

# THE FULL SCOTTISH

Angela Clutton follows literary giants such as Dr Johnson in exploring why the Scottish really are the Best of Britain when it comes to breakfasting.

The 'full English' might have world reknown but in a game of top trumps to determine the UK's finest breakfast I think Scotland would really emerge as the winner. A hearty breakfast is something Scotland has long been lauded for. Not for nothing did Marian McNeill write in her 1929 book *The Scot's Kitchen* that it was the meal upon which her countrymen particularly pride themselves. And just in case anyone thought her biased, she went on to enlist no lesser an Englishman than Dr Johnson as back-up from his admission that: "In the breakfast the Scots, whether of the Lowlands or mountains, must be considered to excel us."

## What were those Scots breakfasting on that was so good?

*Every county has its peculiar excellence. In Argyllshire you have the Loch Fyne herring, fat luscious and delicious, just out of the water, falling to pieces with its own richness, melting away like butter in your mouth. In Aberdeenshire, you have the Finnan haddock with a flavour all of its own: vastly relishing - just salt enough to be piquant, without parching you up with thirst. In Perthshire there is the Tay salmon: kippered, crisp and juicy - a very magnificent morsel - a little heavy, but that's easily counteracted by a teaspoonful of the Athole whiskey. In other places you have the exquisite mutton of the country made into hams of a most delicate flavour, flour scones, soft and white, oatcakes thin and crisp, marmalade and jams of every description.*

Not my words - nor those of the Scottish tourist board - but this most enticing description of breakfast produce belongs to Susan Ferrier in her 1818 first novel, *Marriage*. Coming from a large and relatively affluent Edinburgh family she was well-placed to know what was what at the finest of Scottish breakfast tables. (My favourite Susan Ferrier fact is that Sir Walter Scott helped negotiate her deal with the publisher for her third book.)

Johnson and Ferrier were indulging in the 18th and 19th century highpoint of Scotland's grand breakfasting tradition. Which just makes it all the more exciting to know there modern producers spread right across Scotland - still from the Lowlands to the mountains - who are working hard to maintain its best food traditions. All we have to do is rediscover the joys of the full Scottish.



ARTWORK: SERGIY MAIDUKOV

## Kippers

Modern breakfast salmon may be dominated by smoked slices, but Susan Ferrier's kippered salmon for breakfast was harking back to a time when kipper was a verb rather than the noun it is to us now. Kippering was the process of butterflying, salting and smoking fish be it herring, trout or salmon. Along the way the term became synonymous with herrings and so to us that is what a kipper is.

Kingamongst Scottish herring kippers are, I think, those from Mallaig on the west coast of the Highlands - a fishing port that expanded to become a village as demand for its kippers spread and drove the economy upward. Over time stocks were exhausted, tourism took over and now there's only one traditional kipper yard still going strong in Mallaig - Jaffy's.

The original 'Jaffy' was properly called George Lawrie. In 1944 he established the herring smoking and curing business which is now in the hands of the third generation of the family and another 'Jaffy'. This one is Jeff and he runs the 'J Lawrie & Sons' Mallaig harbour smokehouse where finest Scottish herring are slowly smoked over whisky cask oak shavings in a wind-powered kiln. Their kippers can be ordered online to be grilled, fried or jugged for your breakfast at home - or you could follow one of the most beautiful railway lines in the world to its terminus at Mallaig and collect them yourself from Jaffy.

[www.jaffys.co.uk](http://www.jaffys.co.uk)

## Finnan Haddock

Poached cold-smoked haddock is widely popular for breakfast and just as widely referred to as Finnan Haddock even when it isn't really. The name originally comes from the village of Findon, 5 miles or so south of Aberdeen and pronounced locally as 'Finnan'. Their method of cold-smoking the Aberdeenshire coast's haddock used the particular wood and peat they had to hand in the region. It produced lightly smoked and delicately flavoured haddock superior to how other regions were doing it and which duly became enormously popular beyond the immediate area.

Most Finnan Haddock you get now could be from anywhere. The name is banded around to just mean cold-smoked haddock. Findon itself has sadly lost its smokeries but there are others in Aberdeenshire which I think can lay a stronger claim to producing 'proper' Finnan Haddock. Whitehills town is a little further round the coast from Findon and home to the Downies fishery which has for 130 years been producing terrifically good smoked haddock (and other fish too). Try their Finnan Haddock poached in salted milk with a bay leaf or two.

[www.downiesfish.co.uk](http://www.downiesfish.co.uk)

## Porridge

As delicious as Susan Ferrier's breakfast account was and is it does have one glaring omission: porridge. Oats abound in Scotland, as does this cheap, nutritious and hearty start to the day with its enduring and widespread popularity.

Two things matter with porridge: the quality of the oats and the kind of oats you use. Pinhead oatmeal is traditional but for my taste gives a porridge that is too rough, too course. At the other end of the scale are the rolled oats which are softened with steam and then

flattened between rollers to give flakes that are quick to cook and smoother of texture. At risk of getting too Goldilocks about it, medium oats produce a porridge that treads a line between tradition and smoothness and is, for me, just right.

When it comes to quality and flavour of oats Aberfeldy Oatmeal makes exceptional porridge. This small company is run by Sandy Gray who knew about Aberfeldy Oatmeal from having stocked their produce in his nearby Milton Haugh farm shop. When the owners of Aberfeldy Oatmeal retired Sandy stepped in to save the brand's heritage and now produces a range of locally grown and milled Scottish flours and oatcakes as well as the oatmeals.

Serve your porridge like a true Scot - with cold cream or buttermilk and a tot of whisky.

[www.aberfeldyoatmeal.co.uk/oatmeal](http://www.aberfeldyoatmeal.co.uk/oatmeal)

**“In the breakfast the Scots, whether of the Lowlands or mountains, must be considered to excel us” - Dr. Johnson**

## Oatcakes and Preserves

The traditional Scottish breakfast would traditionally have ended with oatcakes spread with butter and marmalade or preserves. Oatcake lore tells us that every shire, town, village, sometimes it feels like even every street would have had their own particular way of making them with variations of coarseness, shape, size, thickness, crispness and flavour from the choice of oats.

There is less variety of all those aspects these days but there are still some terrific oatcakes to be got. They are mostly quite crisp, 3 or 4 mm thick, round or a triangular quarter (part) of a traditional round bannock. Texture and flavour are where an oatcake can distinguish itself now and few come more distinguished than those from Great Taste Gold Award winning McKenzie's. They use locally grown oats, locally milled to produce slightly sweet, slightly nutty oatcakes of both shapes. McKenzie's have a shop in Turiff, rural Aberdeenshire but also sell online through the Inverawe smokery shop and Scottish Gourmet Food.

[www.scottishgourmetfood.co.uk](http://www.scottishgourmetfood.co.uk)

When it comes to what preserve to put on your oatcake you can go in either the marmalade direction or towards the fruity jams. The place to head for both is Galloway Lodge in south-west Scotland's Dumfries and Galloway where Fiona Heskestad runs a fine line of preserves using top-notch ingredients cooked in small batches to maintain quality. Their Raspberry and Heather Honey jam, Plum and Cinnamon jam, or Orange and Ginger marmalade are particularly suited to the depth of flavour of an oatcake.

[galloway-lodge.myshopify.com](http://galloway-lodge.myshopify.com)

The last word goes to Dr Johnson: 'If an epicure could remove by a wish in quest of sensual gratification, wherever he had supped he would breakfast in Scotland.' How lucky we modern epicures are that the best of Scotland's breakfast produce can now be delivered right to our doorsteps.