

Maggie Smith-Bendell



Dilion, Amey and Betsy out calling with hawking baskets of wax roses.

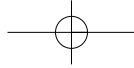
When we reached the next village, Lilea and I went out with our mams and Aunt May to call on the doors. It was the first time that year we had gone calling, and so me dad pulled me aside to give me a strict warning.

“Maggie, my gal, when you go out today you will see money on the doorsteps. That money is not yours, Maggie. It belongs to the baker or the milkman or butcher, but not you. Now have you got that?”

“Yes, dad, I knows it,” I replied.

“Well remember it, or you will get locked up!”

It was a familiar warning; he always gave us the same talk whenever we had to knock on doors, fearing that we would get ourselves into bother. We knew better than to pick anything up, but would accept a penny or two if some kind lady offered it. There were also the ladies



Our Forgotten Years

who would set their dogs on you, or throw water at you just for opening the gate. You would meet all kinds while out calling, I can tell you; the good, the bad and the indifferent.

We were dressed up warm for the long walk ahead of us, me mam carrying the hawking basket full of flowers, and Lilea and I with our handfuls to sell. We worked well like this and I knew how to talk to the housewives at the doors.

“Can I sell you a bunch of lovely fresh flowers, mam?”

We would repeat it again and again through the day, and though so many people refused us, the snowdrops would sell. Snowdrops were such a popular wildflower, and though it took time to walk around the villages we were the first Travellers to have done so, as me dad had surmised. Pick first, sell first – that was his motto.

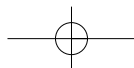
During the day Lilea and I had been given a few sweets and biscuits, but it didn't help the cold. We were dreading the long walk back to the wagons until May called out that she had sold her last bunch.

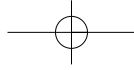
“Well, let's head back now so I can cook for my lot,” said me mam. “I could eat me a grunt¹², I'm that hungry!” We all agreed and happily began to make tracks back along the road.

But all was not well when we arrived where we had stopped. Instead of seeing the welcome site of a roaring fire and our own wagons there was an empty space where they should have been! The police had been and moved them on, and all we found were lumps of grass left for us to follow, breadcrumbs to show us the roads our family had took.

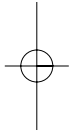
We walked on till we reached a crossroads, counting the lumps of grass to choose the right road. Eventually we heard a horse coming towards us, and to our relief it was our own Patchie, being ridden hard by me dad.

12. pig

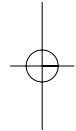




Romani Cooking



BELOW YOU WILL FIND a few of my favourite recipes. These meals were nearly always made over an open fire, using a kettle iron to balance the big black pots we had. When I was young we never had scales to weigh our flour or fat on. Instead, we would manage with a spoon or teacup and so developed a keen feel for the amounts that each recipe needed. Because of this, I can't give exact measurements for any of these recipes, but have included them to give an idea of how we lived and the sort of food we ate. Please treat these recipes in that spirit.

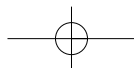


Roasted Meat Dishes

Christmas Dinner

Having got your man to get a kushtie yog³² going with bundles of holly sticks or whatever he could lay hands on, get the good old black pots hanging ready on the kettle iron. Lay an enamel plate upside down in the pot.

32. outside fire





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- * Pluck and draw the goose before washing and drying it.
- * When prepared, stuff the goose with chopped onions and a bit of sage, if you have it, before covering in salt and plenty of pepper.
- * Lay the stuffed goose in the pot on the enamel plate. This saves the bird from drowning in its fat.
- * Wash and peel plenty of tatters and onions. Part-boil the tatters with a pinch of salt. Put all the tatters and onions in with the goose, seasoned with plenty of pepper.
- * Replace the lid of the pot and leave to roast for a few hours, until cooked.
- * Put some water in a pot and bring to the boil over the fire. When the roast is almost done, add swedes and some chopped carrots to the pot.
- * Season with salt and boil gently for ten minutes or to taste.



Hedgehog

We must not forget the jog-jog. Hedgehogs are eaten in the wintertime, as they are considered unclean in the breeding season, like most animals. To ready the hedgehog:

- * Open the jog and wash it clean.
 - * Singe off the bristles over the fire.
 - * Push two thin stakes into each end of the meat to hold it open and push the stakes in the ground, close to the hot embers of the fire.
 - * Roasted, the hedgehog has the flavour of pork.
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