Hands On Learning
with Reading Museum Service

NINETEENTH CENTURY DAIRY H212



In the nineteenth century milk was often transported into towns by rail and delivered to homes by milkmen using small horse-drawn carts or handcarts. In the early years of the Victorian era the carts carried a churn and the milk was ladled into whatever pot was brought out to the milkman by the householder.

Milk did not have a very positive commercial image in the towns and cities of the nineteenth century. In the days before pasteurisation and widespread refrigeration, milk was a risky commodity, very quickly contaminated and easily watered down by unscrupulous sellers. Some wealthy families had their own special churn cleaned and sealed in the dairy to prevent this from happening. If not watered down the cream could be skimmed off the top. The water pump in the dairy was sometimes referred to as 'the cow with the iron tail'! As water could be contaminated with diseases such as typhoid, this added to the danger of disease.

To counteract this, up-market town dairies developed in the more prosperous areas. At the back was a cow-house where first class cows were kept in thoroughly clean and healthy conditions. At the front was a milk shop, fitted out with style and presenting a clean, cool environment where customers could taste and buy the fresh milk almost direct from the cow. The milk was served from attractive china pans that sat on the counter.

Along with this increasing emphasis on dairy cleanliness, up-to-date dairymen adopted a delivery system in which their carts were supplied with a set of graduated cans - 1 gallon, 1 quart, 1 pint … down to a gill (a quarter of a pint). Milk was taken from the storage churn not from the top but from a brass tap at the base. The can was put under the tap and filled up. The lid could be closed to stop soot and other urban muck from spoiling the milk and the can could then be carried to the house door.

Delivering milk in sealed bottles did not become common until after the Second World War.

Top: Delivering milk, using cans like the ones in this box, in the early twentieth century.

READING MUSEUM SERVICE

Hands On Learning
with Reading Museum Service

NINETEENTH CENTURY DAIRY H212

Ladle



This is a one pint measure. It is made of tin, with a curved brass handle to make it easier to hang on a bucket or on a rail in the milkman's cart. Although there is no manufacturer's mark, the brass rim has been stamped to indicate that the capacity is correct. The crown and the initials 'GR' indicate that it was made during the reign of George V (1910 to 1936).

Small Can



This small can holds 1 gill. The stamped print on the lid and side tells us that it belonged to the dairy of P. Lalouette, Langley Park Dairy, Springfield Road, Windsor. It was made by a specialist firm, the Dairy Outfit Company of King's Cross, London, which supplied the whole range of utensils and equipment for conducting a dairying operation along hygienic lines. They had a factory in Boxmore, Hemel Hempstead, Hertfordshire.

Medium Can



This small can holds 1 pint. The stamped lettering on the lid and side tells us that it belonged to the dairy of the Griffin Brothers, 177 Albany Street. It is not known in what town this Albany Street was located. The lid also boasts of the dairy's '1st Prize Dairy Cows'. Griffin is a Welsh/West Country name and many dairies seemed to have been owned by Welshmen, perhaps because of the dairying tradition in parts of Wales.

Large Can



This can holds 1 gallon (8 pints). It has no dairy or maker's marks, although there are some numbers on the base.

Hands On Learning
with Reading Museum Service

NINETEENTH CENTURY DAIRY H212

Milk Bottle



British milk bottles were first produced in 1880 by the Express Dairy Company. The next to use them was Wiltshire United Dairies, which eventually became Unigate. They were sometimes delivered by horse-drawn cart. The bottles came in every shape and size, ranging from an eighth of a pint bottle to a two-pint size.

Before pasteurisation became widespread, bottles were delivered four times a day. In 1894 Anthony Hailwood, a North Country dairyman, pioneered the method of sterilising milk by heating it to high temperatures. The first bottles used a porcelain stopper top held on by wire. Cardboard tops followed, although these were banned in the mid-1950s when deemed unhygienic. Silver, red, blue or yellow aluminium tops were later introduced to indicate the fat content. Unpasteurised was green topped. The use of milkbottles for door-step delivery only became common after the Second World War.

This bottle was produced by the Slough and District Co operative Society. Co operative societies were widespread in the nineteenth century. They began as societies which bought food items at wholesale prices and sold them on to their members at cost-price. The Slough and District Co-operative Society was prominent in Slough for over a century. It became active in 1891, after an earlier start failed. Despite a lot of opposition from local trades people its first shop was opened on Slough High Street on 15 April 1892.

This bottle originally had a cardboard cap, which rested on the ledge inside the neck. This means it dates from before the mid-1950s when these were banned. It would have held a third of a pint of milk. The third of a pint bottle was specifically designed for schools, following the passing of the School Milk Act in 1946, so it could not be resold. The act ordered the issue of one-third of a pint of milk free to all pupils under eighteen. This law, designed to improve child health, was ended by Margaret Thatcher in 1970, who was at that date Education Secretary. This bottle, then, probably dates from the early years of this legislation in the late 1940s or early 1950s.