

Marvellous marmalade

The Dalemain World Marmalade Awards are helping preserve a very British breakfast tradition. By **Caroline Roberts**

When keen marmalade cook Jane Hasell-McCosh moved to Dalemain Mansion as a young bride, she discovered it had been hiding a fascinating culinary secret: an archive of marmalade recipes stretching back to the 17th century. The Cumbrian mansion has been in her husband's family for over 350 years and it was in the 1660s that the widowed Elizabeth Rainbow moved there to live with her nephew, bringing her recipe books with her. 'It's amazing to think I'm making marmalade in the very same kitchen as Elizabeth,' says Jane.

In 2005, not long after Cumbria was devastated by the cattle disease, foot-and-mouth, she decided to launch the Marmalade Awards. 'Lots of businesses had gone to the wall and I wanted to do something to lift spirits and bring visitors back,' she explains. 'Making marmalade with other people gives you a sense of community.'

It's been a huge success. Every spring, more than 2,000 jars arrive from entrants all over the world, and around 4,000 visitors descend on Dalemain for a two-day festival of tastings, talks and a chance to rub shoulders with a special guest – Paddington Bear. 'It's a marmalade-eating frenzy,' says Jane. 'On the second day, we serve an all-day breakfast where you can choose from 1,000 different marmalades. Where else in the world can you do that?'

THE TASTE TEST

Expert judges work their way through entries in the artisan



The Best in Show cup surrounded by different marmalades



Jane with head judge Dan Leopard at the 2021 awards



MARMALADE OF CHERRIES

In the past, marmalade wasn't just made with citrus. The Dalemain archive contains recipes using a wide range of fruit. Why not try this cherry version?

METHOD

To 8lb of cherries take 2lb of sugar. Stone your cherries & boil them on a quick fire in the juice that runs from them till they be dry, stirring them that they burn not. Then your sugar being beaten fine put it to them & let them stand upon coals till the sugar be dissolved, but not to



boil after the sugar is in. Then put it into glasses and store them. When they are candied on the top, if you please, you may turn them out & dry them for paste, or keep them for marmalade.

From *Marmalade Recipes of the 17th Century* by Frances Wilkins. The booklet contains a selection of recipes from the archive and is available to order from the Dalemain shop (£5 plus p&p).

and home-made sections, the latter of which is divided into lots of fun categories, including Merry Marmalade with a dash of alcohol, First-timers' marmalade, and Campanologists, a special category for bellringers who want to try their hand at a different kind of peal. 'I can't tell you how exciting it is when you're judging, as each new jar might be the winner,' enthuses Jane. She's certainly come across some creative combinations. 'We had one containing horseradish. You'd think it would be horrid but just that hint of horseradish turned it into something extraordinary.' And tea is a popular addition for the many entries from Japan, she adds. 'Earl grey and citrus is a lovely combination.'

Selected award-winning marmalades are produced commercially at the Tiptree factory in Essex, as well as being sold at Dalemain and at the upmarket London store of awards sponsor Fortnum & Mason, with a percentage of the proceeds going to charity. Shona Leckie, from Angus in Scotland, won Best in Show in 2017 for her Miss Mint's Treacle Marmalade, based on her paternal grandmother's recipe. 'It was originally a way to create that slightly bitter, dark chunkiness of traditional Oxford marmalade without having to cook it for ages and use up a lot of fuel,' explains Shona. 'I was treated to a champagne

tea at Fortnum & Mason and given a fascinating tour of the factory. Going there to see my marmalade being made was wonderful.'

Shona chose The HALO Trust, a Scotland-based landmine charity once supported by Princess Diana, as the beneficiary of her marmalade sales, but the main cause to benefit from the awards is palliative care, with around £270,000 raised to date. Of each £10 entry fee, £2 goes to Hospice at Home Carlisle and North Lakeland and the remaining £8 is dispatched to a local hospice of the entrant's choice by one of Jane's 100-strong army of volunteers.

'We all die and it would be very nice to die in a good way if we possibly can,' says Jane. 'I wanted to help that happen. People say it's depressing but it's not. If you ask anyone who works in a hospice, they say it's one of the best jobs you can possibly do.'



Shona with her winning creation



Entries for the 2019 awards

RECIPE FOR SUCCESS

She is very excited about this year's new awards category, Generations Together, supported by sponsor Rathbones. 'The idea is that a young and an older marmalade cook pair up to enter. I'm passionate about this because I learnt from my mother and I used to make marmalade with my children,' says Jane. 'It's really important to pass this heritage on to the next generation. The experience of an older marmalade cook and a younger one who might want to experiment a bit is such a fun combination. I'm enjoying the fact that more and more young people are taking part.'

And, in some cases, with considerable success. The 2021 Best in Show was won by nine-year-old Flora Rider from the Isle of Wight for her Seville Orange Marmalade with Orange Blossom. 'The orange blossom was something that's never been done before and it added that bit of magic,' says Jane.

So does she have any tips for those thinking of having a go next year? 'It's the freshness and quality of the fruit, and it's really important to cook the shred properly – that's often the one thing people don't do very well. Only when it's soft do you add the sugar and get it up to a rolling boil pretty quickly,' she advises. And, Shona adds, 'Read the schedule carefully and remember that nothing gets past the judges, even a small smear on the jar or a tiny bit of pip!'

WORLD MARMALADE AWARDS 2023

This year's awards take place on 22 April, so look out for winner announcements on social media and the Dalemain website. And why not have a go yourself next year? Whether you're a complete beginner, a seasoned marmalade maker, or fancy getting a bit creative with your ingredients, there's a category for you.

Visit www.dalemain.com/about-the-festival to find out more and sign up to email alerts for news about next year's awards.