

Object(s): Egg Beater

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Egg Beater

A well-known expression is; “You can’t make an omelette without breaking eggs”. This object in the collection would certainly help you to make an omelette, a soufflé or any number of things in the kitchen that needed beaten eggs.

It is an egg beater, but a rather unusual one. This egg beater takes the form of an earthenware jar with a metal plunger. The jar is of white, glazed earthenware and has a maker’s emblem on it in black, in the form of a garter ribbon circle, surmounted by a crown. The circle contains the words “Gourmet Egg Beater” and inside the circle is the number “3”. There are no other markings on the jar to indicate who made it although the pattern of the mark is similar to that used by the Royal Doulton potteries, which suggests, they may have been commissioned to produce the earthenware component.

The maker’s emblem caught my eye because it appears to be loosely designed around the Royal Coat of Arms; depicting a stylised image of St Edward’s Crown, (used by British Monarchs since the 13th Century) and Garter. It would be impossible for the Royal Arms to have been shown without Royal patronage so we might speculate that this maker’s mark was perhaps co-designed between the company and its selected potters, as commemorative tribute to King Edward VII, who’s Coronation was in January 1901. If nothing else, in marketing terms it might suggest Royal connections, which would probably not be permitted today.



Figure 1: St Edward’s Crown. United Kingdom Government.¹

The plunger is in the form of a metal rod with a pieced metal mesh on one end (rather like a potato masher) and a looped metal handle on the other. The mesh fits snugly inside the jar.

¹ United Kingdom Government. St Edward's Crown [Internet]. 1952 [cited 1 July 2020]. Available from: By United Kingdom Government - This file has been extracted from another file: Crown Jewels of the United Kingdom 1952-12-13.jpg, Public Domain, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=65352877>

It was donated to the museum collection in 1977 having been previously been used by two generations of the donor's family.

The Gourmet Company

Our Egg Beater was manufactured and sold by the Gourmet Company of London who were trading in the 19th and early 20th Centuries. I have found very little information about this company other than the fact that they are no longer trading under this name. Which means that either they ceased trading in the first half of the 20th Century or their business was bought and the name has been lost in time.

What is clear is that they specialised in designing and manufacturing earthenware kitchen equipment. They appear to have supplied at least three different sizes of the same design of Egg Beater. Antique shops, always a good source to locate specific items, offer for sale the same design in numbers '2', '3' and '4'. Each higher number being slightly larger in size.

The company also made a device known as the Eddystone Milk Boiler, again made in various sizes. This was a glazed earthenware tower in the shape of a lighthouse. It had indents on the underside and four holes at the top (roughly where the light would be in the lighthouse) It was surmounted by a small, circular, earthenware handle. The same Gourmet Company label appears (identical to that on the Egg Beater), with the name "The Eddystone Milk Boiler" on the garter ribbon. For this device, The Gourmet Co seems to have gone to the trouble of obtaining a patent on its design, the number of which ('526628'), is included in the centre of the label.



Figure 2: The Eddystone Lighthouse. John Lynn, early 19th Century²

The milk boiler was used to tell when milk had reached boiling point. It would be placed in a pan of milk, heated on the stove. When the milk reached boiling point, it would rattle in the saucepan to

² Lynn J. The Eddystone Lighthouse [Internet]. 1811 [cited 30 June 2020]. Available from: By John Lynn (British, active early 19th century) - 1. Art UK2. Art UK, Public Domain, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=27016264>

remind the cook to remove the saucepan from the heat. The concept certainly worked because it was later copied by several other manufacturers.

Our Egg Beater, was a practical and welcome addition to the kitchen, as our records testify; although it was certainly not the only solution. In 1884, Willis Johnson, an American inventor, patented the first rotary egg beater.³ This used a geared wheel, driven by turning a handle, to turn two opposing beaters. It was set to become the standard design for all subsequent egg beaters.

Societal change in Victorian and Edwardian Britain

The products supplied by The Gourmet Company, suggest that innovation and creativity were essential to satisfy the demands of the Victorian and Edwardian home kitchen.

The 19th Century was a period of huge change in British society, driven by industrialisation, technical innovation and resources from the empire. Picard⁴, tells us that the Great Exhibition of 1851, displayed some 100,000 objects from 15,000 exhibitors in 10 miles of exhibition space. It was a stunning example of the advances that had been made in the 19th Century.

This boom in industrialism led to changing expectations and a rise of a professional middle class eager to take advantage of the new freedoms presented by invention. Matthew⁵ "The Liberal Age 1851-1914" suggests that "The more prosperous sections of the working classes thus began to share a little the prosperity and expectations which the industrial revolution had brought the propertied classes a century earlier." In other words, new inventions led to greater freedom and more time for leisure than previous generations had enjoyed.

These changes were witnessed in most area of domestic life too with new labour-saving devices and gadgets appearing in kitchens and sculleries throughout the country. You can imagine that having the latest invention might also hold an intrinsic value.

Of course, The Gourmet Company were pleased to take advantage of this trend. After all, who could resist being able to show off their new Gourmet Egg Beater or Milk Boiler to their friends?

³ BBC - A History of the World - Object: Rotary Egg beater [Internet]. Bbc.co.uk. 2020 [cited 30 June 2020]. Available from: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/ahistoryoftheworld/objects/seWkoO7hT326RgsueSJtdg#:~:text=Inv>

⁴ Picard L. The Great Exhibition [Internet]. Victorian Britain. 2009 [cited 30 June 2020]. Available from: <https://www.bl.uk/victorian-britain/articles/the-great-exhibition>

⁵ Matthew H. The Oxford History of Britain. 4th ed. Oxford: Oxford University Press; 1987.