

Paynemainne

This bread was the most expensive of the medieval period. Growing the flour is the main issue as it must be grown on the most fertile fields. The ground would be ploughed in the autumn and covered with horse and cow manure. A second ploughing in winter would work the manure into the ground. The land could then be ploughed again prior to sowing the finest wheat seed in early spring. Labour would be on hand to weed the fields and scare off birds to protect the crop.

After harvest the wheat would be dried in stukes and winnowed so that the grain can be sacked for storage. The miller would crack the grain prior to grinding so as to produce the finest flour possible. The flour would then be sifted through sackcloth, then muslin, then double muslin to be bagged for sale as best quality white flour (Paynemainne).

Prior to baking the flour would be sifted again through double muslin to improve the fine quality of the product. Only freshly started yeast would be used to avoid the sourdough taste and sugar would be added to start the mix.

Modern approximation recipe;

- 600g extra strong white flour
- 100g soft plain flour and a pinch of salt
- 6g dried yeast
- 10g sugar in 500ml of warm water
- 15g cool melted butter

Mix the dry ingredients and add the wet ingredients to make a stiff dough. Knead and prove for an hour or more. Knock back the dough and knead thoroughly, proving for an additional hour. Knock back and knead a third time to end up with a rounded loaf shape. Flour well and place in a rounded bowl to finish the last rise until the dough has doubled in size. Turn out carefully so as to retain the shape of the bowl and bake in a hot oven (220°C) for 25 minutes or more until done. Cool on a rack before eating fresh on the same day of baking.



The resulting loaf is the closest thing to modern white bread that was possible at this time in history. Only the wealthiest noble families could afford to produce bread in this way.