

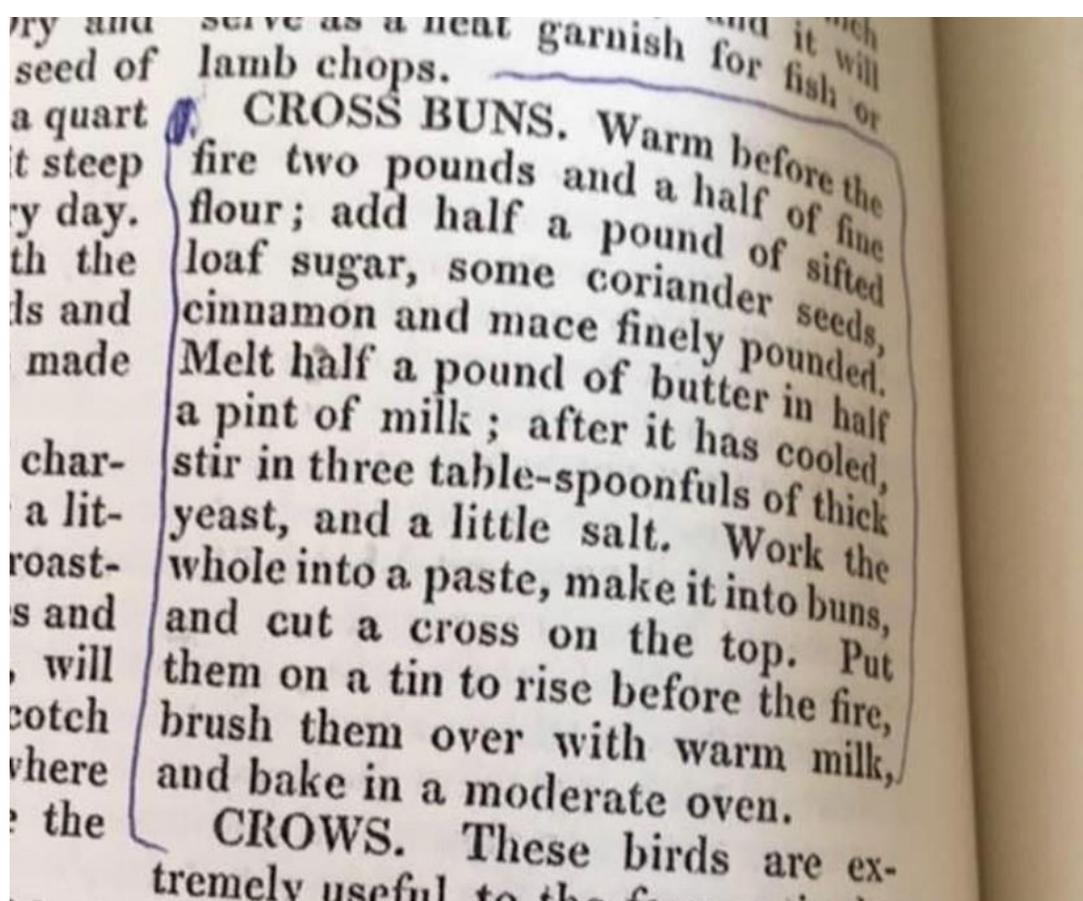


# NOTES AND RECIPES

April 2021

“Work the whole into a paste, make it into buns and cut a cross in the top. Put them on a tin to rise before the fire, brush them all over with warm milk, and bake in a moderate oven.”

1823 Cross Buns recipe from *The Cook and Housekeeper's Complete and Universal Dictionary* by Mary Eaton





Dear Reader

This booklet contains the recipe for Hot Cross Buns, a traditional spring treat, and an unreliable history of the crossed, spiced fruit bun.

Bringing people together to eat food or cook in the faded glory of The Regency Town House has been a mission for me.

The House is still shuttered against the pandemic.

You might be far away, in another part of the world or a few streets away from me. But for a while we will be united, perhaps, by our love of historic kitchens and historic recipes.

Nothing matches physically being in the 1830s kitchen of The Regency Town House. But through the magic of technology, we may recreate the 1830s in our kitchens, distanced but united.

Your humble servant

Paul Couchman

The Regency Cook

# An Unreliable History

## **SPRING FESTIVAL**

Saxons ate buns marked with a cross in honour of the goddess of light, Eostre, whose name was transferred to Easter. In pagan traditions, the festival of Eostre on the spring equinox represented the rebirth of the world after winter. Four seasons and the wheel of life.

Christians replaced the pagan meaning with a Christian one. Bread was offered as a religious offering replacing the less civilised offering of blood. It actually took until the Tudor times for the buns with crosses to be permanently linked to Christian celebrations.

## **PERHAPS IT IS ELISABETH I'S FAULT?**

Elizabethans saw buns made with eggs and spices as a great treat and so they ate them in Lent, sometimes with currants and raisins. They ate them at many times of year.

In 1592 Elizabeth I restricted London bakeries from making crossed buns "except it be at burials, or on Friday before Easter, or at Christmas." Perhaps this is the reason Hot Cross Buns became associated with Good Friday alone?

## SPICY DEVELOPMENTS

Until the 19th century the majority of Hot Cross Buns recipes include spices but no dried fruit.

Writer Emma Kay came across an advertisement for a “Cross-bun distributor” in a 1791 newspaper, which, she suggests, meant they had become widely known as Cross Buns by this time.

Here’s a version from the 1700s from Emma Kay’s book *A History of British Baking*:

*Take to three pounds of flour well dry’d before the fire, two pounds and a half of butter, a pounds of sugar, and two ounces of Caraway-comfits; melt your butter in warm water upon the fire, with six spoonfuls of rose-water, a few more caraway-seeds, if you please, and a pint of new barm; knead all these together, and set your buns in the oven, after white bread is drawn.*

Originally crosses were scored onto the bread. Later recipes call for pastry crosses, crosses made in marzipan and now the cross piped with a mix of flour and water is traditional.

## **ONE A PENNY, TWO A PENNY**

A song from the 1760s by English composer Luffman Atterbury was inspired by the cries of hawkers touting their wares, and their buns, on Good Friday.

*One a penny, two a penny, hot Cross-buns;  
If you've no daughters, give them to your sons;  
And if you've got no kind of pretty little elves,  
Why then good faith, e'en eat them all yourselves.*

## **THE WIDOW'S BUNS**

There was a pub in London, the Widow's Son. The widow baked Hot Cross Buns for her son who was away at sea. He wrote to say he would be home on Good Friday and to have a nice hot cross bun waiting for him. He never returned, but she continued to bake a Hot Cross Bun for him every year. After her death a net full of Hot Cross Buns was found hanging from the ceiling of her cottage.

A pub on the site of her cottage continues the tradition and performs the Ceremony of the Widows Bun.

## **AN OLD RECIPE TO MAKE HOT CROSS BUNS.**

Put 2lbs and a half of fine flour into a Wooden Bowl, and set it before the fire to warm, then add half a lb of sifted sugar, some Coriander seed, Cinnamon & mace powdered fine, melt 1/2 a lb of butter, in 1/2 pint of milk, when it is as warm as it will bear the finger, mix it with 3 table spoonful of very thick yeast and a little salt, put it to the flour, mix it to a paste and make the buns as directed\* Put a cross on the Top not very deep.

(\*To make Common Buns cover it over and set it before the fire an hour to rise, then make it into Buns, put them on a tin set them before the fire, for a quarter of an hour, cover with flannel, then brush them with very warm milk, and bake them of a nice brown in a moderate oven).

Unknown 1818.

# The Recipe

This 6 minute video with my explanatory commentary covers all the steps in the recipe

<https://paul-g-couchman.wistia.com/medias/faptiy2b7e>

## HOT CROSS BUNS

*For the dough*

- 500g wheat flour (ideally strong white) plus extra for dusting
- 10g salt
- 14g dried yeast (two sachets)
- 250g milk, any kind of fat level
- 60g butter
- 40g caster sugar
- 2 eggs

**Vegan option:** swap the butter for 60g dairy-free spread, remove milk and eggs and use 310g coconut milk or other non-dairy milk instead.

### *Fruits and spice*

- 200g mixed dried fruit
- ½ teaspoon ground allspice
- 3 teaspoons ground cinnamon
- 1 teaspoon of ground mace
- ¼ teaspoon ground ginger
- Pinch of ground cloves

**Options:** it is a matter of personal taste, you might enjoy adding ¼ teaspoon ground coriander, a pinch of black or white pepper, or swapping the mace for nutmeg – you might even just use 4-5 teaspoons of mixed spice.

### *Crosses*

- 50g plain flour
- 2 teaspoons neutral oil
- Milk (or vegan milk) for piping consistency

Put all your spice onto a plate.

Put the flour, salt and spices into a basin. Mix with a fork. This is to mix the salt and spices through the mixture. Yeast doesn't like to get too close to salt.

Add the yeast.

Add the butter, chopped into small pieces. Add the sugar. Add the two eggs. Pour in the milk. Stir. Mix as well as you can in the bowl. It won't look like dough at this point.

When you have a rough lump of mixture and your bowl is clean of flour, lift the dough out of the bowl onto your work surface using your hands.

Knead the dough. It is horribly sticky. You will feel like you need to add flour but don't. Gradually the dough will become more elastic. You will feel that it will never work. It will.

The yellow flecks of butter will melt and disappear as you knead.

The dough will remain sticky. Even when you are finished.

Just give it 10 minutes. Stretch and fold. It is normal to think it won't work because it is too sticky. But it will.

Promise.

The dough now needs to go back into the bowl. Use a tiny bit of oil to grease the bowl before putting the dough in. Cover the bowl, with a plastic bag, shower cap or a wet tea towel and leave somewhere warm for an hour.

The dough should roughly double in size. Another test is to push your finger against the dough, it should leave an impression that vanishes when the dough bounces back.

Line a 39x27cm (15x11 inches) baking sheet with baking paper.

Tip the dough out onto your work surface.

Pull and stretch the dough out to form a large rectangle. Sprinkle the dried fruit over the dough.

Fold the dough over like a book. Turn and fold, turn and fold, turn and fold again, until the dried fruit is incorporated throughout the dough. It shouldn't feel like it's rattling around inside the dough.

Form the dough into a rough circle and divide into quarters.

Each quarter is then divided into 3 parts. You can add tiny bits to make all the parts equal. You will have 12 pieces. If you'd like precision do weigh the dough, divide into 12 and weigh each bun individually again. You can pretend you work in a bakery this way.

These pieces are now formed into bun shapes.

Sprinkle your work surface with flour.

Take each piece of dough and press it down gently on the work surface. The bottom should be flat.

Pull the sides up and in like you are making a purse. Do this several times, turning the bun a little so every side is pulled in.

Turn the bun over so the smooth side faces up. Use both hands to form the bun into a round shape. Put the bun onto the baking tray. The buns should end up in neat rows (this will make piping easier).

Making the buns without weighing the dough out does have advantages. Sometimes you want big and small buns. If you divided your dough by eye arrange the buns on the baking tray

with smaller ones in the middle and larger ones on the outside so that they all bake evenly.

Cover the buns loosely with a tea towel and leave to rise for another hour.

While you are waiting do have a cup of tea and think about spring.

Preheat your oven to 220 degrees C (425 degrees F/ gas mark 7).

Mix 50g of flour with 2 tablespoons of oil and milk (dairy or vegan, or even water) to form a paste that you can pipe. Mix with a fork or whisk until you have got rid of all the lumps.

Put the paste into a piping bag, plastic bag or funnel.

If you have a piping bag use a small nozzle. A plastic bag with a small corner cut out is good too. Or a funnel can be used. I've had success with each method.

Pipe your crosses in long lines across the buns.

Put the buns into the oven. Bake for 12-15 minutes.

The buns are ready when they are brown, risen and sound a little hollow when you tap them.

While they bake make the glaze. I do this just before they come out of the oven. Mix 3 tablespoons of white sugar and 3 tablespoons of water in a saucepan. Heat gently until a syrup. Watch it like a hawk. It only takes 2 to 3 minutes.

Using a pastry brush, or a pheasant's feather for a historical flourish, paint the glaze onto your buns. Do this while the buns are warm.

Leave to cool and then enjoy with a cup of tea or even a glass of sherry.

Happy Easter



THE REGENCY COOK'S  
**#1830HotCrossBuns** ONLINE

Web: [paulcouchman.co.uk](http://paulcouchman.co.uk)

Twitter: @TheRegencyCook

Instagram: theregencycook

Email: [paul.g.couchman@gmail.com](mailto:paul.g.couchman@gmail.com)

