Scottish Heritage
Food and Cooking

Capture the tastes and traditions with over 150 easy-to-follow recipes and 700 stunning photographs, including step-by-step instructions

Carol Wilson and Christopher Trotter
Photography by Craig Robertson
A replica interior of a crofter’s cottage, with the fire for cooking in the centre of the room.

The crofters lived in small stone houses with roofs of wood and thatch. Farm animals, such as poultry, lived in one end of the building and the family at the other. A peat fire burned continuously in the middle of the room, where food was cooked in an iron pot suspended from the ceiling. There were no windows, but a hole in the roof allowed the smoke to escape. They were often referred to as blackhouses as the interiors were black with smoke. The crofters’ diet consisted mainly of cheese, butter, herbs, seasonal fruits and vegetables, porridge, oatcakes and barley bannocks. A bowl of steaming hot porridge (oatmeal) served with thick cold fresh cream provided a sustaining and nourishing breakfast. A pot of broth often thickened with oatmeal and flavoured with wild herbs simmered all day over the fire for the evening meal, accompanied by soft barley bannocks cooked on a bakestone or girdle (griddle). A piece of mutton or venison provided a welcome addition to the pot. Filling staples were potatoes and oatmeal boiled in water (brochan) and meals were accompanied by milk, buttermilk, ale or whisky. In the summer wild berries and fruits were enjoyed with cream and honey.

There are around 17,000 crofts today and most of them now have modern amenities. Crofting has undergone a revival and has seen the re-emergence of traditional cottage industries.

The Gaming Estates

Hunting was a popular sport with the nobility in the 18th and 19th centuries, many of whom travelled up from England. Large gaming estates began to appear, the later ones becoming more flamboyant and luxurious. Every laird, as lords were known in Scotland, owned dovecotes for pigeons, and huge flocks of wild pigeons also thrived in Scotland. They provided fresh meat in winter. Increasingly tight laws were put in place to prevent the locals from hunting and fishing, yet poaching increased as they considered that wild animals and fish could not be regarded as property – they belonged to no one and were there for the taking.

Deer and boar were hunted on horseback with dogs. A more formal hunt was the drive, where beaters drove the game to within the hunters’ range. In the murky peat bogs the tinchel method developed. Walls of stone or brush were built on either side of a glen, and men on foot drove the deer from the hills into the enclosure.

Every part of the deer was used; even the antlers which provided deerhorn jelly. Venison was usually roasted and tougher cuts were stewed or used to fill pasties. Venison collops, a very old dish, was made with thick steaks from the

Below Elaborate hunting lodges still host gaming parties with traditional hunting and banquets.
The smokehouses

Smoked foods have been enjoyed since antiquity, and smoking, particularly of fish, has been practised throughout Scotland since the Iron Age. Foods were salted, and then hung in huts and caves where smoke from the cooking fires pervaded the fish or meat. It was discovered that the tarry substances in wood-smoke killed bacteria and formed an impervious layer on the surface of the food, which preserved it. The smoke also penetrated the food imparting the characteristic rich, smoky flavour. Foods were heavily smoked and salted to preserve them for the lean winter months. Smoking was also used to preserve fish that needed to be transported to the mainland or abroad.

Fresh fish such as haddock were heavily salted, then smoked for up to three weeks. Salmon was also smoked, but the end result was hard and salty – very different from the tender, mild product we know today. The famous Arbroath smokies are haddock that have been dry-salted, tied in pairs then hot smoked to a rich copper colour, leaving the insides creamy white. They are still made in a number of family-run smokehouses around Arbroath harbour.

Smokehouses were built in coastal areas, where fish were smoked as they came ashore. Early smokehouses were simple wood or brick buildings fitted with beams, across which lengths of wood were balanced for hanging the fish. Fishwives gutted, split, cleaned and salted the fish and laid the fires in the smokehouses. They also smoked their own fish over peat in their home chimneys – a practice which was common throughout Scotland until the mid-19th century.

Scotland's oldest smoking house still stands on River Ugie in Peterhead. Built in 1585 for the Fifth Earl of Marischal to store his fish and game, the tiny building still has the original 16th-century scarf joints on the ceiling beams. Locally caught wild salmon and trout are still smoked here, along with top-quality farmed salmon from Orkney.

Fish was not the only food to be smoked. Women in the Highlands and Islands smoked home-made sausages in their chimneys. Geese were also sometimes cured and smoked. Joints of beef and mutton hams (legs of mutton cured and smoked in the same way as hams) were much sought after in the 18th century, enjoying a large export market to the New World and the West Indies. Smoking continued in much the same way until 1939, when the Torry Research Station in Aberdeen developed the Torry kiln. This was a new controlled smoking kiln, which produced a uniform product of a high quality. The process was achieved using a forced draught, which improved the drying and smoking. The fish were exposed to moderate temperatures (prime for bacterial growth) for a shorter period. The result was that more fish could be processed in a shorter time and to a higher quality.

The smoking process

The smoking process involves first curing by dry-salting, brining or marinating (according to the producer), then air-drying the food before smoking. The cure is a major factor in

Above High-quality smoked salmon is filleted by hand before smoking.
Smoked fish

In the days before refrigeration and fast transport, a major concern was the preservation of fish. They were smoked in home chimneys, over peat fires or in specially built sheds over halved whisky barrels. Today fish are generally smoked for flavour. Haddock, mackerel, sprats and herring are smoked over oak, beech, hickory, cherry wood, Douglas fir or whisky barrel chippings, which all produce a magnificent flavour. Every curer has his own unique brining recipe and secret flavourings.

Early Scandinavian settlers brought with them their tradition of hot-smoking fish, and it has continued to the present day. In the early 18th century the people of the tiny village of Auchmithie took their skills to the growing port of Arbroath, just north of Dundee and it became a centre for smoking. The salty, smoky, mellow aromas still waft enticingly through the town. Originally the fishwives arranged the fish on rods and smoked them over discarded whisky barrels, which produced a darker colour than those of today. The name “Arbroath smokie” is protected and can now only be used to describe haddock smoked in the traditional manner (dating back to the late 1800s) within an 8km/5-mile radius of Arbroath.

**Smoked haddock**

Smoking haddock was a particular skill of the village of Findon (pronounced Finnan), south of Aberdeen, and it was from this village that the cure took its name. Pale golden Finnan haddock is renowned throughout the world and has a superb delicate flavour.

The original cures produced a hard, heavily smoked fish, but modern cures have improved the flavour and texture enormously. There are hot-smoked and cold-smoked cures, with several regional variations.

Pales or Glasgow pales have a shorter brining and smoking time than Finnan haddock. Some are very lightly smoked and thus have only a slight smoky flavour and just a hint of colour. They are usually made from smaller fish. Smoked fillet, sometimes known as Aberdeen fillet, is a single fillet from a large haddock. The skin is left on to hold the fish together during the curing process. Golden Cutlet is made from a fillet of haddock or whiting with the skin removed. It is only lightly brined and smoked so has less flavour than any other cure.

The garish yellow dyed smoked haddock are best avoided. You’ll find authentic Finnan haddock at good fishmongers. It is delicious simmered gently in milk or water and served with a poached egg on top. Smoked haddock is an essential ingredient of Cullen skink, a creamy fish and potato soup. Hot-smoked haddock or Arbroath smokies are also known by their original names, tied tailies or pinwiddies, and are succulently moist with a wonderful flavour. Whole haddock are split open and the head and guts removed before they are tied in pairs by their tails, then lightly brined and smoked over oak or beech wood until cooked.

*Above* Quality fish and shellfish for smoking is farmed in Loch Fyne.
century to gut the herring ready for smoking. They lived in dilapidated buildings, known as kip houses, which were only suitable for sleeping in – hence the British slang term “having a kip”. Those from Loch Fyne are smoked over oak chips (often from whisky barrels) and are particularly good. They can be grilled (broiled), baked or simmered in boiling water. An old way of cooking them was to place the kippers in a jug of boiling hot water and leave them for 4–5 minutes, by which time they were cooked.

Bloaters are whole herring that have been cured and lightly smoked, but not split or gutted. The name may come from the Old Norse blautr, or from the fact that the fish are plumper than dry-cured fish. They have a delicate smoky flavour and remain silver in colour. They were popular in the 19th century.

**Kippers and smoked herrings**

Freshly caught herrings were originally dried over smoking seaweed and sprinkled with saltwater to preserve them. Kippers are plump herring that have been split, cleaned and soaked in brine for a few minutes then hot smoked. Scottish fishwives travelled to the villages of Craster (known as the kipper capital of England) and Seahouses in England in the 19th century to buy them.

**Other smoked fish**

Almost every type of fish in Scotland has a tradition of being smoked, with lesser or greater success. Smoked salmon is without doubt the best-known type.

**Smoked trout** is a favourite for making delicious patés and mousses and fine first courses, often served with dill or horseradish sauce. The best is first brined and then gutted and smoked over birch with a little peat for a smokier flavour. High-quality smoked trout is now prepared in a similar way to smoked salmon.

**Smoked mackerel** has a rich flavour and a succulent velvety-smooth texture. It can be eaten cold with a salad and makes a delicious paté.

**Smoked halibut** has a translucent white flesh and a delicate smoky flavour. It is smoked and thinly sliced in a similar way to smoked salmon.

**Above Smoked mackerel makes a tasty pâté.**

**Smoked trout** is a favourite for making delicious patés and mousses and fine first courses, often served with dill or horseradish sauce. The best is first brined and then gutted and smoked over birch with a little peat for a smokier flavour. High-quality smoked trout is now prepared in a similar way to smoked salmon.

**Smoked mackerel** has a rich flavour and a succulent velvety-smooth texture. It can be eaten cold with a salad and makes a delicious paté.

**Smoked halibut** has a translucent white flesh and a delicate smoky flavour. It is smoked and thinly sliced in a similar way to smoked salmon.

**Above Smoked trout fillets make an excellent first course.**

**Right** Sea trout is relatively rare now, so smoked sea trout is a real treat.
Rowanberries are tiny bright orange-red berries that are added to sauces and relishes for rich game meats. Rose hips are the seed pods for roses, and appear after the plants have finished flowering. They make excellent jellies to serve with game.

Orchard fruits

The Lowlands produce some wonderful and flavoursome orchard fruits, although the season is short. In addition to those below, peaches and cherries are also grown, if not widely.

Apples of many varieties are grown for eating and use in jams and jellies, as well as pies and crumbles. Pears are also abundant, making fabulous preserves, jellies and pie fillings when they ripen in the autumn.

Plums grow well in the Lowlands and are a favourite in pies and crumbles, as well as with porridge (oatmeal). Victoria plums are the most commonly found.

Jams and preserves

In the 18th century, when sugar became affordable to almost everyone, it became the vogue to make jams and preserves from seasonal fruits. Costly imported fruits, particularly oranges, were also used.

Marmalades Early marmalade had a strong flavour and was so dense and sticky that a knife was needed to slice it. Early Scottish recipes called the shreds of peel “chips” and...
Breakfasts

A good hearty Scottish breakfast is the ideal way to start the morning, especially if your day involves energetic outdoor activities. Oats take many forms, from porridge to oatcakes, and smoked fish, such as smoked haddock and salmon, is also popular.

The national favourite, black pudding, is a traditional breakfast staple, often served with eggs, bacon and rowies, a special breakfast roll enjoyed with jam or marmalade.