

Finding Stilton

The digital age has been a boon to the availability of online resources. Through the magic of the internet, it is possible to study and interact with high quality images of rare and delicate items, without the risk of inflicting damage to them, from the comfort of your own home. Rather than jealously locking away their acquisitions, numerous institutions have embarked on ambitious programs of digitisation in order to share their collections with as many interested viewers as possible. For the food historian, the resources now available are rich and varied. The British Library has created an interactive version of the oldest cookery manuscript, *The Forme of Cury*, the Wellcome Library has over three hundred handwritten manuscripts available both online and to download for free, and many record offices around the UK are now sharing scans of their cookery and household manuscripts online.

In the United States, the Folger Shakespeare Library has hundreds of thousands of items relating to Shakespeare and his world, as well as wider subjects of interest, spanning six hundred years. Last year, as part of a collaboration with them on Taffety Tarts, I had cause to read a digitised cookery manuscript in their collection which appeared to be of Scottish provenance, with Scottish measures such as ‘forpet’, ‘lippie’, etc., being scattered throughout the recipes therein.

Recently, I was able to study this manuscript in greater detail and revisit an entry that I had marked as particularly interesting. The recipe was entitled ‘*Stilton Chease I gote from a darymaid their 1717*’. Quirky spelling aside, with its helpful date, not only does it appear to be a mention of Stilton cheese that predates all other written sources by several years, but it also seems to challenge the widely-held belief that Stilton cheese was never made in the village.

The History

The earliest mention of Stilton cheese that I have been able to find is this oblique reference in a 1713 publication to a fortifying breakfast enjoyed by the main character at an inn in York:¹

“I abandon'd my Snoaring Kennel, and descended the Grades, in order to fortify my Appetite against the contagious Breaths of Butchers, Skips, and Coachmen, with a Pint of Canary, a Pennyworth of Bread, and a slice of Stilton...”

This notwithstanding, the botanist Richard Bradley is currently held to be the first author to mention the excellence of Stilton cheese directly, in a paper published in March of 1721². Another early reference is made by William Stukeley, in 1724.

“Stilton, or Stickleton, analogous to *Stivecle*, is famous for cheese, which they sell at 12 d. per pound, and would be thought equal to Parmesan, were it not too near us.”³

Daniel Defoe also commented, in his two-volume tour through Great Britain, in 1725.

“Coming *South* from hence we pass'd *Stilton*, a Town famous for Cheese, which is call'd our *English Parmesan*, and is brought to Table with the *Mites*, or Maggots round it, so thick, that they bring a Spoon with them for you to eat the Mites with, as you do the Cheese.”⁴

All these references indicate that, by the early 1720s, Stilton is already enjoying a certain fame for the cheese being sold there. It is curious that this renown should spring, fully formed, into print like this; the earliest mentions in print are acknowledgements of how famous it is. Usually, a first mention is an offhand remark, a casual note, that only becomes significant once whatever is being remarked upon achieves a wider fame. Whereas in the case of Stilton cheese, it is already famous, but no-one is writing about it, leading to the conclusion that it's fame must have initially spread by word of mouth alone.

The Recipe

With minimal adjustments for punctuation and spelling, the recipe in the manuscript reads as follows:

Take as much sweet cream as sweet milk if you have it, or what you can get and mix it together. Boil salt & water well & put as much of it to the milk, boiling hot, as will make the milk warm for the rennet. When it is thickened, break it as small as ever you can, then lay a thin cloth over it and take off the whey that runs through it as quickly as you can, breaking always the curd more that the whey may run well out. When it is pretty well [drained] lay a cloth in your cheesewort & put in the curd & press it. If ye find it not salt enough with your warm water, you sprinkle more in as you press it. The vats or cheeseworts are a quarter high. When the curds are first put in, have broad hoops to put on top of the vat to keep in the curds till they press gradually down & if you have no hoops, take a piece [of] strong horse girther and make it the width of the vat and sew it strongly together & put on as many hoops or girther hoops as your curd requires. It must stand 3 days in the fat or 2 days & 3 nights & it must be turned twice a day & a dry cloth put to it every time. When you take it out, one [person] must hold down the cloth tightly and another [person] draw off the vat. When it is set to dry, you must pin a piece [of] strong cloth around it as fast as ever you can, which they call a sweeter [sweater?] & which is kept around it 3 or 4 weeks & changed once or twice a day. They must be kept carefully from heat or from sun, the window glass all covered when the sun is on it. They must be carefully wiped & turned morning & evening while green & once alwise after.

The language and syntax of the recipe is interesting; they are obviously the instructions of someone who has first hand knowledge of the process, as they also include small details of practical advice that suggest they are borne of experience.

Stilton Cheese I got from a Dairymaid then, 1717

Take as much sweet cream as sweet milk if you have it or what you can get & mix it together boyl salt & water well & put as much of it to the milk boying hole as will make the milk warm for the curd when it is thickend break it as small as ever you can then lay a thin cloath over it & take of the whey that runs throo it as quickly as you can, breaking alwise the curd more that its whey may run well out, when it is fully well lay a cloath in your chefwast & put in the curd & press it if ye find it not fall enough with your warm water you presse more in or you press it the fatts or Cheswoks are a quarter high, when the curds are first put in have broad hoops to put on the top of the fat to keep in the curds till they press gradually down, & if you have no hoops take a piece strong horse Girthen & make it the wideth of the fatts & join it strongly together & put on as many hoops or girthen hoops as your curds requires it must stand 3 days in the fat or 2 days & 3 nights & it must be turned twice a day & a dry cloath put to it every time when you take it out one must hold fast down the cloath & another draw off the fatts when it is sett to dry you must pin a piece strong cloath round it as fast as ever you can which they call a sweeler & which is kept round it 3 or 4 weeks & changed once or twice a day, they must be carefully kept from heat or from sun the window glas all covered when the sun is on it they must be carefully wiped & turned morning & evening while green & once alwise after.

Image 1: Stilton Cheese Recipe, 1717. Source: Folger Shakespeare Library, W.a.111

- A 50:50 ratio of milk and cream is desirable, but use what you can get.
- Laying a thin cloth [muslin] over the top of the curd will keep all the small pieces contained, thereby allowing the whey to be scooped off efficiently.
- Taste the curd to assess the saltiness and adjust as necessary. Don't assume the brine has seasoned it sufficiently, especially since no quantities are given for the strength of said brine.

- Instructions for making additional bands to hold the curd if wooden hoops aren't available.
- The task of removing the cheese from the mould is a two-person job.
- Not only should the cheese be kept out of the sun, but any windows need to be covered also.

The recipe is credited as originating from a dairymaid, which would fit with the role at the time, dairy work being very much seen almost exclusively as women's work. Since the recipe is included in a household manuscript book, it would also suggest that it was recorded there by a female, the lady of the household. So this page has recorded a conversation between two women over the nuances of a recipe for cheese. The fact that the cheese is Stilton cheese and it was collected in the village of Stilton itself, is crucial in determining the nature of the original Stilton Cheese that achieved such initial fame. The blue-veined Stilton we are familiar with today is not the same cheese that was famous in Stilton in the early years of the eighteenth century.

The recipe can be contrasted with Richard Bradley's 1721 recipe for Stilton Cheese, gleaned from a gentleman correspondent who signed himself A.B. :

To make Stilton Cheese.

TAKE ten Gallons of Morning Milk, and five Gallons of sweet Cream, and beat them together; then put in as much boiling Spring-Water, as will make it warmer than Milk from the Cow; when this is done, put in Runnet made strong with large Mace, and when it is come (or the Milk is set in Curd) break it as small as you would do for Cheese-Cakes; and after that salt it, and put it into the Fatt, and press it for two Hours.

Then boil the Whey, and when you have taken off the Curds, put the Cheese into the Whey, and let it stand half an Hour; then put it in the Press, and when you take it out, bind it up for the first Fortnight in Linnen Rollers, and turn it upon Boards for the first Month twice a Day.

Unembellished instructions, concise, bordering on scant at times (Is the Fatt supposed to be lined with cloth? Is the cheese put into the boiled whey hot or cold? Wrapped in cloth or not?). In its spare directions it is bluntly stating; this is the way it is done. No discussion is brooked, neither is supposition entertained. Bradley doesn't mention where his correspondent got the recipe, but it is highly probable that it too was from a dairymaid; he just didn't deem it pertinent to acknowledge her. The method he outlines appears straightforward, however, anyone with any experience of producing food, even at the most basic level of cooking in the home, knows that merely following a recipe is just not enough to guarantee success, and there is great skill involved in knowing where adjustments, allowances or substitutions can be made, and knowing what is non-negotiable. As a result of this minimalist approach, Bradley later published a more detailed method in 1729⁵, although he isn't clear whether the additional details are newly acquired or had just been omitted from the original account. These details are for the finished cheese and include dimensions [7 inches in diameter by 8 inches high], weight [18lbs], texture ["one may spread it upon Bread like Butter"] price [12d per pound], best place to buy in Stilton [the sign of

the Bell] and the cost of carriage to London [3 shillings including basket], all of which is incredibly interesting in forming an image of the cheese he is referring to, but not of much merit in terms of the practicalities of manufacture.

The 1717 recipe was shared with some prominent modern cheesemakers to try and determine the type of cheese it would produce. Charles Martell, champion of traditional Double Gloucester and Stinking Bishop cheeses (amongst many others), thought the high cream content would have helped prevent the cheese from drying out⁶. Richard Bradley asserted that the cheese was kept over a year⁷ before it was cut and Charles was of the opinion that, without refrigeration, the cheese would very likely be infested with the cheese mites mentioned by Defoe. However, he was also of the mind that the pressing would have toughened the rind, possibly enough to inhibit them. Despite Bradley's assertion that his Christmas Stilton could be spread like butter, the firmness of the cheese is attested by the 1713 reference, since the breakfast included "a slice of Stilton". Joe Schneider, maker of Stichelton cheese, observed that such a large proportion of cream would make for a very rich cheese and the cutting of the curd into small pieces would help with draining the whey, as failure to do so might cause the cheese to become rancid. He also was intrigued by the adding of the salt with the rennet.

*"Maybe with all that cream they needed to drive out moisture, and perhaps milk back then was so active (unlike modern "hygienic" milk) that they used salt to retard acid formation."*⁸

It would be a challenge to attempt to recreate this cheese, with so little firm information, but decidedly intriguing.

The Manuscript

The woman who recorded this recipe was obviously someone who took an interest in food as well as being very organised; thanks to her diligence we can know, in general terms, when and where and from whom she acquired this recipe. But what of this author? The manuscript itself might hold some clues, and so, leaving the excitement of the Stilton recipe for the moment, let us examine the manuscript as a whole in more detail.

The manuscript is held by the Folger Shakespeare Library and this institution has made available online, digitised images of the entire volume. The background information they have provided suggests it dates from the early eighteenth century, citing a recipe for bottling punch dated June 15th 1706 approximately one third of the way into the manuscript. Frustratingly, there appear to be some pages missing at the start of the book, pages which might well have contained the lady's name. However, there is a bookplate attached at the very front of the book which is emblazoned with a family crest, the name of its owner and a date: *The Hon. George Baillie Esqr. One of the Lords of the Treasury, 1724.*



Image 2: Bookplate of George Baillie Esq. Source: Folger Shakespeare Library, W.a.111.

George Baillie was a Scottish nobleman whose father had been executed for treason in 1684. He fled to Holland, remaining in exile until his return alongside William of Orange in 1688. Having had his family estates at Jerviswood restored to him, he became an MP in 1693 and was a leading member of the *Squadron Volante*, a group who were influential in the debates which led to Scotland's union with England in 1707. He subsequently sat in Westminster as MP for Berwickshire for the next 26 years, rising to high office in both the Treasury and the Admiralty. In short, he was an extremely busy man and unlikely to have had the time to be the author of the many recipes and remedies contained within the manuscript. This was a role much more suited to, and appropriate for, his wife who, as lady of the house, would be responsible for the domestic duties of stillroom, sickroom and kitchen. Yes, the book might well have come from George Baillie's household, as the bookplate attests, but the ownership and authorship is far more likely to have been that of his wife.

And this is where the story takes an exciting turn, because George Baillie's wife was Lady Grisell Baillie, she of the tremendously precise household books, extracts from which were published by the Scottish Historical Society in 1911⁹.

The detail in her household and account books is phenomenal and covers everything from food, servant wages and clothing allowances to travel costs, gambling debts and family pocket money. If this manuscript book did belong to Lady Grisell Baillie, and there is strong evidence to suggest that it did, it would be of great interest to a wide range of scholars and food historians alike.

Evidence of ownership

There are a number of factors that support ownership by Lady Grisell, which are discussed below.

There is clear evidence that a cookery book was indeed amongst the papers left by Lady Grisell's upon her death. In the introduction to the print edition of her household books we learn that:

*Lady Grisell left three 'Day Books' folio size, the first running from 1692 to 1718 inclusive, and containing 442 pages; the second from 1719 to 1742 inclusive, and containing 354 pages, and the third from 1742 to the date of her death (6th December 1746), continued by her daughter, Lady Murray. She also left books containing the accounts of expenses in connection with their journeys to Bath and to the Continent; Books containing Inventories of Bottles, etc.; **a Book of Receipts**; a Book of Bills of Fare; Books relating to estate management during the years 1742, 1743 and 1744, and many other Account and Memoranda Books.¹⁰*

Unfortunately, such was the volume of her paperwork, when the Scottish Historical Society was preparing their publication, they elected to concentrate mainly on the first Day Book, and supplement with information cherry-picked from other books. Several of her Bills of Fare make it into print, but the editors acknowledge that much had to be omitted.¹¹ Lady Grisell's Book of Receipts evidently fell into that category.

Even though Lady Grisell had a recipe book and this book has the bookplate of George Baillie, it does not automatically follow that this manuscript book is Lady Grisell's. Whilst it is unlikely that George Baillie's household would possess more than one household manuscript book, it is still possible, and thus a search for firmer evidence is required, no matter how reasonable this assumption might be.

Dating of the Manuscript

Several recipes in the manuscript are attributed. When attempting to date a manuscript recipe book, if the attribution of a recipe is for a member of the upper class, there is a likelihood that they can be traced through the records of the peerage. With a little detective work, identifying the people mentioned in a manuscript can assist in placing it firmly in a particular era. Entries have been made in several hands. The recipes written in the first hand contain only a few attributions but the greatest number of attributed recipes are in later hands, many of whom can be identified. Although some of the recipes in the book are attributed to 'ordinary' names – a Mrs Johnston is particularly generous with her preserving recipes for fruit – there are still a great many members of the peerage mentioned that are contemporaries of Lady Grisell. Amongst the recipes of the great and the good mentioned are:

- A recipe for pickling oysters, annotated as coming from Lady Ann Murray's Receipt book, 1712¹². This would be Lady Anne Murray, wife of Sir David Murray of Stanhope. Lady Grisell's daughter Grizel was briefly married Lady Anne's son, Alexander Murray, whose susceptibility to jealous rages only became apparent after the wedding (1710) and contributed to their separation¹³. This recipe dates from the short-lived attempt at reconciliation between Lord Stanhope and Grizel before separation proceedings were instigated.
- A remedy for a dropsy¹⁴ and a diet drink recipe¹⁵ from Lady Gordon - Lady Henrietta Mordaunt.
- A recipe to dry figs¹⁶ from the Duchess of Roxburgh - Lady Mary Finch
- A cake¹⁷ recipe from Lady Alice Hume, wife of Sir Gustavus Hume, 3rd Bt.

Other recipe contributions recognisably come from family and friends:

- A recipe for raisin wine¹⁸, contributed by Dr. John Arbuthnott, Queen Anne's Physician.
- Juniper water¹⁹ from Lady Grisell's father, the Earl of Marchmont.
- Two recipes, an ointment and laundry instructions²⁰ from Mrs (May) Menzies, governess to Lady Grisell's daughters and later to her grandsons.
- and a recipe for The Best Soup On Earth²¹ from Earl Hadinton - Thomas Hamilton, 6th Earl of Haddington, father of Lady Grisell's son-in-law.

In addition to these recipes gleaned from family, friends and acquaintances, there are several recipes with geographical annotations that match Lady Grisell's travels:

- A method of clearing wine²² from the Earl of Marchmont's (Lady Grisell's father) time in exile at Cambrai (1685-1688).
- Two recipes, 'A good seed cake' and 'To make chocolate after the Neapolitan manner', both dated 1732, Naples (The entire family travelled there for the health of Lady Grisell's son-in-law Lord Binning, and were in residence December 1731-March 1733).
- A recipe for custard²³ from Lady Frances Erskine, Spa, 1731. (The family were in Spa in July 1731, en route to Naples, and Lady Erskine and her father, John Erskine, 23rd/6th Earl of Mar, were briefly resident in the town before moving to Aix-la-Chapelle later in the year.)

Proof of authorship

Further confirmation of the authorship of Lady Grisell Baillie comes from the words of the recipes themselves. There are a number of unusual spellings in the Stilton recipe, all of which match those in Lady Grisell's printed Household book; these include chease²⁴ (cheese), sweat²⁵ (sweet), cloaths²⁶ (cloths), hote²⁷ (hot), boyling²⁸ (boiling), glas²⁹ (glass) and brecking³⁰ (breaking). Other recipes in the manuscript also reproduce Lady Grisell's capricious orthography seen in the 1911 publication. These include bieff (beef), cheston (chestnut), jacolet (chocolate), salmond (salmon) and aple (apple).

Then there is the handwriting. Following on from the catalogue of paperwork left by Lady Grisell at her death, the introduction to the printed volume includes the following anecdote:

“All are written in her own clear handwriting, the character of which was so well known that in 1706, when the leaders of the ‘Squadron Volante’ were corresponding in cypher, Secretary Johnston writes to Baillie, ‘ Write by an unknown hand ; your wife’s is as well known as your own.’ ”³¹

A distinctive and recognisable hand should be relatively straightforward to verify, if other examples can be found with which it may be compared. Fortunately, the National Library of Scotland holds several examples of Lady Grisell Baillie’s letters, and copies were obtained spanning a date-range of over thirty years. Copyright restrictions do not permit the reproduction of the letters in this paper, however, when the handwriting in them was compared to that of the Stilton recipe, it is very clear that it is a match.

In searching the manuscript for distinctive letter formations to illustrate this point, I stumbled across the following which should put any remaining doubt beyond question. Just ten pages into the second handwriting style, can be found the recipe for “A Gentle Purge” the notes of which include dosages for the family: Jerviswood (Lady Grisell’s husband George), daughters Grise (Grisel) and Rachie (Rachel).

*Jerviswood may take 2 drop puder Hipopekuana.
To Grise or Rachy, 26 grains of the sd puder when ten years old.
A drop & a half of wormseed for Grisie & Rachy at 12 & 9 years old.*

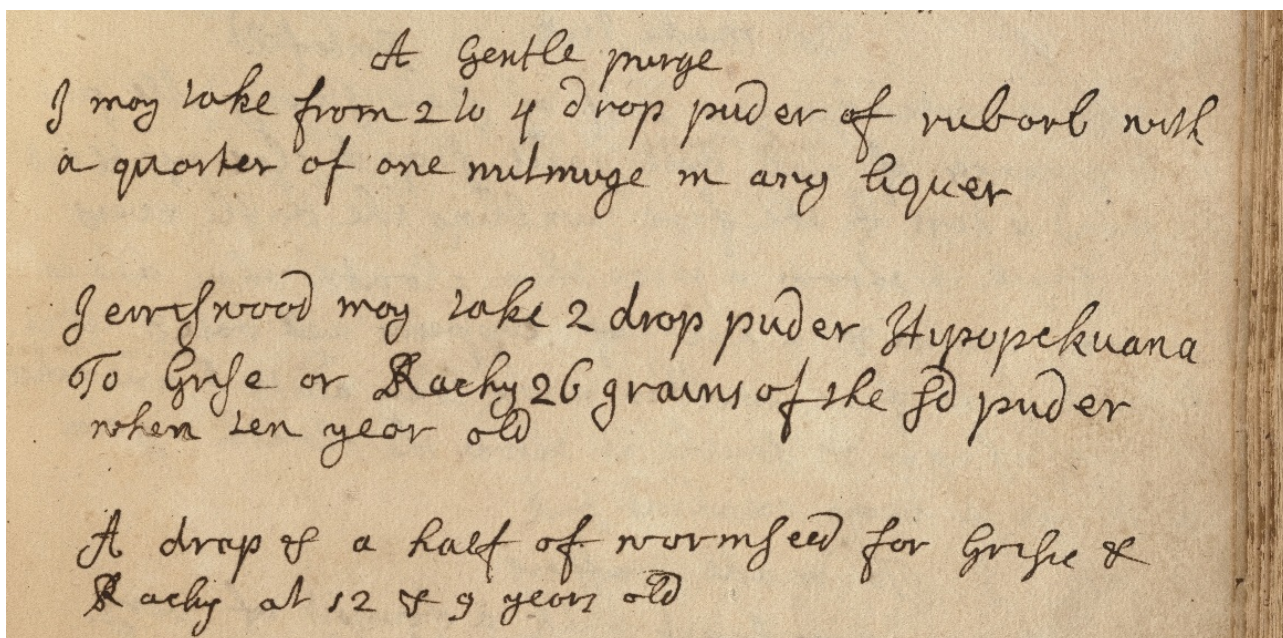


Image 3: Recipe for A Gentle Purge. Source: Folger Shakespeare Library, W.a.111.

This is the final piece of evidence to corroborate Lady Grisell Baillie not only as the author of the Stilton recipe, but also a significant number of other recipes in this household manuscript.

Verifying the date of the Stilton Recipe

And so we return to the recipe for Stilton Cheese. Was Lady Grisell Baillie actually in the village of Stilton in 1717? In short, she was. The proof, once again, comes from her detailed accounts book.

In 1717, Lady Grisell's younger daughter, Rachel, had become betrothed to Charles Hamilton, Lord Binning (1697 – 1732) and the wedding was to be held in Edinburgh on the 3rd of September of that year. When George Baillie had become a Westminster MP after Scotland's union with England, the whole family had moved to London, with Lady Grisell making biennial trips back to Scotland to visit her father³². But for this year, because of the wedding, not just Lady Griselle but the whole family made the trip in 1717, the travel expenses of which Lady Griselle dutifully recorded in her accounting book for August 5th³³:

		Sterling		
		£	s.	d.
Aug. 5	For a coach and six horses to carie us to Scotland in 9 days	32	15	0
	For expences of 5 in the coach on the road to Scotland till we came to Tiningham on the 14th Aug.	14	13	9

The five persons in the coach would have been George and Grisell Baillie, their daughters Grizel and Rachel, and May Menzies. May Menzies had joined the family in 1705 as governess to Grizel and Rachel³⁴, and remained a trusted and valued member of the household for over forty-five years³⁵.

The route between London and Edinburgh followed the Great North Road, and it was already well established in the 18th century: travellers had been passing through the village of Stilton for centuries, even in the days before stagecoaches. The breakfast that included 'a slice of Stilton' enjoyed in the 1713 reference previously mentioned, was in York. For this to be noted as common fare implies that there must have been a trade shipping cheese north from Stilton even earlier, possibly as far back as the seventeenth century.

Stow 1566 ³⁶	Vertegen 1576 ³⁷	Hopton 1612 ³⁸	Morland 1673 ³⁹	Riders 1716 ⁴⁰
			Edenbrough	
			Haddington	
			Cockburnspeth	
Barwick	Barwick		Berwick	Barwick
Belforth	Belforth		Belford	Belford
Anwik	Anwik		Alnwick	Anwick
Morpit	Morpit		Morpeth	Morpit
Newcastel	Newcastel		Newcastle	Newcastle
Durham	Durham		Durham	Durham
Darlington	Darlington		Darlington	Darrington

Northalerton	Northalerton		Northalerton	Northalerton
Topclif	Topclif			Topclif
			Burrowbridge	
York	York	York	York	York
Tadcaster		Tadcaster	Tadcaster	Tadcaster
Wentbridge	Wentbridge	Wentbridge		Wentbridge
			Ferrybridge	
Dancaster	Dancaster	Doncaster	Doncaster	Doncaster
			Bautry	Bautry
Tutford	Tutford	Taxford	Tuxford	Tuxford
Newark	Newark	Newmarket	Newark	Newark
Grantham	Grantham	Grantham	Grantham	Grantham
	Staunford	Stamford		Stanford
			Southwitham	
Stilton	Stilton	Stilton	Stilton	Stilton
Huntingdon	Huntingdon	Huntingdon	Huntingdon	Huntingdon
			Caxton	
Royston	Royston	Royston	Royston	Royston
Ware	Ware	Ware	Ware	Ware
Waltham	Waltham	Waltham	Waltham Cross	Waltham
London	London	London	London	London

Table 1: The route north from London 1566-1716.

As can be seen from Table 1, even though the route wandered slightly over the decades, the main stopping points remained surprisingly consistent. Stilton was generally accepted as being a full day's journey from London⁴¹ and consequently, there was a great trade in providing accommodation for the many travellers that passed through. Puzzlingly, despite this hum of activity, the village of Stilton remained a hamlet. An account written in 1733⁴² noted: *“This place, though in the high road to York, consists not of above ten houses, one half of which are Inns.”*

Thus the necessity of the family's travel to Edinburgh for Rachel's wedding, the record of expenses and of the coach and horses and the standard route north from London all provide strong evidence that Lady Grisell was in Stilton in August, 1717. Depending on the day of departure (it being unlikely, although not unfeasible, for Lady Grisell to have written up her accounts on the actual day they were to leave for Scotland), it is possible to confirm that not only was Lady Grisell Baillie in the village of Stilton in the summer of 1717, it is highly likely that she was there on the 6th/7th August. This is the only time in 1717 that Lady Grisell was in Stilton, as her accounting books reveal her stay in Scotland lasted for six months,⁴³ putting her return to London some time in 1718. To be able to identify the date a two-hundred-year-old recipe was recorded with such accuracy is remarkable, even more so given the significance of the subject, place and time.

The discovery of this recipe also goes some way to quash the notion that Stilton cheese was never made in Stilton itself. There is a possibility that the dairymaid

Lady Grisell spoke with was in the town to sell her cheese and had travelled there from her own dairy, but equally likely is a scenario where the dairy she works and makes her cheese in, is in the town itself. What is obvious, is the woman Lady Grisell spoke with was experienced in making Stilton cheese herself. It is worth emphasizing that the diligence and attention to detail with which Lady Grisell approached everything in life, but especially her record-keeping, confers authenticity to the recipe; it was not in Lady Grisell's nature to fabricate. Had the dairymaid come from elsewhere, that detail would absolutely have been something Lady Grisell would have thought relevant to record. Evidence to support this can be found elsewhere in the manuscript; recipes that have their very specific provenance recorded, together with details that might not appear necessary, but were nevertheless diligently set down. A recipe for seed biscuit is recorded as coming from the Duke/Duchess of Marlborough, *via Lady Limintoun*(sic). The method for clearing wine that came from Lord Marchmont's cellars, *in Cambrai*. A recipe for a custard from Lady Frances Erskine, gathered in *Spa, 1731*. And possibly most comprehensively in the recipe *To Make Earle of Marchmont's Juniper Water by drinking of which for his ordinary drink for 3 years recoverd him from a very bad state of health & is excelent in all complaints of the stomach*.

A potential scenario

I have spent much time musing on this meeting between dairymaid and gentlewoman, trying to imagine how it took place. As a person who also collects recipes from others, I can vouch that it invariably occurs almost immediately, following the tasting of something delicious. My most recent example was for some bread rolls I was served whilst having lunch in a pub. I think a major factor in their deliciousness was that they appeared to have been baked to order, but nevertheless, I wanted to know the chef's secret, so I could recreate them for myself at home. Consequently, when the waiter asked 'Can I get you anything else?' I shamelessly piped up 'Yes, please – the recipe for these rolls.' The following is pure speculation, but might Lady Griselle have had a similar conversation, if she was especially taken with the cheese she had just been served?

Coaching inns provided accommodation and refreshment to their guests and the numbers of people passing through would justify making and selling cheese in-house. There's no way to determine where the Baillies stayed in Stilton, but The Bell Inn is generally acknowledged as being the largest and most well known of the numerous coaching inns in the village at the time. Until refurbishments in the 1980s, The Bell Inn possessed a cheese room⁴⁴, thus it is feasible that the dairymaid was summoned from the cheese room following an enjoyable meal, to discuss the recipe with Lady Grisell, and for her to take her detailed notes.

The alternative is that the dairymaid was questioned in the street, at her stall selling cheeses, which throws up too many unanswerable questions: Were there market stalls even present when the coach arrived after a full day's travel from London, or early in the morning before departure? Would it have been seemly for a gentlewoman to go marketing? Would she have been able to taste the cheese being sold on a stall? How would she have written down such a detailed recipe, standing in the street? Lady Griselle was a remarkable woman in so many respects, but this scenario seems a little far-fetched, even for her.

The upshot is that the former premise is the more likely, thereby lending weight to the notion that this recipe was for a cheese actually made in Stilton itself. It is a little puzzling that the belief that Stilton was never made in the village has such a strong following at all. The main ‘proof’ appears to be the outsourcing of cheese production by Cooper Thornhill, the most famous landlord of The Bell Inn. However, this recipe notwithstanding, Richard Bradley, publisher of the first Stilton recipe, had written in 1729 of the cheese being made at The Bell Inn.

“But it is not every where in *Stilton* that this Cheese is in Perfection, or made agreeably to the foregoing Original Receipt: I have only found it there to answer my Expectation at the Sign of the Bell, where the true Method of making it is followed.”⁴⁵

This was several years before the tenancy of Cooper Thornhill at The Bell, which began in 1733⁴⁶.

Original manuscript ownership

The identity of the manuscript’s original female owner has also occupied much of my time spent with this manuscript. On George Baillie’s side of the family, the manuscript could potentially have come from his mother Rachel. There is a single dated recipe⁴⁷ in the first handwriting style, halfway through the collection of recipes (page 80 of 175). The date is 1698, but since this is also the year that Rachel Baillie died, and the sheer number of recipes that follow this entry are considerable (204), the likelihood that Mrs Baillie senior is the book’s original author is low.

Another possibility, and one which I believe to be correct, is that it belonged to Grisell Baillie’s mother, Grizel Hume. Grizel Hume died on the 11th October, 1703, and the first dated recipe in the second style of handwriting in the book is the 1706 recipe for bottling punch previously mentioned. If Grisell Baillie did inherit this book from her mother in 1703, the 44 recipes between the date of her mother’s death and the first dated recipe in Lady Grisell’s hand, are not an unreasonable amount to collect in the intervening two and a half years. In support of this, in relation to the previously mentioned recipe for a purge (Image 3 above), Grisel Baillie was born in 1692 and Rachel Baillie in 1696. If the entry for the purge was made when they were 12 and 9 years old respectively, it would have been some time in 1704, shortly after the book came into Lady Grisell’s possession following her mother’s death.

The date on the bookplate might seem an anomaly, but 1724 was the year that Lady Grisell’s father, Lord Hume, died. Lady Grisell would no doubt have inherited some of his books and papers, which would have been added to the family library and the household manuscript might have been included in these additions. Another possibility is that all of the family books were so labelled in 1724 in preparation for the soon-to-be-built library in the Adam-designed house at Mellerstain, where Lady Grisell’s descendants still live, to this day.

The final piece of this almost 300-year puzzle is still missing: how did this manuscript come to be at its current location in the Folger Shakespeare Library in Washington, D.C.? On the one hand, it is fairly straightforward: the Folger’s Research and Reference Librarian was able to reveal that the library purchased

the manuscript in June, 1959 from the London bookseller Francis Edwards, Ltd. (Cat. 797, no. 699), for the princely sum of £35.00. The more intriguing part of the mystery lies in what happened to it during the preceding 48 years, from 1911, when its existence was noted by the Scottish Historical Society, and its purchase and trans-Atlantic voyage in 1959. Enquiries have been made to the archivist at Mellerstain, in the hope of filling in some details, but unfortunately, at time of writing, no response has been forthcoming.

Not only does this recipe contribute greatly to the understanding of the type of cheese celebrated in Stilton over two hundred years ago, it has helped identify an important manuscript in both Scottish and British food history. The fact that this recipe was recorded by Lady Grisell Baillie, whose reputation for accuracy and thoroughness has been attested by her detailed record-keeping, validates this recipe's provenance almost beyond question.

In summary, there is a great deal of evidence to support the contention that this early recipe for Stilton Cheese was collected by Lady Griselle Baillie, from a dairymaid with experience in making the cheese, in the village of Stilton, in the first week of August, 1717. Some time later she transcribed it into a household manuscript book of recipes and remedies that she had adopted from a previous owner, probably her mother, which was then passed on to others after her death. Lady Grisell's papers were retained at the family home at Mellerstain, and were made available to the Scottish Historical Society, who published edited extracts in 1911. The Folger Shakespeare Library purchased the manuscript in 1959 and have generously made images of the entire manuscript freely available on their web site under the call number W.a.111.

- 1 Captain Bland, *The northern Atalantis: or, York spy*, 1713, printed for A. Baldwin, London, p9.
- 2 ‘... the Cheese as is used at Stilton, which is esteem'd the best in England, the Receipt of which I have publish'd in my Monthly Papers for the Month of March, 1721.’ Richard Bradley *A general treatise of husbandry and gardening, ... for the months of August and September*, printed for J. Peele at Locke's Head in Pater-Noster-Row, 1724, p33. Referencing *A GENERAL TREATISE OF Husbandry and Gardening, For the Month of March. CONTAINING Such Observations and Experiments as are New and Useful for the Improvement of Land. WITH An Account of such extraordinary Inventions, and natural Productions, as may help the Ingenious in their Studies, and promote universal Learning. To be continu'd Monthly, with Variety of curious CUTTs*. By R. BRADLEY, Fellow of the Royal Society. L O N D O N: Printed for). J. PEELE, at Locke's Head, in Pater-Noster-Row. (Price One Shilling.), p365. reproduced in Richard Bradley *A general treatise of husbandry and gardening. Containing such observations and experiments as are new and useful for the improvement of land. ... (Volume 2)*, printed for T. Woodward; and J. Peele, 1724, p364.
- 3 William Stukeley *Itinerarium Curiosum; Or, An Account of the Antiquities, and Remarkable Curiosities in Nature Or Art, Observed in Travels Through Great Britain*, London, 1724, p77.
- 4 Daniel Defoe *A Tour Thro' the Whole Island of Great Britain: Divided Into Circuits Or Journies. Giving a Particular and Diverting Account of Whatever is Curious and Worth Observation, ...* By a Gentleman, Volume 2, printed, and sold by G. Strahan. W. Mears. R. Francklin. S. Chapman. R. Stagg, and J. Graves, London, 1725, p166.
- 5 Richard Bradley *Observations relating to the making of the famous Stilton-Cheeses The gentleman and farmer's guide for the increase and improvement of cattle*, 1729, London, printed by J. Applebee, for W. Mears p141.
- 6 Charles Martell, email to the author, 02/04/2019.
- 7 *Ibid.*, p143.
- 8 Joe Schneider, email to the author, 19/03/2019.
- 9 Baillie, G., Scott-Moncrieff, R. (1911). *The household book of Lady Grisell Baillie, 1692-1733*. Edinburgh: Printed at the University Press by T. and A. Constable for the Scottish History Society.
- 10 *Ibid.*, xxxv.
- 11 *Ibid.*, “It will be easily understood that with such a wealth of material in these papers, the difficulty of selection has been great. After careful consideration, the Editor has resolved to deal mainly with Lady Grisell’s first ‘Day Book,’ adding one or two selections from the other books.” p.xxxv, “Even this selected volume can only be dealt with by means of extracts, and much interesting matter has thus to be left out.” p.xxxvi.
- 12 Folger Digital Image Collection (2019). [image] Available at: <https://luna.folger.edu/luna/servlet/s/ogdfh4> [Accessed 26 Feb. 2019].
- 13 Lady Murray of Stanhope, *Memoirs of the lives and characters of the Right Honourable George Baillie of Jarviswood, and of Lady Grisell Baillie*, Edinburgh, 1822, pp146-155.
- 14 Folger Digital Image Collection (2019). [image] Available at: <https://luna.folger.edu/luna/servlet/s/zai152> [Accessed 26 Feb. 2019].
- 15 Folger Digital Image Collection (2019). [image] Available at: <https://luna.folger.edu/luna/servlet/s/4566z0> [Accessed 26 Feb. 2019].
- 16 Folger Digital Image Collection (2019). [image] Available at: <https://luna.folger.edu/luna/servlet/s/o5r31p> [Accessed 26 Feb. 2019].
- 17 Folger Digital Image Collection (2019). [image] Available at: <https://luna.folger.edu/luna/servlet/s/94pq93> [Accessed 26 Feb. 2019].
- 18 Folger Digital Image Collection (2019). [image] Available at: <https://luna.folger.edu/luna/servlet/s/48638w> [Accessed 26 Feb. 2019].
- 19 Folger Digital Image Collection (2019). [image] Available at: <https://luna.folger.edu/luna/servlet/s/jx0y4d> [Accessed 26 Feb. 2019].
- 20 An eating posset: Folger Digital Image Collection (2019). [image] Available at: <https://luna.folger.edu/luna/servlet/s/2073dp> [Accessed 26 Feb. 2019], To preserve oranges whole: Folger Digital Image Collection (2019). [image] Available at: <https://luna.folger.edu/luna/servlet/s/1olr66> [Accessed 26 Feb. 2019], A green salve : Folger Digital Image Collection (2019). [image] Available at: <https://luna.folger.edu/luna/servlet/s/jr362u> [Accessed 26 Feb. 2019], ‘How to lay cloths in the buck the best way’: Folger Digital Image Collection (2019). [image] Available at: <https://luna.folger.edu/luna/servlet/s/lm1pdd> [Accessed 26 Feb. 2019].
- 21 Folger Digital Image Collection (2019). [image] Available at: <https://luna.folger.edu/luna/servlet/s/6k02z2> [Accessed 26 Feb. 2019].

- 22 Folger Digital Image Collection (2019). [image] Available at: <https://luna.folger.edu/luna/servlet/s/98z0ik> [Accessed 26 Feb. 2019].
- 23 Folger Digital Image Collection (2019). [image] Available at: <https://luna.folger.edu/luna/servlet/s/10bvp3> [Accessed 26 Feb. 2019].
- 24 Baillie, G., Scott-Moncrieff, R. (1911). *The household book of Lady Grisell Baillie, 1692-1733*. Edinburgh: Printed at the University Press by T. and A. Constable for the Scottish History Society, pp64, 94, 295, etc.
- 25 Ibid., pp75, 209, 286, etc.
- 26 Ibid., pp164, 188, 276, etc.
- 27 Ibid., p251.
- 28 Ibid., p187.
- 29 Ibid., pp47, 52, 59, etc.
- 30 Ibid., pp90, 268.
- 31 Ibid., pxxxv.
- 32 Murray, G. Baillie. (1822). *Memoirs of the lives and characters of the Right Honourable George Baillie of Jerviswood, and of Lady Grisell Baillie*. Edinburgh, p75.
- 33 Baillie, G., Scott-Moncrieff, R. (1911). *The household book of Lady Grisell Baillie, 1692-1733*. Edinburgh: Printed at the University Press by T. and A. Constable for the Scottish History Society, p54.
- 34 Baillie, G., Scott-Moncrieff, R. (1911). *The household book of Lady Grisell Baillie, 1692-1733*. Edinburgh: Printed at the University Press by T. and A. Constable for the Scottish History Society, p.xlvi.
- 35 Lady Murray of Stanhope, *Memoirs of the lives and characters of the Right Honourable George Baillie of Jerviswood, and of Lady Grisell Baillie*, Edinburgh, 1822, pp66-67
- 36 John Stow, *The summarie of English Chronicles*, 1566, Printer/Publisher in Fletestrete by Thomas Marshe.
- 37 Richard Verstegan *The post of the world*, 1576, Printer/Publisher Thomas East, London.
- 38 Arthur Hopton *A concordancy of yeares*, 1612, Nicholas Okes for the Company of Stationers, London.
- 39 Samuel Morland *The description and use of two arithmetick instruments*, 1673, Printed and are to be sold by Moses Pitt, London.
- 40 *Riders (1716.) British Merlin: ...* by Cardanus Riders. printed by John Nutt, for the Company of Stationers, London.
- 41 The Golden Age of the Stagecoach <http://www.stilton.org/about-stilton/history/the-great-north-road/the-golden-age-of-the-stagecoach/> [Accessed 20/02/2019].
- 42 "A JOURNEY FROM LONDON to SCARBOROUGH, In the year 1733, In Several Letters from a Gentleman there, to his friend in London.", Letter 2, in *The Scarborough Repository and Mirror of the Season*, Volume 1, No. 2, p10. Printed & published by John Cole, 1824, Scarborough.
- 43 "For all Drinkmoney while at Edn. and traveling about the 6 monthes I was in Scotland [Sterling] £29 s10 d0." Baillie, G., Scott-Moncrieff, R. (1911). *The household book of Lady Grisell Baillie, 1692-1733*. Edinburgh: Printed at the University Press by T. and A. Constable for the Scottish History Society, p55.
- 44 <https://www.rootschat.com/forum/index.php?topic=348273.msg2302142#msg2302142> [Accessed 19 March 2019]
- 45 Richard Bradley, *The Gentleman and Farmer's Guide, for the Increase and Improvement of Cattle*, Printed by J. Applebee, for W. MEARs, at the Lamb without Temple-Bar, London, 1729, p143
- 46 Classified advertisement in London Evening Post (London, England), May 1, 1733 - May 3, 1733; Issue 846, p3.
- 47 1698 To Collar a Pike - Folger Digital Image Collection (2019). [image] Available at: <https://luna.folger.edu/luna/servlet/s/jgzyg4> [Accessed 15 March 2019].