



the pie that came in from the cold

Shropshire fidget pie



Pork and apple have always gone well together, and this Shropshire speciality is no exception, as **Clare Hargreaves** discovers

Photos: Jason Ingram

Shropshire's once well-stocked larder of food specialities was, until recently, looking worryingly bare. Fidget pie, probably the county's best-known dish, was in danger of becoming a distant memory. Only the elderly still had recipes or remembered fidget pie's function as a portable meal in the hand for workers busy bringing in the harvest. Few actually made it any more.

Then the Hairy Bikers, Dave Myers and Si King, roared into the Shropshire town of Ludlow. They got chatting, garnered some

recipes and started cooking. The result was an exceedingly tasty pie, and the revival of a regional food tradition in danger of extinction.

The visit by the lads in leathers was a shot in the arm for Sandy Boyd, whose Ludlow Food Centre was one of the few places still making fidget pie. "When we opened the centre three years ago, we were determined to keep the tradition going," he says. "Our head chef at the time, Janet Morris, managed to find a recipe, and off we went."

No one knows exactly when the pie was

invented, but it has been made for at least 400 years. The name probably comes from the fact that it was originally 'fitched' or five-sided in shape, explains Sandy, though others come up with the less appetising theory that the name comes from 'fitchett' or 'fitch', local names for a polecat, due to the fact that the pie smelled foul during baking.

Local ingredients

For maximum taste and authenticity, Sandy uses gammon from Gloucester Old Spot pigs reared on the Food Centre's own Oakly Park Estate. The gammon steaks are dry salted for a month, which gives them a wonderful depth of flavour. To make the pie, the gammon is then combined with local apples and cider, all abundant in the orchards around Ludlow, and cheddar cheese, made in the Centre's dairy



Ludlow Food Centre's fidget pie

INGREDIENTS

375g (13oz) gammon steak • 2 medium Bramley apples (peeled) • 160ml (1/4pt) cider • 750g (1lb 10oz) Shropshire potatoes • 1 tbsp wholegrain mustard with honey • 50g (1 3/4oz) butter • 80g (3oz) double cream • 100g (3 1/2oz) cheddar cheese
Pastry: 75g (2 1/2oz) plain flour • 75g (2 1/2oz) self raising flour • 75g (2 1/2oz) butter • pinch salt • water

METHOD

- Preheat oven to 180°C/375°F/Gas 5. Make pastry by sifting flours and salt into a bowl. Dice butter and rub into flour until it resembles breadcrumbs. Stir in water until pastry forms a ball. Wrap pastry in cling-film and rest in fridge 20 mins.
- Peel potatoes, cut into chunks and cook in salted boiling water for around 20 mins. Dice the gammon and sauté in a pan until sealed. Add the cider to the pan and simmer for 15 mins until tender.
- Dice the apples, add to the gammon and stir to coat the apples with the sauce. Cook 2-3 mins then remove pan from the heat to cool.
- Drain the potatoes and mash with the cream, butter and mustard until smooth.
- Remove pastry from the fridge. Roll out and line a deep flan dish. Add gammon mix and top with grated cheese. Pipe or spoon the mustard mash on top to create topping. Place on a baking sheet and bake for 25 mins.

1 A potato-topped fidget pie from the Ludlow Food Centre **2** The market town of Ludlow is the capital of fidget pie production **3** A mini pastry-topped version of the pie **4** Cider is added to the pan as the diced gammon filling is sautéed **5** The pie is now ready for the pastry or mustard mash topping **6** The Food Centre's Gloucester Old Spot pigs provide the pork for the pies **7** The Hairy Bikers discovered the pie and help turn around its fortunes

using milk from Oakly Park.

“Like so many of England’s best dishes, this is a ‘using up’ dish,” says Sandy. “It uses ingredients that are readily available here – potatoes, apples, cider, and gammon. Traditionally, every house had a pig and an apple orchard, and a cellar well stocked with cider. Pork and cider make great bedfellows.”

Although many cooks top their fidget pie with pastry, chef Miles Hammond puts a twist on the original recipe by using mashed potato mixed with mustard,

creating a sort of Shropshire version of shepherd’s pie. “We wanted to keep the traditional, local ingredients but create a fidget that was more visually appealing,” he says. “Our deli counter already had a range of pies with pastry lids, so by adding the mustard mash, we gave the fidgets a

pointed top that made them stand out. We decided to make them bite-sized so that individuals could buy one and enjoy it.”

Popular pie

Sandy’s pies are clearly popular, as the Centre recently sold its 10,000th fidget. “They are far and away our best sellers,”

he says. “They’re especially popular for summer picnics and Christmas buffets.”

The fidget frenzy appears to be spreading. Inspired by the Hairy Bikers

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and by Sandy, Deli on the Square, in Ludlow’s historic centre, now stocks its own pastry-topped version. It’s made by Jane Lloyd, who runs the Courtyard Restaurant across the square, where you can also enjoy them. She uses Maris Piper potatoes, Bramley apples, local organic cider, and sage from the garden.

“Once the Hairy Bikers had visited, people kept asking for the pie, so we started making it,” says Jane who also sells the pies at a market stall twice a month.

I take a bite to see what all the fuss is about. The saltiness of the gammon is perfectly balanced by the sweetness of the apple, and the pastry is meltingly tender. The key, as ever, is in the quality of the ingredients. Armed with Sandy’s recipe, I’m off home to my own kitchen. It’s time to get fidgeting.

▶ Where to find fidget pie

LUDLOW FOOD CENTRE ☎ 01584 856000

📍 www.ludlowfoodcentre.co.uk

DELI ON THE SQUARE ☎ 01584 877353

📍 www.delionthesquareludlow.co.uk

THE COURTYARD ☎ 01584 878080

📍 www.thecourtyard.uk.com

Clare Hargreaves is the food editor of *Countryfile Magazine*.