

# ACROSS THE POND

by Miss Windsor



Hello, darlings!

One must say, it feels like ‘an age’ since our last culinary rendezvous! But fear not, Miss Windsor has returned to ‘flurry’ news upon yourselves, which includes details about her hometown of Bristol, England. But, Miss Windsor’s most exciting ‘slice’ of news is the discovery of a remarkable, handwritten, cookbook from 1793, which possibly contains the oldest recipe for an English chicken curry, plus her delightful interview with Father Christopher Calascione.

This ‘gem of a find’ was unearthed a few years ago by Monks, from deep within the archives of ‘Downside Abbey’ in Stratton-on-the-Fosse, Radstock, Somerset. Now darlings, for the sake of those ‘fanatics’, it’s not quite ‘Downton Abbey,’ but it’s awfully close!

Miss Windsor was brought up in the suburbs of Bristol or, ‘Brizzle’ as referred to by the ‘locals!’ So, please excuse Miss Windsor if she happens to break into her ‘native dialect,’ which is known as the ‘West-Country’ dialect, or just ‘Bristolian.’ Apparently, One would say that we all speak with a ‘farmer’ like twang, similar to the famous West-Country band - The Wurzles. You may recall their 1976 ‘hit’ – The Combine Harvester?

Bristol is oozing with history. It has been a trading port since the Roman era, and for many years the city profited from its main source of income - maritime trade. However, Bristol has a rather sordid past, and during the late 1600’s Bristol entered the transatlantic slave trade, along with other British cities such as London and Liverpool – what a disgrace.

Darlings, Bristol is famous for many magnificent ‘erections’ – Oh, I say! One being Isambard Kingdom Brunel’s assemblage of ‘iron’ bolts and chains – the Clifton Suspension Bridge, which gracefully links Bristol with North Somerset across the Avon Gorge and River Avon. Also, its ‘terra firma’ (translation: dry land) is adorned with a ‘melange’ of architectural building styles, ranging from Medieval, Tudor, Georgian, Victorian, Regency, and up to this present day! During

such times numerous factories were built, as for many years Bristol remained chiefly devoted to its role in the manufacturing industry, and still is to a great extent today.

Thus, Bristol is renowned for one of Miss Windsor’s favourite ‘tipples!’ - Harvey’s Bristol Cream. A fine Sherry, which was created in 1882 by John & Edward Harvey. Also, Fry’s Chocolate, whom Miss Windsor proudly enunciates, is famous for the ‘first’ ever chocolate bar in Britain. This chocolaty curiosity was discovered by Joseph Fry in 1847. Then in 1919 Fry’s merged with Cadbury’s Chocolate.

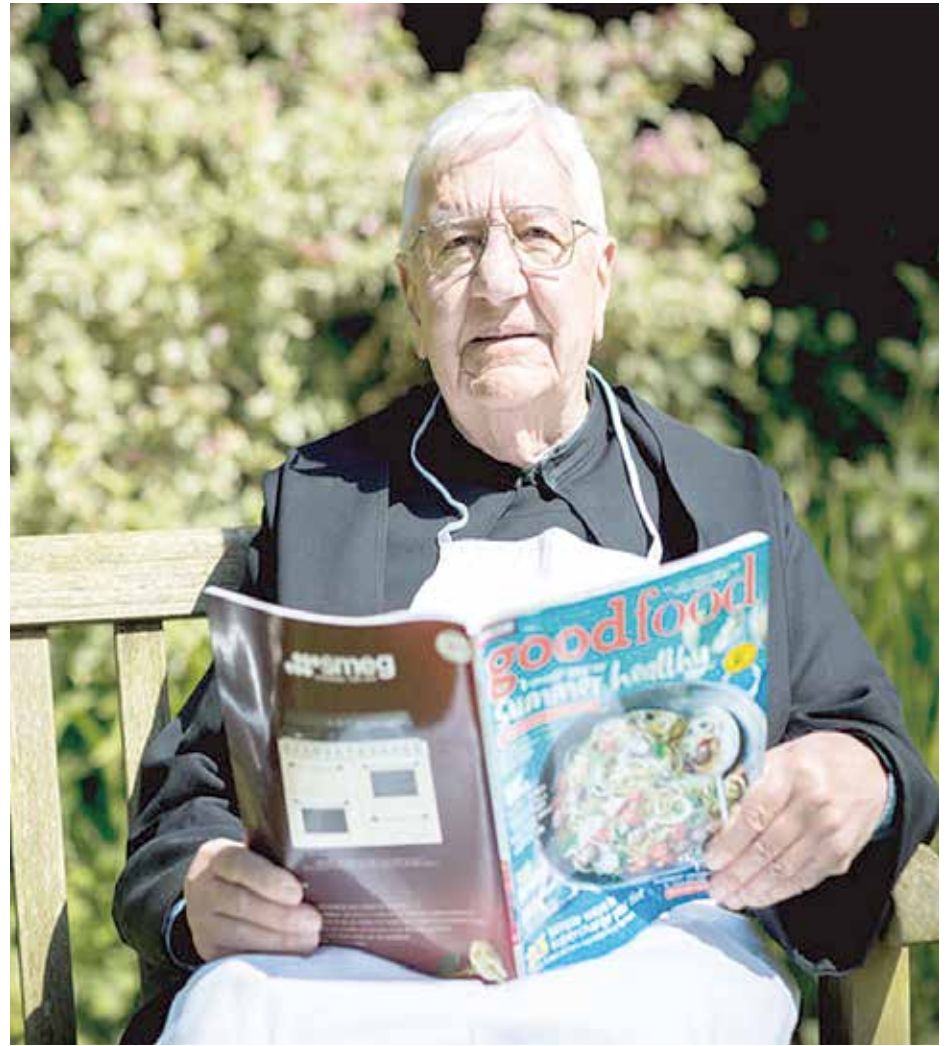
Moving swiftly on! Not so many ‘moons ago,’ Miss Windsor consulted a plethora of avenues in search of a historical ‘food connection’ with her hometown of Bristol. Then ‘lo and behold,’ she stumbled across Downside Abbey, which is about 40 minutes from Bristol. Whom a few years previously had been granted money from the Lottery Heritage Fund to open up their ‘archives’ and to restore the library. Darlings, but would you ‘Adam and Eve it,’ this immensely important piece of ‘culinary’ history – The Begbrook Kitchen Library, which originated from Begbrook House, Frenchay, Bristol, was found by Monks on a shelf covered in dust!

Miss Windsor was absolutely fascinated by this fine discovery, and that it possibly contained the oldest recipe for an English chicken curry, which boasts the following ingredients: ‘veal gravy,’ ‘pounded rice’ and ‘curry powder’! Of course, Miss Windsor carried out some extensive research into such statement, which she found to be ‘sensationalised’ by the local and national press!

So, having delved deep into the history of chicken curry, Miss Windsor revealed that the most renowned and earliest ‘published’ recipe for curry (butter chicken), first appeared in an English cookery book, and was written by Hannah Glasse in 1747 – The Art of Cookery made Plain & Simple. In fact, One realised that the illustrious Hannah Glasse has a rival! Held by the ‘Wellcome Library’ (London, England) is an anonymous manuscript from 1675, which contains an English recipe for a ‘vindaloo flavoured roast’ – darlings, anyone fancies a vindaloo flavoured roast ‘pheasant?’

Now darlings! Miss Windsor could be ‘hailed’ as the next local hero for unveiling the truth about such a misleading statement. Therefore, this extraordinary cookery book has been ‘crowned’ by Miss Windsor, as possibly Bristol’s very own, earliest, handwritten recipe for chicken curry. Indeed, a true Bristolian ‘heirloom,’ and an outstanding piece of ‘social history’ - “Now, isn’t that just GERT LUSH,” Miss Windsor ‘trumpets’ in her native dialect!

What about Father Christopher, you merrily utter! Well, Miss Windsor feels exceptionally honoured that she had been furnished the opportunity to interview such a warm, and genteel man – how spiffing! Father Christopher revealed to Miss Windsor that following early retirement he joined Downside Abbey in 1993. When quizzed about life before becoming a Monk, he quipped, “My history is almost as long as the age of the book!”.



Father Christopher enjoying a jolly good read of BBC Good Food magazine!

Yes darlings, he is indeed well into his 80’s!

Father Christopher is originally from Malta, and worked in management for a family business within the realm of food production. One believes this is where he developed a keen interest in ‘food glorious food! Then during the early years of ‘monastic life,’ Father Christopher spent ten years away from Downside Abbey whilst looking after the parish of ‘Little Malvern’ in Worcestershire. Since his return to the Abbey, and together with his other responsible positions - Guest Master, Monastic Bursar, and ‘Refectorian,’ he became involved in ‘food,’ particularly food provided for his fellow Monks! Father Christopher confessed, “Oh, I do indeed wear many hats!”

Miss Windsor was eager to learn how Downside Abbey acquired this leather bound, culinary ‘antiquity,’ which aroused oodles of interest far and beyond! Father Christopher explained that Daniel Parsons, a Catholic convert, resided at Begbrook House from 1852 until he moved to Little Malvern in 1855. Then during the late 1800’s, he bequeathed the cookbook, along with other family papers and memorabilia, to Downside Abbey. Unfortunately, darlings, Begbrook House no longer stands, as it was completely gutted by fire in 1913 by ‘Suffragettes’ (apparently!)

Father Christopher declared, “Monasteries are thought to be inward looking, but

that’s not really the case.” Therefore, in 2016 due to an abundance of local attraction, coupled with Downside Abbey’s desire to connect with the outside community and ‘stir-up’ interest in the monastery, the Bristol Georgian Cookbook was published. This can be purchased from Amazon or, via their website: www.downside.co.uk.

Since its publication, Father Christopher has become quite a well-known figure in the ‘sphere’ of culinary history, and has appeared on local TV and Radio - BBC Points West, and BBC Radio Bristol, where he talked about the 1793 cookbook and its predecessor. However, during October Father Christopher will grace our screens again with yet another TV appearance on ‘BB4’ (programme to be announced soon). Where you’ll have the pleasure to observe him making ‘sourdough bread,’ which he apparently baked umpteen times over! Father Christopher remarked, “I don’t want to see another lump of ‘dough,’ again!”

Darlings, Miss Windsor must dash off now, but please do visit her ‘blog’ via www.miss-windsor.uk and read more about this intriguing subject matter. Until we meet again, One would be delighted to make your acquaintance via Instagram, Twitter and Facebook (@misswindsoruk).

Cheerio,  
Miss Windsor X

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