

Object(s): Egg Container and Rolling Pin

Object Number(s): STMEA:A.7213 and STMEA:A.7201

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Egg Container and Rolling Pin

These items in our collection, both had very practical uses. An egg container, for carrying a precious cargo of half a dozen eggs and a rolling pin for rolling out the pastry which would have contained those same eggs. Both hail from the early part of the 20th century, a time when wartime and shortages made it imperative to make the best use of every precious ingredient.

The egg container (SMEA:A.7213), is a fairly unique example of a metal egg container, large enough for half a dozen eggs, packed in cotton wool and tissue paper, to protect the contents. The box itself was closed using the leather strap and attached press stud. The container has been painted green, although that may not have been its original colour; nor is it clear whether the container was actually intended for another purpose, before being carefully re-purposed into an egg carrier. This theory may be disproved, since the box also contains markings to suggest that a patent had been applied for, presumably either for the design or its fastening. However, a search of UK and American patents, failed to confirm that a patent was ever granted. Nevertheless, we know for certain that the donor's Grandmother used the box to carry eggs in the first quarter of the 20th century, when she was living at Pond Hall Farm, Bentley.

The rolling pin (STMEA:A.7201), is of a classic design and probably made from Beechwood with varnished handles. Like the egg container, it probably dates from the early part of the 20th century and again was used by the donor's Grandmother at Pond Hall Farm.

Transporting Eggs

Although having protective shells, it is a well-known fact that eggs break quite easily! Ever since chickens were domesticated to produce eggs and meat, various methods have been needed to ensure eggs arrived at the kitchen door in one piece. Traditionally eggs might have been carried in a wicker basket, lined with straw to prevent the eggs from rolling around in transit. Needless to say, a basket wasn't always the best solution, which probably gave rise to the adage: "Don't put all of your eggs in the same basket." Suggesting perhaps that, it's better to have a back-up in case something goes wrong.

Whilst generally acceptable for small domestic supply, larger consumers, such as professional bakers, needed their eggs to be supplied in bulk. Packing eggs in wooden or even metal boxes, lined with straw and paper was the solution, albeit that the product often arrived broken in transit.

In 1911, a Canadian newspaper editor, Joseph Coyle¹, was the first to conceive and produce a carton which could transport eggs safely. The design was improved on in 1931 when Francis Sherman², patented a paper pulp version of the carrier, which was cheap to produce and is still in use today.

The egg carton, has been adapted by consumers for several purposes over the years. I for example, use empty egg boxes, for 'chitting'³ potatoes before planting them in the ground.

Rolling Pins

Holt⁴ suggests that the first rolling pins were, to put it simply, either hands or a smooth, small stone and used to flatten dough. It is unclear exactly when someone hit upon the idea of using a rounded piece of wood for the same purpose, but in time, this became the most popular method used in baking to flatten dough and pastry.

Holt, goes on to tell us that in Elizabethan England (the second half of the 16th century), richer members of society, developed a taste for sweeter pastry's that needed to be flattened 'cold' using what was then known as a 'rouling pin'. It was not until the late 19th century however, that the name appears to have been changed to 'rolling pin', by Mrs Beeton, in her 1861 'Book of Household Management'.⁵

Over time, many different materials have been used to make rolling pins including; hardwood, metals, ceramics and glass - which could be filled with cold water to aid the rolling process. Gall rolling pins apparently became a favourite of sailors who took them on-board as good luck charms, gifts and good places to store illicit tobacco!

Such was the variety of materials used, that the humble rolling pin seems to have become somewhat of a collectable item. However, by far the most popular rolling pins in everyday use seem to be made from wood. It seems that almost any hardwood, or woods with a tight or smooth grain can be used, as long as the rolling pin is able to resist splitting.

¹ 1. Egg carton [Internet]. En.wikipedia.org. 2021 [cited 5 January 2021]. Available from: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Egg_carton#:~:text=In%201911%2C%20newspaper%20editor%20Joseph,eggs'%20often%20being%20delivered%20broken.

² Egg carton [Internet]. En.wikipedia.org. 2021 [cited 5 January 2021]. Available from: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Egg_carton#:~:text=In%201911%2C%20newspaper%20editor%20Joseph,eggs'%20often%20being%20delivered%20broken.

³ 2. [Internet]. Rhs.org.uk. 2021 [cited 5 January 2021]. Available from: <https://www.rhs.org.uk/advice/grow-your-own/vegetables/potatoes>

⁴ 3. Holt G. KITCHENALIA: THE ROLLING PIN. The Independent [Internet]. 2011 [cited 5 January 2021]. Available from: <https://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/kitchenalia-the-rolling-pin-1580089.html>

⁵ 4. Mrs Beeton's Book of Household Management [Internet]. En.wikipedia.org. 2021 [cited 5 January 2021]. Available from: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mrs_Beeton%27s_Book_of_Household_Management

Traditions

The blogger, 'Wedding Fran'⁶ describes the gifts given to the bride, which were traditionally made from wood. First, a wooden spoon, carved by her husband and intended to demonstrate that he was a skilled craftsman and a wooden rolling pin, given to the bride by a child and meant to symbolise the newly wed bride's abilities as a cook. I'm not sure such symbols would be appreciated by the modern bride, but nevertheless the bride is often still presented with stylised replicas.

Of course, rolling pins can have other uses... a typical cartoon shows a wife greeting her husband with a rolling pin over the head for arriving home drunk from the local hostelry! However, what might be considered appropriate for cartoons, unfortunately has some echoes in modern society. A quick internet search, reveals several cases of assault with a rolling pin which have come before the courts in the British Isles.

Pond Hall Farm

Both objects in our collection, were used by the donor's Grandmother whilst she and her husband, a farmer, were living at Pond Hall in 1912.⁷ They stayed there until sometime in the 1920's. The farmhouse is a Grade II Listed⁸ building located off Gainsborough Road, Bentley near Ipswich. It is of 16th century origins with several later alterations and extensions. Today, it is close to the tidal River Orwell. Originally, the river was never that close until it was dredged in the early Victorian era to facilitate larger shipping entering the docks in Ipswich.

Several historic photographs of the farm still exist. I found a very interesting example on the Ipswich Historic Churches Trust website⁹, which would have been taken at about roughly the time that our donors Grandmother was living at Pond Hall Farm. It shows a group of, mainly men and boys, posing with staves, presumably as part of an annual 'Beating the Bounds'¹⁰ ceremony, traditionally enacted on 'Rogation Sunday'¹¹, and intended to walk and mark out the parish boundary.

⁶ 5. How to Bring the Best of Luck to Your Wedding [Internet]. Wedding Thoughts A bride's guide to planning your wedding. 2011 [cited 5 January 2021]. Available from: <http://franswedding.blogspot.com/2011/04/good-luck.html>

⁷ Kelly's Directory of Suffolk 1912. London: Kelly's Directories Ltd; 1912.

⁸ 6. Stuff G. Pond Hall, Ipswich, Suffolk [Internet]. Britishlistedbuildings.co.uk. 2021 [cited 5 January 2021]. Available from: <https://britishlistedbuildings.co.uk/101052271-pond-hall-ipswich-gainsborough-ward#.XR5fdj7SUK>

⁹ 1. Outside Pond Hall Farm - Ipswich Historic Churches Trust [Internet]. Ipswich Historic Churches Trust. 2021 [cited 5 January 2021]. Available from: <https://www.ipswichhistoricchurchestrust.org.uk/st-clements-church/g-outside-pond-hall-farm/>

¹⁰ 2. Village Greens: Beating the bounds of your local common or green [Internet]. Open Spaces Society. 2021 [cited 5 January 2021]. Available from: <https://www.oss.org.uk/need-to-know-more/information-hub/beating-the-bounds-of-your-local-common-or-green/>

¹¹ 1. Palmer T. Rogation Sunday Traditions. The Church Times [Internet]. 2012 [cited 6 January 2021]; Available from: <https://www.churchtimes.co.uk/articles/2012/13-july/regulars/out-of-the-question/rogation-sunday-traditions>



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Until recently, the property was owned by Ipswich Borough Council, who let it as a working farm. However, when the last tenant gave up the lease in 2017, the farm and its buildings fell into disuse. A report to the Council's Executive on 24th March 2020, recommended its disposal as part of an extension to the nearby Orwell Country Park¹² and to facilitate the development of the English Coastal path. It is to be hoped that this historic building can once more be restored to its former glory and brought back into use.

¹² 7. Agenda for Executive on Tuesday 24th March 2020, 6.00 pm | Democracy Online | Ipswich Borough Council [Internet]. Democracy.ipswich.gov.uk. 2021 [cited 5 January 2021]. Available from: <https://democracy.ipswich.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=135&MId=2496&Ver=4>