

Stage 2 Research Project – 2014

RPA

RPB

School Assessment Cover Sheet for

➤ Assessment Type 2: Research Outcome

SACE Registration Number:

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Research Question: What processes could be used to make a Queen Victoria sponge cake using traditional methods? _____

_____ **word count** _____
(for written only)

How to make a Queen Victoria sponge cake using traditional methods.

My research project is an investigation into how to make a Queen Victoria sponge cake using traditional methods and ingredients. I wanted to develop my knowledge in historical cooking and narrowed this initial idea down to focus on the Queen Victoria sponge cake which is one of the most beloved dishes from the nineteenth century, its popularity crossing over into modern times¹. With this in mind, I wanted to focus only on the traditional methods and ingredients of the dish. I conducted an interview with Dr Sarah Richardson of Warwick University, England and Gaena Duncan, the Head of Cookery for the Perth Royal Show in conjunction with secondary sources including books, internet articles and websites to determine the traditional ingredients and methods used when making a Queen Victoria sponge cake.

What is the history of the Queen Victoria sponge cake?

One of Queen Victoria's ladies in waiting, Anna the Duchess of Bedford is said to have become the creator of the idea of afternoon tea after feeling the need for light afternoon meals. Soon her friends also joined her for the extra meal which would consist mainly of cakes, bread, assorted sweets and tea. This practice was formed into social events and the idea was then adopted by Queen Victoria in 1855. One of her favourite afternoon tea cakes, said to be a sponge cake with jam filling, was named after her shortly after her husband's death in 1861, as she spent more time at home and had more time for things such as afternoon tea.^{2,3} This became known as the Queen Victoria sponge cake.⁴

¹ Deborah Arthurs, 31/01/0013, Queen Victoria... sponge! Humble layered sponge cake crowned nation's favourite tea time treat [Daily Mail], [online]. Available: <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/femail/article-2271255/Queen-Victoria--sponge-Humble-cake-crowned-nations-favourite-tea-time-treat.html> {Accessed 05/05/2013}

² Victoria Sponge Cake, History of Afternoon Tea [online] Available <http://www.victoriaspongecake.co.uk/afternoon-tea.php> {Accessed 5th May 2013}

³ Dr Richardson, Sarah, Warwick University, personal interview 21/03/13

⁴ Helen Costello, 24/08/0011, The Great British Bake Off: How To Bake The Perfect Victoria Sponge [My Daily], [online]. Available: <http://www.mydaily.co.uk/2011/08/24/the-great-british-bake-off-how-to-bake-the-perfect-victoria-spo/> {Accessed 05/05/2013}

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What ingredients would have been used?

An important part in the composition of the cake is the use of jam between two layers of sponge cake. Some recipes, both modern and historical, only indicated the jam used to be "good jam"⁵, while others instructed the use of either strawberry or raspberry jam.⁶ Dr Sarah Richardson of Warwick University informed me that jams and preserves of native fruits and vegetables were in common use during the Victorian era as the fresh forms were considered to be too expensive to have imported into England.⁷ I decided to use strawberry jam to join the two cakes as it was the jam most commonly used in both modern and historical recipes and would have been in popular use at the time as it is a native English fruit.^{8,9} Another filling sometimes added is whipped cream, however, this is a modern addition to the dish starting in the 20th century¹⁰, therefore I decided to leave it out of the my version.

Another part of the composition of the final cake includes the use of a dusting of sugar over the top layer of the cake to finalise the dish. The type of sugar used has been debated as either confectioner's sugar or simple castor sugar. I discovered that with advancements in technology during the 19th century, confectioner's sugar, which is the finest grade of sugar, became more easily available to the wider population in England during the Victorian era.¹¹ As castor sugar is used in the making of the two layers of cake, I used it for the final dusting of the cake as well, even though confectioner's sugar would have also been available, as it reduces the number of ingredients used.

The base ingredients of the sponge cake layers were of less concern. This is because the royals had a lot of influence on the upper and middle classes of Victorian society, but much less on the lower class. Therefore trends started by the royals were usually only replicated by the higher classes of society and socially elite. Fresh ingredients such as butter and milk and the other ingredients of flour, castor sugar and cream of tartar would have been readily available year round to people likely to prepare this cake, so I had little concern over the use of these ingredients.^{12,13} Results of my research indicated

⁵ Isabella Beeton, 1898, 1963 reprint. *Mrs. Beeton's Cookery Book: And Household Guide*. England: Pan Books.

⁶ Helen Costello, 24/08/0011, The Great British Bake Off: How To Bake The Perfect Victoria Sponge [My Daily], [online]. Available: <http://www.mydaily.co.uk/2011/08/24/the-great-british-bake-off-how-to-bake-the-perfect-victoria-spo/> {Accessed 05/05/2013}

⁷ Dr Richardson, Sarah, Warwick University, personal interview 21/03/13

⁸ Jacqueline Courteau, n.d., *Fragaria ananassa* Garden Strawberry [EOL Encyclopedia of Life], [online]. Available: <http://eol.org/pages/245515/overview> {Accessed 05/05/2013}

⁹ Hannah Nicholson and Jenna Worthing, n.d., MAY MARKS THE START OF THE BRITISH STRAWBERRY SEASON [British Summer Fruits], [online]. Available: http://www.britishsummerfruits.co.uk/html/news_may.htm {Accessed 05/05/2013}

¹⁰ Bee Wilson, 23/09/0011, The great Victoria sandwich [The Telegraph], [online]. Available: <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/foodanddrink/8753182/The-great-Victoria-sandwich.html> {Accessed 05/05/2013}

¹¹ Lynne Olver, 28/04/2013, Food Timeline: candy [The Food Timeline], [online]. Available:

<http://www.foodtimeline.org/foodcandy.html#refined> {Accessed 05/05/2013}

¹² Dr Richardson, Sarah, Warwick University, personal interview 21/03/13

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that self-raising flour may have been common place in Victorian era kitchens, however, I could not find a clear answer as to whether or not it was used in the dish. To be safe I followed Mrs. Beeton's recipe and stuck to using plain flour.

No extra spices were added as food in England during the Victorian era was very plain. This is because at the time there was a push to step away from French style, in a "national pride' thrift"¹⁴. This led to the cooking of more traditional English style food which used simple ingredients and didn't typically include spices and herbs usually due to the availability of certain foods.¹⁵¹⁶

¹³ Clayton, Paul and Rowbotham, Judith, n.d., How the Mid-Victorians Worked, Ate and Died [National Center for Biotechnology Information], [online]. Available: <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2672390/> [22/05/2013]

¹⁴ Dr Richardson, Sarah, Warwick University, personal interview 21/03/13

¹⁵ Ibid

¹⁶ Clayton, Paul and Rowbotham, Judith, n.d., How the Mid-Victorians Worked, Ate and Died [National Center for Biotechnology Information], [online]. Available: <http://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC2672390/> [22/05/2013]

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What methods were used?

Mary Berry, a judge for the Great British Bake-off, nicknamed the 'Queen of Cakes' has published a book on how to make a perfect Queen Victoria sponge cake and is recognised as the authority on Queen Victoria sponge cakes.^{17,18} I combined her method with information I gained from Gaena Duncan, the Head of Cookery at the Perth Royal show and a recipe written by Isabella Beeton, who was a cookery author in the late 19th century.^{19,20}

Firstly, the butter, eggs, flour and sugar were all measured to be approximately 8oz. This was based on the recipe from Mrs Beeton's 'All About Cookery', a cookbook published in 1898, and also because the original recipe evolved from the pound cake.²¹ I used this measurement as it was the easiest to follow and was supported by other sources.²²

To help the cake rise, I used a quarter of a teaspoon of baking powder and half a teaspoon of cream of tartar and I came to the conclusion of using these ingredients and amounts by combining a number of recipes.^{23,24,25}

After finding similarities in many recipes, I decided to beat the butter and sugar until it was thick and creamy.^{26,27} After consulting with Gaena Duncan, I then beat the whole eggs into the mixture [Figure 1].²⁸ Then I sifted in the flour, baking powder and cream of tartar [Figure 2] and folded it in with a metal knife [Figure 3].

¹⁷ Helen Costello, 24/08/0011, The Great British Bake Off: How To Bake The Perfect Victoria Sponge [My Daily], [online]. Available: <http://www.mydaily.co.uk/2011/08/24/the-great-british-bake-off-how-to-bake-the-perfect-victoria-spo/> {Accessed 05/05/2013}

¹⁸ Mary Berry, n.d., Mary Berry's Victoria sandwich [Goodtoknow Recipes], [online]. Available: <http://www.goodtoknow.co.uk/recipes/495936/mary-berry-s-victoria-sandwich> {Accessed 10/05/2013}

¹⁹ Professor Maxine Berg, Warwick University, personal interview 13/03/2013

²⁰ Unknown, n.d., Mrs Beeton [BBC History], [online]. Available: http://www.bbc.co.uk/history/historic_figures/beeton_mrs.shtml {Accessed 10/05/2013}

²¹ Andy Connelly, 09/06/0010, The Science of Cake [The Guardian], [online]. Available: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/science/blog/2010/jun/09/science-cake-baking-andy-connelly> {Accessed 15/05/2013}

²² Ibid

²³ Hayley Crawford, 09/04/0011, How Does Baking Powder Work? [now for the science bit], [online]. Available: <http://www.nowforthesciencebit.com/culinary-science/how-does-baking-powder-work> {Accessed 10/05/2013}

²⁴ Unknown, n.d., Baking Powder [BBC GoodFood], [online]. Available: <http://www.bbcgoodfood.com/content/knowhow/glossary/baking-powder/> {Accessed 10/05/2013}

²⁵ Gaena Duncan, Head of Cookery Perth Royal Show personal interview 20/03/13, 21/03/13, 01/04/13

²⁶ Mary Berry, n.d., Mary Berry's Victoria sandwich [Goodtoknow Recipes], [online]. Available: <http://www.goodtoknow.co.uk/recipes/495936/mary-berry-s-victoria-sandwich> {Accessed 10/05/2013}

²⁷ Andy Connelly, 09/06/0010, The Science of Cake [The Guardian], [online]. Available: <http://www.guardian.co.uk/science/blog/2010/jun/09/science-cake-baking-andy-connelly> {Accessed 15/05/2013}

²⁸ Gaena Duncan, Head of Cookery Perth Royal Show personal interview 20/03/13, 21/03/13, 01/04/13

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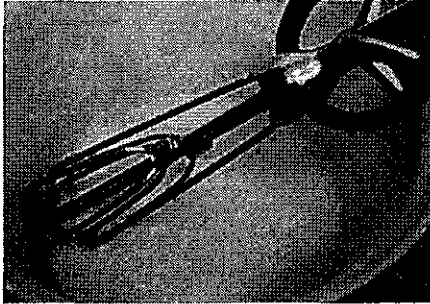


Figure 1



Figure 2

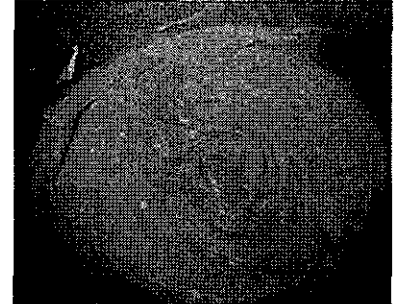


Figure 3

The mixture was poured in equal amounts into two separate and identical cake tins before being placed in the oven and cooked at 180°C not fan forced [Figure 4] (this was the best way to replicate Victorian era ovens) for twenty minutes as most recipes recommended a moderate or medium oven.^{29,30,31} The cakes were tested with a metal skewer at the end of the twenty minutes and indicated that it was fully cooked because the skewer came out clean and it was also lightly golden.^{32,33} The cakes were left in the tins until cool and placed on an oven rack.

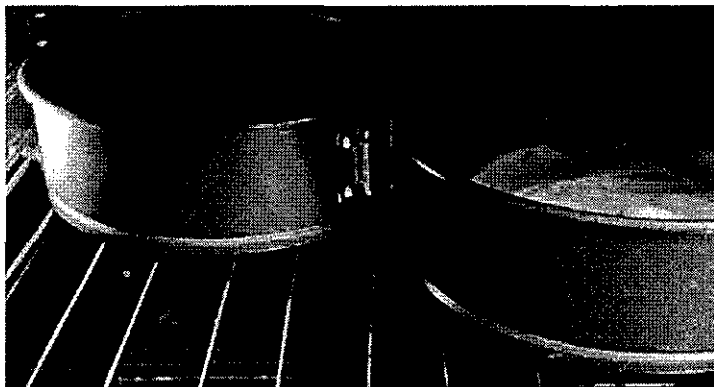


Figure 4

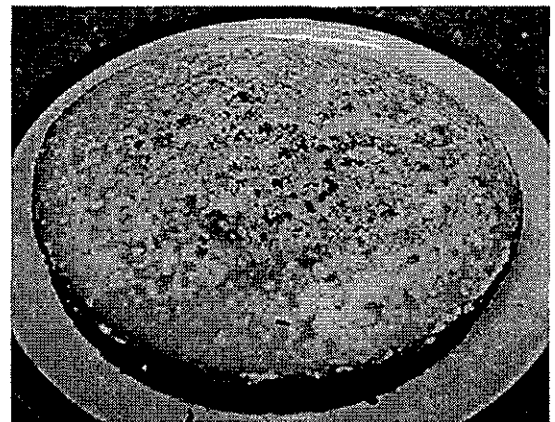


Figure 5

Once the two layers of the cake were cooled, the top of one of the cakes was spread with the strawberry jam and the other layer of cake was placed over the top. Finally, I dusted the now put together cake with castor sugar and the cake was complete [Figure 5].

²⁹ Isabella Beeton, 1898, 1963 reprint. *Mrs. Beeton's Cookery Book: And Household Guide*. England: Pan Books

³⁰ Mary Berry, n.d., Mary Berry's Victoria sandwich [Goodtoknow Recipes], [online]. Available: <http://www.goodtoknow.co.uk/recipes/495936/mary-berry-s-victoria-sandwich> {Accessed 10/05/2013}

³¹ Gaena Duncan, Head of Cookery Perth Royal Show personal interview 20/03/13, 21/03/13, 01/04/13

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My key findings show that the traditional way of making a Queen Victoria sponge cake is an excellent representation of Victorian era foods. This is because represents culture at that time by demonstrating division between societal classes and the influence the royals had on society. Also, the ingredients used in the cake reflect common ingredients and cooking styles during the Victorian era as it uses plain traditional English style cooking.

Word Count: 1,247

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