

Would the Real Colonial Goose Please Stand Up*

Bill Bryce

I remember as a child being curious about the odd, but interesting names of dishes that mum served, and those found in her recipe books.

No one could explain Toad in the Hole, with sausages but no toads. I remember thinking "Cool, fly cemeteries!" - quickly followed by sincere disappointment that, in fact, no flies had been used in their making. On reflection, this early culinary curiosity undoubtedly played a part in me choosing a career as a chef later in life. It also leads to a fascination with the fake, the mock, the pretend, and the simulated dishes of the world. As such, Colonial Goose is a dish that has long held my interest. My mother served the stuffed forequarter regularly; hot on one day with all the traditional roast trimmings and, of course, her mint sauce, then cold the next in sandwiches, with her equally famous cauliflower pickle. Everyone in the family enjoyed it.

What is this strange bird, the Colonial Goose? What are its origins? Is it a genuine New Zealand creation? Where do you begin the task of finding a definitive or authentic version of the recipe? Indeed, is there such a thing as the first, one and only, original recipe?

The "goose" in reality is a shoulder of mutton with the shoulder blade removed, but shank still attached. It is filled with sage & onion stuffing and, classically, the shank is bent to form the neck of the "goose". Roasted, it comes to the table like a bird sitting on a plate.

This paper is largely an exploration of my own precious collection of old recipe books, treasures and documents of unique historical importance. The vile accusation of being a hoarder of smelly old rubbish has been levelled against me repeatedly, but as Duncan Galletly said at an early New Zealand Food History Symposium, pressure by his family to prove their usefulness grew as time went on and the collection continued to expand. I too felt compelled to justify their existence, and my continued collecting. The Colonial Goose was the target of

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Colonial Goose. Photograph by Bill Bryce, 2011.

my research.

I searched for Colonial Goose in 985 New Zealand recipe books, community cookbooks, and promotional booklets. Only 45 recipes used the term Colonial Goose, which is surprising given that it is considered by many to be a national dish. This may have occurred because meat recipes tend to be poorly represented in early volumes. Perhaps knowledge of how to cook the goose was assumed, and therefore not required. Of the 45 books, three quarters called for a shoulder of mutton but only two mentioned leaving the shank on and tying it in the shape of a goose.

Certainly, the shaped Goose was available commercially, and it seems probable that its preparation may have been considered too difficult for the domestic cook. They were usually found pre-prepared in butcher's shops. Leckie's in south Dunedin sold the Colonial Goose until the 1970s, and a butcher in Palmerston sold it every Friday until the business was sold several years ago.

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In *Lights and Shadows of Colonial Life*, Sarah Courage writes about being offered Colonial Goose in 1864, probably at Oram's Pier Hotel in Kaiapoi. However, she was writing from memory some thirty years later.

The National library of New Zealand's wonderful newspaper archive - *Paperspast* - has well over one hundred references to Colonial Goose. The first

was a correspondence from Melbourne in the *West Coast Times*, 15th December 1873, noting that a "Black Swan, under the euphonious name of Colonial Goose, is an article on the bill of fare at Melbourne dining rooms".

The earliest New Zealand reference is in the Notices column of the *Wanganui Herald* dated 2nd April 1874, in which a Colonial Goose, plus 10 shillings was offered as first prize in the tub race of the Wanganui Amateur Juvenile Regatta.

By 1879 the dish must have been reasonably well established in New Zealand, thus in "Under the Microscope", the *Manawatu Times* for the 5th March 1879 provides the following story.

One of the greatest puzzles to new arrivals in the Colonies is the number of slang expressions and phrases which greet him on every side, and it requires at least time for the smell of the lime-juice to have left him before he can properly translate "so long", "no fear", "rather", and other kindred peculiarities to which he is treated. Not long since an aged gentleman lately from Home put up at one of the hotels, and being nearsighted inquired from the waiter the contents of a dish at the other end of the table. "Colonial goose", was the prompt reply. "Eh, what?" said the stranger. "Colonial goose" was again the answer. "Colonial goose",

GREEN Pea Soup, "Colonial Goose," and liberal bill of fare, 6d Dinner, Tomorrow. Coffee Palace No. 1. Suppers nightly, 6d. 5939

*Sixpenny dinner of Colonial Goose at the Coffee Palace.
Star newspaper, 20th December 1880.*

repeated the old gentleman, with a strong emphasis on the nationality, and an evident desire to inquire if imported ones were obtainable. However, checking himself, he replied "Ah, well then I shall try some Colonial goose." The dish was carved, the gentleman helped, and when received the contents of the plate keenly but covertly examined, but no opinion expressed until, fortified with at least half an hour's practical analysis, he seemed to have arrived at a definite conclusion. Turning to his right hand supporter he whispered, "Do you know, sir, I could almost swear that this goose had a coating of wool upon it", and then learned for the first time that Colonial Goose was but another name for a leg of mutton stuffed! The old gentleman's judgment was simply, "Rubbish", but whether the

verdict referred to the dish or explanation did not clearly appear.

The earliest recipe for Colonial Goose that I found in a New Zealand cookery book was in Whitcombe and Tombs' *Practical Household Recipes* (1893):

Colonial Goose:- Ingredients - A leg or shoulder of mutton, 2oz. ham or lean bacon, ¼ lb. suet, rind of ½ a lemon, 1 teaspoonful of minced parsley, teaspoonful sweet herbs, salt, cayenne, 6oz. breadcrumbs, two eggs, 2 small onions. **Method:-** Make a forcemeat of the ingredients. Bone a leg of mutton without spoiling the skin and cut off a great deal of the fat (if a shoulder make a hole by loosening the undercut) Fill the hole up where the bone was taken (if in a leg) with the forcemeat and sew up to prevent it falling out. Bake in a good hot oven for about two hours and a half. Send to the table with a good gravy.

In the *Otago Witness* of 11th February 1897, it is reported that "Colonial Goose dressed in shape" formed part of the London City and Guilds Examination for cookery conducted by Mrs Miller.

The same issue of the *Otago Witness* provides one of the earliest newspaper recipes for the "bird", undoubtedly taken from, or derived from the same source as that given in *Practical Household Recipes* (1893).

Colonial Goose.— A leg or shoulder of mutton, 2oz. ham or lean bacon, ¼lb. suet, one teaspoonful of minced parsley, one teaspoonful of mixed herbs, half teaspoonful of salt and cayenne, 6oz. breadcrumbs, two eggs, and two onions. Make a forcemeat of the ingredients; bone a leg of mutton without spoiling the skin, and cut off a great deal of the fat. Fill the hole where the bone was taken out with the forcemeat, and sew up to prevent it falling out. If a shoulder is used remove the bone, fill the place with forcemeat, roll it and sew it up, afterwards tying tape or strings round the ends and middle of the roll. Bake in a good hot oven for about two and a-half hours. Send to the table with gravy.

Another variant of the Colonial Goose worth mentioning is the "Mock Goose" recipe, which appeared in the *Auckland Star* on the 17th April 1899. Here it is a leg of pork being stuffed, rather than mutton.

Mock Goose - (Being a leg of pork skinned, roasted, and stuffed goose fashion). Parboil the leg; take off the skin, and then put it down to roast; baste it with butter, and make a savoury powder of finely minced or dried or powdered sage, ground black pepper, salt, and some breadcrumbs, rubbed together through

a cullender; add to this a little very finely minced onion; sprinkle it with this when it is almost roasted; put half a pint of made gravy into the dish, and goose stuffing under the knuckle skin; or garnish the dish with balls of it fried or boiled.

A similar recipe to this is found in Florence White's *Good Things in England*.

Poor man's Goose and *Mock Goose* appear in many books, in many forms. Most commonly, they incorporate pig's liver, onions and potatoes. These dishes had a resurgence in the War years, since no coupons were required to buy "specialty meats", as offal was euphemistically known. War was also responsible for a resurgence of Colonial Goose, and dishes such a Haricot Mutton, as people attempted to eke out their ration.

Colonial Goose, or mutton shoulder, has always been regarded as an inferior cut of meat. The expression to give someone the "cold shoulder" is the dish one gives guests who have overstayed their welcome. John Cleese is purported to have based much of Fawlty Towers on his experiences of atrocious hotels in New Zealand. A waitress offered Cleese the choice of Creamota or porridge, fruit or prunes (where the fruit was prunes), and lamb or Colonial Goose.

So where did the Colonial Goose come from?

The great majority of New Zealand's early European immigrants came from England and Scotland and, if early accounts are anything to go by, food loomed large in their lives; perhaps as a way to stay connected to their old homeland. Their diet was certainly dominated by mutton - "everlasting mutton" was one term used to describe it. Did this lead them to call it something else as one way to replace the monotony with a little gentle humour?

The shaped shoulder would certainly have attracted attention in a butcher's shop, and perhaps therefore would have been a useful marketing ploy. Thus, in the *Ashburton Guardian* on Saturday, September 1st 1894 there is the note that:

The dressing of butcher's goods is not altogether a lost art, even in Ashburton, for in the window of Mr W.J. Silcock of the Somerset butchery, has various goods decorated in a most artistic manner. A fine saddle of mutton is especially noticeable, and shoulders made sufficiently like dressed ducks to deceive the average young housekeeper; or perhaps these articles are intended to represent that mysterious thing called 'colonial goose.'

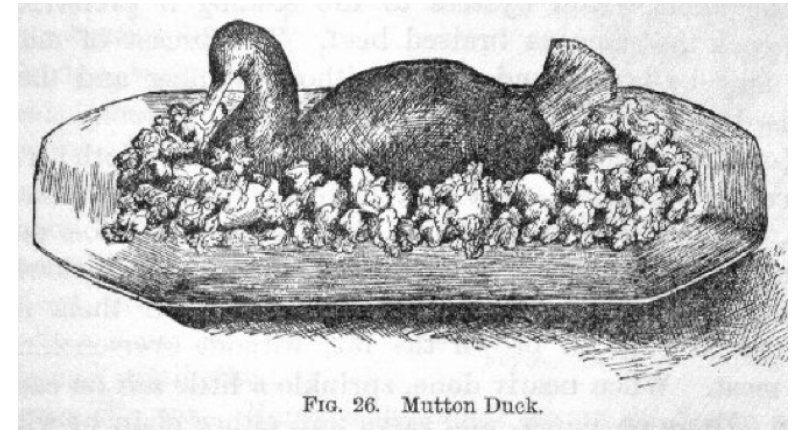


FIG. 26. Mutton Duck.

Mutton Duck from Mrs Lincoln's Boston Cook Book 1885 Edition.

The *Oxford English Dictionary*, *Le Guide Culinaire* by Escoffier, Saulnier's *Le Répertoire de la Cuisine*, Larousse *Gastronomique* and Hering's *Dictionary of Classical and Modern Cookery* all have stuffed leg, or shoulder, of mutton or lamb, but none quite match the Colonial Goose.

This led me to refer to other early works: *The Accomplisht Cook* (1685) by Robert May, *The Receipt Book of Mrs Ann Blencowe* (1694), Hannah Glasse in *The Art of Cookery Made Plain and Easy* (1747), and *The Frugal Housewife or Complete Woman Cook* (1765) by Susannah Carter. Again, all had variations on the theme of stuffed mutton, clearly suggesting that there is not that much new about the dish, other than its name and shape.

There were also many American references, the most interesting being Mutton Duck, or Mock Duck, in *Mrs Lincoln's Boston Cook Book* (1884), (illustrated above) by which time of course, the Colonial Goose had already arrived in New Zealand. Indeed a recipe for a deconstructed "Mutton duck" had been published in the *Otago Witness* on the 30th April 1881.

Mutton Duck.— Slice some cold mutton, lay it in a pie-dish with some bread-crumbs, a sliced onion, sage, pepper, and salt. Beat up two eggs with a little milk, and pour over the meat. Bake for twenty minutes.

The Northumbrian Duck is an early dish from Northern England, which Jane

Grigson refers to in *English Food*. Apparently W.G. Lough & Son, butchers of Newcastle, sold it from the 1880s to the late 1920s, the preparation and presentation being identical to shaped Colonial Goose. I have been unable to find any other reputable early reference to Northumbrian Duck, but given that so many early New Zealand settlers came from the North of England and Scotland, this seems a likely contender for the original Colonial Goose.

Does a truly definitive version exist? Looking for one would be an act of futility; there are so many variations and off-shoots of the stuffed mutton shoulder that the task would be virtually impossible. I don't believe there is any correct or authentic version of the Colonial Goose (or for that matter, any dish or recipe). From the majority of recipes seen, the term "Colonial Goose" simply refers to a stuffed shoulder of mutton which may or not be shaped. Shaping is an added nicety according to the skill of the cook, and is therefore most commonly seen when pre-prepared by a butcher or professional cook.

Was Colonial Goose a New Zealand invention and a genuine "new" dish? In name only perhaps, although the Australian stuffed black swan could at present claim precedence. It seems more likely that the shaped Colonial Goose has its roots in the north of England and Scotland, is a variant of Northumbrian Duck, and is, like the colonists themselves, almost certainly a transplant.



Ornament is from *Domestic Cookery*, Christchurch, 1895.

Pleasing our Lords and Masters*

Alison McKee

Dainties; or How to Please Our Lords & Masters (1887), is a selection of 237 recipes collected and edited by Mrs. Fanny Murdoch of Hastings and printed by Dinwiddie, Walker & Co. Ltd., Tennyson Street, Napier, the then publisher of the *Hawke's Bay Herald*. Mrs. Murdoch is acknowledged as being, almost certainly, the first author to publish a collection of recipes as a cookery book in New Zealand (Boyd 1984:72).

Mrs. Murdoch's first "little cookery book" was a booklet, published and advertised in the *Hawke's Bay Herald* newspaper in March, 1887. It was entitled *Tasty Dishes; or How To Please our Lords and Masters* and was priced at sixpence. Unfortunately no copy of *Tasty Dishes* has, as yet come to light, and it can therefore be regarded as the "Holy Grail", as far as New Zealand cookery book collectors are concerned. The success of her "little cookery book", as Mrs. Murdoch states, prompted her to publish *Dainties; or How to Please Our Lords & Masters* in November, 1887, priced at one shilling.

"Having heard from many friends how much the recipes in my little Cookery Book are liked, I now venture to bring out a much larger and more complete work, hoping that it will meet with equal favour in the eyes of the public" (Murdoch 1887: Preface).

For the benefit of those that did not have her smaller book, Mrs. Murdoch reprinted some of the recipes and added others that "are quite new". She further comments that, by publishing her cookery book, she has indirectly provided the perfect recipe(s) for those wishing to capture a Lord and Master as the song says:

*"Ladies, don't start,
When I say that Love's dart
Should be aimed at the stomach
And not at the heart!"*

The preface to *Dainties* is typical of those written in the nineteenth century,

* A paper presented at the 2010 N.Z. Food History Symposium, Greytown.