‘To the most wanting of the parish’: reflections on the creation of a fictional dole and calendar custom

PARKES-NIELD, Sophie

‘To the Most Wanting of the Parish’:
Reflections on the Creation of a Fictional Dole and Calendar Custom

Dr Sophie Parkes-Nield
Sheffield Hallam University

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Introduction

In 2024, I completed a practice-based PhD at Sheffield Hallam University (UK) within the Centre for Contemporary Legend (CCL), one of the few higher education research centres in England dedicated to the study of folklore, increasingly referred to as Folkloristics. The purpose of my research was to interrogate the representation of the calendar custom in contemporary fiction by producing a novel in which the calendar custom takes centre stage. I then situated this within a wider academic context, in the disciplines of creative writing and Folkloristics, in a corresponding and reflexive exegesis that sought to analyse this new representation.

I use the term ‘calendar custom’ with relative confidence here, as it is a term readers of this journal are likely to be acquainted with. I have found, as I note elsewhere (Parkes-Nield), that when introducing to my research in other circumstances, both within and outside the academy, ‘calendar custom’ is not widely understood or used uniformly. However, when I clarified what I meant, my audience could soon identify the regular seasonal, folkloric and communal traditional practices to which I was referring; indeed, many could offer up examples that they had witnessed. Well-documented and high-profile events in England that are considered calendar customs include May Day in Padstow, cheese-rolling on Cooper’s Hilland the tar barrels of Ottery St Mary. The useful directory available at Calendar Customs.com provides many more examples (Shepherd 2024).

As I detail in a chapter on the formulation and execution of my study (Parkes-Nield), I decided to create a calendar custom for my novel, rather than translate an existing, real-world practice for use in the work. I chose this ap-proach because I wished to avoid any ethical concerns relating to the appropriation of customs for entertainment purposes (presuming that readers of my novel will come to it for entertainment first). I also sought to avoid the difficulty of representing a custom in which I do not participate. As a non-participant, I would not be able to grasp the complex and idio-syncratic machinations, and so I felt I would be unable to ensure the repre-sentation was faithful, accurate and sensitive.

However, the fictional calendar custom I created was not plucked from thin air but rather was grounded in what I refer to as ‘likeliness’ (Parkes-Nield): that is, it was developed using components of England’s calendar customs, such as procession and traditional dance and song, and was grounded in the customs found in the region of England in which my fictional village, Cornley, is situated (Oxfordshire, in the South Midlands). I came to name my fictional calendar custom ‘Thankstide’. Thankstide is a weekend-long celebration of the village’s benevolent aristocratic founders. A prominent part of Thankstide is the baking and dissemination of the ‘Cornley cake’, an affordable and easy-to-assemble bun that is a little like a scone or hot cross bun. My fictional calendar custom also gave the novel its name (Parkes-Nield).

The fictional tradition of the Cornley cake is inspired by the customary dole, a feature of a small number of calendar customs of England whereby the affluent in a particular parish provide money or food for the poor, often upon their death and in the following years through a will. Steve Roud notes that in England ‘Only a handful of doles remain today’ (Roud 2008: 118), two of which are particularly well known: the Tichborne Dole, where, each Lady Day (25 March), the residents of Tichborne and Cheriton are entitled to collect a gallon of flour from the descendants of the Tichborne family (Roud 2008: 111); and at Biddenden in Kent, where, on Easter Monday, bread, cheese, tea and a special biscuit are distributed (Roud 2008: 165).

This paper examines the role of the Cornley cake in both the fictional custom and in the novel at large. It does this by reflecting on how the integration of the cake enabled the development of the fictional world, through what I think of as the ‘writer’s toolkit’, the essential aspects of a novel about which the novelist must make fundamental decisions that affect its very nature: its cast of characters, its plot, and the place(s) and time(s) in which the novel is set.

We are what we eat: using the Cornley cake to develop character

Thankstide[1] is told through the alternating perspectives of five narrators, one of whom is Melodie Dunthorne, a young woman from London. She arrives in Cornley, an Oxfordshire village she has never previously visited, just as the Thankstide custom is getting underway. The novel makes clear that Melodie’s stay in the village is temporary: she has hired a car for the weekend, and she is staying at one of the pubs in the village. Though she comes to the village with a birth connection (she is seeking her biological father, Andy Tarn), she is also a tourist: she is depicted reading tourist infor-mation about Thankstide and about Cornley. While the novel’s narration makes this obvious to the reader, the fact that Melodie is a tourist would not be explicitly clear to local residents since (as the novel indicates) the village experiences many unknown faces during the course of Thanks-tide, with spectators and visiting morris sides also present for proceedings (‘morris side’ is the term given to a team of dancers who perform the English morris folk dance).

For the character of Melodie to be convincing, for her narrative arc to be satisfying to the reader, and for her presence to drive the plot, it was clear I needed Melodie to feel an increasing sense of exclusion—coupled with,

1 *Please note that when Thankstide is referred to in italics, this is a reference to the novel as a whole; when used without italics, it refers to the custom itself.*

or accentuated by, her need to integrate into the village. I understood that Melodie, on encountering this custom for the first time, should feel a marked sense of difference between herself and the people she observes participating, but at the same time she should be unable to stay on the sidelines and just watch—as this would be unlikely to provide the jeopardy needed for readers to feel invested in her story (will she be humiliated or accepted by her biological father when he learns of her existence?).

As the custom gets underway, Melodie is introduced to the Cornley cake and is instantly recognised as an outsider because she has never tried one before. The Cornley cake therefore becomes a symbol, in *Thankstide*, for belonging: to consume it on the sanctioned weekend is to display local knowledge pertaining to a special place. That the strangers around her entreat her to taste a cake also becomes significant; it is clear the villagers want Melodie to enjoy the cake and she recognises they desire her to assimilate. Unfortunately, Melodie is unable to fulfil their wishes: a combination of nerves and the poor tourist food she has previous eaten means that she is uncomfortably full and has difficulty swallowing the cake in front of her audience. In writing this scene I took inspiration from Andrew Michael Hurley's novel *Devil's Day* (Hurley 2018), where the outsider status of one character is heightened by her difficulty in participating in the local custom of sin eating, whereby villagers are required to eat soul cakes that have been placed on the body of a deceased local person. In Hurley's novel, this foreshadows the character's struggle to integrate with the host community. I hope the same effect is produced in regard to Melodie in Cornley.

In Arnold Van Gennep's seminal work *The Rites of Passage* (Van Gennep 1960/2004), the anthropologist states that when a stranger eats with members of a given society, he or she embarks upon a 'rite of incorporation' in which they become familiar with that society (Van Gennep 1960/2004: 29). Melodie, in tasting the cake for the first time, is brought into the circle of the Cornley residents around her. Nevertheless, as soon as the eating has taken place and the custom moves on to the song—to which she does not know the words—she is marked as an outsider once again. Again, this echoes the findings of Van Gennep, who writes: 'A union by this means may be permanent, but more often it lasts only during the period of digestion' (Van Gennep 1960/2004: 29).

This pattern is replicated, and amplified, later in the novel when Melodie is invited to Sunday lunch at her biological father's home. She arrives at the invitation of her father's wife, Jan, but the encounter between the couple, the couple's son Darren (another of the novel's narrative voices), and Melodie becomes increasingly strained as the lunch continues. She has not successfully integrated into this society, either.

Like Hurley's soul cake, the Cornley cake is baked to a secret recipe that is reputedly generations old and safeguarded by a team of women villagers, led by Hilary Morton. Hilary is a peripheral character whose appearance in the novel reminds her neighbours, and the reader, of the hard work it takes to stage a calendar custom. Hilary's work begins early in the year, with the coordination of the baking and freezing of hundreds of cakes that

are later disseminated during the Thankstide weekend. Without Hilary's graft and organisation, enjoyment of the Thankstide weekend would suffer and the custom would not be executed in its traditional fashion.

This 'traditional fashion', however, flexes depending on the social group. Andy Tarn, (Melodie's father), while flirting with Lena (another local resident), plays down the significance of the Cornley cake for fear of appearing too rigid in his adherence to tradition. The village's young people have their own tradition, in which they compete against each other to find the cake with the most currants inside: the more currants, the better luck the eater will enjoy. This is a contemporary adaptation of the legend to which the Cornley cake is attached. Many calendar customs have an associated legend that explains the intricacies of the custom's performance (Roud 2008: 116), such as Lady Mowbray's lost hood inspiring the game at Haxey in Lincolnshire each January (Vintner 2023) or the happy marriage of a twelfth-century couple in Dunmow, Essex (Dunmow Flitch Trials 2025). In Cornley, the performance of Thankstide is explained by the legend of a boy who was orphaned by the bubonic plague and restored to health by Cornley's aristocratic founders. The boy, fed a simple bun baked in the aristocrats' own kitchens, established Thankstide (and the legacy of the Cornley cake) in their honour.

The consumption of the cake at Thankstide is an example of what Linda Dégh and Andrew Vázsonyi deem 'ostensive action' (Dégh and Vázsonyi 1983): behaviour that is adopted, or changes, as a result of legend. Whether the Cornley villagers truly believe that an orphan boy is the reason for the Thankstide festival, Cornley cakes form part of a toast each May, alongside song, speeches and commensality, and, as we learn from the Cornley residents, Thankstide is the only time these cakes can be, or should be, eaten.

These motives for engaging with the Thankstide tradition contribute to the verisimilitude I am striving for in my novel: these characters behave in ways that readers will recognise from the real world, giving credence to Thankstide as a believable, understandable tradition and, in turn, developing characters to whom readers will hopefully relate.

The next course: using food to tease out plot

As already outlined, verisimilitude is a key driver of *Thankstide*; by applying a realist approach, I hoped to examine with rigour the representation of the calendar custom in contemporary literature. But I also knew that to encourage the reader to turn the page, there should be some semblance of plot, especially to warrant the readers' attention regarding 'this' iteration of the village's Thankstide custom: why, when it occurs annually, should readers learn about Thankstide now, in this particular fictional year?

But, with the novel set across one weekend (the duration of the village's annual calendar custom), rather than over a longer duration, I also needed to ensure that the plot was sufficiently small-scale to be credible in such a timescale. For this reason, I left aside dead bodies, criminal heists and

life-changing events in favour of something understated but with enough impact to give the novel momentum. The novel's central plot, then, evolved from a question I asked myself: what would happen if a quiet, reserved man, well known in his community for his role in the organisation of a custom, was approached by a woman claiming to be his biological daughter? To ensure the calendar custom remained integral to the novel rather than a colourful backdrop, Melodie, Andy's biological daughter, uses Thankstide as an opportunity to approach her father for the first time, in the streets of the village he has chosen to make his home. Melodie uses the fluctuations of the custom to choose when to make herself known to him, selecting the 'down time' between performances.

The creation of the Cornley cake became integral to retaining the characters in what Mikhail Bakhtin calls the 'market square' (Bakhtin 1963/1984: 123), the location that is central in his theory of the carnivalesque, or carnivalised literature: the misrule of carnival providing potential for the transformation or suspension of the social order. It is in the market square —in this case Cornley's streets, its village green, and its public houses— that people from different socioeconomic backgrounds are thrown together in revelry. Thankstide brings people out of their houses and gives them something they can participate in, and something to consume, and it allows the plot to progress.

However, the presence of the Cornley cake alone proved insufficient to keep the characters in the market square once the initial bread had been broken. Seeking another method to achieve this, I again looked to food: I developed the 'Cake Scramble', an addendum to the festivities that has been created more recently in Thankstide's history to cater to individuals who want to prolong the fun of Thankstide, but also to enable wider-reaching participation, especially by those who may not be involved in the traditional activities—or may be sceptical about the relevance of tradition to contemporary society altogether. The Cake Scramble is based upon 'scrambling customs', whereby money or food are thrown to a crowd, often children, for fun or to ensure fair distribution (Roud 2008: 173). In Thankstide, once the mayor throws the Cornley cakes from the platform on the village green, sports day-style events take place, with contestants invited to participate in cake-throwing and cake-eating activities.

The contentiousness of the Cake Scramble is crucial to the plot. It is revealed that Andy's initial resistance to the Cake Scramble has, over the years, mellowed into ambivalence: he understands its role and he is consoled by the fact that there is an historical precedent for its foundation, even if there is no evidence that a scrambling custom previously existed in Cornley itself. However, most importantly in terms of the plot, Andy's direct lack of involvement in the preparation of the Cake Scramble, in stark contrast to the traditional activities on Saturday, for which he is a key orchestrator, means he is unable to turn down his wife's suggestion that they host Melodie, his biological daughter, for Sunday lunch. (That he is doing anything other than Thankstide-related activities on Thankstide weekend is unthinkable; his paralysis as a result of Melodie's surprise appearance is demonstrated by his inability to resist his wife's recommendation.)

Andy visits the site of the Scramble ahead of it getting underway, and there he encounters Graeme, the morris side's Fool, whose schadenfreude is evident as he detects Andy's discomfort. Later, once the Cake Scramble has begun, Graeme also strikes up a conversation with Melodie. His polite questioning about her presence in the village heightens her sense of being an imposter, or that she is intruding. She brings these feelings to the Sunday lunch with her biological father, which leads to an awkward exchange. The Cake Scramble, then, provides an opportunity for the characters to appear in different spaces, thus enabling the plot to move forward without the formal constraints of the older traditions that take place on the Saturday.

A local delicacy: what food can offer place

Why do calendar customs thrive in some places and not others? Why do some customs die out while others are revived? The calendar custom is undoubtedly a gift to the fiction writer (who is usually seeking to create a memorable place in which a story can take place), contributing to a place's sense of identity, in the minds of the reader as well as in the minds of a novel's ensemble of characters. We see this in the real world, too, as places proudly remind us of their own calendar customs year-round: Denby Dale, the self-proclaimed 'pie village' in Yorkshire that creates a huge pie every few decades, for example, welcomes motorists with illustrations of pies on its road signage (BBC 2020); while Whittlesey, in the Fens, has a permanent sculpture of the straw bear in 'homage to Whittlesey's historic straw bear festival which is an intrinsic part of this town's cultural identity' (Fenland District Council 2018: 25).

In folk horror literature and film, the foibles of a place—its traditions, values, and the people that practise and embody them, along with its landscape —are exploited for horrific effect. The genre's first scholar, Adam Scovell, notes the importance of place, specifically its topography, in his 'Folk Horror Chain', the set of criteria he uses to define a folk horror text. He states: 'the landscape explicitly isolates the characters and communities within them' (Scovell 2014). This isolation is a direct result of features of the natural setting, often related to the remoteness of the place, and it is key in enabling the resident community to generate what Scovell calls 'skewed morality and belief systems' (Scovell 2014). This skewed morality is often epitomised in what Bayman and Donnelly call 'the final ritual' (2023: 15), a climactic event that leads to the barbaric dénouement, which is a hallmark of the folk horror text. This is a more precise extension of Scovell's 'Folk Horror Chain', according to which folk horror must contain a 'summoning' or 'violent act such as possession, sacrifice or something else that leads to violence and eventually death' (Scovell 2014). I write elsewhere (Parkes-Nield 2023) that this final ritual or summoning is often a recognisable calendar custom, and I make clear that the popularity of folk horror and its legacy has had a pronounced impact on perceptions of English calendar customs: calendar customs are believed to be inherently insular and the communities that perpetuate them are believed to be regressive and dangerous. I call this 'the *Wicker Man* effect' (Parkes-Nield 2023), after the 1973 cult film that has become the cornerstone of the folk horror genre (Scovell 2016) and in

which a calendar custom features as its horrific climax. I fear this phenomenon typecasts English folk culture.

In *Thankstide*, I wanted to acknowledge the far-reaching power of 'the *Wicker Man* effect' by having the outsider make comparisons with folk horror presentations of calendar customs and of the places that host calendar customs, and by showing that they believe Cornley and Thankstide to be strange or even 'creepy' (Fisher 2023). But I was also keen to present an alternative to 'the *Wicker Man* effect' by indicating how it is then possible —even likely—for such a person to be welcomed into a tradition by its custodians, something I experienced myself in my observations of calendar customs like the Abbots Bromley Horn Dance (Staffordshire, UK) and Littleborough rushbearing (Greater Manchester, UK).

Melodie, as an outsider, observes a village that is in thrall to its tradition. During the first day of the festivities, she compares her status to her experience of being sober among intoxicated clubbers at Glastonbury Festival. The reverence with which the Cornley cake is treated; the toast and the song to which everyone, in Melodie's observation, seems to know the words; how the cake is ceremoniously impaled on a dagger; and, later, the absurdity of the Cake Scramble—all of these elements begin to coalesce to form local knowledge, but also local behaviour from which outsiders are excluded. But this exclusion is on the grounds of Melodie's inexperience; this is not ostracisation and hostility resulting from a folk horror clash of morality. Instead, the Cornley cake offers Melodie the chance for integration and inclusion; without its presence, and its role as a gift or offering, there would be little opportunity for Cornley residents to approach an outsider and welcome them into the custom. The women Melodie meets are keen for her to join them in their appreciation of the cake, but also in the moment of reverence.

Later, other village residents, such as Graeme and the man Melodie dubs 'the raver' (due to his age and his unkempt appearance), explain elements of the Thankstide custom to her, recognising her desire for understanding. Here, it is the Thankstide legend they draw upon for meaning-making, with the Cornley cake acting as the 'broker' or intermediary that enables them to make contact.

I hope that all of this sidesteps 'the *Wicker Man* effect'. By offering a realist approach that seeks to reflect what individuals might experience when witnessing calendar customs in the real world, my novel acknowledges that our perceptions may be, at first, shaped by 'the *Wicker Man* effect', but that the enthusiasm and welcome of a custom's custodians may successfully integrate an outsider into the custom and its performance, reaffirming the power and significance calendar customs can hold for some people. Even though there is ostensibly no real need for a dole in Cornley in the twenty-first century, the Cornley cake acts as a token of welcome: to accept it, as Melodie does, is the first stage in the process of integration; to enjoy it is the next stage. Melodie, as such, remains in a precarious position: while she is integrated to a degree, she remains an outsider who is perceived as a threat to the status quo (at least from the viewpoint of the Tarn family).

It was clear, then, that to avoid a folk horror presentation of place, Cornley should be presented as a harmless, unintimidating place, the kind of banal Middle England village anyone could encounter. We might feel out of place there if we are not used to semi-rural living, or we might experience the kind of out-of-place feeling we might have anywhere to which we are not accustomed, but we would not necessarily feel in danger like we might in the folk horror setting. But still, for Thankstide to thrive, and for the novel to be compelling, Cornley must have something special about it, some distinction that means Thankstide is revered and fought for. The Cornley cake fulfils this role: its naming signifies it as unique, despite its apparent resemblance to other cakes, while the associated legend is retold to perpetuate the cake's consumption. While the Cornley cake is inseparable from the village due to its name, this cannot be attributed to the idea of 'terroir', that Cornley has specific growing conditions that make this foodstuff unique to this particular place (Kneafsey, Maye et al 2021: 37). In fact, although the recipe is known only to a few women of the village, it is likely an adaptation of a universally recognised recipe and is probably made with simple ingredients bought from the local supermarket. However, at the same time, I would argue that the Cornley cake is an example of 'placing' (Kneafsey, Maye et al 2021: 37): the use of the village's name to refer to it, the fact that the recipe is secret, the continued home-baking of the cake by an initiated few, and the fact that it is eaten in the village only on one weekend a year, all elevates the status of the Cornley cake. There may be visitors who come to Thankstide purely to sample the Cornley cake, to experience its 'authenticity' as a foodstuff, and therefore an emblem of a community.

This is a common trend in current food tourism, as Godfrey Baldacchino states: 'Our humble local cuisine is not so lowly and unassuming any more. Indeed, it is now burdened with very high expectations' (Baldacchino 2015). Baldacchino offers guidance for food producers seeking to enhance the profile of their local offer, advising: 'Start with some basic local ingredients, preferably ones that easily lend themselves to a deep historicity, and even better if they have a connection to a specific and interesting historical detail or human episode' (2015). The ingredients of the Cornley cake are not local to the village, but their adherence to 'deep historicity'—the idea that this cake has been baked and eaten in the village since at least the fifteenth century—ensures that its profile is high and its consumption recurs annually. 'Taboos, protocols, charms, spells and other nuances can also be added as part of the magic', Baldacchino writes (2015). This, too, is part of the Cornley cake's appeal.

The reader learns, through Andy's narration, that neighbouring traditions have long since died out. The apparent popularity of Thankstide, with its local delicacy to which people pay homage throughout the Thankstide weekend, distinguishes the village from elsewhere in the county: this is a place, in Bakhtinian carnivalesque terms, where anything can happen (albeit on just one weekend a year).

The breadcrumbs of time: how food can illustrate and interrogate time

Calendar customs are unequivocally tied to time. Recurring frequently, often on an annual basis, calendar customs command their own sense of time. I allude to this in *Thankstide*, with the novel's narrators revealing how each iteration of the custom may be indistinguishable from another, unless some other social marker ensures that it commands attention. For example, the narrator Darren recalls a Thankstide that Nicolette, the young woman he admires, failed to attend; while for Andy, the year that Graeme threatened the event due to his unruly behaviour (because of the breakdown of his marriage) was particularly memorable. Similarly, Cornley residents are so familiar with the Cornley cake (they likely first tasted it many years ago, perhaps as a child or on moving to the village) that they cannot recall their first taste.

But the calendar custom also accentuates time in terms of era, as well as narrative time, and the Cornley cake also contributes to this. Its recipe has been allegedly passed down through generations and is known only to a few. This ensures that the cake retains Baldacchino's 'deep historicity' (2015), as mentioned earlier, but also its integrity: it is baked to an agreed and understood recipe. Its recipe is only adapted when the occasion arises, and these adaptations are sanctioned by its stewards. These adaptations, however, are crucial for its survival: they ensure the cake remains relevant to its custom and to its host community, and fulfils its role and serves its audiences. One such adaptation is the fact that Hilary Morton and her band of bakers make the cakes in advance and freeze them. This enables them to make more cakes, and it reduces the strain of production. Before refrigeration was available, the baking process would have relied on more domestic (women) bakers in and around the village producing cakes closer to the time to which they were required. Making cakes in advance ensures that the preparations for Thankstide can be carried out around other, twenty-first century obligations. Similarly, in its current form, the Cornley cake is made with margarine, rather than butter. This adaptation was initially made for reasons of cost efficiency but, as the twenty-first century wears on, it also has positive repercussions for the burgeoning market for plant-based diets, including the narrator Nicolette. The Cornley cake is now wholly vegan, if by accident rather than design.

It is the same Nicolette who has concerns about the usage of real Cornley cakes in the Cake Scramble and who privately advocates for the use of replicas, to reduce food waste.

Liz Williams rightly asserts that calendar customs:

> **have always been developing and altering, right from the start. Like social morality, their only constant has been that of change and contention[…] Folk customs have been well and truly dragged into the culture wars in the twenty-first century, but the fact is that they've never been outside this culture: they are embedded within it.** (Williams 2025: 13)

Thus, while the Cornley cake may seem like a relic from ancient times, and the legend associated with it corroborates this, it only survives and remains a potent agent of Thankstide because it is able to adapt: to fit in with the lives of its bakers through refrigeration, to remain cost effective, and to satisfy divergent dietary requirements. Andy reminds us that the Cake Scramble itself has evolved due to the need to serve differing visitor needs, and he observes that the Cornley cake will likely continue to mutate to meet other societal demands—or else it will fall out of favour altogether.

A cake, a dole, a scramble, a symbol: in conclusion

Given that 'Eating is, in all cultures, a social activity and commensality is undeniably one of the most important articulations of human sociality' (Kerner and Chou 2015: 1), it is no surprise that food is often integral to festive practice, and that food features in many of England's contemporary calendar customs. From Hallaton's Hare Pie, in which a giant pie (usually made of beef) is baked and scrambled for among residents of Hallaton in Leicestershire each Easter Monday (Simpson and Roud 2003), the World Dock Pudding Competition of Calderdale in West Yorkshire, which was created to raise the profile of this local delicacy (Davidson and Jaine 2014), the pancake races of Olney (Roud, 2008: 78), and the bun-throwing at Abingdon (Abingdon-on-Thames Town Council n.d.), food plays a key role, bringing together and sustaining people as they celebrate, asserting a place's uniqueness, and often adding a prominent aspect to the performance of the custom itself.

In creating my own fictional calendar custom, I mimicked this real-world phenomenon by developing the Cornley cake, something that I thought would be a 'likely' component of a calendar custom set in the South Midlands of England: easy and cheap to make at home but at scale, and versatile enough to be eaten and transported throughout a weekend of festivities, the cake adapts well to its festive surroundings. The Cornley cake has even given rise to a new aspect of Thankstide, in the form of the Cake Scramble, the final day of festivities in which cakes are scrambled for (again, modelled on other customary practices) and used in sports day-style events. The Cornley cake is given credence by the Thankstide legend, giving present-day residents of the village a continued opportunity to support and value its legacy and advocate for its future.

As I continued to write the novel, and to develop the festive world around which it revolves, I realised that the inclusion of the Cornley cake goes far beyond a simple and legendary symbol. It enabled me to make key decisions about characters, plot, place and time, demonstrating how vital food can be to the festivities we share in the streets with our families and neighbours.

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