



Newsletter Issue March 2013



Operational Programme I – Cohesion Policy 2007-2013

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Website part-financed by the European Union

European Regional Development Fund (ERDF)

Co-financing rate: 42.5% EU Funds, 7.5% National Funds, 50% Private Funds

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Welcome to the 10th issue of il-Borma

Dear Friends,

Welcome to the 10th edition of "Il-Borma", the monthly newsletter dedicated to Maltese gastronomy. Our March edition features the traditions of Easter and Lent in Malta, what could be called our most important season with regards to food and culture.

Because of Malta's strong roots in Catholic traditions, Easter is a cultural mix of ancient and religious rituals, gastronomic traditions, and a strong community atmosphere. Lent is preceded by the joyful Carnival festivities which are centralized around our capital, Valletta, and its popular display of huge, colourful floats. Lent is then comprised of different religious feasts and processions in many of our villages.

As usual, our newsletter is packed full of recipes mostly linked with Lent and Easter in some way. Our delicious sweet delicacies like Figolli, Kwarezimal and Sfineg are all worth tasting, along with traditional Easter savoury meals like Kusksu, Qassatat ta' l-Ghid and Soppa ta' l-Armla.

It would also be a good idea for you to have a look at our Facebook page since our members post new recipes every day and will be displaying their take on Easter traditions in the coming weeks. Also, feel free to take part in any of our ongoing discussions if you have any queries, comments or suggestions, accessible at www.ilovefood.com/discussions.

We really hope you enjoy this edition of our newsletter, and thank you for your continuous support!

We hope you thoroughly enjoy the Easter festivities with your friends and family!

Tony
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Easter in Malta

Easter is probably the most significant period in Malta, owing to the nation's strong roots in Christianity.

It is a time where most of the population comes together to celebrate very important religious feats - the passion, death and resurrection of Christ. Although Lent, Easter and all the different events that occur throughout are predominantly Christian, most people enjoy the celebrations whether they are religious or not. Needless to say, it is a colourful time in the Maltese calendar that promotes our collective spirit and culture. Any tourist would make a wise choice in visiting between the months of March and April.

The period of Lent, kicked off by Ash Wednesday, is preceded by Carnival, a time of wild and bizarre celebration, parties, and fooling around before the restrictions and sacrifices of Lent (for the more religious). During Lent, many Maltese make small sacrifices like not eating sweets and meat on certain days of the week - some even sacrifice for the full Lenten period up until Easter Sunday. As a child I was advised to give up sweets and television on Wednesdays and Fridays.

Various different events unfold throughout Lent, like Our Lady of Sorrows, Good Friday, and Easter Sunday itself, amongst other symbolic calendar dates. Each of these days holds specific implications and rituals like processions and church visits. Ultimately, the Easter period and all of the individual feasts are characterized by unique Maltese delicacies that can be enjoyed on the street, in cafés or at home. The most popular delicacies - Kwarezimal, Figolli, Kusksu bil-Ful - amongst others, are all highlighted along with their own recipes in this newsletter.

It is safe to say that Easter is the most important time of the year in Malta. Being a summation of cultural, religious, ritualistic and culinary events, it is both enjoyable for members of the local community and fascinating for any foreign visitors to immerse themselves in. For a few moments, one can forget contemporary life, and engage in rites of passage that have existed for hundreds of years.



Lent Fasting and Easter Delicacies

It is highly ironical that a time of fasting and sacrifice should go hand-in-hand with so many culinary delights. Yet while nowadays many of us bend the rules when it comes to fasting, during the time of the Knights of St John, people faced the Inquisition if they broke the fast without special consent from the health authorities. In those days, it was only meat and dairy products which were strictly forbidden during Lent. Catholics could freely eat sweets and sugary foods, contrary to modern conventions. Fasting rules became much less rigid when in 1966 Pope Paul VI declared that fasting was only obligatory on Ash Wednesday and Good Friday.

The fact that older fasting rules allowed the consumption of sweets explains how the tradition of Kwarezimal lives on and eaten throughout the whole Lenten period.

On the other hand, the Figolla, another delicious sweet delicacy, was banned throughout Lent, and remains a treat to be saved for Easter Sunday - though many people cannot resist jumping the gun and having a few bites beforehand. The main difference that could determine why the former was allowed and the latter was not, is the fact that the sweet Figolla dough contains egg yolk and fat (both meat derivatives), in contrast to Kwarezimal pastry's simpler biscuit base.

In the case of Karamelli tal-Harrub, the myth that these sweets do not contain any sugar is of course false, since sugar is required to make carob syrup. Yet the tradition lives on in a similar way to that of Kwarezimal, since sugar was never banned during Lent in the same way that meat was.



Traditional Maltese Figolli

Under normal circumstances, Easter brings to mind images of large coloured Easter eggs, bunny shaped Easter eggs, and other sweets. Malta presents its unique Easter delicacy: The Figolla. The Maltese language has been strongly influenced by Latin and Italian, so it is possible that 'Figolla' is the worn-down version of the word 'Figura' - a form, shape or image.

When someone mentions Figolli, for any Maltese, this will conjure images of pastry filled with almond paste, covered with icing of different colours with a chocolate Easter egg on top. Figolli are typically shaped around figures of butterflies, rabbits or hearts.

This tradition is loved by one and all, particularly Maltese children, who wait anxiously for their Figolla, waking up early on Easter Sunday to taste their much awaited sweet, and in the case of the more religious kids, to take their Figolla for blessing by parish priests on various church parvis. Some Figolli are even made without the almond paste inside the pastry, especially for younger children, or adults who are not fond of almonds but would still like to enjoy the delicacy in some sort (however this does take away the essence of the sweet).

Where and when can Figolli be eaten?

Tradition states that Figolli should not be eaten during Lent, as those days are catered for by the delicious Kwarezimal - so the first taste of Figolli should be on Easter Sunday.

However, Figolli of all shapes and sizes are on sale at all supermarkets in Malta throughout the Easter period. The beautiful displays mean that no one with a sweet tooth can go out without buying at least one Figolla!

Maundy Thursday & Good Friday are two days where all confectioners will be busy selling the famous Qaghqa tal-Appostli (apostle's ring) - and in any confectionery there will be an array of colourful and tempting Figolli on display. Figolli can also be found also in exclusive cafeterias, and undoubtedly in almost every household.

A piece of delicious Maltese Figolla, in any shape, is best eaten with a hot cup of tea or coffee. One can not enjoy Easter Sunday (or even before) without a decent taste of a Maltese Figolla!



Recipe

Ingredients

For the pastry

- 350 grams caster sugar
- 800 grams plain flour, sifted
- 400 grams butter
- Grated rind of 1 lemon
- 4 egg yolks, beaten
- Malta honey and pistachio nuts or additional almonds

For the almond paste

- 600 g caster or icing sugar
- 2-3 egg whites
- Grated rind of 1 lemon
- A few drops orange flower water
- 600 grams almonds, ground
- To finish
- Glacé icing
- Royal icing
- Small Easter egg

Method

To make the pastry mix the flour with the sugar, then rub in butter until the mixture looks like fine crumbs.

Add the yolks and the grated lemon rind, then mix a little water to get a workable dough.

Leave the mixture to chill.

Add the lemon rind and orange flower water to the almonds and bind with the egg whites.

Roll out the pastry mix and cut out the shapes you want.

When doing this cut two shapes for each figolla as they will be sandwiched with the almond paste.

Lay the first shape on a floured and greased baking tray, spread with the almond paste made previously, leaving a small margin.

Put the second shape on the previous and press the edges together.

It would help if you were to wet the edges with a pastry brush to ensure binding.

Bake at a temperature of 200°C/400°F for five minutes and then at 180°C/350°F, for about 20 minutes until pale golden.

Let to cool on the tray.

When cooled, coat with the glacé icing then decorate with some royal icing in an other colour, but do not overdo it and make it look gaudy.

While the icing is soft push a foil-wrapped egg into the pastry.

If you are making human shapes it is traditional to put the egg in the middle of the man's or woman's tummy. Then finish with some ground almonds.

Since ground almonds are quite expensive some substitutes, such as tiny sugar-coated eggs can be used, although these might not be as traditional.

If you can not obtain these pastries it is quite easy to make them yourself. You can also make your own templates, like sheep, out of cardboard. The traditional shapes of figolli are men, women, fish and baskets; the last probably being symbols of fertility. Recently new forms have been added to the traditional such as; cars, lambs and butterflies. The shapes of humans are easily identified by the old-fashioned paper faces that are stuck on the icing. Another traditional decoration is the Easter egg wrapped in bright colours.



Kusksu bil-ful

Broad bean and pasta soup

When Lent carried a much stricter regime than today, one of the main rules was that no meat could be eaten during the period of Lent. So it was obvious that an alternative had to be found, and such an alternative remained a staple dish in our Maltese culinary traditions.

To start with, the Kusksu bil-Ful should not be mixed up with the Tunisian Kuskus as they are two totally separate types of food.

Kusksu bil-ful is small square shaped pasta, cooked with tomato sauce, onions, and obviously fresh broad beans. Nowadays people might add potatoes or Maltese Cheeselet - but the traditional Kusksu bil-ful is the latter. This type of Maltese food is traditional during Lent and especially during Holy Week. The best tasting Kusksu is also cooked in the traditional way - very slowly on a very low flame. The smell is fantastic and one can be assured that a plate of Kusksu bil-ful - especially if cooked correctly - will definitely leave you wanting a second helping.

Where can Kusksu bil-Ful be eaten?

Unlike other typical sweets, or bread, this cannot be bought as a ready made item from supermarkets. But no esteemed typical Maltese restaurant would refrain from putting Kusksu bil-Ful on its menu.

On Friday, during the feast of Our Lady of Sorrows, traditionally, a plate of Kusku bil-Ful is the main dish followed by a piece of Qaghqa tal-Appostli. The same follows on Good Friday.

Ingredients

- Onion
- Salt and pepper
- Water
- Carrot
- 2 potatoes
- Broad Beans
- tomato pure
- peas
- Eggs
- Kusksu
- Fresh goat's chesse (you can use benna goat's cheese not fresh and make a different taste to change a little)
- Chicken stock cube

Method

Fry the onion with some salt and pepper.
Add in the water and leave to boil.
Add carrot, potatoes, broad beans, peas and chicken cubes.
When the vegetables are ready, add in raw eggs not beaten.
When cooked, remove the eggs.
Add kusksu and when ready add goat's cheese
Put in the eggs and serve.

Kwarezimal Recipe

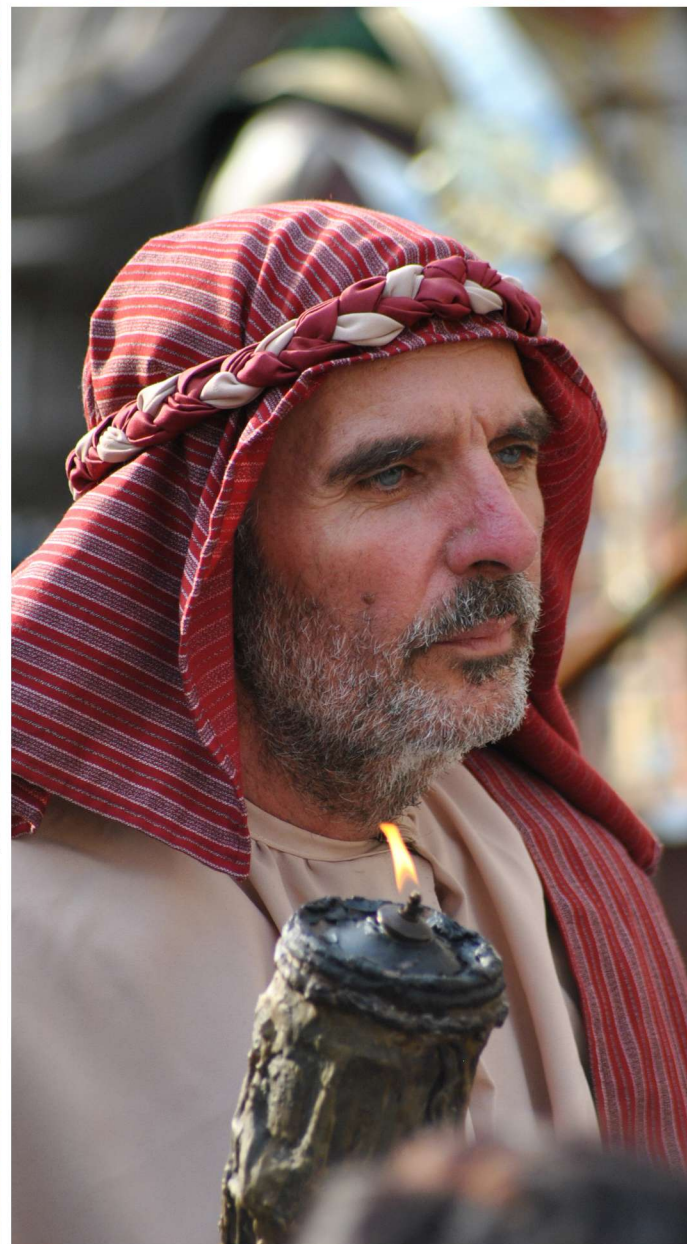
Ingredients

- 250g almonds
- 250g sugar
- 240g plain flour
- 2 egg whites
- Some blossom water
- Some water
- grated rind of orange
- Some cloves

Method

1. Toast or roast the almonds for a while and make sure that they do not get burnt because the taste will become sour. Once it turns golden..
2. Leave it to cool down and then crush them well.
3. In a bowl sieve the flour. Add the almonds, grated rind of orange, sugar, blossom water and the egg whites.
4. Mix all the ingredients until the mixture becomes like dough. If needed be add more water so that it solidifies. You have to be careful when you add the water so that it doesn't become too soft and neither too solid.
5. Knead well.
6. Water your hands and take pieces of this mixture and roll them in balls. Flatten each piece and elongate and fatten it so that its form is like a sausage.
7. Cover a dish with a baking sheet and put the Kwarezimal on top.
8. Before putting them in the oven, set them aside for a few minutes. Then with a knife put lines on top of each piece to form a pattern.
9. Heat at a medium temperature for 20 to 25 minutes.
10. Check that they don't over bake. Some people tend to take out the Kwarezimal when it is too solid. This is wrong as it should be taken out when it is still soft in order so that later on it can be eaten.





Easter Processions in Qormi





Throughout Lent and Holy Week many different processions take place along the streets of various Maltese towns and villages, as with any religious feast on the island. One week before Good Friday, a procession called “id-Duluri” is held in practically every town and village in Malta and Gozo. This very same procession sees thousands of people from all walks of life walking in prayer behind the statue of our Lady of Sorrows (id-Duluri). Some of the faithful very often women walk barefooted behind the statue as a sign of sacrifice or thanksgiving for the fulfillment of vows made to Our Lady.

The Good Friday procession is probably the most established and well-known. It features statues depicting Christ's passion being carried through the streets along with people dressed up as central characters like Pontius Pilate. It also features fragments of many other biblical stories. This procession is organised in many different towns like Birgu, Bormla, Ghaxaq, Luqa, Mosta, Naxxar, Paola, Qormi, Rabat, Senglea, Valletta, Żebbug and Żejtun. In few towns there is also an Easter Sunday procession where the statue of the Risen Christ is displayed.



QAGHQA TAL-APPOSTLI



Ingredients

500gr plain flour
100gr margarine
4 teaspoons yeast
100gr sugar
The grated rind of orange
The grated rind of lemon
2 tablespoons caraway
Quarter teaspoon cloves
Quarter teaspoon of cinnamon
Citrus 50gr · kunfettura
Spoon · blossom water
Spoon · anisett
275ml lukewarm water
4 tablespoons sesame
nut 50gr

Method

1. Sift the flour and margarine. Add the yeast, sugar, the orange peel and lemon, the sweetness, the cloves, the cinnamon and kunfettura. Mix everything well together.
2. Add blossom water, the anisette and warm water and make dough.
3. Divide the dough in two. Use each part to make a Qaghqa.
4. Wrap in sesame. Heat the oven and cook for about 30 -35 minutes.

Qaqocc mimli - Filled Artichokes

Ingredients

- Maltese loaf crumbled (better if a bit stale)
- 4 anchovy fillets, chopped
- tuna chunks in oil
- 6 cloves of garlic, minced
- lots of fresh parsley finely chopped
- capers and olives
- Sea salt & freshly ground pepper
- Olive oil

Method

Mix all these ingredients well.

Stuff the filling between the artichoke leaves, make sure you fill them really well, push the leaves with your fingers so you make space where stuff the filling.

Make sure that the mixture is not dry and add olive oil if necessary out in a pot with cold water at the bottom and bring to the boil, cover the pot for about 30 minutes.

The artichokes will be ready once its easy to pull out one of the leaves.

Once ready drizzle some more olive oil on the artichokes and serve immediately.

Make sure you have lots of fresh Maltese bread.



Qassatat ta' l-Ghid

Ingredients

For pastry:

Half kilo flour

Packet of margarine or a little less

Half teaspoon salt

Teaspoon yeast

Some warm water

For filling:

8 goat cheese moist, grated

4 fresh goat cheese (best if they are bought 2 days before so they are a little dry)

3/4 eggs

Pepper

Currants for those who like - optional

Method

Sieve flour together with salt. Cut the margarine in cubes and knead with flour, till the mixture looks like breadcrumbs.

Melt the yeast in a glass with a little warm water, make a hole in the middle of the flour, pour the melted yeast and knead.

Keep adding warm water little by little till need be, cover and leave for two hours.

Crush the fresh cheese and mix it with all the ingredients. It is important that mixture does not become liquid, so it's better to pour eggs one by one, and use depending on the density of the mixture.

Cut pastry in sizeable portions, open with a lembuba (pleat/rolling pin), pour a spoonful of mixture on it and close the pastry.

Brush the egg yolk on the pastry and bake in very warm oven until golden.

Sfineg

In olden days, the Maltese ate a special kind of bread during Lent. This bread was known as "Sfineg", which were flat and circular loaves of bread. The "Sfineg" were made from flour and meal flour mixed together. Then the bread was coated with honey and fried in oil. Sometimes, Maltese women filled the "Sfineg" with spinach, salted anchovies and olives and rolled them into a kind of Swiss roll. The "Sfineg" were taken with a cup of tea or coffee while a member of the family read a passage from the Bible about Christ's Passion.

Sfineg are also known as anchovy zeppoli, and first started being prepared in Rabat more than half a century ago. It is a food item which was always very popular especially during Lent, when abstinence of meat was strictly observed. Nowadays, anchovy sfineg are available for sale from a number of small food outlets in Malta.

- 1 packet yeast
- 1 cup of water
- 1 1/2 cups all purpose flour
- Anchovy fillets (at your taste)
- Oil for frying
- Confectioner's sugar

Dissolve yeast in 1/2 C warm water with a pinch of sugar

Set aside for 10 minutes to proof

Stir remaining 1/2 C water in bowl, and beat in the flour forming a soft dough.

Mix the very small pieces of anchovies.

Knead the dough for about 10 minutes by hand or 5 minutes in a mixer with a dough hook.

Put the dough in greased bowl and turn to coat. Cover and let rise until doubled, about one to one and a half hours.

Heat about 2-3 inches of oil to 375 degrees

Break off golf ball-sized pieces of dough and fry until light golden brown

Drain on brown paper or paper towels, and dredge with confectioner's sugar

Eat warm & enjoy!





photo by Malta Dairy Products

Soppa tal-Armla

Widow's Soup

- 1 onion, diced
- 3 to 4 cloves garlic, crushed
- 2 potatoes, peeled and chopped
- 2 carrots, peeled and chopped
- 1 kohlrabi, peeled and chopped
- 1 cup broad beans
- 2 celery sticks, sliced
- 1 cup peas
- ½ or a small cauliflower cut into bite size pieces
- ½ cup chopped parsley, plus extra for garnish
- Freash Gbejniet (Maltese cheese), allow one per person
- Stock - enough to cover vegetables (chicken or vegetable)
- 1 ½ tbsp tomato paste
- Salt & pepper to taste

Sauté garlic, onion and parsley in the butter and olive oil until soft.

Add potato, carrot, kohlrabi, broad beans, celery, peas and cauliflower.

Pour in stock and tomato paste. Stir well and season to taste with salt and pepper.

Bring to the boil, cover and simmer for about 15 to 20 minutes, until the vegetables are just cooked.

Add gbejniet and press down lightly to submerge. Cover and cook for a couple of minutes to heat through.

Garnish with parsley and stir through.

Serve with one piece of gbejniet in each bowl.

There really is nothing like a hot pot of soup on those occasional chilly days in Lent when meat is eaten sparingly. The traditional Soppa tal-Armla, or Widow's Soup, is a simple, delicious soup made with fresh vegetables and frozen or dried soaked broad beans. The dish can be topped off with a soft gbejna cheeselet popped in the hot soup just before serving, leaving you with a beautiful molten soft cheese in the centre of your bowl.

This versatile and extremely healthy soup saw many Maltese families through difficult times, including World War I, when Malta was facing the constant threat of siege, leaving hundreds of people stuck in shelters for long periods of time. This dish has become a Lenten tradition owing to the Catholic restrictions of meat during the months of February through to April.

The good thing about this soup is that it's very easy to prepare and all of the ingredients are found at any grocer or local supermarket for a very inexpensive price. In fact, the name 'Widow's Soup' is traditionally called so because the ingredients are affordable even to the 'poor' widow. And although it is made up of relatively simple contents, the result is a delicious, traditional min course in itself. It is most definitely worth a try!



Laham Fuq Il-Fwar

Steamed Beef with Garlic

by Marco Buttigieg

- 4 thin slices rump or topside
- 4 tbsp minced fresh garlic
- 4 tbsp minced parsley
- 1 cup water or white wine

Layer the meat in a soup plate or a circular pie dish, add the above ingredients between the layers of meat and end with some of the mixture on top. Season and add a cup of water, cover with a suitable lid or foil and steam over soup or pan of simmering water for 2 hours. Serve with mash.

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Kannoli tač-čikkulata by Karen Mifsud



Zeppoli ta' San Guzepp by Ruben Overend



Zeppoli by Josette Borg



Gluten Free Figolli by Jacqui Farrugia



Figolli by Fiona Mamo



Figolli by Graziella Vella



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Figolli by Josette Buhagiar



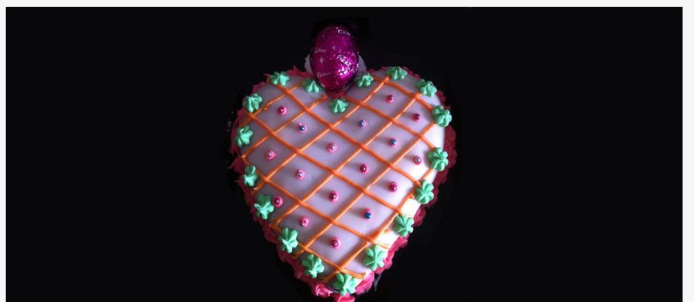
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Figolli by Monica Catania



Figolli by Grace Vassallo



Figolli by Anna Calleja-Sacco



Figolli by Mary Ashwood



Figolli by Roseanne Rickard

Krustini *by Pauline Mifsud*




500 plain flour - 250 sugar - 300 almonds(crushed) - 100ml milk - 4 tbs oil
1 lemon peel - Vanilla & almond essence

Mix all the ingredients together in a bowl.
Rest the loaf for 30 mins in the fridge.
Shape it into a log.
Heat the oven and cook for 20 mins (200 deg).

Remove the loaf from the oven and allow it to cool.
Cut the loaf into slices.
Bake again for another 20 mins (180 deg).

Biskutelli - Rusks (wholemeal flour)

by Jeff Tabone



500g flour (wholemeal) or Plain • 20g dry yeast
200 ml lukewarm water • Pinch of salt
55g butter • 20g crushed aniseed • 210g sugar
1 teaspoon sugar • some oil

Put the lukewarm water in a small bowl and stir one teaspoon of sugar and sprinkle on the dried yeast.

Leave in a warm place (room temperature) until frothy. It is very important that the water will not be too hot because it will kill the yeast and it will not rise. If it is too cold the yeast will take ages to rise.

In a large mixing bowl sieve the flour. Always remember to hold the sieve as high as possible, so that the flour gets a really good airing

Add the pinch of salt, butter and aniseed and rub the margarine into the flour using your fingertips only and being as light as possible, till the mixture resembles breadcrumbs. Make a well in the centre of the flour and the yeast mixture. Mix the dough using a wooden spoon to start with. Then mix by hand when less sticky. Add some more milk if required. Knead the dough until smooth and elastic for about eight minutes. You can use an electric mixer using the dough hooks.

Lightly oil the dough and wrap it in stretch and seal or place in a plastic bag and put back in bowl. Leave in a warm place for about one hour or until double in size.

Preheat the oven 2000C, Gas Mark 6.

Remove dough from bowl put on a lightly floured surface and knead it again back to its original size.

Shape the mixture into two or three oblong loaves and arrange on a greased baking sheet allow spaces in between for increase in size. Leave them to rise again in a warm place for about 45 minutes.

Bake the loaves for about 25 minutes or until they are golden, firm and sound hollow when tapped on the bottom. Remove the loaves from the oven and allow them to cool overnight.

The next day slice them and return the rusks to the oven at 1700C, Gas Mark 3 until they are golden and crisp. Leave them to cool on wire trays and store them in an airtight container.