

SHOPPING EARLY THIS CENTURY

The present generation, accustomed to doing the household shopping in giant supermarkets, would probably view with disbelief an account of methods and practices employed in their parents' and grandparents time.

As a typical example I could take my boyhood home at Albion Park between the years 1910-1925 when we lived in a large house on a ten acre property on the outskirts of the village.

Counting a live-in help we were a large household of ten and the equivalent of many farm establishments in the district.

Many groceries were bought in bulk and behind the door in our pantry hung a side of Hutton's bacon from which each morning was cut sufficient rashers for the usual bacon and egg breakfast; this was the real bacon, cured in a smoke house and in no way like the modern chemical cured product which has a life, even in a refrigerator, of a few days. A side would last for many weeks and in addition to rashers would provide a ham and many boiling pieces.

Then there would be a seventy pound bag of sugar, a fifty pound bag of Brunton's flour, a ten pound bag of rolled oats, a four gallon tin of lighting kerosene, bars of Early Morn or Sunlight soaps, packets of candles, starch and Reckitts Blue, a gallon jar of vinegar and on the shelves scores of jars of home made preserves and jam, always a seven pound tin of golden syrup, black treacle and honey.

Jam making was an ongoing operation with, according to the season, a large pan of blackberries, peaches, apricots, plums, quinces, cape gooseberries or jam melon usually on the stove.

Tea usually came from the tea houses of Inglis, Griffith, or Edwards in Sydney in fourteen or twenty eight pound "chest" and whose salesman paid regular calls booking fresh orders.

In a kitchen cupboard was stored Zebra stove polish for the fuel stove, Brunswick Black for the six open-fire grates, Shinoleum floor polish, Bon-Ton liquid polish for patent leather footwear and cakes of black boot polish which had to be mixed with water. Woe betide the schoolboy whose boots did not pass muster for polish at morning assembly.

The property supported one sulky horse - I am not referring to his temper - and two house cows, always one in milk and the other "resting and expecting"; naturally there was always a large surplus of milk and this was put to "set" in large shallow dishes. The cream rose to the surface and after a couple of days was skimmed off into a large bowl and churned into butter by use of an egg beater. This was an after school job which we hated.

The resultant skim milk, curdled and thick, helped fatten a pig kept in a sty remote from the house. At maturity it would be butchered by an elderly neighbour, Lionel Hurry, and for a few days we dined on fresh pork and the rest would be divided up into boiling pieces, massaged with coarse salt and allspice and stacked in a keg of brine pickle to periodically emerge as salt pork. A replacement piglet took its place in the sty.

Although Albion Park had a couple of general stores the two Dapto stores, Fairley's and Moorhead's had many customers among the "Park" farming community and an orderman from each store would traverse the district on horseback each Tuesday collecting grocery orders to the accompaniment of a rapid fire delivery of memory jogging items.

Their delivery carts on Fridays would carry dozens of egg crates for collection of the large quantities of big open-range hen eggs surplus to requirements on each farm and which helped to offset the cost of the groceries.

Other salesman of those times were the Chinamen who jogged around the district shouldering a long flexible pole from each end of which hung a basket containing all kinds of haberdashery, and small household requirements.

Indian hawkers were a common sight dawdling along back roads in a horse drawn covered van stocked with farm necessities such as work boots, shirts and trousers, brushes and brooms, pots and pans, hats and bonnets, and pulling in at some friendly farm each night where they would be sure of fodder for the horse and a live chicken for the pot.

A Mrs. Cooper from Wollongong would do a regular run around the area with a horse drawn sulky loaded with dress materials, stockings and corsets, pinafores and bloomers.

Also from Stoyle's bottle yard in Wollongong a cart would from time to time do a round buying empty corn sacks, bottles, old iron, bones and household oddments.

Apart from the local butchers someone would occasionally start up a "cutting cart"; this was a box vehicle loaded with bulk meat and mutton and having a let-down tailboard fitted with a wooden block. Driven from door to door the lady of the house would select the meat she wanted and have it cut to her liking. This service was not popular with the established butchers and seldom survived for long.

On Fridays Harry Green, a Lake Illawarra fisherman, would go from door to door carrying a basket of fresh fish which he sold for sixpence per pound.

After reading this the present day shopper would no doubt prefer to push a trolley down the aisles of a supermarket and buy in more manageable quantities.

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