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THE TRADITION OF GOOSE-EATING IN MEDIVAL AND EARLY MODERN ENGLAND

Abstract

Although geese had been known in Britain for a long time, they were not among the most commonly prepared dishes. An analysis of the early cookery books that were published up to the seventeenth century leads to the conclusion that goose was not a common meat recommended for cooking. The paper presents a selection of goose recipes from various periods.

Keywords: goose, recipe, tradition, Michaelmas, goose fair

Słowa kluczowe: gęś, przepis, tradycja, dzień św. Michała, gęsi targ

It is generally accepted that geese were domesticated very early in human history. Domestic geese descended from the tame greylag (*Anser anser*) were a good source of meat and eggs, and the moulted wing feathers provided excellent fletching for arrows when the bow was a common weapon. Geese are easy to tame and they are the most efficient of feeders since they add weight from the smallest amount of food. Besides their meat, eggs and feathers, geese have also been kept for their fat which is high in 'heart healthy' monounsaturated and polyunsaturated fats. According to Dorothy Hartley, goose grease is the softest fat in its category and has been used in cooking:

Goose grease is always treasured by country people as very useful. Well beaten to a cream, with vinegar, lemon juice, finely chopped onion, and chopped parsley, it is used as a filling for sandwiches. It is more appetizing than it sounds, having the creamy white consistency of thick mayonnaise. (1954, p. 196)

Although goose has a high fat content, most of this is under the skin rather than in the meat, which means that during cooking it melts and bastes the breast, keeping it juicy. Goose has a distinct flavour which makes it a favourite Christmas dish.

The earliest domestication of geese is not known. As noted by Buckland and Guy (2002, pp. 3-10), historians hypothesise that geese domestication probably took place about 3,000 years ago since tame or domestic geese were kept in Egypt in the second millennium B.C. The earliest records of keeping geese date 2500 B.C. when the ancient Egyptians deliberately fattened them before consumption. This practice developed into the force-feeding of geese in order to enlarge their livers, which have been considered a delicacy since classical times. The result of it is *foie gras* widely produced today in France, but also in Eastern Europe and Israel. The practise of fattening geese spread from Egypt to Rome where geese were kept for their meat, grease and feathers. Furthermore, with their exceptional eyesight and wide field of vision combined with their strident voices, geese were valued for their guarding duties, reportedly raising the alarm when Rome was attacked by the Gauls in the fourth century B.C. and thereby saving the city. After the collapse of the Roman Empire, geese became an integral part of the European peasant economy. Geese, like pigs, were an economic choice. They were inexpensive to feed, gained weight quickly, and produced excellent meat and fat.

In classical Greece, geese were known in the time of Homer who makes mention of them in *The Odyssey*, speaking of a flock of 20 white geese in the household of Odysseus' wife Penelope (2004, pp. 508-553). Geese were painstakingly fed on moistened grain to fatten them for the table and "fox-goose" eggs ranked second after peacock eggs in Athens (Tannahil, 1973, p. 83).

In Britain, geese were tamed by the Celts who learnt it from their kinsmen in Gaul. Julius Caesar noticed that in Britain, hare, cock and goose were kept for pleasure rather than consumption (1869). The geese kept by the Celts were of the greylag species, which has remained the principal domestic goose of Britain (Green, 1992, p. 24). According to Harrison, in pre-Roman times "it was taken for a great offence over all to eat either goose, hare, or hen, because of a certain superstitious opinion which they had conceived of those three creatures." (1994, p. 125). The greylag is the largest and bulkiest of the grey geese of the genus *Anser*. It has a rotund, bulky body, a thick and long neck, and a large head and bill. It has pink legs and feet, and an orange or pink bill. The plumage of the greylag goose is greyish-brown, with a darker head and paler belly with variable black spots (Madge and Burn, 1988, p. 140). Pliny wrote about 'chernerros', which was probably barnacle goose, the most sumptuous dish known to the Britons (Renfrew, 2001, p. 16).

Geese have been linked to the changing seasons for a very long time. The goose originally served as a sacrifice to the spirit of vegetation, in thanks for the harvest. Go-

ose was served at the Celtic Samhain, or Halloween; the Germanic Yule, originally the first day of the new year; and Michaelmas, the ritual feast of the winter solstice. The Michaelmas feast is probably the most famous goose feast, apart from that at Christmas dinner (Andrews, 2000, p. 106). With the coming of Christianity the Celtic Church adopted the wild goose (*An Geadb-Glas*) as their symbol of the Holy Spirit, a motif which can be seen in much of their artwork. It was the Romans, however, who introduced geese, along with pheasants, as fowl for consumption. Soon “the geese became part of the peasant economy, while the pheasant soon naturalised itself in the woods and fields,” (Spencer, 2003, p. 12).

From the eighth century onwards, rich farmers would keep goose flocks of some size. In the edict *De villis* issued by Charlemagne, “100 chickens and 30 geese are regarded as the appropriate number for a large royal farm, and 50 fowl and 12 geese on smaller ones.” (Serjeantson, 2002, p. 51). In Anglo-Saxon times, flocks of geese were generally kept as part of the lord’s property. These geese were usually bought to be fattened on a paste made of milk and a flour of wheat and oats until they were ready to be eaten. In this way, together with some other domestic fowl, geese contributed to lords’ everyday diet as well as to monastic diet. The Rule of St Benedict stated that fresh vegetables or fruit, when available, were to be served in addition to two cooked dishes at every meal. The Rule stipulated that only sick monks could consume the “flesh of quadrupeds”, but this was quickly interpreted as excluding fish and fowl, hence the monastic tradition of maintaining dovecotes and fishponds. Numerous wills from that period include geese and hens donated annually to monasteries, and the monks reaped a profit from their eggs and flesh (Wilson, 1973, p. 107).

A few medieval delicacies were regarded as fish, which is why they could be consumed on fast days. One of them was barnacle goose; some other examples include puffins and beaver’s tail. The reason for this was that the barnacle goose was believed to reproduce not by laying eggs like other birds, but by growing on driftwood. This belief may be related to the fact that these geese, breeding in remote Arctic regions, were never seen in the summer. It was believed that they developed underwater in the form of barnacles (Kuropatnicki, 2012, pp. 235-236). However, at the Fourth Lateran Council of 1215, Pope Innocent III explicitly prohibited the eating of barnacle geese during Lent, arguing that despite their unusual reproduction, they lived and fed like ducks and so were of the same nature as other birds (Lankester, 1915, p. 119).

After the Norman Conquest, the situation did not change much. The majority of people living outside the towns kept hens and, where conditions were suitable, many also raised ducks and geese. If the number of geese kept in a village was large, a goosherd was required to take the geese out to pasture each day and to look after them. The villagers who kept their own flocks earned something from the sale of feathers,

grease and meat. People prized every part of a goose, not only the meat and fat, but also especially the feathers and down. Throughout the Middle Ages goose feathers were used for arrows. At Agincourt, the longbowmen trimmed goose feathers to fletch their arrows. The English aristocracy rested their heads on pillows of goose-down. Geese also provided other useful things, including quills for pens. Additionally, goose fat was a cure for many ailments. Egg production in geese was also profitable for peasants. Starting from February domestic geese lay one egg per day, or one on alternate days. Eggs were available for sale or consumption from February onwards, for 2-3 months. In medieval England geese were raised in the eastern counties, but they were also raised on the downslands of the south. “The downs, which were used mainly to raise large flocks of sheep and also for cereal cultivation, had wide expanses of grass and access to water, suitable for rearing geese,” (Serjeantson, 2002, p. 52).

Young goose was in season in early summer (“A goose is worste in midsomer mone and beste in stubble tyme, but when they be yong grene geese, then they be beste”) (Anon, 1594, f. A2a), while the fattened goose was at Michaelmas (Frere, 1913). In the light of humoral physiology, onion and garlic have always been thought to thin the blood and were therefore a good accompaniment to fatty food. Alexander Neckam (1157–1217) was of the opinion that goose required a strong garlic sauce made with wine or verjuice. A favourite recipe of that time for goose was to stuff it with herbs, quinces, pears, garlic and grapes. Then it was roasted and when ready the goose was sliced in half and a sauce was made with the stuffing combined with wine and spices (Spencer, 2003, p. 96). The sauce, known as ‘sauce madame’, was poured over the pieces of goose. The recipe for this sauce is found in the oldest English cookery book *The Forme of Cury* from 1390:

Sawse madame.

Take sawge. persel. ysope. and saueray. quinces. and peeres, garlek and Grapes. and fylle the gees þerwith. and sowe the hole þat no grece come out. and roost hem wel. and kepe the grece þat fallith þerof. take galytynne and grece and do in a possynet, whan the gees both roasted ynogh; take an smyte hem on pecys. and þat tat is withinne and do it in a possynet and put þerinne wyne if it be to thyk. do þerto powdour of galyngale. powdour douce and salt and boyle the sawse and dresse þe Gees in disshes and lay þe sowe onoward. (Pegge, 1780, p. 23)

Take sage, parsley, hyssop and savoury, quinces and pears, garlic and grapes, and stuff the geese with them. Sew the hole so that no grease comes out, and roast them well, and keep the dripping that falls from them. Take galyntyne and grease and add to a posset; when the geese be roasted enough, take and smite them into pieces, and that which is within and add to a posset and put wine in it if it be too thick. Add powder of galingale, powder-douce and salt, and boil the sauce and dress the geese in dishes and put the sauce on them. (GreatCookingToday.com, 2015)

According to Brears, sauce madame “was an interesting combination of stuffing and sauce, designed to flavour the flesh as it roasted, as well as providing an excellent accompaniment” (2008, p. 341).

The Ashmole manuscript, dated 1439, contains the recipe for the following sauce to be served with goose:

Sauce for a gos.--Take percelye, grapis, clowes of garleke, and salte, and put it in þe goos, and lete roste. And whanne þe goos is y-now [enough], schake out þat is wiþ-in, and put al in a mortre, and do þer-to .iiij. harde olkes of egges; and grynd al to-gedre, and tempre it vp wiþ verious, and caste it upon the goos in a faire chargeour, & so serue it forth. (Austin, 1888, p. 109)

Both sauces have garlic as one of the ingredients.

Historically, geese were killed at 12-16 weeks as ‘green geese’ or were killed in the late autumn as ‘stubble geese’. A green goose is a young goose, while stubble goose is one prepared around harvest time. Some say a green goose is usually fed on green grass and stubble goose is fed on the stubble of the fields following the harvest. Domestic gosling gain weight rapidly (4.5-5.4 kg) during the first 12–15 weeks, the time when there is plenty of grass and green plants they can feed on. At this age they are known as ‘green geese’. Traditionally, birds kept into the autumn were fattened on the grain which fell among the stubble following the harvest (Serjeantson, 2002, p. 41).

According to Thomas Hale, the right age for taking up the gosling to fatten it for a green goose is at five weeks. The best food is ground malt, or oats boiled with milk, and milk and water for drink. For fattening the stubble goose, the same method and the same food are to be used, and “in a fortnight or three weeks, it will be ready for the market” (1758, p. 93). In Elizabethan England a green sauce made with gooseberries and butter was retained for the green goose (Wilson, 1973, p. 121), whereas mustard and vinegar were served together with a stubble goose ([A.W.], 1591). Sometimes a sorrel sauce accompanied green goose.

To make sauce for a green-goose.

Take a little good gravy, a little butter, and a few scalded gooseberries, mix all together, and put it on the disk with your goose. (Moxon, 1764)

Green sauce, for green Geese, or Ducklings.

Mix a quarter of a pint of sorrel-juice, a glass of white wine, and some scalded gooseberries. Add sugar and a bit of butter. Boil them up. (Rundell, 1807, p. 115)

There has been a long tradition in Britain to eat a well-fattened goose, fed on the stubble from the fields after the harvest on Michaelmas, or the Feast of St Michael and All Angels celebrated on 29 September: “Across the whole country, one aspect that made it seem a pale reflection of Michaelmas was the popularity of roast goose for the dinner table,” (Roud, 2006, p. 344). Although Michaelmas was celebrated on 29 September in most of England, it was celebrated on 4 October in Suffolk and 11 October in Norfolk. During the medieval period, Michaelmas was considered one of the holy days of obligation, although that tradition ended in the eighteenth century. Apart from the preparation of a meal of goose, customs included the preparation of special loaves of bread and St Michael’s bannocks, a special kind of oatcake. Symbolically, the goose was to protect against financial need in the family for the next year: “Eat a goose on Michaelmas Day, \ Want not for money all the year”. Or, as Robert Forby says, “If you don’t baste the goose on Michaelmas Day, you will want money all the year,” (1830, p. 414).

The quarter days in English calendar were Lady Day (25 March), Midsummer (24 June), Michaelmas (29 September) and Christmas (25 December). On these four dates servants were hired, rents were due or leases begun and debts were paid. In some parts of England, particularly in the north, St Martin’s Day (11 November) took the place of Michaelmas, but it was never one of the official quarter days. As one of the “quarter days”, Michaelmas marked the start of autumn and was time for the farmers to pay their debts, often by presenting their landlords with a goose. According to a sixteenth-century poet:

And when the tenants come to pay their quarter’s rent,
 They bring some fowl at Midsummer, a dish of fish in Lent,
 At Christmas a capon, at Michaelmas a goose
 And somewhat else at New-year’s tide, for fear their lease fly loose.

(Burton & Ripperger)

Many of the Goose or Michaelmas Fairs were “hiring fairs” where servants would hope to find new employment. However, the reason for holding goose fairs was to sell and buy geese which were traditionally consumed around Michaelmas. Although many goose fairs have faded from memory, two are still held: one in Nottingham and another in Tavistock, Devon.

The fair in Nottingham most probably started after 1284, when town was awarded a second fair by the Charter of King Edward I (BBC, 2005). Its name is derived from the numbers of geese that were driven from Lincolnshire to be sold in there. Geese are

easily driven and easy to control, a fact which astonished William Harrison living in sixteenth-century England. In his *Description of England* he remarks:

geese are driven to the field like herds of cattle by a gooseherd, a toy also no less to be marvelled at than the other. For as it is rare to hear of a gelded gander, so is it strange to me to see or hear of geese to be led to the field like sheep; yet so it is, and their gooseherd carrieth a rattle of paper or parchment with him when he goeth about in the morning to gather his goslings together, the noise whereof cometh no sooner to their ears than they fall to gagging, and hasten to go with him. If it happen that the gates be not yet open, or that none of the house be stirring, it is ridiculous to see how they will peep under the doors, and never leave creaking and gagging till they be let out unto him to overtake their fellows. (1994, p. 317)

Originally, the Nottingham fair was held on 21 September, but the change of calendar in 1752 forced the fair to move to early October. The duration of the fair was shortened from eight days to three days in the 1800s.

The famous Tavistock Goose Fair, known locally as Goosey, or Goosie Fair, first came into being probably in the sixteenth century. The adoption of the Gregorian calendar moved it from 29 September to 10 October, and this was later changed to the second Wednesday of October. Whilst there appears to be little published evidence of the name 'Goosey Fair' prior to the first decade of the twentieth century, it seems likely that the name was in use locally in the eighteenth century (Roud, 2006, p. 311).

Michaelmas was extremely popular feast in England during the Middle Ages. It marked the ending and beginning of the husbandman's year and as George C. Homans points out: "at that time harvest was over, and the bailiff or reeve of the manor would be making out the accounts for the year" (1941, p. 354). The feast was associated with the custom of eating roast goose. The question arises why goose-eating on that special occasion became a tradition in England. Probably, the most obvious answer to this question would be that geese are at their prime at that time. As stated above, Michaelmas ended the harvest, a time for hard work but also for good fellowship. As Thomas Tusser wrote in 1557:

In haruest time, haruest folke, seruants and all,
should make all together good cheere in the hall
And fill out the black boule of bleith to their song,
and let them be merie all haruest time long.
Once ended thy haruest let none be begilde,
please such as did helpe thee, man, woman and childe.

Thus dooing, with always such helpe as they can,
those winnest the praise of the laboring man.

(1878, p. 132)

When the harvest was over, according to tradition, a goose was given to all “who had not overturned a load in carrying during harvest.” Such a goose was entered in the household accounts as the “the expenses of the sickle goose” or “harvest goose” (Powers, 1922, p. 129). Further in his *Five Hundred Points of Good Husbandrie* Tusser writes:

For all this good feasting, yet art thou not loose
till ploughman thou giuest his haruest home goose.
Though goose go in stubble, I passe not for that,
let goose haue a goose, be she leane, be she fat.

(1878, p. 181)

Besides such self-evident explanations for the tradition of goose-eating, there have been some less conceivable and somewhat ridiculous stories. One of them says that when Queen Elizabeth I heard of the defeat of the Invincible Armada, she was dining on goose and declared that henceforth all true English people should eat the same on that day (Roud, 2006, pp. 301-302). This is, of course, apocryphal because the Armada was defeated in July and the news reached Elizabeth long before Michaelmas.

In the seventeenth century, it became common to serve goose for the Christmas dinner; it remained the predominant roast until the Victorian era. In fact, in Victorian times, the three most widely known staples for Christmas dinner were roast beef, goose and turkey. By the mid-nineteenth century, the middle classes were eating turkey, which had gradually replaced roast beef as the typical Christmas fare, and the poor ate goose. Although geese were cheaper than turkeys, they were often out of range of most working people’s pockets. Those who could not afford a Christmas goose could join a ‘goose club’, which helped people save up throughout the year. Members paid a small sum of money each week towards the purchase of a Christmas goose or an alternative joint of meat. The week before Christmas, London meat markets were crammed with geese and turkeys, many walked from Norfolk to the markets in London. These geese had their feet protected with a covering of tar (Gilligan, 2014).

From the seventeenth century dates ‘goose pulling’, a blood sport practised in England as well as in parts of the Netherlands, Belgium, and North America until the nineteenth century. The original version of the game involved fastening a live goose with a well-greased head to a rope or pole. A man riding at full pelt on a horse attempted to

decapitate the goose by hand as he flew past. Philip Parsons, writing in 1771, described how it was carried out in England using a cock instead of a goose:

In the Northern parts of England it is no unusual diversion to tie a rope across a street and let it swing about the distance of ten yards from the ground. To the middle of this a living cock is tied by the legs. As he swings in the air, a set of young people ride one after another, full speed, under the rope, and rising in the stirrups, catch at the animal's head, which is close clipped and well soaped, in order to elude the grasp. Now he who is able to keep his seat in his saddle, and his hold of the bird's head, so as to carry it off in his hand, bears away the palm, and becomes the noble hero of the day. (1771, pp. 174-175)

The prizes of a goose-pulling contest were trifling — often the dead bird itself, other times contributions from the audience or rounds of drinks. The main draw of such contests for the spectators was the betting on the competitors, either for money or, more often, for alcoholic drinks (Vickers, 2002, p. 147).

Although geese had been known in Britain for a very long time, they were not among the most commonly prepared dishes, at least until Victorian times. The earliest English cookery book, *The Forme of Cury*, includes only two recipes for goose, both for goose in hotchpotch, a kind of stew prepared from a variety of ingredients:

For to make Gees in ochepot.

Nym and schald [scald] hem wel and hew hem wel in gobettys al rawe and seth hem in her owyn grees and cast therto wyn or ale a cuppe ful and myce [mince] onyons small and do therto and boyle yt and salt yt and messe yt forthe.

Gees in hoggept

Take Gees and smyte [t]hem on pecys. cast [t]hem in a Pot do þerto half wyne and half water. and do þerto a gode quantite of Oynouns and erbest. Set it ouere the fyre and couere it fast. make a layour of brede and blode an lay it þerwith. do þerto powdour fort and serue it fort. (Pegge, 1780, p. 24)

A very similar recipe can be found in *Liber cure cocorum*, a cookery book from c. 1430:

Gose in a Hogge pot.

In pesis þou schalle þy gose stryke,
 Take water and wyne bothe ilyke;
 Do in þy gose; and onyons þou take
 A gode quantité, as I er spake,
 And erbus hacked þou take also,
 And cast þou in er þou more do;
 Þen set þy pot over þo fyre,
 And hit wele stir for þe hyre;
 And make a lycoure of brede and blode,
 And lye hit þerwithe, for hit is gode;
 Kast powder þerto and salt anon,
 And messe hit, þenne þou hase done. (Morris,
 1862, p. 33)

Goose in a Hotchpotch.

In pieces you shall strike your goose,
 Take water and wine both alike;
 Put in your goose; and onions you take
 A good quantity, as I ere spake,
 And hacked herbs you take also,
 And cast therein ere you do more;
 Then set your pot over the fire,
 And [if] it boils stir for the hire;
 And make a mixture of bread and blood,
 And mix it therewith, for it is good;
 Cast [spice] powder thereto and salt anon, And serve
 it, then you have done. (Renfrow, 2002)

The fifteenth-century manuscripts also repeat the recipes for goose in hotchpotch, but they also instruct a reader how to roast a stuffed capon or goose:

Capoun or gos farced.--Take Percely, & Swyny s grece [pig's grease], or Sewet of a schepe, & parboyle hem to-gederys til þey ben tendyr; þan take harde olkys of Eyroun [eggs], & choppe forwith; caste þer-to Poudere Pepir, Gyngere, Canel, Safroun, & Salt, & grapis in tyme of ere, & clowys y-nowe [enough]; & for defawte [lack] of grapis, Oynons, fyrst wil y-boylid, & afterward alle to choppyd, & so stufte hym & roste hym, & serue hym forth. And if þe lust, take a litil Porke y-sode, & al to-choppe hit smal a-mong þat oþer; for it wol be þe better, & namely for þe Capoun. (Austin, 1888, p. 41)

The Wellcome Western Ms. 5650, which is in fact a medical compendium compiled in the Westmorland area in the late fifteenth century, contains culinary recipes for meat, fish and vegetable dishes (Wellcome Western Ms. 5650, ff. 68r-75v), including “Goose in gaunseli”. According to *Middle English Dictionary*, *gaunseli* (also *gaunceli(e)*, *gauceli* & *gaunsel*, *gauncel*, *gauncile* [OF *gans'aillie*, var. of *jance aillie*.] is a garlic sauce often used with fowl (MED, 2013). The recipe reads:

Geyse in gaunsell

[Geyse sal be] schakyd and rostyde. Grynd garleck and temper it with mylk and do it in a posnet, and lay it with yolkes of eggs and with flour and boile it and mese it furth. (Wellcome Western Ms. 5650, f. 74r)

A similar recipe can be found in Ashmole Ms. (1444):

Geyes with gawncell

Schall ben roasted. Grynd garlic & mylk & cast into þe vessel & olkes of ayren, salt and safroun, & boyll it, & messe it forth. (Heatt, 2008, p. 41)

The same recipes were repeated in most cookery books that were published in the sixteenth century. An analysis of early cookery books that were published up to the seventeenth century leads to conclusion that goose was not a common meat recommended for cooking. In general, most of the authors who wrote on diet in that period were of the opinion, as expressed by Andrew Boorde, that “gode-fleshe and ducke-fleshe is not praysed, except it be a yonge grene goose,” (1870, p. 270). This opinion was in agreement with humoral physiology expressed explicitly in one of the most famous health manuals, *Regimen sanitatis*. In the book, a distinction is made between wholesome and unwholesome birds. In the former group one can find capon, hen, chicken, partridge, quail, pheasant, woodcock, lark and thrush, but not goose (*The School of Salerno*, 1920). Nonetheless, certain parts of birds were considered better than others. For instance, Thomas Cogan was of the opinion that the wings and necks of geese, capons, hens, pheasant, partridge, and small fat birds are better than the legs, whereas the fattened stomachs and liver of capons, hens and geese make good juice and are easily digested (1584). Thomas Elyot in his *Castel of Helth* writes:

Goose,

Is hard of digestion, but beinge yong and fatte,
the wynges be easy to dygeste in a hole stomake,
and nourysheth competently. (1541, p. 21 r.)

The account books of the later Middle Ages show that geese were consumed seasonally and on special occasions. On the death of the fourth Lord Berkeley in 1368, at least 100 geese were fattened for his funeral (Hammond, 1993, p. 36). In the household of Dame Alice de Bryene, no birds were actually consumed during Lent. Geese were eaten between November and February. In November 1412, goose was served for the first time on Thursday, 10 November, to twenty-two diners. On that day, the kitchen dispensed a quarter of beef, one joint of mutton, one lamb, one goose and twenty-six pigeons. Another day a goose was served to twenty-six diners was Sunday, 13 November (PRO, Chancery Misc. 4/8B). Some geese were purchased, but they were more often delivered from the estates or presented to the lord in the form of gifts together with other birds, as was the case in 1419 when twenty-four geese, two hens, seven pheasants, seventy partridge, three young herons and 190 pullets were received as gifts (Redstone, 1931, pp. 133-135).

In Sir William Petre's household, a goose was served on Christmas Day 1552, a Friday, together with six boiled and three roast pieces of beef, a neck of mutton, a loin and breast of pork, four conies, a capon and eight warden pies. For dinner the servants had the company of nineteen local folk (ERO D/DP A13). This shows that a goose was either served as a treat or else it was not as popular as beef.

The Willoughby household accounts show that geese, both mature and green, were purchased on regular basis by the cater. In 1547–1548, sixty-two mature geese and fourteen green geese (with a total weight of 288 lbs) were bought. In 1588, forty-eight mature and seventeen green geese (230 lbs), in 1598, fifty-two mature geese and thirteen green (243 lbs), and in 1599–1600, seventy-one mature geese (312 lbs) were purchased (Dawson, 2009, p. 84).

The consumption of food in medieval and Tudor England was regulated by sumptuary laws and household ordinances. It was stated clearly that poultry was always reserved for the high table alone. In 1413, the manor house of Dame Alice Bryene had a feast on New Year's Day serving dinner to 160 people. During the feast two pigs, two swans, twelve geese, two joints of mutton, twenty-four capons and seventeen conies were served alongside other foods (Redstone, 1931, p. 28). With so many people present, most of the diners would have been lucky to get a taste of the geese or swans. Additionally, the dishes were to be served in the correct sequence, which was usually spelled out in health manuals or poems. *Liber cure cocorum* presents such 'natural rule' concerning the order in which goose had to be served:

Now tas þys for a rewle fulle gode,
 All hole futed fuylle in flud
 Gose before, and ay þou take
 þo grettis fyrst, savun gose and drake,
 Bothe of towne and of toþer,
 Also bakyn mete, my der brother,
 And most daynte , come byhynde:
 þys is a rewle mad in kynde.

(Morris, 1862, p. 55)

Robert May, a seventeenth-century English professional chef who trained in France and worked in England, wrote and published *The Accomplisht Cook* in 1660. Although May's recipes included customs from the Middle Ages, he also embraced food trends from Europe. In his book one can find instructions on how to boil a variety of large birds, old geese, wild and tame geese including.

To boil any large Water Fowl otherways, a Swan, Whopper, wild or tame Geese.

Take a goose and salt it two or three days, then truss it to boil, cut lard as big as your little finger, and lard the breast; season the lard with pepper, mace, and salt; then boil it in beef-broth, or water and salt, put to it pepper grosly beaten, a bundle of bay-leaves, tyme, and rosemary bound up very well, boil them with the fowl; then prepare some cabbidge boild tender in water and salt, squeeze out the water from it, and put it in a pipkin with strong broth, claret wine, and a good big onion or two; season it with pepper, mace, and salt, and three or four anchovies dissolved; stew these together with a ladleful of sweet butter, and a little vinegar: and when the goose is boil'd enough, and your cabbidge on sippets, lay on the goose with some cabbidge on the breast, and serve it up. Thus you may dress any large wild Fowl. (1685, p. 71)

May provides recipes for boiling and baking goose giblets as well as for sauces to accompany goose dishes, e.g., “sauces for a young stubble goose”, “sauce for a stubble or fat goose”, and “sauce for green-goose”.

Fowls were also baked in pies to be eaten both hot and cold. When birds were baked to be eaten cold, they were given a double dose of spices and plenty of butter. In 1669, Sir Kenelm Digby published his famous *Closest*, a book containing a huge number of receipts for mead and cider drinks as well as general cookery. From it comes the following recipe:

Green-geese-pye

An excellent cold Pye is thus made. Take two fat Green-geese; bone them, and lay them in paste one upon the other, seasoning them well with Pepper and Salt, and some little Nutmeg, both above and below and between the two Geese. When it is well-baked and out of the oven, pour in melted Butter at a hole made in the top. The crust is much better than of a Stubble goose. (1910, p. 209)

The most famous of fowl pies is Yorkshire goose pie, a descendant of the great bird pies of the Middle Ages (Wilson, 1973, p. 125):

A Yorkshire Goose Pie

Take a large fat goose, split it down the back and take all the bones out. Bone a turkey and two ducks the same way, season them very well with pepper and salt, with six woodcocks. lay the goose down on a clean dish, with the skin side down, and lay the turkey into the goose with the skin down. Have ready a large hare cleaned well, cut in pieces, and stewed in the oven with a pound of butter, a quarter of an ounce of mace beat fine, the same of white pepper and salt to your taste, till the meat will leave the bones. Scum the butter off

the gravy, pick the meat clean off and beat it in a marble mortar very fine with the butter you took off, and lay it in the turkey. Take twenty-four pounds of the finest flour, six pounds of butter, half a pound of fresh rendered suet, make the paste pretty stiff and raise the pie oval. Roll out a lump of paste and cut it in vine leaves, or what form you please, rub the pie with the yolks of eggs and put on your ornaments on the walls. Then turn the hare, turkey, goose upside down and lay them in your pie, with the ducks at each end and the woodcocks on the sides, make your lid pretty thick and put it on. You may lay flowers or the shape of the fowls in paste on the lid, and make a hole in the middle of your lid. The walls of the pie are to be one inch and a half higher than the lid. Then rub it all over with the yolks of eggs, and bind it round with three-fold paper, and lay the same over the top. It will take four hours baking in a brown bread oven. When it comes out melt two pounds of butter in the gravy that comes from the hare and pour it hot in the pie through a tun-dish, close it up well, and let it be eight or ten days before you cut it. If you send it any distance make up the hole in the middle with cold butter to prevent air from getting in. (Raffald, 1997, p. 73)

In conclusion, geese have a very long tradition in England. They are easy to tame and breed. What is more, geese are very cheap and easy to maintain, and they provide animal protein and fat as well as cash income. Goose meat is considered good and healthy because crossbreeding geese is very difficult and the natural cycle of raising geese has always been: hatching between April and July and slaughter in September. Perhaps it is this cycle that made goose a favourite early summer, late autumn and Christmas dish. It is noteworthy that goose contains a high proportion of fat so it must be properly cooked to provide the eating pleasure connoisseurs expect. Roast goose was usually served with a proper sauce, the requirement that resulted from the theory of humours. Nowadays, goose can be served without any sauce, as the meat is moist and tender.

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