

# Mash it up

Pies all 'ot, here's all ot'  
Toss up or buy up or win em'

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**There is no doubting who Broadway Market's oldest establishment is. As the sign above the shop states, F.Cooke has been serving the hungry, peckish and downright greedy in the area for over a century, 1900 to be precise.**

The family business actually started nearly forty years earlier in 1862 in Scatter St. These 'penny pie shops' brought respectability to the pie trade. Before then pies were sold by pie men mostly in taverns "Toss up or buy up" was the cry used to initiate a game of chance whereby the toss of a coin could win you a pie. Often the inebriated customers would celebrate by throwing the pies at each other. The opening of the pie shops with their cosy interiors and larger seasoned pies however brought an end to such chaotic ribaldry.



The first shop was run by Robert Cooke, great grandfather of Robert Frederick Cooke, proud occupant of no.9 Broadway Market today.

"You see all first born are either Bobs or Fred's," explains Bob. The Cookes are also related to the Manze's who run shops across London. They obviously like to keep it in the family in Pie and Mash circles.

Robert's dad took over the Broadway restaurant in 1947 a year before he was born. Nearly twenty years later Bob took over the shop.

*My dad said, "What do you want to do?" I said "I want to work in the shop and that was that."*

The shop was closed during the war years after a doodlebug hit the bridge leading up to the market. However damage to the premises was slight and the shop has pretty much retained the same look since the 1930s when the entrance to was moved to the front.

The menu has also changed little. The staple dish is still Meat pie with mash on the side and liquor made from parsley sauce. Demand for jellied eels however has waned over the years "All the people who ate eels are dying and these days the price is such that Bob will only provide eels on order.

*"There's no point in me having them all the time, but I can get them in 24 hours for you."*

Gone then are the days when local youngsters would scoop eels from the canal and run to Cooke's in order to recoup a shilling for their efforts. Back then the eels would have to be skinned in the shop and de-boned, a time consuming practice, which Bob reckons the modern punter is too squeamish to witness.

A few years back displayed his skills on television with top chef Phil Vickery. It's not easy to cook eels properly, says Bob, "they have a very delicate flavour, a bit like Dover sole."

The secret to meat pie he says is density "you've got to pack it out with something, not too much water so the liquor is more concentrated" and of course "don't forget your salt." Cooke's has never been a place for ostenta-

tious show. Indeed in Bob's Grandfathers time it was impossible to even get a cup of tea "He wouldn't have it". Says Bob. Even now Bob keeps things simple. "if you want beans and ice cream forget it" Cooke's does however offer an excellent cherry pie for those with sweeter teeth.

*"You get some pie and mash shops starting up and after a few weeks they start doing breakfast and as soon as I hear that I know they are going to become a café."*

So what does Bob think of his wares? "I love pie and mash" he admits "I know exactly what goes into it." On the day of our meeting however he is on a diet and has restricted himself to a Chicken kebab.

Many of those who used to frequent the shop in the sixties when the market was bustling have since moved away, mostly to Essex. They still return to though at weekends and Saturday is a busy day in the shop

*"People come from Basildon, Chigwell, Southend. Its like a pilgrimage"*

Bob likes what he sees in the market these days "I think its quite good actually, they just need to sort out the parking." Bob's wife Anne was pivotal in regenerating the market in her role as chair of the Broadway association.

So is the shop going to continue in The Cooke family? Bob has two girls and a boy still at school. He doesn't blame them though if they want to try something else. "Does my son really want to be sitting here all day? There's other things out there for him."

One hopes that whatever happens Cooke's will remain a pie and mash shop for many more years. As Bob puts it "pie, mash, salt, pepper and the radio for less than three quid, what more could you ever want?"