The New Zealand Scone

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It turns out that scones are an ideal subject with which to examine food diversity; they are food diversity in the microcosm. When I proposed this paper I had in mind a comparison of scones of old with contemporary versions. However, when I considered the topic more closely, I realised the scale of my proposal. I had underestimated the sheer diversity of scones. Even Elizabeth David shied away from the subject. Writing in *English Bread and Yeast Cookery* on Bakestone Cakes and Breads she says "I would have liked to include a few scone recipes in this chapter, but once you start on scones where do you stop?"¹

What do I mean by a *scone*? In *The Oxford Companion to Food*, Mason explains that the term 'scone' "covers a wide range of small, fairly plain cakes. Leavened with baking powder, or bicarbonate of soda and an acid ingredient such as sour milk, they are quickly made and best eaten hot with butter." And, further confirming the diversity of scones, she states "scone recipes are found in great variety up and down the British Isles."²

Scones may be sweet or savoury. Sweet scones are made from wheat flour sifted with baking powder, mixed with a small proportion of sugar. A little fat, usually butter, is rubbed in. Eggs and milk are added to make a firm dough. Dried fruits such as currants or sultanas are often added to this basic mix. Unsweetened mixtures can be flavoured with grated cheese or chopped herbs. Wholemeal or white flour can be used. In Scotland, oatmeal or barley were the usual flour. Mashed potato is also mixed with flour and milk to make potato scones. In soda scones, bicarbonate of soda combined with buttermilk, yoghurt, or sour milk leaven the mixture. Traditionally scones are cooked on a girdle or a griddle but nowadays are usually baked in an oven. Scones may be baked in small individual cakes or as one large flat cakes and then split into wedges. Scones are entrenched in the baking traditions of New Zealand. The predominance of European settlers from Britain, the early days of open fire cooking, followed by the coal or wood range, the need for the housewife to do the cooking herself because of the shortage of servants, the ingredients available, and the culture of largesse in hospitality all meant that a simple, quickly mixed, quickly cooked bread such as the scone became a staple. Simpson explores these themes in *A Distant Feast*, but curiously, in the chapter entitled 'The rise of the scone' he does not specifically discuss scones or give a recipe.³

In this paper I present my observations on twentieth century New Zealand scones from a personal collection of twelve recipe books published prior to 1971 and compare these to books published in the last 15 years.

Many, if not most, of the mid-century fund-raising recipe books that I looked at have a chapter, or a section, devoted to scones and the like. *Tried Recipes, The Cookery Book of the Ever Ready Committee Victoria League*, published (Auckland) in 1950⁴ has a chapter entitled "Bread, Scones, Pikelets, Teacakes." Similarly, *Cooking is....⁵* from members of the New Zealand Nurses Association, Auckland Branch has a section on "Scones & Gems." Likewise *The Cookery Book of the NZ Women's Institutes* (1938)⁶ has a chapter entitled "Scones, Gems etc." Cookery Book and Household Hints compiled by the League of Mothers, 1926-1951,⁷ has a section headed "Scones, Pikelets etc." *Tried & Tested Recipes* by St Stephens Young Wives Fellowship, Opotiki⁸ has a section headed

¹ David, E., (1977). English Bread and Yeast Cookery. Penguin, London. p. 529.

² Davidson, A. (Ed.) (1999). *The Oxford Companion To Food*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. p. 704.

³ Simpson, T. (1999). *A Distant Feast: The Origins of New Zealand's Cuisine*. Godwit: Auckland, New Zealand.

⁴ Tried Recipes, The Cookery Book of the Ever Ready Committee Victoria League, Auckland (1950) (7th ed.). Wellington: A.H. & A.W. Reed.

⁵ *Cooking is...* from members of the New Zealand Nurses Association Auckland Branch. Auckland: Campbells Printing Service.

⁶ The Cookery Book of the NZ Women's Institutes (1938) (6th ed.) Levin.

⁷ League of Mothers 1926–1951, Cookery Book and Household Hints.

⁸ St Stephen's Young Wives Fellowship. Tried & Tested Recipes. Gisborne: Te Rau

"Items to be Buttered." The *Aunt Daisy Cookbook with Household Hints* published in 1968 also has a chapter on "Bread, Scones and Teacakes." All of my various editions of the Edmonds Cookery Book dedicate a chapter to scones. The fifth edition has a whole chapter on scones alone, whereas subsequent editions include scones, gems and pikelets, and scones, muffins and loaves respectively. The allocation of a specific section of a book to scones and other quick breads, suggests a high status in the general culinary repertoire.

Types of Scone

The books mentioned above, plus two other mainstream New Zealand books of the era^{9,10} gave recipes for the following types of scones:

Scones¹¹ (Plain) and Prize Scones¹² Pumpkin scones¹³ Potato scones¹⁴ Apple scone¹⁵ Current or sultana scones¹⁶

Press.

9 Flower, T. (1971). *The New Zealand Woman's Weekly Cookbook*. Auckland: Paul Hamlyn.

10 Holst, A. (1986). *Alison Holst's Cooking Class*. Auckland: Beckett Publishing.

11 The Cookery Book. p. 106; Tried Recipes p. 153; Tried & Tested Recipes p. 47 (2 recipes); Cooking is... p. 79 (basic recipe); The Aunt Daisy Cookbook with Household Hints, p. 116; Edmonds Cookery Book (5th ed) p. 55 and subsequent editions; Alison Holst's Cooking Class (1986) p. 74.

12 Tried Recipes. p. 153

13 *The Cookery Book*, p. 106; *Tried Recipes*, p. 154; *Cookery Book and Household Hints*, p.73.

14 Tried Recipes, p. 153; Tried & Tested Recipes p. 47.

15 Cookery Book and Household Hints, p. 73.

16 *Cooking is* ... p. 80; *Edmonds Cookery Book* (5th ed) p. 54; *Edmonds Cookery Book* (5th ed) p. 55 and subsequent eds.

Date scones ¹⁷ Date and Apple Scones ¹⁸ Sweet Scones ¹⁹ Brown Honey scones ²⁰ Orange Scones ²¹ Preserved ginger scones ²² Savoury Scones ²³ (Never fail) cheese scones ²⁴ Raisin Cheese Scones ²⁵ Porridge scones (with cold porridge) ²⁶ Wholemeal scones, also called Brown scones ²⁷ Brown scones (with brown sugar, rather than wholemeal) ²⁸ (Scotch) Griddle Scones,²⁹ Girdle Scones Yorkshire Tea Scones ³⁰ Pinwheel scones,³¹

- 18 The New Zealand Women's Weekly Cookbook (1971)
- 19 Edmonds Cookery Book (5th ed), p. 56.
- 20 Ibid.
- 21 Ibid.
- 22 Cookery Book and Household Hints, p. 73.
- 23 Edmonds Cookery Book
- 24 Cookery Book and Household Hints, p. 73; Cooking is, p. 79; Recipe Book, p. 35; Edmonds Cookery Book.
- 25 The Aunt Daisy Cookbook with Household Hints, p. 116.
- 26 *Cookery Book and Household Hints*, p. 73.

27 Cookery Book and Household Hints, p. 73; The Aunt Daisy Cookbook with Household Hints, p. 116; Edmonds Cookery Book (5th ed), p. 54 and subsequent eds.

28 Tried & Tested Recipes, p. 47.

29 Cooking is ..., p. 80; The Aunt Daisy Cookbook with Household Hints, p. 116 (Girdle scones); Edmonds Cookery Book (5th ed), p. 55 and subsequent editions; The New Zealand Women's Weekly Cookbook (1971); Alison Holst's Cooking Class (1986), p. 74.

- 30 *Edmonds Cookery Book* (5th ed), p. 56.
- 31 Tried & Tested Recipes, p. 48

¹⁷ *Cookery Book and Household Hints* p. 73; Cooking is.... p. 80; *Edmonds Cookery Book* (5th ed) p. 55 and subsequent eds.

On this analysis of an admittedly small sample, plain scones are the most published scone recipe, with ten out of the twelve books giving a version, and a couple of books giving two versions. Variations of dried fruit scones, either currant, sultana or date, were the next frequently occurring recipe with date, and current and sultana both scoring five versions. Often the same book cites recipes for both. Recipes for cheese scones were given four times and there was one having a bob each way with a cheese and raisin recipe.

Plain Scones

For the purposes of comparison, I am going to examine the recipes for plain scones, considering their ingredients, method and size.

Ingredients

The proportion of flour to raising agent, which is usually baking powder, ranged from 1 to 2 teaspoons of baking powder per cup of flour. That is, some recipes use double the amount of raising agent than others. Interestingly, the *Edmonds Cookery Book* revised the proportion of flour to baking powder in its later editions, doubling the amount of baking powder required.

The use of breakfast cups, which, according to Edmonds' (5th ed) and *The Cookery Book* ³², converts as I "heaped" breakfast cup to 8 oz of flour, which confuses the comparison given that heaping is not a precise measurement for these purposes.

Most of the recipes use a small, though often imprecise, amount of butter, typically about I tablespoon per cup of flour, though sometimes a little more. Several use cream instead of butter. Only one recipe specified an acidic agent, in that case sour cream, to activate the baking powder.

Four of the ten recipes include sugar, either simply 'sugar', presumably granulated sugar, or icing sugar. Quantity ranged between a third of a teaspoon per cup of flour to a dessertspoonful—the latter should probably be renamed a sweet scone. Indeed the "sweet scone" recipe in the Edmonds' (5th ed.) also calls for one dessertspoon of sugar, as does their subsequent recipe for Yorkshire Tea Scones.

Two recipes required 1 dessertspoon of cornflour per cup of flour, said by Aunt Daisy³³ to make scones finer and lighter. One recipe used half an egg yolk in the mixture.

Method

As is typical of recipes of that era, the instructions are scanty. One book, *The Cookery Book* ³⁴, does not describe any method at all. All of the recipes that use butter instruct to sift the dry ingredients, then rub in the butter before mixing to a soft dough with the liquid ingredients.

Instructions as to handling the dough vary, with some recipes calling for thorough kneading while others direct to knead lightly and others saying don't knead at all. Helpfully Holst³⁵ warns the cook not to "overknead or underknead." Recipes are equally divided on whether next to roll or pat the dough. *The Edmonds Cookery Book* series recommends "roll, or better still, pat" (5th edn), then "roll out," then "press scone dough out" (1992).

All, except one of the recipes which refers to the oven temperature, specify a hot oven.

Size

None of the earlier cook books give any instruction as to what size to cut the scones or how many the recipe will yield. A 1992 edition of the *Edmonds Cookery Book* says that 3 cups of flour yields twelve scones and Alison Holst's 1986 book advises 2 cups of flour yields 9 scones.

There are no instructions as to the shape of the scones.

³² The Cookery Book of the NZ Women's Institutes (1938) (6th ed.) Levin.

³³ Aunt Daisy's New Book of Handy Hints. Whitcombe & Tombs.

³⁴ The Cookery Book of the NZ Women's Institutes (1938).

³⁵ Holst, A. 1986. p. 74.

Cheese Scones

Ingredients

Two of the earlier recipe books, from the 1950s and early 1960s³⁶, feature an identical list of ingredients for what one entitles "Never-Fail Cheese Scones"—I cup of grated cheese to I cup of flour, I egg, and pepper. Neither include butter. The earlier of the Edmonds Cookery Books does not feature a cheese scone recipe but a subsequent edition, from about 1976 gives a recipe using 4-6 tablespoons of grated cheese to 3 cups of flour and a pinch of cayenne pepper and no butter or egg. In the later 1992 edition the cheese scone recipe has become a variation of the basic plain scone recipe—half a cup of grated cheese and a pinch of cayenne pepper is added to the 3 cups of flour. Because it is a variation of the basic recipes it includes 50g of butter. The ingredients and proportions of the cheese scone recipe in *Cooking Is*.... are identical to the individual version in the c1976 *Edmonds Cookery Book*. The raisin cheese scone recipe given in *The Aunt Daisy Cookbook* calls for twice as much cheese per cup of flour, plus butter, but no egg and, given the raisins, no pepper.

Shape

Both of the very cheesy recipes with egg instruct that the mixture be "dropped" or spooned onto the baking tray. The raisin cheese scones recipe directs that the lightly rolled dough be shaped into "biscuits." Whether 'biscuits' is meant in the American sense, what we call scones, or the New Zealand understanding, is unclear. The remaining recipes appear to expect the standard rolling, patting and cutting of the dough.

Scones in Twenty-First Century New Zealand

Fast forward to the twenty-first century. What has become of the scone? It is difficult to estimate the place of the scone in the domestic sphere. In time-poor households where working adults now cook less and differently, home baking is undertaken less often. Yet there has been a resurgence in certain traditional domestic pursuits, including baking, but whether the revival of baking has included scones is mere conjecture.

A perusal of baking recipe books published in recent years in New Zealand suggests that scones continue to be considered important and popular enough to feature. A recipe book entitled *Scones*³⁷ by Genevieve Knights, published in 2010 is entirely devoted to scones, and that same year *Baking for Blokes; DIY in the Kiwi Kitchen*³⁸ by Steve Joll was published with a chapter on muffins and scones. In fact of the twelve modern baking books ³⁹ all included recipes for scones, and several more generalist cook books also included recipes.⁴⁰

Seven⁴¹ of the twelve specific baking books included multiple recipes for scones, with several featuring sections dedicated to scones and other similar items, such as muffins and gems.

The popularity and importance of scones is also evident from recent media publications. This very month the *Dominion Post* published a recipe for "The Best Scones Ever," requested by a customer of the Scorch-O-Rama cafe.⁴² The chef, Bertie, was reportedly "tearful" when told he had to release his beloved cheese scone recipe, but was adamant, however, he

³⁶ *Cookery Book and Household Hints from League of Mothers 1926–1951*; *Recipe Book* from Lismore Free Kindergarten [c1962 or 1963].

³⁷ Knights, G. (2010). Scones. Auckland: White Knights Publishing

³⁸ Joll, S., (2010). Baking For Blokes, Auckland: New Holland

³⁹ Langbein, A. (2010). *Any One Can Bake*. Auckland: Annabel Langbein Media; Martin, R. (2008). *Robyn Martin Bakes*, Whangaparoa, New Zealand: Stylus Publishing; Arndell, A. (2013). *Alice in Bakingland*. Auckland: HarperCollins Publishers; Arndell, A. (2015). *Bake Me Home*. Auckland: HarperCollins Publishers; Goodwin, K. (2013). *Bluebells Cakery*. Auckland: Random House; Oldfield, N. (2013). *Gran's Sweet Pantry*. HarperCollins Publishers; Evans, K. (2012). *Treats from Little and Friday*. Auckland: Penguin

Johnston, A. (2012). *Ladies, A Plate The Collection*, Auckland: Penguin; Jacobs, L. (Ed.) (2009). *A Treasury of New Zealand Baking*. Auckland: Random House.

⁴⁰ Daish, L. (2005). *A Good Year*. Auckland: Random House; Mannering, S., & Graham, A. (2010) *A Year's Worth Recipes from Dunsandel Store*. New Zealand: Juno Publishing; Le Clerc, J. (2003). *Cafe @Home*. Auckland: Penguin; Christensen-Yule, L & McRae, H. (2007). *The New Zealand Chef* (2nd ed). Auckland: Pearson Education.

⁴¹ Langbein, A. (2010). Martin, R. (2008). Oldfield, N. (2013). Johnston, A. (2012). Jacobs, L. (Ed.) (2009). Knights, G. (2010). Joll, S., (2010).

⁴² The Best Scones Ever, From the Menu, The Dominion Post, 4 November 2015.

would never give up his baby—the date scone recipe—unless he was on his deathbed. The scones "have had customers from Hutt Valley to the Kapiti Coast ringing up to book these scones so they don't miss out."

In July 2015 *Cuisine* magazine published on *Stuff* the recipe for the Ministry of Food Cheese Scones⁴³, with a less emotive introduction. "Brenda Jessup (of the Ministry of Food) tells us the recipe was a favourite provided by her mother. Her family would bake them in a camp oven over the fire on camping holidays."

In May 2013 the *Dominion Post* published a review of the cheese scones of eight of Wellington's cafes, "On the hunt for the best cheese scones in town."⁴⁴ The reviewer picked eight of the best scones to judge, based on word-of mouth recommendations. "What's better than a cheese scone fresh from the oven, smothered with butter that melts almost instantly as you spread it over the steaming hot, fluffy interior?" the reviewer asks. "A good cheese scone is at once a filling snack and a savoury, delicious treat." Her review elicited ten comments recommending the scones of other establishments. The *Localist* also published an on-line list of the "Best Cheese Scones in Wellington."⁴⁵

In 2012, as part of the Wellington on a Plate festival, Pravda pastry chef Dom Mackie, presented a workshop teaching the public his cheese scone secrets. It was so popular that it sold out within minutes of going on sale. I was one of the unfortunates that initially missed out. There was such demand that additional workshops were added to the programme, and I did attend. The workshops have proved enduringly popular with a series offered as part of each Wellington on a Plate festival since.

Scones appear to be a regular counter item in many cafes. That so many cafes continue to sell scones is evidence of their ongoing popularity. It seems that scones remain as popular as ever. But are contemporary scones the same as those of the earlier era or have they evolved? The scone recipes in modern books focussing on the baking of earlier generations are, obviously, the same or very similar to earlier scone recipes. However many books tapping into the nostalgia of baking have varied the traditional recipes, by adding or amending ingredients. A cynic might suggest that some food writers believe that to prove their worth they need to offer more novel or complex versions of a recipe, or at least a twist on a recipe, rather than replicate an established one.

In analysing my modern recipe books I found that the main categories of scones continue to be "plain," cheese and fruit, but now each has different variants. Plain scones included lemonade⁴⁶, or in the case of blokes⁴⁷, shandy. Cheese scones included sun-dried tomatoes⁴⁸, paprika and parmesan⁴⁹, mustard⁵⁰, and herbs⁵¹. Date scones could be date-filled (ie a central seam of date rather than date studded throughout)⁵², spicy date⁵³, date and fig⁵⁴, or date and orange⁵⁵. Other fruit scone recipes were apricot yoghurt,⁵⁶ blueberry yoghurt⁵⁷, currant⁵⁸, orange and raisin, pecan, and pear and maple syrup⁵⁹.

This variety is similarly found in Wellington cafés where recently

- 46 Martin, R. (2008).
- 47 Joll, S., (2010).
- 48 Martin, R. (2008).
- 49 Le Clerc, J. (2003).
- 50 Arndell, A. (2015).
- 51 Arndell, A. (2013).
- 52 Langbein, A. (2010).
- 53 Martin, R. (2008).
- 54 Oldfield, N. (2013).
- 55 Evans, K. (2012).
- 56 Joll, S., (2010).
- 57 Jacobs, L. (Ed.) (2009).
- 58 Daish, L. (2005).
- 59 Oldfield, N. (2013).

⁴³ http://www.stuff.co.nz/life-style/food-wine/cuisine/69193940/recipe-ministry-of-food-cheese-scones

⁴⁴ Reilly, M. (2013) *On the hunt for the best cheese scones in town*. http://www. stuff.co.nz/dominionpost/capitaI-life/cafe-scene/8614684/On-the-hunt-for-the-bestscones-in-town

⁴⁵ www.localist.co./profile/84630/lists/alice-h-best-cheese-scones

I've tried scones with cheese and onion⁶⁰, cheese and rocket⁶¹, cheese with paprika⁶², and cheese with cayenne⁶³. Fruit scones have included the traditional sultana version⁶⁴, and a dried cranberry scone⁶⁵.

Ingredients

As well as these variations in flavour, ingredients appear to have evolved in both their proportions and their combinations. Whereas earlier recipes tended to use cream *or* butter, several contemporary recipes for plain scones use both cream *and* butter. Moreover the proportion of fat to flour has increased. Per cup of flour, the modern recipes varied in the proportion of butter/cream: 15g/40mls, 15g/65mls, 25g/30mls, 50g/75mls, and 60g/60mls.

The total content of sugar also appears to have increased. Two-thirds of a tablespoons of sugar is the typical quantity of sugar per cup of flour in a plain scone, but some modern recipes require more than a tablespoon up to one and a half tablespoons—and, if lemonade is added, and the top sprinkled with sugar, the total sugar content is considerably greater.

In many cheese scones, the ratio of fat to flour has also increased. Most of the recipes I reviewed included butter, ranging between 10 and 35g per cup of flour, ignoring the fat content of the cheese. The proportion of cheese to flour has also generally increased in both the domestic and the café recipes. Per cup of flour, the weight of cheese ranges between 20 and 125 grams. In Pravda's Dom's cheese scones the ratio of cheese to flour is 1 to 2. Dom is quoted as saying "if you get a scone and it's not cheesy enough, they're doughy, bland and taste like damper."⁶⁶ In The Ministry

66 Speer, S., (2013) Light hands key to dreamy cheese scone: The key to Pravda's dreamy scones revealed. TheDominion Post, Capital Life. http://www.stuff.co.nz/dominion-post/capital-life/cafe-scene/8802201/Lighthands-key-to-dreamy-cheese-scone of Food's recipe the ratio is 1 to 1. Likewise in Johnston's,⁶⁷ Martin's⁶⁸ and Bertie's Scorch-O-Rama scones the proportions are equal measures of flour to cheese.

Method

Of the recipes using butter, most suggest that the butter be rubbed in rather than melted—both Dom and Bertie use melted butter. However, as several recipes omit butter and use other liquid ingredients they have eliminated that more time-consuming, messier process.

Size

The yield, and therefore the size, of scones varies enormously between recipes. The estimated yield per cup of flour ranges from two to six scones, with most recipes between two and four per cup of flour—two scones per cup of flour results in a very large scone. Café portions are generally very large. I measured several. One was 8 cm wide and 4 cm high, another 9 cm x 5 cm, and another 10 x 10 cm. I made the Pravda's Dom's cheese scones recipe and whereas he says the 500g of self-raising flour and 250 g of cheese will yield six scones, I got 12 and they were still very generous in size.

Shape

The shape scones in the modern recipe books seem to be equally divided between the angular, that is cut into squares, rectangles or occasionally triangles, and the circular, that is into rounds. The commercial scones I observed were also divided between the round and the angular, and, in some cases, indeterminate. Some of the round ones are rolled in the hands rather than cut, making them more dome-like. Pravda's Dom's cheese scones are rolled in wet hands to tennis-ball size.

Overall, I would say that contemporary scones have evolved from the earlier renditions. They are now more varied in their flavours, and ingredients, with more fat, sugar and they are much larger. Scones,

⁶⁰ Pandoro

⁶¹ Floriditas

⁶² Prefab

⁶³ Catering studio

⁶⁴ Floriditas

⁶⁵ Home (National Library)

⁶⁷ Johnston, A. (2012).

⁶⁸ Martin, R. (2008).

however, remain equally as popular.

Twentieth Century New Zealand Plain Scone Ingredients

- 1. 2 cups flour, 2 teaspoons baking powder, pinch salt, milk (*Edmonds* 5th edn)
- 2. 3 cups flour, 6 teaspoons baking powder, 1/2 teaspoon salt, 50g butter, 1 1/2 cups milk (*Edmonds 1992*)
- 3. 2 breakfast cups flour, 2 heaped teaspoons baking powder, 1/2 teaspoon salt, 1 dessertspoon sugar, 1-2 tablespoon butter, milk or water (*Cooking is...*)
- 4. 8 oz flour (conversion is 1 heaped breakfast cup), 1/2 teaspoon salt, 4 level teaspoons baking powder, 2 tablespoons butter, 2/3 cup milk (Aunt Daisy)
- 5. 2 breakfast cups self-raising flour, 2 teaspoons baking powder, 2 tablespoons thick sour cream, milk (*The Cookery Book*)
- 6. 1 cup flour, 2 teaspoon baking powder, 1/2 cup cream, pinch salt, 1 dessertspoon cornflour, 2 teaspoon sugar, 1/2 cup warm water (*Tried and Tested Recipes*)
- 7. I breakfast cup flour, Pinch salt, I teaspoon baking powder, I dessertspoon cornflour, I dessertspoon icing sugar (*Tried and Tested Recipes*)
- 8. 3 cups flour, 3 good teaspoons baking powder, 1 teaspoon sugar, 1 pinch salt, 1 very thin shaving butter, ? egg yolk, milk (*Tried Recipes*)
- 9. 3 cups flour, 3 teaspoons baking powder, 2 oz butter, 1/2 teaspoon salt, milk (*Tried Recipes*)
- 10. 2 cups flour, 4 teaspoon baking powder, 1/2 teaspoon salt, 25-50 g butter, 1/2 cup milk (*Alison Holst's Cooking Class*).