



SpiritStore
cookbook

Packet & Tripe

UNTIL about a decade ago Limerick was the centre of the country's bacon curing industry. This position was reflected in many ways in the life of the city, particularly in its food. During the depressed times of the thirties, forties and fifties, "bones" of all shapes and descriptions—backbones, eyebones, breastbones, spare ribs, strips, lots and knuckles—were familiar sights on the kitchen tables of those working class families fortunate enough to be able to afford them. Pig's heads, tails, toes, (crubeens), sheep's heads and feet (trotters) were also eagerly devoured in many homes in those not too distant days. The decline of the local bacon curing industry and the coming of more affluent times brought changes in long established eating habits. But a unique Limerick dish packet and tripe has not only survived these changes but has also traditionally managed to transcend class barriers in the city. The mere mention of packet and tripe is enough to bring a wistful longing to the eyes and palates of most exiled Limerick men and is as emotive as haggis is for the Scot, bubble and squeak for the Londoner or coddle for the Dubliner. The home of the packet and tripe industry has always been, and still is, King's Island. Slattery's and O'Rourke's of the Island Road and Barrett's of the Sandmull were renowned packet and tripe house factories earlier this century, whose products were sold from street tables in many parts of the city. Now, however, only one family continues the business, carrying on the tradition in the most famous packet and tripe house of all—the one-storey cottage known as Treacy's, at Courthouse Lane, off Athlunkard Street. A latched door gives entrance to a cool, flagged kitchen, divided by a wooden counter. An open yard and shed at the back complete the simple architectural picture. Inside the house the honeycombs of tripe and long tangles of packet are still contained in zinc basins behind the counter. The packet and tripe is cut off in sections at the customer's request and flung expertly from about six feet on to an old-fashioned weighing scale. When an old-age pensioner comes looking for 25p worth Joe Mullane turns on a well practised blind eye if the piece is overweight. The purchased lot is then unceremoniously wrapped in an old newspaper and carried home. As its title indicates, Treacy's was originally owned by a family of that name. Later the premises were taken over by Jim "Packet" O'Halloran, who is credited with being the author of that well known Limerick expression: "It's three o'clock and not a belly in the house scraped yet!"

This remark is now related as a humorous story but it sounded less funny for the ten or so women who were employed scraping the bellies of the sheep in the uncovered yard for a few shillings a week. O'Halloran had a song written about his tripe, the words of which went: "Jim Packet, Jim Packet, your tripe is so green, The finest in Ireland that ever was seen". The taste for packet and tripe is an acquired one and most "outsiders" usually cannot stand its appearance or flavour. The green coloured, pleated, accordion-like tripe is a part of the sheep's belly which, having been washed and scraped, is sold in its raw state. Packet is a blood-sausage or pudding and is dark brown in colour. Sheep's blood is poured into skin taken from the sheep's intestines and spices are also added. Onions and tansy were often included at this stage of its manufacture during past times. The mixture is then boiled in a big vat and the cluster of long, jelly-like lengths are placed in a container ready for sale. A time-honoured way of cooking the tripe is to chop it into small cubes and then steep it overnight in salted water. The water can be drained off or the tripe boiled in the same water. The tripe is then boiled a second time in milk and onion is added. The packet is cut into slivers and also added at this stage. When the dish is simmering gently it is thickened with breadcrumbs and flavoured with a big knob of butter. It is then served, eaten slowly and savoured lovingly for days afterwards. After about fifteen minutes, during which time strong tea is made and served with bread and butter, the packet and tripe is ready for eating. The use of Cleve's condensed milk was reputed to give the meal an extra flavour. Some of the more sophisticated gourmets have been known to add a spoon of curry to give a further exotic touch to the occasion. Packet and tripe, washed down with strong, sweet tea had been found to be easily digestible and rests gently on the stomach, especially one ravaged by an excess of alcohol. For this reason the dish is very much in demand after a weekend "feed of porter" has rendered the stomach hostile to other more abrasive forms of nourishment. Packet and tripe is reputed to give a "lining" to the stomach. So the dish has traditionally been a weekend treat in Limerick, a distinctive Saturday night/Sunday morning ritual. Treacy's also provided other succulent delights for local epicures. The phrase used to describe the whole array was "book, reed and belly".

The book is a part of the digestive system of the sheep, and is scored like a book, hence its name. The grisly reed, when grilled, is considered a rare delicacy. But the belly is regarded as the choicest part of all. The nuns of St. Mary's Convent were very partial to packet and tripe and a large zinc bathful was unfailingly delivered to the convent on Sundays. A special belly was scraped for this purpose, and a "well in" Treacy's customer might, on rare occasions and as a great favour, get a piece of the much-coveted "nuns' belly". Mr. Jim Kemmy



To cook Limericks' PACKET & TRIPE

Ingredients

1lb tripe (ask for honeycomb tripe)
½lb packet
2-3 onions, diced
1 pint water
¾ pint of full-fat milk
large knob of butter
salt and pepper

Cooking Method

1. Rinse the tripe in running water, and cut into small 1cm-2cm cubes (the size of the cubes varies depending on who you speak to).
2. Add the tripe to a pint of boiling water, and simmer for ½ hour to 1 hour, until the tripe is tender.
3. Drain the tripe in a colander,
4. Put it back into the saucepan with milk, pepper and the diced onions.
5. Bring to the boil and turn down the heat to simmer.
6. Remove the skin from the packet, dice it into small cubes or slice into circular pieces and add it to the pot.
7. Simmer for 30 minutes, then spoon into a bowl.
8. Add the knob of butter and plenty of pepper and salt.

Serve in bowls with floury potatoes or buttered cottage bread.



With ev+a curator Elizabeth Hatz in 2010 we chose to play with the familiar as exchange – employing the conventions of domestic, ritualized, convivial, traditional food production and consumption as the intersection of art, labor, economics, and the production of social experiences.

SpiritStore marked the opening of ev+a 2010, in collaboration with Teaspach Theatre Company by serving the traditional Limerick dish, Packet and Tripe on Catherine Street. This traditional meat dish made from sheeps stomach lining (tripe) and a blood sausage (packet) was often, but not always, cooked by the men in the family and was renowned for its pungent smell while being cooked. Often one household on a street cooked the dish for the entire street, taking it in turns as the weeks passed. The logic was to save the occupants from enduring the smell that permeated the house on Packet and Tripe day.

In the absence of the Limerick City Gallery due to renovations, ev+a 2010 found a home in the unused buildings of Catherine Street. The three story building that housed the majority of exhibits had large glass windows which looked down on buildings that at one time were the busy city abattoirs. Historically the surrounds of Catherine Street was called Pigtown, meat production, distribution and its economic impact on Limerick working families was integral to Limerick city centre. Blood was said to run freely down the street, the meat was exported from these streets as far as Russia and Japan.

Packet and Tripe, a recipe unique to Limerick was reproduced for ev+a in consultation with Limerick families and butchers. Our research led us to the senior ladies of inner city St Marys parish, who regularly bought and cooked the produce. Here we met amongst others Mrs Davis, and Mrs Mullane of St Marys Community Group, experts on the dish.

The recipe herein is derived from interviews with the St Marys Community Group.

- See more at: <http://spiritstorelimerick.weebly.com/packet-and-tripe.html#sthash.ZxYvqp8v.dpuf>

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