

CHIPMUNKS

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If something is very good, say a device for removing cat fur from the lint filter on the tumble dryer, or a gadget that makes a buzzing sound when you accidentally put something non-recyclable into the recycling bin, people often say something like “That Defurrer™ is the best thing since sliced bread.” It is a little known linguistic fact that before the invention of sliced bread, people used to compare new inventions to chipmunks, as in “My new Recycalert® is the best thing since chipmunks!”¹

This all changed in 1842 when Arthur Slice patented and released his *Device For Automatically Preparing Convenient Lamalae From Bread*. Despite its name, and its alarming rate of coal consumption, the steam-powered device soon became popular, particularly among the industrious working class people of London, who were often too busy picking pockets, working as prostitutes, spontaneously bursting into song and dance, and dying of communicable disease to cut their own bread. (The middle and upper classes at the time had servants who prepared all their bread. These servants, known as “breaders”, were always working class.)

A loaf of bread, when passed through Arthur Slice’s machine, was cut into several of what Arthur Slice liked to call “lamalae”. The working classes didn’t take to this word. “Look, Mr Slice,” they said. “We are the humble working classes of London. We are all hard working. Right from the moment we are born we have to start picking pockets until we are old enough to work as prostitutes and die of communicable disease. What with that and

¹ Of course, nobody ever actually said that, as sliced bread was invented before the Recycalert®, so the phrase “best thing since sliced bread” was in use for decades before anyone had any opinion about the Recycalert®.

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all the singing and dancing, we never had time for education. We can't use a posh word like 'lamalae' in the context of our food. And besides, the correct plural of 'lamella' is 'lammellae'. We're going to call them 'slices' instead." This so shocked Arthur Slice that he sold the rights to his invention to an early-Victorian consortium of industrialists and retired to Scotland to study Latin.

The "Slice Bread" machine became established throughout the Empire in the 1840s. The working classes were able to make sandwiches in record time and the middle and upper classes no longer had to employ a servant just to cut bread. Soon the phrase "it's the best thing since sliced bread" entered the English language.

Sadly, not everybody was happy. There were hundreds of unemployed breaders who formed into an unruly mob and were going to march on Parliament in April 1844, demanding that Arthur Slice's Device be banned. Ugly scenes were avoided when all the breaders died of the same communicable disease in March. The chipmunks, who were used to being hailed as the best thing before sliced bread, were also deeply unhappy. All over England, gangs of chipmunks smashed Arthur Slice's Devices. The situation was so bad that in Parliament passed the Chipmunk Prevention Act of 1846, which, among other things, made it illegal for chipmunks to gather in groups of three or more, for even a single chipmunk to be within 30 yards of a licensed bakery, or for a chipmunk to be in line for the throne or be married to someone in line for the throne. Prince Albert invented the sport of chipmunk hunting, and often lead chipmunk hunting parties in Hyde Park. It is now widely believe that he died after being

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poisoned by a militant chipmunk, but the Royal family released a cover story about typhoid to avoid scandal.

Arthur Slice returned to invention in 1850, having become frustrated with Latin. He died in 1851 in what appeared to be a freak accident involving a prototype of a machine he called the *Device for Producing Convenient Wedges from Circular Cakes*, although the question of why the pieces of his body were covered in tiny paw marks was never fully resolved. He was buried in Highgate Cemetery. Following instructions in his will, his tombstone was in the shape of a lamella of bread and had only the words "Fuck the subjunctive" carved on it.

This is why, to this day, you will never see a chipmunk buy a loaf of sliced bread.

