

# FUN PALACES

Fun Palaces is an annual weekend of action – arts, science, craft, tech, digital, heritage and sports events and activities – run by and for local communities. As we can't get together in person this year FOLIO Sutton Coldfield is instead sharing a local 220 year old recipe for.....

# DELICIOUS BISCUITS

...in the hope that you might bake them and share them with a neighbour, learn a little bit about local history, feel a little bit curious and perhaps even share with us one of your own family recipes.

So grab your apron and mixing bowl and get ready to recreate a little bit of local history in your own kitchen!

The recipe we're sharing was written here. Do you recognise the building?



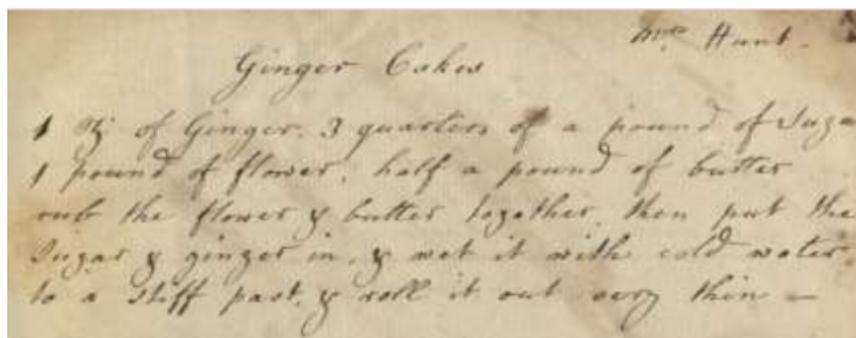
It looks a little like the original Fun Palace but actually it's called the Moat House and is on the Lichfield Road, opposite the Police Station and next to the BMet College in Sutton Coldfield.



Do you have a book at home in which you keep favourite recipes? Perhaps ones you've copied out of cookery books, or maybe recipes passed down through your family or shared by friends?

On March 22nd 1791, Eliza Duncumb of Sutton Coldfield wrote her first entry in what was to become a collection of recipes she no doubt enjoyed or found useful. Some of the recipes were for medicinal "cures" whilst others were for dishes as varied as Hare Pie, Almond Pudding and Damson Wine.

Somehow Eliza's recipe book ended up in New York, where it is now part of the collection of the library at the New York Academy of Medicine. The librarian there generously shared images of some of the handwritten recipes with Janet Jordan, a member of the Sutton Coldfield Local History Research Group. Janet has transcribed these recipes, including one for "Ginger Cakes".



### Ginger Cakes

Mrs Hunt

1 oz: of Ginger, 3 quarters of a pound of sugar, 1 pound of flower, half a pound of butter, rub the flower & butter together, then put the sugar & ginger in, & wet it with cold water to a stiff past, & roll it out very thin -

Image reproduced courtesy of the New York Academy of Medicine Library

Thank you to the New York Academy of Medicine Library for granting us permission to reproduce the image from Eliza's recipe book and to Janet Jordan for permission to share her transcription. To read more of Eliza's recipes, and learn about who she was, and why the recipe says "Mrs Hunt" on it, do read Janet's full article on the Sutton Coldfield Local History Research Group's website:

<https://sclhrg.org.uk/research/transcriptions/2240-the-duncumb-recipe-book-1791-1800s.html>



# NOW IT'S OVER TO YOU!

Join our Fun Palace by trying out this recipe yourself, letting us know how you get on and what you think this wonderful snippet of local history tastes like!

Eliza's Ginger Cakes are more like what we'd call biscuits - thin and crunchy rather than spongy. We've converted the original quantities into metric measurements, and added in what worked for us in terms of water and baking temperature to make it easy for you to try the recipe. Halving the quantities still give you plenty of biscuits (30+). Please bear in mind that Eliza wouldn't have had terribly accurate scales, so don't worry too much about precise weights! If you have any food allergies, please adapt the recipe accordingly.

### Ginger Cakes

1/2 oz or 14g of ground ginger  
6oz or 170g of sugar - we used caster sugar, but you could try others  
8oz or 227g of plain flour  
4oz or 113g of butter - we used unsalted, but you could try salted if you prefer  
45ml of water  
Bake at 180C / 170C Fan oven / Gas mark 4 for 11 minutes - until the biscuits take on a little colour around the edges

# ONCE YOU'VE BAKED YOUR BISCUITS....

## Find someone to share them with!\*

Let us know how you got on - share a photo on our Facebook page or via Twitter and use the hashtag #FunPalaces

\*Within your bubble or socially distanced of course :-)

 @FOLIOsutcol

 FOLIO Sutton Coldfield

info@foliosuttoncoldfield.org.uk

#FunPalaces

Do you have a book at home where you store favourite recipes?

Where might your family recipe book end up in 200 years time?

With us?

Have you got a great family recipe you could share?

We'd love to see it! We'll be sharing ours too on our social media

With a neighbour or a friend?



- Explore Sutton's amazing history on the Sutton Coldfield Local History Research Group website here: <https://sclhrg.org.uk/>

- Find other historic recipes to try out, for example from the Wellcome Institute Library at [bit.ly/wellcomelibraryrecipes](http://bit.ly/wellcomelibraryrecipes), the British Library at [bit.ly/BLrecipes](http://bit.ly/BLrecipes) (16th century pancakes anyone?), or from [www.manuscriptcookbookssurvey.org](http://www.manuscriptcookbookssurvey.org)

- Join Birmingham Libraries here: [https://www.birmingham.gov.uk/info/50163/library\\_services/1540/library\\_membership](https://www.birmingham.gov.uk/info/50163/library_services/1540/library_membership)

- Borrow e-Cookery books with your Birmingham Library card here: <https://birmingham-uk.overdrive.com/> and in particular <https://birmingham-uk.overdrive.com/library/nonfiction/collection/94415>



- Browse and/or Select and collect recipe books (and more) at Sutton Coldfield libraries. Please note that under current circumstances each library has different opening times/days and services. Details of individual library services are available here:

<https://www.birmingham.gov.uk/meregreenlibrary>

<https://www.birmingham.gov.uk/boldmerelibrary>

<https://www.birmingham.gov.uk/suttoncoldfieldlibrary>

<https://www.birmingham.gov.uk/walmleylibrary>



Eliza's biscuits outside the Moat House, the home where she baked them approximately 220 years ago

# Ginger and a brief history of gingerbread

By Hazel Riggall

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Ginger, a rhizome derived from a Sanskrit word meaning 'horn shaped', is thought to originate from SE Asia but also grows in India, Jamaica and Nigeria. The Chinese were using ginger in the 6th century B.C., and Arab traders brought it to the Mediterranean sometime before the 1st century A.D. Highly prized by the Roman Empire for its medicinal qualities rather than in cooking, it was later used from Anglo Saxon times for both culinary and medicinal purposes and became as commonplace as pepper

Gingerbreads in the late medieval period were made from honey and breadcrumbs sometimes coloured with saffron or powdered sandalwood with cinnamon and pepper added for flavour.

The first mention of 'gingerbread men' in England may have been referring to a feast held by Queen Elizabeth 1, where images of some important dignitaries were made and presented. There are records of 'gingerbread husbands', a medieval and early modern pastime in village life among young women, each of whom would create and offer the gingerbread to her chosen man.

The first documented trade in gingerbread in England dates to the 17th century, being sold in pharmacies, monasteries and town squares. Over a hundred years later, Market Drayton became famous for its gingerbread, with the first record dating back to 1793.

Gingerbread may refer to a cake or type of biscuit and so fits with the Duncomb recipe for 'ginger cake' which is really a biscuit.

The selling of gingerbread at fairs as a traditional confection was linked with being a token of affection to sweethearts or as a treat for children. The gingerbread was often cut into shapes and sometimes gilded or stamped. It is mentioned in Ben Jonson's play 'Bartholomew Fair', first performed in 1615. Ginger, a hot spice had associations with aphrodisiacs, women's health and even for tempting consumers into adultery. The lines spoken to and by Joan Trash, the gingerbread seller in the play, have connotations associated with witchcraft and superstition.

Bartholomew Fairs were held every August, all around the country as well as Smithfield Market in London, to celebrate the patron saint of tanners. It was a time for raucous, sometimes criminal behaviour, fights and where 'ladies of the night' frequented.

Gingerbread is a topic in Dickens novel, 'David Copperfield' where a Mr Dick visited him at school. Mr Dick has what we would now call a learning disability and is looked after by David's aunt, Miss Betsey in her cottage and thus saved from the alternative of an asylum. To quote, 'Mr Dick was rather partial to gingerbread. To render his visits the more agreeable, my aunt had instructed me to open a credit for him at a cake shop which was hampered with the stipulation that he should not be served with more than one shilling's worth in the course of any one day.' A generous enough amount I would have thought.

The closest recipe I have found to the Duncomb ginger cake recipe is the Ashbourne gingerbread which dates back to at least the 1820's and originally did not contain egg. Grantham gingerbread first referenced in a 17th century diary is similar but includes egg and self-raising flour. Many regional variations of gingerbread exist, but commonly they also include molasses(treacle) and may contain oatmeal, such as the Orkney and Grasmere variants and my favourite, a secret family recipe for Yorkshire Parkin.

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## Main References:

1. McGee H. On Food and Cooking: The Science and Love of the Kitchen, George Allen &Unwin Ltd .1984
2. Davidson A. The Oxford Companion to Food Oxford University Press. 1999
3. Mason L., Brown C. Traditional Foods of Britain. A Regional Inventory. Prospect Books. 2004