

Recipe Book



Cover of Recipe Book *Mammy oven puff creamed self-raising flour*, Renown Press.

Cookery Bookery

Australian family cooking from the 1950s to the 1990s

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This is an edited version of the paper written by Graham Dudley, Treasurer of the National Book Council (Victoria) and Juliet Flesch, Collection Management Librarian, and delivered to the Friends of the Baillieu Library-National Book Council (Victoria) seminar on 23 October 1993 by Graham Dudley.

This paper looks at what the “typical Australian family” ate between 1950 and 1990. We hope it will provoke some comment on what the food tells us about the society that produced and consumed it. We make no claims to have conducted a scholarly investigation and, despite our tendency to launch into excruciating reminiscences as we were writing it, the paper is not intended to be merely a recital of the worst dishes in the world.

We have taken most of our examples from books in the Cookery Collection at the Baillieu Library of the University of Melbourne, supplemented by a few titles in our own possession. Basing our investigations on the Baillieu collection had some disadvantages, as this makes no claim to comprehensive or even especially logical coverage. The collection has been built up entirely from gifts, mostly from deceased estates, and therefore reflects what our benefactors collected rather than what was available for purchase.

The periods we cover can be divided as:

- **The war is over - things are getting better**
- **From Menzies to Whitlam - cappuccino hits town**
- **Style is everything - eating for health.**

Cookery books used by Australians from the 1950s to the 1990s share certain basic characteristics, all of which seem perfectly obvious when one thinks about them, but which may be worth listing at the outset.

The books are addressed to women, and, in general, to women of the middle class. These women are assumed to be to some extent in charge of family budgets and remarks about Good Value for Money are common. The women are also assumed to be extremely concerned about whether food is Good for the Family as well as elegantly presented and palatable. Family sizes are assumed to be small. Most recipes are for groups of between 4 and 6.

The books are written, broadly, against a background of increasing expectations - expectations of affluence and of more time out of the kitchen, although not necessarily more leisure. Although there is, especially during the recessions of the 1960s and 1980s considerable emphasis on Budget Cookery, rationing is over and it is assumed that the foodstuffs one requires are available. It is also assumed that the cook is the mistress of the house, not a servant, and that she has no servants to assist her.

The sources of cookery books are interesting and varied, including women's organisations such as the Country Women's Association; cookery schools; magazines, especially the Australian women's weekly; and producers of ingredients, such as Simpsons Flours and Davis Gelatine, who were especially prolific from the 1940s to the 1960s.

It is also assumed that women are

interested in an ever-increasing range of domestic appliances, designed to make cooking easier, faster, more aesthetically pleasing, more nourishing. This is at its most obvious when one considers something like icecream. In the 1970s, for example, many recipe books told the cook how to improve on commercial icecream by adding things to it. Today's books tell the cook how to make icecream using fresh cream and fruit. The present day proponents of more Natural Goodness certainly are not, however, despite their admiration for Old Fashioned Ingredients, suggesting producing icecream by the labour-intensive churning of the past.

We mentioned earlier that women are assumed to be achieving more time out of the kitchen, freed from the drudgery of cooking, but that they are not necessarily assumed to have more leisure. There is an assumption women will want these appliances to give them time for employment outside the house. The increasing number of books of the *Cooking for Busy Women*, *Cooking for Women Who Work* (as though cooking were a leisure activity) and *Meals in a Minute* testifies to this, as does the rhetoric of the booklets which accompany the various mixmasters, blenders, pressure cookers, microwave ovens, crockpots, etc., etc.

Most of this equipment comes to the purchaser with a guarantee, an owner's manual and a recipe booklet, designed to show how indispensable and versatile it is. Most of these booklets are also written directly for women, so, instead of insisting, as cookery books for and by men often do, on ways of making food taste

especially good or look particularly fine, they tend to stress that a particular piece of equipment will help “seal in the natural goodness”, “retain freshness longer” permit fat-free and therefore healthier cooking, etc., etc.

The first part of our paper considers particular domestic appliances and what the accompanying booklets tell us about cooking habits of the time.

All of these appliances depend on electricity, so we may as well start with the electric stove and oven. The Baillieu Library Collection contains two publications from the State Electricity Commission, one published in 1955 and the other in 1986. Both contain large sections of recipes after the normal instructions on using and caring for the machine. Some of the differences in the recipes are too obvious to warrant emphasis here and it will surprise no-one to know that in 1955, you were expected to roast lamb by placing the meat in a lightly greased oven dish without any seasoning, whereas in 1986 your “Spanish style lamb” has garlic slivers stuck in it, and before it is placed in the greased oven dish, has been coated with a mixture of mint, olive oil, vinegar or lemon juice, Worcestershire sauce, salt, pepper and sugar and left to stand for an hour and a half.

Some astonishing things have remained the same, however. Both booklets contain recipes for meals cooked completely in the oven, including green vegetables, so that both advise cooking peas in a casserole dish above the meat. The cooking time suggested for these vegetables is three-quarters of an hour, only 15 minutes longer than the potatoes.

The stress on versatility and indispensability can, in some cases, lead to a rather endearing over-enthusiasm, as domestic appliances are pressed into service which would be rather more easily performed by a different piece of kitchen machinery. A prime example of this is the electric vertical grill booklet which tells you how to cook frozen peas in the griller -useful if you are stranded in a room with only one electricity socket and some frozen peas, but not the way most of us would choose to cook them, even in the interests of energy saving and avoiding washing up.

The appliance which revolutionised cooking in the early 1950s was the pressure cooker. According to Anne Gollan



Cover: *Namco Pressure Cooker*, 1949



Cover: *Sunbeam Electric Frying Pan*. Sydney: Mason Duflex Pty Ltd, 1959.

(The Australian tradition of cooking, 1978) the invention of the pressure cooker was one of the three significant factors affecting post World War I cooking. The others are the popularity of the freezer and the effects of immigration. The claims made for it are extraordinary. Describing it in 1949 as "the household miracle of the age", the *Namco* booklet accompanying this marvel tells us

Science has been brought to the aid of industry in a multitude of ways, lightening men's work, improving the products of their hands and making life easier for them in factories and workshops. To a much more limited extent, Science has been made the handmaiden of the housewife, who has the benefit of the refrigerator, the vacuum cleaner and the like. But in the field which requires the most concentrated effort under the most uncongenial conditions, the housewife has had little relief. True, gas and electric stoves have revolutionised the urban kitchen, but the cooking of meals still

remains the bug-bear of the housewife and ties her to the home and to the kitchen for long periods of each day. Now, belatedly perhaps, but none the less effectively, Science, like the Genii of the ancient fables, is at the service of housewives in many countries. Perhaps the most dramatic development of recent times has been the Pressure Cooker, which harnesses the power of steam to cook your meals, much as it has been harnessed to drive the locomotive.

The advent of the microwave in the 1980s led to similar types of claim.

The pressure cooker could be used for pretty luxurious foods -both the 1949 and 1955 *Namco booklets* give a recipe for steaming crayfish. The difference between the two recipes is that in the earlier one only the head of the beast is plunged into boiling water, whereas in the later version, the whole animal is placed in it before cooking on a rack in the cooker.

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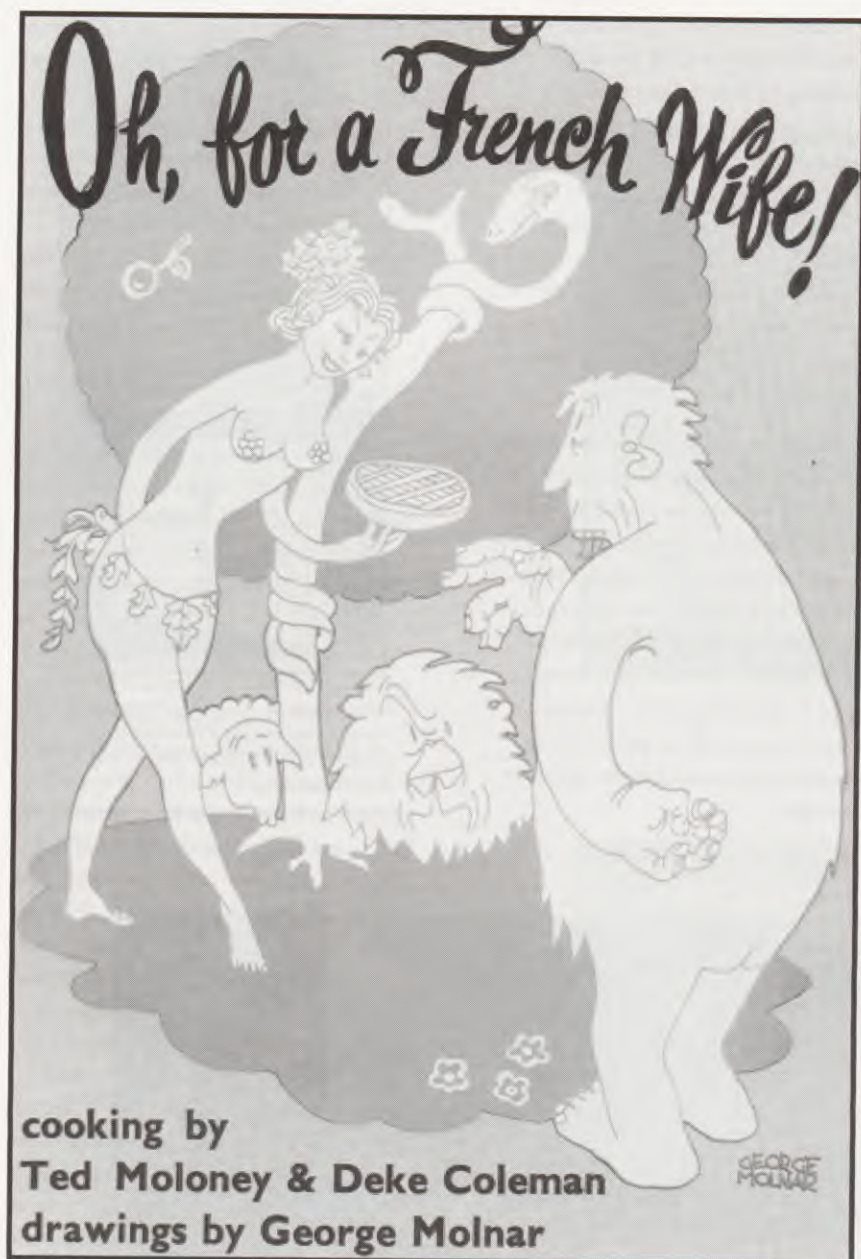
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Golden Circle Tropical Recipe Book



Cover by George Molnar from T. Moloney & D. Coleman's, *Oh, for a French Wife!* Ure Smith, 1952

Most of the recipes are for Australian staples, various stews, soups and casseroles, although there are a few "ethnic" dishes that the ethnics concerned would be hard put to recognise. "Madras curry", for instance, contains apple, celery, sultana, coconut, carrot, chutney and onion added to the meat with the dessert spoon of curry powder. The fact that the meat in question is beef might have raised a few Madras eyebrows. Similarly, the "Hungarian goulash" made with tinned tomato juice and half a tablespoon of paprika added to the two pounds of steak and 4 onions doesn't sound much like the fragrant concoctions described in

Hungarian cookery books.

An interesting addition to the 1955 booklet is a 4-page section of "Answers to your more important questions about Namco Cooking". Many of the questions seem pretty basic:

Q: Why do some potatoes cook faster than others?

A: Because they are not all the same size

But one at least suggests that the pressure cookers had indeed reached every peak if not every nook and cranny of this wide brown land:

Q: In localities of high altitude, how much should cooking time be increased?

A: Cooking time should be increased 5% for every 1000 feet above the first two thousand.

The physical appearance of cookbooks has changed almost beyond recognition in the period we are considering. Those of the 1950s had few illustrations, often in black and white. Change was made possible by developments in printing technology, leading to a greater number of illustrations, more of which are in colour. Today we have great variety in lavishly illustrated works, some of them being step-by-step guides, in which Australia strikes us as a world leader, and others which are coffee table works, designed for reading in the sitting room rather than the kitchen.

The ownership of cookery books is also of interest. An American study in the early 1950s stated that fewer than 40% of American women actually owned a cookery book. We do not know of any later study, but one assumes that the percentage will have increased. We do not know if a similar Australian study exists, but memories Graham has, especially of his grandmothers (both good cooks but from different culinary traditions) are of a few general cookbooks (most likely PMWU or CWA) and lots and lots of clippings from newspapers and magazines, together with handwritten recipes, that valuable way of transmitting favourite dishes.

In these days of photocopying, this has perhaps become less common, but the tradition of the scrap of paper with instructions on how to make Auntie Una's veal casserole or Mary's date slice or Joyce's mango chutney had a long life. The gift to a newlywed of a book of handwritten tried and true recipes was for a long time a traditional and welcome present. Graham's mother kept up the tradition, but by the time he set up on his own in 1970, the handwritten book which remains one of his dearest possessions also contained recipes clipped from various magazines and pasted in.

The rest of our paper is devoted to a consideration of the changes that 40 years have wrought on two Australian meals - breakfast and the family dinner.

In terms of books or even chapters in books, breakfast has been the meal least written about, but a moment's reflection will tell us that practices have changed. Most general cookbooks do not include a

section specifically on breakfast. Individual dishes tend to be scattered through the whole, under headings such as Egg dishes, or Breads, etc.

The 1950s *Commonsense cookery book*, from the Public School Cookery Teachers' Association of New South Wales includes instructions on making cocoa, tea and coffee, the last rating two recipes, including one with salt added. Instructions are also included on frying bacon and tomatoes, cooking eggs in various ways and how to make toast. Cereals are represented by porridge, wheatmeal and rice.

The Constance Spry cookery book (1952) is not an Australian title but was widely used here and is typical of the compendious recipe books of the day. Its breakfast menu includes that perennial English favourite, kedgeriee, as well as instructions on porridge-making, frying bacon and making savoury drop-scones and coffee.

From a little booklet put out by the Rice Marketing Board also in the 1950s, comes "*Ricebrek - Rice for breakfast - the newest way to put a smile on any day.*" It suggests substituting rice for toast, topping it with fried tomatoes, eggs and bacon. Also suggested are frying chopped left-over meat or fish with onions in butter and stirring this into pre-cooked rice and serving fried or grilled sausages on a bed of hot rice with chopped pickle or tomato sauce.

The next book to catch our attention comes from 1971. Written by Ninette Dutton, and called *What's for breakfast*, it is one of the few we found devoted solely to breakfast. It includes the traditional foods: eggs in various guises, porridge and many quickly-prepared dishes such as tomatoes on toast, lamb's fry and bacon (with French mustard recommended as an inducement to children to eat it), brains and bacon, kippers and sausages.

There is a selection of recipes to tempt children, including bread and milk, mince, spaghetti or baked beans on toast, and, interestingly for the period, home-made muesli.

Sunday breakfasts are more elaborate, including various savoury egg dishes, tripe, kidneys and brains, and, tending towards brunch rather than breakfast, cold meats, including mutton, terrine of hare and finally, baked quail, roast wild duck and pigeons en casserole.

Pancakes, another breakfast favourite, are given the full treatment here, together with their cousins, waffles and pikelets. There is an interesting chapter on hangover recipes, suggestive of heavy Saturday nights, and recipes for exotic breakfasts, among them tripe soup and peanut soup. All in all, an interesting array, especially for those with time on their hands in the morning.

By the 1980s, changes are apparent. John Michie's and John Hooker's *Brekky, dinner and tea* (1985) is written for young players and stresses that breakfast is the most important meal of the day. They insist on good tea or coffee (not instant) as essentials and cover the standard hearty staples: eggs, bacon and porridge. What makes the book really enjoyable are the cartoons by Bruce Petty and the humorous style of the writers, with commentary taking up as much space as the recipes.

By this time, however, Pritikin and his followers were already rumbling around and Julie Stafford's very popular *Taste of life* and *More taste of life* contain breakfast recipes of fruit - pears with cinnamon; pineapple and apple; juices in various combinations. Other breakfast suggestions are homemade muesli, yoghurt with fruit, porridge, and toast (multigrain or wholemeal of course) topped, not with bacon or eggs, but with mushrooms or fruit or spinach. Rice (brown this time) makes another appearance, topped with fruit. Eggs, those perennial breakfast favourites, are nowhere to be seen. No meat is suggested, except for fish poached in water and lemon juice.

By the early 1990s, Gabriel Gate's *Family food* allows three eggs per week to creep back in. Bacon and sausages are to be avoided and cereals and fibre are recommended.

From the 1950s to the 1990s, therefore, the only breakfast food constants are tea and coffee, porridge and bread.

At the other end of the day, the family dinner has undergone even greater changes and the number of cookery books is extraordinary. One could write a whole paper on the treatment and importance of pasta in general recipe books. In broad terms, we go from the traditional roast and three veg. in the 1950s to a cuisine changed by immigration, technological development and changes in work

patterns.

We have already mentioned the 1950s *State Electricity Commission recipe book*. Here we find the "complete dinner cooked in the oven", consisting of roast lamb and baked potatoes, buttered carrots and peas (both cooked for 45 minutes) and apple flan. Other oven-prepared dinners include veal and ham pie with marrow casserole and potatoes baked in their jackets and roast chicken with a bread sauce also cooked in the oven.

From 1952 also comes *Oh, for a French wife* by Ted Moloney and Derek Coleman, with wonderful illustrations by the great George Molnar. The book includes a lot of chat and anecdote and also highlights a noticeable trait of the period, the French influence.

Earlier Australian cookery books are very British, with vegetable-based soups, roast "joints", stews and straightforward grilled meats. In *Oh, for a French wife* and the 1956 *Constance Spry cookbook* mentioned earlier, we find Continental and oriental influences, with curries built on the use of individual spices rather than curry powder, and pastas, although the sauces for these are still firmly tomato-based.

These changes can also be seen in the CWA *Coronation cookery books*, originally published for the 1937 coronation and in its 9th edition by 1963. Although the base is still conservative, by 1963 we can find an acceptable recipe for goulash, a galantine of veal, the classic French sauces, including bechamel and hollandaise and souffles and a cheese fondue, cheek by jowl with the amazing curries produced by tipping the meat and a lot of fruit straight into the pot. There is a separate chapter on Chinese cooking in the 1963 edition with a dozen or so Cantonese-based dishes described, including sweet and sour fish and chicken and almonds.

It would be interesting to study how Chinese cuisine, which has been available in Australia since the 1850s, has been incorporated into Australian general cookery books. *Early settlers' household lore*, compiled by L. Pescott for the Sovereign Hill Committee and published in 1976, provides some recipes from gold rush descendants in Ballarat, including a chapter entitled *Chinese chow*, which

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seems to show the Chinese miners trying to make the best of an inhospitable land and cook something at least vaguely familiar.

One of the earliest Australian books of Chinese recipes we could find, Yep Yung Hee's *Chinese recipes for home cooking*, was published as late as 1951 and reprinted and re-edited 14 times by 1968.

The up-to-the-minute 1960s housewife would surely have owned *Entertaining with Kerr*, by Graham Kerr, the Galloping Gourmet. This was first published in 1963 and reprinted four times by 1966. There are some interesting dishes, including Pork Papoose, alleged to be "an Australian speciality". This dish, unfamiliar to us, consists of pork fillets, seasoned with peppers and wrapped in bacon "like a papoose" and served with a chasseur sauce.

By the 1970s, change is on the way. Hamlyn's 1970 *Australian and New Zealand complete book of cookery* includes chapters on pasta, International Cookery and Gourmet Recipes. There is a chart of seasonal menus, giving daily dinners for 4 weeks of each season. These range from the traditional roasts and grills to trout meuniere, spaghetti bolognese, dolmades, kebabs and mous-saka.

Books such as this one and those of Margaret Fulton were starting to impress upon the Australian cook that there were any number of traditions active in the country and that ingredients for "international" cooking were readily available. The *Vogue Australia cookbook* of the same vintage lays a heavy emphasis on "international" cooking and includes a very good coq au vin.

The very popular *Terrace Times* series includes in its Melbourne edition a version of the classic Creme St Germain as well as rabbit and prunes and a simple moussaka side by side with the roast beef. Desserts by this time range from Creme brulee to Russian honey mousse to Ricotta al caffe.

The great standby of the 1970s, *The Australian Women's Weekly cookbook*, while firmly based in the English/French tradition, does not omit others, and includes recipes for kofta curry, osso bucco, paella, chicken chow mein and a whole chapter on fondues. The pasta section is still embryonic, however, the only

saucers being napolitana, bolognese and carbonara. There is, however, a separate chapter on "International Cooking" with menus from Germany, Hawaii, China, Italy, Scandinavia, India and Indonesia.

By the 1980s, the bilingual *Greek-Australian cookbook*, by Carol Wilson, John Goode and Liz Kaydos had been published, while in the West, Lesley Morrissy produced *Australian seafood - Greek islands style*, proudly sold in the fish market of the Kailis family from 1984. This includes a variety of family recipes as well as many from Perth's most notable Greek restaurants, with helpful notes on how to deal with the fish from the water to the plate, and some historico-cultural observations.

In fact, as we move through the 1980s, the competent home cook is

to use them, including fresh salads which did not use the traditional cream/mayonnaise-based dressings, and main courses of caraway and pumpkin pasties, a wide variety of sauces for pastas and desserts based mainly on fruit.

The choice can sometimes seem too bewildering, as in a recent *Australian Women's Weekly dinner party cookbook* which offers a culturally diverse dinner consisting of veal and broccoli consommé with curry, mayonnaise rusks, lemon crumbed chicken with potato and carrot casserole and ratatouille followed by mangoes with a coconut-rum ice.

One of the most obvious trends in this sketchy survey from the 1950s to the 1990s is an increased emphasis on complexity and diversity, without any suggestion that the home cook will have



"A Wholesome Breakfast: Young and old will enjoy this H.V.A. dish. It is stimulating and strengthening. A Palatable and pleasant summer or winter breakfast." *The H.V.A. Cook Book for Tapioca*. Sydney, 1925(?).

assailed by recipes from all quarters of the globe, along with some imaginative, if not always successful adaptations.

In 1982, Margaret Fulton produced her *Superb restaurant dishes*, which presented recipes for the home cook from almost every culinary tradition - French, Italian, Asian, Mediterranean and American of all kinds - and Gabriel Gate's 1989 *Smart food* has, with its stir-fried beef with broccoli, almonds and noodles, and its meatloaf with cumin, moved a long way from his first book on French cooking for Australians.

Julie Stafford's quintessentially 1980s *Taste of life* books, among others, also explored new ingredients and ways

more time at her disposal or domestics to "do the rough".

We also know that in the 1950s as before, cookery books, whether handwritten or printed, were acquired for use. Today we know that while Australians are buying cookbooks as never before, they are actually buying more of their food prepared for the oven or the microwave.

What are they doing with all the cookbooks they buy? Leaving them on tables to fool the guests into believing that the prepared meal was actually home-made, or leafing through them wistfully, dreaming of how the food they see described might actually taste?