

## **‘Cooking electrically is Simple, Safe, Speedy and Certain’. Electrical Association of Women cookery book 1938**

‘Women are no longer satisfied to stop in the old groove of household drudgery. They are becoming more electrically-minded, and will not be satisfied until they have electricity as a handmaid in the home’.

Mrs. May Mathieson address at the Christmas luncheon of the Electrical Association for Women. December 1934<sup>1</sup>

With the progress of knowledge about food and food values during the march of time, rule of thumb methods must be discarded, and the modern method of preparing food for consumption is ELECTRIC COOKING.

Dr. Frances McKay, Foreword, ‘Cookery Book and Electrical Guide.’<sup>2</sup>

The Electrical Association for Women (EAW from here) was formed in March 1934 by Florence Violet McKenzie based on a similar British Association. The EAW was a membership-based organisation. Its aims and objectives were:

- 1.To collect and distribute information on the uses of electricity and to have regular lectures and demonstrations.
- 2.To impart a knowledge of electricity and electrical appliances which will instil complete confidence in their safe handling.
- 3.To arrange lectures in schools, colleges, clubs and broadcast, in order to disseminate this knowledge as widely as possible.
- 4.To have special courses of lectures and training for girls who wish to obtain employment in the electrical or radio world.
- 5.To endeavour to reduce the present charges for electricity and electrical appliances, by educating women to their advantages, and thus promoting increased current consumption.
- 6.To encourage private enterprise and to stress the importance of buying only safe and reputable appliances.<sup>3</sup>

### **The Cookery Book**

One way the EAW achieved its goals was through lectures and demonstrations often involving food preparation. In April 1934 ‘about 200 members of the Electrical Association for Women and their friends paid a visit to the electrical department of Anthony Hordern’s and inspected the latest electrical stoves, vacuum cleaners, washing machines, electrical coal fires, and many varieties of electrical domestic equipment. A demonstration of sponge and tart making was given, and an informal address delivered by Mrs. F.V. McKenzie’.<sup>4</sup> In May 1935 ‘Mark Foy’s Ltd. in conjunction with the City Council gave ‘an afternoon tea entertainment and electrical demonstration to members of the Electricity Association for Women’<sup>5</sup>.

Then in 1938 the EAW published the ‘Cookery Book’ compiled by McKenzie addressing the EAW aims and objectives 1 and 2. On the inside front cover is a black and white photograph of a woman standing dressed for some social occasion in formal dress, a hat and gloved hands in a pristine

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<sup>1</sup> ‘Electrical Association of Women’ Briefly, *The Sydney Morning Herald* 13 December 1934 p.4

<sup>2</sup> ‘Foreword’, McKay, Dr. Frances, *Cookery Book and Electrical Guide*, Electrical Association of Women 1938

<sup>3</sup> ‘Electrical Association of Women, *Construction and Real Estate State Journal* 14 March 1934 p. 12

<sup>4</sup> ‘Electrical Association’ Briefly, *The Sydney Morning Herald* 27 April 1934 p.4

<sup>5</sup> ‘Electrical Demonstration’ *The Sun* 14 May 1935 p.10

kitchen with an electrical oven prominent. Above her is a caption that reads 'An Electric Kitchen Means Freedom, the latter word emphasised in bold.

Below are four outcomes of cooking electrically.

Efficiency - Cooking electrically is Simple, Safe, Speedy and Certain.

Economy – Cooking electrically means a very definite reduction in household accounts.

Cleanliness – The kitchen will be healthy and cool, with brightness and daintiness everywhere.

Leisure – There will be many more hours of leisure – no hard work, no watching, or anxiety.<sup>6</sup>

Page two has text from McKenzie. Most of it is thanking people who assisted in getting out this Second Edition. She also says 'Our readers are advised to study the advertisements very closely. They have been carefully chosen, and we can recommend everything advertised as the best of its kind'. I study the advertisements to see how they reflect the four features above.<sup>7</sup>

Page three is a Foreword from Frances McKay, President of the Advisory Council, Electrical Association for Women. 'The progress in the knowledge of food and its preparation is one of the wonders of today. ... Electricity, this wonder of our age, was looked on as a miracle, and yet we have advanced so far that cooking in an electric oven has become common practice, quite simple to any one of ordinary intelligence making it possible for anyone to lay claim to the truly feminine virtue of being a good cook ... Needless to say that with an electrical range, the cook is not subject to temperature changes, and she has a cool kitchen, hence she herself has less wear and tear on her nervous system as she has both less work and less worry.'<sup>8</sup> Arguably this addresses Efficiency, Cleanliness, and Leisure.

Page four is an advertisement for the Electric Light & Power Supply Corp. Ltd. The advertisement has a sketch of a woman again dressed for a social occasion, perhaps hosting a dinner - prominent at the bottom of the sketch is a traymobile. Above her is the caption 'A woman like yourself Owns this kitchen!'.<sup>9</sup> She is standing in a kitchen with a flat top electrical range, a refrigerator and hot water gushing into a sink. The caption below the image reads 'It's all so easy when you do it electrically'. The text below her emphasises the Economy of electrical equipment. She can Own that kitchen through having an electric range with cost savings enough for her to buy other electrical appliances.

The book has 10 sections. The first Section is titled Electrical Guide, General Electrical Information covering the use of the electric stove and other equipment. The other Sections are recipes in order of food type from Hors d' Oeuvres to Jams, Jellies, Pickles etc. I don't deal with them as they are similar to recipes of that time.

I want to see what the Electrical Guide, General Electrical Information said about an electrical kitchen under the four outcomes above.

### **Efficiency - Cooking electrically is Simple, Safe, Speedy and Certain.**

The single most important way to achieve Efficiency was:

When using the oven make full use of it by cooking complete oven dinners of meat, vegetables and puddings, using the hotplates as little as possible.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> Cookery Book - Inside front cover

<sup>7</sup> Cookery Book - p.2

<sup>8</sup> Cookery Book - p.3

<sup>9</sup> Cookery Book - p.4

<sup>10</sup> Cookery Book p.9

It doesn't strictly come under Efficiency as it is described, but I think here is the best place to put it.

The discussion about Oven Cooking has photographs of three makes of oven with the entire space of the oven holding sundry dishes of food for cooking on different racks. The text describes in detail when and where different dishes are put in the oven.

'Jackson' range.

Every inch of space available for cooking – meat dish right on floor of oven. Short quick cooking at the top – pies, pastries etc. Medium temperature middle of oven, and long, slow cooking at bottom, the coolest part. Meat baked vegetables, and pie placed in the oven at the same time.

Pie removed to warming cupboard at top, and Yorkshire pudding, green vegetables, etc. put in its place on top shelf.<sup>11</sup>

Advertisers of ranges emphasised efficiency also.

McClary Electrical Ranges.

An all-electric range of all-round efficiency.

Smart in Style.

Thoroughly dependable.

Speedy and Economical.<sup>12</sup>

There is a page on Kitchen Safety not dealing with cooking safety but with safe use of electric appliances. Illustrated by photographs are three situations to avoid:

1. Ironing should be performed OUT OF REACH of stoves, sinks etc. for perfect safety.
2. An electric hair-dryer or vibrator should be used OUT OF REACH of stove and taps
3. An electric kettle should be disconnected before being filled at the tap.

### **Economy – Cooking electrically means a very definite reduction in household accounts.**

Saving electricity and so costs when grilling is discussed.

In some ranges, such as the Rowco, only half the grilling element is heated when the switch is at Medium, so if only a small amount of meat is to be grilled, place the meat under this half, and turn to Medium. Only half the amount of current will then be used.<sup>13</sup>

Hotplates also can contribute to economy.

All hotplates are provided with at least three different heats, some time with four. The contents of a saucepan should be brought to the boil on the highest heat, then switched to Low, to keep simmering. It is more economical to do this on the quick-boiling plate, and to keep several saucepans simmering at once on the same plate.<sup>14</sup>

Electric hot water systems were promoted as cost saving:

Even assuming that electric hot water is EQUAL in cost to that produced by other systems, can it not be claimed that the CONVENIENCE of the electrical method its cleanliness, safety and reliability

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<sup>11</sup> Cookery Book p.10

<sup>12</sup> Cookery Book p.15

<sup>13</sup> Cookery Book p.13

<sup>14</sup> Cookery Book p.14

are assets of wonderful value? ... Experience shows however over period, electric hot water costs LESS than water heated by other means.<sup>15</sup>

**Cleanliness – The kitchen will be healthy and cool, with brightness and daintiness everywhere.**

There are quite detailed instructions on how to clean the range.

... The oven should be carefully cleaned while still warm. A damp cloth, with a little cleaner, will remove any stains or marks in a few moments. The whole interior lining of the oven, or else the separate supports for the racks may be detached and washed in hot soapy water.<sup>16</sup>

There are four advertisements for lighting in the kitchen.

It's amazing how many women cook in twilight! In hundreds of kitchens you see them peering into saucepans which are bathed in shadow, bending low over the recipe book and straining their eyes.... A Mazda Lamp over your range- that's the sensible rule.

The advertisement for "Better Sight" Lamps, is alarmist. The image is of a toddler with a sign saying:

Eye Strain picks it victims young.

It goes on to say:

What adorable eyes! Yes...but it is better to protect them than to merely admire them. By school age approximately one child in every five has something wrong with his eyes. Improper and inadequate lighting is a major cause ... For the sake of your eyes and your comfort avoid glare, sharp contrasts, bright spots and shadows. Your home and your entire family need "Better Sight" Lamps.<sup>1718</sup>

**Leisure – There will be many more hours of leisure – no hard work, no watching, or anxiety.**

The electric mixer ...

... is a most helpful appliance in any home – it saves tiring arm-work.<sup>19</sup>

Ranges with automatic control keep the heat at a pre-determined temperature.

The advantages of this are that there is no possibility of the oven becoming over-heated through forgetfulness, an even heat can be maintained without any attention whatever...<sup>20</sup>

Treat your range as a real friend, and ...

... you will be pleasantly surprised at the CERTAINTY of your results, and the utter absence of any anxiety.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Cookery Book p.19

<sup>16</sup> Cookery Book p.12

<sup>17</sup> Cookery Book p. 6

<sup>18</sup> Cookery Book p.7

<sup>19</sup> Cookery Book p.25

<sup>20</sup> Cookery Book p.17

<sup>21</sup> Cookery Book p.12

The woman who 'owns' her kitchen ...

... has far more leisure than most women.<sup>22</sup>

### **Last words**

This article has shown how the Electrical Guide, General Electrical Information addressed four outcomes from an electrical kitchen: Efficiency, Economy, Cleanliness, Leisure.

Electric Cooking is quick, clean, healthy, economical, and the most efficient method known.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Cookery Book p. 4

<sup>23</sup> Cookery Book p.12