



THE  
**BAKER'S  
DAUGHTER**

TIMELESS RECIPES FROM  
FOUR GENERATIONS OF BAKERS

**LOUISE JOHNCOX**

WITH A FOREWORD BY  
**ALBERT ROUX**

MACMILLAN

*For my father, and my mother, with love and thanks.*



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## foreword

When I was first introduced to Louise she told me about her baking memoir based on her family's tea shop in Weybridge, Surrey. I was interested about the pastry chef tradition in her family so I asked her to send me a chapter. I found the writing enchanting, full of evocative stories about her family's English tea shop, recipes and customs.

Louise recreates a gentler era in this delightfully nostalgic book. She tells us how her father opened *Peter's* in 1958 and ran the tea shop with his wife, Frankie, for over forty years. Peter, a traditional baker, made all the cakes, bread and savouries while Frankie welcomed customers as though they were family members.

Louise brings this endearing family story vividly to life through the sights, scents and sounds of the bakehouse and tea room. Every recipe comes with a tea shop tale; where there is a cake, there is a memory. Some are happy, some are sad, and all are a poignant reflection of her family life.

Louise has an extraordinary baking heritage to draw upon – her parents, grandparents and great-grandparents all ran tea shops and were master bakers and confectioners. She gives wonderful insight into the difficult lives of her pastry chef ancestors, who originated in Poschiavo, a Swiss–Italian village. In search of work, they first travelled to Marseille, France, where Louise's great-grandfather was born, and then to England where they opened a series of tea shops. I was fascinated by this tale of emigration and passion for handcrafted food and pastries, because food and family have always been central to my own life.

At the age of fourteen I worked as an apprentice pâtissier, travelling to England when I was eighteen to work in the kitchen at Nancy Astor's home, Cliveden. I opened *Le Gavroche* in 1967, which my son, Michel Jr, now owns and runs. I greatly appreciate the dedication and long hours that go into creating and running family food businesses. There is something special about handing recipes down to the next generation and baking together.

At the start of Louise's journey she tells us she went in search of the family recipes from the tea shop only to discover bits of card and notebooks containing lists of ingredients in huge quantities – but no methods. Only through the process of baking with her elderly father was she able to recreate the actual recipes. This baking experience, with all the tastes and smells, helped her to bring the tea shop memories to life. For Louise, cakes trigger emotions, heartfelt and original. I know from my own experience, when you grow up surrounded by food you store up a vast memory bank of taste memories.

The tea shop may have closed, but Louise continues the family tradition by baking her father's trusted recipes. She has updated many of the recipes and includes her father's baker's tips, making this a personal and practical collection, with period and modern photographs.

A storyteller and a baker's daughter, Louise conjures up a childhood remembered primarily through cakes. This book is an enchanting account of the author's childhood in a tea shop, complete with authentic recipes. It is an affectionate memoir that will both entertain with stories from a bygone world of tea and cakes and inspire people to bake.

ALBERT ROUX, OBE, KFO

# introduction

My life has been shaped by cakes, the ones baked by my father in our family's tea shop, *Peter's*, in Weybridge. For over forty years Peter Johncox made cakes, big and small, of all shapes and sizes; birthday cakes, wedding cakes, cream cakes, fancy cakes, plain sponges. He baked bread most days and handcrafted homemade chocolates all year round. In April 2012, twelve years after the tea shop closed when Dad retired, he died in a hospice, just around the corner from the shop. This loss was shattering for my family. But I soon discovered that it wasn't just the family who missed my father. The local community also mourned the baker, who, over the years had turned a simple tea shop into a welcoming home from home for all those who walked through the doors. This book is both a lament for my father and a celebration of cakes. It is a story of loss and discovery.

Dad rose early six mornings a week to bake the bread and cakes for the tea shop and he typically worked fourteen-hour days. *Peter's* was my second home, where I grew up with my three siblings, Gordon, Johnny and Georgina (who we call Fuby). Our playground was our father's bakehouse, from where the scent of flour and cakes lingered on our clothes. Our toys were piping bags full of cream, and we played with pastry, rolled jam doughnuts in sugar and squished cream in meringue shells. The cake counters at the front of the tea shop, the tea room, customers and staff all formed a big part of our childhood. *Peter's* had a cosy, homely atmosphere. The café provided a haven for locals, who spent their time sipping tea and eating cakes and savouries. The visitors were varied: women with toddlers, school children, upper class Weybridge ladies, the occasional celebrity, priests, nuns, local shopkeepers, the wheelchair bound, couples in love and lonely souls. One tea shop reviewer said she half expected to see Miss Marple sipping tea in the corner. Some customers we knew by name, others by their favourite cake. I learned from a young age, when I was old enough to work there as a waitress, that tea and cake were always more than just fuel for the body; taking tea was an excuse to spend time with a friend or loved one, share stories, indulge in cakes and conversation (with not a mobile or laptop in sight in those days). Our tea room provided an escape from everyday life.

My mother, Frankie, a former nurse, was the face of the shop. She had a natural way with customers and was a surrogate mother to the boarders at nearby St George's College who came in for the daily College Tea: spaghetti or beans on toast with a poached egg followed by an iced

bun or cream cake, a motherly chat and, if they were lucky, a lift back to school. The young boarders, who varied in ages, were regular customers, noticeable in their maroon blazers, while the pupils from St Maurs Convent made welcome appearances in their navy uniform with pretty straw boaters in summer. The premises had previously been a *Fuller's* tea room where my father had enjoyed coffee and walnut cake while a boarder at St George's from the ages of eight to eighteen (between 1939 and 1949).

**IT MAY HAVE BEEN** the seventies when I was growing up, but *Peter's* was in a time warp. It was a classic British café, with 1940s décor (rose floral wallpaper, small wooden tables, red cushioned chairs), a powder room and my father's motley collection of chamber pots lining the shelves. On the walls were paintings of Weybridge scenes alongside copper pans, decorative plates and a wall clock that chimed every quarter of an hour, as it had done for years in my grandparents' tea room, and as it does today in Mum's dining room.

I was aware from a young age that Nana and Papa, as I called my grandparents, had also run a tea shop, called *Lane's* in Westcliff near Southend, and my great-grandparents ran *Beti's* tea shop in Ryde on the Isle of Wight. My great-grandfather, Ferdinando, moved to Ryde from Marseille in 1886, aged nine, with his two brothers and mother, Maria, following the death of his father, Carlo. The family went to live with Maria's brother, Francois Beti, and his wife Mary, who ran *Beti's* tea room. Ferdinando eventually took over the running of this tea shop, where he worked as a pastry chef until his death in 1934. The business was then divided; my grandmother's two brothers, Charlie and Freddy, continued working at *Beti's*, while her other brother, Hector, later opened another tea shop, also called *Beti's*, in Southsea. My grandmother and grandfather opened *Lane's* in Westcliff, when Dad was three, which they ran until 1958, when they helped him set up *Peter's* in Weybridge. It seemed my father's role in life as a pastry chef was pretty much predetermined.

Growing up, I occasionally heard stories about our pastry chef ancestors coming from a small Swiss-Italian village, trudging across Europe to escape poverty, first to Marseille, France, where my great-grandfather was born, then to England, where they set up tea shops.

In 2000, *Peter's* closed. Dad was seventy and his health was in decline. Neither I nor my two brothers and sister had carried on the tradition. We all had our reasons. I had left the cosy confines of the cake shop to train as a journalist. But between visits I always missed my father's baking, the sight, scents and taste of homemade cakes, chocolates and savouries, plus the sound of machines whirring away in the bakehouse and customers chattering in the tea room. The closure of the tea shop signalled the end of generations of tea shops and bakers.

I soon discovered that it wasn't just the members of my family who were saddened by the closure of the shop. People wrote to say how much they missed their favourite treats: some mourned meringues, others missed the macaroons, many said they couldn't find a Welsh rarebit or chocolates like those my father made. Some people said the shop had been 'a friend' to them, others declared *Peter's* had a historical legacy because of the role it had played in the community for over forty years.

**IT WAS ONLY WHEN** I reached my forties that I started to ask more questions about my family's history. In 2005, I began researching and writing about our family tea shops. Why were there so many bakers and an obsession with tea, cake and homemade chocolates? Why did my parents open *Peter's*? And why on earth couldn't I bake?

This last question became more pressing when I had my children: Lara, now sixteen, and Joe, twelve. Over the years I had relied on my father to bake all the classic tea shop cakes for their birthday parties: the iced pink cottage cake for Lara, the chocolate train engine and fortress for Joe. As friends cooed over the birthday cakes, sometimes I omitted to say who had made them. I had taken it for granted that my father always made the cakes for every family occasion. I had had an excuse not to bake in my childhood because there simply had been no need to make cakes; life had revolved around the shop, where there had been a steady supply of 'homemade' sweet treats. But now I was a mother and the shop was closed, I realized that it was high time I learned to bake. Besides, an uncle once said that my father had chocolate and sugar flowing through his veins. I wondered if, perhaps, I might have inherited this magic baking gene, if only to discover it rather late in life.

My intention was to write a baking memoir based on my memories of a childhood growing up in a tea shop and the tales of our line of family pastry chefs, including recipes for all the classics. So, one day, while my father enjoyed his well-earned retirement at the family home in Weybridge, I turned up with a tape recorder and announced my plan. He looked perplexed. I started off by asking him about the family's pastry chef tradition. Peter went upstairs and returned with a green book, our family history, which I discovered traced our ancestors back to a village called Poschiavo on the Swiss-Italian border. This book, dusty from being hidden away for years, was self-published by Bernadette Forer, a distant relative in Canada, and contained details of my family lineage, including a family tree, photographs and stories. Entitled *The History and Genealogy of the Forer Family (1796-2002)*, it made fascinating reading about the overabundance of pastry chefs in Poschiavo and the mass emigration that followed. I discovered plenty of pastry chefs in my family, including not only my great-grandfather, Ferdinando, who ran *Beti's* on the Isle of Wight, but both his brothers, Joseph and Enrico, who also learned the art of baking pastries and managing tea shops. I was fascinated, but disappointed that I couldn't find a single

recipe. When I asked Dad for copies of all the recipes for the tea shop cakes and pastries, I expected him to pop upstairs and return with a box load. Instead, he looked up with a quizzical expression and said, "They're all in my head. What do you want to know dear?" My mother put the kettle on, as she usually does in an emergency.

Admittedly, I had never seen Dad refer to any recipe books in the bakehouse, although I recalled bits of card with ingredient lists. After the heart-stopping moment of sheer panic when I realized there were no written recipes, I raided some of the boxes retrieved from *Peter's*, unopened since the shop closed in 2000, tucked away in a dusty corner of the attic. I came across some of the handwritten small cards, almost indecipherable, with names of cakes and ingredients in proportions that would blow your mind. Dad used these cards in the bakehouse, where he produced vast quantities of cakes for our customers. How could I be expected to mix forty pounds of flour in one go? How many eggs made a gallon? What would I do with two hundred and fifty Japonaise biscuits? These cards, smeared with the residues of jam and cream, formed the start of the Holy Grail. I found a mixture of recipe style cards and books but none contained recipes for the domestic cook. I describe the contents of these books as 'notes' as they often contained

**Initially, I tried to interview my father about the cakes and pastry chefs with a voice recorder, but I soon realized he was more comfortable baking than sitting still answering questions. It wasn't that long before he switched on the oven and suggested I get my hands messy.**

ingredients in large sizes without methods, as if written for a pastry chef working at one of the family tea shops producing big numbers of cakes.

I found a brown ledger full of neat handwriting that turned out to be the notes written by Peter's elder sister, my Auntie Hazell, who had grown up in *Lane's*

tea shop alongside my father. I found another book or collection of notes, barely legible, without a cover, worn from age and nibbled at the edges, where the once-white paper had turned sepia. I originally thought this tattered notebook was my father's, but when I asked him to decipher a word he said it had belonged to his mother and was written in the heyday of her parents' tea shop, *Beti's*. As I flicked through the pages, some came loose in my hand, and they were infused with that telltale musty vanilla scent of both age and baking. Next, I found a hardback leather-bound indexed book made by Twinlock Crown (at a cost of one shilling) that, again, contained lists of ingredients in big proportions, but no methods. Some of the writing looked like Dad's, some like Auntie Hazell's and some resembled my grandmother's spidery scrawl. I came to the conclusion that my ancestors were more pastry chefs than writers. When I tried to make sense of these chaotic records I realized the enormity of the task ahead of me.

Initially, I tried to interview my father about the cakes and pastry chefs with a voice recorder, but I soon realized he was more comfortable baking than sitting still answering questions. It wasn't that long before he switched on the oven and suggested I get my hands messy. When it came to recording the tea shop recipes, one big challenge was to adapt the large shop quantities for the home cook. When I asked Dad for details on quantities, methods and cooking times his stock response was, "It's instinct and experience". While this was frustrating, it was the truth about Dad and the baker's life he led for over four decades, as well as his experience of watching all the bakers in his family work while he was growing up.

At first, I baked with my father so I could record the methods and put into practice the theory that was second nature to him. But I also wanted to chronicle his personal tips from a lifetime of baking. My children, Lara and Joe, came along and baked with us, too. Then my father held a few masterclasses in which my older brother, Johnny, and childhood friend, Karen, joined in. We

made everything from custard tarts to coffee Japonaise. It struck me after a few baking sessions that the recipes were simply part of my father, not just information held in his head.

As we baked, the stories about the cakes and tea shops flowed far more naturally than they did with me posing formal questions. I discovered that a wooden spoon, a mixing bowl and sweet cake ingredients were my best friends. My father was comfortable in my childhood kitchen teaching me to bake and sharing tales from the tea shops. When I baked my first loaf of white bread I was instantly back in the bakehouse, watching Dad knead the dough as he had done time and time again, before placing the large tray containing ten or so loaf tins in the oven. Handling the dough myself, with my father telling me to feel the consistency, was a revelation. I felt absorbed in baking bread and grateful that my dad was showing me how to do it. I was like a child again when the loaf came out of the oven and looked similar to the ones he had made. He tapped it on the base, teaching me to listen for the hollow sound to prove it was baked. My baking journey had begun.

**EACH CAKE, SAVOURY PASTRY OR BREAD ROLL** we made brought back a memory and a feeling linked to the tea shop, a customer, a member of staff, my family or an event. James Beard, the chef and food writer, said that 'taste memories' make life richer and, for me, this is certainly the case; every time I bit into one of our creations the taste sensation invariably led me back to my past. I remembered watching Dad knead dough, decorate cakes and make chocolates, and I recalled helping in the bakehouse, enjoying tea and cakes in the tea room with my friend Alice, holding my birthday parties in the café (friends thought I had the perfect childhood, growing up in a cake shop) and later working in the shop. But some memories filled me with sadness: tense visits from the Environmental Health Officer, the

**Each cake, savoury pastry or bread roll we made brought back a memory and a feeling linked to the tea shop, a customer, a member of staff, my family or an event.**

seemingly endless days my parents spent working in the shop, especially at Christmas and Easter, my father's collapse at work, the closure of the family business. I enjoyed the

companionship of baking with my father, but as time went on I sensed him slowing down as energy ebbed away from him. In the Spring of 2011, my father's health deteriorated further and I realized that time might be running out. While the baking was essential empirical research, it was proving both physically and mentally taxing for a weak elderly man. There were many medical investigations, the consultant ordered regular blood transfusions and Dad spent increasing amounts of time in hospital. Eventually, my father was no longer able to bake.

Peter's deterioration led to a role reversal whereby my mother, Frankie, rose to the challenge of regularly baking cakes and pastries under Peter's guidance as he sat on a stool in the kitchen. She did this naturally, keen to take part in the baking and in the knowledge that the scent, sight and taste of cakes made everyone happy. My brother Johnny stepped in to help make the jam doughnuts using the ancient jam machine we had played with as children. I finally made a birthday cake, Dad's favourite coffee and walnut cake, for his eightieth birthday on 29 April 2011. Lara and Joe began to excel at baking, too, with Lara revealing a natural talent for piping petals on cakes and adapting the traditional cakes from *Peter's* for her

teenage friends. Joe followed his grandfather's lead by sprinkling chopped walnuts into carrot cake mix with surprising confidence and success. I felt the process had come full circle when Lara baked the pink cottage cake sponge for my niece's eighteenth birthday in October 2011 under the direction of her grandfather and with her uncle Johnny's help. The cake-making odyssey I set out upon became an unexpected bonding experience for my family, during which time we discovered that the baking gene lives on.

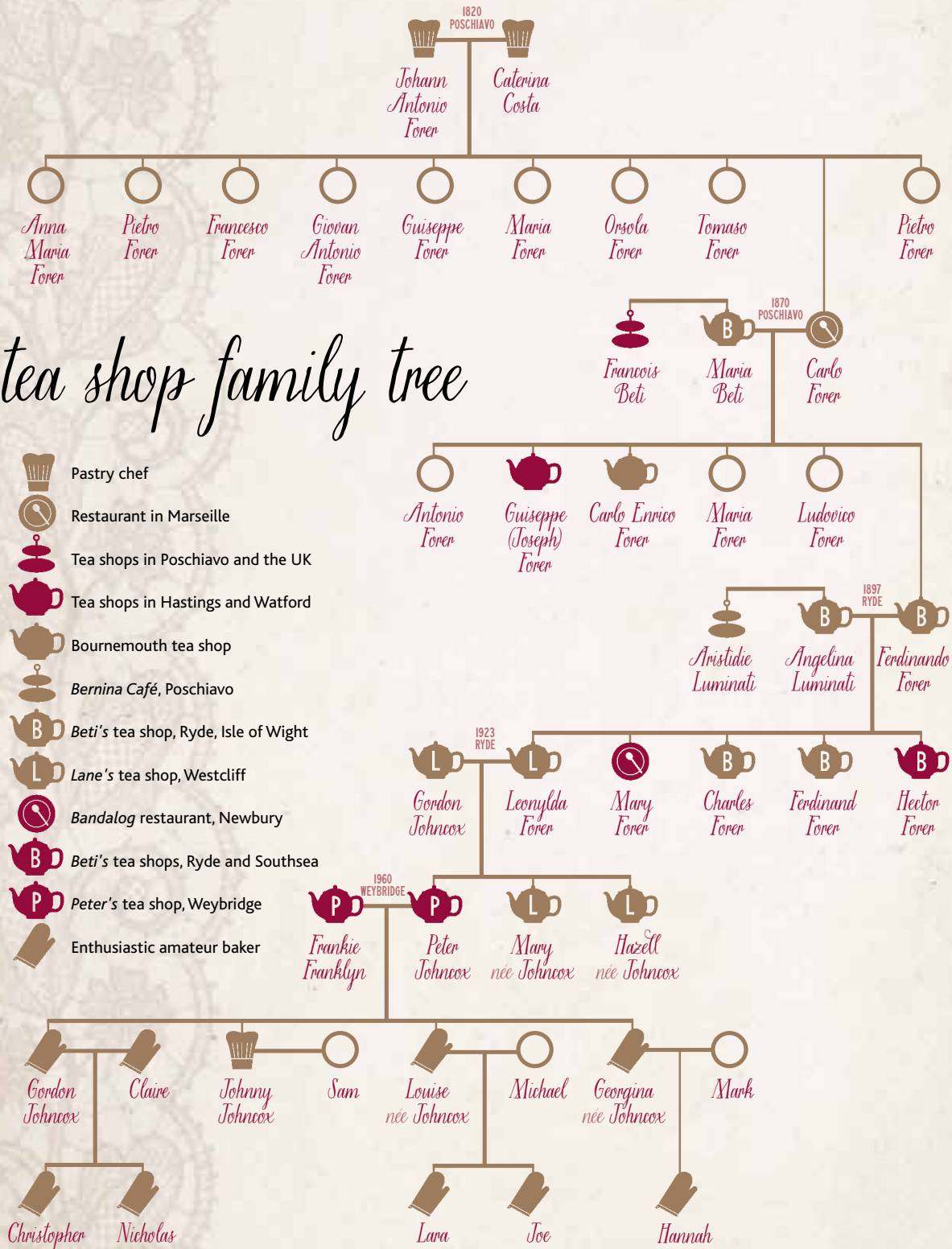
Whenever people heard about my baking lessons with my father, they asked me to share the recipes. Dad devoted his life to making sweet and savoury pastries and chocolates people loved. It seemed natural to share these in a cookbook to bridge the gap between my family's generations of baking experience and the contemporary home cook. I also wanted to tell the story of our tea shop through the recipes and stories about the cakes and some savouries Dad made. These simple recipes are suitable for all who share a passion for traditional cakes, both the beginner baker and the more experienced pastry chef. Included throughout are Peter's personal baking tips.

**NOW, WHENEVER I MAKE CAKES** I feel my father by my side again, urging me to 'bake with confidence and instinct'. I'm no longer afraid to get my hands messy. My initial obsession with finding and recording the recipes became far more than a recipe hunt. This rewarding experience gave me precious time with my father and mother. After we stopped baking Dad often asked me how my book was going. He said, "Don't forget to tell everyone how hard your mother worked; she was the shop." I promised to convey his message. The tea shop was founded on teamwork: Dad baked while Mum gave a warm welcome to everyone; Peter and Frankie offered a combination of homemade cakes, chocolates, conviviality and more.

My father's gift was to teach me not to feel tied to the written recipe. A good baker knows to trust their instinct – therein lies the magic in your hands. I hope you will follow the spirit of these recipes and share both the baking and the cakes with friends and family, creating your own taste memories to take with you into the future.

# tea shop family tree

-  Pastry chef
-  Restaurant in Marseille
-  Tea shops in Poschiavo and the UK
-  Tea shops in Hastings and Watford
-  Bournemouth tea shop
-  Bernina Café, Poschiavo
-  Beti's tea shop, Ryde, Isle of Wight
-  Lane's tea shop, Westcliff
-  Bandalog restaurant, Newbury
-  Beti's tea shops, Ryde and Southsea
-  Peter's tea shop, Weybridge
-  Enthusiastic amateur baker



1 The Forer family, including my grandmother, Leonylda (Nana).  
 2 My grandparents, Leonylda and Gordon (Nana and Papa), 22 February 1923, St Mary's Church, Ryde. 3 Four family bakers in *Beti's* making petit fours in the 1930s: Charlie, Joseph, Freddy and Hector Forer. 4 Dad on the beach at Ryde, Isle of Wight. 5 Dad, known as 'Diddums', with his sisters, Hazell (left) and Mary (right). 6 Mum and Dad with Gordon, my oldest brother, 1961. 7 The baker's children: Fuby, Louise, Johnny, Gordon (left to right) 8 The baker's grandchildren: Nick, Chris, Hannah, Joe and Lara (left to right).

**MAKES APPROXIMATELY 36\***

200g butter  
200g caster sugar  
2 eggs (or 1 egg, 1 yolk – you need 75g), beaten  
400g plain flour, plus extra to dust  
1 teaspoon baking powder  
Pinch of salt  
3–4 tablespoons apricot jam  
2 x 500g coloured ready-to-roll icing  
200g dark chocolate, broken into pieces  
White royal icing, to decorate

\* depending on the size of the cutter

### *baker's tip*

Dad used a special patterned rolling pin to create a ribbed effect on the icing for these animal biscuits. You can buy a textured rolling pin or a patterned mat from good kitchen shops if you would like to create a surface pattern in the icing.

## ANIMAL BISCUITS

We had fun decorating these chocolate-dipped animal biscuits with coloured icing and then piping eyes. Dad had cutters for various animal shapes, including a rabbit, penguin and chick, which was always popular at Easter. Fuby has these cutters now and still makes animal biscuits with her daughter, Hannah. Everyone enjoys making them, especially when a biscuit is accidentally submerged in the melted chocolate while dipping it.

Preheat the oven to 180°C/gas mark 4. Line a couple of baking sheets with baking parchment.

Cream the butter and sugar together until light and fluffy. Add the eggs, then stir in the flour, baking powder and salt. Gently but thoroughly mix to form a dough. Wrap the dough in cling film and chill it in the refrigerator for about 30 minutes.

Roll out the dough on a lightly floured surface to a thickness of 7mm. Using animal-shaped biscuit cutters, cut out your shapes. Reroll and use the trimmings for more biscuits. Transfer the shapes onto the prepared baking sheets and bake for 10–12 minutes until they are light brown. Leave the biscuits to cool on the baking sheet.

Meanwhile, gently heat the apricot jam in a small pan until warm or in a microwave for one minute until soft. Once they are cool, brush the surface of each biscuit with a small amount of warm apricot jam.

Roll out the icing to a thickness of about 2.5mm. Using the same cutters, cut out a corresponding icing shape for each biscuit and place it onto the biscuit over the warm jam. Set aside on the baking sheet.

Melt the chocolate in a bowl set over a pan of simmering water, then take the bowl off the pan. To dip each biscuit, place it on a fork, put a finger from the other hand on top to steady the biscuit and dip it into the chocolate so that its base and sides are covered. As you lift the biscuit out of the bowl, drag it against the side of the bowl to remove excess chocolate. Place it on a piece of baking parchment, chocolate-side down, to set. When the chocolate has set, the parchment paper will peel off easily, leaving the chocolate behind on the biscuit.

Once the chocolate has set, pipe white royal icing to make the whites of the eyes. Use a cocktail stick to dab some melted chocolate onto the white icing to form pupils.



*the baker's little helpers*



## CHOCOLATE CRUNCH

### MAKES 25

300g plain or milk chocolate, broken into small pieces  
150g butter, plus extra for greasing  
230g digestive biscuits  
90g icing sugar  
Smarties, to decorate

We used to make this at home when I was a child and I still make it today for family parties. Chocolate crunch takes me back to *Charlie's Angels*. We would munch on the crunch while watching this classic seventies' American TV drama – I pictured myself as Sabrina Duncan. Chocolate crunch is always best served with Smarties on top.

Grease an 18cm shallow square cake tin.

Melt the chocolate and butter in a bowl set over a pan of simmering water. Stir the butter and chocolate together over the heat until they are well blended.

Meanwhile, crumble the biscuits into a mixing bowl (you want peanut-sized pieces). Sift in the icing sugar and mix it into the biscuit crumble. Pour the chocolate mixture over the biscuit pieces and mix thoroughly.

Press the mixture into the tin and level off the surface with a palette knife. Using a knife, score the surface into 25 squares. Place Smarties on top while the mixture is still soft, pressing them into the surface so they will stick. Chill in the refrigerator for 1 hour to set. Turn the mixture out of the tin and, using your score marks to guide you, cut the squares with a knife.

### *baker's tip*

If you're not a fan of Smarties you can decorate chocolate crunch with other sweets, such as chocolate buttons (ordinary or coloured), M&Ms or mini marshmallows. Squares of chocolate crunch, sealed in bags tied with ribbon, always make a lovely gift.

