



Oxford Word of the Month – January: egg flip

noun: a kitchen utensil with a broad flat blade for lifting and turning food.

THE STORY BEHIND THE WORD OF THE MONTH

The history of **egg flip** is an interesting one. In standard English use, dating back to the 1830s, it is a sweetened milk drink containing beaten egg, with rum, brandy, or other flavouring. Many, perhaps older, Australians will know a tame version without alcohol from childhood. (It used to be recommended as food for invalids.) The second element in this sense of **egg flip** may derive from *flip* in the sense ‘to whip up’.

The first exclusively Australian meaning occurs in the 1950s, when **egg flip** is recorded as rhyming slang for a racing ‘tip’:

As a horse was led close to them, the Wrecker, eager for information, addressed the trainer: ‘Ah Doc, how about givin’ a bloke d’egg flip?’ (J. Alard, *He Who Shoots Last*, 1968)

Since this time, another Australian meaning of **egg flip** has become much more common than the rhyming slang sense. It refers to the long-handled kitchen utensil with the broad, flat blade, used for turning and lifting food such as fried eggs, rissoles, and pancakes. (The same thing is called a *fish slice* in British English.) Australians have several names for this utensil, with spatula perhaps the most common, but **egg flip** is also widely used.

It is unclear whether this sense of **egg flip** is related to the earlier egg and milk drink. Perhaps it was influenced by the existence of the older term, but with a different understanding of the second element. Anyone flipping pancakes with this utensil is likely to interpret the *flip* in **egg flip** as meaning ‘to turn over’.

Recorded evidence is fairly recent, dating back to this report of a recipe for ‘Egg Toast’:

Fry the ... slices in the frying pan with the margarine. ... Turn the toast over with the egg flip, fry that side too. (*Canberra Times*, 26 July 1985)

However, anecdotal evidence suggests the name **egg flip** for the utensil is likely to be found earlier than the 1980s. The following editorial comment in a Western

Australian newspaper is tantalising as possible early evidence:

Many thanks for the item, which I handed to 'Virgilia' as suitable for her pages. 'Sonny Boy' apparently did not appreciate your method of applying the egg flip. (Perth Western Mail, 13 January 1938)

'Virgilia' was the name of the editor of the 'Virgilians' Friendly Corner' section of the newspaper, which published letters from women about their lives and families. In this context, the reference to 'applying the egg flip' to 'Sonny Boy' may (unfortunately) point to the punishment of a child with the utensil.

Egg flip will be considered for inclusion in the next edition of the *Australian National Dictionary*.

Share our Word of the Month:

