

## A sixpenny dinner at the Colonial Exhibition of 1886

The Australian Agents-General propose to startle the culinary connoisseurs of London with a series of sixpenny dinners at the Colonial Exhibition of 1886, the viands being exclusively Australian. The menu will comprise kangaroo tail soup, smoked barracouta, pickled Murray cod, stewed iguana, possum ragout, roast wombat, haricot bandicoot, wallaby pie, salt bush salad, munyaroo tart, preserved loquats, syrup of native cherries, bottled quandongs, and a conserve of "bardies" and wild honey (as a bush substitute for strawberries and cream). The repast will be moistened with she-oak beer, Warrenheip gin, Mount Gambier potato brandy, and "stock and rider" tea, served in quart pots and concocted with Yan Yean water. Queensland corn cob pipes, New South Wales sheepwash tobacco, and cigars of Victorian leaf will be provided to top off with.<sup>1</sup>

This humorous item was published in October 1885 in the *Port Augusta Dispatch, Newcastle and Flinders Chronicle* purporting to be part of the Australian display at the 1886 Colonial Exhibition in Britain. The Exhibition was the fourth in a series 'intended to display as perfect a Collection as possible of the natural and manufactured products of our Colonies, as also of our Indian Empire ... Australia, too, will certainly do herself more than justice on this important occasion, and will be represented on a scale of remarkable completeness'.<sup>2</sup> At least I think the item was humorous: it was in a column called 'Grapeshot' which was a mix of short items some which looked credible others of which looked to be satirical. Certainly, there was no mention of the dinners in reports of the Exhibition.

But let's say it did happen, let's (re)construct the menu via recipes and substitutes and let's play around with time as well.

### Kangaroo tail soup

Kangaroo in different forms have been at the Australian table since the arrival of the First Peoples at least 65,000 years ago. Recipes for preparing it had been published in the first extant Australian cookery book, Edward Abbott's 1864 *The English and Australian Cookery Book. Cookery for the Many As Well the "Upper Ten Thousand"* though none for kangaroo tail soup.<sup>3</sup>

Here's a recipe for it from *The Tasmanian* newspaper in 1886.

Kangaroo Tail Soup — Kangaroo should be hung some time or it will possess little flavour, yet it should not hang long enough to become tainted. If in the bush, where kangaroos plentiful, the stock may be made from the same instead of beef or veal. Cut the tail into medium sized pieces, and place in the stewpan three or four pounds of the meat from the leg or any other part, a slice of ham or lean bacon, two blades of mace, a bay leaf, two onions, a head of celery, and pepper and salt to taste. Add four quarts of light beef stock, place on the fire and cook gently until the tail is thoroughly done, then strain the soup and thicken to a proper consistency. Cook gently for half an hour take off all fat and scum, put in a large glass of sherry or Maderia wine, a teaspoonful

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<sup>1</sup> 'Grape Shot', *The Port Augusta Dispatch, Newcastle and Flinders Chronicle* 26 October 1885 p.3

<sup>2</sup> 'The Colonial Exhibition 1886', *Maryborough Chronicle, Wide Bay and Burnett Advertiser* 1 January 1886 p.2

<sup>3</sup> 'Abbott, Edward, *The English and Australian Cookery Book. Cookery for the Many As Well the "Upper Ten Thousand"*, Sampson, Low, Son & Marston London 1864: Kangaroo Ham p.195; Hashed p.85; Jugged p.85; Pan Jam p.86; Pasty p.82; Roast p.83; Slippery Bob p.86; Steamer pp. 82, 83, 84; Stuffing p.101.

of red currant jelly, and the juice of a lemon; return the pieces of tail -boil up and serve, and the soup should be perfect.<sup>4</sup>

### **Smoked barracouta**

I found references to smoked barracouta at the time but no recipe for smoking them.<sup>5</sup> I did find a method for smoking fish published in 1909.

The fish scaled, gutted, cleaned then pickled in water, salt and brown sugar for a few hours then let to dry. 'As soon as the fish are thoroughly dry, hang them in the smoke house. Hang the fish in the smoke house before lighting the fire, and they must be at least 4ft. from the fire in the bottom. Pine sawdust is considered the best for smoking fish. A small fire of shavings is made on a sheet of iron in the bottom of the smoke house, and sawdust gradually sprinkled on it. When the sawdust catches alight it will smoulder for some time, and fresh sawdust must be added at intervals until the fish are smoked. Do not have a blaze in smoke, as too much heat will spoil the fish. The smoking process takes from four to six hours but no strict time can be set down, as much depends on the weather conditions.'<sup>6</sup>

**Pickled Murray cod** – I couldn't find a reference for pickled Murray cod at that time. I found a 1915 recipe for serving Murray cod cold which uses pickling spices and vinegar. Let's go with that.

#### TO SERVE FISH COLD.

Some persons like the flesh of large fresh-water fish, such as the Murray cod, served cold. Here is a recipe for the dish. Boil the fish carefully in the ordinary way and be careful that you do not break it. This is most easily avoided if you have one of those long elliptical enamel, fish kettles with a false perforated bottom, that acts as a slice for lifting and draining the fish.

When it is cool enough to handle, slit it carefully open and remove the back bone. The skin may also be removed with advantage. Lay the halves of the fish in a deep dish and pour over it a pickle made as follows: Take three gills of vinegar and one of water, a dozen peppercorns, two red chillies, half-a-dozen cloves, a little salt, three sprigs of parsley, two of thyme, one of marjoram, and two bay leaves. Boil all these gently together for ten minutes, strain, and, when cold, pour over the fish, and allow it to steep for three or four hours. Afterwards drain out and serve with a garnish of lemons.<sup>7</sup>

**Stewed iguana** – First things first, there are no native species of iguana in Australia. Goannas, yes. I looked for a goanna recipe and found one for roasting them in the coals of a fire in *Bill Harney's Cook Book*.<sup>8</sup> Casting more widely I found a recipe for stewed eel from Mrs. Pike that could do. Here it is with iguana in place of eels.

#### Stewed Iguana

ingredients : 2 lbs of iguana, ½ lb gravy beef, juice and peel of half a lemon, a little nutmeg and cayenne, one wine glassful of claret, one teaspoonful of anchovy sauce, flour. Mode :- Cut the iguana into three lengths, allow a pint and half of water. Put the iguana into a saucepan with the water, gravy beef, lemon, juice and peel season with pepper, salt, nutmeg, and cayenne. Stew gently until quite tender, keeping the pan closely covered. Remove the pieces of iguana when

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<sup>4</sup> 'Kangaroo Tail Soup', *The Tasmanian* 29 May 1886 p.4

<sup>5</sup> 'Melbourne Fish Markets', *Bairnsdale Advertiser and Tambo and Omeo Chronicle* 6 May 1886 p.2

<sup>6</sup> 'How To Smoke Fish', *Daily Mercury* 4 October 1909 p.3

<sup>7</sup> 'To Serve Fish Cold', *The Farmer and The Settler* 30 March 1915 p.8

<sup>8</sup> 'Goanna', *Bill Harney's Cook Book* 1960 p.38

cooked. Strain the sauce, to which add the claret and anchovy sauce, brown a little flour, and thicken with it; pour over the iguana and serve very hot.<sup>9</sup>

**Possum ragout** – No recipes for possum outside of Harney's Cook Book for a possum thrown on the coals. Here's a recipe for Ragout Hare that will have to do. If you close your eyes a little the hare can look like a possum.

#### Ragout of Possum

A portion of cold cooked hare, 1oz. of butter or dripping, one good-sized onion, one tomato, 1oz. of flour, ¾ pint of stock, some potato croquettes. Cut the hare into nice-sized pieces. Make the dripping hot and fry the chopped onion a pale golden colour. Shake the flour over the pieces of hare, lay them into the sauce, and sprinkle in any loose flour. Fry lightly for about three minutes, taking care that the onion and flour do not burn. The contents of the saucepan must be stirred well. Then put in the ¾ pint of stock, or, failing this, use water, and the tomato sliced, season and bring to the boil, stirring well. Draw to the side of the fire, and simmer gently for an hour or an hour and a-half until quite tender. Serve in a hot silver entree dish and strain the gravy over. Garnish round the dish with small potato balls or croquettes. Of course the ragout of hare may be elaborated by the addition of a teaspoonful of red currant jelly and a glass of claret or port to the gravy.<sup>10</sup>

**Haricot bandicoot** – No recipe for bandicoot of any kind then or after so let's substitute bandicoot for mutton in this recipe from the earliest extant Australian cookery book, Edward Abbott's 1864 *The English and Australian Cookery Book. Cookery for the Many As Well the "Upper Ten Thousand"*.

#### Haricot of Bandicoot

Skin the bandicoot. Cut the bandicoot up into several pieces as you would a rabbit. Fry the pieces and well nearly done take them out and fry of a brown colour equal quantities of turnips and carrots, cut into small pieces, and a few onions. When done put the bandicoot and vegetables in a stewpan, with a small quantity of stock, and pepper and salt; simmer and serve. A good haricot is never watery or full of gravy.<sup>11</sup>

**Wallaby pie** – No contemporary recipe for this but here's one from 1924

"Paddymelon" or wallaby pie:

The stringybark cockatoo of fame served to new hands, with "paddymelon pie," but all the same it is not too bad.

Take two "paddymelons" or small wallabies, a tin of tomatoes or a few of the fresh or dehydrated variety, two teaspoons, sugar, one minced onion, one pint boiled lima or haricot beans, half pound butter, half pound bacon, cut fine, salt, pepper and water. Stow carefully for two hours, except the butter. Linc the camp oven with dough made from self-raising flour with a little dripping worked in. dump in the lot including the butter, put on the lid and cook with the duff setting, for about half an hour.

Treat rabbits or wallaby similarly. If old. parboil first.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> 'Stewed Eel', Sunday Times 9 June 1907 p.15

<sup>10</sup> 'Ragout of Hare', *The Queenslander* 2 June 1906 p.7

<sup>11</sup> Abbott, Edward, *The English and Australian Cookery Book. Cookery for the Many As Well the "Upper Ten Thousand"*, Sampson, Low, Son & Marston London 1864 p.24

<sup>12</sup> "Paddymelon" or wallaby pie, Western Mail 4 September 1924 p.8

### **Munyaroo tart**

No luck here about getting a recipe. And anyway, munyaroo is apparently pig face so I'm not sure what kind of a tart that would be. So, I will substitute a recipe for Rosella Jam Tarts.

#### Ingredients

90g unsalted butter, at room temperature  
3 tablespoons caster sugar  
1 egg  
½ teaspoon vanilla paste  
1½ cups self-raising flour  
⅓ cup milk  
30 small pastry cases approximately 5cm across, 1.5cm high  
1 cup lemon curd or rosella jam  
½ cup flaked or slivered almonds  
Icing sugar to dust

#### Method

Pre-heat oven to 180°C. Line a large baking tray with baking paper.  
Combine the cream, butter and sugar and beat until light and fluffy. Add the egg and vanilla and beat again until well mixed.  
Add the flour and milk in three batches, folding through by hand after each addition. Spoon the mixture into a piping bag fitted with a plain nozzle (or just snip off the end).  
Place the pastry shells on the baking tray and spoon 1 teaspoon of lemon curd or jam into each one. Pipe the cake filling on top to come just to the top of the pastry. Sprinkle over the almonds.  
Bake in the oven for about 15 minutes, turning the tray around if browning too much on one side.  
Remove the tarts from the oven and cool to room temperature on a cooling rack. Dust with icing sugar before serving.<sup>13</sup>

### **Salt Bush Salad**

No go here either. So, I am going to give a 2025 recipe for Warrigal Greens Salad instead.

#### Ingredients

2 large handfuls warrigal greens  
1-2 tbsp melted coconut oil  
1 mango, diced  
coarsely chopped toasted macadamia nuts, to serve  
finger lime (optional), halved and pearls scooped out, optional  
Dressing  
1 lime, juiced  
1-2 tbsp extra virgin olive oil  
1 long red chilli, finely chopped  
1 tsp honey

#### Instructions

Strip the warrigal green leaves from the stalks, wash the leaves, then pat dry and place in a bowl. Drizzle over the coconut oil and gently massage the oil into the leaves. Transfer to a serving bowl. For the dressing, place all the ingredients in a bowl and whisk to combine well.

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<sup>13</sup> Alison Alexander's little lemon curd or rosella jam tarts [www.abc.net](http://www.abc.net)

Pour the dressing over the warrigal greens, then scatter over the mango followed by the chopped macadamia nuts and finger lime pearls, if using.

**Loquat Preserve** – I found no recipe for loquat preserve contemporaneous with the Exhibition but did find this one from 1937.

#### Loquat Preserve

Take the required amount of loquats and prepare by washing them, cutting off the ends and stoning. Allow  $\frac{3}{4}$  lb sugar to 1 lb fruit, and 1 gill water to 1 lb sugar. Strew a little sugar over the fruit, and leave overnight. Next day boil the remaining sugar and the water for 15 minutes. Skim, add the loquats, and boil until done.<sup>14</sup>

**Syrup of Native Cherries** – No recipes for this so let's adapt a 1919 blackberry syrup recipe.

#### Syrup of Native Cherries

To each pound of fruit allow 1 lb. loaf sugar, and 1 tablespoonful of cold water. Place the fruit, sugar and water in a large jar with a close-fitting cover. Stand the jar on a saucepan of boiling water, and cook gently for two hours. Strain the juice, measure it, put it into a preserving pan or an enamelled stew-pan and boil gently for 20 minutes, skimming carefully. To each pint of syrup add a small glass of brandy, and when quite cold bottle and seal.<sup>15</sup>

**Bottled Quandongs** – No recipes for this so let's adapt a recipe for bottling cherries.

#### Quandongs to Bottle

Have ready some wide-mouthed bottles, such as are generally used for bottling fruit, and make sure that they are quite dry. Put the fruit into the bottles, shake them down, and put two tablespoonfuls of sifted sugar at the top of every bottle, Cork them closely, and tie them down. Put them into a large pan of cold water, bring it to the boil, let it stand on the hob for five minutes, then lift the boiler from the fire, and let the bottles remain in it until the water is cold. The juice of the fruit ought to cover it. The corks must be looked after when the fruit has been scalded, and refitted, if necessary.<sup>16</sup>

#### **Bardies (Witchetty grubs) and Wild Honey**

Roast bardies in the coals of a fire or on a stove top sufficient for the number of those dining allowing three or four per person. When ready serve in individual dishes with wild honey drizzled over them.

**She-oak beer, Warrenheip gin, Mount Gambier potato brandy** - These three products we will buy in as it would take a long time to make the from scratch.

**Stock and Rider Tea** - I'm reliably informed that this is another name for 'post and rail tea' which was so named for poor quality tea, with particles of stalk and other impurities floating on its surface.<sup>17</sup> So we will look for poor quality tea to buy or toss a handful of eucalyptus twigs into a quart-pot of water collected from the oldest reservoir in Victoria built in 1857 the Yan Yean.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>14</sup> 'Loquat Preserve' Cookery, Newcastle Morning Herald and Miners' Advocate 16 September 1937 p.4

<sup>15</sup> "Blackberry Syrup' Selected Recipes, *The Prahran Telegraph* 1 March 1919 p.7

<sup>16</sup> 'Cherries to Bottle', *Weekly Times* 26 November 1887 p.6

<sup>17</sup> 'post and rail tea' Green's Dictionary of Slang

<sup>18</sup> The name Yan Yean comes from the Wurundjeri leader who signed the 1835 Batman's Treaty, whose name was recorded as 'Yan Yan' (meaning 'bachelor' or 'young male'). Parks Victoria

**Coda**

And there you have it my version of what was or may be more likely was not a sixpenny dinner at the Colonial Exhibition of 1886.