

MILK BOTTLES

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The invention of the milk bottle was a significant event in the history of Western Civilisation. For the first time there was a convenient, hygienic way to deliver milk to the consumer.

Prior to the invention of the milk bottle, milk was delivered via a network of plastic hose pipes that ran from house to house. Every kitchen had a milk tap in it. This was an extremely inefficient way of distributing milk, as the typical distance between the cow and the tap would be several miles. Most people drank less than a pint of milk each day, but you can get much more than a pint into several miles of hose pipe. You had two choices; either take the first milk that came out of the tap, which was usually quite elderly by this point, and almost always off, or you could run the tap until fresh milk came out. This was very wasteful and meant you had a few hundred gallons of rotting milk in your kitchen. As a result, very few people drank milk, the nation's health suffered, and from time to time an over-full cow would explode because nobody was drinking her milk.

When the milk bottle was invented, all of this changed. Fresh milk could be delivered in conveniently-sized portions direct to your door. More people drank milk, the nation's health improved, and fewer cows exploded.

For a couple of years after the milk bottle was invented the network of milk pipes lay unused. Then researchers at the Royal Society in London worked out how to use them for the nation-wide distribution of electricity.

At the time, electricity was drawn directly from the ground by hand-operated pumps. Every village had electricity pumps in the square, and some of the grander houses in the towns had their own private pumps in their back yards. If you needed electricity

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in your house, say to run the light bulbs in your bedroom, you took a bucket out to the pump, placed it under the outlet, pumped the handle, and filled the bucket. Then you took the electricity back to where it was needed and poured it into your light bulbs, or perhaps your 19th Century television set.

Carrying electricity in this way was very dangerous. If you slipped and fell, you could get raw electricity everywhere. A splash of electricity on the skin could be very painful, often leaving a scar. Electricity buckets were very heavy, and many of our grandparents can remember seeing people made lame in electricity spills. Piping the electricity through disused milk pipes made it much safer. That is why electricity pumps are only seen in museums, and to this day electricity comes into our homes and offices in plastic tubes.

