

Christmas? Must have shortbread in house!

For centuries, shortbread has been associated with the Christmas and New Year seasons. A search through history reveals the interesting story about this delicacy.

Like tartans and whiskeys, shortbread is part of the pride of Scotland. It is eaten year round but especially at Christmas and Hogmanay, the Scottish New Year's Day. The rich, slightly sweet, biscuit-type cake is an essential part of the welcome to those who come to visit on the first day of the New Year.

Shortbread is probably a descendant of the Yule Bannock (an oatmeal cake) which used to be baked on

Christmas eve in honor of the new-born Child. The round cake bore the sign of the cross. This explains why so many rounds of shortbread made today are marked into quarters.

As the festive season approaches, bakeries and specialty stores across the country are offering different types of shortbread. Many are decorated with nostalgic designs such as heather, "hands-across-the-sea" or "Frae Bonny Scotland."

Fine, thin cakes, cut in strips, with caraway are sold as Petticoat Tails. The name comes from "petits gâteaux" meaning small cakes in old French. Ayrshire Shortbread

contains egg yolk and cream; and Queen's Tea Cakes, egg, grated lemon rind and rose-water. Ginger Torte is made of two ginger-flavored cakes, sandwiched and iced with ginger icing and decorated with green sugar.

If you're on a shortbread treasure-hunt this year, try the following variations.

Shortbread
1 cup butter
1/3 cup fruit sugar
2 1/2 cups sifted all-purpose flour

Cream butter well until light yellow. Add sugar gradually and beat until fluffy. Reserve 1/4 cup flour for flouring board. Add 2 cups flour to creamed mixture 1/2 cup at a time. Mix well after each addition. Turn dough onto board and gradually knead in remaining 1/4 cup flour. Divide dough in half and knead each half 5 minutes. Chill 30 minutes. Roll to 3/8-inch thickness. Cut in 1 1/2-inch rounds and prick with fork. Bake about 20 minutes at 300 degrees F. Cool. Makes about 4 dozen.

Fruit and Nut Shortbread
Make as Shortbread but combine 1/4 cup chopped candied peel or cherries and 1/4 cup chopped almonds with flour before adding to creamed mixture.

Ginger Shortbread
Make as Shortbread but combine 1/4 cup finely chopped candied ginger with flour before adding to creamed mixture. When cool, sandwich two cookies together with small amount of butter icing.

Chocolate Shortbread
Make as Shortbread but add 1/4 cup cocoa to butter with sugar and reduce flour to 2 cups. Reduce baking time to 15 minutes.

Oatmeal Shortbread
1 cup butter
1/2 cup brown sugar
2 1/2 cups rolled oats
1 cup sifted all-purpose flour

Cream butter until light yellow. Add sugar gradually and beat until fluffy. Combine rolled oats and flour. Add to creamed mixture 1/2 cup at a time. Mix well after each addition. Roll on lightly floured board to 3/8-inch thickness. Cut in 1 1/2-inch rounds and prick with fork. Bake 12 to 15 minutes at 350 degrees F. Makes about 5 dozen.



I LOVE YOU Santa Claus, says four-year-old Jennifer Skeggs as she kisses the familiar man in red at the Acton Figure Skating Club Christmas party on Monday.

Charge developers later

Purchase land for Upper Middle Road

Hutton Regional Council will acquire five parcels of land it requires for road widening of Upper Middle Rd. in north Oakville.

The Public Works Committee had recommended acquisition of only three of the five parcels. The committee had agreed that the price for two parcels in the green-belt were too high.

Some Oakville councillors felt the committee position prompted by Burlington representatives was a way to stall and possibly kill the project. Oakville Councillor Bill Mason charged Jack Rottis, mover of the motion in committee, with using "back door" tactics to scuttle a project.

Council's action Wednesday means that the region will qualify for subsidy on the project out of the 1976 allocation from the Ministry of Transportation and Communications.

Pay it back
The council agreed to pay

market value for the land now, but if and when developers who own land there now develop the property, they'll have to pay back that money to the region along with interest and administration costs.

That represents a new policy by the region. Public Works Chairman Raftis explained the road widening will eventually benefit landholders in the area and they should pay for that benefit.

Traditionally municipalities have asked for land dedications for road widening at the time of severance applications or rezoning.

But in those cases where improvements had to be made prior to development, the developer escaped contributions.

ADOPT HOLIDAY
According to the manager of a large department store in Hong Kong, Christmas no longer belongs to Christians only.

"The Chinese population has made it a fete of their own. Confucians, Moslems, Shintoists, Taoists and all other men of good will express in some way the spirit of the season."

THE DEVIL TOO?

"The devil dares not show himself in Cornwall at Christmas time lest he should be baked in a pie."

This old English saying takes its humorous inspiration from the wide variety of ingredients actually used in the mince pies and other Christmas pies of early England.

One 14th-century recipe for a Christmas pie included: a pheasant, a hare, a capon, two partridges, two pigeons, two rabbits, beef meat balls, eggs, pickled mushrooms, seasonings and spices, all in a pastry crust.



A Joyous Christmas

May all the blessings and happiness of this holy season be bestowed on you and your family. Have a Joyous Holiday.

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GIFTS NOT TRADITION
In early times, even christianity, pagan followers exchanged gifts at the New Year. At first the gifts were collected by priests and distributed to the poor. The exchange of Christmas presents is not a tradition of modern vintage. With christianity, the exchange of gifts was changed to Christmas.

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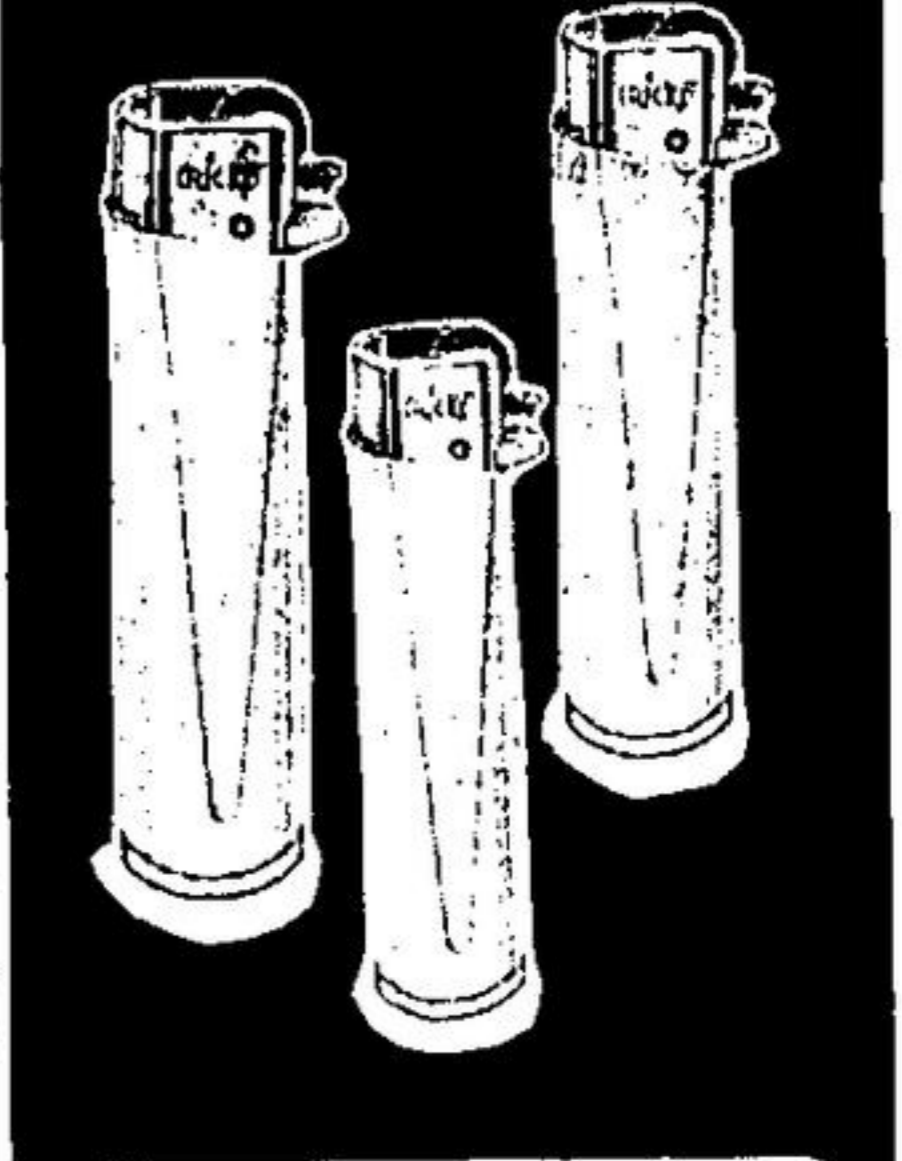
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