

## Where our Food Came from in the Sixties

Although many families grew their own herbs, fruit and vegetables, most food was either bought at local shops or delivered to the house. Milk came from the local dairy, meat from local farms, vegetables from local market gardens.

We did not describe food as 'organic' as we knew very little about how it was grown or processed. We knew milk was sterilised, that kippers were smoked, but the label did not tell you if anything had been added. Pesticide use was low - tomatoes had blemishes, apples had scab marks, cabbages might have a hole in and lettuces might harbour a slug or two. Shoppers had to keep a wary eye on what they were being sold!

Shopping was often done daily (except on Mondays which was washing day) by mother, who took her own string bag and/or baskets and she usually had to lug them home by bus, bike or on foot. Some shops delivered orders to regular customers using small vans or delivery boys on bikes. Refrigeration was not widespread until the late sixties, so food was bought regularly and stored in a cool larder or cellar head.

The basket or string bag would be presented to the greengrocer who filled it with loose potatoes, carrots etc, only resorting to paper bags for delicate items like tomatoes, grapes or cherries. Avocados, garlic, peppers, aubergines were all regarded as exotic. But pomegranates and chestnuts were easily obtainable. Plastic bags did not exist! Grapes were often delivered to the shop by the wholesaler in barrels of cork pieces.

At a large grocer's like Sainsbury's you needed to queue at each counter. many items were weighed and put into bags or packets. There were two types of rice - long-grain or pudding. Other grains included tapioca and semolina. Sugar bags were blue. Tea was loose and was put into packets with the tops carefully folded over. Biscuits came from large square tins or glass-fronted drawers. Broken biscuits were cheaper. Sultanas and currants often had to be rubbed to get the stalks off and checked for 'foreign bodies'! Prunes were usually bought dried and soaked in hot tea or stewed. Many items like fruit and vegetables were tinned because the frozen equivalents were not yet available and would in any case have thawed out on the way home.

In the early sixties butter was bought loose and wooden butter pats were used to make it into a neat block shape then wrapped in grease proof paper. Later on it started to arrive foil-wrapped. Bacon, ham etc would be cut on a bacon slicer and you would ask for the thickness you required. It was wrapped in greaseproof paper, as were pies and pasties.

Portions of fish and meat were cut to order and wrapped in several sheets of white paper but the blood would often seep through, so you had to pack it carefully to avoid contamination. Whole rabbits and pheasants would hang mournfully at the front of the shop.



Basically shopping was a chore and you did not buy more than you needed because you had to carry it home. For most of the decade weekends tended not to be used for food shopping except in emergency. Many shops closed at midday on Saturday and did not open at all on Sunday.

The Co-op used to sell milk tokens which were left out on the window sill for the Co-op milkman to deliver the number of pints according to the number of tokens left out. Gold top milk had an inch of cream on top, much favoured by blue-tits who used to peck off the metal foil tops. Milkmen also used to carry cream, orange juice and often eggs. Moulded paper egg-boxes had existed since before the war but some retailers still used paper bags.

Fish and chips from the fish and chip shop were wrapped in grease proof paper bag then in newspaper. The newspaper was then used to light the fire.

Corona pop was delivered to the house . An early example of recycling as the bottles were returnable. Ringtons Tea also delivered and there was still the occasional onion-seller.



By the end of the Sixties more and more self-service shops were opening - Maypole, Fine Fare and then Tesco's. You used a basket and paid for everything at a till near the door. There had to be more than four checkouts in order for a shop to be classed as a supermarket.

Customer loyalty was encouraged through the use of Green Shield stamps or the Coop equivalent. Stamps would be licked and put in small books: full books could be exchanged for articles at Green Shield Stamp shops.

