

THE STAFFORD BRANCH CANAL / RIVER SOW NAVIGATION

THE LOCK HOUSE AT ST THOMAS' (BASWICH)

"THE COOKING RANGE" IN THE FRONT KITCHEN (LIVING ROOM)

Researched and written by

David Jones

The ground floor of the Lock House consisted of four rooms: the Living Room and Washhouse at the front, with the Kitchen and Pantry at the back. According to Olive Price (née Shaw), who grew up in the Lock House in the 1940s and 1950s, the Living Room was usually known as the "Front Kitchen" by the family, while the Kitchen was called the "Back Kitchen".

There was a kitchen range in the Living Room, fixed into the east wall. Ranges had a dual purpose – for heating the room and for cooking. A range essentially combined a fire grate with an oven.

The Lock House was occupied until September 1956 and the range, being a permanent fixture, was left in position. The house was demolished soon after.

SRL Work Parties in October and November 2014 found several artefacts including parts of the cast iron range. See the photograph below (Figure 1).



Figure 1: Parts of the cast iron Range from the Lock House found in 2014

Two of these parts had the number "17" on them, possibly a model number.

It was serendipitous that SRL Committee members Yvonne Plant and Geoff Hales identified the same parts on their range at home which was acquired from a house in Chase Terrace in the 1980s. See the photograph of their range (Figure 2).



Figure 2: The Range belonging to Geoff Hales & Yvonne Plant: the fender was not the original and a metal shelf had been added along the top.
The dimensions are: 36" wide x 11" deep x 48" high.

A key to the various features of this range is given in the Appendix.

When Olive Price saw this photograph, she confirmed that this was the same model of range that she remembered being in the Living Room of the Lock House – and the dimensions seemed correct too. However, she said there were two differences: the fender was not quite right and secondly, the Lock House range had a wooden shelf above the range rather than a metal one.

Coincidentally, an identical model of this range is on display at the *Black Country Living Museum* in Dudley¹; this has the original fender, which was identified by Olive as the correct type.

But when was this type of range manufactured, and by whom, and where?

Apart from the number "17" on some of the parts, there were no other visible identifying marks, such as a manufacturer's plate. Perhaps there are marks on the back or sides of the range which are obscured because it has been built into an alcove? One way to find out is to dismantle the range out of the alcove; and that is not going to happen anytime soon!

This range is a typical domestic 'closed' range known as 'Kitchener', where heat and smoky fumes circulate through flues surrounding an oven (to the right of the grate in this range) before escaping up the chimney. More expensive models had a boiler on the opposite side of the grate (instead of a void), providing hot water, and fitted with a tap.

'Kitcheners' are usually associated with the Midlands and became increasingly popular in ordinary homes after 1850. The style of the oven door latch and the hinges is of a type that appeared in the 1860s and remained current until ranges disappear from trade catalogues around 1940.

The consensus is that this range was most likely manufactured in the West Midlands/Black Country/Birmingham area, and probably dates to the period 1890-1910 but could be later. This suggests that the range was possibly installed in the Lock House during the tenancy of Harry Holloway (1899-1929) and his family, or perhaps a little earlier.

However, few ranges of this type have manufacturer's marks, suggesting that many foundries made them. And without a maker's plate to guide the research it is difficult to identify a make and model, and precisely date it. It may be that this information will yet be found, in a Victorian trade directory, complete with illustration? Or perhaps the identity of this range – like most – will forever remain a mystery!

Sources of Information and Acknowledgements

- (a) *Firegrates and Kitchen Ranges* by David J Eveleigh; Shire Album 99, Shire Publications Ltd., 2004. ISBN 0 85263 629 6.
- (b) *Over A Red-Hot Stove, Essays on Early Cooking Technology* edited by Ivan Day; Prospect Books, 2009. Chapter 1 *Cast-Iron Progress – The Development of the Kitchen Range* by David J Eveleigh.
- (c) Email correspondence with:
 - (i) David J Eveleigh, Director of Collections & Research, *Black Country Living Museum*.
 - (ii) Irene de Boo, Curator (Domestic & Cultural Life), *Black Country Living Museum*.
 - (iii) Dr Tamsin Bapty, Curator of Library and Archives, *Ironbridge Gorge Museum Trust*.
 - (iv) Chris Copp, Senior Museum Officer, *Staffordshire Archives & Heritage*, Shugborough, Stafford.
- (d) (i) Olive Price.
 - (ii) Geoff Hales & Yvonne Plant.

(1) A picture of the *Black Country Living Museum* range, taken on 24 April 2010 © by Eleanor (Thorskegga) Thorn, is on the internet: to find this, (a) do a Google search "Fairground Art Black Country Museum thorskegga; (b) then click on "Fairground Art, Black Country Museum"; (c) then, in the URL address, change "4549161280" to "4548654093".

APPENDIX

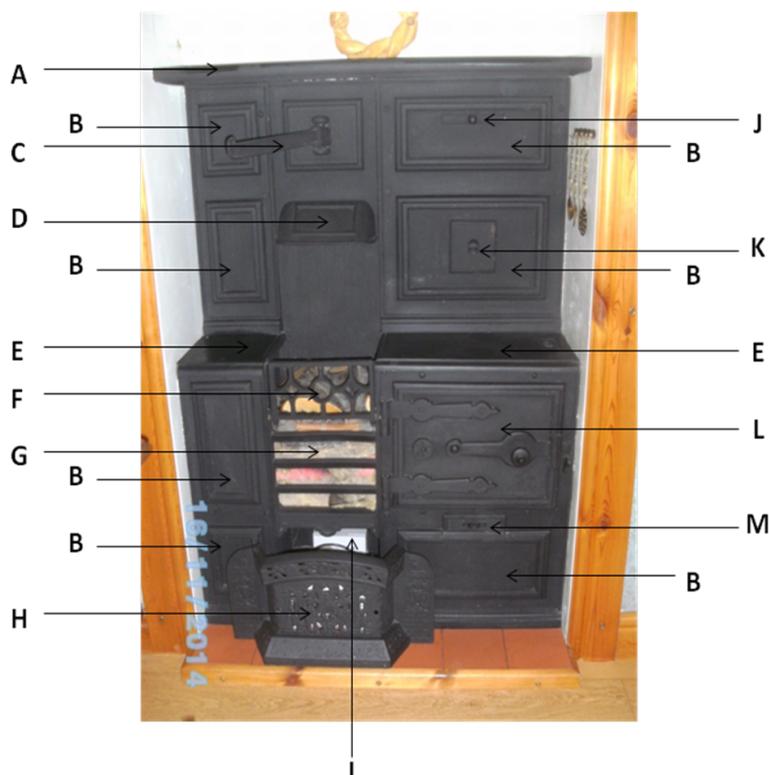


Figure 3: Key to the Range

Item	Feature and Comments
A	Mantlepiece Shelf; often used for crockery, candlesticks, a clock or other ornaments.
B	Decorative Panel
C	Fireplace Crane (swing-out arm); for hooks so that pots, pans, kettles could be heated directly in the fire when a more intense heat was needed.
D	Canopy/Hood; Olive remembers that a Draw Pan was used to control the heat.
E	Hot Plate; a good surface for keeping food warm, or for simmering which requires less intense heat. Some ranges had circular holes (with removable lids) if higher temperatures were needed.
F	Adjustable Trivet; is vertical in this picture (parallel with the front of the grate) but horizontal in the <i>Black Country Living Museum</i> range picture ¹ so it can be used as a hot plate.
G	Fire Grate with horizontal front bars. There was a bottom grating so that ashes could fall into an Ash Pan. The Grate at the Lock House was modified by Olive's father to include several vertical bars which helped prevent embers falling into the hearth.
H	Fender; this prevented any falling embers and ash going into the room.
I	Ash Box; this is the space below the Grate into which ash would fall into an Ash Pan.
J	Flue Stop; this was used as a damper to regulate the flow of gases and heat in the flues.
K	This plate lifts out giving access to the flue for cleaning.
L	Oven Door showing handle (on right) and hinges (on left). Olive remembers using a cloth when opening/closing the hot oven door.
M	This plate lifts out, giving access to the flue under the oven for cleaning.

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