

## A vermicelli dinner party

December 2023

As I've been researching various items of food in Australia one item keeps cropping up like an insistent child tugging at my leg wanting me to give it attention. Well, I give in. This paper is going to be all about vermicelli at the settler Australian table via a vermicelli themed dinner.

The recipes have been sourced through *Trove*, the digitised depository for newspapers and magazines managed by the National Library. I limited my search to recipes from 1872 with the first vermicelli recipe in *Trove* to fifty years later, 1952. I also went to my collection of Australian cookery books looking only at those that were generalist i.e. not about a particular ingredient or practice.

### Some brief notes on vermicelli in Australia

Vermicelli was being imported into Australia at least by 1831 when Ambrose Foss, a druggist and chemist advertised the sale of vermicelli from his premises.<sup>1</sup>

Pietro Lucini is acknowledged as the first person in Australia to make pasta for commercial use in 1852 or 1854.<sup>2</sup> In 1861, the *Argus* reported that 'A sample of very excellent macaroni, manufactured from Magarey's superfine Adelaide flour by Mr. Danelli, of Brunswick, has been handed to us for inspection. The sample is equal in appearance to the best imported, and certainly preferable in flavour to the majority of the shipments arriving here.'<sup>3</sup>

In 1905 the *West Australian* in its Current Market Rates listed 'Macaroni, Rinaldi's 1 lb. pkts. 4d. lb. Vermicelli. do., 4d. lb.'<sup>4</sup>

By 1933, Australia was exporting macaroni and vermicelli to New Zealand and Britain. 'As the result of extensive wheat breeding operations at Government agricultural research centres, distinct macaroni-type Australian wheats have been evolved, and the use of these has enabled the Australian manufacturer to compete in the world's markets.'<sup>5</sup>

In 2013 IBIS World noted: Increased demand for high-value added premium industry products has supported industry revenue over (the past five years) Food-savvy consumers have sought healthier alternatives and high-quality products, which have benefited manufacturers of niche pasta products, such as organic or fresh pasta made via traditional methods. There are 78 businesses producing pasta. Dry pasta is a staple in most households. However, fresh pasta is becoming increasingly popular as producers are diversifying their product ranges.'<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Ambrose Foss, The Sydney Herald 24 October 1831 p.1 [24 Oct 1831 - Advertising - Trove \(nla.gov.au\)](#) Chemists at that time were much like grocers selling a range of products other than medicinal.

<sup>2</sup> [First pasta factory in Australia - Australian food history timeline \(australianfoodtimeline.com.au\)](#)

<sup>3</sup> Commercial Intelligence, The *Argus* 1 March 1861 p.4 [01 Mar 1861 - COMMERCIAL INTELLIGENCE. - Trove \(nla.gov.au\)](#)

<sup>4</sup> Current Market Rates, the *West Australian* 4 February 1905 p.3 [04 Feb 1905 - FINANCE AND COMMERCE. - Trove \(nla.gov.au\)](#)

<sup>5</sup> 'Australian Spaghetti', *Advertiser* 25 August 1933 p.8 [25 Aug 1933 - Australian Spaghetti - Trove \(nla.gov.au\)](#)

<sup>6</sup> Pasta Production in Australia industry analysis, IBIS World, 2023 [Pasta Production in Australia - Market Size, Industry Analysis, Trends and Forecasts \(2023-2028\) | IBISWorld](#)

## Home- made Vermicelli

In keeping with the trend reported above for fresh pastas here is a recipe for making vermicelli at home.

### Making Vermicelli

One quart of flour; one level teaspoonful of salt; two eggs, and a very little water. Mix and divide into five equal parts; then roll out very thin and spread upon a clean napkin to dry but do not allow them to become brittle by over drying. Prepare this about three hours before meal time, and about one hour before you wish to use it, take the partially dried sheets of dough and lay them upon the kneading board, flouring well the upper side of the sheets. Then roll them from you so as to form a flat roll about one and a-half inch wide. Take a short, thin knife and cut very fine across the roll; after you have cut them all in this manner, take them up carefully and shake them apart, leaving them to dry again, until about five minutes before you wish to serve the dish. Have ready any good soup stock, boiling-hot; throw in the vermicelli; cook five minutes, stirring constantly. This quantity of vermicelli is sufficient for a large kettle of soup.<sup>7</sup>

Fresh vermicelli in hand I proceed to making the dishes for the meal.

## Soup

Vermicelli soup is one of the two main uses evidenced in the recipes I reviewed. This is the simplest recipe for it I came across.

Vermicelli Soup. — Into three quarts of clear gravy soup, drop very lightly and by degrees 6 oz of vermicelli, broken rather small. Let it simmer for half-an-hour, or rather less, over a gentle fire, and stir it often.<sup>8</sup>

But what if you don't have a 'clear gravy soup? Here's one that is built from the basic ingredients up, with bonus extra vegetables.

### Vermicelli Soup

Ingredients: Half a head of celery, two leeks, four tomatoes, six ounces of butter, mixed herbs, one quart of water, and an ounce and a half of vermicelli.

Method: Cut up half a head of celery, two small leeks, three or four tomatoes, according to size, a small bunch of bruised herbs; pepper and salt to taste. Add one quart of water and six ounces of butter; stew gently for half an hour. Strain through a sieve, pressing with a wooden spoon.

Replace liquor in the pan; when boiling, put in one ounce and a half of vermicelli. Cook for seven or eight minutes. Serve with grated cheese.<sup>9</sup>

Vermicelli played a support role in other soups. This recipe is for something like a Greek avgolemono soup without the chicken.

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<sup>7</sup> 'Making Vermicelli Household Recipes, Australian Town and Country Journal 23 October 1880 p.27 [23 Oct 1880 - Household Recipes. - Trove \(nla.gov.au\)](#)

<sup>8</sup> 'Vermicelli Soup' The Household, *Weekly Times* 14 October 1876. [14 Oct 1876 - THE HOUSEHOLD. - Trove \(nla.gov.au\)](#)

<sup>9</sup> 'Vermicelli Soup' Useful Recipes, *The Land* 30 April 1920 p.11 [30 Apr 1920 - USEFUL RECIPES. - Trove \(nla.gov.au\)](#)

### Egg and Lemon Soup

Take two pints any meat stock, 2 egg yolks, 1 lemon, 2 oz vermicelli or rice. Bring stock to the boil, then add vermicelli or rice and boil until cooked. Take off fire to cool. Beat the yolks separately; then add lemon juice; add also some of the stock, little by little then pour into saucepan; stirring all the time. Leave on fire to just before it comes to the boil. (If it is boiled it would curdle).<sup>10</sup>

Now on to the fish course and a recipe for using up cold fish lying around the place.

### Vermicelli Fish Rolls

Mrs. F. T. Blunt, of Kingsholme, wins today's "Brisbane Telegraph" recipe competition with her recipe for vermicelli fish rolls. Here it is.

Mince all leftover cold fish with salt, pepper, grated cheese, and one tablespoon white sauce and chopped parsley. Boil and mash three medium-sized potatoes and work in three tablespoons flour. Beat two eggs, add half the eggs to the potato, season, put in saucepan, and stir over heat till it forms a thick paste. Roll out paste, cut it into 2in. by 4in. squares, place dessertspoonfuls of the fish mixture on each square, dampen edges, and roll. Brush over with beaten egg. Crush half-cup of vermicelli and sprinkle over the rolls. Place in a baking dish and bake in a hot oven.<sup>11</sup>

Patties, rolls or croquettes coated with crushed or broken vermicelli was a frequent use for the pasta. 'Cornettes' de Mouton' wrapped parcels of minced mutton with either oysters or mushrooms in puff pastry and vermicelli before being baked till firm on the outside but melting in the mouth when eaten.<sup>12</sup> 'Croquettes of Veal and Ham' have minced meats in a thick sauce in packets of pastry which are rolled in egg and crushed vermicelli and then deep fried.<sup>13</sup>

For the entrée here's another prize winning recipe. This one is from Miss C. J. Colledge.

### Tomato Vermicelli Cheese Savoury

Ingredients: 4oz. boiled vermicelli, 1 large bottle tomatoes, 1 egg, 1 ½ cups milk, 6 oz grated cheese, 1 level tablespoon flour, pepper, salt, breadcrumbs.

Method: Place half the bottle of tomatoes (sliced if liked) in bottom of casserole, add vermicelli then remaining tomatoes. Mix together flour, salt, pepper, egg, add milk and nearly all cheese, stir till boiling. Pour sauce over the tomatoes, etc. Sprinkle with remaining cheese and breadcrumbs. Bake in hot oven about ½ hour and serve very hot.<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> 'Egg and Lemon Soup' Culinary Arts, *Riverina Recorder* 6 July 1935 p.4 [06 Jul 1935 - Culinary Arts - Trove \(nla.gov.au\)](#)

<sup>11</sup> 'Vermicelli Fish Rolls', *Brisbane Daily Telegraph* 28 March 1949 p.14 [28 Mar 1949 - Vermicelli Fish Rolls - Trove \(nla.gov.au\)](#)

<sup>12</sup> 'Cornettes' de Mouton The House, *South Australian Chronicle and Weekly Mail* 13 May 1876 p.13 [13 May 1876 - The House. - Trove \(nla.gov.au\)](#)

<sup>13</sup> 'Croquettes of Veal and Ham' Homely Fare, *Weekly Times* 18 November 1899 p.31 [18 Nov 1899 - HOMELY FARE. - Trove \(nla.gov.au\)](#)

<sup>14</sup> 'Tomato Vermicelli Cheese Savoury', *The Mercury* 20 July 1948 p.7 [20 Jul 1948 - Tomato Vermicelli Cheese Wins Recipe Prize - Trove \(nla.gov.au\)](#)

This recipe calls for pre-boiled vermicelli. Here's a method for that.

Have ready a saucepan full of boiling salted; water, break the macaroni or vermicelli into short lengths, put into the water, and boil fast without a lid until it feels soft, when a piece is tried between the finger and thumb. Drain and use the water they were boiled In for stock for sauces or thick soups.<sup>15</sup>

An alternative entrée:

#### Egg Vermicelli

Make a white sauce with 2 ½ tablespoons each flour and butter, 1 ½ cups milk, and season with salt and pepper. Chop up the whites of 3 hard-boiled eggs, add to the sauce, pour over 4 or 5 slices of nicely-browned toast. Rub the yolks of egg through a sieve and sprinkle on the top.<sup>16</sup>

For the meat course let's have two dishes that are a little unusual.

#### Knuckle of Veal Stewed Brown

Take a knuckle of Veal, cut it into four pieces, just fry it to be brown then put to it three pints of boiling water, and let it stew on a very slow fire nearly three hours; put with it a bunch of sweet herbs, an anchovy, and some vermicelli and salt, with a little cayenne. When it is done, take it up and pour the sauce over it.<sup>17</sup>

#### Stewed Kidneys and Cut Vermicelli

Take 2 oz flour, sprig of parsley, 4 sheep's kidneys, pepper and salt, 1 gill stock or water, 3 oz curled vermicelli, ½ oz butter or small piece of fat bacon, 2 oz cheese, 1 onion, wash and clean the kidneys and cut them into small pieces, melt the butter in the saucepan or fry the fat bacon and when cooked remove from the pan. Fry the onion golden brown, add the kidneys and when fried stir in the flour. Cook it a few minutes, add the stock, pepper, and salt and parsley; bring to the boil, stirring meanwhile and simmer gently for one hour; remove the parsley and pile in the centre of the dish. Arrange the cooked vermicelli round the dish. Vermicelli requires only a few minutes to cook; when tender a little butter and grated cheese should be added, and the whole heated before serving.<sup>18</sup>

Or we could look to another cuisine. This recipe is outside the date range but I think the circumstance of its publication excuse its inclusion. It was published in 1966 four years after Australia began its involvement in the Vietnam war.

'An enthusiastic hostess and cook, Mrs Nguyen Van Hieu, wife of the Ambassador of Vietnam, is just as happy to hand around her recipes and show women visiting Canberra how to prepare them as she is to serve them with a flourish at her home at Forrest. When she is cooking for 10 to 12 people, Mrs Nguyen Van Hieu often chooses the Vietnamese dish Ga Xao Bun Tau — 'Chicken and Vermicelli'

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<sup>15</sup> 'To boil macaroni, spaghetti or vermicelli' In the Kitchen, *Bowen Independent* 7 June 1919 p4 [07 Jun 1919 - In the Kitchen. - Trove \(nla.gov.au\)](#)

<sup>16</sup> 'Egg Vermicelli', *The Sun* 16 February 1919 p.13 [16 Feb 1919 - EGG VERMICELLI - Trove \(nla.gov.au\)](#)

<sup>17</sup> 'Knuckle of Veal Stewed Brown' Recipes, *Cornwall Advertiser* 30 March 1877 p.3 [30 Mar 1877 - RECIPES. - Trove \(nla.gov.au\)](#)

<sup>18</sup> 'Stewed Kidneys and Cut Vermicelli', *Sunday Times* 22 July 1928 p.4 [22 Jul 1928 - Fifth Prize. - Trove \(nla.gov.au\)](#)

## Ingredients

1 lb vermicelli  
1 chicken cut into pieces  
1 ½ pints cold wafer  
2 tsps salt  
2 tsps fish gravy or maggi sauce<sup>19</sup>  
4 tsp pepper  
1 tsp Ve-Tsin gourmet powder<sup>20</sup>  
1 sliced onion, half fried with chicken half use for broth.  
2 eggs and/or three chicken livers for garnish.  
Few pieces celery.

## Method

Bring water to boil, add chicken, boil slowly for about 30 minutes. Remove chicken and allow to cool. Separate meat from hones and cut into small pieces. Add remaining ingredients to the broth.

Soak 1 lb vermicelli in cold water about 10 min. Drain and cut into 3 inch pieces. Slice half an onion and fry in oil until golden. Add chicken and vermicelli and fry about 3 minutes. Stir in 4 cups of chicken broth. Place in oven-proof dish or on oven-proof platter and keep warm in oven. Beat two eggs, add salt to taste and a little sugar. Fry the egg mixture a little at a time so that it spreads thinly on the bottom of a greased pan. Cut egg in small pieces and place on top of chicken vermicelli.

Chicken livers which have been fried and chopped finely can be added as a garnish and the dish decorated with curls of celery<sup>21</sup>

Whichever of the meat dishes we choose, we have a couple of vegetarians joining us so we need a main without meat. They are not vegans so we can have eggs.

## Vegetarian<sup>22</sup> Luxuries - Vermicelli and Tomato Pie

Three-quarters of a pound of rough puff pastry, a quarter of a pound of vermicelli, one tablespoonful of parsley, two teaspoonfuls of onion, uncooked tomatoes, three hard-boiled eggs, one ounce of butter, one egg, three-quarters of an ounce of flour, half a pint of water. Slightly, grease a pie dish with a little butter. Throw the vermicelli in fast-boiling salted- water, and boil till soft, about five minutes. Then drain off the water. Chop the parsley and onion finely. Put a layer of sliced tomatoes in the dish, then a layer of vermicelli and a good sprinkling of the parsley and onion, salt and pepper. Then another layer of tomatoes, and so on till the dish is full. Cut the eggs in slices and lay on the top. Melt the butter and stir into it three quarters of an ounce of flour. Put the pan back on the fire, and fry the flour in the butter till a pale brown. Then add half a pint of water and stir till it boils. Flavor this sauce with pepper, salt, and a little bought

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<sup>19</sup> I assume this refers to Maggi Seasoning Sauce created in 1886 [What Is Maggi Seasoning? \(thespruceeats.com\)](http://thespruceeats.com)

<sup>20</sup> Monosodium glutamate

<sup>21</sup> 'Ambassador's wife at the stove', the *Canberra Times* 13 April 1966 p.18 [13 Apr 1966 - Ambassador's wife at the stove - Trove \(nla.gov.au\)](http://nla.gov.au)

<sup>22</sup>'As a cultural or religious choice, vegetarianism was first introduced to Australia by the Swedenborgians who arrived here in the 1830s. Other religious groups who practised vegetarianism soon followed. At this time, meat was a central part of every European Australian's meal, thanks to an abundance of sheep. However, by the 1930s, it was no longer just the religious pushing vegetarianism. The free-body culture movement, or Freikörperkultur, was making its way into Australia, and Australian swimmer and Hollywood film star Annette Kellerman enthusiastically advocated vegetarianism.' [The history of vegetarianism in Australia is only two centuries old and it's full of characters | The Runway \(airforce.gov.au\)](http://airforce.gov.au)

sauce. Pour into the pie-dish. Cover over the dish with the pastry as for an ordinary meat pie. Decorate the top prettily with leaves, etc., and brush over with beaten egg. Bake in a quick oven about three quarters of an hour, or till the pastry is crisp and a nice brown. This may be served hot or cold.<sup>23</sup>

For dessert vermicelli pudding with a twist that takes care of after dinner coffee as well.

#### Vermicelli Coffee Pudding

One dessertspoon butter, 1 tablespoon each sugar, self-raising flour, and coffee essence, 2 oz vermicelli, ½ pint milk. Cook the vermicelli in boiling water for 25 minutes, drain thoroughly. Melt butter, stir in flour, then the milk, bring slowly to the boil, add sugar and coffee essence, then mix in the drained vermicelli. Butter a pie-dish, pour mixture in, cover top with cake-crumbs, dot with pieces of butter; bake in a moderate oven until brown.<sup>24</sup>

An alternative dessert. This one is from an advertorial for Rinoldi vermicelli.

#### Vermicelli Meringue Cream

2 oz "Rinoldi" vermicelli  
1 oz butter  
1 oz plain flour  
Vanilla essence  
½ pint milk  
1 oz sugar  
2 eggs—separated  
2 extra oz sugar

Place vermicelli in boiling salted water and cook for 15 minutes. Melt butter in saucepan, add flour and cook for 2 or 3 minutes, stirring constantly. Add vanilla and milk and stir until mixture boils and thickens. Add sugar and egg yolks. Add vermicelli and mix thoroughly. Place in a greased pie dish and bake in a slow oven for 30 minutes. Make a meringue from the egg whites and the extra sugar and pile on top. Return to oven to set the meringue.<sup>25</sup>

#### **A note on the Australian cookery books.**

These cookery books were quite conservative in the recipes they carried, basically being either vermicelli soup or vermicelli pudding or both. The exception here was the *Cole's Household Cookery* which had eight. 'Vermicelli au lait' p. 572; 'Chicken in Vermicelli' p. 212; 'Game in Vermicelli' p. 217; 'Vermicelli Jelly' p. 1091; 'Vermicelli Pudding' p.1091; 'Vermicelli Rich Pudding' p.881; 'Vermicelli with Apples' p.881; and 'Vermicelli Soup' p. 1001. The books in which vermicelli recipes were published are listed in Appendix 1.

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<sup>23</sup> 'Vermicelli and Tomato Pie' *The Household*, *The Daily News* 9 June 1900 p.7 [09 Jun 1900 - THE HOUSEHOLD. - Trove \(nla.gov.au\)](#)

<sup>24</sup> 'Vermicelli Coffee Pudding' *Topics for Women*, *The Newcastle Sun* 6 June 1934 p.5 [06 Jun 1934 - Topics for Women - Trove \(nla.gov.au\)](#)

<sup>25</sup> 'Vermicelli Meringue Cream' *The Australian home beautiful: a journal for the home builder* Vol 24 No, 5 (May 1945) p.4 [Vol. 24 No. 5 \(May 1945\) \(nla.gov.au\)](#)

## Appendix 1. Australian cookery books with vermicelli recipe

Abbott, Edward, *The English and Australian Cookery Book: Cookery for the Many, as well as the Upper Ten Thousand - by an Australian Aristologist*, Sampson Low, Son, and Marston, London, 1864 - 'Vermicelli Pudding' p.56

Drake, Lucy, *Miss Drake's Home Cookery*, 1943 first edition 1940 - 'Vermicelli Soup' p.23

Forster Rutledge, Mrs., Compiler, *The Goulburn Cookery Book*, 1899 – 'Vermicelli Soup' p.10

Heritage, Lizzie, *Cole's Household Cookery*, E. W .Cole 191? – 'Vermicelli au lait' p. 572; 'Chicken in Vermicelli' p. 212; 'Game in Vermicelli' p. 217; 'Vermicelli Jelly' p. 1091; 'Vermicelli Pudding' p.1091; 'Vermicelli Rich Pudding' p.881; 'Vermicelli with Apples' p.881; 'Vermicelli Soup' p. 1001

NSW Public School Cookery Teachers' Association, *The Commonsense Cookery Book*, 1904 – 'Vermicelli, Rice or Macaroni Custard' p. 103

Rawson, Mrs. Lance (Mina) *The Queensland Cookery and Poultry Book*, William Hopkins, Rockhampton, 1890 (Facsimile edition 2023) – 'Vermicelli Soup' p. 15.; 'Vermicelli Pudding' p. 54

Wylie, Margaret A, Yewers, Mabel E, Reeves, Margaret H, Gray, Doris S, McKinnon, Maria A, *The Golden Wattle Cookery Book*, E. S. Wigg & Son Pty Ltd 1926 – 'Vermicelli Soup' p.33