Pickles, tinned meat and tongues. A snapshot of Ham and Beef Shops 1882 – 1941

August 2026

> Then one afternoon I saw Adeline outside Condy's Ham and Beef at Taylor Square.
> *Iris, Fiona Kelly McGregor.*[1]

It was only a passing reference, but it stopped me in my tracks. I've written extensively on Australian food and foodways but have never before encountered Ham and Beef Shops. McGregor's novel is set in the mid-1930s. It's meticulously researched in food as in other aspects of living in Sydney during these years. Had she found something I'd missed?

I went searching.

Ham and Beef Shops

The earliest reference to Ham and Beef Shops I found was in 1882.

> Charles Lewis was summarily convicted of having stolen a bottle of pickles, valued at 1s, the property of Louis Helvegaon, of George-street, ham and beef shop-keeper, and was sentenced to be imprisoned seven days.[2]

The earliest detailed description of them I found was this in 1893:

> MR. MIERS' NEW HAM AND BEEF SHOP
> The new premises at the corner of Brunswick and Palmer streets are so nearly completed that Mr. J. Miers, who has so successfully carried on business opposite for the past ten years, is now able to definitely announce that he will open the new shop tomorrow. ... Mr. Miers has always made a specialty of hams, both imported and colonial, and his skill in selecting them is a guarantee of their quality. The scrupulous cleanliness with which his cooked meats are displayed is one of their most attractive features, and the increased facilities of the new premises will in the future make this even more prominent. Additional attention will be devoted to dairy produce, arrangements having been made for fresh supplies daily during the summer months. Frankfurt and German sausages, pies, pickles, tinned meats, tongues and other delicacies can be relied on to be of superior quality and Mr. Miers announces his determination to make the new Star Ham, Beef and London Pie Shop the most attractive of its kind in Melbourne or suburbs.[3]

Others listed additional items: dressed poultry, baked rabbits[4]; fresh pork, Christmas suckling pigs, "Crown Brand" butter[5] sauces, cheeses, butter, eggs, bacon as well as a hundred tasty delicacies.[6]

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[1] McGregor, Fiona Kelly, Iris, Picador Pam Macmillan 2022 p.240
[2] Central Police Court, Police, The Sydney Morning Herald 4 May 1882 p.8
[3] Miers' New Ham and Beef Shop, Fitzroy City Press 15 December 1893 p.3
[4] Kempsey Ham and Beef Shop, Macleay Argus 27 June 1918 p.4
[5] Ham and Beef Shops, Newcastle Morning Herald and Miners' Advocate 22 December 1905 p.7
[6] Ham and Beef, E. W. Burgess, The Armidale Express and New England General Advertiser 4 April 1941

Also available were tea, coffee, soft drinks,[7] and confectionary[8].

Origins of the goods

Some made smallgoods on their premises.

> Mr. Glocker, who has had a number of years in the business in Hamburg (Germany) manufactures his own small goods and customers can rely on getting only fresh and wholesome food at his ham and beef shop which is at present being fitted up on modern lines.[9]

Some sold home-cooked goods.

> Miss F. McIntyre intimates that she has removed to 78 Rose street, Essendon, where she is now conducting a ham and beef shop where she sells home-cooked food.[10]

Others gave assurances of the quality of the goods they carried from other sources.

> Only goods of the finest quality are kept in stock, and of them a fresh supply is constantly coming to hand so that one can be sure of obtaining fresh goods at Goldsworthy's.[11]

Convenience

One news item proposed:

> Mr. Burgess's really complete provision store also provides a most convenient shopping centre for those housewives who do not wish to go to the bother of cooking heavy meals every day. There they can obtain delicious cooked meats they can take home ready to serve.[12]

Dine in

Some were reported as having on-site dining.

> Mr. Gordon also has public private refreshment rooms, where one can enjoy a well-made sandwich and fresh cup of tea, &c., in comfort at a moderate price. [13]

> Light Luncheons with Salads will be provided.[14]

Non-metropolitan areas

Shops were established outside the metropolitan area.

> Mr. Windus, who established himself in Kempsey a few months ago, has two fresh food carts running to all parts of the district, and has built up a wide connection. Among other lines, he

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[7] The Highgate Ham and Beef Shop, The Daily News 25 January 1913 p.9
[8] The Central Ham Shop, Daily Herald 27 April 1917 p.7
[9] Warwick Ham and Beef Shop, Warwick Examiner 13 May 1914 p.5
[10] Ham and Beef Shop, Flemington Spectator 2 August 17
[11] Hugh E. Gordons' Ham Shop, Critic 26 September 1906 p.17
[12] E. W. Burgess, Ham and Beef Shop, The Armidale Express and New England General Advertiser 4 April 1941 p.7
[13] Hugh E. Gordon's Ham Shop, Critic 26 September 1906
[14] Ham and Beef Shop. The Horsham Times 10 April 1923 p.5

> supplies dressed poultry, baked rabbits, etc., and readers will do well to peruse his advt. in this issue.[15]

Metropolitan services served non-metropolitan areas.

> The "City Ham and Beef Shop" at Cotterill's new buildings, 413 Hunter street West, does a thriving business. Since last year the proprietor, Mr. J. Cotterill, has opened a manufacturing business for the supply of country orders, in connection with which he does a large business.[16]

Alcohol

Ham and Beef Shops were not licensed to serve alcohol. That didn't stop them.

> P.c.c. Koetsveld said that with Constables Fox, Forbes, and Hamilton, he visited the shop and caught a girl handing glasses of beer to the young men. They seized the bottles and glasses and found them to contain beer. May Grennan had no licence, and had said to witnesses that she only sold a little beer to make a bit of a living ... May Grennan had previously, been convicted for sly grog selling.[17]

Food Safety

News items stressed the cleanliness of the premises.

> Opposite the Hindmarsh Police Station is the place for ham, beef and smallgoods. The shop is kept by Mr. P Goldsworthy, and his establishment is a model for cleanliness and civility.[18]

A point is made of refrigeration.

> The part played by modern refrigeration methods at E. W. Burgess's
> Is a most important one. All perishable goods are kept fresh wholesome by the very latest cold storage equipment.[19]

Shops, however, did not always inspection.

> Inspector Lewis M. Gibson, of the Public Health Board, gave evidence that he visited defendant's shop on 2nd June, and found the floor caked with dirt and dust. A "fly-proof" wire gauze door was broken and incapable of serving its purpose. There were pasties in the shop on |which innumerable flies were revelling. The kitchen was no better, the floor being dirty and dusty; and a room off the shop where sandwiches were cut, was in keeping with the rest of the premises as regards neglect. The bathroom was apparently, used for washing vegetables. In the yard there was a litter of dirty rags and old papers, as well as bottles, and the refuse bin was overflowing— the whole condition conducing to the breeding of flies.[20]

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[15] Kempsey Ham and Beef Shop, Macleay Argus 27 June 1918 p.4
[16] Mr. J. Cotterill, Ham and Beef Shops, Newcastle Morning Herald and Miners' Advocate 22 December 1905 p.7
[17] Beer Drinking in Ham and Beef Shop, The Evening Mail
[18] The Central Ham Shop, Daily Herald 27 April 1927 p.7
[19] E. W. Burgess, Ham and Beef Shop, The Armidale Express and New England General Advertiser 4 April 1941 p.7
[20] A Filthy Shop. Flies and Foodstuffs, The Age 2 August 1924 p.13

Ham and Beef Shops, Butchers and Delicatessens

Ham and Beef Shops were open late, often till 11 o'clock at night. In 1918 the Premier of New South Wales in addressing a Saturday Half Holiday Bill compared ham and beef shops to butchers and proposed they should also have to close at 5 p.m. 'Wonford' wrote a rejoinder to this:

> To The Editor of the Sydney Morning Herald As a humble keeper of a ham shop, I must strongly protest against such remarks, as I contend that ham shops are not in competition with any shop. I do not speak of ham shops which sell butter, cheese, eggs, bacon, raw pork, etc, and which are practically mixed shops, but of those shops where only cooked provisions are stocked and sold as agreed to by Sir Perry when he was Minister in charge of the Early Closing Act, and which are practically restaurants, the only difference being that the goods are consumed off the premises, just the same as in connection with a grocers wine license I might point out that there are not half a dozen butchers' shops in the city and suburban area where you can purchase ham, tongue, trotters, feet, pigs, or a dozen and a half different articles, all cooked, which we sell, and are, and always have been recognised as articles sold and procurable only in ham and beef shops.[21]

Ham and Beef Shops also ran in parallel with Delicatessens. The earliest reference to the latter I have found was in 1864 in an Australian German newspaper.[22] The earliest English language reference was in 1874.

> A.H. Heine, Wine Merchant, View Place, has on Sale the following Continental Delicacies suitable for luncheons, &c.: —Caviar, Limburg cheese, Dutch anchovies, sardellon, green and Swiss cheese, Frankfort and all other kinds of German sausages. [23]

The two seem to have co-habited without competition. In one instance they were conflated.

> Residents of the railway end will welcome the opening of a new smallgoods and ham and beef shop by Miss S. Mason at the shop in Keppel Street for years occupied by Miss Hotham. The new delicatessen is a particularly bright and attractive looking shop and carries a splendid stock of all small goods as well as specially home cooked meats etc.[24]

Final words

Ham and Beef Shops are food outlets that have been left out of Australian food history. In parallel with delicatessens they dealt with smallgoods made on the premises or bought in, as well as a range of other foodstuffs.Some provided luncheon rooms serving tea, sandwiches and salads. Subject to inspection by health authorities some were found unfit for carrying on a food business. Others sold liquor in contravention of their licensing. Some operated in non-metropolitan locations or provided a service to them.

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[21] Ham and Beef Shops, The Sydney Morning Herald 25 August 1910 p.7
[22] *Sùd Australische Zeitug* 22 July 1864 p.7
[23] Deutsche Notice, *Bendigo Advertiser* 12 May 1874 p.3
[24] New Ham and Beef Shop, National Advocate 9 June 1934 p.2