FACTSHEET No. 9

THE HISTORY OF BREAD

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ANCIENT TIMES (8000 BC – 600 AD)

Man discovered fire half a million years ago and cereals were probably roasted over open fires at least 100,000 years ago. Cereals were first cultivated in the Middle East 10,000 years ago. Wheat and rice were probably the most widespread and still provide 40% of the world's food.

Wheat is now the most widely used of all. It is highly nutritious, containing the protein, carbohydrate and many of the vitamins needed for a healthy diet. These advantages are shared by other cereals but wheat differs from them in an important way - it makes the best bread. Because humans have been eating wheat for ten thousand years our bodies have learnt to make the enzymes and other physical mechanisms necessary to digest it.

c 8000 BC
At first grain was crushed by hand with pestle and mortar. In Egypt a simple grinding stone (quern) was developed. All bread was unleavened, there were no raising agents and bread was made from a mixed variety of grains. Today's equivalents are Indian chapattis and Mexican tortillas.

c 5000 - 3700 BC
Egypt developed grain production along the fertile banks of the Nile. Grain became a staple food and spread to the Balkans and throughout Europe, eventually being cultivated in Britain.

c 3000 BC
Tougher wheat varieties were developed and the baking of bread became a skill in Egypt along with brewing beer. In this warm climate wild yeasts were attracted to multi-grain flour mixtures and bakers experimented with leavened doughs.

The Egyptians invented the closed oven and bread assumed great significance. Homage was paid to Osiris, the god of grain, and bread was used instead of money; the workers who built the pyramids were paid in bread.

c 2300 BC
In India grain cultivation began along the Indus valley.

c 1500 BC
Horses took over ploughing from men, using the first iron ploughshares.

c 1050 BC
The south of England became a centre of agriculture - barley and oats were grown freely; by 500 BC wheat in Britain started to become important.

c 1000 BC
In Rome, risen yeasted bread became popular and by 500 BC a circular quern was developed - a circular stone wheel turned on another which was fixed. This was the basis of all milling until the industrial revolution in the 19th century and is still the way stoneground flour is produced today.

c 450 BC
In Greece the watermill was invented; although it was a few centuries before its significance was fully realised.

c 150 BC
In Rome the first bakers' guilds were formed and well-to-do Romans insisted on the more exclusive and expensive white bread - a preference which persists in Europe and English speaking countries to this day. A Roman invented the first mechanical dough-mixer, powered by horses and donkeys.

c 55 BC
Romans invaded Britain where wheat was still being crushed by hand and baked over open fires. More sophisticated techniques were introduced, including watermills.

c 40 BC
Bread and politics. In Rome the authorities decreed that bread should be distributed free to all adult males.

c 500 AD
Saxons and Danes settled in Britain and introduced rye which was well suited to cold northern climates. Dark rye bread became a staple which lasted to the Middle Ages.

c 600 AD
The Persians are said to have invented the windmill. The power generated could drive much heavier stone querns for milling but it was 600 years before they appeared in Western Europe.

MEDIEVAL TIMES (1066 – 1666)

The growth of towns and cities throughout the Middle Ages saw a steady increase in trade and bakers began to set up in business. Bakers' guilds were introduced to protect the interests of members and to regulate controls governing the price and weight of bread. By Tudor times, Britain was enjoying increased prosperity and bread had become a real status symbol: the nobility ate small, fine white loaves called manchets; merchants and tradesmen ate wheaten cobs while the poor had to be satisfied with bran loaves.

c 1066
Hair sieves were introduced to help sift the bran from flour, leading to finer white bread.

1086
The Domesday Book. Watermills were shown as the prime source of milling.

1150
Bakers formed guilds to protect them from manorial barons and in 1155 London bakers formed a brotherhood.

1191
The first recorded windmill in Bury St Edmunds, Suffolk.

1202
King John introduced the first laws governing the price of bread and the permitted profit.

1266
The Assize of Bread. This body sat to regulate the weight and price of loaves. The first bread subsidy was given - 12 pennies for eight bushels of wheat made into bread. (A bushel of wheat is the actual weight of 8 gallons of wheat - this could vary according to the hardness or dryness of the grain). If a baker broke this law he could be pilloried and banned from baking for life.

1307
White bread bakers and brown bread bakers formed separate guilds. In London the Bread Street market defended London bread, forcing rural competitors to sell at uncompetitive prices.

1400
Chaucer wrote The Miller's Tale, pointing to the greedy ways of millers and their suspicious standing in society.

1569
Queen Elizabeth I united the white and brown bakers to form The Worshipful Company of Bakers.

1666
The Great Fire of London, said to have been started in a bakers' shop in Pudding Lane, destroyed 80% of the city and with it, the milling and baking industry in the capital.

THE INDUSTRIAL AGE (1700 – 1887)

In Georgian times the introduction of sieves made of Chinese silk helped to produce finer, whiter flour and white bread gradually became more widespread. Today more than 70% of the bread we eat is white. Tin from the flourishing mines in Cornwall began to be used to make baking tins. Bread baked in tins could be sliced and toasted - and it was not long before the sandwich was invented. In the early 19th century, life was dramatically changed by the Industrial Revolution. As large numbers of farmworkers moved from the country into cites to work in the new factories, less food was produced. When the Corn Laws were passed prohibiting the importation of grain, starvation became a serious problem.

c 1700
Wheat began to overtake rye and barley as the chief bread grain.

1709
A new Act superseded the Assize of 1266. Magistrates were empowered to control the type, weight and price of loaves. Only white, wheaten (wholemeal) and 'household' bread were permitted ('household' bread was made from low grade flour).

1757
A report accused bakers of adulterating bread by using alum lime, chalk and powdered bones to keep it very white. Parliament banned alum and all other additives in bread but some bakers ignored the ban.

1783
The first recorded chain of bakery shops was set up by Christopher Potter of Westminster.

1815
The Corn Laws were passed to protect British wheat growers. The duty on imported wheat was raised and price controls on bread lifted. Bread prices rose sharply.

1822
In London standard weights for loaves were abolished. Bakers had to weigh each loaf in the customer's presence.

1826
Wholemeal bread, eaten by the military, was recommended as being healthier than the white bread eaten by the aristocracy.

1834
Rollermills were invented in Switzerland. Whereas stonegrinding crushed the grain, distributing the vitamins and nutrients evenly, the rollermill broke open the wheat berry and allowed easy separation of the wheat germ and bran. This process greatly eased the production of white flour and by grinding the wheat more finely made better-textured bread but it was not until the 1870s that it became economic. Steel rollermills gradually replaced the old windmills and watermills.

1846
With large groups of the population near to starvation The Corn Laws were repealed and the duty on imported grain was removed. Importing good quality North American wheat enabled white bread to be made at a reasonable cost. Together with the introduction of the rollermill this led to the increase in the general consumption of white bread - for so long the privilege of the upper classes.

1887
The National Association of Master Bakers was formed.

THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

Gas ovens replaced the wood and coal burning brick ovens, producing much more even results. Large automated baking units significantly increased productivity. The Chorleywood Bread Process, which enabled increased use of cheaper home-grown wheat, helped produce more bread at a lower price in the UK. Today the wrapped, sliced loaf is a staple in the British diet but fresh ideas and development of new techniques continue to provide a variety of new ethnic and speciality breads.

1912
Otto Rohwedder started work on a bread slicing machine and after many setbacks produced a machine that sliced bread and wrapped it to keep the moisture in. It took many years for his machine to become accepted.

1928
Otto Rohwedder's bread slicing machine was first exhibited at a bakery trade fair in America.

1929
Scientists identified the benefits of wholemeal flour and bread but this did not change the nation's overwhelming preference for white bread.

1930
Introduction of commercial bread slicers for use in large bakeries. Sliced bread appeared in Britain in 1930 under the *Wonderbread* label.

By 1933 around 80% of bread sold in the US was pre-sliced and wrapped. Americans loved it so much that the expression "the best thing since sliced bread" was coined.

1941
Calcium was added to flour to prevent rickets which had been detected as common in women joining the land army.

1942
The London Wholesale and Multiple Bakers joined with regional organisations to form The Federation of Bakers, to assist in organising the wartime production and distribution of bread. The 'National Loaf', roughly equivalent to today's brown bread, was introduced due to shortage of shipping space for white flour.

1950
Reintroduction of slicing and wrapping loaves which was prohibited during World War II as an economy measure.

1954
The Baking Industry (Hours of Work) Act, known as the Night Baking Act, came into force. It was the culmination of a long campaign to control night working in bakeries. Although the working conditions in bakeries which had prompted the campaign had largely disappeared by the 1950s, the Act lead to the introduction of the National Agreements of the Baking Industry between employers and the Bakers' Union, regulating working conditions in the baking industry. Even though the industry has now moved away from national bargaining, the National Agreements still form the basis for working arrangements in most companies. The Night Baking Act was repealed in 1986.

1956
The National Loaf was abolished. Laws were introduced whereby all flour other than wholemeal had to be fortified with minimum amounts of calcium, iron, Vitamin B1 (thiamin) and nicotinic acid.

Ever increasing efficiency of production and distribution systems, as well as the development of the supermarket, began the shift away from bread produced by small master bakers and the emergence of the large wholesale companies.

1963
The Bread and Flour Regulations were introduced, governing the composition and additives permitted in bread and flour.

1965
The Chorleywood Bread Process, first developed in 1961, came into general use. This substantially reduced the long fermentation period by introducing high energy mixing for just a few minutes, dramatically reducing the time taken to produce a loaf. The process also permitted a much greater proportion of homegrown wheat to be used in the grist.

1974-79
Under the Control of Inflation Act 1973, wages and the prices of most goods and services were subject to government control. In order to keep prices down, the government subsidised the price of staple foods, including bread. In April 1974 the price of a large sliced white loaf was controlled at 14½p. to the consumer, with the baker receiving an additional ½p. from the government. The Bread Prices Order was revoked in April 1979, by which time the price to the consumer was 29½p with a subsidy of 2p.

1981
A government health report on bread and flour recommended that the consumption of all types of bread be promoted to replace some of the fat and sugar in the nation's diet. It also recommended that flour treatment agents already used in the production of white and brown bread be extended to wholemeal. Another conclusion was that statutory fortification of bread with vitamins and minerals was no longer necessary.

Nevertheless statutory fortification was retained and the flour treatment agent permitted in making wholemeal bread was restricted to Vitamin C (ascorbic acid).

The long term decline in bread consumption which had taken place after World War II, as a result of a more affluent workforce with access to an increasing variety of foods, was halted. A much greater variety of bread became available and the share of the bread market shifted away from the master baker to the large bakery companies and the rising in-store bakery sector.

1985
There was a dramatic increase in the consumption of wholemeal bread following a greater awareness of the value of bread in the diet and the development of wholemeal bread using vitamin C to produce a lighter, greater volume, more versatile loaf.

1987
The development of softgrain white bread with greater fibre content led to a reduction of brown bread consumption.

1991
A government white paper on The Health of the Nation led to the formation of the Nutrition Task Force which recommended that energy obtained from fat in the diet be reduced in favour of energy obtained from cereal based foods. It recommended that bread consumption should be increased by 50%.

1993
The Task Force recommendations had not yet been implemented and overall bread consumption remained stable. Premium white breads made from high quality imported wheat gained in popularity offsetting some erosion of sales of standard white sliced bread which had suffered as a result of supermarket price wars. A much greater consumer interest in ethnic and continental bread varieties was made possible by the increase in frozen doughs and part-baked breads.

1995
The Bread and Flour Regulations were greatly simplified. A government committee was set up to examine the nutritional status of the population, with particular relevance to the nutritional fortification of foods. Folic acid and its importance in preventing Neural Tube Defects is included in the committee's work.

1997
Longer life bread was introduced in late 1997. It is usually wrapped in silver packaging and has a shelf life of about seven days. This type of bread has rapidly become an important feature and has already achieved a 5% share of the wrapped bread market.

1998
At the end of 1998 the government committee looking at bone health and the fortification of foods concluded that white and brown flours should continue to be fortified with calcium. Government accepted the recommendation and white and brown breads remain an importance source of calcium in the national diet.

21st Century

2000
The industry continued to battle with persistent below cost selling of bread by the supermarkets with regular promotions seeing loaves being sold at 19p.

2001
The long awaited *Competition Commission Report into the Supermarkets* was published and one of the recommendations was the setting up of a new Supermarket Code of Practice to redress the balance between the large supermarkets and their suppliers.

2006
The industry established an independent company, Bakers Basco Limited, to implement and manage a new industry standard 'Omega' bread basket to provide an industry wide solution for delivering bread and to address the loss and misuse of bread baskets which costs the industry millions of pounds each year.

2007
Due to poor wheat harvests and rising energy costs the price of a standard loaf reached £1 for the first time.

2008
The 750 year old Bread Weights Legislation which stretched back to the Assize of Bread and Ale of 1266 and governed the weight of bread for sale in the UK was finally abolished by an EU Directive. The first 600g loaf of bread went on sale and now bread is sold in all sizes and weights.

2010
Since the introduction of FSA salt targets for foods, plant bakers have continued to implement salt reductions in their products enabling salt in bread to be reduced by 37% by comparison to the levels in 2000. The average salt content of a sliced and wrapped loaf is now 1.1g per 100g.

2011
The Chorleywood Bread Process celebrates its 50th Anniversary! The Chorleywood Bread Process revolutionised bread production in the UK by facilitating larger scale production and producing a loaf with a longer shelf life whilst continuing to bring a healthy nutritious loaf of bread to the British public.

Today we eat the equivalent of more than 9 million large loaves every day and the consumer can choose from hundreds of varieties of bread and rolls, baps and buns, continental, ethnic and other speciality breads.