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NOTES & QUERIES

LORD MAYOR'S CUSTARDS

from Bridget Ann Henisch and Diana Gregson

On May-day, 1749, Lady Luxborough wrote to William Shenstone about a change she had just made in her own garden, 'by turning the seven grass-plats that were in the shape of Lord Mayor's Custards, into one large one'.[1] Lady Luxborough is confident that her contemporary correspondent will catch the allusion, but we ourselves have felt baffled whenever we have tried to crack her code. The only answer to the problem which we have been able to come up with is that she was probably thinking of some traditional custard glass, ample enough in size to be fit for a Lord Mayor at a City feast, but in the simple round or oval form which is familiar still today.

New information has now made us think that she may have had something very different in mind. In his recent essay, 'Illustrations in British Cookery Books, 1621–1820', Ivan Day writes about a custard fashion popular in England for two hundred years, from the sixteenth century well into the eighteenth. In this, the custard was presented in an open tart of elaborate design, in a great variety of ornamental patterns, with many-angled sides and scalloped edges. To achieve the effect, the custard mixture was set to bake in hardened pastry moulds of the desired shape, and eaten directly from these forms. The confections were served at city livery company feasts, and indeed were so associated with those great occasions that they were sometimes given the name 'city custards'.[2] This link between the decorative custards and the annual round of celebrations in the City of London suggests that 'city custards' and 'Lord Mayor's Custards' belong to the same family tree. There is another family resemblance, one between this kind of custard design and the equally intricate patterns devised for the parterre work of grass and gravel which went in and out of fashion in English gardens

throughout the same period. Lady Luxborough may have been reminded of 'city custards' when she looked at the somewhat similar shapes of the 'seven grass-plats' which she had decided to uproot and replace.

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1. Deborah Kellaway, ed., *The Virago Book of Women Gardeners*, Virago Press, London, 1995, p.33.
2. Ivan Day, 'From Murrell to Jarrin: Illustrations in British Cookery Books, 621–1820', in Eileen White, ed., *The English Cookery Book*, Prospect Books, 2004, pp. 132–3, figs. 44, 51.

GUINEA-PIGS OR 'CUY' from Rex Fritschi

For hundreds of years theologians of all faiths have been grappling with the fundamental question: what did Jesus Christ eat at the Last Supper? I am sure this question has been keeping you awake on many a night. I have solved it. Recently, my wife and I enjoyed a brief stay in Lima, Peru, – a greatly improved and cleaned-up city. This time we explored the great Spanish colonial treasures in downtown Lima, especially the sixteenth-century monastery of San Francisco. This is a beautiful edifice embellished with huge paintings of the school of Rubens and Murillo, lovely wood carvings and acres of hand-painted tiles – all brought from Spain by galleon to Panama, carted on mule-back across the isthmus, then on another ship down the coast to Peru. The timbers, by the way, of this huge complex were carted by ship from Colombia. Exploring this monastery, we came to the huge refectory, one wall of which is covered by an immense oil painting of the Last Supper that was created in Peru (not Spain). If you enlarge it and focus on the plate in front of Jesus you will see what he is eating. It is the Peruvian national dish – a *cuy* – a roasted guinea-pig (see over).

After discovering that Jesus enjoyed a plate of roasted cuy I just had to experience this culinary sensation. I badgered my dear friend, Eduardo Arrarte, the founder of the venerable Lima Tours, to find me a restaurant that serves cuy. He found