

Catholic Recipe: St. Stephen's Day Stew

On St. Stephen's Day (Boxing Day) when I was a child there was a very old custom called Hunting the Wren which still persists in some parts of the country. Boys and girls dressed up in borrowed cast-offs and painted their faces with burnt corks or perhaps stolen lipstick then went from house to house in groups carrying a holly bush and singing the Wrenboys song.

*The wren, the wren, the king of all birds
On St. Stephen's Day he got caught on the furze...*

We would be given a few pence or sometimes a bun or a few biscuits. Older groups often had several musical instruments and drove from pub to pub singing songs. The collection was usually very worthwhile because of the spirit of Christmas!

Our family tradition was tied in to the local fox hunt on St Stephen's Day. After a late breakfast we'd pack up a picnic, tumble into the car and head for the local 'hunt meet'. The picnic needed to be quite substantial because the weather was cold, and it was quite likely to be shared with many hungry friends. After the red-coated master blew his bugle to start his day's hunting he was followed not only by horses and hounds but by a stream of cars who followed the action from the nearest road.

The picnic at its most basic might include turkey and ham, spiced beef or smoked salmon sandwiches, a few wedges of Christmas cake and flasks of tea. But the real favourite was a bubbling

INGREDIENTS

2 lb cold turkey meat

1 lb cold ham or bacon

1/4 stick butter

12 oz chopped onions

8 oz flat mushrooms (or button)

4 cups well flavoured turkey stock or

2 3/4 cups stock and 1 1/4 cups turkey
gravy

3/4 cup cream

1-1 1/2 tablespoons chopped parsley

1-1 1/2 tablespoons chopped chives

2 teaspoons fresh marjoram or
tarragon if available

roux

12 hot cooked potatoes

salt and freshly ground pepper

Details

Serves: 12

Prep Time: Several hours

Difficulty: ••••

Cost: \$\$\$\$

For Ages: 15+

Origin: Ireland

Food Categories

[Main Course](#)

stew transported in a haybox. This would be ladled into deep bowls and it tasted pretty terrific on a cold December day. Buttery sponge cakes, clementines, mince pies and flasks of hot mulled wine made this one of the most memorable picnics of the year.

Eventually after much good cheer everyone would gather around a blazing fire in the local pub to sip glasses of steaming hot punch (see link). -*Darina Allen*

Below is the recipe for St. Stephen's Day stew. Left-over turkey and ham never taste so good as in this stew, particularly when it is eaten out of a haybox while following the hunt on a cold winter's day.

DIRECTIONS

1. Cut the turkey and ham into 1 inch pieces.
2. Melt the butter in a wide heavy saucepan, add the chopped onions, cover and sweat for about 10 minutes until they are soft but not coloured. Remove to a large plate.
3. Meanwhile wash and slice the mushrooms. Cook over a brisk heat, a few at a time. Season with salt and pepper and add to the onions.
4. Toss the turkey and ham in the hot saucepan, using a little extra butter if necessary; add to the mushrooms and onion.
5. Deglaze the saucepan with the turkey stock, add the cream and chopped herbs. Bring to the boil, thicken with roux, add the meat, mushrooms and onions and simmer for 5 minutes. Taste and correct the seasoning.
6. Peel the freshly boiled potatoes and put on top of the stew.
7. Put the lid on the casserole, set into the haybox and cover with more hay. Serve steaming hot several hours later.

Recipe Source: *Festive Food of Ireland, The* by Darina Allen, Kyle Cathie Limited, 1992

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