

BEE WILSON is **THE** **KITCHEN** **THINKER**

Scottish hot-heads

Chips and: curry sauce, with a deep-fried. Bounty bar for afters. Is this the limit of Indian cookery in Scotland?

Far from it..

English prejudices aside, not all food north of the border is bland pies and porridge. In honour of St Andrew's Day we should celebrate the Scottish liking for spice. Curry devotees sang that some of the best Indian food in the British Isles can now be had in Glasgow. Since the 1990s Mother India and its sister restaurants (including the Wee Curry Shop) have been setting up a refined version of Indian cuisine, far removed from blow-your-head-off lager curries. At Mother India you can eat ginger and green chilli fish pakora; cardamon-rich butter chicken; home-made paneer with spiced broccoli; or smoky aubergines. It recently opened an outpost in Edinburgh serving tapas-style dishes for about £3 to £5 each.

The Scottish love of curries goes back a long way as a captivating new book (the perfect little Christmas stocking-filler) demonstrates: *The Road to Vindaloo* (Prospect Books £9.99), by David Burnett and Helen Saberi, tells the story of British curry, from the Empire to the present day. The authors have dug up a treasure-trove of Scottish curry recipes from the 18th and 19th centuries.

We often talk of Anglo-Indian food – tea and tiffin taken in posh English accents at 4 o'clock – and forget how many Scots also came home from imperial service with a taste for chillis.

Take Sir Ronald Martin. He was born on the Isle of Skye in 1796 and spent 2 years in India treating tropical diseases. When he settled back in London in 1840 he became famous for his curry dinners, attended by Florence Nightingale among others. The proud host showed off the recipes he had collected from the courts of different rajas. The dishes may not have been quite like in Calcutta. Green apples or rhubarb replaced mangoes for chutney. Curry paste was slathered on fried bread. And Sir Ranald showed his Scottish ancestry when he made kebabs ('Hooseinee Curry') from cold mutton.

He was a stickler, however, for authentic spicing. His own recipe for curry powder is a cracker, heady with powdered cloves and coriander.

The Road to Vindaloo includes Scots recipes for chicken curry from the 1780s, as cooked by the granddaughter of the Laird of Craig. Sometimes the chicken was rubbed with curry powder, then fried with butter and lemon



pickle. Other times it was stewed with onion and gravy, with curry powder added at the end with flour to thicken and cream to enrich. These old recipes may not have the finesse of Madhur Jaffey (there is a notable lack of fresh herbs), but no one could accuse them of blandness. Mrs Dalgairns's recipe for 'Knebobbed Curry' from 1829 calls for a large tablespoon of curry powder and a whole pungent head of garlic.

Nineteenth-century Scotland had a passion for curry soup. This makes sense. For what is mulligatawny but a fierier version of Scotch broth? Another Caledonian favourite was rabbit curry. In 1826 Meg Dods, a Peebles landlady who cooked for Sir Walter Scow, made her rabbit curry with fresh coconut, mushrooms and tamarind or lime juice, along with an inimitable Scottish touch - streaky bacon. Dods suggests another reason why the Scots were so fond of curry: it is, she remarks approvingly, very 'economical'.