

Lord Woolton Pie- the Iconic Dish of WW2 – by Simon Wilson

For this article, I'm turning to a cookery book rather than a dusty old newspaper. Lord Woolton Pie, as it was originally known before it lost its title, is one of those wartime horrors like carrot lollies and snoek that has been passed into legend. I remember it being mentioned on Dad's Army once and neither of my parents seemed terribly keen when I asked what it was, though they did move on to tell me that snoek and whale meat were both worse, and that you should never buy a rabbit without the fur on.



The recipe was one of several developed for Woolton by Francois Latry (1889-1966), the head chef of the Savoy Hotel in London. It initially appeared on the menu as "Le Lord Woolton Pie" but later became known simply as Woolton Pie.

Latry had a penchant for the unusual, and for getting in the papers, being pictured at one time preparing a bear for roasting (*left*). This was the Christmas Special for the Savoy's Christmas dinner of 1921 and, it was, he claimed, the first time the dish had been served since the time of Henry VIII.

Bear meat, in case you were wondering, is best eaten in autumn. Select a bear that has been feeding on berries and has a reasonable amount of fat. Bear that has been eating fish or carrion can be unpleasant, and in the early part of the year can be dry and stringy. Good bear is considered to be similar to wild boar or venison.

He started at the Savoy in 1911 but left to spend five years at Claridges and a year in the army, where he was discharged as medically unfit after a serious leg wound. In 1919 he returned to the Savoy as their youngest ever Head Chef.

In a WW2 wartime interview he claimed he had embraced non-rationed vegetables and could make 50 different dishes from potatoes, though it is only Woolton Pie that has survived as a wartime icon.

The pie was launched in March 1941 at a Savoy Luncheon of the Pilgrim's Society, an organisation to promote goodwill between the UK and the USA. The new American Ambassador, John Winant was welcomed, Churchill made a speech and the pie was launched. In his diary Woolton recorded that the pie was "extremely good". Churchill, on the other hand, who was not a fan of rationing, refused to eat his pie and told the waiter to bring him cold beef.

The Times published the recipe and described it as "good", "economical" and "wholesome".

However, they later said: "When Woolton Pie was being forced on somewhat reluctant tables, Lord Woolton performed a valuable service by submitting to the flashlight camera at public luncheons while eating, with every sign of enjoyment, the dish named after him."

It is true that he did not always enjoy the Woolton pies he was given as he toured the country, and several times he is known to have sent the official recipe to people who were, he felt, in need of guidance.

It is a simple recipe, using available, non-rationed vegetables, and saving on meat. The original crust used some potato to save on fat and flour, and it has no onions as they were in short supply during the war – most of our pre-war supply having come from Europe. The recipe can easily be varied to allow for the vegetables that are available.

The recipe is -

For the filling –

- 1lb cauliflower
- 1lb swedes
- 1lb carrots
- 1lb potatoes
- Three spring onions
- 2 teaspoons of Marmite
- 1 tablespoon of rolled oats
- Salt and pepper to taste
- 1 tablespoon fresh parsley or one teaspoon dried parsley.

For the pastry -

- 8oz wholemeal flour
- 4oz mashed potato
- 3oz margarine or lard
- 2 teaspoons of baking powder
- Pinch of salt
- Also milk to glaze the crust

Variations – I used half swede and half parsnip. It varies the taste and I had some parsnips that needed using. I also used a stock cube and Henderson's Relish. You can also use Worcestershire Sauce, but I was cooking for a vegetarian and Henderson's is vegetarian. I used half a spoon of extra oats and forgot to buy parsley. Apart from that I stuck with the recipe.

Cut the veg into suitable sized pieces and add water, stock cube and oatmeal to a depth of about 3/4 that of the vegetables. Simmer for 20 minutes until the vegetables are soft. Let them cool.

Make the pastry as you normally would if you make pastry. Or, if you are like me, cut some ready rolled pastry to size. When the filling has cooled put it in a pie dish and put the pastry on top.



Make holes for steam to escape, use scraps of pastry to make decorative leaves and brush with milk.

Cook at 200C, 180C (Fan), or Gas 6 for 30 minutes or so till nicely browned.



Originally it was to be served with “a brown gravy” but in these days of plenty, most recipes suggest extra vegetables and gravy.



It's not as bad as I thought it would be from all the comments that are made about it, and I'd be happy to have it again. It is similar to a vegetable stew I often make in winter, though we tend to have dumplings rather than a crust. I also use leeks in the stew rather than spring onions – that's the point of Woolton pie - you can use whatever is available.

So, there you are, at a cost of a couple of pounds and an hour's work you can actually eat a genuine WW2 collectable. The difference is that your wife might actually approve of this one. Mine almost enjoyed it, but did mention the lack of dumplings several times, so I may stick to stew in future.



Lord Woolton

LORD WOOLTON PIE

THE OFFICIAL RECIPE

In hotels and restaurants, no less than in communal canteens, many people have tasted Lord Woolton pie and pronounced it good. Like many another economical dish, it can be described as wholesome fare. It also meets the dietician's requirements in certain vitamins. The ingredients can be varied according to the vegetables in season. Here is the official recipe: —

Take 1lb. each diced of potatoes, cauliflower, swedes, and carrots, three or four spring onions—if possible, one teaspoonful of vegetable extract, and one tablespoonful of oatmeal. Cook all together for 10 minutes with just enough water to cover. Stir occasionally to prevent the mixture from sticking. Allow to cool; put into a piedish, sprinkle with chopped parsley, and cover with a crust of potato or wheatmeal pastry. Bake in a moderate oven until the pastry is nicely browned and serve hot with a brown gravy.