

20th Century Sparks!

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Meals

In the first half of the 20th century, the majority of the population found it a struggle to feed themselves and their families. Memories of the difficulties of finding food on a low budget, between 1910 and 1940, in the local area of Brighton and Hove, are explored on this page and in [Tea Shops](#) and [Shopping for food](#).



J. Lyons and Co. Cafe, North Street, c. 1910
Brighton and Hove in Pictures

Then there was the children (me included) whose parents hadn't got a lot of food for the family.

We were given a large white ticket and took this up to Park Street School (Park Street) between 7.30 a.m. and 8.30 a.m. every morning, show this ticket and the attendant would give all the boys and girls a large round of scones plus 1 pint of skimmed milk, and this was our breakfast.

Dinner times (between 12.30 and 1.30) we were given another ticket. With this, we went down to Richmond Street School (which is now pulled down) and were given a plate of hot soup or stew, followed by a large slice of currant roly-poly, or jam pudding for a change. And this for five days a week.

Apart from this there was in Cobden Road (off Islingword Road) a soup kitchen.from Monday to Friday children would line up outside in Cobden Road armed with enamel jugs, wash-stand jugs, stone jugs with handles, in fact anything large to hold liquid. Their parents would give them all they could afford, perhaps 1 penny or 2 pennies. In they would go, through a rough old door in the wall, and say to the woman, "1 pennyworth of soup please" (or 2 penniesworth). Then she would say, "How many brothers and sisters have you got?" Perhaps he or she would say, "4 brothers and three sisters."

The woman would then cut off 8 thick slices from a dry loaf (given to them by a local baker) and say, "There you are, then. See you again tomorrow?" So that's how all the children waiting for soup were treated.

Albert Paul - [Poverty, Hardship but Happiness](#)



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Meals - continued

Whatever was available was shared equally, no-one was allowed to take any mean advantage of another, cleanliness and a smart appearance were a must, table manners had to be observed, meal times were strictly adhered to, anyone arriving late for dinner without reasonable excuse would find their dinner on the table getting cold.

The greatest crime in my father's eyes was to waste food. He had experienced hunger after his own father died when he was only four. Any food left on one's plate at one meal would be served up again at the next meal.

Don Carter - Just One Large Family

Depending on how much milk was in our can, we would have milk over our bread or cocoa. This was our breakfast every day...

When we returned midday (from school), one of us would cut slices of meat for all the plates, fry the leftover vegetables and share it. If any trifle was left from Sunday dinner that also was shared. What an elaborate name for three penny worth of stale cakes, with a custard made with skimmed milk.

Daisy Noakes - The Town Beehive

Nearly all houses in all the working class districts kept 2 or 3 rabbits, chickens or pigeons in their back gardens and these they would kill for Christmas.

Albert Paul - Poverty, Hardship but Happiness

Grandad brought in a basket of birds one day - some sparrows, but mostly finches. My mother just skinned the breasts and cut them off to make a sparrow pie. Sometimes we had rook pie, and at lambing time it was lambs' tail pie, as all lambs' tails were docked for cleanliness, and also to improve the meat. The nourishment would all go into the body. When tails were left on, they got very fat. I don't remember what these pies tasted like.

George Noakes - To be a Farmer's Boy



Home

Teas shops

My favourite was Ma Egan's, the rooms situated in Stone Street off Preston Street. It was little more than a long hut with tables each side and a kitchen at one end.

Our visits at breaktime were an experience not to be missed. The tables, fixed to the outer walls, with benches each side, left a narrow walkway. Many people came in at this time so that the first sat just inside and then it filled up as far as the kitchen. It was a case of first in, first out, for it was virtually impossible to move otherwise. On entering, you would call out, "Mug (or cup) of tea and one and one," followed by the number of your party and then the table number. Tea was two old pence for a mug or one and a half pence for a cup. 'One and one' was a slice of bread and butter and a slice of bread and dripping with thick brown gravy on top.

Many and varied were the tea-shops around the Brighton and Hove area. One large chain was run by the Divall family, the principal one being opposite the Hippodrome in Middle Street. I can still recall the hiss and gurgle from the steam geysers as the taps were turned on and the huge teapots filled. The speciality of the house, rock cakes, were as light as a feather, shot through with sultanas; the name 'rock' was not applicable. The chain of Divall's stretched from Fiveways through to Brighton Station, Palmeira Square and Preston Circus.

Another institution was the London Dining Rooms, opposite New Road in Church Street. One could obtain an individual meat pudding for one penny. Many other small independent premises served the working man around the town. Sadly, few if any of the type described survive, for they were an institution in themselves. At some of the shops you stirred your tea with a spoon chained to the counter - fancy not trusting us!

Tim Wren - Flying Sparks

Tea Dances

Further along the road, near where C & A is now, there was a store called Staffords; quite a fascinating place where they sold ornaments and fancy goods, the sort not seen at any other shops. In the afternoons they held tea dances. There was a small charge for a cup of tea, sandwich and cake. You could either sit and watch or participate in the fox-trot, waltz and the quick-step. The music was provided by a piano and a violin.

Marjory Batchelor - A Life Behind Bars

The Tea Shop ladies of Ditchling

There were four tea-rooms in the heart of the village and several on the outskirts. Teas of bread, butter, jam, a slice of cake and a pot of tea could be bought for 1/6d (7 1/2p). Mrs. Weller at Wing's Place opposite the church also took in paying guests. Mrs. Partridge had the Sundown Tea-Rooms in the South Road. This was the first home of the Bowling Club. She also had a tennis court which could be hired, not only by local people, but also by those calling in for teas. Mrs. Black was at the Old Forge Tea-Rooms which was next door to the North Star Inn in North Rd.

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Teas shops – continued

Mrs. Black always wore green stockings and a long green cloak with a tall black hat, rather like those depicted in pictures of witches. This of course seemed very strange in the times when married women usually wore black. Mrs. Creighton-Brown had the tea-room at Old Yard. This was an ex-army hut next to the playing fields at the far end of the Lewes Rd., towards Westmeston.

Doris Hall - Growing up in Ditchling



Beach Stall selling teas and refreshments, 1925. The Palace Pier can be seen in the distance.
Shops Book



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Shopping for food

Dad had to work on Saturday mornings till one o'clock before he got his pay. Before one o'clock we were all waiting for him with empty shopping baskets on the door of the print shop, smelling the familiar scent of the ink and listening to the rattle of the machines. When Dad appeared with his pay packet it did not stay in his pocket very long. We were off on our tour of the back streets, for meat and vegetables.

Ruby Dunn - Moulsecombe Days

Fish and chips was a real treat. There was a lovely fish and chip shop in Edward Street near Henry Street where you could buy a bag of 'scraps' for half a penny. Crispy bits of batter fell off the fish when it was fried, and then drained from the bottom of the fryer. Lillywhite's the fruit shop on the corner of Steine Gardens sold twopenn'orth of 'specks', this was fruit that was bruised or soft, and when you cut off the bruised parts you had a lovely feed.

Giggin's the bakers in Grand Parade was where we got our clean pillowcase filled with stale bread for fourpence each morning before we went to school. The grocers shop that I remember best was Corder's, on the corner of William Street and Carlton Hill. This was like an Aladdin's Cave, you took your bottle to buy the vinegar, and a jam jar for jam. Everything was loose and had to be weighed and put into thick blue paper bags. Sugar, rice, soda and all the dried fruit came in hessian sacks.

Georgina Attrell - Backyard Brighton



Market Street Looking South from Town Hall, 16 October 1930. A view of Market Street taken from the roof of Brighton Town Hall. The first market hall was built in Bartholomews in 1774 for the daily sale of meat, fish, poultry, butter and garden produce. When Brighton Town Hall was built there in 1829, a new market house was built on the western side of Market Street. Market Street disappeared in the development of Bartholomew Square which opened in 1987.

Brighton and Hove in Picture