

# The Art of Confectionery

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## Introduction

In the eighteenth century, the confectioner was the most highly regarded of all tradesmen involved in the preparation of food. His skills were considered to be of a more elevated order than those of a mere cook or baker and if he was successful in his craft he could command not only impressive financial rewards, but a respectable social standing usually denied to other food professionals. Some confectioners found employment in the households of the aristocracy. Others ran their own shops in the cities and large towns and sold a remarkable variety of sweetmeats, biscuits and ices, as well as the elaborate table furnishings necessary for the lavish entertainments of the rococo age. The range of luxury food items available from these outlets, can be seen from the announcement on the trade card of Domenico Negri, a particularly successful Italian confectioner who traded from the sign of the Pot and Pineapple in Berkeley Square in the 1760's:

“all Sorts of English, French and Italian wet and dry'd Sweet Meats, Cedrati and Bergamot Chips, Naples Diavolini and Diavolini, All sorts of Biskets & Cakes, fine and Common Sugar Plums, Syrup of Capilaire, Orgeate and Marsh Mallow, Ghimauve or Lozenges for Colds & Cough, All Sorts of Ice, Fruits, & Creams in the best Italian manner, Likewise furnishes Entertainments in Fashions, Sells all sorts of Desarts, Flower-frames & Glass-work at the Lowest Price”.<sup>1</sup>

These exclusive items were not just available in the capital. At the same time that Negri was trading in London, the French confectioner Nicholas Seguin was offering an equally impressive range of products in an advertisement in the York Courant of 11th December 1764:

SEGUIN, Confectioner from Paris  
in the Minister Yard, YORK

Makes and sells all Sorts of dry and wet Sweetmeats, Apricots, Green Gages, Pears, Apples &c. ....Comfits of all Kinds, perfumed Ginger, Carrimum, (Cardamum), Raspberries, Carraway, Images, and Sugar-Boxes. ....All sorts of Biscuits and Macroons, as made in Paris. ....The true Paste and cakes of Mallows for Coughs; Syrup and Paste of Orgeat: Syrups of Mallows, and Capilair of Orange Flower. .... He makes Deserts of all Kinds, either to sell or lend; besides he makes Sealing wax fine and common. .... The whole in Wholesale or Retale, at the most reasonable Prices”.

By 1781, there were eight confectioners trading in York, a city of 17,000 inhabitants, which boasted fine assembly rooms and a busy social round of ball suppers and routs. Upper class mores in such a fashionable city dictated that an elegant “grand dessert” was an essential conclusion to an important meal. With so many confectioners at hand it would have been easy for local patrician families to buy in confectionery, of a standard beyond the capabilities of their own kitchen staff. *À la mode* tableware and impressive sugar work ornaments could also be hired or purchased from these shops. A bill to the 4th Duke of Gordon from Domenico Negri, dated 20th June 1765, shows that it was possible to buy an entire grand dessert layout from a confectioner, including a looking glass

plateau with its brass frames, ornamental parterres, glass fountains, porcelein swans, Bow figures and sugar gravel, as well as the necessary sweetmeats, the whole costing £25. 7. 9d. It would seem from this that the high class confectioner was also a dealer in fashionable tableware novelties made of glass, and porcelein, as well as those artfully moulded on the premises from sugar.

A similar plateau arrangement is described in detail by Hannah Glasse in *The Compleat Confectioner*, published in the same year as Negri's bill to the Duke,

“The above middle frame should be made either in three parts or five, all to join together, which may serve on different occasions on which suppose gravel walks, hedges, and a variety of things, as a little Chinese temple for the middle, or any other pretty ornament; which ornaments are to be bought at the confectioners, and will serve year after year; the top, bottom and sides are to be set out with such things as are to be got, or the season of the year will allow.”<sup>2</sup>

The skills required to lay out a dessert of this kind were much admired, and housekeepers and cooks who were able to make good quality confectionery, as well as the ability to arrange it in the fashionable style, were much sort after, particularly in the country. Robert Abbot, one time apprentice to Negri, in his book *The Housekeeper's Valuable Present* (c. 1790), explains how the Berkeley Square workshop sometimes doubled up as a cookery school, “many housekeepers to noblemen and gentlemen were frequently present in order to observe our peculiar method of preparing confects”.<sup>3</sup>

Abbot's work was one of a number of books on confectionery written by professionals for hostesses and their housekeepers who wanted to improve their knowledge of this genteel skill. It is interesting to note that the earliest English cookery text published outside London, was a small work on confectionery, printed by Alex. Staples of Coney Street in York in 1737. Its author, John Emmett, had been chief confectioner to the Duke of Grafton, and his book, with a preface addressed to the lady subscribers, was also aimed at a female readership of this type.<sup>4</sup> A housekeeper, or cook seeking a position, who possessed these desirable skills had decided advantages over her peers. Writing in 1817, the Scarborough confectioner Joseph Bell tells us, “A knowledge of all the branches in confectionery is sought after with equal avidity by the fair sex, at which we need not be surprized, when we consider how many candidates there are for situations in Noblemen and Gentlemen's families; and, as they generally reside at a considerable distance from any principle town, which renders it impossible for them to be supplied with every article from manufacturers, it is absolutely necessary for housekeepers to understand this art.”<sup>5</sup>

The production of confectionery and other stillroom products had been a sociably acceptable activity for high-ranking ladies since the Tudor period, when ability in “the ordering or setting forth of a banquet” had been one of the necessary skills of a “compleat woman.”<sup>6</sup> In the aftermath of the Civil War and Commonwealth, Hannah Wooley found “so many Gentlewomen, forced to serve, whose Parents and Friends have been impoverished by the great Calamities, *viz.* the late wars, Plague, and Fire, and to see what mean Places they are forced to be in, because they want Accomplishments for better.” In a treatise written for “the Gentlewomen, who have the Charge of the Sweet-meats, and such like Repasts”, she goes on to instruct these unfortunate victims of circumstance, in the proper art of laying out the baroque-style banquet of the later Stuart age.<sup>7</sup>

Writing a hundred years later, Mrs. Glasse, continues to advocate the art as a suitable lady-like activity for young women, though the banquet was now known by its fashionable French name, the dessert, and the style of presentation was in the new rococo manner,

“Giving directions for a grand desert would be needless, for those persons who give such grand deserts, either keep a proper person, or have them of a confectioner, who not only has every thing wanted, but every ornament to adorn it with, without giving any trouble to the family, when supposed to be taken up with other affairs; though every young lady ought to know how to make all kind of confectionary and dress out a desert; in former days, it was look'd on as a great perfection in a young lady to understand all these things, it it was only to give directions to her servants; and our dames of old, did not think it any disgrace to understand cookery and confectionary.”<sup>8</sup>

I hope the following essay will give the modern reader an insight into the historical background to the art of the confectioner in the 18th century and also some understanding of the sweetmeats, biscuits, ices and liqueurs prepared by both the professional practitioner and the skilled housekeeper at this time.

### **Saccharon and sukkar**

The raw materials of early confectionery were expensive exotics from the Mediterranean and the Middle East; sugar, citrus fruits, spices, almonds, pistachioes, rosewater and later, from the New World, chocolate. Even homegrown fruits like the apricot and quince had originally come from abroad and were grown at first only in the gardens of the rich. Many sweetmeats, like preserved lemons and quince marmalade were at first imported, before English confectioners and housewives learnt how to imitate them. This sense of “foreign-ness”, the high cost of the ingredients and the labour-intensive nature of the work has always given an exclusive status to the confectioner and his art. Servants were often not trusted to use expensive materials, which were often kept under lock and key, so confectionery work became the responsibility of the lady of the house and as a result, a genteel and refined activity.

Sugar was by far the most important material in confectionery. The Romans had known of it from their trade contacts with Arabia and India, but according to Pliny, who called it *saccharon*, its use was confined to medicine, honey being the most important sweetener in the Roman kitchen. In his *Materia Medica* of the second century A.D., Dioscorides prescribed a weak saccharon solution for stomach and bowel disorders.<sup>9</sup> Saccharon probably entered ancient commerce in the form of small hardened tears, which had exuded naturally from the cane, as sugar produced through refining the extracted sap was unknown.

The Persians and Arabs recognised it as a medicine for treating colds and bronchial disorders. They also developed its use as a sweetener and almost certainly discovered its preservative properties. Most importantly they learnt how to refine sugar from raw cane and spread the cultivation of the plant throughout the Moslem world. The very word sugar has hardly changed from the original Arabic name *sukkar*. In the Durham Account Rolls of 1299 it appears in its earliest English form *zucker*, as in *Zucker Roch* (rock sugar) and *Zucker Marrokes* (Moroccan sugar).<sup>10</sup> A number of other words associated with sugar are also of Eastern origin, indicating the importance of the Islamic world in the early history of this material. For instance the word “candy” is derived from the Persian *qand*, while syrup is a corruption of the Arabic *sharab*.

During the medieval period sugar was imported into Europe by the Venetians and Genoese from the Arab controlled areas of the Mediterranean and from Persia. However, Italian domination of this trade was broken in the 1420's when the Portugese started to cultivate cane in the Azores, and later in Brazil.<sup>11</sup> By this time, centuries of experimentation with this versatile plant product had resulted in a much clearer understanding of its extraordinary properties, not only as medicine, sweetener and preservative, but also as an artistic medium of tremendous flexibility.

## Sugar as medicine

In the early history of sugar usage in Europe, it was initially the apothecary who had the most important role in the production of sugar-based preparations, but as the non-medicinal applications were rapidly realised, the comfitmaker, or confectioner gradually came into being as a separate trade. Medieval European physicians learnt the medicinal uses of the material from the Arabs and Byzantine Greeks. One Middle Eastern remedy for rheums and fevers, enthusiastically adopted by the cold-prone inhabitants of Northern Europe, were little twisted sticks of pulled sugar called in Arabic *al fānād* or *al pānād*. These became known in England as alphenics, or more commonly as penidia, penids, pennet or pan sugar. They were the precursors of barley sugar and our modern cough sweets. In 1390, the Earl of Derby paid “two shillings for two pounds of penydes.”<sup>12</sup> A medicinal confect called *diapenidion*, in which penids were ground to a powder with pinenuts, almonds, cinnamon, cloves, ginger, liquorice and starch, was an early Arab pectoral medicine which was still being prescribed in 17th century England “for such as those who have Coughs, Ulcers and Consumptions of the Lungs”.<sup>13</sup>

Exotic sugars flavoured with violets and roses imported from the Middle East were also popular as cough cures and were consumed in large quantities by those who could afford them. Anne Wilson points out that the annual consumption of rose sugar (1,900 pounds) in the royal household in 1287 was actually greater than that of ordinary sugar (677 pounds).<sup>14</sup> However, by the early modern period, the therapeutic applications of sugar were being somewhat overshadowed by its much more important roles as sweetener and preservative. In 1640 the botanical author John Parkinson commented on this development, “The Sugar that is made of the Sugar Reede hath obtained now a dayes so continuall and daily use, that it is not accounted Physicall”.<sup>15</sup> By this date Britain had established sugar plantations in Barbados and the Leeward islands and home sugar consumption had increased enormously, but principally as a foodstuff rather than as a medicine. Parkinson’s disciple Nicholas Culpepper gives us detailed instructions for making penidia, but appears to dismiss their use as old fashioned, “I remember country people were wont to take them for coughs”.<sup>16</sup>

Despite these doubts, a wide range of sugar-based preparations designed for therapeutic use in the medieval and Tudor period were still being prescribed as late as the eighteenth century. Among the survivors available at the confectioners were the mallow or ghiamauve lozenges and pastes advertised by both Negri and Seguin for coughs and colds. In addition, the apothecary shops stocked a huge range of medicinal syrups, lohochs, floral confects and the “condited” roots of eryngo and elecampane. *Manus Christi*, a sugar lozenge, flecked with gold leaf and flavoured with rosewater was sold as a cordial medicine. A similar candy, *Saccharum Tabulatum Perlatum*, was prepared from crushed pearls, gold leaf and boiled sugar and was also used for “cooling and comforting the heart”. A wide range of medicinal quidannies and marmalades are listed in the official pharmacopeias of the 17th and 18th centuries. Among them are quince marmalade prescribed for vomiting, weakness of the stomach and “want of appetite” and Quiddany of Green Walnuts for inflammations of the mouth and throat.<sup>17</sup> The wide circulation of recipes for these “secrets”, through manuscript as well as printed sources, enabled English housewives to make medicinal confections for themselves with sugar purchased from the grocer and the fruits, flowers and roots of their own gardens. Many of the household texts published in the late 16th and early 17th centuries make a strong link between the compounding of home medicines and the preparation of preserves and confectionery. Both were still-room activities, undertaken by gentlewomen for the benefit and health of their families.

It was the alleged digestive and warming properties of sugar, that gave it such an important role in the medieval *voidée* or void, the ritualised ending of a state meal, when the sovereign or noble lord “closed” his overfull stomach by eating comfits (sugar coated spices and seeds), and drinking a draught of sweet spiced wine called hypocras. With the increasing availability of sugar during the Tudor period, the range of sweet foodstuffs consumed at this “aftercourse” grew dramatically and the void developed into the elaborate sweet banquet of the Elizabethan age.<sup>18</sup> Although the chief purpose of the banquet was to delight both the eye and the pallette with a lavish and visually dramatic display of sweetmeats and sugarwork novelties, the medicinal element remained an important factor. Marmalade of quinces was one “banqueting stuffe” particularly valued for its soothing effect on the stomach after a heavy meal and in 1580 the euphuistic writer John Lyly wrote “Therefore you must giue him leaue after euery meale to cloase his stomacke with Loue, as with Marmalade”<sup>19</sup>. Marmalades and sweetened spice mixtures seem to have been the Elizabethan equivalent of our indigestion tablets and stomach settlers. One medicinal confection of Galenic origin, called *Species Diatrion Piperion* (confect of the three peppers), was made from the powder of white pepper, long pepper, black pepper, thyme, aniseeds and ginger and made into a conserve with sugar, or taken with honey after a meal. John Partridge, the author of *The Widdowes Treasure* of 1595, extols its virtues in verse:

*Virtutis hujus confectionis sequuntur*  
This decoction is good to eate  
alwaies before and after meate.  
For it will make digestion good,  
and turne your meate to pure blood.  
Besides all this it dooth excell,  
all windiness to expell.  
And all groce humors cold and rawe  
that are in belly, stomacke or mawe.<sup>20</sup>

The caraway and aniseed comfits of the medieval void continued to be consumed at the Renaissance banquet with draughts of hypocras, as in Heywood’s *Fair Maid of the West*, “I will make bold to march in towards your banquet, and there comfit my selfe, and cast all carawayes downe my throat”.<sup>21</sup> Like *diatrion piperion*, they were eaten as carminitive medicines for flatulance and indigestion, while sugar preserves and sweetened cordial waters were offered to guests who may have been over-indulgent. So called “surfeit waters”, usually distilled over poppy petals and a host of other herbs, were frequently at hand for those who were suffering the consequences of eating too much. However, there were some who had their doubts about these practices:

“no sooner have they by Gluttony, or eating of too great quantities of Flesh, fish or other Rich-foods or over-strong liquors brought themselves out of order, but away they run or send Jillian the Chambermaid (who already spoil’d her Teeth with sweet-meats and Kisses) to the Closet for some Conserves, Preserves, or other Confectionary-Ware: and if that will not do (as alas! how should such sower abortive things, only Embalme’d with nauseous Sugar, do any good?) then fetch the Bottle of Black-Cherry-Brandy, the Glas of Aqua Mirabilis, and after that a dose of Plague-water”.<sup>22</sup>

By the end of the 17th century when Thomas Tryon expressed these suprisingly modern sentiments on the health risks of sugar, most people probably justified their excessive consumption with the thought that sweetmeats possessed beneficial medicinal properties. According to Tryon, sugar abuse seems to have been as widespread then, as it is now,

“The like is to be understood of *Green* and *Candid Gingers*, as also all sorts of *Conserves* and *Preserves* that many of the more *curious Dames* stuff their own and their Childrens Paunches

with; not forgetting the great quantities of the *Confectioners Hodge-Podge*, and the *Cakes*, the *Buns*, the *Ginger-bread* &c. All which do wonderfully *fur* and abstract the Passages".<sup>23</sup>

## Comfits

In the late medieval period the words confyt, comfect or cumfitt were generic terms for all kinds of sweetmeats made from fruits, roots, or flowers preserved with sugar. By the 16th century a cumfit was more specifically a seed, nut or small piece of spice enclosed in a round or ovoid mass of sugar, though the more general sense of the word remained in usage until the 18th century.

The production of comfits, or confits for the void, was one of the core skills of the early confectioner, who was known more commonly in 16th and 17th century England as a comfitmaker. Reflecting their original medicinal purpose however, comfits were also produced by apothecaries and directions on how to make them, appear in dispensatories as well as cookery texts.<sup>24</sup> An early medieval Latin name for an apothecary was *confectionarius*, and it was in this sort of sugar work that the activities of the two trades overlapped.

One of the earliest detailed accounts of the craft in English, is entitled "The arte of comfetmaking, teaching how to cover all kinds of seeds, fruits or spices with sugar", included by Sir Hugh Platt in *Delights for Ladies* in 1600. Before he outlines the method of production, Sir Hugh describes the equipment required,

"First of all you must have a deepe bottomed bason of fine cleane brasse or latton, with two eares of Iron to hand it with two severall cordes over a bason or earthen pan with hote coales. You must also have a broad pan to put ashes in, and hot coales upon them. You must also have a cleane latton bason to melt your sugar in, or a faire brazen skillet. You must have a fine brason ladle, to let run the Sugar upon the seedes. You must also have a brasen slice, to scrape away the sugar from the hanging bason if neede require".<sup>25</sup>

In 1820 the London confectioner Guglielmo Jarrin published an illustration of a balancing comfit pan which agrees exactly with Platt's earlier description.<sup>26</sup> (see plate ) In fact the comfitmaker's apparatus did not change until it was mechanised in the late 19th century. Jarrin's equipment included a copper beading funnel, with a screw thread spigot in the centre, to regulate the flow of syrup more accurately than a plain ladle. Over two hundred years before, Platt had described a similar device, "Some commend a ladle that hath a hole in it to let the sugar run through of a height"

The carraway seeds or other items to be converted into comfits were put in the balancing pan and coated with a layer, or two, of gum arabic solution to seal in the natural oils which could prevent the sugar from adhering efficiently. As the seeds dried in the gentle heat provided by the chaffing dish below, they were rubbed between the hands in order to separate them. When they were completely dry a ladle of thin syrup was poured into the pan to "pearl" or coat the seeds. This syrup was made from three pounds of double refined sugar to one wine pint of water and boiled:

"untill it streame from the ladle like Turpentine, with a long streame and not drop, then it is come to his decoction, let it seeth no more, but keep it upon hote imbers that it may run from the ladle upon the seeds."<sup>27</sup>

This was a sticky job, as the comfitmaker once again had to rub the seeds in his hands in order to get them to separate. Once dry, they were given successive coats or "charges" of syrup until they took on a spherical or elliptical form as a result of the centrifugal force created by the revolving pan. Some comfitmakers added amyllum or starch to the first few syrup coatings to encourage the seeds

to separate.<sup>28</sup> The comfits were usually dried after every tenth charge, in a cool oven, stove or sometimes even in the sun. Sieves of different grades made from perforated leather were used to sort the finished comfits into various sizes.

Unless white comfits were required, colourings were added to the syrup used in the last few coats. In Platt's day a decoction of brazil wood or saunders powder was used to create red comfits, spinach or beet juice to make a light green colour and saffron for yellow. The confectioners of the 18th and early 19th century used liquid carmine, mulberry syrup and cochineal for red, gum gamboge for yellow and indigo for blue.<sup>29</sup>

The above process created what were known as smooth, pearl, or plain round comfits. If the syrup was boiled to what Platt called a higher decoction, the comfits were rough in texture and were known as ragged, or crisp comfits. Although sugar coated caraway, coriander, anise and fennel seeds were the most popular, many other items were made into comfits. Small slivers of cinnamon and candied orange were made into "long comfits" to adorn marchpanes and printed marmalades. In a still life painting by Clara Peeters (Charles Roelofsz Gallery, Amsterdam) small coloured seed comfits adorn a marchpane on a silver charger, while some long comfits spill from a platter of biscuits and wafers. (see plate ) Almond comfits, identical to modern sugared almonds (still known in Italy as *confetti*), were coated in the balancing pan, as were tiny biscuits and pellets of spiced breadcrumbs.<sup>30</sup> Muskadines, or kissing comfits for sweetening the breath were made in the 16th and 17th century by scenting sugar paste with musk, rosewater and orris powder and cutting them into diamond shaped tablets with a pastry jagger. Although these were not made in the balancing pan and were really a type of lozenge, or floral cachou, the early 19th century confectioner Jarrin describes very similar gum-paste comfits which were flavoured with "coffee, chocolate, bergamotte, vanilla, &c ... cut with tools of different forms, as lozenges, hearts, clubs, &c and are only to be put into the balance pan to be finished smooth" with three coatings of syrup to create a smooth glazed finish.<sup>31</sup>

The confiseurs of the town of Verdun were particularly celebrated for the quality of their dragées and recipes which attempt to replicate their methods occasionally appear in 18th century English cookery texts.<sup>32</sup> French comfitmakers were experts at using their balancing pans to coat tiny grains of gum paste flavoured with floral marmelades, to make dragées of violets, jasmine and orangeflowers.<sup>33</sup> Acid-flavoured *dragées de epine vinette* (barberry comfits) also appear to have been popular.<sup>34</sup>

By the Georgian period the range of comfits had increased to include cardamom comfits and the brightly coloured tiny nonpareils so frequently mentioned in later 18th century cookery books. The latter were made by coating microscopic particles of orris root dust with sugar in the balancing pan, although a slightly rougher grade was based on celery seeds. Comfits in liqueurs were made by soaking bitter almonds, or apricot kernels in maraschino, or brandy for a fortnight, and then coating them with sugar in the pan. Almond comfits were also flavoured with floral essences, such as rose and orangeflower, jasmine and bergamot. A few drops of the essential oils of these plants were added to the syrup used to make the central layers of the comfits.

Hollow sugar paste eggs, filled with imitation fruits, or other items, were also sugar coated in the comfit pan. In France this practice was taken to surprising lengths; "In Paris they put in a number of nicknacks, little almanacks, smelling bottles with essences, and even things of value, for presents." These novelty items are reminiscent of the artificial sugar paste walnuts of the Stuart banquet which were filled with mottoes and caraway comfits. Mrs. Glasse gives a recipe for "little things of sugar, with devices in them",

“in the middle of them have little pieces of paper, with some pretty smart sentences wrote on them: they will in company make much mirth.”<sup>35</sup>

Dried fruits such as cherries, currants and raspberries were also made into sugar-coated comfits, as were rings of preserved angelica stem. In the second half of the 18th century these jewel-like sweets were used with coloured sugar sands and other candies to create millifiori-like decorations on looking glass plateaux and dessert frames at high class desserts and ball suppers. Caraway comfits were also used to decorate trifles, biscuits and rout cakes and were also an ingredient of the enriched buns known as whigs. The Yorkshire cookery writer Elizabeth Moxon gives a charming recipe for Cupid Hedge Hogs, which were sugar glazed almonds coated in a layer of gaily coloured nonpareils. She tells us “They are pretty to put in glasses, or to set in a desert”. These were identical with the *amandes masquées* of the French confectioners. “Shot comfits” were used to make imitation gravel walks in decorative centrepieces for second courses and wedding suppers, such as Mrs Raffald’s Desert Island, a chinoiserie fantasy of candied eryngo roots and spun sugar, embellished with gum paste figures.<sup>36</sup>

### **Sugar Boiling**

The density and temperature of the syrup used by the comfitmaker was critical. A thin syrup boiled to a level called “smooth” or “sleeked” was necessary for making smooth comfits, while ragged comfits required sugar boiled to a higher “degree” known as the “pearl”. Comfitmakers were able to judge the correct height of their syrups by reading the sugar’s changing behaviour as it rose in temperature. Expertise in this skill was essential for good results, not only in comfit making, but in many other more difficult branches of the confectioner’s craft. Although medieval Arab, and later Renaissance Italian confectioners were instrumental in perfecting the art of sugar boiling, it was the French who first published a system that could be easily followed. In the last two decades of the 17th century this became more widely known in Britain, after it appeared in a translation of *L’École Parfaite des Officiers de Bouche* in 1682. This important work, first published in Paris in 1662 by Jean Ribou, contains six little treatises, one of which, *Le Confiturier Royal*, describes six main *cuissons*, or degrees of sugar boiling: *à lissé* (smooth or thread), *à perlé* (pearled), *à soufflé* (blown) *à la plumé* (feathered) *à cassé* (cracked) and *à brulé* or *caramel* (caramel). To allow even finer adjustment of sugar temperature some of the degrees had subdivisions such as *petit lissé* (small thread) and *grand lissé* (great thread)

Before the discoloured and often dirty sugar of the pre-industrial age could be used in confectionery, it had to be clarified by boiling in clear water with egg white and straining through a clean napkin. The resulting clear syrup could then be boiled to the first or “small thread” degree. To test the syrup the tip of the forefinger was dipped into the sugar pan and instantly joined to the tip of the thumb. The thumb and forefinger were then slowly separated. If the sugar was ready a short thread would form, which would break and leave two small drops on the thumb and finger. If the sugar was boiled a little longer and this thread extended to about a quarter as far as the forefinger and thumb could stretch, the syrup was at the “great thread” degree. To achieve the “small pearl”, the sugar was boiled until the thread stretched half the distance between forefinger and thumb, while the “great pearl” was known when the thread stretched the full distance without breaking. At the great pearl height, many small spherical bubbles like pearls were said to appear in the boiling sugar, giving this degree its name.

The next degree, the “blown” was assessed by dipping a perforated skimmer in the sugar after further boiling. The confectioner blew through these holes and if the syrup was at the correct temperature small bubbles of sugar would form on the holes in the skimmer. When these were much larger, forming strings of bladders, or “flying flakes” the sugar was said to be at the “small



feathered” degree.<sup>37</sup> The “great feathered” was known “by dipping a Skimmer in it, and giving it a strong turn over shake of the hand; if it turns to large sparks, which clog together in the rising, it is done to this Degree”.<sup>38</sup> Apart from the production of penidia and barley sugar and a few caramel decorations, confectionery made from syrup boiled beyond the feathered degree, was rare before the beginning of the 19th century.

The table below summarises the various terms of sugar boiling, as used from the 16th to the 19th century, giving their approximate temperatures in degrees Fahrenheit. It is only intended as a rough guide. There would have been considerable overlap between the various degrees, as quality of sugar, water purity and atmospheric humidity would have all had an influence on the behaviour of the syrup.

<i>Le petit lissé</i>	Smooth, sleeked, full syrup, small thread	215° - 220° F.
<i>Le grand lissé</i>	Great thread, Manus Christi	220° F.
<i>Le petit perlé</i>	little pearl, pearled	223° F.
<i>Le grand perlé</i>	great pearl	225° F.
<i>La petit queue de cochon</i>	the little pig’s tail	227° F.
<i>La grande queue de cochon</i>	the great pig’s tail	229° F.
<i>Au soufflé, a rozat</i>	blown, bloom, candy height, blown away	230° - 235° F.
<i>Le petit plume</i>	small feathers, little feather	240° F.
<i>Le grand plume</i>	large feather, casting height	245° F.
<i>Le petit boulet</i>	little ball, small bullet, soft ball,	247° F.
<i>Le gros boulet</i>	great ball, new ball, fondant	250° F.
<i>Petit cassé</i>	Small crack, spinning height	280-290° F.
<i>Grand cassé</i>	Broken, cracked, crack, crackled, snap, large crack	312° F.
<i>Le caramel or à brûlé</i>	Caramel, carmel, carmeled, burnt	350° F.

## **Wet or moist sweetmeats**

### **Preserves**

The ability of sugar to enable the flavours of seasonal fruits to be experienced at all times of year must at one time have been perceived as nothing short of miraculous. At the beginning of the 17th century, when sugar preserves were becoming more widespread in England, Sir Hugh Platt expressed his sentiments on the subject in verse,

“When crystall frost hath nipt the tender grape,  
And cleane consum’d the fruits of everie vine,

Yet heere behold the clusters fresh and faire,  
Fed from the branch, or hanging on the line,  
The Walnut, small nut, and the Chestnut sweet,  
Whose sugred kernels lose their pleasing taste  
Are heere from yeere to yeere preserved meet,  
and made by arte with strongest fruits to last”.<sup>39</sup>

The Greeks and Romans used honey as a preserving agent, but it was the Arabs who pioneered the use of sugar syrups to preserve fruits and the practice gradually spread throughout the Mediterranean during the medieval period. Citrus fruits preserved in syrup (sitranade) were being regularly imported into England by the early 15th century. By the Tudor period, these articles were being made in England from imported lemons and oranges.<sup>40</sup> At this time preserved fruits were known as “wet suckets”, and were an important item at the banquet course, their bright colours and translucent coatings of syrup being shown off to handsome effect in Venetian sweetmeat glasses.

Although there were various methods, the fruits were usually poached first in water and then boiled gently for a short time in a thin syrup. “It is a great fault to put any kind of sweetmeats into too thick a syrup, especially at first, for it withers your fruit, and takes off both the beauty and the flavour”.<sup>41</sup> They were steeped in this initial syrup for a day or two, which was then drained off and boiled again to reduce it to a stronger density. The process was repeated a number of times until the fruits had absorbed the saturated syrup completely, a method favoured in England since the reign of Queen Elizabeth I.<sup>42</sup> The finished preserves were stored in glasses or “gallipots” which were sealed with writing paper dipped in brandy, or bladders tied on with string. Sometimes the preserves were covered in a layer of rendered mutton suet to exclude the air.<sup>43</sup> A few household writers in the early 17th century advocated syrups made from reduced wine (cute) and unfermented malt liquor (wort) as preserving agents for fruit, but these methods never really caught on.<sup>44</sup>

Whole oranges and lemons were prepared by cutting a hole the size of a sixpence in the stalk end and making a cavity, by pushing a finger into the fruit, allowing the syrup to penetrate the inner flesh. If all the fruit pulp was removed carefully, the hollow preserved orange peel could later be filled with orange marmalade, or preserved apples and stored in glasses of pippin jelly. Sweetmeats of this kind were probably made in imitation of farced oranges imported from Portugal in the 17th century.<sup>45</sup> Whole preserved orange rinds were also filled with custard and baked in a slow oven to produce “a very genteel dish” called orange loaves.<sup>46</sup> Some confectioners preserved fruits in large tanks or tubs which had a hole in the bottom to allow easy draining of the syrup.<sup>47</sup>

A rather different method of preserving fruit with denser syrups, which originated in France, became popular with some professional confectioners towards the end of the 18th century, though it seems to have been known in England since the reign of James I.<sup>48</sup> For fruits like apricots and cherries this involved boiling sugar *à la grande plume* and adding the whole fruit to the boiling syrup for a few minutes. Softer fruit like gooseberries and red currants were added to syrup boiled *au cassé*, while verjuice grapes and mulberries were poached briefly in syrup prepared *à le grand lissé*. Syrup preserves of flowers such as orangeflowers and violets were made in the same way.<sup>49</sup>

The range of preserved fruits in syrup increased as sugar became more widely available from the 1640's onwards. By the 18th century, professional confectioners were selling such exotics as whole green pineapples in syrup, whole cedraties and grapes preserved in bunches, sometimes with a vineleaf attached for decorative effect.<sup>50</sup> “Pink lemons” were made by wrapping individual fruits up in little squares of cloth and preserving them in syrup coloured with cochineal.<sup>51</sup> Confectioners who worked in the households of the very wealthy were able to provide their noble lords with succulent preserves made from the produce of the estate orchards, orangeries and hothouses.

Favourite items for adorning the dessert were whole oranges and lemons, whose peel had been carved with intricate designs in the form of flowers, stars, borders “or any other fanciful ornament”. All sorts of citrus fruits were decorated in this way, including Seville and China oranges, citrons, bergamots and green “baby” oranges and lemons, though these were apparently difficult to obtain in England, other than on estates with orangeries.<sup>52</sup> An “orange cut in figures” was often given pride of place in a sweetmeat glass at the apex of a pyramid of salvers. As a result of this practice these “top glasses” were also known as “orange glasses”, as mentioned in a glass dealer’s advertisement of 1772, “Glass Salvers or Waiters chiefly from 9 to 13 inch, to be sold in Pyramids or Single, with Orange or Top Glasses”.<sup>53</sup> Top oranges were sometimes garnished with a coronet of sugar-preserved mustard sprigs, or candied pea pods, a decorative feature that dates from the 17th century. Hannah Wooley (1684), tells us that these were not eaten as, “they will look very finely, and are good to set forth at Banquets, but have no pleasant taste.” Samphire shoots were also preserved and candied as decorative knick-knacks, rather than for consumption. Hannah Glasse tells us “if you frost them they will be very pretty.”<sup>54</sup>

Peaches, apricots, cornels, pippins, warden (cooking pears), quinces, medlars, many varieties of plum, greengages, gooseberries and raspberries were all preserved entire in succulent syrups. Pippins were preserved in a variety of colours - green, white, amber and red, their flavour sometimes enhanced by spiking them with little lengths of cinnamon stick.<sup>55</sup> Medlars were preserved in a syrup made by boiling them with an equal weight of sugar in a wine known as tent. Fruits for preserving whole were usually picked when under-ripe, as mature fruits tended to go soft and disintegrate. Quinces had their skin pared decoratively in a spiral to resemble a screw and were then preserved in syrup, a new pewter spoon boiled with the fruit in the pan to encourage them to take on a red colour, a trick known since the 17th century.<sup>56</sup>

Preserves of a green colour were particularly admired and despite the considerable danger from poisoning, it became common to boil fruit and sugar in an untinned brass or copper pan in order to colour the preserve with verdigris. Another method of greening was to add roach alum to the water in which the preserves were boiled. A much safer, but not particularly effective way was to boil the fruit under a thick layer of vineleaves, or a heavy wooden board to exclude the air, as the flesh of fruits like gooseberries, greengages and green apricots tended to oxidise and go brown when cooked uncovered.<sup>57</sup> A modified version of the Tudor banquetting dish “sucket of greene Walnut”, originally preserved in vinegar and honey, remained popular into the 18th century, when white and black varieties also became available.<sup>58</sup> To make preserved green walnuts, or “jerkens”, small immature nuts about the size of nutmegs were wrapped individually in vine leaves and soaked in a series of brine baths for six days. They were then covered in layers of more vineleaves and blanched in hot water to which roach alum had been added before being heated in a succession of syrups spiced with ginger. Sometimes preserved green nuts were “aromatized with cinamon (by sticking it in them).” Immature apricots and Green almonds were preserved in a similar way. Even artichoke hearts were preserved in syrup.<sup>59</sup>

One unusual, but seemingly popular green sweetmeat was made by preserving gherkins in sugar syrup. An early recipe calls for lemon juice and orangeflower water in order to give the rather bland cucumbers a sharper flavour. Melons were also preserved like this, the general idea being to produce a cheap substitute for citron. “Either way they answer in taste, in mince pies, or cakes, as well as citron”.<sup>60</sup>

Gooseberries were partially cut crossways twice and opened out to form a four petalled flower. After the pips had been removed, about six were threaded on cord and preserved green under vineleaves in syrup to make “Gooseberries in the Form of Hops” an extremely attractive wet sweetmeat of a beautiful pale green. A red version was made with Campaign gooseberries coloured

with red currant jelly. Both kinds were sometimes preserved in pippin jelly. Preserved gooseberries made in this way were apparently used to make a striking ornament for the table - Hannah Glasse tells us "if you have a mind to make a little tree of them according to art, they will be very pretty in a dessert".<sup>61</sup>

The similar "Apricocks in Ears" and "cherries booted", introduced in the early 18th century from France, were made by joining apricot or cherry halves together. Cherries and red and white currants were tied together in attractive "Nosegays or Bunches", as were "barberries in sprigs". Barberries were a very popular fruit for confectionery as they had a "quick" acid taste and a beautiful red colour.

Fruit chips, or faggots and rings were made by cutting thin slivers, or sections of orange or lemon rind, or slices of the flesh of apricots, quinces, peaches or pineapples and preserving them in the usual succession of syrups. Some confectioners cut their apricot chips in spirals, others into "chips the size of a shilling".<sup>62</sup> "Paring Chips" were made from apricots and "China Chips" from the sweet China orange. Some high class confectioners like Domenico Negri advertised cedrati chips from citrons and "Bergamot Chips" made from the wonderfully perfumed rinds of the bergamot orange (*Citrus bergamia*).

The leaves of various fruit trees were also preserved, to be used to decorate plates of sweetmeats at winter desserts. They were sometimes preserved in the glasses with the fruits they belonged to, but were also bottled up separately. The following directions are given by Robert Abbot (c.1790), one-time apprentice to Negri:

To preserve Green leaves

Take grape leaves, strawberry leaves, or any other leaves: let them remain four hours in cold spring water, then take them out and put them into some sugar, give them a gentle boil, and set them by for use. N.B. They are convenient for putting under fruit in plates.<sup>63</sup>

## **Compôtes or Comports**

Related to the fruits preserved in syrup was the fresh fruit compôte or comport, usually served in an elegant compotier. However, unlike preserves, compôtes were cooked once only, in thinner syrups, and were designed to be eaten as soon as they had cooled, usually as accompaniments to ices. The frequent inclusion of compôtes in late 18th and early 19th century bills of fare, indicate that they became a popular and important dessert dish in England in the decades following the French Revolution, though recipes had been around since at least 1692.<sup>64</sup> The most common sorts were made from apples, pears and quinces. More unusual were Compôte of Verjuice and Muscadine Grapes, Green Almond Compôte, Chestnut Compôte and Stuffed Apple Compôte. The latter was made by baking cored apples stuffed with apricot marmalade and finishing them with a light syrup. Elderflower Compôte was a reduced apple marmalade flavoured with a strong decoction of elderflowers and decorated with coloured jellies.

Masked Compôtes were embellished with a wafer thin sheet of red or clear jelly to produce a stained glass window effect. Chestnut compôte, flavoured with Seville orange juice or lemon chips was sprinkled with powdered sugar, which was then heated with a red hot salamander to create a crisp caramel glaze. In the winter months, when fresh fruit for compôtes was unavailable, preserved fruits were removed from their thick coatings of concentrated syrup and put into a thinner one, diluted with lemon juice, to create an acceptable substitute.<sup>65</sup>

## Fruit Jellies and Jams

Throughout the 17th and 18th centuries some fruits like apples and quinces were first boiled in syrup and then when “you see the Apples look very clear, and as though they were transparent” they were strained and preserved in a transparent apple jelly rather than in their own syrup. This jelly was made by boiling apples to a pulp, straining the juice through a linen or woollen jelly bag and reboiling the juice with sugar until it set as a result of its own pectin. Whole pippins preserved in jelly in this way were often wrapped in a preserved orange peel. Sir Kenelm Digby preferred “them thin sliced, rather than whole; and the Orange-peels scattered among them in little pieces or chips”.<sup>66</sup> An early 18th century version of this delightful recipe uses little pieces of lemon peel rather than chips of orange rind. We are directed to put the apples “into Glasses that will hold but one in a Glass” and to cover them with a pippin jelly scented with musk and ambergrease.<sup>67</sup> Red and white raspberries, plumbs, bell grapes, cherries, currants, peach chips and barberries were preserved in a similar way in their own jellies.

The brightly coloured translucent jellies made from these pectin-rich fruits were themselves very much in demand and confectioner’s kitchens and still-rooms were equipped with at least one jelly bag, which was often hung on a round iron socket on a wall (see illus.).<sup>68</sup> One late 18th century authority tells us that we are “in sifting the different sorts of Fruits, not to force the gross fleshy particles, rather only the Juices, which make the Jellies clearer, and ought for that purpose to be strained in Linen cloths, rather than any kinds of Sieves”.<sup>69</sup> Jelly of muscadine grapes (*Gelée de Muscat*) and jelly of pomegranate (*Gelée de Grenades*) were two unusual French recipes of court origin which appeared in English translations in the last quarter of the eighteenth century. In contrast to the method for making English jellies, the strained juices of the fruit were added to syrups boiled *à la grande plume* for the muscat grapes and *au grand boulet* for pomegranates.<sup>70</sup>

As well as being an important wet sweetmeat in its own right, red currant jelly was often used to embellish other dessert foods, such as the following centrepiece for a supper published by the Doncaster confectioner Elizabeth Raffald in 1769.<sup>71</sup> It must indeed have looked very striking in the candlelight.

### *To make a FLOATING ISLAND*

Grate the yellow rind of a large lemon into a quart of cream, put in a large glass of Madeira wine, make it pretty sweet with loaf sugar, mill it with a chocolate mill to a strong froth, take it off as it rises, then lay it upon a sieve to drain all night, then take a deep glass dish, and lay in your froth, with a Naples biscuit in the middle of it, then beat the white of an egg to a strong froth, and roll a sprig of myrtle in it to imitate snow, stick it in the Naples biscuit, then lay all over your froth currant jelly cut in very thin slices, pour over it a very strong calf’s foot jelly, when it grows thick lay it all over, till it looks like a glass, and your dish is full to the brim; let it stand till it is quite cold and stiff, then lay on rock candied sweet-meats upon the top of your jelly, and sheep and swans to pick at the myrtle; stick green sprigs in two or three places on the top of your jelly, amongst your shapes: it looks very pretty in the middle of a table for supper.

Pulped fruit boiled in a mass with its own weight of sugar and known from 1718 onwards as Jam or Giam, was a much easier sweetmeat to make than fruit jelly, which demanded careful straining through the jelly bag. These seem to have been a speciality of Queen Anne’s confectioner Mrs. Mary Eales, who was among the first to publish recipes for cherry, apricock and raspberry jam.

In addition to fruit jellies thickened with naturally occurring pectin, 18th century confectioners often list calf’s foot jellies in their advertisements. These were made by colouring and flavouring the clarified stocks obtained from boiling up calf’s feet and various other animal products rich in gelatine, such as hart’s horn, isinglass and ivory. Usually served in jelly glasses on salvers with creams and syllabubs, these were very popular and feature in many of the dessert bills of fare for the period. For special occasions, novelty items made from jelly and flummery (opaque cream or

almond jelly) were very popular in the last three decades of the century. Sets of quadrille and cribbage cards made from flummery, sparkled in a covering of white wine, while gilded flummery fish swam in ponds of crystal jelly.<sup>72</sup>

These conversation pieces in jelly were the descendents of the “conceited dishes” of the Tudor period. Sir Hugh Platt describes a banquet presented in the form of a supper of cooked birds and rabbits moulded in isinglass blancmange, “you may dredge over your foule with crums of bread, cinamon and sugar boiled together, and so they will seeme as if they were rosted and breaded”.<sup>73</sup>

### **Clear Cakes and Clarequets**

Related to fruit jellies, but more difficult to make, were clear cakes, known in France as clarequets. These were made from fruits naturally rich in pectin such as currants and gooseberries. In a late 17th century English recipe for “Clear Cakes of red Currants or raspberries, to dry with a firm Ice upon them”, we are instructed to dissolve one pound and two ounces of fine sifted sugar in one pound of strained currant juice. The decoction is then heated on the fire, “but be sure let it not boyl” and is then poured into “clear Cake-Glasses; and when it is cold, set it in a Stove, there being a very gentle Heat: and when the upper-most Side is Iced, then turn them out of the Glasses upon pieces of Window-glass: and when they are Iced with a firm Ice, turn them upon paper laid in a dry Sieve”.<sup>74</sup> The finished clear cakes were stored in boxes in layers between papers and were said to last up to a year.

These delicious little sweets for the dessert had a thin layer of candied sugar on the outside, but the inside remained an exquisite jelly. The cake glasses or *moules à clarequets* were filled to a depth of about half an inch. Clear cakes were also made from codlings, pippins, pear-plumbs and quinces and could be cut into “any shape you please, as ovals, squares, lozenges, &c”.<sup>75</sup> Mrs. Eales (1718) gives a recipe for Pomegranate Clear Cakes which are made from pippin jelly flavoured with orange syrup and coloured with carmine, but despite their name they do not contain any pomegranate juice. Perhaps, fresh pomegranates were difficult to obtain at this time. However, from the time of Edward Lambert, who traded from his confectionery shop in St. Albans Street, Pall Mall in the 1740’s, recipes for real pomegranate clear cakes start to appear in the cookery and confectionery texts.<sup>76</sup> French confectioners made their clarequets by adding the carefully strained fruit juice to sugar boiled to the crack degree (*au cassé*) and allowed them to develop a sugar crust in a gentle heat of about 75° F. in a confectioner’s stove. A taste for sweetmeats flavoured with scented flowers at the French court throughout the 18th century meant that apple clarequets were often enriched with the perfume of violets and orangeflowers.<sup>77</sup> Clear cakes made from “white” or colourless fruits like apples were tinted green with a mixture of “stone blue” and gum gambodge.<sup>78</sup>

### **Brandy Fruits**

Recipes for these, the most luxurious of wet sweetmeats, started to appear in English cookery and confectionery texts in the second half of the eighteenth century, as in “A nice Way to preserve Peaches” in the sixth edition of Hannah Glasse’s *The Art of Cookery made Plain and Easy* of 1758. The gently scalded peaches were put in wide mouthed bottles covered with clarified sugar syrup and topped up with brandy. In another recipe, Mrs. Glasse tells us to “Observe that you leave room enough for the Peaches to be well cover’d with Brandy and cover the Glass with a Bladder and Leather, and tie them close down”.<sup>79</sup> Other fruits preserved in this way were cherries, apricots, pears, greengages, mirabelle plumbs and grapes. An English household which had a well-stocked orchard and nuttery and could afford the services of a French confectioner might enjoy green

walnuts, green almonds and green apricots in brandy. The sugar syrup for brandy fruits was usually boiled to the pearl degree by professional confectioners. In late 18th century they were usually served at the table ends with the ices and wafers.<sup>80</sup>

### **Marmalades and Fruit Pastes**

Although marmalades are now jam-like confections made from citrus fruits, they were once stiff pastes and jellies made by boiling quinces with sugar. Originally imported into England from Portugal and Italy during the Renaissance and variously known as marmalets, cotoniacks or quiddanies, these succulent fruit cheeses and jellies, often perfumed and speckled with gold leaf, became one of the best-loved sweetmeats of the Elizabethan banquet course.<sup>81</sup>

The honey-scented flavour of the quince had been esteemed from the time that the Greeks first cultivated the tree in the Eastern Mediterranean and one of its ancient synonyms *melimelon* (honey apple) was the probable source of its Portuguese name - *marmelo*. Thus the early English names marmylate, marmelad and marmalet. However, the most common classical name for the quince was *melocyclonium*, the Latin source of its Renaissance Italian name *melo cotogne* or *cotogne* (it was originally cultivated around the city of Cydonia in Crete - modern Hania). Quince marmalade, or Genoa paste as it was sometimes known, imported into England in the 16th century from Italy and France, became known here by its Italian and French names *cotognata* and *cotoniack*, later corrupted into quindiniac and finally quiddany. However, by the early 17th century, quiddanies were considered distinct from marmalades, being more like a jelly in consistency, "Quiddanet, a sweete mixture thicker than a sirupe, and not so thicke nor stiffe as marmalet".<sup>82</sup>

The quince and its various confections were so popular in England from the 16th to the 18th centuries that recipes for them in old cookery texts usually outnumber those for all other fruits. Gardener and herbalist John Parkinson wrote with great enthusiasm on the culinary delights and the medicinal properties of this luxurious fruit:

"There is no fruit growing in this Land that is of so many excellent uses as this, serving as well to make many dishes of meate for the table, as for banquets, and much more for the Physicall vertues....And being preserved whole in Sugar, either white or red, serve likewise, not onely as an after dish to close up the stomacke, but is placed among other Preserves by Ladies and Gentlewomen, and bestowed on their friends to entertaine them, and among other sorts of Preserves at Banquets. Codimacke also and Marmilade, Jelly and Paste, are all made of Quinces, chiefly for delight and pleasure, although they also have with them some physicall properties."<sup>83</sup>

This evidence that the marmalades and codimakes of the Tudors and Stuarts were consumed for therapeutic reasons as well as "for delight and for pleasure" is borne out by the large number of recipes in the household books and dispensaries of the period. In Richard Surfleet's 1616 translation of Estienne's *The Countrey Farme* we learn that "some make a confection of Quinces, called Marmalade, which is verie soveraigne against a flux of the bellie". *Diaconydium simplex*, sometimes incorrectly called *Dia Setonia*, (simple quince marmalade) was much used by the apothecaries as a basis for making a wide range of preparations.<sup>84</sup> One known as *Marmelada Cephalica*, or marmalade for the head, was prescribed for "most Diseases of the Head, as Frenzy, Madness, Epilepsie, Apoplexy, Vertigo, Megrim, Lethargy, Fits of the Mother" In addition to the quinces, salt of man's skull, amber and mace were included in the composition. There were other less dubious "official" marmalades such as *Marmelada Pectoralis* (for the breast and lungs), *Marmelada Cordialis calida* (marmalade warming the heart) and *Marmelada Cordialis frigida* (marmalade cooling the heart).<sup>85</sup> Some marmalades were consumed for more sensuous reasons and were fortified with alleged aphrodisiacs such as eryngo root, satyrion and rocket seed.<sup>86</sup>

The marmalades and cotoniakes of Southern European origin were exported in round wooden boxes, which are often depicted in Spanish and Dutch still-life paintings of banquet tables. (see illustrations - Clara Peeters and Osias Beert ) Like many other banquetting foods of the Renaissance period, marmalades and fruit pastes were often made in intricate moulds. In a recipe “to make paste of Quinces” Gervase Markham directs us to boyl it together till it be stiff enough to mould, and when it is cold, then role it: print it”.<sup>87</sup> Sir Hugh Platt gives more detailed directions for printing the more jelly-like “Quidini of Quinces”, “and if you please to printe it in moldes, you must have moldes made to the bigness of your boxe, and wet your moldes with Rosewater, and so let it run into your molde”.<sup>88</sup>

Rosewater was a frequent ingredient of these pectin-rich pastes, though some preferred the flavour of stronger animal perfumes and musk and ambergreese are required in many recipes. William Salmon gives us directions to perfume confections of this kind:

“Take of Musk in very Subtil Pouder, Oil of Nutmegs, of each equal weight; mix them well together and digest them in D.R.W., (Damask rosewater) with which you may gently sprinkle your Banqueting matters: so will their Scent, or Odour and smell, be as grateful and pleasing to the Nose, as their Taste will be to the Palate.”<sup>89</sup>

“Marmalade the Spanish way”, by the same author was a quince paste embellished with perfumed comfits. A disc of quince marmalade printed with an intricate strapwork design in “Lazarus and the Rich man’s table” by Frans Franken II is garnished with long comfits. ( see illustration German Bread Museum Ulm).

English comfitmakers and housewives were making marmalades from homegrown quinces by the 16th century and recipes for red and white marmalade abound in the cookery texts from this time on. Methods vary considerably , but generally speaking, red quince marmalade was made by covering the saucepan and slowly cooking the fruit in the sugar for a long time, while the white was cooked more rapidly in an uncovered preserving pan. Sometimes the juice of barberries and cochineal were added to enhance the colour of red quince marmalade.

As well as quince pastes, various confections and jellies made from other fruits also became known as marmalades and by the 17th century, flavours included cherry, cornel, red currant, plum, citron, damascen, apricock and grape. These jelly-like marmalades, were also called quiddanies, a word which appears to have become obsolete by the middle of the 18th century. French confiseurs excelled in making marmalades from orangeflowers, violets and green almonds and apricots. The expressed juice of unripe grapes was concentrated by boiling to make *marmelade de verjus*.<sup>90</sup> During the Regency period a marmalade was considered to be “a half liquid preserve” rather than a stiff paste, or fruit leather.<sup>91</sup>

Eventually, marmalade became the name exclusively given to the favourite British breakfast preserve made from oranges or lemons. A very early orange marmalade appears in Gervase Markham’s *English Housewife* of 1615, but this was still very much a paste or “cutting marmalade” and was stored like its quince relative in boxes.<sup>92</sup> By at least the early 18th century marmalades were appearing on the breakfast table as well as being consumed as “banqueting matters” at desserts. In 1707, the royal confectioner Elizabeth Stephens is recorded as supplying,

“8lb of Quince Marmalade for His Royal Highness Breakfast at 4s. the lb 32s. and Carraways for her Majesty 3s. in all by her provided and delivered”.<sup>93</sup>

Confectioners soon learnt that stiff marmalade paste prepared from pippins and apricots was an excellent modelling material for making decorative features like knots, jumbals and artificial fruits.



These were originally Tudor banquetting conceits, but they remained popular into the late 18th century and were readily available in the confectioner's shops. These "cakes", or pastes were made by reducing the fruit pulp to a thick puree over a gentle heat and adding an equal weight of sugar. The resulting pap was reduced further and then spread or "dressed" on a slate, sheet of glass, or pie plate. A large range of other fruits were prepared in this way, including orange, lemon, plum, cherry and gooseberries. Colour as well as taste was important - a paste of eglantine "of the colour of red corall" is described in *A Closet for Ladies and Gentlewomen* of 1608, while the Pall Mall confectioner Edward Lambert (c. 1744) gives a recipe for a bright green "Angelico Paste".<sup>94</sup> Gaily coloured apricock jumbals were made by colouring the paste "with saunders, Cochineale or blew Starch, and make it up into what colour you please, rowl them with battle doors into long pieces, and tye them up into knots, and so dry them."<sup>95</sup> Sometimes pippin paste was cut into long strips or fillets and then made up into true lovers' knots, letters and other fancy shapes.

Pastes of apples, apricots and plums were spread very thinly on sheets of glass, dried in the stove and then rolled round sticks to make little wafer-like sweets called "spun paste". Artificial fruits moulded from these pastes often contained the kernels of real fruit and were embellished with an actual stalk. In the context of the rococo dessert we are told that all these sweetmeat novelties served "to garnish Frames in Deserts, or for Plates intermixed."<sup>96</sup>

### **Conserves**

Conserves were usually made by pounding fresh herbs, flowers or fruits with sugar to form a thick, sticky mass. They were a favourite still-room item, made by housewives and their maids, as well as by professional apothecaries and confectioners. Valued for their alleged remedial properties, they became an important item at the banquet, although a spoonful of the appropriate conserve was no doubt dispensed from the closet at other times for various infirmities.

The most favoured conserves were made from flowers. Freshly gathered petals of highly-scented damask and gallica roses were pounded in a mortar, with sometimes up to three or four times their own weight in loaf sugar, to produce the celebrated conserve of red roses. This was a highly esteemed cordial, not only good for cooling the heart, stomach and bowels, but also for hindering vapours. Its sweet perfumed flavour must have made a spoonful or two a favourite nursery medicine. Sir Kenelm Digby tells us how it was also made into a beautifully coloured julep or sherbet drink in spring water with lemon juice and zest.<sup>97</sup> In addition to the usual flower petals and sugar, John Nott's recipe for conserve of marigolds, is fortified with other medicinal ingredients:

To make a Conserve of Marigolds

Take four Ounces of Marigold-flowers, Confection of Hyacinth and Kermes, of each four Drams, the Powder of Pearl two Ounces, and as much syrup of Citron as will make it up into a Conserve, mixing and bruising them well together with refin'd sugar.<sup>98</sup>

Other flower, or herb conserves, were made from bugloss, borage, chicory, rosemary, sage, violets, lavender and marjoram. While fruit conserves were prepared from barberries, pomegranates, verjuice grapes, apricots, peaches, nectarines and oranges. After Clermont's translation of *Les Soupers de la Cour* by Menon appeared in 1767, and the publication of Borella's *Court and Country Confectioner* in 1770, a range of recipes for elegant conserves popular at the French court became available to English speaking confectioners. Among these were conserves of jasmine flowers, saffron, pistachios, filberts, cedrats and marshmallow roots.<sup>99</sup>

### **Dry Sweetmeats**

## Candy and “rock works”

Candied fruits were made by washing the syrup from previously preserved fruits with warm water and drying them in a stove. They were then rolled in powdered sugar, or given a frosted coating by dipping them into syrup which had been boiled to the blown degree and “grained” by rubbing the syrup against the sides of the pan with a spaddle. English comfit-makers in the 17th century used this process to produce what they called “candy sucket” or “rocks” from preserved fruits, lettuce stalks, mallow stalks, flowers and herbs.<sup>100</sup> Professional confectioners of the Georgian period used a third, very effective method of finishing. They let the fruits acquire a sparkling, crystalline coat, by steeping them in tanks of syrup in a moderately heated stove (80° F.) for ten to twelve hours. The syrup used for this purpose was boiled to the little blow and was gently poured onto the fruits, which were laid out on wire gratings, or racks, and placed in a mould with a hole in the base, so the syrup could be drained out on the removal of a cork (see illustration).

This method was a refinement of a very old process used to produce large crystals of sugar in an earthenware pot, which had to be broken to get to the “rock sugar” inside. Elizabethan comfit-makers had used this technique “to candie Nutmegs or Ginger with an harde rocke candie.” Sir Hugh Platt instructs us to,

Take one pound of fine Sugar, and eight spoonefulls of Rosewater and the waight of 6. pence of Gum Arabique, that is cleere, boyle them together to such an height, as that dropping from thereof out of a spoone, the sirup doe rope and run into an earthen pipkin, wherein place your nutmegs, ginger or such like, then stop it close with a saucer, and lute it well with clay, that no ayre may enter, then keepe it in a hote place three weekes, and it will candie hard. You must breake your pot with an hammer, for otherwise you cannot get out your candie. You may also candy Orenge, or Lemons in like sort if you please”.<sup>101</sup>

Nutmegs to be candied in this way were first softened by steeping them in a solution of wood ash lye for about ten days.

In his usual idiosyncratic way, the dietician Thomas Tryon (169 ), tells us of the medicinal uses (and dangers) of rock sugar,

“There are two sorts of it, White and Brown, but they are both of one Nature and Operation, and the chief use that is made of either, besides spoiling of Childrens Teeth, is to several sorts of People as a Medicine, when they are troubled with Coughs, Colds and inward Stoppages of the Breast”.<sup>101</sup>

In the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries large crystals of rock sugar were used to represent rocks and boulders in decorative centrepieces for the dessert. These were often coloured by adding stains to the syrup in spirits of wine. By this time re-usable tin, or copper candy moulds, were being utilised (see illustration ). These were conical vessels pierced with concentric rows of holes, through which threads could be passed. The moulds were lined with a double layer of paper and a syrup which had been boiled to the little feather poured in. The process was finished by putting the mould in a moderately heated stove (probably about 75° F.) for eight days, the sugar crystals forming on the threads. Earlier confectioners had encouraged the crystals to grow on little sticks, or lengths of willow whisk.<sup>102</sup>

A confectioner’s stove was a form of drying cabinet made from tin plate with a number of slatted shelves and a simple ventilation grill, usually in the door. The simplest kind for domestic use were small tin boxes which were heated by placing a chaffing dish of charcoal underneath, while larger stoves in professional kitchens were built as tin-lined cupboards with a space at the bottom for a

charcoal brazier. A large drying stove of this kind dating from the 1820's survives at Syon House and has recently been described by Peter Brears.<sup>103</sup>

Contemporary with the Syon stove is an illustration of a drying stove published by Jarrin in *The Italian Confectioner* in 1820, which the author tells us was of his own invention (see illustration). This stove was heated from the bottom by a pipe carrying hot air from another stove. A hole in the door could be opened or shut to regulate the heat, while pivoting trays allowed the syrups to be drained into a bason below for recycling, an ideal arrangement in a busy confectionery with a large volume of work. All kinds of fruits were candied in this way. Jarrin lists, "Green apricots, ripe apricots in halves, apricots stuck with green almonds, greengages, mirabelles, barberries in bunches, cherries, angelica, orange, or any other fruit".<sup>104</sup>

Floral candies had long been a favourite and early cookery literature abounds with recipes to candy the flowers of rosemary, tuberose, cowslips, marigolds, borage, gilliflowers, violets, roses and orangeflowers. A variety of methods are given by the apothecary William Salmon in his *New London Dispensatory* of 1692:

"Here it is to be noted, 1. That flowers are Candied by pouring on them Syrup of Sugar highly boiled. 2. Some are Candied whole, as flowers of Citrons, Oranges, Roses, Cowslips, &c. 3. Some are Candied by covering them *stratum super stratum*, with fine Loaf sugar. 4. Some flowers, as Capers, are Preserved with Pickle. 5. Some anoint the Flowers with Glair of Eggs, sprinkle them with white Sugar and Set them in the sun to dry; so will they be kept whole and well coloured."<sup>105</sup>

For the Stuart banquet, cowslips and violets were candied in wedges of crystallised sugar, scented with musk and gilded, a sweetmeat of apparent Spanish origin. These floral "cakes", their texture, rather like that modern Kendal mintcake, survived into the 18th century, though they were most commonly made with orangeflowers. They were cast in little paper cases "in the form of a Dripping pan".<sup>106</sup> Of French origin, but available in Georgian confectioner's shops in England were "orangeflower prawlings", made by adding freshly gathered orangeflowers to sugar syrup boiled to the little ball. The sugar was stirred with the spaddle to a fine sand and the prawlings sifted out. They were sometimes finished off with a fine crystallised crust by steeping them in syrups in the stove. Whole jonquils and violets were candied in the same way. Pots of orangeflowers that had been preserved in syrup were put into boiling water to melt the syrup, which was then drained off. The flowers were then sprinkled with powder sugar and dried.<sup>107</sup> Dried and powdered roses were added to sugar and transformed into a rose candy, which was "made into figures, as men, women or birds - and if you want ornaments for your desert, you may gild or colour them."<sup>108</sup> Candied flowers of this kind provided colour and interest for dessert frames and mirror glass plateaux and were at the height of fashion in the second half of the eighteenth century. However, by the 1820's they were considered as outmoded and frivolous as powdered wigs and recipes start to disappear from the confectionery texts.<sup>109</sup>

Barks and roots were also preserved and coated in sugar candy. Cinnamon and cassia were soaked in syrup, or spirits of wine, to soften them and then candied in the stove. Roots with sweet flesh, such as skirrets, carrots, parsnips and sweet potatoes were particularly suited to the candying process and were favourites with comfitmakers in the 17th century. The best known of all condited roots was candied eryngo, made from sea holly roots and much praised as an aphrodisiac. Eryngo candy was soft and succulant inside its coating of sugar and was twisted to resemble barley sugar or penidia.<sup>110</sup> Some recipes recommend us to "slit them, and take out the pith, and braid them in Braids as you would a woman's Hair, or else twist them."<sup>111</sup> The most celebrated eryngoes were made by the Great family, who traded at the Old Twisted Pots and Posts in Colchester between 1650 and 1797. One of their eryngo boxes survives with its original label in Colchester Museum see

illustration.<sup>112</sup> An even more powerful aphrodisiac was an orchid called satyrion, whose roots were also candied.<sup>113</sup> It is impossible to say whether the long comfits on the table in the Banquet scene by de Coullery are candied eryngo, or satyrion roots, but the flirting banquetees are certainly in an amorous mood (see illustration). Similar licentious activities are also depicted in another painting by de Coullery, this time a summer feast of fruits and wine in the form of an open air picnic. (illustration) An etching by Pieter Van der Borcht shows a similar event taking place, but this time with a group of carousing and brawling monkeys enjoying a summer banquet of provocative roots and fruits. (illustration) In his *Anatomy of Abuses*, the puritan writer Phillip Stubbes attacks gatherings of this kind, which in England often took place in the privacy of a garden banquetting house,

“And leist they might be espied in these open places, they have their Banquetting Houses with Galleries, Turrettes, and with not els therein sumptuously erected; wherin thei maie (and doubtlesse doe) Many of them plaie the filthie persons... truly I think some of these plaices are little better than the Stewes and Brothell Houses were in tymes past”.<sup>114</sup>

Many other sweetmeats were candied by professional confectioners in their drying stoves. Knots of fruit paste, rings of apple jelly and brightly coloured miniature meringues called meteors were all given a sparkling coat of sugar in trays of “feathered” syrup. A confectionery item called “Northpole candy” was made by dribbling a mixture of egg yolk and maraschino through a narrow throated funnel into “blown” sugar syrup to form a soft vermicelli-like material. This was made up into little rocks the size of a half crown and finished in trays of syrup in the stove to achieve a sparkling candied coating.<sup>115</sup>

Special boxwood moulds were needed to make the little paper cases required to create “Ball candy”, perfectly hollow spheres of transparent sugar candy in which, we are told “you can also paint in the interior some small flowers, a motto, or other ornament, which produce a pleasing effect”.<sup>116</sup>

A considerable amount of ingenuity went into making other decorative items for the dessert using the candying process. Miniature sugar trees and bushes for dessert plateaux were made by encouraging rock sugar crystals to grow on sprigs of thyme, hung in candy boxes full of “blown” syrup. These were placed in the stove for six to eight hours and “if you put them in candy a second time, they will come out ornamented with crystals extremely pleasing to the eye”.<sup>117</sup> A chinoiserie candy tree of this kind, growing in a rock sugar landscape, is depicted on the trade card of a London confectioner called Carter, who had shops at the *Cherry Tree and Sugar Loaves* in the Strand and at Westminster Hall in the 1770's (see illustration). These ornamental trees were also made with leaves cut from pistachio nuts, coloured almonds and gum-paste.

### **Boiled Sugar and caramel work**

The alphenics and penidia of medieval Arab apothecaries survived in the Georgian confectionery shops as sticks, drops and lozenges of barley sugar, though by this time they were probably used more to keep children quiet than for treating coughs and rheums. The sticks were made by pouring sugar boiled to the crack, from a pan with a spout, into narrow lengths on a marble slab greased with almond or olive oil. As the sticks cooled they were twisted into shape by hand. These ancestors of our boiled sweets were sometimes flavoured with essential oils, that of citron being the most popular. Penidia were prepared by the apothecaries “of sugar dissolved of a gentle fire in Barley water”, so it would appear that barley sugar and penids were identical.<sup>118</sup>

Another cough remedy based on pulled sugar, available in the confectioners' shops were “poppy drops.” Known to the apothecaries as *Diacodium solidum*, these were made by adding a strong decoction of poppy flowers to a barley sugar syrup as it reached the crack degree. The mass was

then cut with scissors and formed into little lozenges which we are told “thicken and stop Catarrhs, help Coughs, Roughness and Soreness of the Wind-pipe, causes Rest and Sleep, and ease all sorts of pains. You may carry them in your Pocket, and eat them as you see occasion”. Little tablets of boiled sugar flavoured with elderflowers were also sold by the confectioners as “an excellent remedy for the stomach complaint”.<sup>119</sup>

Bon-bons, a traditional New Year’s Day gift in France, were available in England at least as early as 1770, when they were referred to by the confectioner Borella as Bomboons in his *Court and Country Confectioner*. However, they became more common after the Revolution, due to the influence of refugee confectioners who had worked for French noblemen. In their native home, they were enclosed in papers inscribed with “fables, historical subjects, songs, enigmas, jeux de mots, and various little gallantries”.<sup>120</sup> However, in England, where this custom was unknown, they were chiefly used to ornament dessert frames. Bon-bons was really a generic term for a family of different sweetmeats moulded from sugar boiled to the crack degree and flavoured with various essences or liqueurs. Favourites were rose, cinnamon, vanilla, bergamot and lemon. Borella gave recipes for bitter almond, orangeflower and nut. His coffee cream bomboons were a precursor of modern toffee. Twenty years later Robert Abbot gives a recipe for another early toffee called Strasburgh paste, which was made from sugar and honey boiled to caramel.<sup>121</sup>

Another popular sweetmeat made with sugar boiled to a high temperature, were burnt almonds, sometimes called almond prawlongs, prawlings, parched, or crisp almonds. These were identical with the *Grillages* and *Amandes à la Praline* of the French confectionery texts. To make them, sugar syrup was boiled to the crack and the unblanched nuts stirred in until the sugar dried on them. The process was sometimes repeated to get a thicker coating. Red burnt almonds were made by adding a little cochineal to the syrup when it reached the crack. Prawlongs were also prepared from pistachio nuts, but by boiling the sugar to a lower temperature, usually the feathered degree, and are occasionally referred to as *pistachios in surtout*.<sup>122</sup> Prawlongs created from various citrus fruit chips, burnt filberts and orange flowers were other favourite variations, easily purchased from both city and provincial confectioners.

The early forms of nougat or nogat, which seem to have arrived in England in the early 19th century, were probably developed by continental confectioners who experimented with the praline method. In order to prevent burning their fingers, some workers spread their nougat mixture on the marble slab with a carrot or lemon, creating a paste that could be moulded into rock-like shapes for decorating dessert plateaux.

Other sugar ornaments were also made with nuts. Roasted chestnuts were skewered on sticks of whisk and dipped into sugar boiled to caramel. By lining buttered moulds with these and ensuring they stuck together, the resulting containers could be made into ornamental baskets, by finishing them with handles made from spun sugar. Fruits, both fresh and preserved, were coated in caramel in the same way and were served in chestnut baskets of this kind. Alternatively they were arranged in little pyramids on paper mats, cut or embossed with decorative patterns.<sup>123</sup> All traces of syrup had to be removed from preserved and brandy fruits, which had then to be completely dried before coating in caramel. Quarters of fresh oranges were dried “before a Fire, or in a Stove, to make the Skin tough: for if any wet come out, the Sugar will not stick to it.” Whole bunches of “carmel grapes” were prepared in this way.<sup>124</sup> Decorative baskets were also made from slivers of almonds coloured with cochineal, held together with spun sugar and embellished with gum paste ornaments.

Table ornaments of spun sugar, both silver and gold, were used “to set off” a dessert, their web-like appearance, making a particularly striking spectacle as they sparkled in the candlelight. Transparent hemispheres of sugar filigree, known as burnt sugar or caramel crokants (*croquante en caramel*) were

used to make covers for dishes of preserved fruits, custards and other sweetmeats. To make a silver web, a lump of loaf sugar was melted in a silver dish by the fire and the transparent threads drawn out from it on the end of a knife, were spun over a greased hemispherical mould to create a little cupola of sugar threads. Gold web was created in the same way, but by melting powdered sugar to caramel in a silver ladle. Elizabeth Raffald specialised in this sort of work and in 1768 advertised “Jellies, Creams, Gold and Silver Webs for covering sweetmeats, and all other decorations for cold entertainments”.<sup>125</sup> In her *Experienced English Housekeeper* of 1769, she gives detailed instructions for making these spun sugar crokants as well as for an entire Dessert of Spun Sugar. This “pretty desert for a grand table” was a fairy tale tower of three hollow spun caramel globes, one on top of the other, each filled with sprigs of myrtle and flowers. Festooned with smaller baskets of sugar web and crowned with a sprig of myrtle, this remarkable structure was elevated above the centre of the table on a silver salver.<sup>126</sup>

Jarrin, writing in 1820, tells us that “with spun sugar you may make every required ornament, temples, vases, ships, globes, covers for vases, and even imitate horse-hair on a helmet &c..” Perhaps the most extraordinary decorative centrepiece of this kind was a spun sugar beehive, populated with gum-paste bees, described by the Scarborough confectioner Joseph Bell in 1817.<sup>127</sup> Spun sugar work became one of the most popular forms of decorative confectionery in the later 19th century, when intricate sultanes and pavilions graced the dinner tables of wealthy Victorians.<sup>128</sup> The intricate moulds needed for spinning these ornaments were available from suppliers like William Adams and Son of Haymarket and Norris Street. Intricate crokant covers for sweetmeats were also cut from pastes, known as “crackling crusts”. Recipes for these vary, some were made from almond paste, others from gum tragacanth and sugar or sugar and flour.

Fruits moulded from sugar had been served among the *trionfi* at Italian Renaissance banquet and directions to make these start to appear in this country from the late 16th century onwards, though a few English terracotta sugar moulds have survived from the late medieval period.<sup>129</sup> Sir Hugh Platt describes moulds carved from wood as well as those cast from actual fruit in “burnt alabaster” (plaster of Paris). These were usually three-part moulds and were soaked in water before use. Sugar boiled to the blown degree was “de-greased” with a little vinegar or lemon juice and “grained” by stirring it with a spaddle. This was poured into the damp mould, which had previously been bound tightly with tape, and the mould rotated a few times to coat the inside with a thin layer of sugar. Any waste syrup was poured out through the opening. When the sugar had cooled the mould was opened to reveal a perfect life-size orange, lemon or pear in hollow candy. A convincing finish was given to the fruit by painting it with food colours. The little brown spots on pears were achieved by painting them with “a decoction of coffee, chocolate, and Spanish-liquorice juice”, while the bloom on peaches was supplied by dusting them with fine powder sugar.<sup>130</sup> Hollow fruits and nuts were also moulded in gum-paste, which when broken into, often contained little surprises: “note that you may convey comfits within, before you close the sides”.<sup>131</sup>

Very realistic fruits moulded from marzipan paste actually contained a hard gum-paste stone inside with a sweet almond for a kernel. These were made even more convincing by dipping them in coloured isinglass to achieve a fleshy skin which felt soft and yielding to the touch. They were finished by powdering the fruit with starch powder to create a bloom. Plums with dark skin were dusted with blue powder made from indigo stone.

### **Drops and diavolini**

The one pound of drops mentioned in the 1765 receipt to the Duke of Gordon from Domenico Negri were probably used to ornament the elaborate plateau arrangement composed from the other items listed on the bill (see illustration). Drops were made by flavouring an icing made from finely

powdered double refined sugar with an essence. Egg whites, lemon juice, fruit jellies and jams were the favourite binding agents. The icing was dropped from the end of a knife, or from a pan with a narrow lip (see illustration), on to sheets of writing paper, or pewter sheets, to form small convex sweets, which were then usually dried in a stove.<sup>132</sup> Drops of two colours were made by using a pan with two compartments to keep the different coloured icings separate, until they met in the lip. Flavours included barberry, bergamot, orgeat, vinegar, violet, neroli, orange, catechu and peppermint.

Chocolate drops were made by softening sweetened chocolate in a metal mortar, or on a pewter sheet in a stove and forming it into balls “in size of small marbles”. These were laid out on sheets of paper “and when they were all on, take the sheet of paper by each corner, and lift it up and down, so that the paper may touch the table each time, and by that means you will see the drops come quite flat, about the size of a sixpence.” The finished drops were strewn with coloured nonpareils.<sup>133</sup> This very early chocolate sweet can still be obtained from modern confectionery shops.

Chocolate drops were a type of *diavolino*, or *diablotin*, a chocolate sweet which probably originated in Naples. It was introduced into England by continental confectioners in the second half of the 18th century. These “little devils” are the precursors of our modern chocolates and are mentioned in the list of sweetmeats on Negri’s trade card. Recipes for various kinds are given in the works of Menon, the earliest in English appearing in Clermont’s 1767 translation of *Soupers de la Cour*.<sup>134</sup> They were created by making the chocolate malleable with oil, or by warming it in a stove, and rolling small pieces in the palm of the hand into the form of olives or nuts. They sometimes contained a pistachio nut kernel and were finished by dusting with cinnamon, or by rolling them in coloured comfits or nonpareils. Some were made to imitate fruits and by the 1820’s were being moulded to represent “some object, coat of arms or device”.<sup>135</sup> Moulded “chocolate almonds” had been available since the early 18th century, but these were made from gum-paste flavoured with a little chocolate, ambergris and musk and were really a sort of pastille, rather than a sweetmeat made entirely from chocolate.<sup>136</sup> Similar *Pastilles* and *Dragées de Chocolat* described in the French confectionery texts were favourites with the notorious Marquis de Sade.<sup>137</sup>

The very earliest chocolate confections to be available in England were medicinal comfits, known as the Queen’s chocolatas, which were sold by the chocolate dealer Richard Mortimer at his shop in Sun Alley in East Smithfield in the 1660’s. Their production was extremely labour-intensive, as they were made by larding immature cacao kernels with little strips of cinnamon and citron bark. The larded nuts were then soaked in a series of syrups of increasing strength, the last one being perfumed with ambergris, before being candied in the stove. Looking like small sugar-coated hedgehogs, they were prescribed “to strengthen the Stomach without heating it too much”.<sup>138</sup> Remarkably, these survived into the 19th century in a slightly altered form and were sold in London confectionery shops as “Cocoa Nuts in Sugar”.<sup>139</sup>

The chocolate of the 18th century was made from the whole roasted cacao nut and was much higher in butterfat than the modern confection, so Georgian diablotins and chocolate drops would have tasted much richer than twentieth century chocolate sweets. Jarrin gives an illustration of the equipment required to grind the nuts in *The Italian Confectioner* of 1820 (see illustration). This curved grinding stone is identical to the *metate* of pre-Columbian America and remained in use in some specialist confectionery establishments in Italy until as late as 1989.<sup>140</sup>

### **Biscuits, marchpane and wafers**

Biscuits of various kinds were an important feature of the Renaissance banquet, their dry texture acting as a foil to the sticky sweetmeats, rich creams and jellies. They were particularly suited to dipping into hypocras and other sweet wines. Some of them were of the dry sponge variety, leavened by beating eggs into an aerated snow, sometimes for hours on end with a wooden bat. After the initial baking they were returned to a cooler oven to dry out, thus the name from *biscocus* - twice cooked. The 16th and 17th housewife was familiar with a variety of these, the most common sorts being *bisket bread* and *Naples bisket*. Dry, “twice-cooked” rusks of this kind are still very popular in Italy and Greece where they are chiefly used for dipping into sweet wine. *Naples bisket*, was probably imported from Italy in the Tudor and Stuart period, as there is a dearth of recipes in the cookery literature of the time, though they are frequently mentioned as ingredients in other dishes.<sup>141</sup>

By the 18th century *Naples biscuit* had become an indispensable kitchen item and was used as a foundation for countless puddings and trifles, but was more commonly purchased from a confectioner than made at home. Recipes for this caraway and orange-flower flavoured rusk are still rather sketchy in the cookery books until 1789, when the Berkeley Square confectioner Frederick Nutt revealed for the first time the method used by the professionals. This involved making an Italian meringue-like mixture with whisked eggs and a boiling sugar syrup, to which the sifted flour and caraway were added. The mixture was baked in a paper case, which was removed later, by wetting the paper with a brush. Another method was to bake them in a *Naples biscuit frame*, a tin tray eight inches long, three inches wide and an inch deep, divided into compartments that could be separately lined with paper.<sup>142</sup>

There were countless variations on the sponge biscuit; *prince bisket*, *savoy biscuit*, *bisquite du roy*, *long biscuit* and *coriander biscuit* are just a few of what could be a very long catalogue. Jarrin gives an illustration of an ingenious funnel used to pipe four *savoy biscuits* onto a papered tray at the same time (see illustration).

Biscuits in the form of intricate knots and letters of the alphabet are frequently depicted in Dutch still life paintings from the early 17th century onwards. (Clara Peeters and Peter Binoit illustrations). The letters sometimes have decorative serifs and are stamped with decorative patterns, gilded here and there with little spots of gold leaf - in Binoit's painting some appear to be coloured with cinnamon. They have an extremely polished appearance and were probably purchased from the comfitmaker rather than made at home. Very similar alphabet biscuits appear to have been professionally made in England at this period. Describing the uses of marchpane paste at the beginning of the century, Sir Hugh Platt tells us how, “our comfit makers at this day make their letters, knots, Armes, escocheons, beasts, birds, and other fancies”.<sup>143</sup> In 1617, John Murrell actually gives a recipe:

To make Cinamon Letters

Take paste made as for *Gemillissoes*, colour it with cinamon, and rowle it in long rowles, as neere as you can all of a bignesse, and thereof make faire capitall Romane letters, according to some exact patterne, cut in thinne board or or white plate, gild them and make a crosse in the beginning of them.<sup>144</sup>

It is difficult to be sure what Murrell means when he tells us to “make a crosse in the beginning of them”, but he could be referring to the serifs or “cross pieces” of the letters. *Gemillissoes*, more normally known as *jumbals* in England, were intricately knotted biscuits, which originated in Italy. (illustration of Clara Peeters). Sometimes they were boiled in a kettle before baking in the oven, rather like medieval *simnels* and *cracknels*. Robert May tells us how to make the paste and then



instructs us “to roul it into long rouls, as big as a little arrow, make them into divers knots, then boil them in fair water like simnels; bake them and keep them in a stove”.<sup>145</sup>

Jumbals survived well into the 18th century and many cookery books of the period contain recipes that were first published in the Tudor period. A Georgian variant on the boiled jumbal was the breakfast turtulong, a beigel-like ring sold at confectioners shops in London in the 1790s.<sup>146</sup>

Jumbals were sometimes made by forcing a batter mix from a tin syringe with a wooden plunger, called a butter squirt, or jumbal mould. Both Nutt and Jarrin illustrate this instrument, which enabled the confectioner to “make several different shapes, such as the prince’s feathers, fleur de lis, a small ring with icing in the middle and a dried cherry in the icing” (see illustration).<sup>147</sup> The apparatus is first mentioned by Robert May in a recipe for jemmeloes, a sort of knotted pastille made with flour, sugar and gum tragacanth, which was candied by boiling in a syrup of sugar and rosewater.

Marchpane paste was made by grinding almonds to a fine pulp in a mortar, usually with a little rose or orangeflower water to stop the nuts oiling, and mixing the resulting paste with powder sugar to form a pliable material that could be readily moulded into any form. Large biscuit-like discs of marchpane, usually rolled out on a layer of wafer paper, and often gilded and embellished with comfits and other decorations, had been an important feature of the Renaissance banquet. These were often moulded with intricate designs, or supported sugarwork “standards”, or models of beasts, emblems, and heraldic devices. The 16th century York cook William Thornton left an impressive variety of moulds (prints) in his will of 1551, some of which would have been used for making marchpanes. They included a,

“print called Sampson; print with Fleurdelyce; small leache print, print with Lion and Unicorn; standing print with hart and hind; print with one knote: close print with birds; .... print with other arms on it; small print; print with wheatsheaf; print with dolfinge”.<sup>148</sup>

John Murrell (1617) instructs us to “strike in your standing conceits, as namely golden marigolds, and long Comfits or such like” and to surround the finished marchpane with a wreath of bay leaves.<sup>149</sup> Writing later in the century, the author of *The Accomplish’d Ladies Delight* (1686) tells us of a highly perfumed creation, decorated in similar vein, “bake it in a very soft fire, always bedewing it with Damask water, Civet, and Sugar, and lastly with a gut of Dates gilt, or long Comfits gilt, or with Cinnamon-sticks gilt, or the kernels of the Pine-apple, and so set it forth”.<sup>150</sup> These large iced biscuits usually had a pinched border and were dried out in a slow oven, rather than baked. Although there are no detailed English depictions of Marchpanes, a painting by Clara Peeters does demonstrate that this kind of centrepiece was important on the continent as well as in England. caption with painting.(see illustration).

Attractive little marzipan cakes made with a combination of ground almonds, pistachio nuts and pinenuts, decorated with quartered pistachios and glazed with rosewater icing are described in Hannah Wooley’s *Queen-like Closet*.<sup>151</sup> By the 18th century, the large decorative almond paste centrepiece had passed out of favour, and marchpane recipes are usually for much smaller biscuits of this kind, cut in the form of a heart, or other fancy shape. Royal marchpanes were little coronet-like rings of puffed almond paste, the void space filled with “small round Pellet of some Paste, or a small Grain of some Fruit, such as Raspberry, Cherry, or the like”. These entered the repertoire of the English confectioner through the 1702 translation of Massiolot’s *New Instructions for Confectioners*, as did marchpanes flavoured with fruit marmalades and juices, such as those of raspberries, cherries

and currants. Chocolate, cinnamon and orangeflower marchpanes also appear in the French influenced confectionery texts of the late 18th century.<sup>152</sup>

Marchpane paste, aerated with beaten egg whites and puffed up in the oven, usually on a bed of wafer paper, were known internationally as *maccarone* (Italian), *macarons* (French) and macaroons, or macaroni drops here in England. They appear to date from the Renaissance period. Those made with bitter almonds, or apricot kernels, were more usually called ratafias, or ratafia drops and were identical to the modern amaretti biscuits we import from Italy. A variety was also made with ground filbert nuts.<sup>153</sup>

A vast range of other almond confections was available from the confectioners' shops. The oddly named bean'd bread or bane bread was a kind of puff of sugared sliced almonds baked on wafer paper with carraway or coriander comfits. We are told to "break away the Wafers with your Fingers, and then clip them neatly with a pair of Scissors, and lay on some Leaf-Gold if you please".<sup>154</sup>

Sugar biscuits made without almonds or flour were very popular. An early form was the biskittello, a little sugar puff made with gum tragacanth and powder sugar, perfumed with anise and musk and baked in a very cool oven on wafer paper. This type of flourless paste of sugar mixed with gum, or egg white, became the basis of a whole family of biscuits that are more closely aligned to the meringue than the true biscuit. Satin biscuit was a very early form of meringue, flavoured with carraway, with a smooth, lustrous texture which gave it its name.<sup>155</sup> Chocolate and lemon puffs, for which recipes are very common in 18th century cookery books, are early forms of meteor, a miniature meringue, variously flavoured with essences and usually joined together in twos, back to back. Perfumed sugar biscuits were also made with the orangeflowers and jasmine.

## **Wafers**

In addition to the comfits and sugared spices consumed at the medieval void, it was an established part of the etiquette of the occasion for the sovereign lord to eat a wafer with a glass of hypocras. This may have originated as a eucharistic thanksgiving for the meal, as the wafer and hypocras echo the wine and host of holy communion. Wafers continued to be an important feature of both the Renaissance banquet and the rococo dessert and were often impressed with elaborate designs. They were made by squeezing a batter between the two preheated plates of a pair of wafering irons (see illustration) and were sometimes rolled on a stick to form the kind of curled wafer illustrated by Clara Peeters in plate . They were sometimes flavoured with coffee or with orangeflower water and rolled round a wooden cone to produce cornets or cornucopia.<sup>156</sup> Eighteenth century confectioners made very fine sugar wafers by thinly coating sheets of wafer paper (more or less identical to modern rice paper), with a mixture of sugar and egg white and letting them curl round little sticks in a hot stove. These were flavoured with lemon, orange, bergamot, peppermint and violet and were probably intended to be eaten with ices.<sup>157</sup>

## **Creams and Ices**

In her directions of 1684 "to the Gentlewomen, who have the Charge of the Sweet-meats and such like Repasts", Hannah Wooley gives instructions on how to lay out a summer banquet at the conclusion of a meal, "when the Meat is all taken away, you may present several sorts of Cream Cheeses; one Meat, one Dish of Cream of one sort, the next of another".<sup>158</sup> Various fruits washed in wine, jellies and sweetmeats were also served with these fresh cheeses and creams. At this time the English had developed an extraordinary range of cream-based sweet dishes for the banquet, including leach, syllabubs, junkets and trifle - indeed junketing became a synonym for banqueting. Many of these dishes survived as important dessert foods into the next century.

Most 17th and 18th century books on cookery and confectionery contain a large section on creams. Recipes include rich confections of quince, pistachio, ratafia, chocolate, orange and lemon. Tuff - Taffity cream was a delightfully named dish included in Wooley's *Queen-like Closet*, flavoured with rosewater and adorned with red current jelly.<sup>159</sup> The less appetising sounding "ghizzard creams", described by Mrs. Glasse in *The Complete Confectioner* (c. 1765), were made by thickening boiled cream with the skins taken from chicken gizzards, a commonly used alternative to rennet.<sup>160</sup> The soft, velvety texture of this descendent of the Tudor trifle is responsible for the dish's French name *crème veloutée*, which was adopted by a number of 18th century English cookery authors. The anonymous writer of *The Whole Duty of a Woman* (1737), from which Mrs. Glasse stole her recipe, gives a version of Cream Veloutée with pistachio and another with chocolate. For summer use these creams were cooled in ice, though apparently not frozen.

Professional city confectioners advertised jellies, creams and syllabubs, to be eaten on the premises, or ordered in quantity for a rout, or ball supper. James Gilray's 1797 etching, "Hero's recruiting at Kelsey's" shows a group of military men feasting on whip syllabub and sugar plums at Kelsey's confectionery shop in Pall Mall. (see illustration). When purchased for outside consumption, the cost included the hire of the little serving glasses, which were returned after use. A confectioner called John Bridge advertised in the Daily Advertiser in 1753:

"Good Hartshorne Jellies, as 2s a dozen: 6s a Dozen to be left for Glasses, which will be returned when the Glasses are brought home."<sup>161</sup>

Whipt syllabub was floated on sweetened wine, or coloured whey, in little glasses with a belled top, which helped support the delicate froth and stop it from sinking into the wine. It was made by whipping together wine, lemon juice, sugar and cream with a chocolate mill and laboriously skimming the bubbles off as they rose on the surface. After draining on a sieve for a number of hours, the froth was transformed into a light fluffy spum which was then transferred to the glasses of wine, which were usually presented on sets of salvers. "Boyl'd sullabubs" appear on a table plan for a very grand summer ambigue in Charles Carter's *Complete Practical Cook* of 1730. The author fails to give a recipe for these, but there is evidence to demonstrate that syllabub mixtures were sometimes heated in a water jacket to encourage the formation of a thick, rich topping of curd, rather than the usual foam.<sup>162</sup>

Most Georgian trifles were made by covering a layer of Naples biscuit, or ratafias soaked in sack, with a rich cream custard and a topping of whipt syllabub. They were often decorated with nonpareils, currant jelly, or preserves, so they combined all of the principle foods of the dessert in one bowl.

With such a strongly established taste for these rich dairy foods, it was no wonder that the English took so readily to ice cream, the ultimate luxury sweet. Although ices of sorts had been known in England since the late 17th century, cream ices and water ices did not really become important dessert items until the second half of the 18th century. By 1765, Mrs Glasse was writing "ice cream is a thing used in all deserts, as it is to be had both winter and summer, and what in London is always to be had at the confectioners". Out of her twenty two bills of fare for desserts, ices of various kinds feature in half of them, though like her predecessors Mary Eales and Edward Lambert, she doesn't offer a great variety of flavours in her recipe section.<sup>163</sup>

It was not until "an ingenius foreigner" called Borella published *The Court and Country Confectioner* in 1770, that the secrets of professional continental confectioners were revealed to the English housewife. This former confectioner to the Spanish Ambassador offered a wide range of recipes, which included pistachio, chocolate, white coffee, brown bread and royal cream ice, the latter a rich

concoction flavoured with coriander, pistachios, cinnamon and preserved peel. Apricot ice was enriched with the bitter almond flavour of the fruit kernels. His recipes were enthusiastically and rapidly plagiarised by subsequent authors. Shortly after his work appeared, Mary Smith, former housekeeper to Sir William Blackett of Wallington Hall in Northumberland, was reproducing Borella's recipes in her own book, published in Newcastle in 1772, spreading the fashion for delicacies like brown bread ice cream to the northern counties.<sup>164</sup> Professional confectioners like Robert Abbott and Frederick Nutt, who published their own books later in the century also relied heavily on Borella's treatise.

Some of Borella's recipes for frozen aromatic waters flavoured with violets, jasmine and orangeflower, never really caught on in England. These *liqueurs glacées* had been an important feature of the grand dessert in France and recipes abound for them in the works of Massiolot, Gilliers, Menon and Emy. One perfumed ice, which did attain a brief popularity in England towards the end of the century, was bergamot water ice, a refreshing lemon sorbet seasoned with bergamot essence, nowadays familiar to us as the principle flavouring in Earl Grey tea. Based on a *niege de bergamotte* in Gillier's important work *Le Cannaméliste*, the first English recipe appeared in Frederick Nutt's *Compleat Confectioner* in 1789. Nutt, a former apprentice to Negri, also includes a recipe for parmesan cheese ice cream, which is derived from Gillier's *fromages glacés de parmesan*, a rich custard ice designed to be moulded in the form of a wedge of parmesan cheese (see illustration). In the original French version the cheese skin was simulated with burnt sugar. Nutt's refreshing punch water ice is flavoured with seville orange and fortified with rum, a recipe much modified in the early 19th century to create the celebrated Punch Romaine of the Empire period.<sup>165</sup> Trompe l'oeil moulded ices in the form of fruits (*fruits glacés*) and animals were very popular and made a particularly striking novelty item for the dessert. The moulds were made of pewter, or lead and consisted of two parts joined by a hinge. A remarkable variety of these is illustrated in a well-known plate in Gillier's book, including a gherkin, truffles, a pomegranate, a cedrati and a host of other fruits. He also illustrates moulds to make a head of salmon, a head of a wild boar, a ham and crayfish. Like the artificial fruits made from jellies, marmalades, candied sugar and gum paste, these were also popular in England and remained in vogue until the advent of the First World War, when a huge variety of moulds was still available from suppliers like Mrs. Agnes Marshall of Mortimer Street. According to the Scarborough confectioner Joseph Bell (1817), the insides of these moulds were coloured before the ice cream mixture was forced in. He gives detailed instructions to make realistic ice cream apricots:

"Your apricot moulds being ready for use, open them, and colour the inside a pale yellow, with a small brush; then take another brush, and dip it in lake finely ground, colour the sides of the mould, in part, with it; then take a small bit of whisk, dip it in the lake, and spot the mould a little with it; after which, fill both sides very full, and put them together; wrap the shape in strong brown paper, to keep the salt from penetrating the opening of the mould; then immerse it well in salted ice".<sup>166</sup>

18th century confectioners made ices of all kinds in a freezing pot, or sabbatier (French *salbotière* or *sarbotière*), a tall cylindrical vessel made of pewter or tin. The freezing pot was filled no more than half way with the cream, custard or flavoured water. After the lid had been fitted, it was plunged in a wooden pail or freezing tub filled with a mixture of crushed ice and salt (see illustration). Robert Abbot tells us to "keep turning it till the water comes round the pot; then open it and scrape it down: continue turning it, and scraping it down as it freezes, till it becomes quite hard and smooth".<sup>167</sup> The scraping down was done with a long handled ice spoon, or spaddle, with a curved pewter blade of exactly the same profile as the inside of the freezing pot. The pails and freezing tubs often had false bottoms for insulation purposes and were provided with a corked hole to release excess water. Some were designed to hold up to two or three sabbatiers at once, each for a different flavour, and were tilted to one side to make the pots easier to turn, "draw the tub a little to

one side, and turn each pot as quickly as possible, if you have two pots in, turn one with each hand; if three, let one stand alternately".<sup>168</sup> Although it sounds troublesome, this method is very effective and fast, freezing a quart of ice cream in about forty minutes.

As well as being moulded into fruits and other forms for a grand dessert, ices were also served in their simple state in little goblets and cups made of glass, or porcelain, and presented to the guests on salvers in much the same way as syllabubs and jellies. In winter, when fresh fruits were unavailable, ices were flavoured with preserved fruits and marmalades.

### **Syrups and cooling drinks**

In the 1702 English translation of *Massiolot's New Instructions for Liquors*, we are told of

"certain Liquors and Syrups, usually prepar'd by Confectioners, which are of two sorts, *viz.* some cooling to be us'd in the Spring and Summer, and others strong for Autumn and Winter, more especially proper to revive and cheer the Spirits during that rigorous season, some of which are very particular and remarkable".<sup>169</sup> The strong waters of autumn and winter were chiefly alcoholic spirits and are dealt with in the next section. Many of those intended for summer use were floral or fruit syrups, which were frozen in a cistern of ice and salt to make primitive granita-like ices, of the type known as *liqueurs glacées* which are described above. Others however, were not frozen, just simply cooled in ice and served as refreshing drinks during hot weather. The latter included lemonade, orangeade and rosade, a kind of almond milk similar to orgeat. Typical of 17th century French courtly taste, one of Massiolot's recipes for lemonade is strongly scented with sweet smelling flowers, or musk and ambergris.

Most English confectionery texts of the 18th century also include recipes for similar concentrated syrups which were intended to be diluted with water when required, rather like modern "squashes". Many of these were the descendants of the "physical syrups" of the apothecary's shelves, such as the rose and violet syrups extolled for their virtues as cordials in Elizabethan books of remedies like the *Widdowes Treasure* of 1580.<sup>170</sup> Orgeat or orzat syrup was usually made from a mixture of sweet and bitter almonds, flavoured with orange flower water, or oil of neroli, though some early recipes include the "cooling" seeds of cucumbers and melons in the composition.<sup>171</sup> It was a favourite ladies' drink at routs and remains a popular summer refreshment in Italy, where it is known as *orzata*.

Capillaire, which is advertised on Negri's trade card, had been popular since at least the 17th century and was made from the maidenhair fern (*Adiantum capillis veneris* L.). Early versions were flavoured with liquorice, though in the 18th century, the most popular addition was orangeflower water.<sup>172</sup> Jarrin complained that much of the capillaire on sale in London was just syrup flavoured with orangeflower water, a crime of which his senior colleague Frederick Nutt was certainly guilty, as he fails to include any of the fern in his recipe.<sup>173</sup> Jarrin also tells us the best maidenhair fern for making capillaire syrup came from Canada. This was probably *Adiantum pedatum*, brought back to England from Virginia by John Tradescant and first described by John Parkinson in 1640 as "foraigne or strange Maidenhaire". We learn from Parkinson and his fellow herbalists that among other things, maidenhair was used for treating coughs and chest complaints, so capillaire belonged to that group of soothing confectioner's remedies, which included mallow syrup and barley sugar.<sup>173</sup>

### **Cordial waters, liqueurs and ratafias**

Strong alcoholic waters were an important feature of the dessert and recipes for a great variety of them appear in 18th century works on confectionery. When they first came into common use in the

16th century, cordial waters were strictly employed as alcoholic medicines, prescribed in small doses to invigorate the heart and revitalise the spirits. Two hundred years later, many were being imbibed as much for their intoxicating effects as for their medicinal virtues. Some eventually became recreational drinks. A recipe for a cordial water of 1655 tells us that “it reviveth very much the stomach and heart, strengthenth the Back, procureth Appetite and digestion, driveth away Melancholy, sadness and Heaviness of the Heart.”<sup>174</sup> The same cordial in Eliza Smith’s *The Compleat Housewife* of 1727, is recommended as a “fine entertaining water” but no mention is made of its medicinal properties. At first, this transformation from stimulant drug to convivial tipple seems puzzling, but a number of other liquid medicaments have undergone the same change of use. Tonic water and coca-cola were originally introduced as patent medicines and even tea, coffee and chocolate were classified as drugs before they became acceptable as social beverages.

“Whatever raises the Spirits, and gives sudden Strength and Chearfulness, is termed Cordial, or comforting the Heart” wrote John Quincy in his *New Medical Dictionary* of 1723. Like many early physicians, Quincy thought that aromatic herbs and natural materials of attractive appearance or scent had a very real power to directly invigorate the heart and cheer a flagging spirit. He believed that substances of “a Subtilty and Fineness of Parts”, such as flower perfumes and the odours of musk and ambergris, were particularly able to penetrate the olfactory nerves and restore the vital spirits seated in the heart. These volatile materials were thought to revive strength more quickly than food, which had to undergo the slow process of digestion. The more subtle or spiritous a substance was, “the sooner a Person feels its cordial Effects”.

Among the most efficacious of these spiritous materials was the concentrated alcohol distilled from wine, known throughout Europe from the 13th century onwards as *aqua vitae*, meaning “the water of life”. It is likely that the remarkable feeling of well-being induced by the consumption of this ardent liquor led to the belief that it had an actual physiological effect on the heart.

Before *aqua vitae* became well-known, many other substances had been used in medicine for their cordial effects. These included a number of flowers, herbs and minerals, particularly those which possessed beautiful colours or pleasing odours. The four brightly coloured cordial flowers of the Galenic system of medicine - borage, bugloss, violets and roses - were frequent ingredients in cordial mixtures. Among the chief herbs considered to have strong cardiac effects were sundew, saffron, rosemary and angelica.

Other natural materials of beautiful appearance, like gold, pearls, amber and coral, were also attributed with powerful virtues and found their way into cordialine medicines. Alcoholic preparations of these precious substances were frequently prescribed, although they were costly drugs, the expense no doubt adding to their efficacy. *Aureum potabile* (drinkable gold) and *Magistry of Pearls* were considered to “renew the natural heat, recreate and revive the Spirits, and free the whole Body from the malignity of Diseases”.<sup>175</sup> In a 1727 recipe for *The Lady Hewet’s Water*, a cordial distilled from over seventy different herbs, spices and drugs, we are instructed to fortify each bottle with:

“the Cordials, Bezoar 30 grains, Musk 24 Grains, Ambergrease 20 Grains, Flour of Coral 2 Drams, Flour of Amber 1 Dram, Flour of Pearl 2 Drams, Gold 4 Leaves, Saffron in a little Bag, 2 Drams”.<sup>177</sup>

Bezoar was a rare concretion found in the stomachs of wild Persian goats, much celebrated as a cordial and antidote to poison.

Distillates or infused preparations of these restorative substances were the original cordial waters, but the term rapidly came to include alcoholic nostrums compounded for other reasons than invigorating the heart. Some were recommended as preventatives against pestilence, such as Plague or Epidemick Water, which was usually distilled over a complex mixture of herbs, including some cordial drugs to strengthen the heart against contagion. Others were used as general cure-alls and were given high-sounding latin names like Aqua Mirabilis and Aqua Coelestis.

Many were named after their inventors. Dr Butler's Cordial Water and Dr Steven's Water were the creations of two celebrated Tudor physicians, which remained popular for over two centuries. The former was said to "cureth all melancholy fumes, and infinitely comforts the spirits", while the latter was prescribed to preserve youth. As a result of a regimen of daily doses its inventor was said to have lived to the age of ninety eight.<sup>178</sup> Recipes by aristocratic "hobby distillers" such as Sir Walter Raleigh and Sir Kenelm Digby also found their way into the printed household manuals. Sir Kenelm's version of Aqua Mirabilis became one of the most popular cordial waters of the late 17th century, perhaps because of the extravagant claim that "if this be given to one a dying, a spoonful of it reviveth him".<sup>179</sup> The personal recipes of many high-born housewives, such as that of Lady Hewett cited above, were also disseminated through the literature for the public good .

A number of these waters contained herbal ingredients which helped digestion or settled an overfull stomach after excessive eating. These spicy digestives and "surfeit waters" were often drunk during the banquet and by the late 16th century were being consumed as an alternative to hypocras, the traditional spiced wine imbibed at the close of the meal. Cordial waters gradually became a social drink as a result of this practice.

If a strong cordial had the power "to comfort the Heart and Spirits, and to suppress Melancholy", why not consume it in good company at a special occasion? In his diary entries for July 8th and 9th 1663, Samual Pepys tells us that he drank homemade elder spirits after a meal of "extraordinary good" umble pie. This cordial, known to the apothecaries as sambooch, was originally a diuretic medicine distilled from fermented elderberries and used for treating dropsy. However, Pepys obviously consumed it for his own enjoyment, as he goes on to say, "and so home, merry with this night's refreshment."<sup>180</sup>

In the household manuals of this period, recipes for cordial waters are usually included in a chapter on "banquetting stuffe" (sugarwork and preserves), rather than among the domestic medicines, clearly demonstrating their new role. Sugar became an important ingredient of these strong spirits when they were used strictly as drugs, added to disguise the sometimes bitter flavours of the herbs. In the early days a few drops were given to the patient on a lump of sugar, or a spoonful was diluted in wine or ale. However, by the time of Tryon and Pepys no such restraints were observed. If a single spoonful of Sir Kenelm's Aqua Mirabilis could raise the dead, what miracles could a whole glass perform for a healthy man? The practice of drinking cordials neat and as "entertaining waters" had well and truly arrived.

It was believed that a number of cordial waters acted as aphrodisiacs, a view which also encouraged their consumption in a social rather than a medical context. The most important of these was Rosa Solis or Rosolio, a drink which probably originated in Renaissance Turin. It was distilled over large quantities of sundew, the carnivorous bog plant *Drosera rotundifolia* L. but was also flavoured with hot provocative spices like cubebs and galingale. According to the 17th century medical writer William Salmon, sundew "stirs up lust". He goes on to say that the distilled water "is of a glittering yellow, like Gold, and colours Silver of a Golden Colour if put therein".<sup>181</sup> It was used in England at the banquet course to wash down other venerous food items such as kissing comfits and candied eryngo roots.

By the 18th century the elaborate French-style dessert had replaced the banquet course, but some cordial waters continued to be offered to guests in this new setting, along with fashionable dessert wines such as mountain and malmsey. The emphasis on elegance at these occasions required wealthy hosts to offer their guests cordials in attractive purpose-made “cordial glasses”. These were beginning to appear in illustrations on the trade cards of glass cutters, such as those issued by William Parker of Fleet Street in the 1770’s.<sup>182</sup> They are usually shown in the company of other glassware designed for the dessert, such as syllabub and jelly glasses and sweetmeat trees, indicating the continuing importance of this family of spirits at the sweet aftercourse.

By the 1740’s cordial waters were being referred to in England by their smart French name of liqueurs. In 1750 William Shenstone refers to their continuing role as an accompaniment to sweetmeats in his poem *To the Virtuosi*, “Know what conserves they chuse to eat and what liqueurs to tipple”.

Most cordial waters and liqueurs were made by distillation. However, some were produced by a less complicated method. The ingredients were simply steeped in neat aquae vitae or brandy and sealed in jars exposed to the heat of the sun. This technique was used to produce infused fruit cordials such as Sir Walter Raleigh’s cordial of strawberries and the Black Cherry Brandy mentioned in the passage by Tryon on page \*. A much imitated version of Cherry Cordial Water called Visney (from Turkish vishneh - cherry) was imported from Turkey and cost twenty shillings a gallon in 1733.  
reference

Another important family of cordials of the simple infused type were the almond flavoured “kernel waters”, ratafia, noyau and persico. These were made by steeping the kernels of apricots, bitter almonds and peaches in brandy and sweetening the resulting liquid with sugar. The Italian liqueur amaretto, so fashionable today, is identical to the apricot kernel ratafia once popular in England. In 18th century France ratafia was used as a generic term for a wide range of infused liqueurs, including one, flavoured with the juice of muscatel grapes, which still survives. Other French ratafia flavours included orangeflower, green walnut, quince and sweet lime. These “sweet drams”, as they were known here, were all sold at London confectioners in the 18th century.<sup>183</sup>

Most cordials were of continental origin and many, like rosa solis, were first produced by Italian Renaissance apothecaries. This explains why they are frequently referred to in French confectionary texts as *Liqueurs d’Italie*. However, some British cordials achieved popularity on the other side of the Channel. The most important of these was an infused spirit known in France as *Escubac d’Angleterre*.<sup>184</sup> At home this was familiar as usquebaugh, the Irish translation of aqua vitae, a word later corrupted into whisky. However, the usquebaugh consumed in 17th and 18th century England and France bore no resemblance to the spirit we now call whisky. It may have started life in an attempt to imitate the type of aqua vitae being distilled in Ireland from malt liquor in the 16th century, which unlike today’s whiskey was flavoured with herbs. It was a spicy, bright yellow cordial, flavoured with aniseeds, liquorice and saffron and sweetened with fruit sugar extracted from figs and raisins by maceration. An expensive version called Royal Usquebaugh was fortified with tiny particles of gold, a frequent ingredient of many other cordial waters. Green usquebaugh, coloured with spinach, was also available, but the most sought-after was the “right” or genuine usquebaugh from Ireland. An advertisement in a London Gazette of 1682 reads “There is right Irish Usquebaugh to be sold at the Rein-Deer in Tuttle-street, By one from Ireland”.<sup>185</sup>

Cordials flavoured with the rinds of citrus fruits were also much favoured. Barbados Water imported from the Caribbean was distilled from citron peel, the genuine article being recognised by the presence of citron flowers in the bottles. Shrub, prepared from Seville orange peel steeped in brandy or rum, could also be made with lemon rind or white currants.



Many of the liqueurs we enjoy today are descendants of these fascinating cordial spirits and the practice of drinking them after a meal is a faded memory of their role at the banquet and dessert courses. We might well now question many of the medicinal claims made for them, but most of us would agree with the 17th century physician Woodall when he tells us that, "Aquavitæ distilled out of Wine is the chief cordial in cheering the heart of man".<sup>186</sup>

## **Sugar as artist's medium**

### **Ornament making**

Table decorations made from sugar paste have been a feature of important feasts and banquets since the late medieval period. Powdered sugar was made into a pliable modelling material by the addition of tragacanth, a mucilaginous gum, obtained from a number of *Astragalus* species native to the Eastern Mediterranean. (illustration) Sometimes known as "gum dragon", in the early cookery and medical literature, tragacanth was first used by apothecaries as a binding agent for powdered drugs, including sugar, in order to make them up into pills. By the end of the 15th century, very elaborate "sotelties" in the form of buildings and animals were being made of sugar paste made in this way. In Dürer's monumental woodcut the *Triumphs of Maximilian* there is a small scene of cooks and confectioners carrying sotelties of this kind up from the kitchen to the celebrations above. (see illustration).

The first recipe in English for sugar paste, known also as sugar plate, or gum paste, is in the 1558 translation of an Italian book of "secrets" by Giralamo Ruscelli. Ruscelli's work introduced the English to the novel idea of edible sugar tableware, "platters, glasses, cups and suchlike things, wherewith you may furnish a table, and when you have done, eat them up. A pleasant thing for them that sit at the table".<sup>187</sup> This became a favourite party trick of the Elizabethan period and is mentioned in a few later works like those of Thomas Dawson and Hugh Platt.<sup>188</sup> Sir Hugh tells us that the edges of dishes or plates made in this way were gilded, "then guilde it on the edges with the white of an egge laide round about the brim of the dish with a pensill, and presse the gold downe with some cotton, and when it is dry skew or brush off the golde with the foote of an Hare or Coney". All sorts of sugar novelties became indispensable to the banquet, some of them executed with considerable artistry. John Murrell tells us that shoes, slippers, keys, knives and gloves were made of sugar plate. Elaborate sugar work standards were used to decorate marchpanes for important occasions. In 1562 Queen Elizabeth was presented with a marchpane by the surveyor of works, which was adorned with a miniature sugar model of old St Pauls.<sup>189</sup>

The Italians were the masters of this sort of work and a number of Renaissance artists, such as Giambologna, Ammanatti, Buontalenti and Sansovino were involved in designing elaborate sugarwork *trionfi* for important feasts. In the 1660's, the French artist Paul Sevin sketched a number of fêtes and banquets held in Rome in which elaborate sugar-work were an important feature. A feast for Holy Week prepared for Pope Clement IX on Maundy Thursday 1669, has a centrepiece in the form of Bramante's Tempietto, surrounded by sugar sculptures of the cardinal virtues and other religious figures, all executed in a lively baroque style. (see illustration).

Although sugarwork of this kind featured less in the French baroque dessert, which was dominated by impressive symmetrical arrangements of pyramids of fruits and candies, by the middle of the 18th century, very elaborate gum-paste decorations once again became an essential feature of royal and upper class dining. The artistry involved in the creation of some of these was on a par with the extraordinary craftsmanship that we associate with furniture and other decorative arts of the period. Gilliers illustrates a number of rococo gum-paste table centrepieces, in the form of elaborate fountains inhabited by Chinese peasants, and even a sugarwork candle holder adorned with

miniature pyramids of fruit, artificial flowers and playful putti.<sup>190</sup> (plate ) In 1749, Menon, Gillier's contemporary, published a design for a sugar palace, inhabited by the goddess Circe and a number of Ulysses' unfortunate men, whom she has turned into pigs. The palace, a fantasy pavilion, with both classical and oriental features, is set in a formal garden with parterres and trees. Perhaps, the London confectioner Jarrin was thinking of table decorations like these, when writing in 1820, he lamented the passing of the remarkable artistry and knowledge required to make sugar work of this calibre,

"This mode of decoration and embellishment was once in great vogue, and the most magnificent and costly ornaments have been made of gum paste: but it has fallen comparatively into disuse: and, what is worse for the confectioner, the fragments of the art have been transferred to pastry-cooks, and cooks, who have at once disfigured, if not destroyed, the most beautiful flower in the banquet of the confectioner. To make gum paste properly, great care and dexterity, much patience, some knowledge of mythology, of history, and of the arts of modelling and design, are requisite - qualifications seldom possessed by the mere pastry-cook." <sup>191</sup>

In France, table parterres were at first moulded from *mousseline*, which was made from coloured pastillage paste, or sometimes a kind of pistachio marzipan, forced through a sieve to create a mossy paste. However, by the middle of the century, it became more fashionable to cover pastebord parterre shapes with silk chenille, or velvet and fill them with coloured "sugar sands" (*sables d'office*), nonpareils and sugar candies. Sugar sands were made by colouring clarified sugar with spinach for green, cochineal for red, gamboge for yellow and boiling it to the blow. As the syrup candied, it was vigorously stirred with a spaddle to create small crystals and passed through a sieve. Other shades were made by mixing the basic colours. Old fruit and flower confects and marmalade pastes, which had dried out were also ground down and made into sands of more subtle hues.<sup>192</sup> Elaborate parterres filled with coloured sands are illustrated in Gilliers and Menon (see illustrations). Surviving imitations of continental table gardens, or "flower frames" made in glass or porcelain, give us an accurate idea of the appearance of these extraordinary confectionery landscapes. (illustration of Venetian glass dessert and porcelain dessert garden at Schloss Weiffenstein, Pommerffelden).

English cooks and confectioners had been laying out tables in formal garden style since Tudor times, when second courses had been arranged in kaleidoscope fashion with complex borders of intricately moulded custard pies, in the form of volutes, scrolls and cants. These were the "fifty-angled custards" described by Lickfinger in Ben Jonson's *Staple of News* (1631). James Parry, in a dedicatory poem to the author, in Robert May's *Accomplisht Cook* (1660) also refers to these "baroque" custards,

"Which of Mathematicks doth pertake,  
Geometry proportions when they bake.  
Who can in paste erect (of finest flour)  
A compleat Fort, a Castle, or a Tower.  
A City Custard doth so subtly wind,  
That should Truth seek, she'd scarce all corners find;"<sup>193</sup>

May gives a number of illustrations for both double bordered and single bordered custards. They have a very strong resemblance to the parterres used in the dessert settings of the next century. The "forms" were made of hot water pastry, with no shortening and dried out blind in a cool oven, often with brown paper pushed in the corners for support. They were filled on the oven floor with a custard funnel. May tells us to embellish our custards with "biskets red and white, stick muskedines red and white, and scrape theron double refined sugar."<sup>194</sup> They continued to be illustrated in English cookery books, right through the late 17th and early 18th century, when they were more

usually called “set custards”. Some particularly elegant designs were published in 1737 in *The Whole Duty of a Woman*.<sup>195</sup>

In 1723, John Nott tells us how to make a very pretty centrepiece for a winter table in the form of a marzipan garden embellished with confectionery,

“Take a large dish, cover it with another of the same Bigness, and lay the uppermost all over with Almond-paste; inlaid with white, red, green, blue and white Marmalade in the Figures of Banks and Flowers. Then take Branches of candy'd Flowers and stick them upright in the Paste, in as handsome Order as you can: then erect little Bushes covered with Paste, and upon them fasten preserv'd Apples, Apricocks, Currants, Gooseberries, Peaches, Pears, Plums, &c. and for Leaves you may use either of couler'd Paste, Parchment or Horn.”<sup>196</sup>

With such a well established tradition of table ornamentation in the form of gardens, it is not surprising that the English in the second half of the 18th century, readily adopted the continental manner of laying out a dessert as a formal park with parterres and temples. In 1783, Parson Woodforde was at a formal dinner with the Bishop of Norwich where he saw,

“A most beautiful Artificial Garden in the Center of the Table remained at Dinner and afterwards, it was one of the prettiest things I ever saw, about a Yard long, and about 18 inches wide, in the middle of which was a high round Temple supported on round Pillars, the Pillars were wreathed round with artificial Flowers on one side was a shepherdess on the other a shepherd, several handsome Urns decorated with artificial Flowers also &c. &c.”<sup>197</sup>

We know from Hannah Glasse that ornaments like the temple described by Woodford could be bought at the confectioners “and will serve year after year” (see page ). They were probably put away in a dry place, rather like we store Christmas decorations, and brought out again when needed for a special occasion.

From the time of Ruscilli onwards, most English cookery and confectionery texts have recipes for the sugar paste, with which these decorations were made. However, these books were chiefly targeted at housewives, and the directions in them are rather brief, as they were understandably intended for amateur use. It is not until the early nineteenth century, that a confectioner actually reveals the secrets of the ornament maker's trade in clear detail. This was Guglielmo Jarrin, formerly ornament maker at James Gunter's shop in Berkeley Square, where he had been “in the habit of mixing sixty or eighty pounds of gum paste every week” to provide wealthy Mayfair households with decorations for their desserts.<sup>198</sup> He tells us that when making such a large quantity as this, he would use a press (of his own invention) for forcing the sugar and gum mixture through a linen cloth to render it fine and pliable. (see illustration).

We learn also that there were different grades of gum paste. Fine paste was made from good quality gum tragacanth and sugar only, and was used for making ornaments that might be eaten. Common gum paste had a large proportion of starch added and was used in the trade to mass produce figures and other decorations that were not for consumption. At Jarrin's time cheap moulded figures and animals made from common paste were imported from Germany and France in considerable quantities. Non-edible ornaments were also made from pastes of rice flour and the powders of plaster, alabaster and marble, all with tragacanth as the binding agent.<sup>199</sup>

Figures, animals and birds were directly modelled in fine sugar paste, and according to Jarrin were, “without dispute, much better than those made in a mould, as the modeller can give a grace and attitude to his figure, which it is impossible to obtain from the other mode”. The furry coats of

animals like sheep, were obtained by providing a texture with a notched goose quill to simulate “the frizzled appearance of the wool”. While the bodies of birds were modelled by hand, though their wings were made in a carved wooden press mould, and attached afterwards.<sup>200</sup>

Figures, fruits and many other decorative features were made also in wooden and plaster moulds. These were often carved or moulded by the confectioner himself. Figures and animals were generally made in two halves, which were dried separately and then joined back to back. Some confectioners made moulds from imported sugar figures, which were left in a cellar, or other damp place, so the two halves could be easily separated and then cast in plaster.<sup>201</sup>

These ornaments were either left in their plain white condition, or were coloured with paints made by grinding pigments with gum arabic and a little sugar, which was added to make the colour shine. They were also sometimes sealed with a varnish made from gum arabic, egg white and sugar syrup. Many ornaments were gilded. The gold size was made from gum arabic and sugar. It was painted on the areas to be gilded and left to dry. The worker then breathed onto the model and his breath made the goldsize just sticky enough for him to apply the gold leaf. Excess gold leaf was removed with a paint brush.

Artificial flowers made of sugar paste were a perennial favourite and much skill and dexterity went into their production. In Gillier's *Canamieliste* there is a striking plate of confectioners making pastillage flowers, with some illustrations below of examples of their finished handiwork. The anonymous author of *A Whole Duty of a Woman* (1737) tells how these could be made by the housewife at home,

#### To make Artificial Flowers

At first you are to make Pastes of divers Colours, with gum Dragant thoroughly steep'd and mingled with Powder Sugar, which is to be well tempered, and beaten in a mortar, 'till the Paste is become Pliable. For the Red, some prepared Cochineal may be added; for the yellow, Gambooge; for the Blue, Indigo and Orris, and for the Green, the Juice of Beet-Leaves, which are to be scalded a little over the Fire, to take away their Crudity. The Pastes being thus ordered, and rolled out into very thin Pieces, may be shaped in the Form of several Sorts of Flowers, as Roses, Tulips, Wind-flowers, &c. by the means of certain Tin Moulds; or else they may be cut out with the Point of a Knife, according to Paper-Models. Then you are to finish the Flowers all at once, and dry them upon Egg-Shells, or otherwise. In the mean while, different sorts of Leaves are, in like Manner, to be cut out of the green Paste, to which you may also give various Figures, to be intermixed among your Flowers, the stalks whereof, are to be made of Slips of Lemon Peel. The Tops of the Pyramids of dried Fruits, may be garnished with these Artificial Flowers: or else a separate Nosegay may be made of them, for the Middle of your Desert; or they may be laid in order in a Basket, or kind of Cup, made of fine Pastry-work of Crackling Crust, neatly cut and dry'd for that Purpose.”<sup>202</sup>

Professional confectioners dried their flowers by hanging them on wires stretched across a frame of wood and iron.

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