

Of eggs and buns: Easter eating March 2024

As we approach Easter I thought it would be of interest to gather from friends what they/their family have traditionally eaten over the Easter period - Holy Thursday through to Easter Sunday.¹ I've done some web surfing too and found some surprising intel.

Hot Cross Buns

SB: A really good bun is a rare find

Who knew? Nigh 200 years ago you only ate Hot Cross Buns on Good Friday. Confectioners would open especially to sell them. So popular were they, those desirous of enjoying them on that day were advised to get their order in early. Youngsters would buy a batch and then on-sell them. Confectioners would hire young folk to hawk their buns. The good citizens woke to their cry of 'Hot Cross Buns! Hot Cross Buns'. Shops being closed – apart from the confectioners – folk would head off to parks and beaches for picnic and games. Taking their buns with them of course. Some churchmen railed against this desecration as they saw it of such a holy day.

Now hot cross buns are in the supermarkets virtually immediately post-Christmas against which I would rail if I had the culinary energy.

The 'only on Friday' tradition continued into the young years of FB friends. SA 'Only hot cross buns on the Friday and chocolate eggs on the Sunday morning'. MP 'Hot cross buns (homemade) on Friday and painted hard boiled eggs, chocolate eggs and unyeasted Easter wreath cake on Sunday - a brioche type dough with fruit.' I'll get to the eggs and the breads later. Back with the buns RD: said 'My mum used to make hot cross buns (lots) and deliver them to friendly neighbours.'

Which is a nice segue to giving a recipe for them. Here's the earliest I found.

Hot Cross Buns

2lb. flour, ½ lb sugar, 1 tablespoonful of yeast, ½ pint of warmed milk, ½ lb. butter, 1 lb. currants, ½ teaspoonful of salt, 1 teaspoonful of mixed spice. Mix the flour, sugar, spice, and currants; make a hole in the centre of the flour and pour in the yeast and milk; make a thin batter of the surrounding flour and the yeast and milk, and set the pan covered before the fire till the leaven begins to ferment. Then add ½ lb. of melted butter and enough milk to make a soft paste of all the flour; cover this with a dust of flour, and let it once more rise for half an hour. Shape the dough into buns and lay them apart on buttered tins, in rows, to rise for half an hour. Mark with a cross, bake in a quick oven from fifteen to twenty minutes, and glaze while hot by brushing moistened sugar over the tops with a feather.²

Notice something? That's right, no pastry crosses. The first recipe I found that does have pastry crosses was in 1937:

For the Pastry Crosses: 2 tablespoons flour, 2 teaspoonfuls margarine or lard, pinch of salt and baking powder. ... Make the pastry for the crosses by mixing the lard or margarine and the flour together, add the salt and baking powder, and mixing to a stiff paste with a little cold water. Work on a floured board, roll out until quite thin, cut into narrow strips, and place a cross on each bun.³

¹ [Not Meatless Monotony: One hundred years of Lenten Fare in Australia - Compost](#)

² 'Hot Cross Buns' Household Recipes, *The Tasmanian* 31 March 1888 p.4

³ 'Hot Cross Buns' This Week's Recipe, *Queensland Times* 22 March 1937 p.4

What to do with left-over buns

COB: I like to use hot buns to make bread pudding.

KS: We did make bread and butter pudding from left over hot crossed buns once.

Eggs

I expected that folk would say Easter Eggs, and was not wrong. But we need to distinguish here between painted hard boiled eggs and chocolate eggs.

But first, why eggs at all?

The egg was a widely used premodern and pre-Christian symbol of fertility and restoration. European “Pagans” (a term used to refer to people who practiced a variety of non-Christian traditions) viewed eggs as a symbol of the regeneration that comes with springtime. Early Christians borrowed this image and applied it not to the regeneration of the earth but rather to Jesus Christ. This was also extended to the new life of the faithful followers of Christ.⁴

Painted eggs

JvR: We did have a small tradition of Arnott’s milk arrowroot biscuits covered with icing and decorated with sweets and made to look like Easter eggs. We got to do this on Saturday for Sunday.

SA: In England, egg-painting on the Sunday.

The earliest Australian reference I found for this was in 1892:

The shops at Easter are full of prettily dyed ornamental eggs of all descriptions and of various prices, many of the more expensive ones containing valuable gifts. A basket or dish of freshly boiled and coloured eggs placed on the breakfast table on Easter morning is, however, preferable to imitation eggs, whilst the preparation of them will give pleasure and occupation to the younger members of the family.[A detailed description for colouring eggs follows]⁵

But why are painted eggs gifted?

A lot of us may chomp on chocolate eggs at Easter, but originally eating eggs was not allowed by church leaders during the week leading up to Easter (known as Holy Week). So any eggs laid that week were saved and decorated to make them Holy Week eggs, that were then given to children as gifts. Victorians adapted the tradition with satin-covered cardboard eggs filled with Easter gifts. This has now developed into the tradition that many people enjoy today.⁶

⁴ ‘What Do Eggs Have to Do With Easter? Britannica What Do Eggs Have to Do with Easter? | Britannica

⁵ ‘Easter Eggs’ The Dawn 1 March 1892 p.13

⁶ Why do we have Easter eggs and the Easter bunny? Why do we have Easter eggs and the Easter bunny? - BBC Newsround 17 February 2023

Chocolate eggs

JN: Chocolate back then was really a treat. COB: Yes it was. I still remember some of the Easter eggs I received as a kid.

SA: ... chocolate eggs on the Sunday morning.

Here's a recipe for making them:

Easter Eggs

6 oz. castor sugar, 8 oz. butter, 4 eggs, 3 cup of milk, 10 oz. S.R. flour, ½ lb grated chocolate, pinch of salt, vanilla. Cream the butter and sugar, beat in the yolks of eggs separately. Have the chocolate ready mixed with the milk. (If cocoa is used, take 4 oz. and mix with a little less milk.) Add to the mixture alternately with the sifted self-raising flour. Lightly fold in the stiffly-beaten whites of eggs, half fill the prepared moulds, and bake in a moderate oven. 'When cold join the cakes together with a little chocolate icing, cutting the tops level if necessary to make them fit. Now sit the cake on a small basin, which should look as nearly like the top half of an egg-cup as possible. Shape the cake lightly with a knife so that it resembles an egg. Ice with chocolate icing. Sprinkle with chopped nuts or shredded cocoanut to give it a festive appearance, and tie a gay ribbon round the centre. Leave the cake on the basin, wiping away any spilt icing. An empty Marmite jar and an upturned saucer should complete the egg-cup illusion, but care must be, taken, when balancing the basin and cake on this, or the Easter egg may share the fate of Humpty Dumpty.⁷

What about the hollow chocolate egg? ,In 1893 Cadbury created the first modern chocolate Easter egg after developing a chocolate that could be poured into moulds. Made of dark chocolate, the eggs had a smooth surface and were filled with sweets.⁸

Easter bunny and bilby

JN: We were eggs only - envied the rich kids who got bunnies.

Why a bunny? This from the *Smithsonian Magazine*

Recent archaeological research appears to confirm the worship of Eostre in parts of England and Germany, with the hare as her main symbol. The Easter bunny therefore seems to recall these pre-Christian celebrations of spring, heralded by the vernal equinox and personified by the goddess Eostre. After a long, cold, northern winter, it seems natural enough for people to celebrate themes of resurrection and rebirth. The flowers are blooming, birds are laying eggs and baby bunnies are hopping about.⁹

This is the earliest reference for the bunny in Australia I found, a cute poem:

The Easter Bunny comes to town
Each year on Easter Eve
When all the children are asleep
His pretty eggs to leave
He has as little basket full
Red, yellow, green and blue
Sometimes he gives us lolly eggs

⁷ 'Easter Eggs' Recipes, *The Catholic Press* 27 March 1930 p.2

⁸ 'A history of Easter Eggs' Why we eat chocolate eggs at Easter: the history and tradition behind the sweet treat, *Chocolate Easter eggs: why we eat them and the history behind them* (foodmatterslive.com)

⁹Thompson, Tok, 'The Ancient Origins of the Easter Bunny', *Smithsonian Magazine*, 14 April, 2022

And eggs with pictures, too.¹⁰

As for making them, unless you have/can find a rabbit mould, this recipe is doable I reckon:

Cereal Bunnies — Twelve oz. semi-sweet chocolate, two-thirds cup honey, 5 cups rice cereal. Melt chocolate over hot, but not boiling water. Add honey and mix well. Remove from heat, add cereal, and stir until well coated with chocolate. Press into greased pan, about 15 in. x 10 in. Cut with rabbit-shaped biscuit cutter, or one yourself out of thick cardboard. Allow to cool thoroughly before removing from pan. This quantity makes about 20 bunnies.¹¹

Cometh the hour, cometh the Bilby.

Easter Bilby takes over

The Easter Bunny has been replaced ... by the Eastern Bilby.

The National Parks and Wildlife Service has just launched a campaign aimed at saving bilbies. an endangered marsupial species, extinct in South Australia. Regional administration officer Karen Jowett said NPWS had just released a book about the Easter Bilby.

The book told the story of how the Easter Bunny realised that rabbits had caused a lot of damage in Australia, so decided to hand over the Job of delivering Easter eggs to Australian children to the Bilby, because it did a much better job of looking after the country.

She said while the books were being sold Australia-wide, NPWS's Fleurieu office was the only one to take the concept one step further and sell chocolate bilbies as well.¹²

I found no recipe for making Easter Bilbies, sadly.

Breads and Cakes.

My search for all things edible for Easter came up with a selection of pastries and pud: Easter Egg Biscuits, Easter Nut Loaf, Simnel cake,¹³Easter Pudding,

FBers added:

SK: Kulich is our traditional Russian Easter cake. L: My Russian neighbours made paska- it was incredible.¹⁴ Paska is another name for kulich.

RKB: Traditional Southern style Germanic sweet, braided bread with a red coloured egg¹⁵, essentially a braided brioche dough. PA: second this , the Greeks call it Tsoureki , sounds essentially the same.

¹⁰ 'The Easter Bunny' *Weekly Times* 16 April 1927 p.53

¹¹ 'Easter bunnies – easy if you know how', *Weekly Times* 10 March 1954 p.60

¹² 'Easter Bilby takes over', *Times* 15 March 1994 p.2

¹³ 'Simnel Cake' 'Simnel Cake is a traditional fruit cake that is associated with Easter, particularly in the United Kingdom. It often includes spices and zest, peel or essence. Rich in history and symbolism, these days it's also generally covered with marzipan and decorated with eleven marzipan balls on top. These eleven balls represent the twelve apostles – minus Judas who betrayed Jesus according to the Bible. Often the cake is also decorated with a ribbon around the outside and flowers. Some Simnel Cakes have an additional marzipan layer baked into the cake' Simnel Cake - Cooking with Nana Ling

¹⁴ Kulich. 'This gorgeous Russian Easter bread, or kulich, is a sweet, yeast-risen bread flavoured with raisins and honey.' Natasha's Kitchen

¹⁵ According to some followers of Eastern Christianity, we owe the Easter tradition of painting eggs red on Holy Thursday to Mary Magdalene. This tradition of some believers states that Mary Magdalene brought cooked eggs to share with the other women at the tomb of Jesus and that the eggs in her basket miraculously turned

Mum used to make her special "Easter Torte."

FO: Being from the South, we had Elvis Presely cake. Yes, there are recipes for that!¹⁶

But I couldn't go past this one:

Easter Fairy Cakes

8 oz. S.R. flour, 3 oz. sugar, 2 oz. butter or margarine, 2 eggs, 2 oz. currants, ½ teasp. salt, a little flavouring essence. Method: Mix together flour, salt, and currants, put butter and sugar into a mixing bowl— heat a little — and beat to a cream. Add eggs separately and beat well— then the essence. Add gradually the dry ingredients to mixture. Grease patty tins well, half fill each one. Bake in a fairly hot oven from 15 to 20 minutes.

Miss Eva Robin

Other Easter treats

SB: Easter also meant apple, herring, and potato salad at home because it was autumnal, and apples were fresh.

MS: Figolla (pl. Figolli). A Maltese Easter pastry made with short crust pastry and almond filling. Made in various shapes, covered with icing or chocolate.¹⁷

LP: Only special food at Easter was Darrell Lea Nougat egg.

RD: We always had a gathering with roast lamb lunch. It used to include glazed carrots because bunnies liked them - and we were given extra to go leave outside for the bunnies.

To end off, here's a recipe for Easter Jelly Salad:

One pint cooked tomatoes, small bay leaf, slice of onion, small stalk of celery, 2 or 3 cloves, 1 tablespoonful gelatine softened in 4 tablespoonsful cold water, salt, Simmer the tomatoes and seasonings for a few minutes. Strain and add the softened gelatine. Stir well and pour the mixture into egg-shell moulds. To prepare the eggshells, open the eggs at the small end, remove the egg, and rinse the inside of the shells with cold water. Fill the shells with the tomato mixture and set aside to harden in a pan of metal or other substance .that will fit them upright.¹⁸

brilliant red when she saw the risen Christ. Others relate a similar story with a few minor changes. According to tradition, Mary Magdalene, after stumbling upon Christ's empty tomb, rushed to Pontius Pilate, the Roman governor to tell him that Christ had risen. The governor, however, didn't believe what he was told and announced that he would believe Mary Magdalene's claims only if the eggs in a basket next to him turned red, which they instantly did. 'Why Greeks Dye Eggs Red for Easter.' Why Greeks Dye Eggs Red for Easter - GreekReporter.com

¹⁶ 'Elvis Presley Cake' Southern Living

¹⁷ Figola. Maltese Easter biscuits (figolli) | SBS Food

¹⁸ 'Easter Jelly Salad' This Week's Recipe, *Queensland Times* 10 April 1933 p.4