

PURSuing A SELF-TAUGHT HOBBY

featuring Gill Roberts



As I was walking into North Square I saw two teenage boys, laden with bags being waved off by a petite fair-haired lady. I assumed she was saying goodbye to a son and his friend.

It turned out that the lady was Gill Roberts who I had come to interview and the boys were on summer holiday from UCS and had come to her for a cookery lesson. The 14-year-old boys loved fish but wanted to learn how to make more adventurous dishes so had come to Gill for tuition and inspiration. On departure their bags carried Thai cod and salmon fishcakes, cod in a spinach and tomato sauce, crème brûlée and tiramisu – I felt inclined to run after them! Over a cup of tea and a delicious almond nibble I asked Gill how her career in ‘food matters’ had started.

“I’d always had a passion for cooking and consequently graduated in Home Economics and went on to teach cookery at secondary schools. I got involved in catering when unbeknown to me, my brother put an advert in the Ham & High and someone called and asked me to do a dinner party and it has blossomed from there.” I asked her how she knew when an event had gone down well, she replied “there is always one sure sign – usually you go in as a stranger but when the party is over you finish with a hug and a kiss.”

Gill caters for all sorts of functions from dinner parties to teas to Bar Mitzvahs and very large events including our Proms at St Jude’s. Her biggest one to date has been to provide the catering for the Channing Ball (for 3 years) which involved a 3 course meal for some 250 guests. I asked whether over the years there were any memorable ‘problems’, she answered, “well, I do some hospital catering and although I always allow bags of time, on this one occasion going to Kings College Hospital I was running late because of the traffic and it did go through my mind that at least if I did have a cardiac arrest, I was heading to the right destination. One of my first catering jobs was a wedding where I did everything but make the wedding cake – however I had to take it to the reception at the church hall. The cake was layered by pillars and no sooner had we arrived at the hall when the pillars started to collapse. Fortunately my father was me and in no time at all he managed to re-assemble the cake and the bride never knew of what might have been a disaster!”

In 1993 with her catering business firmly established Gill decided to start cookery classes initially when asked for the children of friends. These took place in her home, which at that time was in Sutcliffe Close where she lived with her husband Brian and three children, Lucy, Andrew and Nick. As they developed the classes catered for all ages with the youngest being 4 years old and upwards!

Gill and the family moved to North Square 11 years ago and the cookery classes continued – for all ages. I asked her what brought people, adults and children, to them. “It’s the magic of it, people are so proud of what they have created, it’s a great leveller – the barriers come down. It must be one of the most sociable activities that bring people together.” I was however disturbed to learn that four gorgeous elderly gentleman regularly come to Gill to learn how to cook and take an excellent three course dinner home for their wives – where was my husband Peter?

Gill and Brian came to the Suburb in December 1986 a few months before their first child was born. Both her parents and she and Brian were married at Christchurch in Hampstead and they wanted a house with a garden for their children to play in, so the Suburb was perfect. As she says, “I most like the Suburb because the people share a common bond and are proud of their surroundings. When I come back to the Suburb it always feels as if I am returning to civilisation. My favourite walk is to go down to Heathgate and onto the Heath Extension to climb up the hill and look back at the Suburb in all its glory. We have an allotment that I would love to spend more time in and I am delighted to be a member and chalice bearer at St Jude’s where my children have been christened and confirmed. My favourite view is from my balcony at home but if I had a memorial bench it would be in Central Square for people to enjoy the surroundings.”

I asked Gill about the community that the Suburb had offered her and the family “I have many friends through our children going to local schools, through my cookery courses and parties, and a book club that has translated itself into a dining club as well. My daughter went to Henrietta Barnett School, sang in St Jude’s choir and is now a soprano, returning recently to perform at our Proms.”

Many of us would think of Gill as a ‘Master Chef’ but she is endearingly modest, saying she is pursuing a self-taught hobby that has grown. Naomi and Gerald have seen how the Suburb has evolved over the past 37 years. Has it changed for the better?

“When we moved here there were still original residents who had moved to the Suburb in its early years sharing the ideology of its founders,” she said. “Our next door neighbour in Denman Drive South, for example, was Dora Jewel who, with her sister, had lived in Denman Drive since the house was built. They had been members of the Bloomsbury set and were good friends with L.S. Lowry. The Suburb is now a very different place but its essential charm has remained.” **S**

SUBURB RECIPE by Gill Roberts

BOUILLABAISSE

Fish Selection: Salmon, Cod, Halibut, approx 750g
3tbsp Olive Oil · 450g New Potatoes · 4 Leeks
4 Celery Sticks · 4 Cloves Garlic · 1 Orange, Juice & Zest
½ Red Chilli · 8 Tomatoes · Pinch Saffron Strands
Handful Fresh Thyme · 2 Bay Leaves · 1½ Litres Water
or Fish Stock · Pinch Cayenne Pepper · Parsley



Peel and boil the new potatoes until just soft. Drain and cut in half if too large. Peel and slice onions, garlic, celery and leeks and fry gently in the olive oil until just starting to soften and turn translucent.

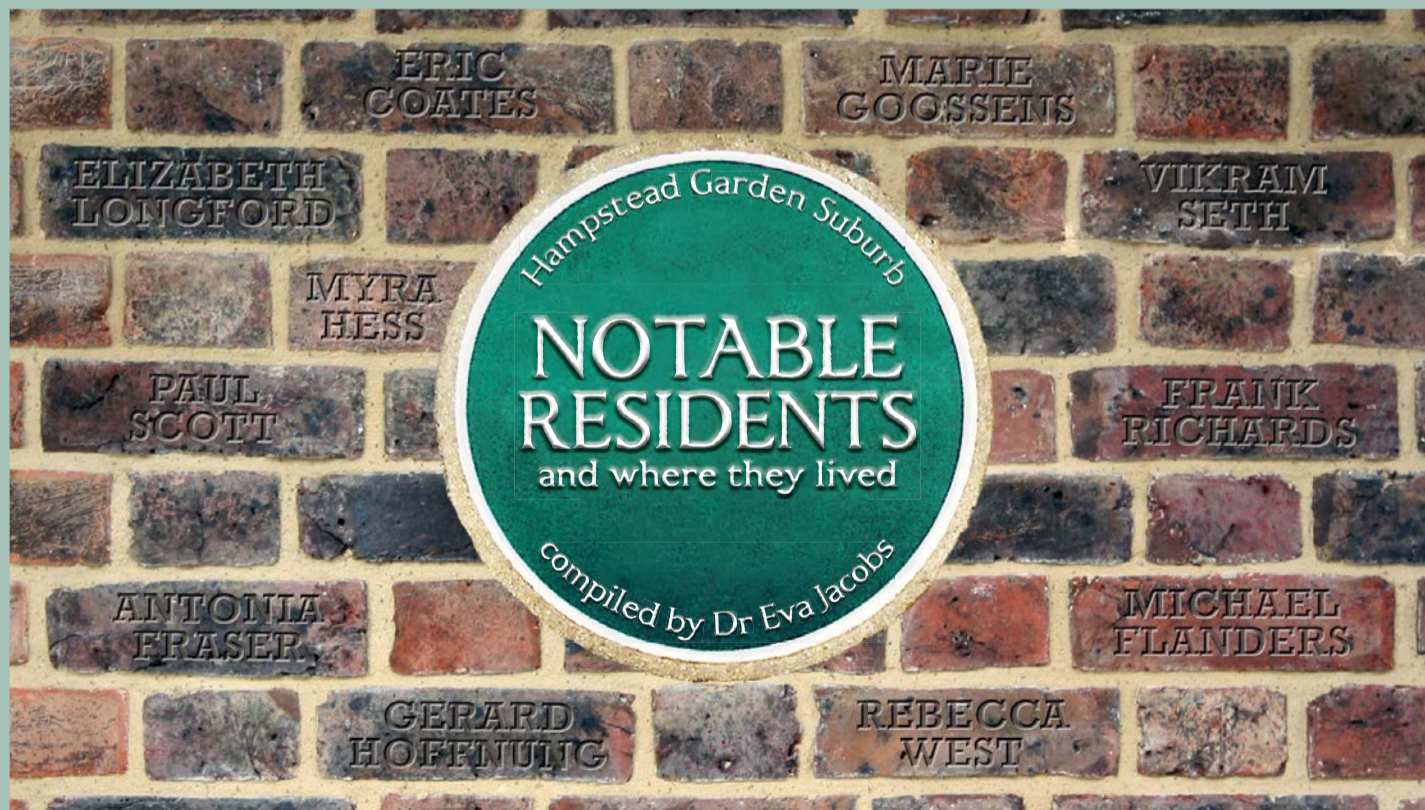
Plunge the tomatoes into boiling water for 1 minute and then pierce the skins and remove. Roughly chop and add to the onion mixture together with the new potatoes. Stir well and cook for another 5 minutes.

Finely chop the chilli and add to the pan together with the saffron, orange juice and zest, chopped thyme, bay leaves, stock and cayenne pepper. Allow to simmer for 5 minutes.

Cut the fish into large chunks and add to the soup. Simmer gently for another 10 minutes and then remove the bay leaves and pour carefully into serving bowls.

Serve with chopped parsley, crispy croutons and rouille which can be bought or made with roasted red pepper and chilli, blitzed with bread, garlic and olive oil.

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1. Notice is hereby given that the Management Charge upon every enfranchised property for the year ended 5 April 2013 was £110.40 (one hundred and ten pounds 40p).
2. An account of the expenses of the Trust in operating the Scheme of Management for the year ended 5 April 2013 as confirmed by the Trust's auditors is available for inspection at the offices of the Trust for a period of one month from the date of publication (6 August) of this notice.
3. On request to the Trust (862 Finchley Road London NW11 6AB, tel. 020 84551066) a copy of the said accounts may be obtained at a cost of £6 (including postage).
4. That each owner may within six weeks of the Publication Date notify the Trust in writing of their specific objection to the sum specified.
5. If within six weeks of the Publication Date, the owners of not less than 200 enfranchised properties notify the Trust of their specific objections to the sum specified, the amount of the Charge shall be determined by a surveyor appointed by the President of the Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors; and that each Owner may at the time they notify the Trust of their objection to the sum specified make written representations in support of their objection which shall be considered by the Surveyor (if they be appointed).

Jane Blackburn
Company Secretary