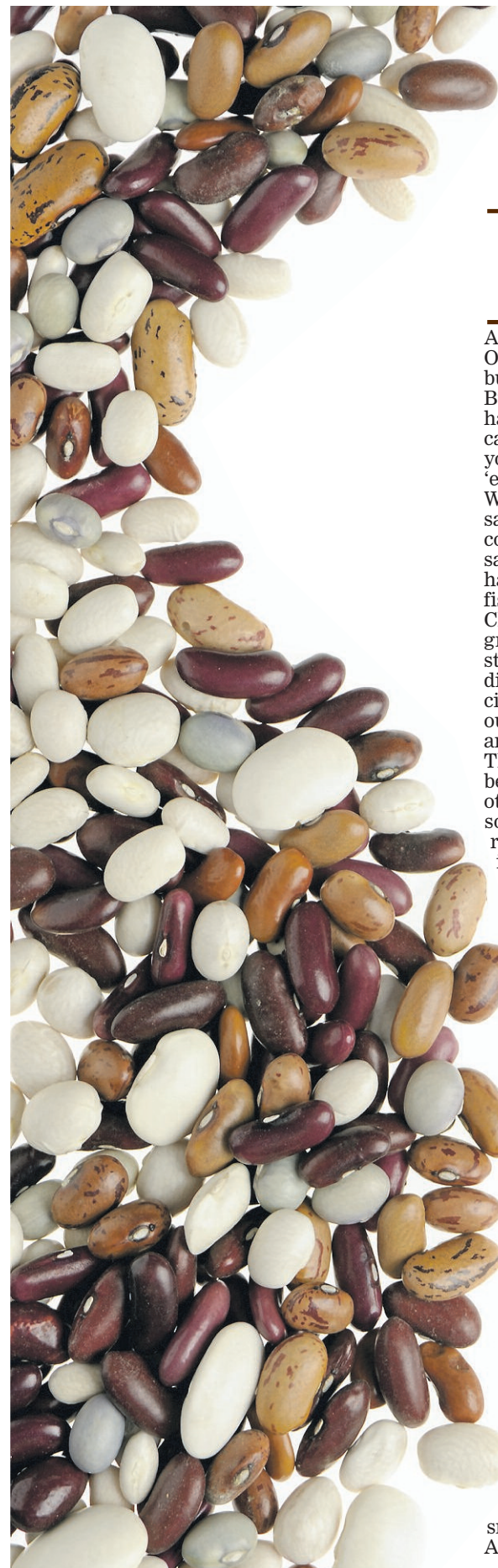


on a **plate**

Is your jar the business?



Rumour has it that it inspired the cowboys' dish of choice and virtually every recipe is different, with families guarding their own down the generations. Pig's trotter or shin of beef? Butter beans and haricots? Carrots? Has ever a Guernsey recipe been so contentious? **Shaun 'Bean' Shackleton** wades through the wonderful world of bean jar

NOTHING says Guernsey like a big, steaming dish of bean jar. Gache? Good for afters. Gache melee? Also good for afters. Ormers? A delicacy and a treat, but seasonal. But for a robust, iconic dish that has stood the test of time and can be enjoyed all year round, you cannot do any better than 'enne jarraie d'haricots'. Wholesome, meaty, filling, beany, savoury and warming, this meal could well have inspired the saying 'sticks to your ribs' and has fuelled everyone from fishermen heading into the Channel, growers all-night greenhouse steaming and nurses starting a weekend shift, to road-diggers up Le Val des Terres, civil defence volunteers on call-out in the middle of December and craving mums-to-be. The recipe is thought to have been taken to the US, along with other northern French bean and southern French cassoulet recipes, and was used as an inspiration in the recipes for the North American colonial dish of baked beans. So Buffalo Bill's dinner may have had its origins in Le Coudre. It's not hard to imagine that even Victor Hugo gave it a try - he didn't stay here for 15 years for nothing. When it comes to bean jar, however, local cookery-book author Marguerite Paul really knows her onions, as well as her haricots, hock of pork and bay leaves. 'I suppose I've eaten bean jar all my life,' said Marguerite, whose books include Channel Fish (2001) and Island Kitchen (2003). 'I was brought up on a farm at Le Bigard in the Forest. I remember the pig-killing in autumn after the war. It was terrible.'

In her 2003 book, Marguerite writes that pork was the most widely used meat and would last a family many months. As a result, nearly every farm and smallholder kept pigs. After slaughter, some cuts were



Carrots or none, single- or multi-bean, pork or shin - whatever the individual variations, bean jar is a rib-sticking winter cuddle in a bowl. (Picture by Tom Tardif, 1245349)

heavily salted, which drew the moisture out, and once drained, the meat would be stored in crocks of brine. Salt might also be rubbed on the skin and patted on the underside, and pepper rubbed into the ball joints. The meat was then hung in a barn before being cut up and sold, stored in crocks or dried on kitchen racks for household use. Traditionally, bean jar has usually been made with pig's trotters or a hock, though some

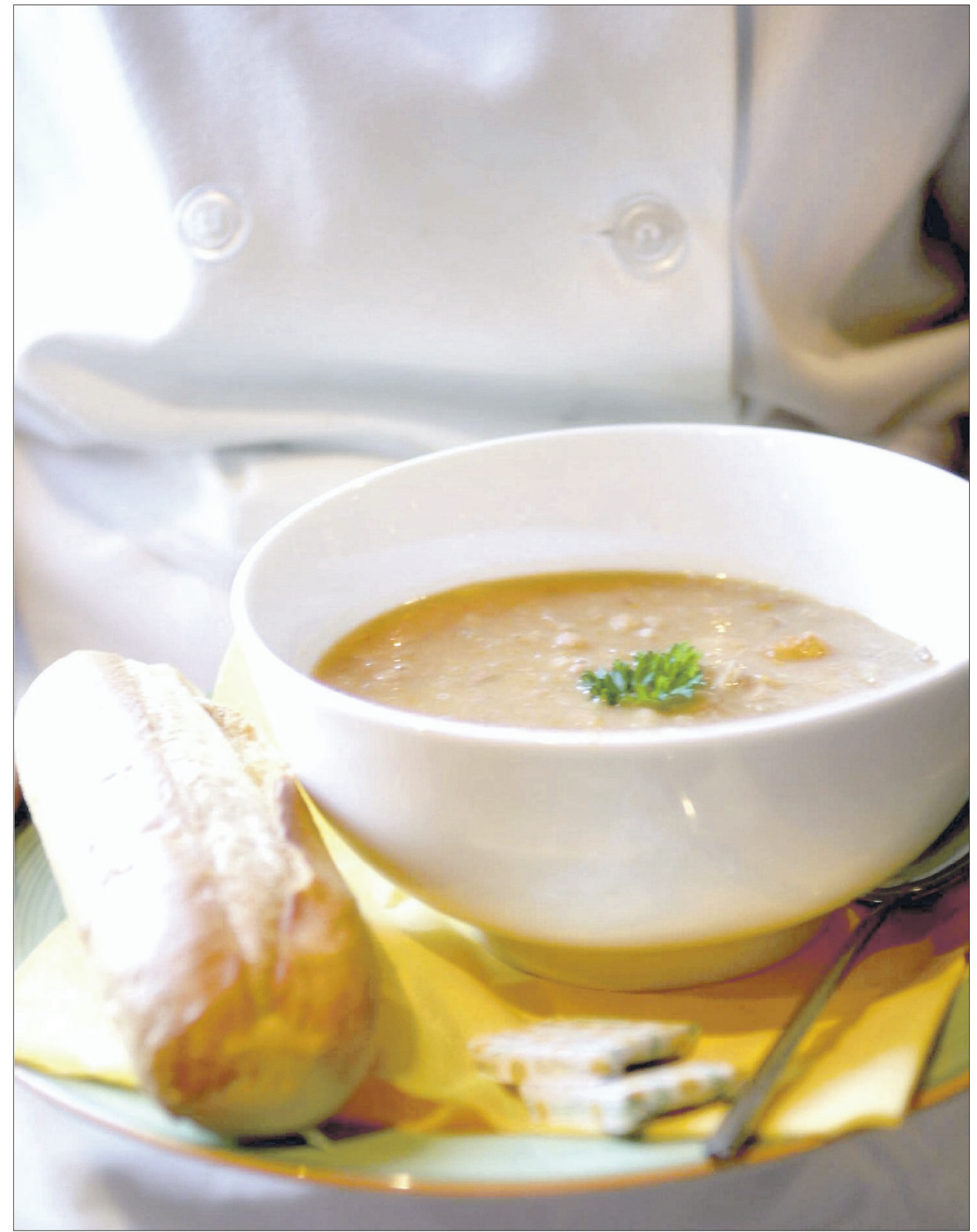
factions prefer shin of beef. 'Perhaps it's a north-south thing. I have a friend who lives in the north of the island and she only makes bean jar with beef. 'It's the same with gache, I suppose. Some use sultanas, others currants. Some actually use margarine instead of Guernsey butter, which horrifies me.' Because of this, Marguerite says it's not a 'classic' dish as everyone adapts it. 'Some say beef, some say pork, some mix the beans - haricot and butter beans -

and some use carrots as well as onions.' She has made vegetarian bean jar with carrots, turnips, and courgettes, as well as onions, which she said was 'a really nice, tasty meal' but for her meat dish, there is one additional ingredient that she always uses. 'Smoked gammon. It makes it richer and gives it a smoky flavour. There's not a great deal of meat on a hock and I always skin it anyway as I don't like the whiskers.' At this point, Marguerite's husband Francis, a huge fan of bean jar, chipped in. 'I like it toenails and all.' He recalled people taking bean jar to the bakeries to be cooked overnight. 'They would have brown paper over the lid tied up with box cord and a label with their name on it.' 'I remember a friend's mother sending him to the bakery with

their bean jar in a bucket,' said Marguerite. 'It must have weighed a ton. 'Of course, this was just in Town. If you lived on a farm, then you'd have a big range or a furze oven to put it in.' On the question of whether the dish was a staple breakfast meal, Marguerite was adamant. 'My father was a grower as well and the men who came and worked for him lived in St Peter's and had to leave home early and cycle to work. No cars in those days. 'I can well appreciate that a plate of bean jar would be a good start to the day.'

Marguerite's own recipe has also travelled afar. A while ago, she and Francis went to Biberach, where Marguerite was asked to demonstrate a Guernsey recipe. Bean jar was the obvious choice. 'They loved it. The smell was in the house all night. It's a lovely smell.' Marguerite has a few 'jars' that she has used over the years, a huge one from Guernsey Pottery and a fair-sized one from Moulin Huet Pottery (as well as a cider jug, important if you want to wash it down properly), but admits that she doesn't use them any more. 'I use a Le Creuset casserole. It has a lovely wide neck.' Beef or pork? Carrots? Earthenware or steel? Vegetarian or not? It's a minefield out there. But there's one thing Marguerite and all makers of bean jar agree on, and that's how it's cooked. 'It has to be long, slow cooking. The longer the better. Almost an overnight thing. 'You get it going and then put it on a low heat.' Marguerite and Francis are pleased that a new generation of Pauls are enjoying the traditional taste of Guernsey. 'I still make it. The children still love it and so do the grandchildren. 'I think they love it because it's beans.'

NB: Reporter's confession: I have never, ever eaten bean jar.



PICKLED OYSTERS, CONGER SOUP... AND BEANS

IT'S a book every Guernsey food lover worth his or her fleur de sel should have on the kitchen shelf. Introduced with a pithy 'Dedicated to those Guernsey housewives who feed their families with good Guernsey food in preference to modern cyclamated poisons and homogenised pap', Guernsey Dishes of Bygone Days is a collection of long-lost local dishes compiled by the late James Stevens Cox from recipe books belonging to local families. The 1974 edition combines his 1966 monograph Guernsey Dishes of the 18th Century and his 1969 one, Guernsey Gache. Among the many gems, including how to prepare lobster pudding, make conger soup, pickle 500 oysters, produce 20 gallons of something called 'shrub' (a popular fruit liqueur made with rum or brandy mixed with sugar and citrus juice or rinds) and create milk cake ('for delicate children'), there's an 18th-century recipe for bean jar, courtesy of Mrs Louisa Helmut:

Guernsey bean jar

Pig's trotter (or beef shin bone) or both. Tripe is sometimes included
 1lb haricot beans
 1lb onions
 1lb carrots
 Thyme
 Sage
 Parsley - to taste, but use plenty

Soak beans overnight. Place the above ingredients in an earthenware jar and cover with water. Bring to the boil and then simmer for eight hours, adding more water when necessary. A note underneath informs readers: 'Until the 1920s, Guernsey bean jar was the usual Guernsey breakfast. A few still so indulge. 'Some recipes give cowheel in place of pig's trotter and also include salt and pepper. Indeed, of some 30 recipes for this gastronomic delight that the editor has collected, no two are identical.' (Extract used by kind permission of Gregory Stevens Cox.)

MAKE IT YOURSELF - MARGUERITE'S WAY

Marguerite Paul's bean jar recipe - from her book, Island Kitchen: A Book of Seasonal Cookery from the Channel Islands (Seaflower Books, £11.99).

Serves six

500g/1lb haricot beans
 Piece of leg pork on the bone weighing about 750g/1.5lbs
 Alternatively one pig's trotter with some extra pork as there isn't much meat on a trotter
 2 large onions
 3-4 bay leaves
 Salt and pepper

Soak the haricot beans in cold water overnight or for about 12 hours until they have swollen. Rinse them and place in an earthenware bean jar or crock. If you don't have time or have forgotten to soak the beans, cover them with water and bring slowly to the boil. Leave to cool in the water for an hour. Rinse and put in the bean jar. Push the meat among the beans. Add the quartered onions, bay leaves and pepper. Cover and cook gently in a moderate heat for at least five hours, even overnight, but make sure the oven isn't too hot. Check occasionally to make sure there is enough liquid. Near the end of cooking, season with salt.



JOIN THE GREAT BEAN JAR DEBATE...

'I'M GOING to 'fess up here. I always slip Ian Oxo cube into my bean jar. I also include butterbeans and carrots. Lots of those. But no parsley. Purists may throw their hands up in horror, but no one has ever turned down a bowl of my bean jar (made using shin of beef, perhaps because I live at L'Anresse). Don't hunt me down and shoot me, but I've got a pack of Jersey bean crock mix in my larder that's full of all sorts - a joyfully beany medley that looks interesting and a tad more

What makes the ultimate bean jar? **Di Digard** has her own ideas - and we want to hear about yours...

colourful than our own 'jar staples. Is snow forecast any time soon? Because I'm looking forward to trying those, and there's nothing like putting a bean jar in the oven when you trudge off to work in your wellies and trapper hat, knowing that (a) no one will laugh, because everyone's too busy doing their own Arctic Warrior act and (b) you will come home to the best, most comforting supper ever. So what about you? We'd like your thoughts on

Guernsey's most famous (and possibly most contentious) dish. And your recipes. How do you make your enne jarraie d'haricots? Is it similar to Mrs Helmut's or Marguerite's, or completely different? Is it your own recipe or one passed down the generations? Maybe you've created a completely modern twist on this old favourite. Cajun bean jar, anyone?

● Join the debate by emailing features@guernsey-press.com or writing to us at PO Box 57, Braye Road, Vale GY1 3BW. Or link up via our Facebook page, www.facebook.com/guernseypress

