



Oldest bakery school in the world celebrates 125-year anniversary

by Jemima Broadbridge, Senior Press Officer, London South Bank University, UK

The National Bakery School (NBS) at London South Bank University (LSBU) is officially the oldest bakery school in the world (established 1894) and celebrated its 125th anniversary in 2019. The NBS marked the occasion with a succession of milestone events. Festivities kicked off in September 2019 with the launch of a sustainable new eco beer brewed by local brewing companies Toast Ale and Orbit Beers from waste bread produced by bakery students.

The beer launch in Borough Market was followed in October with a special event for leading baking industry figures, city guild members, NBS staff and students and successful baking alumni who previously graduated from the National Bakery School years ago. The party was hosted by the Worshipful Company of Bakers in the City of London at Bakers' Hall.

At the event, David Phoenix, LSBU's Vice-Chancellor spoke about the bakery school's long and illustrious history,

highlighting some of the key historical moments and baking innovations its staff and students have been involved in over the years. He was followed by bakery businessman and former NBS graduate, David Powell, now a multi-millionaire running a large, successful baking company.

In November, NBS staff and students joined a float on the Lord Mayor's parade, and presented the new Mayor, William Russell, with a basket of bread to take away, as part of a time-honoured tradition. The historic moment was captured on live TV for BBC viewers.

To symbolically mark the 125-year anniversary, a specially designed commemorative, anniversary cake was created over an eight-month period by expert baker, Jane Hatton. This tall white five-tiered cake was displayed at Bakers' Hall during the celebrations.

The cake was designed and baked in the shape of a sculptural monument incorporating five traditional cake shapes (square, hexagon, petal, roundel and sphere), coated with white icing, displaying decorative motifs, including a 'horn of plenty'





cornucopia of flowers, LSBU's heraldic shield, a new crest created specially to mark the NBS' 125th anniversary and the coat of arms representing the Worshipful Company of Bakers.

Jane Hatton said, "The starting point for my design was to think about cake shapes through the ages. I sketched a rough design starting with square, petal, hexagonal, roundel and sphere. I felt that if I put the logos on there in colour then it would have risked drawing the eye away to a particular part of the cake, so I decided to do it all in white, so that it would become a cake of textures instead."

Jane Hatton teaches baking confectionary at the NBS. She created the cake with an ex student and friend from Japan, who as a student many years earlier achieved top marks in royal icing techniques while working at Brooklands Bakery. Jane said, "Together we worked for five days to create the cake, drawing on both our illustrative skills to decorate it."

To get a sense of perspective—and of just how significant this 125-year anniversary is for the NBS—we need to go further back in time.

The history of the NBS extends back to 20th October, 1894, when the first 60 students took up their studies, consisting of a mixture of theoretical lectures and practical tutorials. Over the next few years, NBS students expanded their skills and knowledge of baking considerably, with the result that they began winning many prizes for baking, while making numerous appearances at bakery exhibitions across the country.

They won several accolades in quick succession, with first places and gold medals clinched at the National Bakers and Confectioners' exhibition, as well as an award from The Worshipful Company of Bakers at Bakers' Hall.

It was the politician and educational reformer, Sir Philip Magnus, who as MP for Southwark and represented the London Polytechnic, as it then was, who proposed the establishment of the school. Impressed as he was by the running of a private bakery school by John Blandy in Middlesex, he invited Blandy to the polytechnic for advice on how to set up a national school. Blandy agreed and he subsequently joined forces with Owen Simmonds and Dr Goodfellow, after which the first bakery school was formally established.

In 1899, five years after opening, the school was renamed 'The National School of Bakery and Confectionery'. The name was supported by the National Association of Master Bakers and Confectioners, The London



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Master Bakers' Protection Society and the Scottish Association of Master Bakers. The school was managed from that point on by the governing body at the Polytechnic.

In 1915, as the First World War raged, NBS started to take on female students for the first time. The following year, 'war emergency' classes were offered, with firms supplying flour, eggs and other essentials.

Unable to remain open for the later years of the war, the school reopened in 1919 and expanded the range of qualifications offered to include a national diploma, while pioneering a course in tea room confectionary designed to train women in every aspect of baking, needed by small restaurants and tea shops.

The school also has a long history of baking and presenting cakes to royalty and other notaries, such as the Lord Mayor. The first of these cakes was a wedding present for HRH Princess Mary in 1921. The school also presented a cake in 1930 in the shape of a doll as a gift to the royal Princesses, Elizabeth and Margaret, followed in 1947 by the Royal Silver wedding cake for the King and Queen.

In 1948, the school presented a christening cake to HRH Princess Elizabeth for young Prince Charles and in 1989,

presented the Lord Mayor with a cake to symbolise his appointment. From this point on, the NBS has provided a cake to the new Lord Mayor, every year in November.

Another milestone occurred in 2004, when NBS bakery students collaborated with fashion designer John Paul Gaultier, recreating some of his iconic designs in bread.

In 2015, the NBS presented a cake to the Houses of Parliament, marking the 800th anniversary of the signing of Magna Carta, in June 1215. So, 125 years on, where does the National Bakery School see itself now?

Elaine Thomson, Course Director of the NBS, responds to this point: "In its 125-year history, the NBS has always sought to be at the forefront of vocational training for the industry. Historic technological advances in the field of baking science and changes within the education landscape have already helped to increase the diverse range of courses we offer at LSBU and this offering will continue to expand in future.

"We now face the challenge of energising and inspiring the next generation of bakers – from developing craft skills through to investing in applied scientific baking research."

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