

# Kitchen Studio Training Notes

## An Egg for Easter

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### Activity Background



### What are Pate Eggs?

The image of the egg embodies the symbol of new life and rebirth, fertility and purity.

The egg is prominent in creation myths across the world. In Mexico, life began when the sun egg hatched from a mountain, which split open.

Ancient Egyptian mythology also linked the image of an egg with the sun and within Indian beliefs (specifically Buddhist and Hindu) the egg is so closely linked to the sun it is even used in magical rites to strengthen the powers of its rays.

Many myths discuss the struggle of life. In Ancient Greek and Roman myths eggs and the hatching of two eggs is used to talk about rival principles and aspects, day and night, good and evil, man and woman.

The idea that life is to be protected or celebrated with sacrifice is also an ancient belief evident in many cultures and eggs were used within ceremonies as a substitute for blood sacrifices.

Eggs have been used in witchcraft and magic rituals such as seeing into the future (the shape of the egg being like the fortune teller's ball).

Central to the lives of farming communities eggs were used in numerous seasonal rituals. For example, rituals for opening and closing seasons of growth, looking after cattle and rain making charms.

Pace – from the Old French *pasque*, which stems from the Hebrew *pesach*, Passover.

**Extract from *The Yorkshire Dictionary of dialect, Tradition and Folklore* by Arnold Kellett.**

*'Pace Eggs: hardboiled eggs, dyed in various colours, formerly the basis of several Easter customs. Pace eggs are rolled down grassy slope, either on Easter Sunday or Easter Monday (once called Troll Egg Day) traditionally remembered of the stone which rolled away from the tomb of Jesus on Easter morning. If they reach the bottom of the slope without cracking it is a sign of good fortune. Egg rolling has been revived in many parts of Yorkshire, including Fountains Abbey. Another custom was to jowp (bang) pace eggs together in a game similar to conkers. The custom of brightly dressed mummers (actors) going round begging pace eggs is associated with surviving pace egg plays.*

***Pace Egg Plays:***

*These are traditional plays still performed each Easter especially in the Calder Valley. The Midgley Pace Egg play involving St George killing Bold Slasher, who is revived by the Doctor's magic potion, is performed by the boys of Calder High School, Mytholmroyd and taken round Hebden Bridge, Midgley and other villages. A similar play is performed in Brighthouse and there have been revivals of pace egg plays in such places as Barnsley and Heptonstall'*

**Extract taken from William Hone, *The Every-Day Book*, vol. 1 (1827).**

*"The eggs being immersed in hot water for a few moments, the end of a common tallow-candle is made use of to inscribe the names of individuals, dates of particular events, &c. The warmth of the egg renders this a very easy process. Thus inscribed, the egg is placed in a pan of hot water, saturated with cochineal or other dye-woods; the part over which the tallow has been passed is impervious to the operation of the dye; and consequently when the egg is removed from the pan, there appears no discolouration of the egg where the inscription has been traced, but the egg presents a white inscription on a coloured ground. The colour of course depends upon the taste of the person who prepared the egg; but usually much variety of colour is made use of.*

*Another method of ornamenting 'pace eggs' is, however, much neater, although more laborious, than that with the tallow-candle. The egg being dyed, it may be decorated in a very pretty manner, by means of a penknife, with which the dye may be scraped off, leaving the design white, on a coloured ground."*

## **10 Egg Facts!**

- ❶ The Romans said 'ovum ruptum est' 'the egg is smashed' to describe a catastrophe.
- ❷ In modern Germany a smashed egg means trampling on your good fortune.
- ❸ According to the Roman writer Pliny the wife of the Roman emperor Nero carried an egg around with her when she was pregnant to determine the sex of her child. The egg hatched into a cock and some time later she gave birth to a son.
- ❹ According to Northumbrian Easter traditions if a woman refuses a pace egg from a man he can seize her boots, and if a man refuses one from a woman, she can snatch his cap!
- ❺ In Estonia, Bosnia, Czechoslovakia and Switzerland coloured eggs were placed in ant hills. The insects will sprinkle the eggs with their own natural acid so that the shells are brightly speckled.
- ❻ Popular dyes for pace eggs included cochineal (crushed from the cochineal beetle) for scarlet, gorse for yellow and logwood for rich purple.
- ❼ The most valuable decorated eggs were hand crafted in the 1880s. Made by goldsmith Peter Carl Faberge, they were commissioned by Czar Alexander III of Russia as gifts for his wife, Czarina Maria Feodorovna.

⑧ The household accounts of Edward I, for the year 1290, recorded an expenditure of eighteen pence for four hundred and fifty eggs to be gold-leafed and coloured for Easter gifts.

⑨ The Dutch and French made the first chocolate eggs in the 1800s using moulds. It was a time consuming and difficult method.

⑩ The inventing of a press for separating cocoa butter from the bean by the Dutch inventor Van Houten in 1828 and the introduction of a pure cocoa by the Cadbury brothers in 1866 were the keys to creating good eating and moulding chocolate.

## The Collection

There are 16 Pace Eggs in the social history collection. Many of them will be on display in the case outside the Kitchen Studio. Most of the eggs were decorated by members of the Wilson family, who inscribed each egg with the name of the decorator and the date it was decorated. The family lived in Crook near Helmsley. The decorated eggs are late Victorian and early Edwardian. The eggs have been dyed with onion skins wrapped round them.



## Natural Dyes

Natural dyes can be made from almost anything, plants, minerals and even some insects. Here is a list of pasc egg colouring substances used in different countries.

### **British Isles:**

Red – cochineal

Yellow – gorse flowers

Green – spinach

Purple – log wood or Beetroot

### **France:**

Green – young sweet corn

Pink – radish peel

Yellow – marigold

Green – artichoke leaves

### **Germany:**

Red – crushed red clay

Yellow – crab apple bark

Brown – plum tree bark, or a rusty nail soaked in whey

### **Hungary:**

Yellow – wolf's milk boiled in water

Green – hemlock

### **Poland:**

Orange – crocuses

Green – moss

### **Ukraine**

Yellow – apple tree bark, mistletoe leaves

Violet – sunflower seeds, elderberry fruit

Black – old walnuts