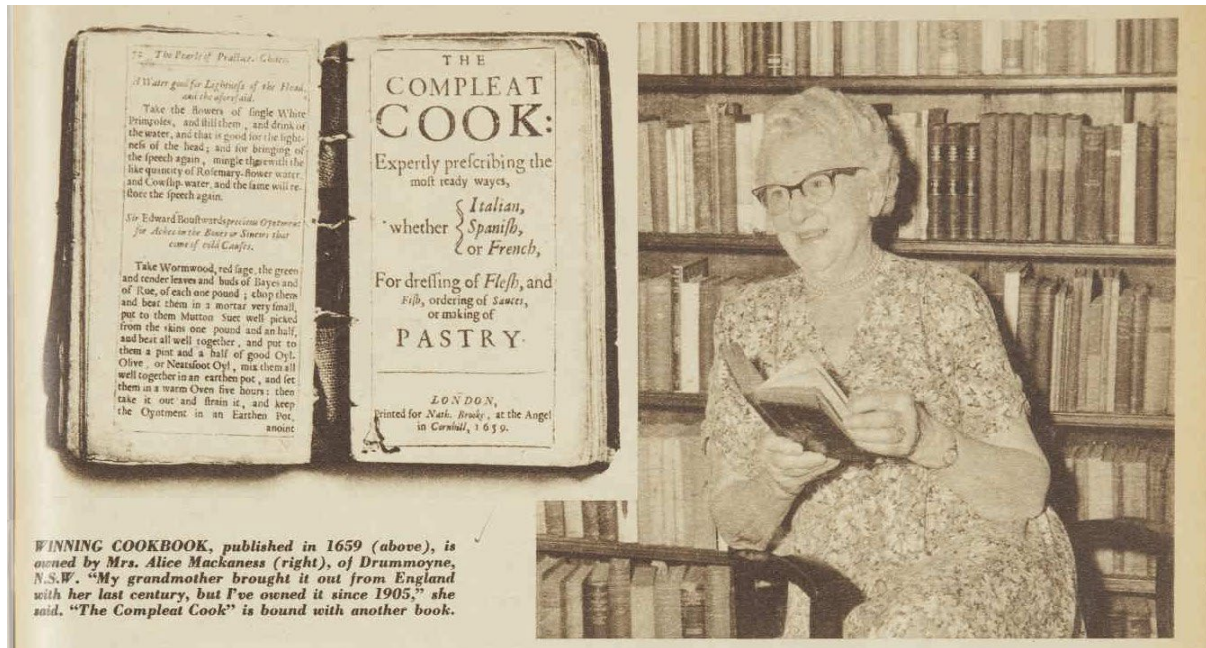


THE Cookbook and Butter Churn Quest

A book printed in 1659 and a churn brought from Ireland last century have won £100 each for their owners in our quest to find the oldest cookbook and butter churn in Australia.

By Barbara Butchart



WINNING COOKBOOK, published in 1659 (above), is owned by Mrs. Alice Mackaness (right), of Drummoyne, N.S.W. "My grandmother brought it out from England with her last century, but I've owned it since 1905," she said. "The Compleat Cook" is bound with another book.

THE Cookbook and Butter Churn Quest was conducted last month by The Australian Women's Weekly in conjunction with the Australian Dairy Produce Board to celebrate 175 years of cookery in Australia.

Mrs. Alice Mackaness, of Drummoyne, N.S.W., won the prize of £100 for her cookbook, printed in England in 1659, a year after the death of Oliver Cromwell.

Mrs. Margaret Riordan, of Orford, via Port Fairy, Victoria, won £100 for her old butter churn brought from Ireland last century.

Mrs. Mackaness has owned her winning entry, "The Compleat Cook," since 1905. "My grandmother, Mrs. Matilda Symons, brought the book with her when she migrated as a young schoolteacher from England to Sydney 120 years ago," said Mrs. Mackaness. "She fell in love with an engineer on the boat trip and married him soon after arriving. They lived in a mansion on six acres of ground where the White Bay Power Station is now.

"When she died, she left me all her books, and 'The Compleat Cook' was among them."

The first edition of "The Compleat Cook" (1655), which is bound with "The Queen's Closet Opened," was printed in the time of Oliver Cromwell, Lord Protector of the Commonwealth of England, who died in 1658.

The 1659 printings of the book are recorded in Wing's "Short Title Catalogue of Books Printed in England 1641-1700 as being the 4th and 5th editions respectively.

This places Mrs. Mackaness' book as being printed at the time of the Restoration, which re-established the British Monarchy and Charles II to the throne in 1660, after Oliver Cromwell's son Richard abdicated in May, 1659.

Mrs. Mackaness' book is one of about 20 copies known to be in existence.

"This is the first contest I have ever entered," she said. "I knew it was an old cookbook and thought it might have a good chance of winning."

It won - from 3335 books!

"I've never cooked any of the recipes," said Mrs. Mackaness, "in fact I'm not very fond of cooking."

But we tasted a piece of Mrs. Mackaness' home-made boiled fruit cake during our interview and thought it delicious. "This is one of her best recipes," said her husband, well-known author-historian Dr. George Mackaness.

The judges of the quest were surprised by the large number of old cookbooks and butter churns sent in by our readers. As the entries were received, they were forwarded to the Australian Dairy Produce Board for judging.

Final selections of the oldest cookbooks were authenticated with the Mitchell Library in Sydney and the butter churns with the Institute of Applied Science in Melbourne.

The judges said, "In almost every instance, the cookbooks were treasured heirlooms, passed from mother to daughter for generations."

For these cookbooks were, to the December 25, 1963 early Australian housewives, encyclopedias of domestic wisdom.

The pioneer housewife was a homemaker in the fullest sense of the word. Is it any wonder she treasured her book, such as "The Accomplish'd Gentlewoman's Companion" or "The Compleat Housewife," because from it she became hostess, cook, brewer or vintner, and even doctor, to minister to her family's needs.

And what needs! Ingredients must have been very much cheaper than they are today. These examples from an 18th-century book "The Art of Cooking Made Plain and Easy" would make the modern housewife throw up her hands in horror.

"To make a rich cake: Take four pounds of flour well dried and sifted, seven pounds of currants washed and rubbed, six pounds of best fresh butter, two pounds of Jordan almonds blanched, and beaten with orange-flower water and sack till they are fine, then take four pounds of eggs . . ."

It's a very long recipe and a very rich cake!

Other extravagant – sounding excerpts from old cookbooks entered are: "To ice a cake-take the whites of 24 eggs . . ." "four pounds of butter . . . then beat 35 eggs . . ."

Mrs. T. van Eupen, of Camberwell, Victoria, entered a book called "The New Family Receipt-Book," 1811, which was given to her mother when she was a young girl, by Georgiana McCrae, with her signature inside.



WINNING BUTTER CHURN (above) is shown with its owner, Mrs. M. Riordan, of Orford, Vic. Contemporary accounts of this type go back to 1750.

Mrs. R. L. Ditcham, of Lindisfarne, Tasmania, wrote: "My book, 'London Art of Cookery,' printed in 1789, is leather bound and bears the stamp of the Port Arthur Public Library, having been in circulation during the days of the penal settlement at Port Arthur."

Another very old book was the "Family Magazine in Two Parts," printed in 1741. It was entered by Mrs. D. H. Clayton, of Launceston, Tasmania. "My cookbook was brought to Australia by my great-grandmother when she migrated here with her family in 1856 in the brig Fairlea."

Mrs. H. J. Warren, of King's Park, S.A., wrote: "This book, 'The Art of Cookery made Plain and Easy,' printed in 1796, belonged to my great-great-grandmother, Mrs. Charles Everard, who sailed from England in the Africane. They landed at Holdfast Bay and pitched their tent about a mile from the beach."

Mrs. C. A. Middleton, of Finley, N.S.W., owned a titleless book written in 1864. "It belonged to my father's Aunt Sarah and Uncle William Crowder, who kept the lonely lighthouse at Hell's Gates at the entrance to Macquarie Harbor on the west coast of Tasmania in the early times."

Before the contest we doubted that there were many old churns still in existence in Australia, because public interest in them had not been stimulated until now.

But the contest turned up 498 butter churns from all States in Australia.

It is interesting to know how butter was first made.

These details come from "The Story of Butter," published by the Butter Information Council in London.

"Butter was first discovered by wandering herdsmen in biblical days through carrying milk in goat-skin vessels on their camels. The movement agitated the milk and butter was formed. They liked its taste and began making it deliberately, either by beating the milk by hand in an earthenware bowl or by swinging the skin vessel filled with milk from the bough of a tree.

"Later, man discovered an easier way to make his butter. He inserted radial spokes into a stick and moved it rhythmically up and down in the liquid."

This developed into the upright butter churn, which consists of a long tapered cylinder of coopered wood with a removable wooden lid with a hole in the centre. Through this hole the "dash" a pole with a four-leafed clover-shaped beater at the end -was worked rhythmically up and down by hand.

Although Mrs. Riordan, owner of the winning churn, was not able to tell the judges its exact age, they were guided by the style and appearance, which established it as being a very old churn indeed.

It was the earliest type entered, as known to the Institute of Applied Science in Melbourne, and preceded churns which had beaters powered by a handle or treadle.

"It is a strange, old churn like a barrel with a lid on it and a beater inside," wrote Mrs. Riordan on her entry form. "It is not broken, but old and dusty. This churn was never used in my time.

"The diameter of the churn at the top is 13in. and at the bottom 16in. It is 21in. tall.

"I presume it was brought here when my grandfather immigrated from Ireland. He and my husband's grandparents were all pioneers of Orford.

"In the early days butter-making was my husband's family's source of income. The butter was sent to Melbourne in butter boxes (in bulk), where it was divided into pounds.

"A distant cousin who used to live with my husband's people at our home about 60 years ago said they used to milk 75 cows by hand and separated it with a steam engine and made butter."

The churns were acquired by their present owners in many different ways. Some churns were part of stock and machinery when the farm changed hands. Others have been in a family for 100 years or more.

But most of the old butter churns were acquired as curios at auction sales.

One housewife wrote of her husband's habit of making regular searches of rubbish tips for curios. And on a council clean-up day, very early morning he found her a churn!

Most of the churns were still in working condition, whether made of wood, glass, metal, or earthenware.

But our readers brought them back to life again for the quest.

"My churn was hand-made by my husband's grandfather," wrote Mrs. G. Rayner, of Porepunkah, Victoria. "He came to Wandiligong, an early gold-mining district in north-east Victoria, over 100 years ago as a tent-maker. The churn is now displayed at 'Como' (headquarters of the National Trust of Victoria in Melbourne.)"

Mrs. M. Spence, of Blackall, Queensland, wrote: "My butter churn came from an old dairy, since demolished, not far from Blackall. Early residents tell of the lad from the dairy driving her horse and buck-board across the Barcoo River into town to sell her butter. Each pound was carefully wrapped in a strip of wet linen and sold for 2/- per lb. in the 1880s."

Another intriguing story was received from Mrs. D. McGregor, of Rochester, Victoria, when she entered an old churn. "My ancestors, Nancy and William McGregor, in 1877 selected land near Rochester. He helped lay sleepers on the railway to Echuca; she sold butter, eggs, and cheese to the railway workers. Nancy and her daughter were excellent cooks and took prizes at local shows making fancy butter.

The dairy, dug out 10ft. to 12ft., had shelves round it on which fat dishes of milk were set and skimmed. In winter a fire was lit to keep the milk at the correct temperature. The best butter was made in October, when the best cow was fed on natural grass where there were no weeds to taint the milk."

One entrant wrote saying she had turned her grandmother's butter churn into an elegant flowerpot stand.

The quest certainly proved one thing to the judges-that Australian women, and a few men, too, love collecting old cookbooks and butter churns.

[25 Dec 1963 - Announcing the prizewinners of Oldest Cookbook and Churn - Trove \(nla.gov.au\)](#)