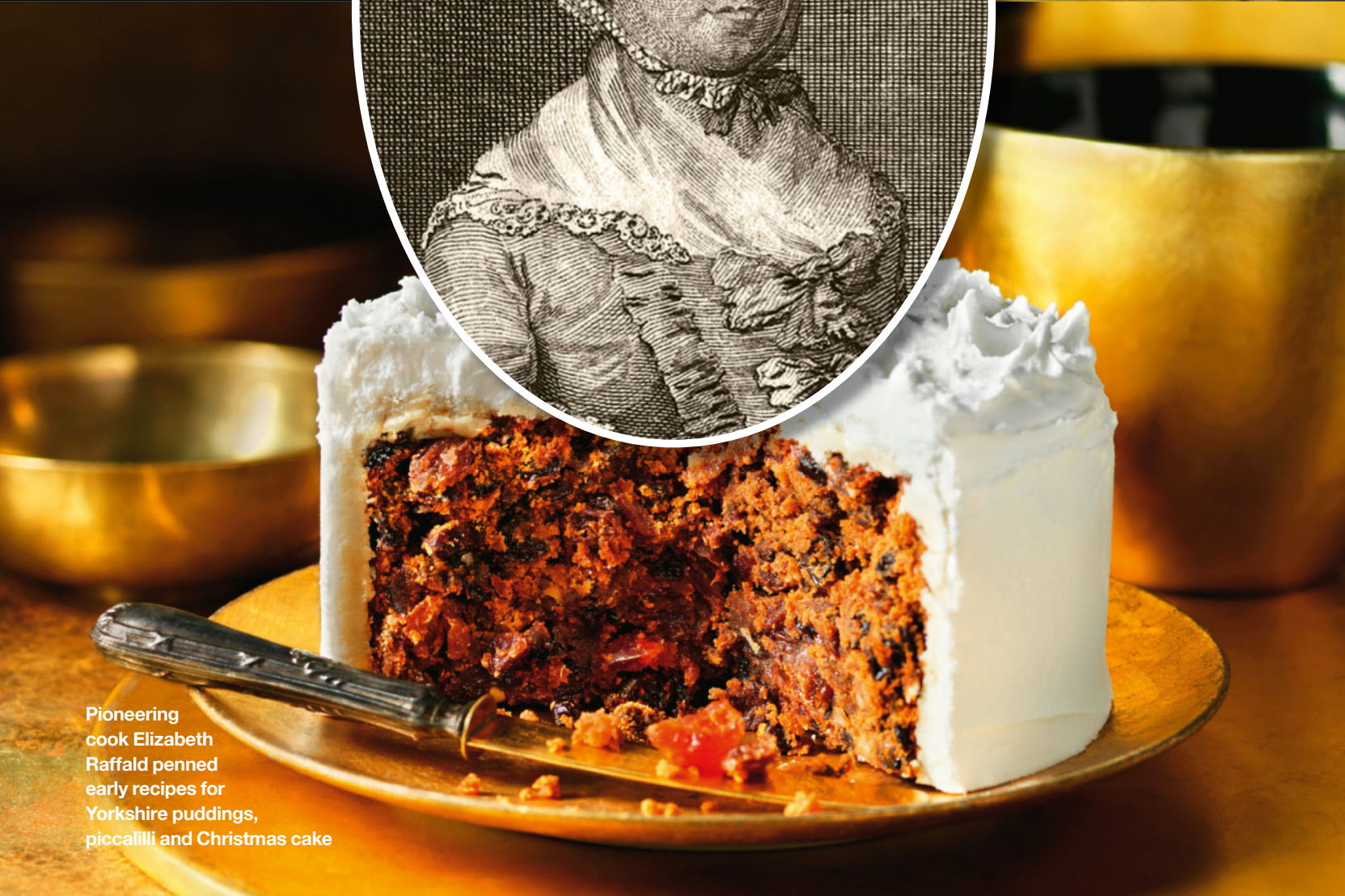




HOME MADE
PICCALILLI



Pioneering
cook Elizabeth
Raffald penned
early recipes for
Yorkshire puddings,
piccalilli and Christmas cake

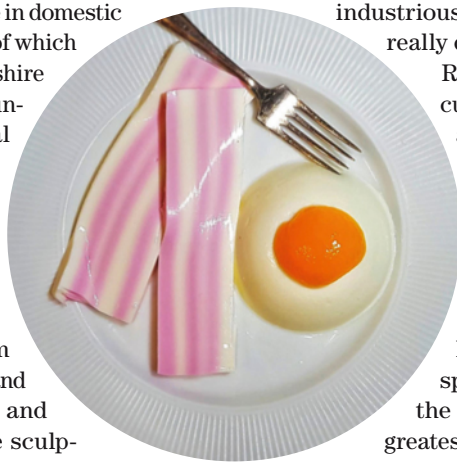
Move over Mrs Beeton

Credited as ‘the mother of the modern wedding cake’, the 18th-century housekeeper, caterer and confectioner Elizabeth Raffald should be better remembered for her great contribution to British cuisine, contends Neil Buttery

IF you were to imagine a key contributor to our national cuisine, the 18th-century cookery-book writer Elizabeth Raffald is unlikely to be the name that first springs to mind. Some people may perhaps think of Mrs Beeton, but not of Raffald—yet her impact cannot be overstated: her influential cookbook, *The Experienced English Housekeeper*, first published in 1769, ran to 30 editions. She was a household name and her then cutting-edge dishes are now our quintessential British ones, but, today, she is an obscure figure.

‘She is considered the inventor of the modern stock cube or Cup-a-Soup’

Born in 1733, Raffald mastered the art of confectionery by the age of 25; at the time, being a confectioner meant, as it does today, working with sugar to make a range of sweets and syrups, but it also included baking fancy breads, cakes and all manner of what we now call *pâtisserie*. She spent the first 16 years of her professional life in domestic service, the majority of which took place in the Yorkshire and Lincolnshire countryside, but her final three years of service were the most important: she worked as housekeeper in grand Arley Hall, Cheshire. There, she spun golden webs of sugar from superheated caramel and developed complex and showstopping edible sculptures. After marrying and moving to Manchester in 1763, Raffald took the town by storm: she opened two high-class food and confectionery shops selling a range of fancy foods, including her fantastical decorations; launched a personal-chef business cooking for the well-to-do; opened Manchester’s first servants’ register service (essentially an



Arley Hall in Cheshire, where Elizabeth Raffald created showstopping edible sculptures

employment agency); set up a finishing school for young ladies; and published a full directory of all businesses in her *Manchester and Salford Directory* (for two towns containing 20,000 people, this was no mean feat). During this time, she was constantly either pregnant or nursing; she reputedly gave birth to 16 daughters. She also had a reputation for being an effective exorcist—the words industrious and indefatigable don’t really do her justice.

Raffald’s impact on food culture could have stopped at Arley and Manchester: with her talents and connections, she was a pillar of the community and highly regarded there until well after her death, but, with the success of her book, her influence spread to every corner of the country. It is by far her greatest achievement. Into it, she distilled her knowledge and skills as housekeeper, caterer and confectioner. Her book contains many firsts, several of which have survived the test of time and become part of Britain’s food culture, including macaroni cheese and Eccles cakes (although she called them ‘sweet patties’ and added the meat

of boiled calves’ feet—something omitted today!). Despite not being the first to write a recipe for ‘portable soup’—a block of reduced, concentrated and dried meat stock that could be dissolved in hot water—she was the first to produce it commercially, which was very handy when on the hoof. For this reason, she is considered the inventor of the modern stock cube or Cup-a-Soup.

Yet her most significant invention is the wedding cake, called a ‘bride cake’ in her book. What was unique? That it was a cake at all, for starters, as bride’s pies had been the tradition. These were large mince pies laced with brandy, Champagne, spices and dried fruit. It had been customary to break →

Left: The author’s attempt at Raffald’s bacon and eggs in flummery.

Right: The Eccles cake was a Raffald invention



the pie over the head of the bride for luck, but Raffald instead made a large fruit cake, much more appropriate in a time when displaying one's civility was of paramount importance. Her cake—and this is the real innovation—was covered in a double layer of marzipan and royal icing, a flourish of hers that has endured 250 years. Today, royal wedding cakes are still made to this design and not only for weddings either, for this is now the archetypical Christmas-cake recipe.

She wrote seven editions of her book in her lifetime, the last completed in a pokey coffee house in the dodgy end of the Shambles district of Manchester; she had gone bankrupt, her tavern having folded because of mismanagement by her alcoholic, spendthrift husband. She died of a stroke in 1781 at the age of 47, but her book lived on. Endlessly reprinted, it became the recipe book to gift to new brides and her cake became the one to be cut after the wedding ceremony itself.

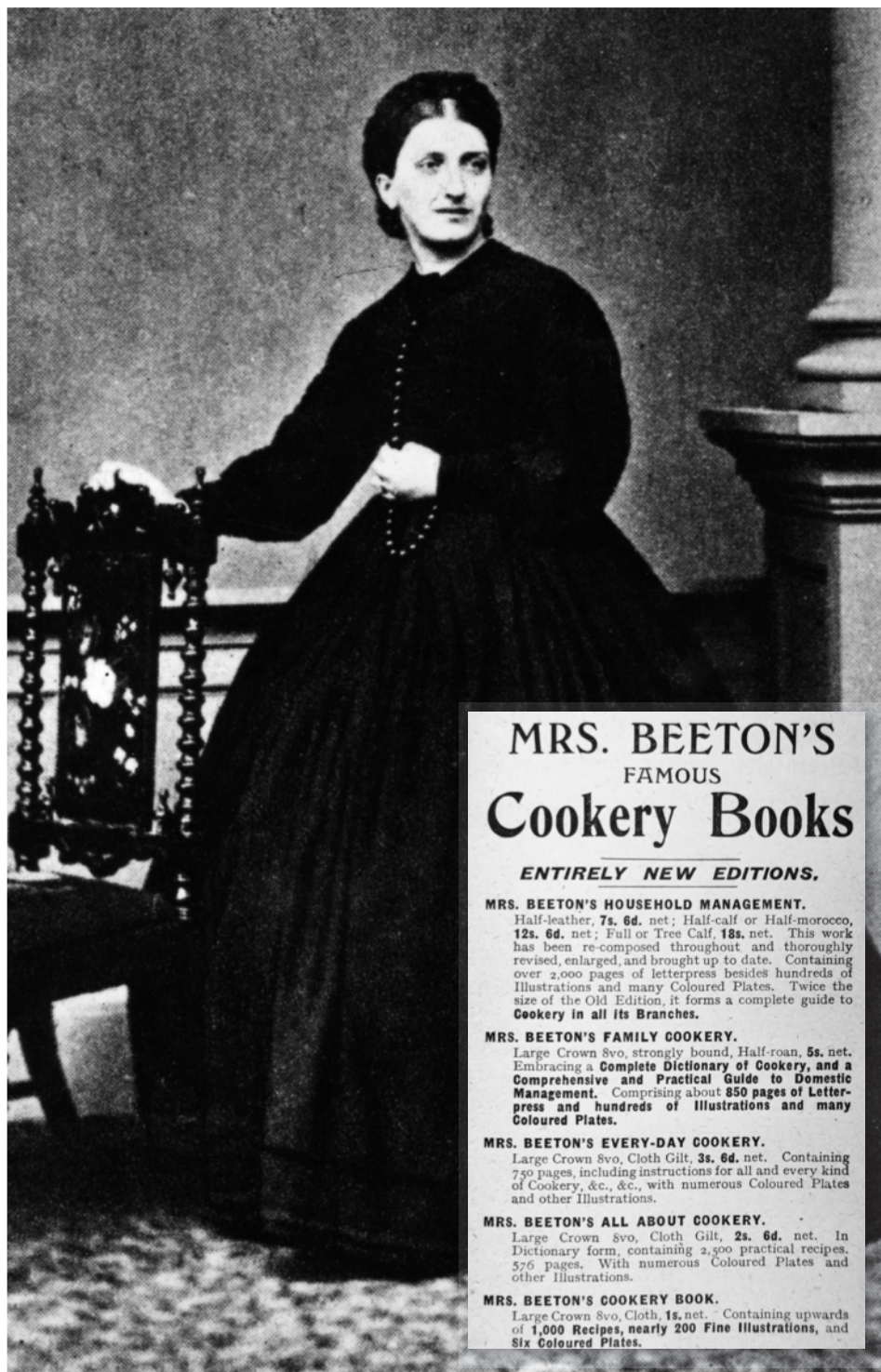


Not forgotten: Manchester celebrates the cook with a plaque near the site of her inn

Flicking through its pages, her recipes for exciting contemporary foods read to us now like a traditional cookbook: jugged hare, ice cream, omelette, piccalilli, Yorkshire pudding. Why don't we know her? Well, let's turn again to Mrs Beeton and her 1861 *Book of Household Management*, a book so comprehensive and skilfully marketed that a housewife required no other. Not only that—Beeton's behemoth was full of recipes taken from female authors' books that preceded her, including Raffald.

Eventually, Raffald faded away, but her recipes, plagiarised by more people than Beeton alone, were cooked up all over the country; her food was now ubiquitous. Most fittingly perhaps, she is still present at weddings and Christmastime, when her cake—her crowning glory—is the edible centrepiece of the days we now hold most dear. 🐣

Dr Neil Buttery is author of 'Before Mrs Beeton: Elizabeth Raffald, England's Most Influential Housekeeper' (£20, Pen & Sword History)



Mrs Beeton drew on Raffald's recipes and her books dominated due to skilful marketing

Cook like it's 1769

Raffald's insightful instruction was the secret to her success. She took the time to describe accurately the subtle cues one needed to look out for to cook a dish well. Here are a few of her kitchen hacks: she was frequently poetic and, to modern sensibilities, rather shocking.

- Add yeast only when the liquid is so clear 'it summer-beams and blinks in the tub' was her advice for making wine

- For anyone wishing to spin a sugar web, Raffald advocated placing 'a pan of water on the fire to keep the heat from your face and stomach, for fear it should make you faint'
- On serving rabbit: 'When... roasted, draw out the jaw bones and stick them in the eyes to appear like horns'
- When preparing a pig for roasting, she recommended: 'Stick your pig just above the breastbone, run your knife into the heart; when it is dead... rub it over with... its own blood'