

The word "Microbakin" is written in a large, orange, cursive script font. It is positioned at the top of the image, partially overlapping the background scene which includes a kitchen counter with a scale and a container labeled "HAZEN MÖN".

# Microbakin

A collection of round, rustic breads with a golden-brown crust and visible scoring patterns, resting on a metal wire rack. They are the central focus of the upper half of the image.

**Baking Bread  
For Sale at Home**  
The Story of  
*Bethesdabakers*



**Mick Hartley** is a practical, down-to-earth baker of naturally leavened bread. Twenty years baking experience, including four years running Bethesdabakers, a home-based microbakery, supplying individual and commercial customers. This venture has produced a legacy of around one hundred sourdough breads for his baking repertoire. He is the originator of the Bethesdabakin' annual baking weekends starting in 2007, author and publisher of bread books, teacher of bread courses.



His first book, “Bethesdabasics – Sourdough Made Simple” ISBN 987-0-9570134-0-7 was published by The PArtisan Press in 2010 and has been widely acclaimed as the best available sourdough primer.

Books and courses available via his blog [www.thepartisanbaker.com](http://www.thepartisanbaker.com).

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*Microbakin'*

# Baking Bread For Sale at Home

The Story of

*Bethesdabakers*

Words & Photographs

Mick Hartley

aka the PArtisan Baker



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# Chapter 1: Introduction

This is the story of how I set up and developed Bethesdabakers, the microbakery that I ran from home between December 2007 and February 2012.

It is written both to entertain and to fire-up readers who might find it liberating to start a similar creative venture. It aims to show not only the aspects that worked but also the setbacks along the rocky road to developing a dynamic bakery with the aim of smoothing your way to establishing a successful small business.

Sidestepping a political and economic analysis of the situation, there are an awful lot of people in modern society who feel they have little control over their lives. There is also considerable concern about the industrialisation of food production and marketing. An increasing number of people are seeking to counter this, in their own personal way, through developing small scale and often part time businesses for their own creative satisfaction, to supplement their incomes and to link into their local communities.

My personal belief is that people have most chance of achieving satisfaction in life through tapping into that little bit of creativity we all seem to have in us. For people with limited means and heavy commitments changing their lives to achieve this is certainly not easy. It can be done but it requires effort and a lot of uncertainty.

I can't really lay claim any great personal battle over hardship. I'm just a bloody-minded person with a really good partner and no other responsibilities. Now in my mid sixties my life could be viewed as a total mess. Left school at 18 without qualifications, did the best part of ten years on building sites, became a probation officer when I was about 30. Within less than ten years of working for probation and local authorities was fairly wrecked by the politics of it all. Reinvented myself as a self-employed consultant in work with young offenders. Managed to stagger through twenty odd years of self-employment before setting up the microbakery at the age of 60.

In material terms I am reduced to the basic State Pension, a minute occupational pension, a now mortgage-free terraced house plus what I can earn from baking bread. But apart from the small matter of having minimal assets, for a substantial part of my life I have at least been able to avoid doing what I didn't want to do, and, sometimes, to actually do the things I really wanted to.

Never having had large reserves of cash, changing direction in life has always seemed problematic if not impossible. For us holidays – almost always in France - have represented periods of sanity when the brain can be allowed to unravel and become receptive to the thoughts floating round in the ether, a bit like making a starter really – being open to all those wild yeasts and bacteria that might take up residence and start to bubble, ferment and develop. Allowing the ideas to materialise and take shape has always been called The

Grand Plan. It requires the purchase of one of those French notepads with the little squares made by Rhodia, preferably A4, a walk down the beach in hot sunshine to a restaurant for a long lunch and, on the way back, a stop at a beach-side café where the business takes place during the consumption of a bottle of the local Bordeaux Rosé (well, it doesn't have to be rosé but that always seems to work in the heat). "The business" might be no more than a wish-list but it's a sort of ritual that generates change.

One year it allowed me to get out of London to work with a friend in North Wales during which time we bought the house we couldn't afford in the big city even though there didn't seem to be any prospect of being able to live in it. A few years later it let me take a sabbatical from the madness of local authorities at the end of which I decided to freelance rather than return to the insanity, which in turn created the way we could move from London to Wales.

Putting aside my personal experience we have had a lot of interest from people often in their 50s, maybe whose levels of responsibility are reducing (mortgages paid, children through college) who have the opportunity to cut down their working hours and see the idea of the microbakery as being a way of doing something creative and supplementing their income.

A few words about bread and then let's also sidestep the politics of baking. The "product" turned out by industrial plants and that fluffy stuff sold by supermarkets, small chains and individual bakers – some of it designed to look like bread – is Bread Substitute. The difference between bread substitute and bread is greater than that of margarine and butter. So let's stop talking about Real Bread and Artisan Bread (another meaningless expression) and repossess the proper name.

For me Bread means bread made by long natural fermentation using additive free ingredients. I know millers add unspecified ingredients to flour but my aim is to use products that are as pure as possible. I also use organic ingredients where I can, not necessarily because they are better but because they are kinder to the environment – when you think of the world acreage of wheat, that's a rather large consideration. Some people use commercial yeast. That's their choice; I don't see the point. However, this book describes a microbakery set up for sourdough with the bulk of doughs being mixed the evening before the bakeday for overnight refrigerated fermentation. If you use commercial yeast you will have to design your own bake schedule.

This is important because in my experience, your organising skills and administrative systems, your ability to communicate with and provide variety for your customers, not to mention your resilience, will be more crucial to your success than your ability to bake. That may sound strange to the keen amateur baker but your objectives will change. The amateur baker puts time, effort, study, emotion into producing a single, perfect exhibition loaf. When you are supplying customers your objective is to produce an order consisting of several batches of bread from different doughs, in saleable condition, in the most efficient and time-effective way. Of course you still want all your loaves to be perfect, but if you have a single oven and time restraints, you can't wait

until a particular dough is exactly proved - when one batch comes out of the oven, the next batch goes in. It also means you need a repertoire of breads that are similar in production method but offer the customer variety. If you can turn out a competent loaf you will find your skills develop as demand and your work-load increase. I once calculated that in the first few months of baking for sale, I produced more bread than I had baked in the previous fifteen years of amateur baking.

So you've decided you want to be a baker on at least a part-time basis. At the time I was setting up I knew of at least three other people who had taken a similar decision but who were approaching their objective from different angles; my friend Rick Coldman in South Wales, Andrew Auld at The Loaf, Crich in Derbyshire and Dan McTiernan at Handmade Bakery in Marsden West Yorkshire. So there are a number of models you might want to check out before deciding your own route.

Rick ([www.mairsbakehouse.co.uk](http://www.mairsbakehouse.co.uk)) is the only one I know well and his approach is diametrically opposite to mine. Rick is nothing if not whole-hearted. He lives on a smallholding near Carmarthen about a mile from the nearest road down a rutted track. No mains services – generates his own electricity by wind turbine. His prime consideration was his young daughter, Mair, who needed 24 hour care. By building a bakery onto the house he and his partner Maggie could share the care responsibilities day and night. A tough proposition, but it didn't end there. Rick, who had been studying masonry ovens for years, built a 7'x5' Alan Scott wood-burning oven into the bakery. This obviously requires 100% commitment - financial, physical and in terms of time. Aside from the obvious considerations he needs a day per week just to split wood. He also chose to go organic which throws up another set of obstacles that have to be overcome.

My approach is to take on as little risk and commitment as possible, in fact Rick once said, "Anyone could do what you do, Mick." It was actually intended as a compliment – he meant I had developed a method of bread production that anyone could adopt in their own home with minimal specialist equipment and funding. This suck-it-and-see approach suits my personality and has a number of advantages if you want less than the 100% commitment of establishing a full time Proper Business. You could start tomorrow by buying a few extra bags of flour and selling bread to your friends. No bank manager, no planning applications, no business premises, business rates, business refuse collections. Simple. But I'm assuming you want to take it further than that and to develop a business which will bring in a significant income. This is what the book is intended to help you to do.

After this **Introduction**, the book has four more chapters: **Progress**, a history of how I arrived at the decision to bake for profit from home; **Microbakery**, an account of how the bakery operated, the equipment that had to be bought, the systems I developed to organise the work; **The Actuality**, a two day bake in action; **Customers & Communities**, the realities of working with customers and unforeseen satisfactions; lastly **Final Thoughts**, some matters you should consider before starting together with some useful addresses.

## Chapter 2: Progress

A little background – just so you know where I’m coming from. I have always been into cooking but I didn’t start baking until 1992 when I was 45. How do I know this?

Well, you know how it is. Middle-aged man, smoker, *slightly* overweight walks into the doctor’s surgery and they have some sort of sensor that triggers an alarm alerting the staff to the number of targets they can achieve with just this one patient. The doors lock automatically and, never mind what you went in for in the first place, you don’t get out until you’ve been weighed, had an ECG, had your blood pressure tested, pissed in a bottle, had blood samples taken, been issued with a diet sheet. I staggered out blinking into the light having agreed to give up smoking in return for not being made to attend the Well Person Clinic *for the time being*.

There is a long forgotten connection – the usual joke is about needing to do something with your hands (doing some kneading with your hands?) – but when I gave up smoking I took up baking. So if I ever forget when I started baking I ask my doctor when I gave up smoking.

I started with a recipe from the back of a Delia Smith book. After the initial blast of excitement at discovering (1) bread was easy to make, and, (2) right from the start it was better than you could buy in the shops, I had a desire to move on to more *sophisticated* recipes. I didn’t go as far as connecting what I was doing with the fantastic stuff displayed in some French boulangeries – that was beyond what mere mortals could achieve – but I did start to look for more *authentic* methods.

The first baking book I bought was “The Bread Book” by Martha Rose Shulman. This is a pretty wide ranging work and it was here that I first came across the magic and mysterious word *sourdough*. But straightaway I was confused. She described a bread that was made using a starter of natural yeast, explained how to make a starter, then gave a recipe for Pain au Levain which included commercial yeast. I thought to myself, this cannot be right. If this is a method used before the development of bakers yeast, how come it’s now got yeast in? The name is said to come from the prospectors in the Alaskan gold rush who were known as “sourdoughs” because they carried their starters strapped to their stomachs to keep it warm and drank the hooch it produced instead of booze. I might just believe that but I don’t believe they carried little sachets of instant yeast in their back pockets as well.

Later I discovered the Joe Ortiz book, “The Village Baker”. Joe Ortiz and his wife ran a bakery in California and had travelled around Europe visiting bakers and collecting their methods which he presents in his book together with a selection of American recipes. He describes step-by-step the French method for making pain au levain and I thought, at last we are getting somewhere. But I had the most terrible trouble getting sourdoughs to work to the extent that at one point I gave up altogether and went back to yeasted.



In late 1999 I thought I'd have another bash and made the starter I've been using ever since – with one difference. The Joe Ortiz starter is a very firm one and this is how the 1999 version started out. But it still left me struggling to produce the bread I wanted. Then I got my hands on a copy of "The Bread Builders" by Daniel Wing & the great Australian oven builder, Alan Scott. All bakers have their inspirational bread book and this is mine. It came along at just the right time. Ironically I bought it mainly for the information it contained about brick ovens but the thing that completely changed my bread making was Dan Wing's description of his method and routine.

Instead of having a stiff starter à la Joe Ortiz, Dan Wing's starter is at 100% hydration – equal weights of flour and water – so it's wet enough to pour and, being a liquid, you can see the bubbles in it and consequently how active it is. He also describes exactly how he maintains and refreshes his starter. As soon as I increased the hydration of my starter my bread was transformed.

It's odd but back then, even if you found a sourdough recipe, there was no information about how to maintain the starter, almost as if it was a professional secret. Occasionally something vague was said about keeping some back for the next bake but that's as far as it went. Now, of course, you'd just go out and buy a copy of my first book, *Bethesdabasics – Sourdough Made Simple*, and your problems would be over. A number of experienced bakers have said to me that they wished the book had been around when they had first started – it would have made their lives a lot easier.

Anyway, by this stage I knew inside that bread making was a significant part of me. I wanted to "take it further" but I didn't know what this meant. What I think I meant was that I wanted to bake bread professionally but had no idea about how to achieve this without large scale upheaval and serious financial investment. Having recently come very close to bankruptcy and losing our one asset, the house, there was no way we were going to take any further financial risks. Consequently it took seven or eight years and a lot of false starts before I got Bethesdabakers up and running. Hopefully this book can help short-circuit the process for you.

You have to be hard-headed to turn your dreams into reality. Fantasies are elusive and have to be pinned down. Most people are constrained by commitments and finances – you have to decide what is possible in your own circumstances.

For most would-be serious bakers there is the dangerous matter of the masonry oven. Sue bought me a weekend course with Andrew Whitley at Village Bakery, Melmerby in Cumbria on 05 November 2000. When you've baked in that monster wood-burning oven it's easy to think nothing else will do.

I discovered Paul Merry about this time through Alan Scott. Alan Scott was an Australian living in America who became *the* authority on masonry oven building and sold his oven plans through his company, Ovenscrafters. Even though this was how he made his living, he was incredibly generous with his

time. I was convinced I could work a brick oven into our little house and emailed him the measurement of the chimney breast in the living room (what was I thinking about?). Not only did he reply, he faxed me, free of charge, the plans of an oven he thought would just about fit. At the same time he put me in touch with fellow Australian, Paul Merry, teacher and oven builder, who lived in the UK.

Paul had been working with Andrew Whitley at Village Bakery – there had been some big bust-up between the two which meant that he was still living in Cumbria but was just starting to run his own courses down at Cann Mills in Dorset – quite a long commute. Paul says he not only built his own bakery in Australia, he made the mud bricks that the bakery was built from. I've never been quite that back to basics.

Sue bought me a day's consultancy with Paul. It's very useful having a partner like Sue. Must have been the easiest day's work he ever did. He was on his way from north to south so he only had to detour west into Wales. Discussed oven possibilities, had lunch cooked for him, had a little walk in the afternoon, got taken out to dinner, had his hotel paid for. I'm not complaining, it was a very pleasant day. Fortunately I did not proceed with a masonry oven which would have been totally wrong for me. My advice to you would be, unless you see a wood burning oven as being essential to your baking plans, forget it – it's hard enough getting up at 5.00 a.m., turning on an electric oven and working a 15 hour day. If you can't live without one take advice as widely as possible from people who bake professionally in masonry ovens, not just from people who sell them or who bake in them for pleasure.

My next big idea was find a way of setting up a commercial bakery where I would be protected from financial risk. My background is work with local authorities and probation. I was just coming to the end of a contract setting up a project for young offenders and I saw my chances of getting a bakery together diminishing as I got older. Employment projects for offenders had returned to the political agenda once again so I spoke to a trusted contact in the probation service who was wholly enthusiastic. Spent a lot of time and cash putting together a formal proposal which included a funding application for Paul Merry to undertake a feasibility study (for which I had to put up matched funding). Probation said we really needed a partner organisation – an existing charity eligible to apply for funding and administer the project – and suggested the local branch of a major national voluntary organisation. I was seriously happy. I knew and had worked with the individuals in both organisations, the funding was assured, none of our personal assets were at risk, what could possibly go wrong?

This is likely to be a popular way for people without resources to try to set up a bakery. There are bakeries in prisons and community projects for people with learning disabilities and employment problems. People are attracted to the idea of combining their interest in baking with doing good in the community. My advice is to be very aware of the risks.

In my case, it was very clear from the outset that it was my project; I came forward with the original idea, put together the proposal and wrote the funding application. The plan was for it to be eventually overseen by a committee of local people and for the scheme to develop into a broader community project linked to baking and food education. Probation's job was to provide support (and eventually some of the employees); the voluntary organisation's role was to act as a conduit for funding and to undertake administrative tasks.

Nothing was straightforward. The funding application went in early in 2005 with a promised turn round of three weeks. It wasn't successful until September **2006** with agreed funding for only **four months**.

I won't bore you with the details but I wasted the best part of two years of my life planning the project, writing smaller subsidiary funding applications, finding premises, getting building work organised, buying equipment, etc.

Relations between the voluntary organisation manager and myself deteriorated to an extent that the situation had become intolerable for both sides. What I couldn't understand was how they could get rid of me – I was the only one who knew how to run the project – where else could they find someone who knew about work with offenders and sourdough bread?

Their solution was blindingly simple. It should have been obvious to me at the start what "administering the project" meant. It meant that the voluntary organisation owned the project. I wrote the funding application but it was submitted in their name, the lease to the premises was in their name, they owned the equipment and everything else to do with the project. Even the trainees were employed by the voluntary organisation. I was the only one who wasn't at the party.

Without any fuss they just side-lined me. As soon as they received the funding they stopped inviting me to planning meetings, they excluded me from the selection process for trainees because that was a matter for the employing organisation, I wasn't allowed to see trainees' files because they were confidential. They had other employment projects and a manager who oversaw them. Her role was extended to cover all of the non-bakery aspects of the project. So they produced individual plans for the trainees to cover sessions on presentation skills and interview techniques in which I had no involvement. The bakery was not yet ready and my only role was to teach the trainees how to bake.

I had no power to do anything but to resign. I was being paid quite a reasonable Project Manager rate and it occurred to me that they could make considerable savings by hiring someone with a catering background simply to run baking sessions. They didn't even do that. They took two of the trainees that I had been teaching, even though their experience was minimal (as was their employment background otherwise they wouldn't have been in the project), appointed them as supervisors at minimum wage, got rid of the other trainees and brought in a fresh intake to be taught by the new "supervisors".

It was without doubt the worst period of my working life but I've moved on. So what objective lessons can we draw from this episode that might be of use to you? Don't just think, Mick was unlucky in his choice of partners, or used bad judgement. I have heard of at least two similar incidents since my experience including one where a guy who had a craft business set up a Trust so that he could apply for funding to teach other people. He couldn't be a member of the Board because he wanted to be employed by the Trust. Once it was formed they sacked him by which time the Trust owned the business and he lost his livelihood.

So, firstly, when everything seems finally to have fallen into place and you think to yourself, "what could possibly go wrong?" and Steve Earle's "Some Dreams" starts playing in your head, do some very serious thinking. I wouldn't advise anyone to get involved in a scheme where another organisation had control of the project but if that's a route you are determined to go down you need written agreements including a clause that says you get paid for an agreed period (three months?) if things don't work out.

I would go further and say beware of projects that require funding to operate. You can't rely on funding – it dries up, the rules change, you receive funding but it's less than you applied for and imposes constraints that the project can't bear. You want to make bread not be a fund raiser.

I had a piece of luck in the aftermath of this very bad experience. At the noble age of 60 I became eligible to receive a small occupational pension which came with an equally small lump sum – enough to make life a little more flexible for a few months but an amount that was quite easy for me to spend. We decided to go to France for several weeks to do a lot of writing but also have a good time – wash away the crap we had just been through. But before we went I set in motion my next attempt to become a baker.

A friend put us in touch with a deli owner who had an ambition to have her shop window filled with a display of breads such as might be seen at either end of the Rue Monge. She also had spare kitchen space which she was very keen to rent to me and the price was quite reasonable.

The lurking danger is that you try to fit your plans into what is available – you convince yourself of what you want to believe. In theory, if you have to work in commercial premises, then rented kitchen space could be a good option. And the deli would have provided a ready-made customer base and was in a more up-market area than Bethesda. But the first problem I pushed to one side was the fact that I don't drive and the best journey times there (and back) would have been an hour each way – early and late would have been much longer.

*The converse problem is you have to be able to recognise the essential elements of your dreams. For me the masonry oven could go – my fundamental objective was making good quality sourdough in quantity for sale. A couple of eminent bakers advised me to compromise on this and to bake mostly yeasted because I wouldn't be able to sustain a sourdough regime as a lone baker. I hung on to my dream. I do get some things right.*

Anyway, we came to an agreement and off we went to France, pausing only to make a much more obvious mistake – allowing barefaced theft. A couple of guys ran a second-hand catering equipment company in the Manchester area. We had used them before and, although they were a little erratic and operated in their own time zone, they had come up with the goods. They came down and took a look at the deli kitchen, advised on what equipment would fit in the space and walked off with a down payment of £2000 in cash.

I don't need to offer you advice on this – it was just a bloody stupid thing to do. The only way we saw the money again was in the form of a full page advertisement on the front of the British Baker announcing the launch of their new deck-oven company. All I can say is that I find straight theft more morally acceptable than my earlier treatment at the hands of the “caring services”.

Came back from France and started work on the kitchen space in the deli which included forking out for some expensive electrical work. Funny how rapidly things can start to disintegrate. The kitchen area was in the basement of the deli and the deal was that my oven would go in the existing kitchen and my mixer, racking, etc would be in an adjacent cellar-like room that had originally been the coal-hole underneath the pavement when the Victorian premises had been built. Since those days it had been patched up and whitewashed and lined with wooden shelving now pretty much in poor repair.

Sorting out the details of agreements is not easy and deficiencies can sometime only become apparent when things start to go wrong. So let's say the deal was £100 per month for kitchen space plus a separately metered fuel supply. If you are renting from someone then the premises should be fit for purpose. OK, it was a good deal and I didn't mind paying to have my own power supply put in, together with new lighting and an extractor fan in my little dungeon of a bakery, or to doing an amount of work to put my working space in order.

I had to get the Environmental Health Inspector in to approve what I was doing. She was basically fine but of course cast her eye around the whole of the kitchen area and concluded the floor surface needed renewing. The deli owner decided to put down good quality non-slip flooring but she also wanted me to pay half the cost, a not insubstantial amount. Discussions followed, my line being the “fit-for-purpose” argument, plus I wouldn't be using half the floor space, plus she would be the ultimate beneficiary.

The situation was tense and still unresolved. The condition of the walls in the little cellar hadn't seemed too bad until I started to remove the old shelving. The wooden wedges they were attached to were wet and rotten, and large patches of the render were damp and disintegrating. I'm beginning to think a total re-rendering job rather than a coat of paint. When I pointed out the state of the walls to the owner she said, “Oh, yes. That must be from the flood last year. The whole place was four feet deep in water.”

I just walked away from the money that had gone into the electrics and was back to square one.



## Chapter 3: The Microbakery

Why hadn't I thought of it before? After all the years of trying to fit in with other people's expectations, having plans hijacked, being let down and having money stolen, the obvious place to set up a small bakery is – at home. Maybe I had thought of it but simply dismissed the idea as being hopelessly impractical. The place you can be your own boss without interference and that doesn't involve additional overheads is your own house.

I admit our house is not one you would immediately choose if you were setting up a bakery. Two up, two down terraced house, no garage, no sheds, no storage, shared access. On top of which neither of us drive so, no transport - not that you can blame the house for that.

**The house** is an old quarryman's cottage with two foot thick stone walls and backs directly onto the narrow road. From the road (we're going clockwise), through the gate, path along the gable, turn the corner to the front of the house, front door in the middle. The door to the kitchen is immediately inside and to the right of the front door, except the kitchen entrance is doorless – in such a small place it seemed superfluous. As a matter of interest, all the five internal doorways are different heights and all less high than many of our visitors. So they successfully duck their heads for the first one only to concuss themselves on the second or, if they're really observant, the third.

The kitchen is small (everything is small) and cluttered, about fourteen feet by seven. Never mind running a bakery, we usually have to clear a space to make beans on toast

The short wall immediately inside the kitchen doorway (we're going anti-clockwise now) is mainly taken up by a window onto the garden. Because the doorway is pretty much in the corner, little use can be made of the space in front of the window (until my subsequent, Absolutely Brilliant, oven idea – explained later.)

The longer gable wall is taken up with a work surface and sink unit above which there are long open shelves stacked with plates, bowls, cups, saucers, pestles and mortars, glasses, bottles in various states of depletion, cocktail shakers, cookery books – all perfect for gathering dust (well, no dust on the bottles – but then they represent a glass hazard). In short, an Environmental Health Officer's nightmare.

The work surface returns along the short wall at the back of the house under the window onto the road, but by the time you deduct the space taken by the gas hob there's little room to do anything more than park a kettle.

Coming back along the longer internal wall there is a tall kitchen unit which houses a domestic oven and a lovely old court cupboard inherited from Sue's mum. No scope for development here.



The kitchen with the clutter of an average non-baking day. Garden window; to the right the kitchen door; to the left the gable wall



Gable wall leading to the back window onto the road



Back window – domestic oven on left

The plan was that a part-time bakery would operate in the house not that we would turn the house into a bakery – that was the idea – so the two larger rooms, the living room and, above it, the bedroom were not to be part of the equation. The bedroom traditionally has, in any case, always been Sue's territory during the day where she has her desk and computer.

Returning to the hall, up the stairs (of which more shall be said), to the right, the smaller of the original bedrooms has had the back third appropriated and turned into a bathroom, and so is even more minute than the kitchen. Even so, given the lack of garage, sheds, etc., it has to deal with all our storage needs, plus act as an office with my desk, computer and other paraphernalia (i.e. junk).

I go further, if you were choosing a house in which to run a bakery, you'd walk right past this one.

**Making a Start:** I decided that the business had to be legit. Having been self employed for the best part of a quarter of a century the taxman would want some sort of explanation and anyway I'm a coward. So with a great deal of misgiving I contacted the Environmental Health Officer. The one point in my favour was that I had a basic Food Hygiene Certificate which was the only positive thing to come out my two year association with the "caring services".

The Environmental Health Officer arranged to visit and I prepared to have a wholly negative experience. Wrong again. She looked for all the positives – after all, she pointed out, the kitchen floor was tiled as were much of the walls. The remaining walls were emulsioned and so could be washed down. She was happy for the smaller of the two sinks in the double unit to be used for hand washing. She pointed out the odd risk like the glasses on the shelf above the work surface, asked questions about how we intended to operate, pointed out a few requirements – she was thorough but helpful. I needed a drink.

**Ethos:** I was fairly determined to do things on my own terms. This meant I was not going to use the conventional business model of going to a consultant, doing market research, writing a business plan, talking to the bank manager, arranging an overdraft, going on a how-to-set-up-a-business-for-people-of-the-third-age course, researching the range of funding available to finance 40% of the costs of any of the above, and I certainly wasn't going to go as far as applying for a grant. Previous experience had taught us that most of the "experts" you have to explain yourselves to have little or no business experience themselves or no understanding of the bizarre project you are asking them to consider. The time and effort you put into meeting the criteria and filling in applications for grants is in inverse proportion to the amount of funding you receive. Plus you can't afford the 60% matched funding you have to come up with yourself.

Anyway, baking is the ideal business to start off in a small way without any outlay other than a few extra bags of flour. You already have a group of friends who have had the occasional loaf from you over the years. When they

know you want to begin small scale production they will be insisting you start charging for bread – it will be you who has to overcome the embarrassment of taking the money.

The other thing I wasn't prepared to compromise on was the type and quality of the bread. Other bakers had urged me not to make exclusively sourdough, one, because of the hours involved and, two, because they said most people won't buy it – "it's not what they're used to". Sorry, I'm not going back to yeasted bread. Some people won't buy my bread because it's "fancy", comparatively expensive, or "not what they're used to" but that would still be the case if I was making hand-crafted yeasted bread. I've never yet had anyone say they didn't like the taste. I don't make an issue of the fact that it is sourdough; I prefer to put the emphasis on quality and people seem happy with that.

But then I didn't set out to keep everyone happy.

With naturally leavened bread, the other advantage of working from home is the lack of travelling. The hours may be long but you only have to roll out of bed and you're at work. Roll the other way and you're back in bed.

I considered going organic. But, apart from the fact you have to pay, every individual recipe has to be registered and precise records have to be kept of everything produced. You can't change an ingredient without notifying the authorities. If you run out of one brand of organic flour you can't use another without registering it.

I use as many organic ingredients as possible and rely on labelling to let customers know what is and what isn't organic. Again customers see this as a sensible approach. Only once has a potential commercial customer said he would only take our bread if it was certified organic. I don't think he would have anyway – he hasn't paid us yet for a loaf he had several years ago. (Interestingly enough, this organisation recently came back to us in search of a bread supply – they seemed to be saying my bread is preferable to Tesco's - ooooooooooh!)

I try to ensure that all my stock – flours, salt, seeds, grains, oils, olives - is organic. Produce bought weekly for specials might not be. Clear labelling is the answer.

The other principles I set out with were:

- No deliveries - the buyer collects
- Not to allow demand to dictate output – (to work within my own comfort-zone and capacity)
- Only to supply to the people I'm happy selling to and who are able to stick to the rules about orders and collection

On the last point I have learned to be marginally tolerant – occasionally assisted by Sue's diplomacy.

**First Bake:** So on 07 December 2007 at the age of 60 I started what could be the world's smallest bakery, baking just one day a week. I baked four small Pains de Campagne and four small Mick's Classic Sourdough and sold six of them to three customers grossing £7.20. Two months later on 07 February I sold the equivalent of 84 small loaves to 15 customers. By the end of that month the only way to meet demand was to introduce a second bake day.

That first week I mixed nearly 4 kilos of dough. Exactly a year later, in one baking day I mixed nearly 60 kilos – and everything was sold because it was pre-ordered.



This is how the bakery used to look in the early weeks. Customers knew they could come from 6.00 p.m. on Friday. They selected what they wanted from the display and off they went.

**Equipment:** Shortly before we started I bought a Kenwood Major mixer at a very good price. The best thing I can say about it is it makes great frozen margaritas because the blades of the blender attachment can cope with ice cubes. Much later I bought a mill attachment which is excellent for making coarse rye meal and, at its widest setting, for mangling rye grain for soakers. As a bread dough mixer it's a waste of time. I have, in any case, concluded that unless you have physical problems with kneading a mixer is totally unnecessary for the home baker – anything around 4 kilos or less I mix by hand and if you're only making one 800g loaf you're hardly going to raise a sweat using the short knead method.

I more or less started with my home baking kit using our domestic oven. Friday was bake day. Everything on the work surface in the kitchen had to come out and get stacked in the living room. The flour at that stage was still coming from Tesco in 1.5k bags and so was not too hard to store up in the work room on an existing bay of deep wooden shelves cleared for the purpose. Apart from stripping off at least six layers of bizarre wall paper (some of which extended behind the skirting boards), I've managed to avoid decorating the work room in the 25 years we've lived in the house. As a token gesture to Environmental Health I put down a four foot strip of cushion flooring under the shelving and painted the corresponding strip of wall and ceiling behind, above and beside it.

Some people are great eBay watchers. They love a bargain, have the transport to collect and are happiest spending months restoring condemned



pieces of equipment thought to be beyond repair. I ain't like that. I bought all the major items of gear, new, from one of the big internet catering equipment companies, free overnight delivery and a one year guarantee. I did wait until I needed them and when they were at a good price.

On this basis my first major equipment purchase was a spiral mixer on special offer – about £500 including VAT – which I bought in that first December probably before I needed it but because the price was right.

In it's favour?

- It's single phase (runs off a 13 amp plug) and fits under the work surface. Having concluded a tumble drier was a waste of time some while back, we even had a suitable space available – an opportunity not to be missed in this kitchen.
- It'll handle up to something like 17k so it's perfectly adequate for any single doughs I might be mixing.

Drawbacks?

- It has a fixed bowl so cleaning is a bugger especially at the end of a long baking day.
- It has a flat bottom so you have to watch for dry spots in the dough. The best method I have found is to add the water first, then the flour and salt, then the starter. I scrape the sides down and run my hands underneath before declaring the dough mixed.
- It doesn't mix dough weights under 4K very well.



Overall it was a pretty good buy.

I'd been going for nearly four months before I bought the second major item of equipment, a commercial oven. Up until then I was just using our domestic oven which limited me to baking four large loaves an hour. You can still turn out a lot of bread in a day like that, but what's the point in struggling? There were two major problems, (1) the usual – money, and, (2) where the hell to site a second oven in that kitchen? I thought and thought and gave myself headaches thinking until the solution came to me. It wouldn't have worked in a

modern house but, with two foot thick stone walls it was possible to put a deep shelf half way up the reveals of the window at the front of the house. We even had a spare length of kitchen work surface knocking about. And being high up and recessed into the window, it made best possible use of that dead space just inside the kitchen doorway.

I did a lot of research into ovens and concluded that Blue Seal had the solution. I even got in a rather bemused rep from a local catering equipment company. He was a chef who'd always worked in commercial kitchens with stainless steel walls and massive extract systems. He wasn't even sure it would be safe in a domestic environment (a quick phone call to Blue Seal after he had gone sorted that one out).

He would have sold me one for the knock-down rate of about £1,500 plus Vat. My internet company had them on offer for £1,000 including Vat. I went with the internet.

I am really happy with this oven. Again, it is single phase so you just plug the thing in. The fan is permanently on (unless the door is open) but it gives an even heat throughout the oven and it doesn't seem to produce that dryness that I find in the domestic oven. It can take six large loaves on two racks so, with the domestic oven in tandem, I can now knock out ten large loaves an hour. I can do twenty 200g baguettes at a time on four racks although the racks have to be rotated because of the amount of moisture produced. At one stage I was taking orders for Turkish Pide eighty at a time for a local café and with this oven it took just four bakes of twenty.



The method I decided on to make sourdough baking feasible is to mix as many doughs as possible the evening before the bakeday, to ferment them overnight in a fridge and to scale, shape, prove and bake them the following day. So three vital items of equipment that had to be bought early on were a fridge, plastic dough boxes and racking on which to stack baskets of proving dough.

The fridge is a whole story in itself. Bought a fridge on the internet from a large company covering all of Europe and linked to a major UK High Street electrical company – “Over 6,000,000 satisfied customers” - perfect size for the very limited space available in the work room and for the plastic dough boxes, good price, quickly delivered. After one week it stopped working. No problem with the manufacturer who issued a replacement number without argument. But the company with the 6,000,000 satisfied customers just couldn't get their act together to deliver. Fortunately it was winter because for several weeks I had to use it as an insulated box. You feel a little foolish buying bags of ice cubes to put in a fridge.

Thankfully back to my regular internet company for the racking and the dough boxes. Got a nice square tower for £80 (plus Vat & wheels). Problem is it came with four shelves and I needed six to maximise the number of proving baskets I can stack on it. I was fairly pissed off to discover you can't buy individual shelves and so had to dish out another £80 (plus Vat, minus wheels). BUT, with the leftover uprights and two spare shelves I discovered I could erect a mini-tower for cooling breads which fitted perfectly under the shelf bearing the oven.

I couldn't have set up this bakery without the invention of the wheel.





The only possible layout for the proving tower, the flour storage shelves and the fridge is as you see in the photo on the previous page. It's bad enough humping 25K sacks of flour up the narrow staircase (my elbows touch both sides), ducking and twisting through the lowest, narrowest doorway in the house. But it would be impossible to get them onto the shelves if I couldn't wheel the tower out of the way first.

To the right of the fridge is my desk and computer which is the most important piece of equipment in the bakery. The wall opposite is totally taken up by cupboards and shelving filled with essential belongings and there really is nowhere else for them to go. But I have to have somewhere to store all my other ingredients. Enter wheels. Between my desk and the be-shelved wall I have another narrower metal tower (for which additional shelves *can* be purchased separately) on which are stacked plastic boxes containing dry ingredients and all sorts of other bakery junk. There is just space for me to sit at the desk and I can wheel the tower out when I need to get to the shelves behind it.

I started out with the sort of ragbag of proving baskets, some good, some not so, that home bakers tend to accumulate over the years, supplementing them with some nasty (but very cheap) plastic ones. But I soon needed more and engaged in a Small Act of Revenge.



When I was setting up the employment project I ordered 100 bannetons from the Société Coopérative Agricole de Vannerie in the village of Villaines-les-Rochers near Tours. The cooperative was set up over 150 years ago and

dominates the whole village, employing more than 80 people. They grow the willow, turn it into cane and make pretty much anything that can be made out of wicker. This includes the finest bannetons you can buy. They don't come cheap – that little lot on my window sill cost £2,000 - £20 a piece (and that was before prices rocketed).

The outlay was justified because the intention was to give them some pretty hard wear turning out “artisan style” bread. But the knowledge walked out of the door with me when I left the project and they became pretty much redundant. They found it easier to make bog standard yeasted tin loaves and just a few in bannetons for that rustic look at farmers markets.

To be honest I found it pretty tough at first walking past that bakery every day and thinking of the hopes, dreams and effort I had put into it and the squandering of the project's potential. But by now I was pretty hardened to it and more interested in that pile of bannetons going to waste in the shop window. So I phoned up the project manager and asked her if she was interested in getting rid of them. Make me an offer, she said. I'd done my homework – with the exchange rate the way it was, the cheapest I could find them was a staggering £35 *each*. So I took a breath and said I'd go as high as £5 if I could take 60. Done, she said.

It was the fastest I ever paid an invoice and once the cheque cleared I made sure they knew what the going rate was. I paid £300 for 60, sold 30 at a tenner, net outlay for 30 bannetons ...?

A less expensive way of providing support for your rising doughs is the couche which is essentially nothing more than a cloth. You can pay good money for a professional one or you can do as I did and buy a cheap length of heavy white cotton at Chester Market.





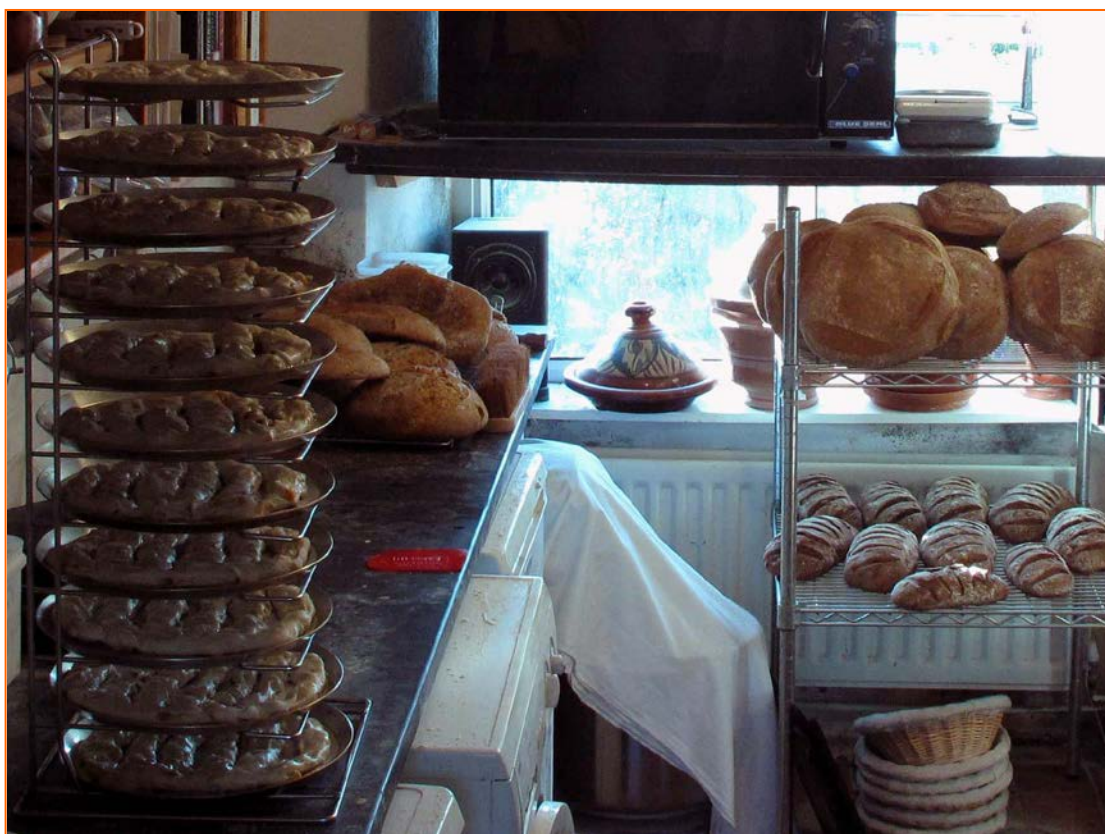
But everything has its down side. The only space I have for a couche is on my precious eight feet of work surface in the kitchen.



This is my work area. The work surface on the left is the only space I have for mixing, scaling and shaping. If I have a couche (and the number of bannetons I have and the stacking space available for them means that I *do* have to use a couche) my working space is reduced. Same with tins. I end up with a couche at one end of the bench and rye in tins at the other end and me squashed in the middle. Plus I have to finish with the mixer before I've got space to put up my bread cooling tower. And that's before the flatbreads are made.

The flatbreads have proved to be a brilliant idea. I wanted to offer more variety to customers (and to keep myself interested and developing); it was summer, and we wanted to do something seasonal plus there was a recipe for Black Olive, Rosemary and Caramelised Onion Focaccia I had been itching to try. So we promoted it as a taste of the Mediterranean, it was certainly delicious and it walked out the door. On the strength of that I started developing a range of focacce, fougasses and other flatbreads. The problem is, they might be very thin, but they take up a hell of a lot of surface area – an item, which as you now know well, is severely lacking in this little house.

But in this case it was possible to turn a weakness into a strength – back to the internet catering catalogue.



1 x pizza rack @ £30, 16 x pizza tins @ £5 = £80. Total = £110 (+ Vat) = The Solution.

£110 can be a lot of money when you're trying to keep your outlay to the minimum and everything has to be justified. But this has paid for itself over and over again. I can stack 11 flatbreads on one square foot of space. They sell for the same as an 800g Special – and think of the space taken up by 11 large loaves.

Scales take on a new significance when you start baking for sale. Firstly you are dealing with larger quantities and secondly you have to comply with the rather weird British laws on bread weight. We shall come back to the latter; although I'm not sure if anyone understands the exact legal requirements. I made do with my domestic scales at first but when your day begins with 10K of starter you need something a little more industrial. The wonderfully named Myweigh had a special offer on platform scales at just over £100 so they came first. I got my 5s confused – they weigh up to 50K all right but I thought this was in increments of 5g. In fact it was 50g. With my home baker mind-set this just seemed an impossibility to work with. But a bit over 150g is 175g, and a bit under is 125g, and, when you're mixing kilos of dough at a time, 25g is neither here nor there.

Later on (yet another internet special offer) I bought a more heavyweight set of 3K scales for a mere £30. One reason for buying them was I thought it would be useful to have scales with a mains supply to save on batteries. Ironically I just found the mains cable was always in the way and I now use

them with batteries. Now that Bangor has a Poundland that's costing me all of £1 a month.

The other irony is that these scales go to the other extreme – they work in increments of 0.5g. My poor aging mind can't cope with the display – there are always too many numbers so I think tens are hundreds, and hundreds are kilos. Sad.

Remaining items of equipment:

- Bread tins – not so important to me because generally I don't like them. Give me a free-form loaf any day. But I have 12 Matfer non-stick tins. They are not cheap @ £13 but, given my usage, will last forever. I like these ones because they are narrow so you can bake both 400g or 800g loaves in them.

I also have a couple of joke 2K tins. They're not supposed to be funny but I always think a 2K tin loaf looks comic – like a night on the Guinness has made your sense of perspective go awry.



- Baking sheets – 4 x black iron baking sets @ £7.50 = £30
- Tea towels and plastic sheeting. You can buy a pack of 50 tea towels on the net for about £25. They are invaluable for covering doughs, bannetons, etc. Plastic sheeting for covering the tea towels covering the doughs – I ended up using large size bubble wrap. We bought a roll over the internet one Christmas for wrapping presents without quite realising we were getting enough to lag the loft.
- Small First Aid kit containing blue plasters + disposable medical gloves – essential for your Environmental Health Officer and, as she pointed out, don't get latex ones because some people are dangerously allergic to latex.



- Odds and sods of plastic bowls, buckets, scrapers, bench brush, razor blades for slashing – just one out at a time and if it goes missing start scrapping your doughs. Foot operated waste bin.
- Large, cheap calculator, pencils, post-it notes – mark your doughs with the time they went in the baskets – you'll think you remember but ...
- Thermometers including a probe thermometer (£5 special offer) – if you're doing something a bit different check the internal temperature is well over 90C.

**Labelling:** Crucial areas to be covered are labelling and packaging – and these are items that both the Environmental Health Officer and Trading Standards are interested in. The EHO needs to be satisfied that your packaging is adequate to ensure the bread can leave the premises uncontaminated (what customers – including commercial customers - do with it once it's outside the front door is not your concern) and that it is stored hygienically. Minimum charges for free delivery and minimum quantities are frustrating for the small producer when you would prefer to shell out less cash and have a smaller order to store. We use one bakery supplier for tissue paper – single sheet per loaf, says Sue – and the brown paper take-away bags the wrapped bread goes into. In addition we use paper bags for flatbreads. We had a go with pizza boxes for flatbreads – I couldn't even assemble them never mind produce standard size breads to fit in them.

The tissue paper round the bread is held together by the label for which we use standard ink-jet address labels.



The caricature was done by our very good friend Wendy Shea. She thought I was totally barmy when she heard I was making bread while on holiday in France about ten years ago. So she knocked off a picture which had me sweating away kneading while Sue was reclining on the balcony drinking cocktails. I can't even remember what the original speech bubble said - I can't even find the original now.

She hadn't seen me for a few years but the likeness – including the ageing process - was pretty scarily accurate. And I just love the apron with the little Eiffel Towers on and the fluffy pink slippers.

## Use of New Technology

This brings us back to the computer which, as I have said, is the most important item of equipment in the bakery (aside from the cash box that is).

Without:

- the website, for advertising, displaying the week's breads and taking orders,
- the internet, for email communication with customers,
- the mobile phone, for sending out txt alerts and communicating with non-internet customers
- spreadsheets, for storing bread formulas, calculating ingredient weights, compiling orders, and undertaking a whole range of administrative tasks
- a labelling facility

I'm not sure if one person could run the bakery. It certainly would have burnt me out a long time ago.

When we started various friends gave us the email addresses of contacts who might be interested in good bread. So we set up a little database which developed as these original contacts also gave us the addresses of their friends. Over time new customers heard of us by word of mouth and contacted us directly.

Within a few weeks of starting we switched to producing pre-ordered bread only and to baking two days a week, Thursday and Friday. So people on the database would receive an email at the start of the week informing them what bread was on offer next bake. The majority of people ordered by email from the start, a few by txt, fewer by phone.

**Website:** Several months later we had the website [www.bethesdabakers.com](http://www.bethesdabakers.com) written which made another huge difference. It was put together by a friend of a friend who did it out of interest and for free. Getting something for nothing is great but you are never sure how much pressure it is polite to exert to get the job done and then what demands it is fair to make for modifications. We are eternally grateful to the programmer and really pleased with what he has produced.

We wanted it simple: a Home Page to give the context; a Next Bake Page to say when and what we are baking; an Order Page to let people know how to order with a link to an Order Form; a Contact Page; a Plaudits Page which I wish I hadn't bothered with; Links to other sites.



The great thing about it is that I can edit and update about two thirds of the site, photos and text, which, of course, needs to be done every week without having to go back to the programmer.

The pattern of breads we baked became: Baguettes, Pain de Campagne, Mick's Classic Sourdough, Wholemeal, 5 Seed with Spelt, Multigrain, plus three weekly specials, a main special, a rye and a flatbread (which sometimes turned out to be a brioche). These were available in 400g and 800g sizes plus 2K for the Campagne and the Classic. Baguettes were 200g (dough weight), flat breads varied according to type.

The regulars remained on the website order page and only the specials needed to be updated each week.

So the system we settled down to was – at the start of the week the website was updated and the customers received an email to say the week's orders were being taken; they used the website order page which automatically generated an email to me with their itemised order; I copied that back to them for checking and as acknowledgement of receipt; lunchtime Tuesday customers received a "last orders" txt alert; Tuesday evening I made up the order using the spreadsheet system described in the next section.

**Spreadsheets:** During the four years of the bakery I developed what has become a very comprehensive system of spreadsheets for storing information and doing calculations. The hardest part was finding a balance between creating a labour-saving tool and avoiding duplication and storing information for its own sake.

We started off storing customer details on the spreadsheet – addresses, phone number, mobile, email but then realised their email addresses were already on computer in an email group and the phone numbers were on my mobile. That was all that we needed and the Environmental Health Officer was very happy all customers were contactable if we became the source of an e coli outbreak or couldn't find the razor blade.

**Orders:** The first worksheet contains bread orders by bake day. After 6.00 p.m. Tuesday I could transfer the customer email orders into this table. The first table has bread type and size along the top, customer name down the side. The spread sheet totals the orders up along the bottom and transfers the information to a second table which calculates the customer's bill, the total take for the day and the breakdown for each category of bread.

Extract from Orders Worksheet Table 1

12.02.10	Campagne 400g	Campagne 800g	Campagne 2K	Classic 400g
John	1	0	0	1
Mary	2	0	0	0
Robert	0	1	0	2
<b>Total</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>0</b>	<b>3</b>

Extract from Orders Worksheet Table 2

12.02.10	Total	Campagne	Campagne	Campagne	Classic
		400g	800g	2K	400g
John	£3.00	£1.50	£0.00	£0.00	£1.50
Mary	£3.00	£3.00	£0.00	£0.00	£0.00
Robert	£5.50	£0.00	£2.50	£0.00	£3.00
<b>Total</b>	<b>£11.50</b>	<b>£4.50</b>	<b>£2.50</b>	<b>£0.00</b>	<b>£4.50</b>

**Bake Schedule:** The next worksheet (below) contains the bread formulas for that particular bakeday and compiles the bake schedule. The number of loaves by bread type and weight are entered and it calculates the rest.

You can see the dough weights I use to achieve the legal bread weights: 480g to produce a 400g loaf; 940g for an 800g loaf; 2150g for a 2K loaf. Getting this right is trickier than you might think. We had to raise the dough weight for a large loaf from 910g to 940g because we were getting a few underweight. It is possible for industrialised bread plants to have the weight of a particular line exact; they produce millions of loaves, they have the scientists and technicians and automatically controlled baking machinery. When you might bake a dozen of a particular high hydration rye once every three months it is not so easy to decide on a dough weight which will consistently produce over the legal weight – wet doughs seem to lose more weight in the baking. The only sensible thing to do is to stick with the dough weights that work for your regular breads. You are providing a fairly unique product and your customers are unlikely to complain if one loaf, one week is a few grams underweight.

Extract from Bake Schedule Worksheet

12.02.10									
	Campagne						Dough Weight	Wheat Starter	Rye Starter
	400g	800g	2k	%	Total	Plus 3%			
Number	3	1	0						
Strong White	257	503	1150	100	1273	1312			
Water	152	297	679	59	751	774			
Starter	68	133	304	26.4	336	346		346	
Salt	4	8	17	1.5	19	20			
	480	940	2150	186.9					
					2380	2451	2451		
	Classic Sourdough						Dough Weight	Wheat Starter	Rye Starter
	400g	800g	2k	%	Total	Plus 3%			
Number	3	0	0						
Strong White	125	245	560	50	375	386			
Wholemeal	125	245	560	50	375	386			
Water	156	306	700	62.5	469	483			
Starter	70	137	313	28	210	216		216	
Salt	4	8	18	1.6	12	12			
	480	940	2150	192.1					
					1440	1483	1483		
<b>Total</b>							3934	562	0

The spreadsheet produces the totals and then adds 3%. This is a fairly arbitrary figure I selected to allow for the dough that sticks to bowls and

utensils. In addition it totals the weight of wheat and rye starter required for the days bake.

Finally it calculates the total dough weight for the day and warns me if I needed to be afraid. Self-employed people don't get ill but they do know what fear is.

**Diary:** is just a simple record of Specials by date. As well as providing an historical record it helps for planning a few weeks ahead and to put together complementary combinations without too much repetition.

#### Extract from Diary Worksheet

01/10/09	New York Rye	Fougasse Provencale	Oat/Honey Bread
08/10/09	Swedish Spiced Laputabrot	Pear & Rosemary Focaccia	Tomato Bread with Sundried Tomatoes
15/10/09	Guinness Volkornbrot	Courgettes/Parmesan Flatbread	Fig & Walnut Wholemeal
22/10/09	Normandy Rye Cider	Apricot & Almond Fougasse	Butternut Squash, Sunflower Seed & Chile
29/10/09	Simple Danish Rye	Curry & Cardamom Flatbread	Nina's Bread with Dark Beer & Spelt
05/11/09	Borodinski	Red Grape & Fennel Seed Focaccia	Potato/Rosemary/Black Onion Seed
12/11/09	Pain de Seigle sur Levain	Fougasse Provencale	Apple & Sesame Bread
19/11/09	Rheinisches Schwarzbrot	Yr Ardd Fadarch (shitake) Focaccia	Oat/Honey Bread
27/11/09	New York Rye	Orange/Cumin Flatbread	Thanksgiving Bread

**Bread Supplied:** contains a table for each of the commercial customers and can be updated weekly from the Diary worksheet with the current Specials.

The main table (below) can be copied into a headed letter template so that customers have a weekly record of bread supplied. Each week the total is copied with the date into the smaller table on the right. At the end of each month this, in turn, is copied into an invoice template which is mailed or emailed without delay.

#### Extract from Bread Supplied Worksheet:

<b>Joe's Cafe 25.02.10</b>			<b>No</b>	<b>Total</b>
Pain de Campagne	400g	£1.50		£0.00
Pain de Campagne	800g	£2.50		£0.00
Pain de Campagne	2 kilo	£5.50		£0.00
Baguette		£0.90		£0.00
Mick's Classic Sourdough	400g	£1.50		£0.00
Mick's Classic Sourdough	800g	£2.50	4	£10.00
Mick's Classic Sourdough	2 kilo	£5.50		£0.00
Wholemeal Wheat	400g	£1.50		£0.00
Wholemeal Wheat	800g	£2.50		£0.00
Multigrain	400g	£1.75		£0.00
Multigrain	800g	£2.80		£0.00
5 Seed with Spelt	400g	£1.75		£0.00
5 Seed with Spelt	800g	£2.80		£0.00
Rye: Swedish Spiced Laputabrot	400g	£1.75		£0.00
Rye: Swedish Spiced Laputabrot	800g	£2.80	4	£11.20
Flatbread: Courgette & Parmesan	Each	£3.50		£0.00
Special: Tomato Bread	400g	£1.80		£0.00
Special: Tomato Bread	800g	£3.50	4	£14.00
<b>Total</b>				£35.20

04.02.10	£35.20
11.02.10	£31.20
18.02.10	£34.00
25.02.10	£35.20
<b>Total</b>	£135.60

### Bakers Percent Worksheet: A handy little device.

If you know the ingredient weights for a recipe the calculator on the left will give you their bakers' percentages.

If you then enter these percentages in the right hand calculator and enter the dough weight you require, this one will tell you the ingredient weights you need.

Bakers % Calculator

	Ingredients	Weight	%
Flour 1	Strong White	400	100.0
Flour 2			0.0
Flour 3			0.0
Flour 4			0.0
Flour 5			0.0
Ingredient 1	Milk	100	25.0
Ingredient 2	Starter	200	50.0
Ingredient 3	Butter	100	25.0
Ingredient 4	Eggs	90	22.5
Ingredient 5	Salt	6	1.5
Ingredient 6	Brebis	100	25.0
Ingredient 7	Dried Figs	100	25.0
Ingredient 8			0.0
<b>Total</b>		1096	

Dough Weight Calculator

	Ingredients	Weight	%
Ingredient 1	Strong White	343	100.0
Ingredient 2	Milk	86	25.0
Ingredient 3	Starter	172	50.0
Ingredient 4	Butter	86	25.0
Ingredient 5	Eggs	77	22.5
Ingredient 6	Salt	5	1.5
Ingredient 7	Brebis	86	25.0
Ingredient 8	Dried Figs	86	25.0
Ingredient 9		0	
Ingredient 10		0	
Ingredient 11		0	
Ingredient 12		0	
Ingredient 13		0	
Ingredient 14		0	
<b>Total</b>		940	274.0

**Regulars, Specials, Ryes and Flatbread Worksheets:** are identical to the Bake Schedule Worksheet but store the formulas for the type of bread in each of the headings (e.g. as the name suggests, flatbread formulas are stored on the Flatbread Worksheet). Each week the previous week's specials are deleted from the Bake Schedule Worksheet and those for the current week are transferred in from their respective worksheets.

Most of the formulas are straightforward and assume I know what I am doing. The more complicated formulas, such as the Rheinisches Schwartzbrot shown on the next page, will also calculate starters and soakers and contain simple instructions. Sometimes I can still understand what these mean when the bread comes up in the schedule again!

On the printed page all of this looks horrifically complicated but spreadsheet calculators are very simple to construct. I assure you that if you are baking seven doughs in three sizes for 25-30 customers in a day, spreadsheet calculators will let you sleep easily the night before.

Example of complex formula with starter and soaker automatically calculated:

	<b>Rheinisches Schwarzbrot</b>					
	<b>400g</b>	<b>800g</b>	<b>2k</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>Plus 3%</b>
<b>Dough</b>	3	10	0			
Coarse Rye	113	222	508	100.0	2559	2636
Water	28	55	127	25.0	640	659
Starter	204	399	914	180.0	4606	4744
Rye Grain Soaker	130	254	580	114.3	2925	3013
Salt	5	10	22	4.3	110	113
	480	940	2150	423.6		
					10840	11165
<b>3rd Starter</b>						
Coarse Rye						1940
Water						1642
Starter						1158
<b>2nd Starter</b>						
Coarse Rye						597
Water						359
Starter						201
<b>1<sup>st</sup> Starter</b>						
Coarse Rye						75
Water						89
Starter						37
<b>Rye Grain Soaker</b>						
Broken Rye Grain						1506
Water 30C						1506
	<div> 3<sup>rd</sup> Starter: 3 hours 26C  2<sup>nd</sup> Starter: 10 hours 25C  1st Starter: 7 hours 24C  Rye Grain Soaker: Water 30 C Overnight </div>					

## Chapter 4: The Actuality

“It must be nice to only work two days a week.”

Long pause.

OK, so I only bake two days a week but if you take just that element of the job: on Wednesday evening I have about four hours mixing; Thursday I start at 5.00 a.m., bread has to be ready and wrapped by 6.00 p.m. by which time I am already mixing for the Friday bake, earliest finish about 9.00 p.m.; Friday, 5.00 a.m. start, bread ready by 6.00 p.m., clearing up and customers ‘til 9.00 p.m.

36 hours isn’t a bad two days work.

If this is a route you fancy travelling, it’s rewarding, it can be profitable, it has the potential for further development, but it’s hard work. I worked on building sites as a labourer and scaffolder for the best part of ten years in my youth and it’s still hard work.

And, a word of advice – don’t have a two storey bakery. Never mind the other ingredients which probably arrive in 3-5K bags, a typical delivery for me would be six sacks of strong white and one each of wholemeal wheat, spelt, wholemeal rye and light rye in 25K sacks. So I struggle to make the ten journeys up and down the stairs with them on my shoulder (my youth is now well in the distance) and manoeuvre them onto the wooden shelves in the workroom, I sometimes worry about the strength of the floor not to mention my own strength. This is the first of many journeys. The flour comes down the stairs again to be mixed and then back up the stairs into the fridge to ferment. Then it comes downstairs to be scaled and shaped. Back up the stairs in baskets to prove. Back down the stairs to be baked. The stairs are so narrow I can only manage three bannetons at a time so a single bake of ten large loaves means at least four trips up and down the stairs to take them up to prove and the same to get them down to bake. Is it any surprise I’m hobbling round in France at the moment with what I think is a cartilage problem in my left knee wondering if I will be able to bake again when I get back to Wales?

The reality is I probably do some bakery work every day of the week.

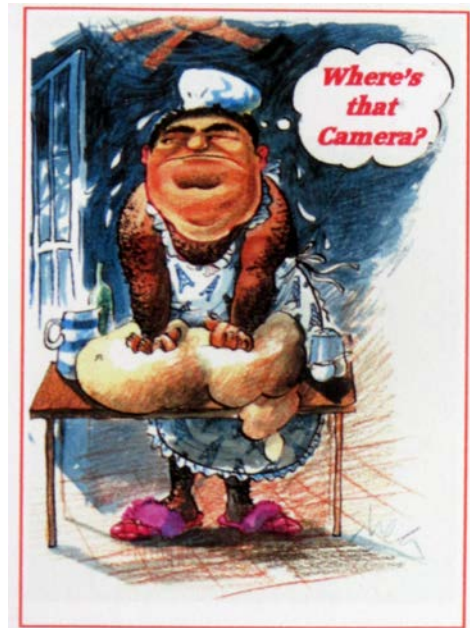
First thing Monday I update the website. I like to put a different photo on the Home Page every week just to keep people’s interest and to stop the thing becoming stale. Nothing as off-putting as an obviously out of date website. I try to include a little bit of news on the Next Bake Page to keep customers informed and involved. It’s really important to give your customers a sense of involvement but it has to be genuine on your part.

Then, obviously, the week’s Specials have to be updated on the Order Form and a photo and a brief description of each added to the Next Bake Page. I have a file for each bread on computer so in theory I just have to copy these

onto the site – in reality there is always at least one bread per week which is new or which hasn't yet got a file so this has to be made up.



Two solutions when you don't have a photo available for one of the Specials. A general response on the right and a brainwave (for Parmesan and Courgette Flatbread – if you hadn't guessed) on the left



The bread descriptions need to be brief but have to have a bit of zip. No one (including myself) believes they are affected by advertising but even the use of mundane and clichéd words like “fantastic” have a noticeable effect on sales never mind “the taste of summer”.

*Going to the other extreme is the time I decided to do the imitation Lionel Poilâne 2 kilo miche as a Special. It was August, school holidays, people were away, sales were down, I was tired and could have done with a few days' break. So more for my own entertainment than anything I thought I'd do the Poilâne miche. I would only bake them as 2 Kilo loaves but allow customers to order halves and quarters as well as full size loaves.*

*So, instead of the usual brief description of the bread I spun the whole story of Lionel Poilâne, his place in modern French baking, described his bread “factory” of 24 wood burning ovens each with its own baker, his tragically early death, etc.*

*I thought I'd just get a few orders and that they would be mainly for halves and quarters. Orders started rolling in and I began to get scared – 17 of them. That's 36.5 kilos of dough. That's the equivalent of 85 small loaves. The thing is, I only had two 2k bannetons. I was baking the buggers for three days (along side my normal bake) – one pair went in the oven and the baskets went on top of the oven to dry out while the next pair were being scaled and shaped and having a short rest on the bench.*

Where were we? Once the site has been updated I email customers to let them know and to invite orders. I txt customers who don't use the net.



Check the formulas for the week's Specials are in order. Delete last week's from the Bake Schedule Worksheet. Copy in this week's.

In the Orders Worksheet I copy down last Thursday's and Friday's orders, change the dates to the current week and delete the customer names and orders (with the exception of standing orders) so that I have two nice blank tables in which to enter this week's orders.

Clear up the workroom, check the stock to make sure I have:

- flours in 25K sacks already mentioned: strong white, wholemeal wheat, spelt, wholemeal rye and light rye
- barley, maize meal and brown rice flour in smaller quantities
- for the 5 seed and Multigrain: poppy, sesame, sunflower, pumpkin and golden linseed; polenta, millet, jumbo oats and bulgar – usually in 3-5K sizes
- 5k Halen Môn/Anglesey Sea Salt (has to be quoted as a high value item on the insurance policy)
- olive oil and sunflower oil
- black Kalamata olives
- an assortment of herbs and spices
- an assortment of dried produce – sun dried tomatoes, nuts, dried fruit. I try to buy these as they are needed but there's always some over.
- ditto honey/golden syrup (for the ever-popular laputabrot)

There's probably a good couple of hours quiet work here.

If I'm organised I can keep Tuesday clear 'til about 4.00 p.m. when I txt "any last orders for the Thursday bake by 6.00 p.m. please" which usually prompts a little flurry of txts and emails in response. I need to have made sure I have about a kilo of wheat starter ready by evening and whatever rye is required. The wheat is refreshed before I go to bed so I have 3K active by morning.

Wednesday the tempo starts to pick up. First do the order. Most people will have ordered using the Order Form on the website. This automatically emails to me a list of all the breads with the number ordered in each category. I email this back to the customer with an acknowledgement so it can be checked, block the order and copy it into a Word file. When I've worked through them all I print out the Word file and manually transfer the individual orders into the Orders Worksheet followed by the bits of paper with txt, phone and verbal orders which have been accumulating since the end of the previous week. Then I print out the order from the worksheet and check it. Then I give it to Sue and she checks it. Then I make corrections. Actually we make very few mistakes – in the end.

The totals are then transferred into the Bake Schedule Worksheet and I print out my Thursday schedule. This tells me the amount of starter I will need by this evening although I now know that about 9-10K of starter will give me the maximum dough I can ferment overnight so that's what I mix. It also tells me the amount of other produce I need to buy to make the Specials (Fridays

needs I have to estimate). But before I trot off to the shoppers paradise that is Bangor I prepare my soakers. It really pays to get any prepping out of the way well before mixing time, especially things that need to cool before going into the dough.

Back from shopping, finish any prepping, have a nice lunch and try to have a quiet couple of hours.

About 4.00 p.m. I txt “any last orders for the Friday bake by 6.00 p.m. please”. Then it’s get changed, wash everything up and put it away, remove everything from the kitchen work surface and floor and stack it in the living room, clean down the working area. Set up the platform scales, out with the buckets, bowls scrapers, etc, bring down the principal flours. Set out my work schedule on top of the court cupboard with a sharp pencil and the calculator. Start mixing.

Basically that’s it for the next 36 hours.

I start off by adding together the ingredients for the Pain de Campagne and the Baguettes (same dough). It’s a sort of ritual – I could easily get the spreadsheet to do it for me. Invariably it’s the first mix. I then have to work out a schedule for maximising the amount I can get in the upstairs fridge, how many mixes will need two dough boxes, whether or not there’s a dough which will taint the mixer (i.e. to be mixed last), what doughs will have to be mixed in the morning. Then it’s just a question of working through the mixes, oiling and filling the dough boxes as needed, carting them up to the fridge.

Thursday’s my busiest day because I do all my commercial orders then but inevitably there’s a bit of hand mixing.

Clean the mixer, clean down the kitchen again, sort out the starters, put everything away that isn’t needed, get out clean work clothes for the morning, go to bed and hope to sleep.

5.00 a.m. alarm goes off and I get straight up. It would be fatal to linger. Stumble into my clothes in the dark. Inevitably Sue says, shall I put the light on, and, inevitably I grunt, no. Go to the loo, splash a bit of water around, if it’s winter take all of the dough boxes out of the fridge. I usually start with the Campagne so this goes downstairs. Put on the coffee, roll up my nice clean proving cloths ready for action and put them to one side.

Check the schedule, flour a section of the work surface, tip out the first dough, scale and loosely shape and leave on the bench for a short intermediate prove. My hope is not to have to use the mixer again (I don’t want to have to clean it out) but on a Thursday there is usually a mix big enough to warrant using it. So I do my first mix. While the mixer is running I shape and scale the first dough, get it in the baskets and the trekking up and down the stairs begins in earnest.

By now I have a rough idea of the order in which I will use the doughs. The objective is to maximise oven use so I want ten large loaves (or equivalent) in every bake. It takes 50 minutes to bake so I want doughs to be perfectly proved every 50 minutes. That's the theory.

It also has to be the reality. To get the day's bake shifted I have to work in units of 50-60 minutes. I don't have the luxury of having a deck oven with a spare deck just waiting so I can have one (or more) doughs baking while I wait for the next to reach a perfect state of readiness. Conversely, if a dough is over-proving I just have to grit my teeth and hope it picks up when it hits the oven heat. But that's one of the beauties of sourdough – it doesn't need split second timing. Very, very rarely have I had to say to a customer, I don't think that bread is saleable, what do you think?

So by now I'm well into my scaling and shaping morning mixing routine. One dough out on the bench, dough boxes have to be washed and dried straight away otherwise chaos ensues; while the shaped, overnight dough is having a short intermediate prove, finish the next mix and get that dough into boxes for fermentation.

On a Thursday I would usually have at least one mix, probably two plus the flatbread and the rye doughs, probably in that order. One advantage of the ryes is that very often they only have one rise and go straight into tins which means they can be mixed comparatively late in the morning. Likewise the flatbreads usually don't mind being flexible and will happily fit in with the way the day's working out (that's what I tell them).



King of 8 feet of work surface (two days a week)

The first dough will be in the baskets by about 5.50 a.m. so the first bake will be about 9.30 a.m. That first dough sets the pace for all the others.

Once all the overnight doughs are in baskets (or couches) and the mixer cleaned I get ten minutes for breakfast. If I'm really lucky I get time to grab a quick bath between scaling and baking.

So the first bake goes in. The first of the morning mixes will be coming up ready for scaling but I also have to finalise Friday's orders (you say 6.00 p.m. Wednesday is the deadline but there's always an order or two waiting for you when you get chance to look at the computer in the morning), make up Friday's baking schedule and, once I have this, mix the starters for the evening mix.

By now the timer is beeping so the mini cooling tower under the oven shelf is hastily erected and the first bake out onto it. Up and down the stairs getting the next bake in.

You would think that things would settle down as the morning progresses and that during those 50 minute bake periods there would be time for half hour stretches in the deck chair. Think on. There is a continuous flow of cleaning down the work bench (about three feet of it now between the couches and the rye tins – and by the end of the morning, no feet at all once the pizza tower is stacked with flatbreads), sweeping the floor, washing up and putting gear away, brushing out the used bannetons, brushing the burnt flour off the baking sheets, squeezing in any prepping that can be done for Friday's bake.

What time would you like lunch? asks Sue. An impossible question. Well, the next bake's out in 25 minutes but the 2K needs to stay in for an extra 15 minutes, then the next bake needs to go in, etc., etc.

Her role is indispensable. She gets a cup of tea in the morning at 6.00 a.m. after which our normal relationship is suspended for two days and she plays the part of skivvy housewife. She makes me breakfast when I shout for it, she shops for last minute baking needs, makes lunch with about 2 feet of preparation space (no oven available) and hangs around until I can eat it, puts up with being snapped at. The thing is, I always have a bowl of warm water in the sink because I have to wash up as I go along. She *never* walks in the kitchen without emptying the washing up bowl ...

Twelve noon is aperitif time. It is one of those beacons in the day to work towards and is never missed. I might get half an hour for lunch usually interrupted by the timer's beep.

Sue washes up after lunch, I bring down the baguette dough which was returned to the fridge after the campagne was scaled first thing in the morning. By now the work surface is clearer but the growing mountain of baked breads means it needs to be called into service for additional cooling wires.



The only part of the operation which is not my domain is wrapping and labelling the bread, and making up the orders and bills. This is where I become the skivvy and Sue takes over. I print her a copy of the customer orders with the amounts to be paid. We keep ring-binders of labels for each bread and weight. She works out what additional labels are needed and I print these out for her (this is where the computer decides to get temperamental and it can be a fraught time of day).

At this time I also prepare the Bread Supplied information for our commercial customers and, if it's the last bake of the month, the invoices.

All the while bread is still going in and out of the oven, toppings are being arranged on flatbreads and baguettes shaped.

The wrapping and making up of orders is a bigger task than you might imagine and it requires that precious commodity, space. So the rule about the two larger rooms, the living room and the bedroom, not being used for bakery purposes had to go out of the window. Fortunately, the living room table is very big when extended and this is where wrapping and sorting operations have to take place. This together with making up the bills can take up to three hours on a busy day.



The oven gets turned up to 240C and the flatbreads followed by the baguettes – not to mention mini baguettes made up from all the day's scraps of dough – are the last bakes of the day.



Sue with a specially baked & wrapped, 6 kilo loaf for a wedding reception centre-piece

I've already started preparing for the evenings mix. If I haven't managed to get them done earlier I make up my soakers. As soon as I am allowed (I want space in the kitchen, Sue wants space in the living room) I get rid of the last of the cooling bread and take down the mini tower so I can get at the mixer. Clean down the work surface yet again and start mixing.

When I get the signal, and certainly by 6.00 p.m., I txt the "bread ready" message to customers. I swear some of them are waiting round the corner. Sue does front-of-house but inevitably I have to help out when everybody arrives at once. They all want to chat ...

Usually the Friday bake is lighter than Thursday with more hand mixing because of the smaller quantities. Even so I am rarely finished before 9.00 p.m. by which time even the stragglers have usually phoned up in a panic and collected their bread.



Then, the most wonderful thing in the world happens. Sue makes me a BLT on my own freshly baked baguette. What greater thing could a woman do for a man?

Then it's mix the starters, final clean, bed.

Friday morning 5.00 a.m. alarm goes off and I get straight up. It would be fatal to linger ...

Yes Friday is much the same, busy but a bit quieter and no order to be made up or prepping and mixing for the following day. There is at least a sense of the end being in sight. On Fridays, at the end of baking, the kitchen can be cleared up and the work surface used to stack the completed orders. A glass of wine can be taken - well, it was last night too, but this is more relaxed and convivial and I have more time for customers. Very occasionally the Welsh summer allows for this to take place outside.

The Friday ritual is pizza. I have time to knock up a dough in the morning and improvise a light topping when the customers are thinning out in the evening. But there is still that last customer dashing for the 9.00 p.m. deadline.

Saturday. Clear the kitchen stuff out of the living room. The kitchen floor has to be completely scrubbed which means pulling out the mixer, fridge, freezer, washing machine, court cupboard and mopping underneath them. More often than not this occurs on Sunday. The money has to be cashed up and paid into the bank which means a bus ride to the shoppers paradise, i.e. home again as soon as possible before I get over-excited.

Then it's, what specials shall we do next week?

Not a bad two days work.

**Sample Baking Schedule:** The following pages show the Baking Schedule for Thursday 18 and Friday 19 February 2010 together with a small table giving the dough weight mixed and loaves by weight. They were probably fairly typical days. I mixed 53.2 kilos of dough on the Thursday and 35.6 kilos on Friday. This compares with the highest daily dough weight I can remember – 64 kilos but I would guess that the following day was really small.

I have an ongoing (but friendly) battle with my customers to get an even workload over the two days. I have to do my commercial orders on Thursday so periodically I put out an appeal for customers to order on Fridays *if it is not inconvenient*. Then everyone switches to Friday and I have to persuade those I know find Thursdays easier to switch back. I also know in a few months I will have to make the Friday appeal again.

## Typical 2 Day Baking Schedule 18/19 February 2010

	Dough Weight	400g Loaves	800g Loaves	2 Kilo Loaves	Flatbread	Baguettes
Thursday	53.2K	16	41	1	5	2
Friday	35.6K	16	25	1	12	6
Total	88.8K	32	66	2	17	8

Thursday									
<b>Baguettes</b>									
				%	Total	Plus 3%	Dough Weight	Wheat Starter	Rye Starter
	2								
Strong White	107			100	214	220			
Water	63			59	126	130			
Starter	28			26.4	57	58		58	
Salt	2			1.5	3	3			
	200			186.9					
					400	412	412		
<b>Pain de Campagne</b>									
	400g	800g	2k	%	Total	Plus 3%	Dough Weight	Wheat Starter	Rye Starter
	2	6	0						
Strong White	257	503	1150	100	3531	3637			
Water	152	297	679	59	2083	2146			
Starter	68	133	304	26.4	932	960		960	
Salt	4	8	17	1.5	53	55			
	480	940	2150	186.9					
					6600	6798	6798		
<b>Micks Classic Sourdough</b>									
	400g	800g	2k	%	Total	Plus 3%	Dough Weight	Wheat Starter	Rye Starter
	0	6	1						
Strong White	125	245	560	50	2028	2088			
Wholemeal	125	245	560	50	2028	2088			
Water	156	306	700	62.5	2534	2611			
Starter	70	137	313	28	1135	1170		1170	
Salt	4	8	18	1.6	65	67			
	480	940	2150	192.1					
					7790	8024	8024		
<b>Wholemeal</b>									
	400g	800g	2k	%	Total	Plus 3%	Dough Weight	Wheat Starter	Rye Starter
	0	0	0						
Wholemeal	244	478	1094	100	0	0			
Water	164	320	733	67	0	0			
Starter	68	134	306	28	0	0		0	
Salt	4	8	17	1.6	0	0			
	480	940	2150	196.6					
					0	0	0		

	<b>5 Seed &amp; Spelt</b>								
	<b>400g</b>	<b>800g</b>	<b>2k</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>Plus 3%</b>	<b>Dough Weight</b>	<b>Wheat Starter</b>	<b>Rye Starter</b>
	6	2	0						
Strong White	171	335	766	80	1695	1746			
Spelt	43	84	191	20	424	437			
Water	100	197	450	47	996	1026			
Starter	60	117	268	28	593	611		611	
Salt	3	7	15	1.6	34	35			
Seed	51	100	230	24	509	524			
Water soaker	51	100	230	24	509	524			
	480	940	2150	224.6					
						4903	4903		
	<b>Multigrain</b>								
	<b>400g</b>	<b>800g</b>	<b>2k</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>Plus 3%</b>	<b>Dough Weight</b>	<b>Wheat Starter</b>	<b>Rye Starter</b>
	2	14	0						
Strong White	99	194	443	50	2909	2996			
Wholemeal	99	194	443	50	2909	2996			
Water	124	242	555	62.6	3642	3751			
Starter	55	108	248	28	1629	1678		1678	
Salt	3	6	14	1.6	93	96			
Mixed Grains	44	87	198	22.4	1303	1342			
Water soaker	56	109	249	28.1	1635	1684			
	480	940	2150	242.7					
					14120	14544	14544		
	<b>Tomato Bread</b>								
	<b>400g</b>	<b>800g</b>	<b>2k</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>Plus 3%</b>	<b>Dough Weight</b>	<b>Wheat Starter</b>	<b>Rye Starter</b>
	5	10	0						
Strong White	185	362	829	75	4548	4684			
Rye	62	121	276	25	1516	1561			
Water	112	220	503	45.5	2759	2842			
Starter	69	135	309	28	1698	1749		1749	
Salt	4	8	18	1.6	97	100			
Tomato Sauce	48	94	215	19.5	1182	1218			
	480	940	2150	194.6					
					11800	12154	12154		



<b>Friday</b>									
	<b>Baguettes</b>								
				%	Total	Plus 3%	Dough Weight	Wheat Starter	Rye Starter
	6								
Strong White	107			100	642	661			
Water	63			59	379	390			
Starter	28			26.4	170	175		175	
Salt	2			1.5	10	10			
	200			186.9					
					1200	1236	1236		
	<b>Pain de Campagne</b>								
	400g	800g	2k	%	Total	Plus 3%	Dough Weight	Wheat Starter	Rye Starter
	4	3	0						
Strong White	257	503	1150	100	2536	2612			
Water	152	297	679	59	1496	1541			
Starter	68	133	304	26.4	670	690		690	
Salt	4	8	17	1.5	38	39			
	480	940	2150	186.9					
					4740	4882	4882		
	<b>Micks Classic Sourdough</b>								
	400g	800g	2k	%	Total	Plus 3%	Dough Weight	Wheat Starter	Rye Starter
	0	1	1						
Strong White	125	245	560	50	804	828			
Wholemeal	125	245	560	50	804	828			
Water	156	306	700	62.5	1005	1035			
Starter	70	137	313	28	450	464		464	
Salt	4	8	18	1.6	26	27			
	480	940	2150	192.1					
					3090	3183	3183		
	<b>Wholemeal</b>								
	400g	800g	2k	%	Total	Plus 3%	Dough Weight	Wheat Starter	Rye Starter
	4	1	0						
Wholemeal	244	478	1094	100	1455	1498			
Water	164	320	733	67	975	1004			
Starter	68	134	306	28	407	420		420	
Salt	4	8	17	1.6	23	24			
	480	940	2150	196.6					
					2860	2946	2946		



	<b>5 Seed &amp; Spelt</b>								
	<b>400g</b>	<b>800g</b>	<b>2k</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>Plus 3%</b>	<b>Dough Weight</b>	<b>Wheat Starter</b>	<b>Rye Starter</b>
	0	6	0						
Strong White	171	335	766	80	2009	<b>2069</b>			
Spelt	43	84	191	20	502	<b>517</b>			
Water	100	197	450	47	1180	<b>1216</b>			
Starter	60	117	268	28	703	<b>724</b>		724	
Salt	3	7	15	1.6	40	<b>41</b>			
Seed	51	100	230	24	603	<b>621</b>			
Water soaker	51	100	230	24	603	<b>621</b>			
	480	940	2150	224.6					
						<b>5809</b>	5809		
	<b>Multigrain</b>								
	<b>400g</b>	<b>800g</b>	<b>2k</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>Plus 3%</b>	<b>Dough Weight</b>	<b>Wheat Starter</b>	<b>Rye Starter</b>
	1	7	0						
Strong White	99	194	443	50	1454	<b>1498</b>			
Wholemeal	99	194	443	50	1454	<b>1498</b>			
Water	124	242	555	62.6	1821	<b>1876</b>			
Starter	55	108	248	28	815	<b>839</b>		839	
Salt	3	6	14	1.6	47	<b>48</b>			
Mixed Grains	44	87	198	22.4	652	<b>671</b>			
Water soaker	56	109	249	28.1	817	<b>842</b>			
	480	940	2150	242.7					
					7060	<b>7272</b>	7272		
	<b>Tomato Bread</b>								
	<b>400g</b>	<b>800g</b>	<b>2k</b>	<b>%</b>	<b>Total</b>	<b>Plus 3%</b>	<b>Dough Weight</b>	<b>Wheat Starter</b>	<b>Rye Starter</b>
	4	5	0						
Strong White	185	362	829	75	2551	<b>2628</b>			
Rye	62	121	276	25	850	<b>876</b>			
Water	112	220	503	45.5	1548	<b>1594</b>			
Starter	69	135	309	28	953	<b>981</b>		981	
Salt	4	8	18	1.6	54	<b>56</b>			
Tomato Sauce	48	94	215	19.5	663	<b>683</b>			
	480	940	2150	194.6					
					6620	<b>6819</b>	6819		

	Swedish Spiced Laputabröd								
	400g	800g	2k	%	Total	Plus 3%	Dough Weight	Wheat Starter	Rye Starter
	3	2	0						
<b>Dough</b>									
Strong White	115	225	514	65	794	818			
Light Rye	35	69	158	20	244	252			
Wholemeal Wheat	26	52	119	15	183	189			
Water	15	29	66	8.3	101	104			
Starter	118	231	528	66.7	815	839			
Sunflower Oil	22	43	99	12.5	153	157			
Golden Syrup	31	61	138	17.5	214	220			
Rye Soaker	118	231	528	66.7	815	839			
	480	940	2150	271.7					
					3320	3420	3420		
<b>Starter</b>									
Starter						280			
Water						280			
Strong White						84			
Light Rye						84			
Wholemeal Wheat						112			
						840			
<b>Soaker</b>									
Light Rye						263			
Salt						32			
Water						525			
Anise Seed						11			
Fennel Seed						11			
	<b>Parmesan &amp; Courgette F/bread</b>						Dough Weight	Wheat Starter	Rye Starter
	400g	800g	2k	%	Total	Plus 3%			
	12	0	0						
Strong White	131	210	495	72.2	1576	1623			
Semolina	34	54	127	18.5	404	416			
Wholemeal	17	27	63	9.2	201	207			
Water	126	202	476	69.4	1515	1560			
Starter	143	229	540	78.7	1718	1769		1769	
Salt	3	5	12	1.8	39	40			
Courgettes	77	123	291	42.4	925	953			
Cheese	39	62	145	21.2	463	477			
	570	910	2150	313.4					
					6840	7045			
							Weight	Starter	Starter
							35566	6061	0

## Chapter 5: Customers & Communities

So Bethesdabakers ran for a little over four years from December 2007 to February 2012 when I “retired” on my 65<sup>th</sup> birthday. What did I get out of it? Well, I did it; I set up and ran a microbakery on my own terms, without anyone else’s help or finance (except, of course, Sue). I do acknowledge an awful lot of support and goodwill from friends and fellow bakers for which I am hugely in their debt.

My baking skills and confidence have been totally transformed in a way that could only be achieved through baking in volume and against the clock, the weather, power cuts and other forms of adversity. In the course of the period I have borrowed, adapted and created bread formulas so that I now have around 100 in the repertoire. These include a substantial number of ryes and flatbreads of which I had little experience before I started. I have developed a whole system for running a home microbakery.

During the final year I had the satisfaction of having several students for two day courses in setting up microbakeries. Now I am “retired” I can capitalise on my experience of the past four years to extend the scope of these courses, to pass on practical baking skills to others and I will find the time to do more writing.

But there are a whole lot of benefits that I hadn’t even thought of. I remember Paul Merry saying to me, “Don’t just do wholesale, Mick. You need the contact with customers.” When you are getting into the baking-for-sale business you are thinking about the practicalities – organisation, logistics, baking skills, finances. In a nutshell, will you be able to hack it? Your ambitions are to develop your baking skills, achieve sales, make enough money to survive and continue, maybe even a little profit. But I found out there’s a whole other side to it which I would say has enriched our lives considerably.

When I was first starting to bake bread for sale I suppose I was a bit lacking in confidence that anyone would take me seriously – both people like suppliers and potential customers. You have to stand up and say, “I am a baker” – and then you have to prove it, to yourself as well as the punters. So like a new graduate touting for a start in an illustrious career I tried to stuff my CV with glittering achievements.

Yes I had won the overall prize in the bread competition at the Ludlow Food Festival in 2007 but it was a pretty badly organised competition (I entered three sourdough loaves in different categories. There wasn’t a sourdough section otherwise I would have entered them in it. But when the results were announced a rather well known, local singer turned out to have won the ... errhm ... sourdough category.)

I also had some good quotes from Dan Lepard singing my praises but then he likes to encourage people.

But the best of all came in a baking supplement published by the Guardian in November 2007 where I was described as “the sourdough genius Mick Hartley”. This was Adam Newey, an editor at the Guardian and a jolly nice chap who had met me at the Bethesdabakin’ event in August that year. It wasn’t true of course and he had met other more talented bakers in Bethesda but it was a gem of a quote.

So I copied them all into my publicity and later onto the website. I wish I hadn’t now because, although it’s great to receive praise, it’s all a little over the top. Let’s face it, it’s more crucial to have a realistic understanding of your own strengths and weaknesses.

On the other hand, customer response is something quite different. Unlike your baking peers who maybe just want to stay friends, customers have no reason to be free with their plaudits; they can just stop buying. After I had been baking for sale for several weeks, a couple of customers emailed me with almost identically worded messages, “Thank you for improving the quality of our lives.” This totally stopped me in my tracks. It wasn’t the praise, it was the realisation that you could actually do something as simple as making good bread and have a significant effect on someone’s well-being.

More followed:

“Maybe appreciative is too understated – it has brightened up my life to have some decent bread finally!” Gert, a Dutch chef, a personal and commercial customer.

“First, wow, your bread is like a little slice of heaven. It has amazing flavor. It sticks to the ribs. And it has a texture similar to...well...bread, rather than marshmallows. You’ve just made life significantly better.” One of our American customers.

“Your bread continues to be a daily source of joy and delight!” Two of our regulars.

“It’s bettah than what I can get in Noo Yawk” American customer’s visiting mother in her strong NY accent.

Feedback from customers is not saying “you are a better baker than other bakers” so much as “you are providing a service which we really appreciate.”

So not only did I get to do what I wanted, it paid the bills and there is a little community out there who felt they were significantly benefiting from my labours. Can’t get better than that, can it?



Deio, at the time our youngest customer, has his first taste of bread – and it's a rye

Community. Now there's a word I hadn't given much thought to. Bethesda is a large North Wales village only five miles from the sea where the mountains of Snowdonia rise abruptly putting an end to the road until Thomas Telford needed to drive through a route to carry the mail from London to Holyhead and onward to Dublin in the nineteenth century. It only went that five miles in the first place to give access to the Penhryn quarry which grew to become the biggest open slate quarry in the world. At it's height it employed 3000 men. It now employs less than 300 but it explains the size of the village in so unlikely a place.

It is a traditional, Welsh-speaking, chapel-going community where on Sundays people still walk to worship in their best clothes, bibles under their arms. That, of course, is only one aspect of the village but, just as you would not choose our house as a place to set up a bakery, Bethesda is an unlikely place to start any sort of up-market food enterprise. But, in doing so, you start to open up another world.

On the database of email addresses there are around 80 customers. About 40 of these placed regular orders, and, of these, probably three quarters ordered virtually every week. Most have been customers for a significant time, many right from the start. They are a pretty faithful lot.

A few were personal friends before we started and at first I thought they were buying just to help out but they have persisted. Virtually all of our customers are what you might call professional people – connected with Bangor



University, teachers, social workers, probation officers, health professionals, employed by the national park and other public bodies, the odd artist, writer, etc. Virtually all are friends, friends of friends, colleagues of existing customers.

Advertising was a complete waste of time. We advertised in the local Welsh language newspaper, had handouts printed, had an advertisement in a local charity shop window in the centre of the High Street for six months without picking up a single order. Everything was done by work of mouth.

Even the website didn't have much effect in terms of orders but its value lay in providing information for potential customers in an efficient and attractive way and it simplified the ordering process for me.

Strangely enough, few of the commercial outlets that had previously expressed an interest in buying bread actually placed orders when I started baking for sale. Ultimately this didn't matter because we have always achieved the sales we needed. But it wouldn't have been so clever if I had been depending on them.

One that did was Ye Olde Bull's Head in Beaumaris. It's not just that they placed a regular weekly order, it's the manner in which they did so. The Bull is a hotel in the centre of Beaumaris with a large and thriving Brasserie downstairs and a smarter restaurant upstairs. The partners who own the hotel, David Robertson and Keith Rothwell, very obviously care about the quality of the service they provide. We had a meeting with Keith, who runs the restaurant side, expecting to have to do a big sales job especially as we weren't going to offer a commercial discount or delivery. Took about five minutes – twenty large loaves a week for the upstairs restaurant, us to choose the breads, anything new throw a sample in with the order (at their expense). Could we have them ready for collection about 5.30 p.m. rather than 6.00 p.m. so that Keith could pick up on his way into the Bull? We certainly could.

So we stayed for lunch in the Brasserie on the strength of it. David, the other partner, came up to say how happy he was they were now taking our bread and bought us a bottle of wine. I thought the contractor was supposed to pay the backhanders.

The order reduced over the months as the recession hit business but they were great people to supply to. And as the restaurant is at least up to one star standard I'm also quite proud to have had my bread there. It's a strange feeling to have your own bread served to you in a restaurant of that quality.

And David Robertson supplied me with another good quote. He went down to London for the weekend and ate at l'Atelier de Joël Robuchon. He told me that he sat there feeling smug in the knowledge that in their restaurant the bread was at least as good. I hope he told Keith the same about his cooking.

We have also supplied other commercial outlets virtually since we started. The first was a café in Llanrwst, a village about 15 miles away, run by an

enthusiastic young couple, Oli and Rebecca, keen to make their way in the catering world. The great thing about this was they were happy to take local orders just for the price of a small percentage on top of our charges. Trouble is, they were so keen to get on they moved to a larger establishment, Conwy Falls, too far away for it to be feasible to continue our relationship.

Scrumptious Produce was a very innovative service run by Sandy, a young German woman, who sourced good quality local produce and took orders over the net for weekly delivery. She added our bread to her website but sadly, just after having won a Bronze in the True Taste Wales Awards, she decided it was just too tough a business to run with a small child, and put it on the market (the business, not the child).

Very, very rarely have we thought a customer was taking advantage and only twice in over two years has a customer not paid up.

We had a brief flirtation with an ideally placed residential centre just outside Bethesda which we won't go into. Let's just say that, for the sake of my blood pressure, it wasn't worth trying to collect the eight quid they owe us. Liam, a friend of ours, used to run a pub in Soho. If anyone was acting funny he'd just walk up to them, ask what they were drinking, give them their money back and tell them to leave. That's sort of how I feel. If anyone has the slightest complaint they get their money back. If I think someone is pissing me about or a complaint is totally unjustified I might take them off the customer list. Some hassle isn't worth having and I don't mind losing a bit of money.

But there is also the unforeseen non-payer. We were supplying a very worthy co-operative organisation, people we liked – only a small weekly order, but debts soon add up and I should have been more observant. Soon they owed a couple of hundred pounds which is money to me. I discovered they had cash-flow problems but also that they were still paying their major supplier, who didn't need the money but whose continued supply was vital to their survival, rather than me who did need the money. It was resolved but it took several months and raised some interesting ethical questions.

Which leaves us with Gert, Dutch chef, innovative restaurateur, nice guy who keeps me on my (baking) toes. He started buying bread from us when he was chef at Caban, a converted school in Brynrefail just outside Llanberis which now houses small businesses, a conference centre and a café.

He used to put on themed meals there to complement the films that were periodically shown, so he would ask us to provide a bread that matched the theme. On one occasion he ordered eight large New York Ryes to go with the NY Deli food he was preparing to accompany *Man on Wire*, the film about Philippe Petit, the guy who walked the high-wire between the Twin Towers. The night before he phoned us and said the film had been changed. What to? A Scottish film. He still took the bread.

Now he has his own little restaurant, Oren, in Caernarfon, which he managed to get into the Good Food Guide within a few months of opening. He believes

in accessibility and variety so he changes his menus every week and offers a three course dinner for a mere £15. He puts on music and poetry and it is the only restaurant I know of that has its own reading group. The great thing for me is one week he does provencale food so I can do olive breads from my repertoire but then phones up and says, "Next week I'm doing the Austro-Hungarian Empire. What can you bake for me?", so off I go, researching, adapting, creating.

Apart from the Bull none of these commercial customers placed huge orders but they supplied a regular small income to supplement that of the individual customers. They provided us with variety, helped to get the bakery more widely known and they are nice people to deal with. We got a lot more from the business than financial income.

Having decided to run this bakery on my own terms I set out to impose an iron discipline on my customers. Follow The Rules or buy your bread elsewhere – I *shall* be treated with some respect. Shouldn't have bothered. Jeremy the artist is the best example. Being an artist, his mind is elsewhere. Being an artist he denies this – "No need to phone me. I don't forget things." He usually ordered bread for Thursday, i.e., The Rules say his bread is available for collection on Thursday 6.00-9.00 p.m. or any time Friday up 'til 9.00. p.m.

One *Sunday* about 3.30 p.m. in the middle of an extended lunch with friends, knock at the door, Jeremy come for his bread. Very apologetic when he sees the situation and says he'll call back. No, no, Jeremy, come in and have a drink. One of our guests, Clive, is a video artist now living away from Wales. Three hours and a number of drinks later, having come to an arrangement with Clive to show several of his films at a show he is producing, Jeremy says he must be going and can he have his bread. Apart from the fact it was Sunday, he hadn't ordered any bread that week.

He was a good customer and eventually had a standing order for a weekly 2K Classic. He was still prone to turning up outside of The Rules but I gave up moaning. If I acted grumpy they'd all just laugh at me – Sue included. Wouldn't mind but I only invented The Rules to protect her from the bakery taking over our home. Giggle, giggle, giggle from the hallway - I'm going to bed.

But then his partner, Pam, borrowed some starter and a recipe, took to making bread so we lost him as a customer. This is a cause for celebration. We have always encouraged customers to make bread and dished out starter on request. We've only lost two customers this way and the world has gained two bakers.

In the main our customers have been a joy and turn up enthusiastically with their children, dogs and sometimes with visiting friends or relatives to show them this weird and unlikely place. If two customers coincide the house is crowded. Often it's like a social club when people who haven't met for some time bump into each other, all sorts of social networks emerge, people we've known independently turn out to know each other, we even discovered two

long-standing customers were brother and sister when they turned up at the same time. One week we found the hall (that's about three foot square) full of acquaintances discussing how we could turn the living room into a bar so they could meet up on a Friday night on their way home from work to collect their bread. Now there's a thought ...

Phoebe the dog crashes in, her claws scrabbling away on the tiles, straining to get her weekly mini baguettes. Juliet, her owner, and Sue discuss getting their writing published. Phoebe pretends she loves me.

As well as the Welsh and English customers different nationalities appear. We had no idea there was a group of Americans and Canadians dotted around the area. We've had up to four Germans as customers (well, Steffi lives next door but it's still more than you would expect in a rural Welsh area). Plus there's Gert from Holland and Vasilis and Klimentini from Greece who have lived in Wales longer than we have. These people are enthusiasts I suppose because they have experienced good bread in other situations – and they both contribute to and make demands of your baking.

We make a feature of Christmas breads, stollen one year, brioche with crystallised fruits the next. Klimentini came to me and asked if I could make a bread from her local village. Her brother usually sent one over from Greece at Christmas but the previous year it arrived three weeks late and in pieces. Homeland Security obviously concluded that the astonishingly strong spiciness was there to disguise something of a more illicit nature. So she gave me a hand-written recipe. The ingredients were measured in kilos, coffee cups and wine glasses. The only liquid (apart from a little orange juice for soaking the fruit) was olive oil. How do you make a sourdough without water? Well, I did and the result was excellent, and two Christmases later when I reworked the recipe with a little less respect for the original it was even better.

Our Welsh customers have been really supportive even though our good intentions to be bilingual have turned out very scrappy indeed. Carys, whose family farm near Bala, gave me the photo on the next page of her grandmother and aunt baking in the 1950's.

This is how microbakeries used to be. Look at the size of the loaves. Note also the "Live Chicks" boxes and the little lamb at the bottom. Don't think they had Environmental Health Officers in those days!

Our good friends Nia and Gruff have eased our way into the Rugby Club for two of the annual Bethesdabakin' events and have now arranged for me to use the kitchens there to run bread courses.



In return I have tried to produce what you might call modern Welsh Breads – Focaccia Dewi Sant for St David's Day, a sourdough Bara Planc, a soda bread Bara Surgeirch, Yr Ardd Fadarch Focaccia with Cynan Jones' fantastic fresh and dried shiitakes from Beddgelert.

The Americans wanted bread for Thanksgiving so we developed a bread with pecans, cranberries and a whack of bourbon for them (I got into trouble for having overlooked the Canadian Thanksgiving – I didn't even *know* a Canadian Thanksgiving existed). Two of the Americans, Rene and Erin, have given me family recipes for different styles of corn bread. Rene gave me a session on baking corn bread and together we concluded that a mixture of maize meal and polenta gave the nearest equivalent to the corn used in the States – she brings me back samples of cornmeals to try when she goes back to Texas. Steffi and her friends bring me back Grünkern from Germany and scour the place for einkorn and emmer. When Dorota moved in to share the house with Steffi I had the incentive to develop some Polish breads.

Maggie txted from California one Thursday pleading for me to take a late order for bread for Friday because the only bread they could get there was so bad. They turned up on the doorstep *en famille* the next evening after 24 hours travelling.

We did an Inauguration Bread to coincide with the swearing in of Barack Obama (I confess it was surprisingly like Thanksgiving Bread). Sian, a Welsh customer, contributed the suggestion that we call it Bara Barack Bread (bara = bread in Welsh) which I turned into Bara CK Bread as a neat bilingual title.





Bara CK Bread

Customers also give presents in the spirit of good things made at home – chutneys, jams, preserves. Some bake bread themselves as well as buying and bring samples to share. A bread-for-eggs trade has developed with Beryl round the corner, not just hens eggs, but duck and monster goose eggs. Phil the gardener brings National Trust chocolate bears along with Peace, Love and Blue Skies.

So, in terms of “The Community”, i.e. the population of Bethesda, I’m not sure we have made much of an impact; we still meet local people who are astounded to hear we have been baking for sale since 2007. But, in my old age I have started to register that there isn’t one community but all sorts of different communities within a population and that you can create new communities simply by starting an activity that resonates with other people and everyone benefits. Oh well, I’ve been a late developer all my life ...

I have to include a short piece about Bethesdabakin’, another sort of community referred to a number of times previously. Back in 2007 I organised a baking event at Bethesda Rugby Club for people who wanted to meet up for

a weekend of communal baking. It basically came about because of chatter on Dan Lepard's forum. Someone was suggesting an event in Australia and I put forward a counter proposal for the selfish reason that no way could I afford to go to Australia. I tried to organise it by committee over the internet but it soon became clear that the leg-work had to be done by someone where the event was taking place. In the end it was put together by me and a guy from Shropshire called James Langton.

It was a great success. The sun shone. Dan Lepard contributed a day of his time, Rick brought up a prefabricated masonry oven of his own design. Bacheldre contributed a portable mill. Edward Dickin came from the Department of Agriculture at Bangor University to talk about naked barley. The most important principal that was established was that no one should be excluded – the whole weekend was done on shared costs, including food.

The following year it went to France organised by Brad Prezant, then Rick took it to his bakery in South Wales, then Martin and Joe hosted it in the Yorkshire Dales, then I grabbed it for the fifth event and brought it back to Bethesda (and the sun shone again). Now, this year Joe is doing it again with Jay Butters at another North Wales rugby club, Nant Conwy.

The first Bethesdabakin' had an organised programme, Brad brought in a German baker (Brad paid him a wild boar ham), to take a lead at the French weekend, but since then there has been almost no programme and the "stars" are the people who attend and learn from each other. There is no organisation, no one owns it, it just needs someone to offer to host the next event.

In addition to the principal of shared costs, the other important aspect of these events is the development of a community of bakers who have attended, shared ideas and skills, who stay in touch with each other and bring other people into the pool. A significant number who come have already started or have aspirations to become involved in baking for sale, or are involved in related businesses (Anne and Andy, millers from Felin Ganol, Terry Lyons, oven builder) so there is a really useful exchange of ideas, recipes and support. But beginners or home bakers with no commercial ambitions whatsoever are there on an equal basis with everyone else. Plus, local people were invited to the Yorkshire Dales event, some of our customers took part last year, and I understand that the same is happening again this year in the Conwy Valley. So the ripples spread out locally as well as nationally. And, indeed, internationally – from the start we have had Americans (Brad, Jeremy and last year Emily), Australians (Dom and family) and, twice in Bethesda, Nina Holm Jensen from Denmark. Nina is a great baker who deserves special mention for her generosity with recipes – so much so that we used to have Nina weeks at the microbakery when all the specials came from her bread formulas.

Knowing when to stop is as much an art as getting the show on the road (he wisely says, he who has never been able to do one thing for more than three years at a time). I announced to my customers that I was ending the

microbakery in February this year when my state pension was due but, to be honest, it started to fade away after the big Christmas bakes and I kept them guessing when the last bake would be. We finished with a monster 65<sup>th</sup> birthday party – where else could this be held but at Bethesda Rugby Club? My family periodically throw huge parties in Birmingham where my mother lives. When the extended family gets together with friends there can be a couple of hundred people plus musicians – I have eight brothers and sisters which is a good start and most of them have been out and multiplied.

So we held it within this tradition. The family were invited, friends local and national, anyone who was currently or had once been a customer, everyone who had been to the baking events, to party from early afternoon ‘til midnight.

My brothers Pete and Bernie, both really good musicians, agreed to play. We booked local band the Cane Toads led by David Hopewell, long time friend and bread customer. Then we had a call from Humph the bass player – could he do a short set with a new line up who hadn’t played in public yet? It was very confusing because a number of musicians played in various combinations, but in the event I think we had four different bands (plus the brothers). At least you know where you are when the Cane Toads finally get on stage (Gloria! G-L-O-R-I-A!).

Jeremy and Pam decorated the room as only artists can. I baked about twenty flatbreads, fougasse and foccace plus simple dips for the afternoon. Guests brought fabulous cakes. In the evening Gert served about a hundred portions of meat and veggie cassoulets followed by Dutch apple cake.

Everyone agreed it was a very fine event. People of all ages came and went throughout the afternoon – some did a couple of hours, went home and came back for the evening. I managed to drink Guinness (and finally a couple of Jamesons) from two in the afternoon until midnight without disgracing myself.

The whole was enlivened by a cup match in which Bethesda trounced a South Wales team who on paper should easily have won. So both bars were heaving with considerable interchange between the two, particularly with the kids and dogs. Another slice of overlapping communities.

## Chapter 6: Final Thoughts

This book has been about how I set up and ran Bethesdabakers. You can't copy it exactly and in any case you will have your own vision of what your microbakery will look like. But you can learn a lot from my experience.

This final chapter lists issues you might want to consider before launching your project. It's not comprehensive - you still need to do your homework - but it will help you on your way. The book is based on my style of bakery, i.e. If you are baking yeasted bread, are taking the wholesale route, aiming at farmers markets, intend to have retail premises, make deliveries, become certified organic, you will have to research these and probably other matters yourself before taking the plunge.

**Partners:** Most importantly, if you are in a relationship with someone start by discussing the implications of your plans – thoroughly, over a period of time. Any business creates stress but businesses run from home can create particular tensions. Your joint finances may come under strain. Your partner's personal space will be infringed, their time and ability to concentrate on their own activities affected. Inconveniences arising from your business that you might put up with could be unacceptable to a partner not involved in the project.

**Legislation & Regulations:** Check out the **Food Standards Agency** website - [www.food.gov.uk](http://www.food.gov.uk) – and order a “**Safer Food, Better Business**” DVD and pack. Instead of having to draw up your own risk assessment, the pack itemises safety points each of which has a box in which you can record the action you have taken to address them.

Then there's “**The Weights and Measures (Specified Quantities) (Unwrapped Bread and Intoxicating Liquor) Order 2011**” – [www.legislation.gov.uk](http://www.legislation.gov.uk) and the associated “**Guidance for Businesses**” from [www.bis.gov.uk](http://www.bis.gov.uk). Please let me know if you can make sense of it, in particular at what point does unwrapped bread become wrapped bread?

While we're on the subject, there's also “**The Bread and Flour Regulations 1998 (as amended) Guidance Notes**” to set your pulse racing: [www.food.gov.uk/multimedia/pdfs/breadflourguide.pdf](http://www.food.gov.uk/multimedia/pdfs/breadflourguide.pdf)

Do a basic food hygiene course - I don't think it's a legal requirement but it will show the Environmental Health Officer you are taking the matter seriously.

It is a legal requirement to notify the Environmental Health Officer if you intend to supply food products to the public so the best approach is to involve them well before you start.

Trading Standards also need to know of your existence. They are concerned with issues such as labelling, weights and measures, etc.

You may also need to check with your local Planning Department that planning permissions are not required. This is unlikely if your business is to be carried out without changes to your property.

In reality, anyone baking bread for sale from home is going to be seen as such an oddball by all these very busy officials that they are unlikely to make trouble for you – they have bigger fish to fry, as you might say. Bread (don't make meat pies if you want a quiet life) is classed as a low risk food so the EHO only has to visit once every two years. And if you are baking in your own home they have to give you 24 hours notice. The sensible approach is to show you are taking steps to ensure hygienic bread production and that you are aware of the issues.

**Insurance & Liability:** Did you know that having more than a comparatively small number of people visit your house in connection with a business can invalidate your house insurance? **Business from Home Insurance** is easily available, is reasonably cheap and can incorporate your household cover, public liability and other business risks. Apart from protecting you, you won't be able to sell or exhibit at farmers markets, food festivals or other events unless you have public liability cover.

**Capacity – How Much Bread Can You Produce?:** You need to consider the strange matter of Capacity. At its simplest "capacity" means the amount of bread you can turn out in a day.

I have two ovens with a total capacity of 10 freeform 800g loaves. A loaf takes 50 minutes to bake; you're bound to lose a bit of time loading and unloading plus 2 kilo loaves take an extra 15 minutes, so let's say you can bake 10 loaves an hour. How many loads can you bake in a day? On bake days I used to start at 5.00 a.m. The first load would not be scaled, shaped and ready to prove until about 5.45 a.m. Three and a half hours prove. First bake 9.15 a.m. Customers arriving at 6.00 p.m. So all bread must be cooled and wrapped by then. That allows for nine bakes = 90 x 800g loaves – in theory.

If you are offering a range of types and weights of bread oven capacity gets more complicated. I used to bake 2K, 800g, 400g loaves, probably ryes in tins, flatbreads on pizza tins, baguettes.

The busiest day I recorded I mixed 64K of dough. But that in itself is not straightforward. On paper I can get roughly 52K (6 large dough boxes @ 8K + 1 small @ 4K) in my fridge to ferment overnight. But that day I mixed eight different doughs and the weights were all different depending on customer orders, i.e. they did not conveniently fit into 8K or 4K boxes. In addition I had to mix some doughs on the bake day because the total was greater than my fridge capacity.

Other factors to be considered: not just the number and type of tins, baskets and cloths you have but the space you have for proving doughs, cooling space for hot breads, space and time for wrapping and packing cooled breads.



note the number of times “space” occurred in the previous paragraph. It’s even hard to slash dough with confidence if your elbows are colliding with other objects in the kitchen.

And don’t forget your personal capacity – you have to protect yourself from the enthusiasm and demand of your customers. The day I did 64K I didn’t realise it until I went back and calculated it. My body told me it was getting to be too much – I didn’t have a system that warned me when orders were getting over the top. So I built in a calculator that totalled the dough weights as I recorded the bread orders. It didn’t work, of course, in the sense that I never realised how big the order was until it was too late but it did make me start looking after myself a little. That’s why it’s also worth having clear rules about deadlines both for orders and bread collection otherwise you end up with no life of your own. As discussed above, you also need a fairly clear understanding with your partner about acceptable parameters. Unless you want your life to be taken over by it you need to build a fence around your bakery – bakeries are unruly things.

If you are starting small and waiting to see how the business develops, within reason there’s no need to worry about calculating capacity with any precision – a different matter if you are entering into contracts. After all, if I can bake 90 loaves in my bit of space I’m sure you can in yours.

**Essential Equipment:** The equipment I used is listed in Chapter 3. There’s no point in repeating it here in detail but let’s look at the broader issues.

Unless you have a pile of money (or huge lottery funding) it’s pointless to buy equipment until the need for it becomes apparent. Basically you can make a start with little more than your amateur baking kit.

Be pragmatic. It’s very tempting to buy the best pukka kit or equipment that you think will impress other people. You actually want stuff that works and at the best possible price. Your ideal might be a wood burning masonry oven, a deck oven or, failing this, an upmarket stone lined bread oven but, as I show every week, good results can be obtained from an all-purpose convection oven at a much smaller price. Sadly the price of top quality French linen-lined wicker bannetons is astronomical – I was lucky to get mine on the cheap. They are also very lovely objects in themselves, but less costly German bent cane and fibre brotformen, and even plastic baskets will do the job.

The three principal items you need are a mixer, a fridge if you are fermenting overnight, and an oven. Dough boxes have to go in the fridge so choose the two together with a view to maximising the quantity of dough that can be handled – no point in having an unneeded freezer compartment taking up space.

You need different types of storage all of which have to be cleanable. Flour must be stored off the floor – strong shelving capable of containing several 25k sacks is probably best. Additional shelving is required for other

ingredients and containers for open packs and convenience of use. Any packaging – tissue paper, bags, etc. must be stored hygienically.

**Spreadsheet Administrative System:** Yes, I'd be more than happy if you bought my system of spreadsheets for storing bread formulas and calculating ingredient weights, printing out your work schedule, etc. as illustrated at the end of Chapter 3 – The Microbakery. But I cannot deny that these types of spreadsheet calculators are fairly simple to construct. I would urge you to buy or develop some sort of computerised system – as a lone baker they will preserve your sanity – pencil and paper will not do.

**Suppliers:** There are, more or less, three main types of supplier you have to be involved with: ingredients, equipment, packaging. I say “have to” because you need them but it's often a case of trying to find the least bad option.

**Ingredients:** You shouldn't have to put up with damaged goods and from an Environmental Health point of view you *mustn't* accept damaged goods but food suppliers will try to slip them through. And it's not easy for the small producer when you don't carry large amounts of stock. It's not usually possible to examine every item in a delivery – the driver's not going to hang about, he wants to finish his round. Then you discover split flour sacks and there isn't a delivery in your area for another two weeks – possibly a month. Suppliers seem to have no concept of what it's like to be a customer. They know you are a baker but they don't warn you when major items in your order – like flour for instance – are out of stock. I once had an order that was so depleted when it arrived that I phoned the supplier and asked if they could suggest any recipes involving 3 kilos of golden syrup, 2 litres of sunflower oil and a sack of spelt flour.

In five years we've had two ingredient suppliers. I got rid of the first after numerous split flour sacks – the driver said he couldn't help it because there was a bit that stuck out on his trolley. What can you say? The second, we tolerate because you have to have a supplier and if you complain loudly enough about damaged or missing items, they will send replacements out by courier. I wouldn't actually go as far as recommending them.

Another problem for the small producer is the minimum orders to qualify for free delivery. You don't have the money for a large order or the space to store it. In the current recession it's worth trying to negotiate with suppliers who are as desperate for sales as anyone else is.

I haven't used them but nationally **Suma** has a good reputation – **[www.suma.coop](http://www.suma.coop)** but also has a comparatively high free delivery threshold.

A number of millers sell direct: **Doves Farm** – **[www.dovesfarm.co.uk](http://www.dovesfarm.co.uk)**; **Shipton Mill** – **[www.shipton-mill.com](http://www.shipton-mill.com)**; **FWP Matthews** – **[www.fwpmatthews.co.uk](http://www.fwpmatthews.co.uk)**, but I have no experience of any of them.

**Equipment:** On the equipment front, probably 90% of my baking gear has come from **Nisbets** – **[www.nisbets.com](http://www.nisbets.com)**. They are a huge catering supplier

but they will deliver free, overnight, orders over £50. So you don't need to be a large purchaser of equipment to benefit. It's worth studying their catalogues over a period (once you get on their mailing list there'll be plenty of them to peruse!). They sometimes have amazing reductions but you also have to be aware of their methods. In their clearance sales "Now only £50" means they have reduced the price and they will state the original and current prices, but "Only £50" means no change. Occasionally you need to read the small print. I bought a commercial convection oven from them for an exceptionally good price but had to wait six weeks for delivery and there was no flexibility over delivery date basically because they order them by the container load from China. No problem if you're not in a hurry, but someone else who bought the same oven which was delivered without the advertised number of racks had to wait several more weeks until the next shipment arrived. Overall I rate them pretty highly.

The ultimate French proving baskets – **Société Coopérative Agricole de Vannerie** - [www.vannerie.com](http://www.vannerie.com); German brotformen - **Ernst Birnbaum Company** - [www.bannetons.com](http://www.bannetons.com)

**Creeds** are "proper" bakery equipment suppliers. Their website used not to show prices, you had to select your items and ask for a quotation. They also refused to supply amateurs. But their new website seems much more user-friendly – [www.creedsdirect.co.uk](http://www.creedsdirect.co.uk).

**Panibois** wooden baking moulds - [www.buyrite.co.uk/Panibois.htm](http://www.buyrite.co.uk/Panibois.htm). Last time I bought from them I ordered at 4.00 p.m. and they were on the doorstep by 10.00 a.m. the next morning.

Should you be stuck for an excuse to go to Paris, within a few hundred yards of each other you will find: **E. Dehillerin**, 18 et 20, rue Coquillière - 51, rue Jean- Jacques Rousseau - [www.e-dehillerin.fr/index.php](http://www.e-dehillerin.fr/index.php). It's not brilliant for bakery gear but it is just such an astonishing catering shop you have to go there. **Mora**, 13 rue Montmartre - [www.mora.fr](http://www.mora.fr) - probably the best shop for bakers. They stock Vannerie bannetons at heart stopping prices and a variety of other gear. Their website is also the best. **La Bovida**, 36, rue Montmartre - [www.labovida.com/index.html](http://www.labovida.com/index.html) - more for patisseries than boulangers. **A Simon**, 48, Rue Montmartre – bit hit and miss. Sometimes well stocked, other times don't seem to have much bakery gear - [www.simon-a.com/](http://www.simon-a.com/) Finally, for a great selection of food books including a good bakery section, **la Librairie Gourmande**, 90 rue Montmartre: [www.librairiegourmande.fr/boutique/](http://www.librairiegourmande.fr/boutique/).

Should you happen to be in Bordeaux, check out the enticingly named **Bordeaux Machines**, 45-47 rue Camille Flammarion: [www.bordeaux-machines.com](http://www.bordeaux-machines.com). Straightforward commercial outlet away from the tourist trail. They were rather surprised to find two Brits in their shop but also extremely helpful. Found some very well-priced 2K bannetons there. But they are totally geared up to invoicing trade accounts and so don't take credit cards (or have much change). We coped.

**Packaging:** For loaves, our style of packaging is a single sheet of tissue paper secured with a label. The label is just a basic inkjet address label. If customers want them we have a stock of two sizes of brown paper takeaway bags. Plus we have a supply of white paper bags for any miscellaneous uses. Flatbreads are usually clingfilmed as are serious German ryes.

The clingfilm comes in catering sizes from **Nisbets**. Apart from the labels, the tissue paper and bags are supplied by **The Reynard Group** – [www.reynards.com](http://www.reynards.com). Our nearest branch, **Davies Bakery Supplies**, have always been efficient. They deliver in Bethesda on Wednesdays – I know that I can order late Tuesday afternoon and receive the delivery by about 10 the following morning. Their minimum delivery charge is now down to £50 – even so, at my current rate of production, six reams of tissue paper is going to last us quite a long time!

**Final Word:** OK, I've done my bit. If your creativity expresses itself through baking, I'm sure you too will have the drive and passion to set up a successful and thriving microbakery.

The time could be right. As the great Woody Guthrie said, "Take it easy. But take it."

For microbakery courses, bread courses, informal advice contact me at [www.thepartisanbaker.com](http://www.thepartisanbaker.com).

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