

Wassail/Lambswool

A warming spiced drink at this time of year was wassail, made from the apples harvested in late autumn. In a version called 'lambswool', apple pulp was added to ale with spices, sometimes with eggs too, and drank communally as part of festive celebrations. Special wassail bowls were used to hold the drink which could be carried around the community to share, akin to Halloween trick or treating, in exchange for festive hospitality. This can be seen in this detail recorded by Henry Machin on Twelfth Night 1555:

'Into room came 12 wessells with maidens singing, with their wessells; and after came the chief wives singing with their wessells; and then gentlewoman had ordained a great table of banquet, desserts of spices and fruit, as marmalade, gingerbread, jelly, comfit, sugar plate and divers others'.

Poet Robert Herrick, in 1648 gives a rough recipe for the tippel:

*Next crown a bowl full
with gentle lambs wool:
Add sugar, nutmeg, and ginger,
with store of ale too;
And thus ye must do
to make the wassail a swinger.*

Some wassails were made with cider instead of ale, and you can adapt as you please with this adapted modern recipe:

Lambswool:

Ale or cider (3 bottles)
6 cooking apples, cored
Tsp ground nutmeg
Tsp ground ginger
150g sugar



Bake the apples, skin on, in the oven until they are soft and fluffy inside (about 30 mins in a low oven, 140oC or gas mark 1. Scoop out the pulp when they are cool enough to handle. In the meantime, while the apples are baking, heat the ale or cider in a large pan and add the spices and sugar. Mash the apple pulp up so they are no lumps and stir into the wassail mix in the pan. Heat through on a low heat for 30 mins and then serve. If you like you can include 6 eggs, whites and yolks beaten together, and added to the cider/ale mixture before heating. Keep stirring so you don't end up with scrambled eggs!

The typical cheer when drinking wassail was 'Wassail!' or 'Waes hael!', deriving from the Anglo-Saxon word for 'good health.' In response, recipients would shout 'drink hael!'.