



Culinary delights not so royal

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Queen Victoria liked her sorbets served at the halfway mark of a 12-course dinner and preferred them flavoured with rum. Mad Ludwig II of Bavaria hated people looking at him and had imaginary guests to dinner. Wicked Henry VIII once boiled a chef alive when two dinner guests died of food poisoning.

It took two hours for the poor man to die though history does not record whether he was lowered into rapidly boiling water or merely brought to a gentle simmer. Either way, it was a hideous price to pay.

Such information comes from a wonderful book called *Eating with Emperors* which covers 150 years of dining with emperors, kings, queens, presidents and even a maharajah. By studying his vast collection of historical menu cards, author Jake Smith has come up with a culinary journey like no other.

Hundreds of menu cards are reproduced, with some modern recipes for old dishes and information about lesser-known ingredients, such as the ortolan.

In France, diners are forbidden from eating ortolans, which are very small and apparently tasty birds.

Several British royals, including Edward VII, loved them, too.

The proper way to prepare an ortolan — brace yourself — is to trap one and leave it in a darkened box for a month, sometimes with its eyes poked out, to gorge itself on a diet of berries, grapes and small insects. Once the bird is four times its original size it is drowned in Armagnac, a process which draws brandy into its lungs as a fine flavour enhancer. The poor creature is then roasted or sauteed and then goes whole, bones intact and head still attached, into the mouth of an eager diner who bites off the head and eats all but the beak.

On a grander scale than the tiny bird, the book also offers a helpful recipe to replicate the whole stuffed boar's head from the Christmas menu of Queen Victoria — first remove head from carcass, remove bristles and scrub, paying particular attention to the snout and ears. Well, yes. Then it must be de-boned, soaked for two days, stuffed into its original shape with suet, truffles, veal, bacon and assorted goodies and simmered, much like the aforementioned cook, for six hours.

Queen Victoria insisted on having plates removed as soon as she'd

finished eating. Imagine the scramble down the table as those served later struggled to keep up.

The book reports that royal eating was forever changed by war-time food rationing and the need to set an example. George V slashed Buckingham Palace staff by half and preferred to eat good, solid, old-fashioned British food such as Irish stew, cottage pie and roast beef, accompanied as often as possible by mashed potato. He also enjoyed a good curry, courtesy of his time in India in the navy. His wife, Queen Mary, had a particular passion for Eton Mess, that concoction of strawberries and cream. Her recipe did not include the more modern addition of crushed meringue.

The wedding breakfast of the present Queen was the simplest in history. It lasted just 20 minutes and there were three courses — sole, casseroled partridge and ice-cream with fruit. The book also covers later British royals, royal families of Europe and the Middle East, and functions at the White House.

Eating with Emperors, by Jake Smith, Melbourne University Publishing, \$59.99



MENU

Potage a la Tete de Veau Claire
Consommé made from a deboned calf's head, carrot, onion, celery, arrowroot and Madeira and garnished with portions of poached calf's head

Potage a la Reine
Chicken consommé thickened with tapioca and garnished with shredded chicken cooked in court-bouillon (aromatic stock) and diced Royale in savory custard made from egg, chervil and chicken consommé

Les Tranches de Saumon, sauce Tartare
Slices of salmon in a Tartare sauce made from mayonnaise, chives and spring onion

Les Filets de Soles Frits
Fried fillets of sole lightly battered

Les Bouchees de Homard
Puff pastries filled with lobster meat

Les Chaud froid de Poulets
Cold dish of chicken breasts coated first in a white sauce made from chicken consommé, butter and brandy and then glazed with aspic jelly

Roast Haunch of Venison
Roast Beef

Les Cailles
Roast quails stuffed with foie gras

Les Asperges a la Sauce
Asparagus in sauce

Les Reinequets de Semouille a l'Ananas
Pineapple flavoured semolina fritters served with fruit preserves

Les Profiteroles au Café
Round choux-pastry cakes stuffed with coffee cream

A side table of hot and cold fruits, tongue, cold beef

MENU

Quenelles de Barbu
Sauce Nantua

Poulet Poêle au Champagne
Mange-tout au Beurre
Carottes Vichy
Pommes Nouvelles à la Menthe

Salade

Bombe Succès

MERCREDI, LE 6 MAI, 1981

Restrained: A menu for The Queen

Cooking For Queen Victoria



Plates removed: Queen Victoria