

BELOW: FIVE-MONTH-OLD YESEO LEE AND HER MOTHER, HANNAH PAEK. OPPOSITE, TOP ROW: A SIMPLE WORKER'S MEAL AT COOK IL KWAN; SEUNG RYUL PAEK, HANNAH PAEK'S FATHER. SECOND ROW: KING PRAWNS ON DISPLAY AT KOREA FOODS; KOREAN RADISH KIMCHI

Korean kitchen

Marc Millon visits New Malden in London's suburbs to meet the Korean community whose members stay connected with their heritage through the authentic tastes of home

PHOTOGRAPHY BY RODERICK FIELD

Hannah Paek, a young, vivacious Londoner, meets us at her family restaurant, Su La, on the Kingston Road in New Malden. We take off our shoes and step up into an *ondol* room. This private dining room reflects a traditional Korean style of living: the under-floor heating lends a comforting warmth as we sit on the floor around a low table, sipping *boricha*, Korean barley tea.

'I was just eight years old when my family moved to London from Korea,' explains Hannah. 'It was such an exciting time! I didn't speak any English, but within a year I could communicate just fine. Everyone was so friendly and we assimilated into life in England very easily.'

At first the Paeks lived in South Wimbledon, but they soon moved to nearby New Malden. Today, an estimated 16,000 Koreans live in the south-west London suburb, which has become the largest Korean community in Europe. Many came here originally because they were working for the large global Korean corporations. Others soon followed, taking the opportunity to live and work in England, serving the needs – and feeding the appetite – of the fast-growing Korean community.

D.C. Jang, for example, originally came to England as a businessman working for a large Korean company. He lived here for a decade and, when his contract finished, he decided it would be best for him and his family to remain in London. So he bought his favourite restaurant (formerly the well-known Asadal) and transformed it into Sorabol, a high-end restaurant that caters to Korean and Japanese business customers as well as Westerners.

Today New Malden is the place to taste one of the few remaining great unknown cuisines of Asia. I stand on the corner of New Malden High Street, at the junction of Kingston and Burlington Roads, and inhale deeply. The familiar, pungent, slightly sour aroma of *kimchi* seeps into me. The famously odiferous fermented cabbage pickle – made from Chinese cabbage, salted then layered with copious amounts of garlic, ginger, hot chilli powder, soused anchovies and other ingredients – has been hailed for its health-giving properties. To Koreans, it is the taste of home and no meal is complete without it.



At Su La, we sit around a table laid out with numerous small round side dishes, including three types of kimchi. In the Korean way of eating, there are usually no separate courses: dishes are all laid out at once for everyone to enjoy. We devour a communal feast of fire-cooked strips of *kalbi* – short ribs of beef, marinated in a mix of soy sauce, garlic, ginger, toasted sesame seed and oil, Asian pear juice and spring onions. Using metal chopsticks, Hannah takes a strip of char-grilled beef, places it in a soft lettuce leaf, adds a dollop of *ssamjang* – a chilli-tinted fermented soy bean paste – a slice or two of fresh chilli, a sliver of raw garlic, then hands it to me. I pop it into my mouth: it is crunchy, meaty, spicy, pungent – utterly delicious!

Later we visit Korea Foods, a vast emporium on the edge of New Malden. Here we see mountains of Chinese cabbages, spring onions, chillies, radishes, and other fresh vegetables; sacks of rice; noodles; live fish and shellfish; prepared kimchi, *namul* (salads) and other *panchan* (side dishes); buckets of marinated *kalbi* and *bulgogi* meats for grilling, and more. This is where Koreans – including the restaurateurs – come to shop.

Elsewhere in New Malden, restaurants cater for the working population, offering amazingly good value. At Cook Il Kwan, there are 23 dishes on offer at a daily Korean buffet that costs just £5.50.

I sample a bowl of hot and sour kimchi *tchigae* – a flavourful soupy stew of kimchi, pork and vegetables, to enjoy alongside a bowl of rice, crunchy side dishes and more kimchi.

At Nak Won Foods, we enjoy cakes made from glutinous rice flour, sticky, crunchy, lightly sweet or intensely sweet. In a traditional society, these cakes are made to celebrate a child's first birthday, to honour ancestors, or to mark an elder's 60th birthday. On the surface, New Malden may seem to be just another suburb of south-west London but to the people who live here, the traditions as well as the flavours of Korea remain deliciously intact. □

Marc Millon and Roderick Field visited New Malden with the assistance of Rae Hong of the Korean Residents Society. —————➔



CLOCKWISE FROM ABOVE: DRIED ANCHOVIES IN CHILLI, SOY SAUCE AND SUGAR; HYUN CHANG SONG, OWNER OF HYUN'S BAKERY; STEAMED SPINACH IN SOY AND SESAME OIL; RICE, VEGETABLES, EGG AND RAW MEAT SERVED IN A HOT STONE BOWL; MYUNG HEE PARK, WIFE OF HYUN CHANG SONG'



FOOD *glossary*

Hangul, the Korean alphabet, is phonetic and there are various English transliterations.

Chap chae Glass or vermicelli noodles with vegetables and pork.

Chongol Korean one-pot stew or casserole, usually a combination of meat, fish, beancurd, and/or vegetables, often cooked at the table over a burner.

Gui Barbecued or char-grilled food, often cooked at the table over a burner or charcoal. *Pulgogi* or *bulgogi*, Korean-style marinated barbecued beef, is the most famous – and most delicious – such dish.

Guk or **tang** Boiled soup or stew.

Jon Batter-fried vegetables, meat, or fish. *Pajon* – green onion pancake – is the best-known of many varieties. *Haemul pajon* is made with seafood.

Kalbi Marinated short ribs of beef, either barbecued or braised in soy sauce.

Kimchi The national dish of pickled vegetables, usually first salted, then seasoned. There are countless varieties, with the most common being made from cabbage, Korean radish or cucumber.

Kimchi tchigae Soupy stew of kimchi, pork and vegetables, served with rice and accompaniments.

Kochujang Fermented soy bean and chilli paste that is used in any variety of dishes. *Ssamjang* is a variation, with sesame oil, garlic and more chilli.

Maeuntang Hot and spicy fish soup containing fresh fish, stewed with chillies and *kochujang*.

Mandu Korean dumplings, filled with ground pork, kimchi, spring onions, and bean curd, usually poached in a rich beef broth or sometimes pan-fried.

Namul The generic term for seasoned vegetables, sometimes served raw, stir-fried, lightly steamed, or boiled. Namuls are served at every Korean meal.

Naengmyon Cold buckwheat noodles.

Pibimbap A one-dish meal consisting of a mixture of rice and any assortment of cooked cultivated and wild vegetables, perhaps some meat, a fried egg, and topped with a generous dollop of *kochujang*.

Pindaetok Mung bean pancake filled with ground meat, bean sprouts, chillies and coriander.

Saengsonhoe Korean sashimi.

Pokkum Stir-fried or braised dish. *Nakchibokkum* – stir-fried baby octopus – is a popular appetiser

Twoenjangtchigae Classic soy bean paste soup – deeply flavoured and scented. An everyday staple.

Yukhoe Raw ground beef in a soy sauce, garlic, ginger and sesame seed marinade and served on shredded Korean pear and with a raw egg.



FROM ABOVE:
GRILLING KALBI
(MARINATED SHORT
RIBS); YUM YUM
DOUGHNUTS AND
BANANA CAKES AT
HYUN'S BAKERY;
CLAMS AND LIVE
SOFT-SHELL CRABS
AT KOREA FOODS



LOCAL *stops*

Cook Il Kwan 15 Coombe Road, New Malden KT3 4PX (020 8949 2710) A more informal eatery noted for its superb one-dish meals, kimchi made fresh daily, as well as an outstanding lunchtime Korean buffet.

Hyun's Bakery 94 Burlington Road, New Malden KT3 4NT. Koreans don't usually eat bread, but Hyun Chang Song found that by combining Korean flavours with Western baking techniques he could produce food with cross-cultural appeal. Traditional rice cakes and cakes filled with sweet red-bean paste are on offer alongside 'hot dogs' (a sort of sausage roll), Korean pizza and curry doughnuts.

Korea Foods Unit 5 Wyvern Industrial Estate, Beverley Way, New Malden KT3 4PH (020 8949 2238; koreafoods.co.uk) One of the largest Korean groceries in Europe, offering all the staples of the Korean and Asian kitchen. This is both a wholesale as well as retail outlet. Within the centre of New Malden, there are a couple of smaller branches that will probably have just about everything you might need: Seoul Plaza 1 (36 High Street) and Seoul Plaza 2 (126 New Malden Road).

Nakwon Rice Cake Shop 89 Kingston Road, New Malden KT3 3PA (020 8949 6474)

Mr K H Kang is nothing if not enterprising: in this little shop, he makes an amazing range of rice cakes, fresh tofu, as well as growing soy bean sprouts, to sell both to private customers as well as to the Korean groceries and restaurants of New Malden.

Sorabol Restaurant 180 High Street, New Malden KT3 4ES (020 8942 2334; sorabol.co.uk) This stylish and more formal restaurant caters to both a business clientèle as well as to Westerners seeking to enjoy dishes such as belly pork cooked at the table, raw fish such as skate in a spicy sauce, and other Korean classics.

Su La Restaurant 79-81 Kingston Road, New Malden KT3 3PB (020 8336 0121) Friendly family restaurant run by the Paeks. Su La is one of few restaurants actually cooking Korean barbecue over real charcoal. The *kalbi* is to die for. Ask Hannah to advise you on what to order. For a more intimate experience and private dining, book an *ondol* room.

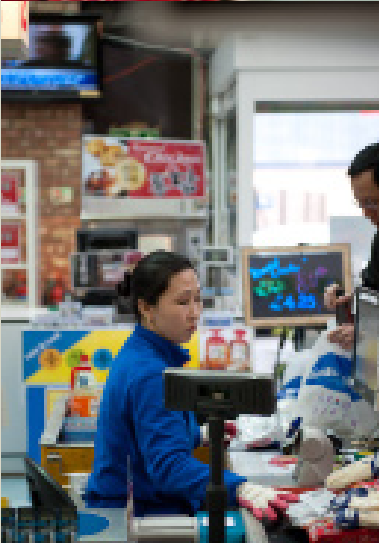


LEFT: A TYPICAL KOREAN BANQUET AT SORABOL RESTAURANT. RIGHT: HANNAH PAEK MIXES THE YUK HOE BIBIMBAP. BELOW LEFT: KOCHUJANG. CENTRE: DOUGHNUTS FILLED WITH RED-BEAN PASTE AT HYUN'S BAKERY

RECIPES START ON PAGE 121



Seafood and spring onion pancake (Hemul pajeon)



FROM LEFT: A CHECK-OUT AT KOREAN FOODS; THE MENU AT SU LA RESTAURANT; CUCUMBER KIMCHI; THE PRIVATE ONDOL DINING ROOM AT SU LA RESTAURANT

