



CHILTERN
OPEN AIR
MUSEUM

*Where buildings come
alive through history*

The Victorian Kitchen



Location:

- Leagrave Cottages.

Practical Notes:

- Adult helpers will need to help young children at some stages. The amount of help required will be dependent on the age and ability of your group members.
- There are photo opportunities throughout this activity.
- There will be an open fire lit for the purpose of this activity, safety information will be provided to the children before they enter the cottage.

Purpose and content of the activity session:

- A Museum teacher will talk to your class about the importance of food at this time; the types of food that the Victorian family would have had and made and where their food came from.
- Your class will then be asked to help prepare a Victorian dish, including weighing out the ingredients using pounds and ounces and mixing the ingredients together.
- The final recipe will then be cooked over an open fire using a pot or griddle.
- Seasonal recipes may be used.

Background Information:

The kitchen has always been the heart of the house and has seen many changes, especially in the 18th and 19th centuries. Before the beginning of the 19th century the British had a very simple diet although this was affected by changes in fashion and technology throughout this century.

Even with the many changes within the 19th century the staple diet of many poorer families remained as bread, soup or pottage (a thick soup made with oats) and puddings, using many ingredients grown in their gardens and on local farms. Stews, pottages, soups and pies would have been made for the main meal as they allow a larger ratio of vegetables to meat, as incomes were low and meat was very expensive.

Many of the receipts (a Victorian word for recipe) used were basic and the taste is slightly different from modern recipes. Herbs and sometimes spices were used in the majority of these foods, which were also sweetened using local honey (as it was more readily available and cheaper than sugar).

Changes in kitchen equipment:

Traditionally all food was cooked in an open hearth, like the one in Legrave Cottages, with a fire-back made of iron at the base of the chimney to protect the wall. Hanging over the fire, on chimney cranes, would be the family's cooking pot and kettle. Other items included a bakestone or griddle which could sit on a brandreth (a small tripod) and three-legged pots sitting over or near the fire. These would all be made from iron, with some very poor families using clay pots for cooking. Many families also had a bread oven within the hearth, where bread and biscuits would be baked. A fire was lit within these ovens and then the ashes were raked out and the bread or biscuits put in. Baking took place when the oven cooled down. The tradition of putting a cross in the top of your loaf before cooking comes from baking not being exact and people believing that bread would not rise due to evil spirits.

By the 1850s, however, cast iron kitchen ranges became more available due to new and improved manufacturing techniques. These ranges were more

precise and required a smaller amount of space than the open hearths. By the 1880s, ranges began to dominate the kitchen and cost between 80s and 93s 6d.

Unlike modern ovens there were no temperature dials on the range to set the oven at the correct temperature and so many housewives would have had a technique to test the temperature. The following paper test that was done before baking is taken from Mr. Black's Household Cookery.

1. If a sheet of paper burns when thrown in, the oven is too hot.
2. When the paper becomes dark brown, it is suitable for pastry.
3. When light brown, it does pies.
4. When dark yellow, for cakes.
5. When light yellow, for puddings, biscuits and small pastry.

Improvements also came with indoor cast iron water pumps, being easier to maintain and de-ice than the older outdoor lead pumps, and increased awareness of the storage of food. Many smaller homes started to have a small larder or pantry, painted blue to ward off the flies, with stone or clay slabs to keep the food that stood on them cool.

Prices of some items taken from the 1895 Harrods catalogue:

Household flour	7lb bag	8d
McDougall's self raising flour	6lb bag	10d
Household salt	7lb linen bag	4d
Mixed spice	2oz tin	3d
English cheddar cheese	per lb	7d
Demerara sugar	per lb	2½d
White crystal sugar	per lb	2½d
Raisins	per lb	3d
Butter	per lb	1s 4d
Beef (different cuts)	per lb	between 5d and 1s 2d
Mutton (different cuts)	per lb	between 3½d and 1s 2d
Lamb (different cuts)	per lb	between 11½d and 1s

Weights and measurements:

16oz (ounces) = 1 lb (pound)

14 lb = 1 stone

20 fl oz (fluid ounces) = 1 pt (pint)

1 oz = 28.35 g 1 lb = 453 g

1 fl oz = 28.4 ml 1 pt = 568 ml

Money:

12d (penny) = 1s (shilling)

20s (shilling) = 1 £ (pound)

1 s = 5p

Access Statement:

Leagrave Cottages: The 18th Century cottage does have a step going down into the building, but if the Victorian Kitchen activity has been chosen, a more suitable location will be provided for groups with wheelchair users, to undertake the measuring and mixing.

Viewing the inside of the 1920s cottage is possible, as is moving through the cottage's garden (some paving is uneven), although the path is quite narrow.

The Victorian Kitchen:

This activity provides a hands-on experience for all children and can be adapted to all needs, however for groups requiring wheelchair access an alternative venue for the activity will be provided to undertake all parts of the activity except cooking over an open fire.