

## Jelly Crystals and Evaporated Milk: On the trail of the 'Australian flummery'

It was the kind of observation on Australian history by a new chef that ever-so-slightly irks the food historian in me and sets me sleuthing for the evidence to back up it up. Phil Wood, chef-owner of up-scale restaurant Ursula's, in Paddington in an April 2022 article by journalist Max Brearley on a revival of 'old-school, 1950s grandma food' is quoted as saying this of flummery:

While flummery's English cousin is centuries old, the Australian version of flummery was born out of post-war necessity, says Wood. The original recipe combines packet fruit jelly and evaporated milk. The evaporated milk must be "made really cold, and when you whip, it whips up like fake cream". The fruit jelly is left in the fridge until almost set. Then you "fold those two things together, ending up with this flavoured mousse".<sup>1</sup>

Was the 'Australian version of flummery' actually 'born out of post-war necessity'? Did the 'original (Australian) recipe' in fact combine 'packets of fruit jelly and evaporated milk'?

Well, no on both counts. The history of the flummery in Australia is longer and more interesting than that.

### The 'English cousin'

Wood is right when he says that the Australian flummery's 'English cousin is centuries old'. The Oxford Companion to Food gives the origin of the word as Welsh *llymru* for a dish made by 'soaking fine oatmeal in water for a long time and then boiling and stirring the liquid till it was almost solid'.<sup>2</sup> By 1631, 'it gives the impression of a peasant dish beginning to climb up the social scale' and by the 17th century flummery now meant 'a sweet jelly made with almonds, set in moulds by means of calf's foot or isinglass or hartshorn resembling the earlier leach which was a kind of blancmange'.

In fact there were several 'English cousins' for Australian cooks to draw on. Charlotte Mason in her 1773 cookery book *The Lady's Assistant for Regulating and Supplying her Table*, gives three recipes for flummery.

#### Flummery

BOIL one ounce of isinglass in a little water, till melted; pour in it a pint of cream, a bit of lemon peel, a bit of brandy, and sugar to the taste; boil and strain it; put it into a mould; turn it out.

#### Welsh Flummery

ONE quart of stiff hartshorn jelly with a little isinglass, one pint of cream, some lemon juice and sugar, a little brandy; boil this all thick, strain it; if agreeable add three ounces of almonds blanched and beaten, about ten bitter ones.

#### Oatmeal Flummery

BOIL four quarts of water, when it is rather warmer than milk from a cow, put it to two quarts of oatmeal just cracked; when it has stood till sour, pour off the water; wash the flour well, through a sieve, with three quarts of fresh water; let this stand twenty-four hours, then pour the water clear off, leaving the thick; to one cup of which measure three of milk; set it over the fire, stirring it; when it begins to curdle put it through a sieve, set the liquor again on the fire; repeat this, passing it through the sieve so long as it curdles; the boil it four twenty minutes; put it into cups first dipped in water.<sup>3</sup>

If the water stand upon the oatmeal fourteen or twenty days, according to the weather, so that it only turns sour, not mouldy, the better the flummery will be.

Eliza Acton in her 1845 *Modern Cookery, in all its Branches, Reduced to a System of Easy Practice, for the Use of Private Families* gives a recipe for Jaune Mange, Sometimes Called Dutch Flummery. Jaune Mange translates as yellow food the colour coming from using egg yolks, as distinct from blancmange – white food which does not use eggs, being originally a dish of boiled and macerated capon and almonds.

Jaumange or Jaune Manger, Sometimes Called Dutch Flummery.

Rind of 1 lemon; sugar, 8 ozs.; water, 1 pint: 3 or 4 minutes. Isinglass, 2 ozs.; juice, 4 lemons; yolks of 8 eggs; wine, 1 pint; brandy (at pleasure), 1 wineglassful.

Pour on the very thin rind of a large lemon, and half a pound of sugar broken small, a pint of water, and keep them stirred over a gentle fire until they have simmered for three or four minutes, then leave the saucepan by the side of the stove that the syrup may taste well of the lemon. In ten or fifteen minutes add two ounces of isinglass, and stir the mixture often until this is dissolved, then throw in the strained juice of four sound, moderate-sized lemons, and a pint of sherry; mix the whole briskly with the beaten yolks of eight fresh eggs, and then pass it through a delicately clean hair-sieve; next thicken it in a jar or jug placed in a pan of boiling water, turn it into a bowl, and when it has become cool, and been allowed to settle for a minute or two, pour it into moulds that have been laid in water. Some persons add a small glass of brandy to it, and deduct so much from the quantity of water.<sup>4</sup>

These four recipes broadly set out the ingredients and methods for all of those that followed over the next 250 years, including Australian recipes: milk or cream; a setting medium - hartshorn and isinglass at this time; lemon peel/juice; brandy, sherry or white wine (alone or in combination); yolks of egg; and sometimes almonds or almond essence.

### **Flummery begins its Australian career**

The first Australian recipe for flummery I have come across is in Edward Abbott's 1864 *The English and Australian Cookery Book. Cookery for the Many, As Well As for the "Upper Ten Thousand"*, where it has gone back somewhat to its peasant starchy origins with rice flour replacing oatmeal, no isinglass, gelatine or other setting agent – no doubt the quantity of flour was enough to set the mixture – and no almonds.

Spanish Flummery – Scale a quart of cream with a little cinnamon or mace, mix this gradually into half a pound of rice flour, and stir it over a gentle fire until it has the thickness of jelly. Sweeten it to taste, and pour into cups or shapes. Turn it out when cold, and serve up. Cream, wine, or preserves eat well with it, or it may be eaten alone, as preferred.<sup>5</sup>

Spanish flummery must have been popular in Australia in the years preceding Abbott's publication of this recipe. In 1855, G.W.C. placed an advertisement offering his services in the Sydney Morning Herald:

Wants a Situation as a Confectioner and Pastrycook, a steady man, who is well acquainted with making jams and jellies, Spanish flummery, blancmange, creams, ices, cakes, biscuits, savory and other kinds of pies. Would make himself useful in a respectable hotel; or as steward aboard a ship going home (presumably meaning Britain) with passengers.<sup>6</sup>

In late 1880's Australia, versions of Acton's flummery are reproduced as either Dutch Flummery or Yellow Flummery. This one is one for the former from 1882:

Dutch Flummery. — Put 1 oz. of isinglass or gelatine into a jug, pour upon it a full pint of boiling water, and let it stand half an hour, or until it is dissolved. Then put it into a brass saucepan, adding the peel of one lemon, and the well-beaten yolks of three eggs, half a pint of sherry, and loaf sugar to taste. Let it simmer gently, or just boil up altogether, then put it in a cool place until it is lukewarm, when add the juice of a lemon ; run it through a jelly bag into moulds.<sup>7</sup>

Dutch Flummery was popular enough for Miss Ruby Purves to advertise in 1899 that at Cookery Classes at the Mechanics Institute that the 'Subjects treated [include] Caramel Walnut, Dutch Flummery, Potato Soup'.<sup>8</sup>

This is one for Yellow Flummery from 1886.

Yellow Flummery. Boil 2oz. of isinglass in a pint and a half of water till it is dissolved, and then add a pint of white wine, the juice of two and the outside of three lemons, the yolks of seven eggs well beaten, and sugar to your taste. Mix the whole together and set it on the fire till it boils, stirring it continually strain it into a basin, and stir it till it is almost cold, then put it into the moulds.<sup>9</sup>

Isinglass is a form of gelatine (the protein collagen) originally derived from the swimming ladder of sturgeon, but also from large catfish in South America, and some species of hake and cod.<sup>10</sup> In the 19<sup>th</sup> century it had a wide application including in glue, cement, and for clarifying wines and beers for which it continues to be used. Russian isinglass was being sold in Sydney at least by 1898 when Mr. John Reddington was advertising it to brewers in the Sydney Gazette and New South Wales Advertiser.<sup>11</sup> Flummery recipes using isinglass tapered off over the first decade of the 20<sup>th</sup> century in favour of gelatine possibly because it could not compete on price or convenience.

Gelatine is the term used for collagen obtained by boiling bones with water, usually from cows or pigs in a process first refined by Frenchman Denis Papan in 1682. Imported gelatine was being advertised for sale by at least 1841 when Geo. I. Robinson & Co. advertised Patent Gelatine for making blancmanges, soups, jellies &c.<sup>12</sup> During the 1840s pastoralists, writes Jacqueline Newling, 'found ways to extract extra money from famine-affected beasts thanks 'to a modern invention ... the melting pot'.<sup>13</sup> Tallow, rendered fat, was used in soaps and candles, and bones and tendons when boiled produced gelatine. In 1844, V.S. Armstrong who was in the business of 'slaughtering, boiling down, rendering and packing tallow' advertised his company's Gelatine or Portable Soup 'equal in clearness and consistency with the best English and German gelatine, specimens of which are on view at his establishment where their comparative merits may be examined'.<sup>14</sup> Two years previously J and G Company of Edinburgh Scotland began producing dried gelatine as a powder and it is likely Armstrong's gelatine was also a powder, hence its portability.

In 1917 Davis Gelatine was established in Botany, a suburb of Sydney and became the leading brand in Australian households. It remains the only gelatine manufacturer in Australia.<sup>15</sup> In 1937 Davis published a promotional recipe book which included a recipe for Passionfruit Flummery.

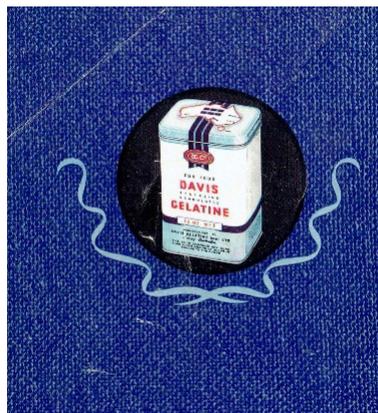
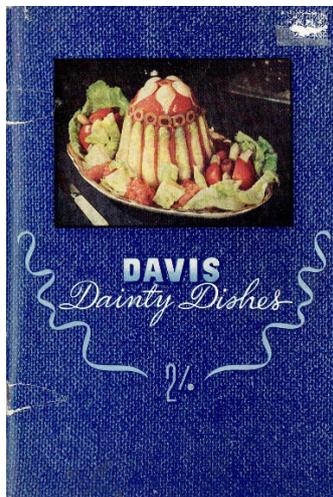
Passionfruit Flummery  
6 Servings  
Ingredients.

2 dessertspoons (1/2 oz) Davis Gelatine  
1 ¼ cups water  
¾ cup sugar  
1 tablespoon flour  
½ cup orange or lemon juice  
½ dozen passionfruit

**Method:**

Mix flour to a smooth paste with a little cold water. Add sugar to hot water. Carefully add flour. Boil for 5 minutes. Add gelatine dissolved in ¼ cup hot water, and fruit juice. Mix well. Leave until thickening slightly, then beat to a stiff cream. Stir in the passionfruit. Place in a bowl. Serve with cream or custard.

*If setting in an ice-chest or refrigerator, use less gelatine – 1 ½ dessertspoons.*



Front and back covers of Davis Dainty Delights 1937<sup>16</sup>

Fruit was used in flummeries in Australia from the earliest appearances of it in public. Here is an 1879 recipe:

Apple Flummary - Pare, core, and slice 2lb, of apples, and put them into a stewpan with 1lb of sugar, the finely-chopped rind of a lemon, and sufficient water to cover them. Let them stew

gently until quite tender, then drain them from the juice, and beat them to a pulp. Soak 1oz. of gelatine in a little cold water for twenty minutes. Put it into a saucepan with the apple, juice, and stir until the gelatine is dissolved; add the apples and a cupful of cream. Stir for a few minutes over the fire, but do not let the mixture boil. Turn it into a mould that has been soaked in cold water, let it stand until stiff, then turn out, and pour a good custard over it. Time to stiffen, eight or ten hours.<sup>17</sup>

There are recipes using apples, pineapples, passionfruit, peaches, apricots, strawberries and rhubarb well into the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Mrs E Brookman won £1 for her Custard Apple Flummery in the recipe contest of the Truth in 1934.<sup>18</sup> Mixed fruit flummeries were also popular. Almonds, however, virtually disappear. Custard and whipped cream were popular accompaniments to a flummery.

Rice flummeries also appeared in newspapers in the late 1800's and into the 1920's. They dropped Abbott's Spanish appellation and often the cinnamon and mace and returned to almonds/and or almond essence. M.L.F.M apprised readers of The Australasian in 1893 of the original flummery, with instructions of how to make it, and had a bet-each way on the flavouring opting for both cinnamon and almonds.

M.L.F.M – Flummery in its original form was something between a refined kind of porridge and blanc-mange. Here is one recipe. Steep some very finely-ground oatmeal for three days; then pour off the water, add as much fresh water, stir it all together, strain, and boil it with a tiny pinch of salt till of the thickness desired. A little water may be added at the first if it seems to thicken too quickly. A piece of butter and a little castor sugar should be added. Rice flummery is made by rubbing two good spoonfuls of rice flour smooth with a little cold milk, then stirring it into a liberal pint of new milk, previously boiled with two or three strips of lemon-peel and a morsel of stick cinnamon. Add two or three drops of essence of almonds, and let it all boil together, stirring it frequently, lest it burn, till it is of the proper consistency, then remove the cinnamon and lemon-peel and pour it into a mould to set. Turn it out and serve, with either cream custard or wine sauce round it.<sup>19</sup>

### **Enter jelly crystals**

So, there is a recorded history of flummery in Australia for at least a hundred years prior to the end of World War Two using fruit juice, crushed fruit, gelatine, fresh milk or cream. Now, what about the use of 'fruit jelly'?

The earliest Australian recipe for using jelly crystals I have come across was published in February 1928:

Peaches in Jelly — Take four large peaches, pare them, cut into dice, add three cups of water, four tablespoons sugar, stew for three-quarters of an hour Take one packet of jelly crystals two and a half cups of peach juice, and mix with crystals, then add peaches, stand aside till cool, and put into mould, and stand on ice till set. Serve with, custard.<sup>20</sup>

The year before, 1927, Sydney tram driver Bert Appleroth famously made his first batch of jelly crystals in his bathtub and began selling them along his tram routes.<sup>21</sup> Jelly crystals are simply gelatine flavoured with fruit juice and sugar and a colouring agent e.g cochineal, saffron, violets and spinach. Aeroplane Jelly went on to become a standard ingredient in every kitchen cupboard across Australia and the jingle that accompanied advertisements for it is very much part of Australian musical memory. But despite the proximity of this recipe to Appleroth's creation of the iconic jelly crystals we can't assume it was his jelly crystals called for in our recipe from 1928. There were

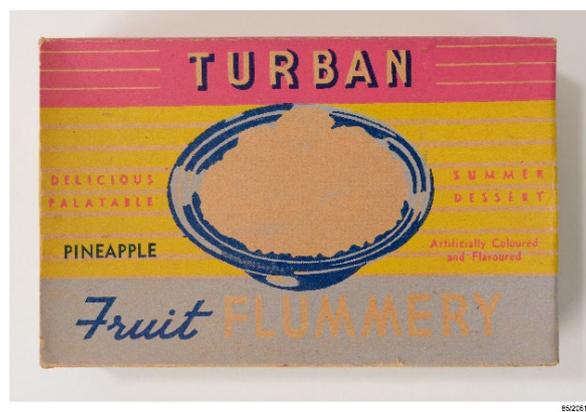
several other brands on the market. Among the Seasonable Comestibles in Our Grocery Department, Foy and Gibson's in 1922 advertised Invicta, Pioneer, Parson's, White's, Hoopers, Poppy, Pioneer and Jellex.<sup>22</sup> F Duball & Co. advertised Allen's Superior Jelly Crystals in 1926.<sup>23</sup> Once in the market, packets of jelly crystals became a common ingredient of flummeries, but both the crystals and gelatine continued to be used in some recipes.

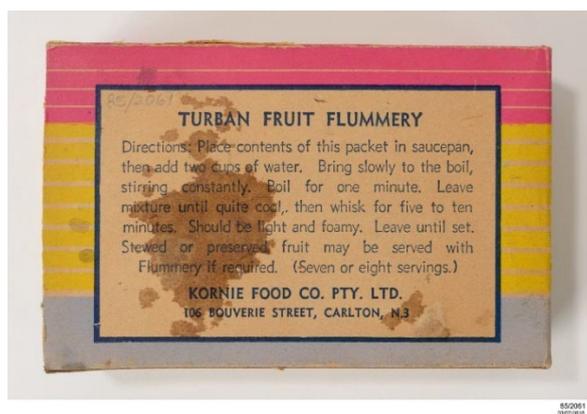
Six years later, in 1933, S. Richard & Co Ltd advertised 1 large tin of Melba peaches and 1 packet of Fruit Flummery at the two for one price of 1/- (one shilling). They also advertised 1 large packet jelly, 1 packet Bingo pudding, 1 packet junket crystals, 1 packet custard powder all for 1/3 (one shilling and threepence).<sup>24</sup> Also in 1933, John Willis & Co, Ltd advertised Thistledown Dutch Flummery for sale at 3d (pence) the packet.<sup>25</sup> These were the first advertisements I came across for Fruit and Dutch flummeries sold in a packet and advertisements for them appeared regularly into the late 1940s. I was initially surprised that despite how extensively the product was advertised there were no recipes published using the packets. The likely reason for this became clear when I came across this 1951 recipe:

#### Sponge and Nut Flummery

One packet flummery, 1 packet jelly (same flavor), 5 cups whipped cream, 1 cup sponge cake cubes, 1 oz. blanched chopped almonds, 4 teaspoons salt. Prepare jelly in usual way. Chill until firm, cut into cubes. Prepare flummery as directed, when slightly thickened whip until thick. Add salt. Fold in cream, cubes of jelly and cake, and almonds. Fill into mould, chill until firm. Serve with cream, decorate with cubes of jelly.<sup>26</sup>

So the method for making the flummery was on the packet itself, a practice still today when promoting a food product. (See images below) It would be redundant then to have a published recipe that set out the ingredients in the packet of flummery and the steps to take to make it up. This of course leads to the question of what was in the packet. That this recipe calls for the packet of flummery *and* jelly crystals is puzzling in the context of flummery recipes of this time where jelly crystals on their own often were the basis of the dish. There are, however, flummery recipes at this time that use both jelly crystals and gelatine, so perhaps the packet contained powdered flavoured gelatine, or powdered milk or eggs, some artificial colouring and sugar.<sup>27</sup> Sadly no amount of searching uncovered what was in the packets.





Turban Fruit Flummery made 1930-1940<sup>28</sup>

### And what of evaporated milk?

And speaking of milk, when did evaporated milk enter the world of the flummery? In January 1891, the Pioneer Dairy and Concentrated Milk Company Limited was advertising to Families, Caterers, Hotel Proprietors, Coffee Palace Companies &c a 'supply of Sweet and Pure Milk always available in any weather. It is only necessary to take delivery once a week instead of twice a day. *No waste or loss* and absolute immunity from all infection. Used without water being added, it not only equals cream but is superior to it, as it includes the sugar of milk and other solids in addition to the butter fat. To produce rich cow's milk add three parts water to one of concentrated milk; after being slightly stirred it is ready for use'.<sup>29</sup>

I have found no recipe using concentrated milk called such as an ingredient. A recipe for Banana Soufle in 1940 asks for half a pint of 'tinned milk which is 'beaten till frothy', which is more likely to happen with evaporated milk than condensed milk.<sup>30</sup> Evaporated milk is specified in a 1940 recipe for Honey Chocolate Fudge.<sup>31</sup>

The earliest recipe using evaporated milk in a flummery I have found was in 1951:

#### Flummery With Meringue Tops

Creamy light flummery flavoured with passionfruit and topped with meringues is an attractive dish for warmer weather, and really easy to concoct.

#### Ingredients:

1 large tin evaporated milk

1 cup sugar.

2 level dstspns. gelatine.

1 cup hot water.

4 to 6 passionfruit.

Method: Chill milk a few hours before using. Place gelatine in hot water, stand in saucepan of boiling water until it dissolves. Beat milk until thick, add sugar gradually, beating well. Add dissolved gelatine, beating until mixture is thick and creamy, then add passionfruit. Turn into wet glass dish until set. Serve in individual dishes topped with a meringue.<sup>32</sup>

So, the stage looked set for the entrance of *evaporated* milk and fruit jelly crystals to appear together in an Australian flummery.

## The birth of the 'old-school,1950s grandma food' Australian flummery

In the July 1940 issue of The Australian Woman's Mirror this recipe appeared.

### Orange and Passionfruit Flummery

One packet orange jelly crystals, 1 cup milk, 1 tablespoon sugar, 1 egg, 4 passions (sic). Dissolve jelly, and while still hot stir in egg yolks, milk, sugar and passion pulp while still hot. When set top with beaten egg whites and put in cool place to set. – 'J.S.', Young, NSW.<sup>33</sup>

Recipes submitted by readers to newspapers and magazines had often been circulating in kitchens for some time, shared by women verbally and transcribed into household cookery books, without appearing formally in print. It's likely that this is the case here. What that suggests is that the combining milk and jelly crystals was a practice that preceded World War Two by some years.

Of the 60 recipes for flummery between 1950-1959 I found in Trove, the digitised library of newspapers and magazines of the National Library of Australia, not one turned up a flummery recipe which combined jelly crystals with evaporated milk. In fact, most flummeries made from scratch continued to use fruit juices and fruit pulp. Some recipes in the 1950s call for unsweetened condensed milk which I suspect was evaporated milk as most again call for the milk to be beaten till frothy. But most Australian recipes for flummery since the earliest I found in the late 1800s do not use milk at all.

There was one other source to which I turned: product advertising which included recipes for using the product. The 1951 recipe above doesn't name a particular brand of evaporated milk. Carnation Evaporated Milk, created in 1899 in the United States by Elbridge Amos Stuart, was first promoted in Australian in 1952 and soon become a popular brand.<sup>34</sup> In 1957 Carnation took out a full-page advertisement in the Australian Women's Weekly.

And there in pride of place across half the page is a photograph of a flummery to end all flummeries with the recipe below it:

### Carnation Jelly Whip

1 packet jelly crystals or table (any flavour you like); 1 cp boiling water; 1 cup Carnation Milk, icy cold.

Dissolve jelly crystals in boiling water, allow to cool until thick and syrupy. While icy-cold Carnation Milk in a chilled bowl until thick, and blend in jelly mixture. Set in ice-chest or refrigerator.

Variations: 1. Add pulp of three passionfruit to dissolved jelly. 2. Just before setting, fold in one cup of diced tinned fruit, well-drained.

Serve jelly whip with whipped Carnation or Carnation straight from the can.<sup>35</sup>

Sure, it's not called a flummery, but all the elements are there, and the method is as for flummeries past. I feel confident that this is the origin of the 'old-school,1950s grandma food' flummery combination of jelly crystals and evaporated milk.



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- <sup>9</sup> The Australasian 22 September 1886, p. 5 accessed at [trove.nla.gov.au](https://trove.nla.gov.au) April 2022
- <sup>10</sup> Davidson, Alan (ed), 'Isinglass', *The Oxford Companion to Food*, Oxford University Press, 1999 p. 407
- <sup>11</sup> Sydney Gazette and New South Wales Advertiser 25 September 1808, p. 2 accessed at [trove.nla.gov.au](https://trove.nla.gov.au) April 2022
- <sup>12</sup> The Sydney Herald, 30 January 1841, p.3 accessed at [trove.nla.gov.au](https://trove.nla.gov.au) April 2022
- <sup>13</sup> Newling, Jacqui, *Eat Your History. Stories and Recipes from Australian Kitchens*, Sydney Living Museums, 2015, pp. 177-178
- <sup>14</sup> 'Gelatine or Portable Soup', Sydney Morning Herald 6 August 1844, p.3 accessed at [trove.nla.gov.au](https://trove.nla.gov.au) April 2022
- <sup>15</sup> <https://davisgelatine.com/why-davis-new/#:~:text=DAVIS%20Gelatine%20was%20established%20in,gelatine%20manufacture%20plant%20in%20Australasia>.
- <sup>16</sup> Davis Dainty Delights c.1942, Davis Gelatine Organisation, 1937 image scan by Paul van Reyk
- <sup>17</sup> Weekly Times 11 January 1879, p. 10 accessed at [trove.nla.gov.au](https://trove.nla.gov.au) April 2022
- <sup>18</sup> Truth, 15 July 1934 p. 25 accessed at [trove.nla.gov.au](https://trove.nla.gov.au) April 2022
- <sup>19</sup> 'Notes and Queries', The Australasian 15 July 1893, p. 33 accessed at [trove.nla.gov.au](https://trove.nla.gov.au) April 2022
- <sup>20</sup> Sunday Mail (Brisbane) 19 February 1928, p. 23 accessed at [trove.nla.gov.au](https://trove.nla.gov.au) April 2022
- <sup>21</sup> <https://www.aeroplanejelly.com.au/en-au/history>
- <sup>22</sup> The West Australian 20 December 1922, p. 11 accessed at [trove.nla.gov.au](https://trove.nla.gov.au) April 2022
- <sup>23</sup> The Eastern Recorder, 10 September 1923 p. 3 accessed at [trove.nla.gov.au](https://trove.nla.gov.au) April 2022
- <sup>24</sup> The Murrumbidgee Irrigator 14 September 1933, p.4
- <sup>25</sup> Kalgoorlie Miner 18 November 1933, p.10 accessed at [trove.nla.gov.au](https://trove.nla.gov.au) April 2022
- <sup>26</sup> Australian Women's Weekly 19 May 1951, p. 37.page 28
- <sup>27</sup> I am grateful to food historian Alison Vincent for this suggested list of ingredients
- <sup>28</sup> 'Turban Fruit Flummary', Museum of Applied Arts and Sciences, [collection.maas.museum/object/37764](https://collection.maas.museum/object/37764) accessed April 2022
- <sup>29</sup> The Bacchus Marsh Express 3 January 1891, p. 2 accessed at [trove.nla.gov.au](https://trove.nla.gov.au) April 2022
- <sup>30</sup> The Southern Mail 9 January 1940, p. 4 accessed at [trove.nla.gov.au](https://trove.nla.gov.au) April 2022
- <sup>31</sup> The Advocate 4 January 1944, p.4 accessed at [trove.nla.gov.au](https://trove.nla.gov.au) April 2022
- <sup>32</sup> The Sydney Morning Herald 6 September 1951 p. 12 accessed at [trove.nla.gov.au](https://trove.nla.gov.au) April 2022
- <sup>33</sup> The Australian Woman's Mirror Vol 16 No 33 9 July 1940, p. 46 accessed at [trove.nla.gov.au](https://trove.nla.gov.au) April 2022
- <sup>34</sup> 'Carnation Evaporated Milk marketing display in a Victorian Crofts Store' (image), University of Melbourne Library, <https://gallery.its.unimelb.edu.au/imu/imu.php?request=multimedia&irn=101728>
- <sup>35</sup> 'Delicious low-cost Carnation Jelly Whip', the Australian Women's Weekly 2 October 1957 p.48 accessed at [trove.nla.gov.au](https://trove.nla.gov.au) April 2022