

To the untrained eye, they're just blokes pigging out in a pub. To our pork-pie makers, they're judge and jury.



For more than 20 years, a snug room at The Old Bridge Inn in the West Yorkshire village of Ripponden has been the setting for a unique gathering. Every Saturday evening, an exclusive even elite group of men assemble to discuss weighty matters and cast a verdict of no small importance. Theirs is the power to lift up or cast down, a responsibility not to be taken lightly. This is the Pork Pie Appreciation Society, and their weekly meeting is about to start.

“We love our pies. We're very passionate about this,” says Kevin Booth, life president of the society and one of its founder members. Just how passionate can be gauged by the fact that when his brother and fellow society member Stuart was married earlier this year, instead of a wedding cake there was a three-tier, 50lb pork pie, complete

with a miniature bride and groom on top. “I think we might have made a few converts,” Booth says with quiet confidence.

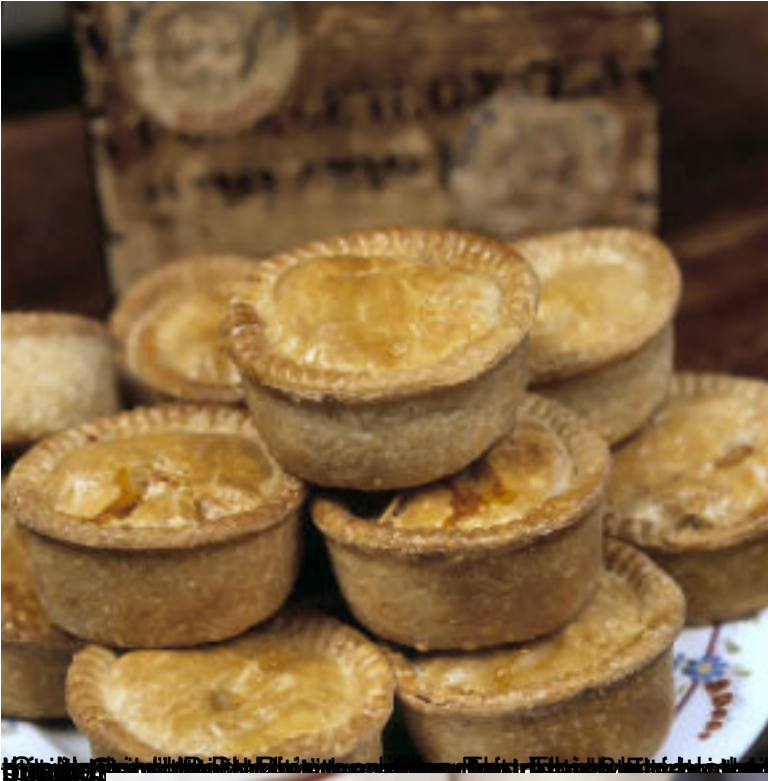
The society started in 1982, ironically enough following the opening of a new health club in the village. “About eight of us used to go there to work out. Then we’d retire to the



pub,” recalls Peter Charnley, one of Booth’s fellow founder members. “Because the pub didn’t serve food, the wife of one lad used to pack him up with a pork pie, which he’d eat in front of us. He never shared. So another lad offered to bring pies in for all of us from then on” With the landlord’s blessing, the Saturday-night pork pies became a ritual — until the week when the pie provider couldn’t come. A pieless evening loomed.

“We were a bit upset,” Charnley admits. Drastic action was needed: they decided they would take it in turns to fetch the pies. Male competitive spirit being what it is, it soon became a matter of pride as to which “pie fetcher”, as they became known, could bring the best Butcher’s shops for miles around were scoured in search of pies with crispier pastry, tastier filling. Marks out of ten were awarded and comments noted, at







Members of the Pie Society at a meeting in the Logan Hotel, Glasgow, 1911.



Report: Simon Beckett Photographs: John Angerson