

Learn to Cook the Modern Way. Recipes from the Australia Gas Light Company c.1950

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Rifling through a collection of recipes and other food related paraphernalia I had bought in a bundle from an antique dealer, I came across a set of 38 recipe sheets¹ produced by the Australian Gas and Light Company (AGLC from here) c1950.² Titles of the sheets and the recipes on each are Appendix 1.

This kind of ephemeral material – recipes printed in booklet form or as in this case single sheets - were a common promotional tool. These recipe sheets were part of the promotion of what these days would be called a ‘wrap-around service’. They were distributed free at ‘Lecture Demonstrations of Automatic Gas Cooking’ at one of AGLC’s Home Service Centres of which there were six – the western suburb of Parramatta, the inner west suburb of Burwood, the southern suburb of Hurstville, the eastern suburb of Bondi Junction and central Sydney. Each of these Centres had a Cookery College – on site teaching kitchen. There were Home Service Advisers at each centre who could undertake Home Calls if the ‘housewife require(d) assistance with cookery or kitchen management which necessitates a visit to her home’. The Advisers also managed a Recipe Service with Home Service Advisers supplying recipes on request.

The recipe sheet ‘Home Made Sweets and Candies’ carries on its reverse side an advertisement for the cookery classes:

Learn to Cook the Modern Way

Practical classes in modern cookery are held regularly in specially equipped classrooms in (the following) Home Service Centres of the Australian Gas Light Company. These special classes are under the supervision of highly trained teachers who will show you how to become an expert in every style of cooking. They are held during the day and evening.

In 1950 AGLC had a customer base of 1,300,000.³ I wondered what they would come to understand was ‘modern cookery’ and ‘expert in every style of cooking’

Recipe Sheets Described

Each sheet is A5 in size (14.8 cm x 21cm) and cream in colour. Each sheet has a title e.g. ‘Desserts for Warmer Days’. The sheets are unnumbered. Twenty-six of them have an illustration next to the title appropriate to the sheet’s content, usually featuring a female figure engaging in cooking relevant to the recipes. Eight have a cartoon strip at the end of the recipes each frame showing an individual at a HAND BASIN, in the KITCHEN, in the BATHROOM or at the LAUNDRY doing an activity related to the uses of gas with the accompanying text:

Only GAS gives you:
Hot water all the time
Three times faster
At lower cost per gallon

¹ Each sheet is printed on A5 paper and is two-sided. Most carry the words Recipes – with the compliments of Your Gas Company on the obverse side.

² I say circa as the sheets themselves don’t have a date but an illustration for the sheet ‘Grandma’s Puddings – Brought Up to Date’ has an illustration of said grandma holding a cake on which is written 1950. Also, another antique dealer confirmed that the style of illustration was late 40s early 50s.

³ The Chairman’s Address at the Annual General Meeting of Proprietor, Australian Gas Light Company, *The Farmer and Settler* 10 March 1950 p.3

Recipes are printed on both sides of the sheet. There are from four to eight recipes on each sheet. Fourteen sheets have text at the end of the recipes: 'Recipes – with the compliments of YOUR GAS COMPANY'. The rest have text: 'The Australian Gas Light Company'. Three have text about AGLC itself: one describing AGLC's wrap around service, the other two carrying promotional text about their new product - the gas refrigerator. (See below.)

Modern Cookery

What does 'modern cookery' look like for AGLC's customers? It's all about saving time and fuel.

'Double-Barrelled Cooking' invites the cook to 'Save time ... save Gas by steaming the pudding over the soup saucepan. They'll both be cooked perfectly by the best saver of all ... Your modern Automatic Gas Range'.

'Meals to save Time and Gas' says 'There is no better way of saving time, effort and gas than that of using the whole of the oven space and cooking the complete meal in the oven at the same time. It is important that the foods selected require the same cooking time.'

For example: Suggested combinations requiring the same time as well as temperature.

Thirty Minute Oven Meal: Preheating temperature, 500°F, Cooking temperature, 375°F. Ham and Spinach Rolls, Tomato Halves, Pineapple Betty. Place Ham and Spinach Rolls in the centre of the oven and the tomatoes and Pineapple Betty in the upper half.⁴

'One Burner Magic' promises 'With the aid of a large saucepan and steamer, complete two-course meals maybe prepared using only one gas burner.'

Suggested Menu

Braised Steak with Carrot and Pineapple Stuffing
Potatoes, Parsnips, Onions
Steamed Marmalade Pudding
(One burner) 1 ½ hours

These ways of saving time and fuel through cooking techniques are predicated on having the modern equipment to facilitate these. For AGLC that meant its Automatic Gas Range and its control of heat.

One of the chief essentials is evenness of browning ... the exact, even heat of your automatic gas range takes care of that for you. (Make Your Own Biscuits)

You will welcome the convenience, the better results and the new freedom your automatically controlled gas oven gives you. (Dinner in half an hour)

This was complemented by the new Gas Refrigerator:

... the silent refrigerator – no moving parts – just a tiny flame does all the work – ample storage space for all your food.
(‘Palate Pleasers’)

'Desserts for Warmer Days' carries on its reverse side instructions for 'The Use and Care of the Gas Refrigerator'. Home-cooks are advised where in the refrigerator different foodstuffs should go and how to wrap them if necessary: Fresh meat should be wrapped in grease proof paper and stored in the coldest section, under the ice cabinet; Fruit in the bottom of the cabinet, wrapped or in a

⁴ The recipes are all in the recipe set

vitaliser; Salad Dressings containing oil should be stored in the less cold section (away from the evaporator). There are instructions for Defrosting and Cleaning the refrigerator.

There was also a recipe sheet for 'Using your Gas Refrigerator to the best advantage' – recipes here were for Ice Cream Alaska, Savoury Ham Pie with a Refrigerator Crust, Fruit Sherbet, Refrigerator Nutties and Timbales of Lobster and Cucumber.

At the time of its Annual General Meeting in March 1950 AGLC estimated that 'one in four of our domestic consumers possesses a gas operated refrigerator'.⁵

Every Style of Cooking

The classes promise to make the home cook 'an expert in every style of cooking'. The recipe sheets are an integral operational part of this promise. How well do they do this?

I took style to mean the method of cooking - e.g. baking, poaching; the type of dish – e.g. soup, dessert; and also, cuisines – e.g. vegetarian, Italian.

I developed a list of styles from recipes in the *Australian Women's Weekly* (AWW from here) 1949 – 1950 issues. I chose the AWW because its wide reach lent itself to publishing a wide range of styles of dishes.⁶ The list of styles is Appendix 2.

Comparing the AGLC recipes from Appendix 1 against the AWW styles in Appendix 2 shows that there are only a handful of AWW styles not covered in the AGLC recipes, e.g. Poaching, Sherberts, Meatballs.

At the same time there are styles in the AGLC recipes not covered by those in the AWW. For example, AGLC has a sheet for 'The Hors D'Oeuvre Platter'. Items for it are built around olives, cream cheese, toast fingers, celery sticks among others. AGLC has a sheet of 'Lenten Dishes', that is, meatless dishes for those observing the restrictions of the Lenten season. 'Honey for Tea' presents a selection of recipes incorporating the use of honey that 'should prove helpful to you through present-day rationing.'

Both lists show an Australian table still dominated by Anglo-Australian cuisine. The exceptions are the triumvirate of non-Anglo cuisines popular at the time - Indian, Italian and Chinese. AGLC has more recipes from the triumvirate than AWW.⁷ The Indian recipes are scattered through the recipe sheets. There are recipes for 'Casserole of Curried Tripe', Curried Lamb Pies', Mulligatawny, Madras Kedgeree, and Salmon Kedgeree. AWW has two Italian recipes. AGLC has a separate sheet 'As It's Cooked In Italy' which includes Minestrone (sic), Risotto All (sic) Milanese, Spaghetti Italiane, Zabaione (sic) and Pizza Figliata'. Similarly, AWW has one 'Chinese' recipe, AGLC has a separate sheet – 'Chinese Dishes' with recipes for Chicken and Almonds, Sweet and Sour Pork, Fried Rice, Sweet and Sour Fish and Spring Rolls which includes how to make the batter for them.

Vegetarians are well-served by AGLC with recipes running 2:1 meat to vegetable main dishes There is a separate sheet for some 'Interesting New Vegetable Dishes' which includes a Vegetable Souffle.

⁵ Chairman's Address ...

⁶ In 1947 the *Weekly* claimed it sold over 700,000 copies each week. Cover Page', The *Australian Women's Weekly* January 1947

⁷ I am aware that these recipes will show at best adaptation of the cuisines and only a nominal relationship at the worst.

'Eating Your Way to Health'

The home cook now knows the best equipment for modern cookery and they have a range of styles to cook - what about the foods to cook? 'For a normal, healthy diet certain foods should be eaten every day', said this recipe sheet. 'These are known as the "Protective" foods because they are essential to good health'. This sheet has a table for the home cook to check when preparing the day's meals to ensure they 'include these basic foods.' For example,

Meat, Poultry, Fish	At least one serving per day.	Provides: Proteins mostly for body-building, some minerals Sea-foods supply iodine. Eggs and liver - Vitamins A and D and iron.
Eggs	One per day or 3-5 per week.	
Liver etc.	Whenever possible.	

Curiously the sheet has four recipes of which three would be seen as borderline unhealthy these days – Tutti Frutti Twists, Nougat Crunchies and Harlequin Fluff. The healthy recipe is for Tomato Surprises – tomatoes stuffed with vegetables and herbs.

So, not quite an expert in every style of cooking ...

... but armed with the best time and gas saving equipment and the AGCL recipes the home cook will be well on the way within the parameters of the Australian table at the time.

Appendix 1. Australian Gas Light Company recipe sheets c1950

1. Oranges and Lemons

Lemon Fleur
Lemon Filling
Orange Velvet Cake
All-Bran Orange Tea Loaf
Lemon Tea Muffins

2. Cooking Without Looking

(Winter Casseroles)
Sharp Mushroom Steak
Casserole of Beef Steak with Orange Dumplings
Savoury Liver with Walnuts
Casserole of Savoury Rice with Cocktail Sausages
Casserole of Curried Tripe

3. As It's Cooked in Italy

Veal and Ham Rolls with Risotto All Milanese
Spaghetti Italienne
Zabaione (sic)
Pizza Figliata

4. "Chinese Dishes"

Sweet and Sour Pork
Chicken and Almonds
Fried Rice
Sweet and Sour Fish
Spring Rolls

5. Savoury and Homey

Barbecued Beefburgers
Savoury Cheese Cake
Savoury Filling
Egg and Bacon Slice
Kameruka Patties

6. Everyone's Favourite – Dates

Orange Date Muffins
Date Luncheon Cake
Wholemeal Date Scones
Butterscotch Squares
Date and Chocolate Macaroons

7. Home-made Sweets and Candies

French Almond Rock
Caramels
Chocolate Walnut Fudge
Apples on Sticks
Truffles
Fruit and Nut Clusters

8. Most-Asked-For Recipes

Peach Shortcake
Devi's Food Cake
Date and Walnut Cake
Custard Tart
Sponge Sandwich

9. Lighter Pastries for the Warmer Weather

Apple Turnover with Cream Cheese Pastry
Tomato Luncheon Tart
Cocoanut Nougat Tart
Vegetable Pie with Peanut Butter Pastry

10. Interesting New Vegetable Dishes

Spanish Corn Fritters
Cauliflower Flan and Potato Pastry
Cheese Recess with Carrot Balls
Vegetable Souffle
French Fried Onion Rings

11. Home Made Bread and Buns

White Bread
Hot Cross Buns
Honey Twist
Sugar Plum Loaf
Milk Bread

12. Small Cakes with 'Eye' Appeal

Toasted Lamingtons
Slab Cake
Mushrooms
Raspberry Fingers
Stuffed Monkeys

13. Gifts to Please

Christmas Surprise
Shortbread
Deville Almonds
Mincemeat
A Pleasing Gift – A Box of Home-Made Sweets
Suggestions
Russia Caramels
Cocoanut Ice

14. Honey for Tea

Honey Bran Muffins
Honey Hermits
Honey Fruit Fritters
Twisted Honey Tea Ring
Raisin Honey Luncheon Cake
Honey Rusks

15. Children's Party Dishes

Maypole Cake
Chocolate Cream Cakes
Mammy's Boys
Quoit Biscuits
Mushrooms

16. Cakes and Puddings from just one bowl

The Basic Mixture
Fruit Patty Cakes
Chocolate and Cocoanut Bar
College Cup Puddings
Up-side Down Pudding

17. Scones and Tea Cakes

Peanut Butter Scones
Jubilee Tea Loaf
Nutty Apple Tea Cake
Tomato Cheeses Whirls

18. Pies on Parade

Shortcrust Pastry
Lemon Chiffon Pie
Canadian Pie
Macaroon Custard Tart

19. Palate Teasers

The Hors D'oeuvre Platter
Suggestions for the Hors D'oeuvre Platter
Supper Savouries
 Cassolettes Boheme
 Creamed Whitebait in Grapefruit Cases
 Savoury Cases

20. Casserole Capers

Casseroled Stuffed Livers
Cheesed Potato Chips
Barbecued Meat Loaves
Rice and Liver Casserole
Casserole of Beef Steak with Carrot Dumplings
Mixed Vegetable Casserole with Peanut Butter Whirligigs

21. Biscuits that are Different

Fruit Rockies
Kornettes
Caraway Sticks
Puffed Tea Wafers
Cocoanut Pyramids
Walnut Fudge Wafers

22. Eating Your Way to Health

(Table of health)
Tomato Surprises Tutti Frutti Twists
Nougat Crunchies
Harlequin Fluff

23. Gas Fireside Suppers

Hot Lamb in Bread Timbales
Finger Croquettes
Potato Baskets
Salmon Kedgeriee
Almond Cheese Fingers
Prune Savoury

24. Meals to save Time and Gas

Suggested Combinations Requiring the Same Time as Well as Temperature

Suggested Combinations Requiring the Same Temperature But Not The Same Time

Peach Shortcake

Pear Gingerbread

Ham and Spinach Rolls

Spaghetti Meat Roll

25. Top Burner Cooking

Veal Croquettes with Orange Slices

American Doughnuts

Sardines and Savoury Rice

Oysters Mornay

Marble Puddings with Fluffy Chocolate Sauce

26. "Dinner in half an hour"

Menus Suggested

American Fish Pie

Pineapple Muffins

Lemon Sponge Pudding

Pear Gingerbread

27. One Burner Magic

Suggested Menus

Marmalade Pudding

Sago Plum Pudding

Meat Mould

Braised Steak with Carrot and Pineapple Stuffing

Caper Sauce

28. Automatically Cooked Oven Meals

Suitable Foods

Meat

Menus

Canberra Cutlets

Apricot All-Bran Betty

Peach Slices

Chocolate Queen Pudding

29. Using your Gas Refrigerator to the best advantage

Ice Cream Alaska
Savoury Ham Pie
Timbales of Lobster and Cucumber
Refrigerator Nutties
Fruit Sherbet

30. Grandma's Puddings – Brought Up to Date

Banana Cream Pie
Apple Snow with a Difference
Pumpkin Chiffon Pie
Hawaiian Gateau

31. "Lenten Recipes"

Madras Kedgerree
Cheese Souffle
Stuffed Vegetable Marrow
Cold Fish Croquettes with Cucumber Salad
Bean Roast
Cheese and Vegetable Shortcake

32. Double-Barrelled Cooking

Sago Plum Pudding
Apple Sauce Pudding
Fruit Puddings (Eggless)
Cabinet Pudding
Soups
 Minestrone
 Mulligatawny Soup
Ox Tail Soup

33. Make Your Own Biscuits

Gingernuts
Strawberry Fingers
Cocoanut Honey Squares
Cherry Wines
Chocolate Cream Fingers
Fruit and Nut Roughts

34. For Those Holiday Picnics

One-Egg Fruit Cake
Cheese and Onion Pie
Spaghetti Meat Roll
Nutty Fruit Bars
Banna Nut Bread

35. "Pies"

Flaky Pastry
Shortcrust Pastry
Biscuit Pastry
Champagne Pastry

Curried Lamb Pies
Kidney Pasties
Cocoanut Tarts
Lemon Cheese Tartlets

36. Desserts for Warmer Days

Ice Cream
Pineapple Angel Pie
Bavoroise Princesse

The Use and Care of the Gas Refrigerator

37. Fire Side Snacks

Club Sandwiches
Fried Oyster Biscuits
Potato Baskets
Cocktail Pies
Savoury Eggs
Welsh Rarebit

38. There's Real Pleasure in Outdoor Meals

Lemon Twist Cake
Pumpkin Sandwich Scones
Cauliflower and Sweet Corn Flan
Pineapple and Walnut Loaf
Wine Biscuits

Appendix 2. Criteria for Every Style of Cooking derived the *Australian Women's Weekly* 1949 – 1950 issues

Aspic's	Pasta Dishes
Baking Cakes	Pasties
Baking Fish	Pastry
Baking Fruit	Patties
Baking Meat	Pavlovas
Baking Vegetables	Pickles
Biscuits	Pies Savoury
Braised Meat	Pies Sweet
Buns	Poaching
Burgers	Puddings
Breads	Rice Dishes
Candies	Roast Meat
Cassoulets	Roast Vegetables
Casseroles	Rolls
Cheesecakes	Salads
Chinese Dishes	Sandwiches
Chutneys	Sauces
Cobblers	Scones
Creams	Sherberts
Curries	Slices
Custard	Souffles
Devilleed Dishes	Soups
Dumplings	Sponge
Egg Dishes	Spreads
Fillings	Stews
Flans	Stuffed
Fried Dishes	Sundaes
Fritters	Tart
Frosting/Icing	Timbales
Fudge	Trifles
Grilled Meat	Vegetable Dishes
Ice Cream	
Italian <u>Dishes</u>	
Jams Conserves	
Jellies	
Junket	
Kedgerree	
Loafs	
Marmalade	
Meat Cutlets	
Meatballs	
Meatloaf	
Meringues	
Moulds	
Omelettes	
Pancakes / Flapjacks	
Parfaits	

