiosity and should you choose to try out any of the recipes (or indeed the remedies!) we cannot be responsible for any consequences, whether they are culinary delight or food poisoning! The title given to each recipe is just as it is written on the back of the envelope, complete with eccentric spelling of "Cokernut" [sic]. I have, of course, also retained the old style imperial measurements, pounds and ounces, and teaspoons, dessert spoons and tablespoons, on the grounds that the recipes were a product of an age where it was easy to imagine things such as feet, inches and yards, because they related to reality, unlike the modern-day fad for metrication, which is based on a completely arbitrary construct.

I hope you'll enjoy reading the book purely as a piece of social history, and a tribute to a remarkable woman who lived through some tough times, some stirring times, and some epoch-making times, raising a large family with scarce resources, scrimping and saving through five years of war; from a little girl looking at the first motor car in her village, via watching a Nazi bomber crash in flames into the inferno of the old Hammonds store in Ferensway, during the Hull Blitz, to being able to see, on her modest little TV in her flat, the first men land on the moon. -

STEVE RUDD.

Acknowledgements

As always, as ever, I am indebted to Mr Grant, my old English teacher at school, who first introduced me to these strange and wonderful things called books, some 47 years ago now. With regard to *this* book, obviously my greatest debt of gratitude is due to my Granny for amassing and hoarding all this stuff in the first place. Maisie Robson has helped enormously with the production of the work and generously contributed her own thoughts, and Lucy Verrill also kindly reviewed the material in its raw form and commented on some of it. Finally, of course, I must record, as always, my thanks to my wife, who put up with heaps of yellowing paper and old envelopes for days on end while the contents of the famous biscuit tin were being sorted and transcribed.

STEVE RUDD

Gran's school photograph from Welton School. She is third from the right on the middle row. Her future husband, Jim Fenwick, is second from the left on the back row.

Afterword: the View from the Scullery

Maisie Robson

The mixed contents of Granny Fenwick's biscuit tin arouse equally mixed feelings in the bosoms of her modern sisters. There's a mere 50 or maybe 70 years between us, but our generation and hers regard each other with mutual incomprehension. Which of us now can joint a rabbit and turn it into a pie without the condescending instructions of some TV chef (usually a man)? And conversely, what would Granny Fenwick make of microwave ovens and ready meals in throw-away dishes? If there is one single message apparent on every page of this remarkable collection, it is that nothing should ever be thrown away. Waste not, want not. Make do and mend.

Granny's recipes and remedies, ill-spelt and laboriously hand-written, take us back not just to the world of *Lark Rise to Candleford* but to an England of half a millennium ago. Much of this lore – dandelions as a cure for warts, for example – would have been familiar to a boy called Will Shakespeare, growing up in rural Warwickshire: he learnt at his mother's knee how to use spider's webs on a cut finger.

It is the profusion of remedies for children's coughs that reveal Granny Fenwick's roots in the industrial working class. Poorly housed and sleeping several to a room, a child's cough could keep Father awake and unfit him for a long day of manual labour – and then who would pay the rent on these miserable couple of rooms? Mother, of course, bore an equally heavy burden of hard manual labour in the home. Her days were longer still and there were no weekends or days off.

The attitudes and assumptions of Granny's generation are not quite dead, even now. Girls born as I was in the middle of the twentieth century were trained by the spiritual daughters of

Granny Fenwick. As late as 1966, classroom time was spent teaching us the formula for buying net curtains (twice the width of the window plus half again) and how to darn old clothes. Never mind that our teenage fashion magazines celebrated space age disposable dresses made of paper and tin foil. And by the end of that momentous decade, Germaine Greer's *The Female Eunuch* revealed the dirty little secret underlying household hints and pop magazines alike: women's ambitions were crippled to make us fit for the scullery, where our lives would waste away making the world more comfortable for men.

The routine self-sacrifice expected of Granny's generation of women is most apparent in the tips and wrinkles sent to newspapers. Our very underwear is commandeered to keep baby's blankets tidy (clip them to his cradle with your suspenders). I am relieved to find no trace here of the ultimate sacrifice, recommended in housewives' guides from the 1930s, requiring women to use human hair for "invisible" mending. Let's hope Granny Fenwick snorted with derision at such a waste of eyesight, though she has preserved a tip about repairing Father's trouser bottoms which is almost equally degrading in its contempt for women's time and intelligence.

The second world war lent extra urgency to the recipes Granny carefully preserved from the newspapers of those years. It was a war fought, like none before, on the Home Front. An army of grannies – and mums, and spinsters – helped save us from starvation by concocting food and drink from materials found in England's hedgerows as well as Dad's allotment. In wartime, this desperate swapping of kitchen hints, this domestic oppression of women by other women, can perhaps be seen in a more heroic light.

And now this book, which goes to press in a new age of austerity, bordering on crisis. Many of us are tightening our belts, switching off the central heating and looking forward to a bleak

retirement. Among those mixed feelings we women feel, sorting through the contents of Granny's biscuit tin, must certainly be respect for our sisters who went before, and who endured the slavery of the scullery with stoicism, ingenuity and common sense. Now that Germaine Greer is herself a white-haired pensioner who admits to baking her own bread, perhaps it's time to bury the hatchet and embrace the sisterhood represented by that battered biscuit tin of barely literate scraps. We are all the daughters of Granny Fenwick and there is no shame in that.