

## FROM OPEN HEARTH TO CORNISH RANGE

In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries cooking was done on open hearths; at least two still exist in Feock parish at Tregew and Tregoose. The one shown in the illustration is just outside this parish, in that of Kea. This large house was the home of a prosperous tinner. The hearth has remained unaltered, so it was possible to measure it and to examine the chimney.

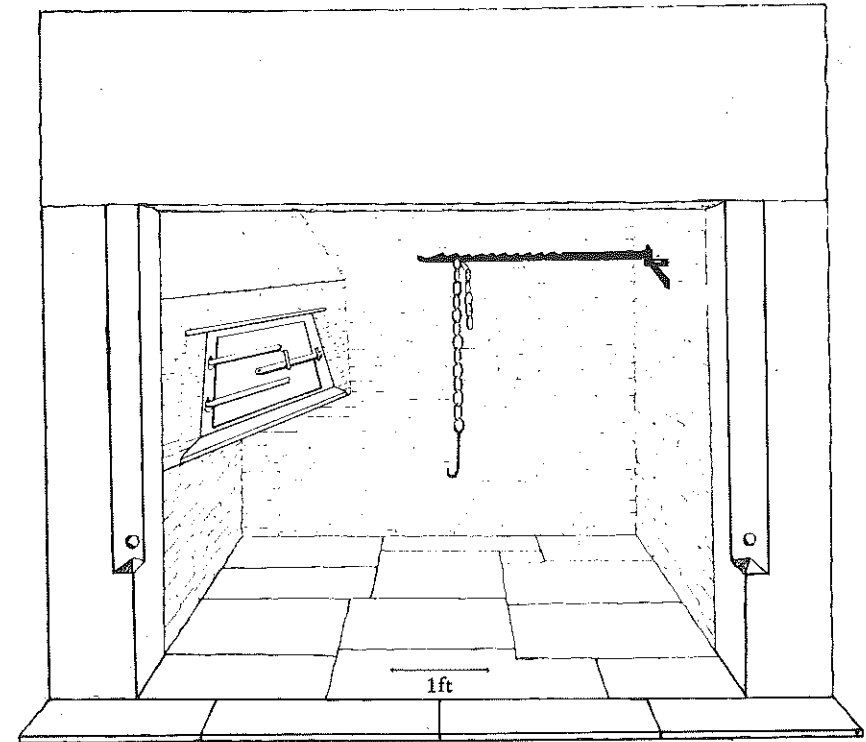
The hearth is made of rectangular granite slabs, beautifully fitted together and raised above the kitchen floor which is also granite. The lintel and its supporting pillars are single pieces of granite. The oven is hollowed out of the fireplace wall across the back corner; it is  $3\frac{1}{2}$  ft deep and  $2\frac{1}{2}$  ft high. I could find no traces of clay between the stones to suggest that it had been lined. Both this oven and the one at Tregoose have iron doors.

The only small hearth I have seen was about 4 ft across and made from a single piece of rough stone of a type still to be found in the surrounding fields; the lintel was a thick wooden beam and there was a cloam oven. Furse was lit inside the oven and when it was hot, the ashes were raked out and the baking put in. The old lady who used it said that in order to get a good seal she would put a little damp clay round the edge of the oven door, which broke away easily when she opened the oven. A cloam oven was in use at La Feock Grange as late as 1935.

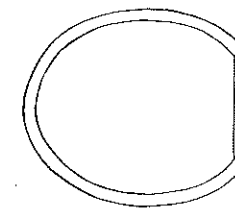
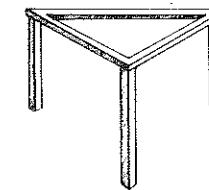
Above the level of the lintel the sides of the chimney slope inwards until the chimney stack is reached; the stack is not over the centre of the hearth, but slightly to one side, away from the oven. In the chimney of the large hearth there is a thick horizontal wooden beam about 8 ft up, from which meat could be hung for smoking. There was also a notched iron bar let into the wall of the hearthplace which could be swivelled and from this the cooking pots were suspended on chains with hooks.

In the small hearth a brandis, or brandiron was used. This was a triangular iron frame supported on three legs, which stood over the fire and supported the cooking pots; a large brandis had an extra bar joining one corner to the centre of the opposite side.

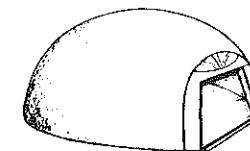
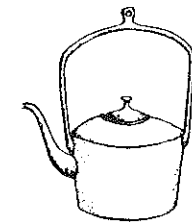
Cooking pots are listed in inventories as crocks, pots, pans, kettles and skillets. Some can still be found in use as plant pots; the lids are usually missing but people who remember them say the lid was slightly domed. They are made of



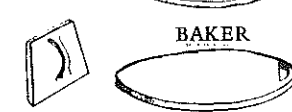
Open Hearth

1ft  
CLOAM OVEN

BRANDIS



BAKER



brass or iron. I found a skillet, which was a pan eight inches in diameter and five inches deep with a lip for pouring and a long handle; these were usually made of brass. The baker, or slab, was a flat iron plate about 2 ft in diameter and 1 in. thick, with a handle at one side. This was placed on the hearth before the fire was lit.

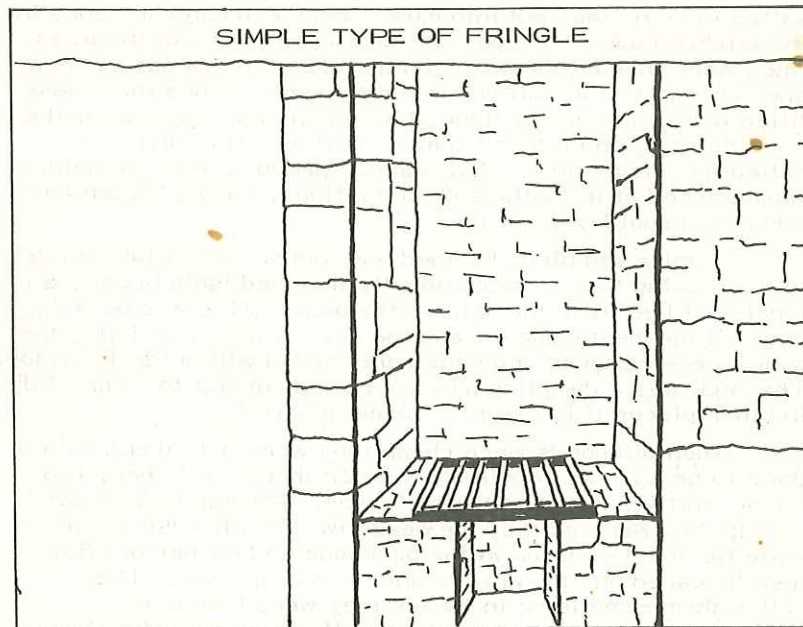
I have recently met a Mrs Sandry, born in 1904, who married in her early twenties and lived in a cottage on the cliffs between Porthleven and Rinsey Head, where she cooked on a small Cornish range and a fringle. She clearly remembers her grandmother cooking on an open hearth. I am indebted to her for the following information

Her grandmother cooked by 'furze and turf'. The furze was cut as long as possible, placed head to tail alternately and tied when the bundle was a convenient size. These 'faggots' were made into a rick near the cottage. One rick was made each year, so that there was always one in use and another drying for the following year. There was also a rick of turf. The slab, or baker, was put on the hearth and a furze fire lit on top of it; when the furze had almost burnt to ashes, the remaining sticks and ashes were drawn off the slab with furze hooks. The bread, etc. was put on the slab and covered with an inverted 'kittle', the slab having been swept clean with a home-made brush of twigs. The hot ashes were piled over the kittle and the whole covered with turves. When asked how they knew when the food was cooked, she replied, "Well we just knew, and if you wasn't sure you could hook up one side of the kittle with the furze hook and have a peep and a smell." The baked food was then put on home-made rush mats to cool. This particular hearth had no rod and chains, so all pots had to be handled with the furze hooks.

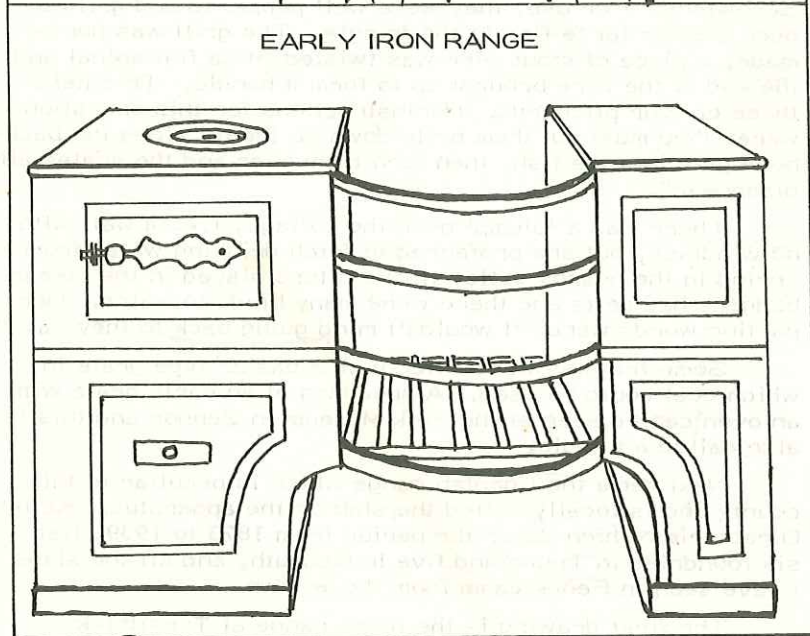
When Mrs Sandry married, her cottage had a small Cornish range and a fringle where there had once been a hearth. The range did not occupy the whole hearth, so a rough wall was built at the side of the range and the remaining space converted into a fringle. The bottom was filled in with stone to a height of about 8 ins, leaving a draught hole from back to front, iron bars were put on this foundation and a furze fire lit on the bars; bellows were needed to get a good fire. The brandis was then put on to support the cooking pots. On Mondays the water was boiled there in a big iron boiler. She was bringing up a family of five children on 30/- a week, so the range was only lit on baking days because coal was expensive.

They kept a sow, some poultry and grew vegetables. After farrowing, two piglets were kept for family use and by careful feeding one was fattened to give plenty of lard and the other kept lean to give good bacon. The hams and flitches were

SIMPLE TYPE OF FRINGLE



EARLY IRON RANGE



salted in brine then put into muslin bags and hung on hooks in the kitchen beams. No part of the pig was wasted; the intestines were thoroughly washed out, turned inside out and re-washed and soaked in salt water for ten days. Then they were filled with a mixture of flour, fat, onions and seasoning, the ends tied off, and either baked or boiled. This dish was called 'pudding skins'. Any surplus produce from the holding was bartered at the village shop for flour, sugar, butter and other household necessities.

Rabbits and birds "helped out, but we didn't take birds in the nesting time". Occasionally they had 'shin broth', a foreleg of beef with the shin on the bone. This was boiled until all the meat came off and the gristle turned to jelly, the bones were removed and vegetables added with a 'deck' on top. The deck was a dumpling mixture rolled out flat to form a lid; in other places it is called a 'skimmer cake'.

When pilchards were cheap they were gutted and salted down to be used as required, "two or three for father, two for me and one each for the children". Pilchards were also dried; they were gutted, the heads twisted off - "never use a knife for that" - cut down the backbone and opened out flat, then threaded on strong wire and hung in the sun. They called them Scrollers; in Gweek they were known as Scrowlers. For use, they were well peppered and grilled over a clear furze fire in the fringle. The grill was home-made; a piece of stout wire was twisted into a flat spiral and the end of the wire brought up to form a handle. This held three or four pilchards. Her instructions for this operation were: "You must put them belly down so the oil along the backbone gets into the fish, then turn them over and the scales all disappear".

There was a 'plump' near the cottage, i.e. a well with no windlass, but she preferred to fetch drinking water from a spring in the nearby valley where otters played in the stream, badgers had setts and there were many birds to watch. Her parting words were: "I wouldn't mind going back to they days".

Some fringles were fitted with a basket type grate in which coal could be used. A specimen of an early grate with an oven can be seen at the Folk Museum in Zennor and this is also called a fringle.

Next came the Cornish range which is peculiar to this county and is locally called the slab or the apparatus. Kelly's Directories which cover the period from 1873 to 1939, list six foundries in Truro and five in Redruth, and all the slabs I have seen in Feock came from these towns.

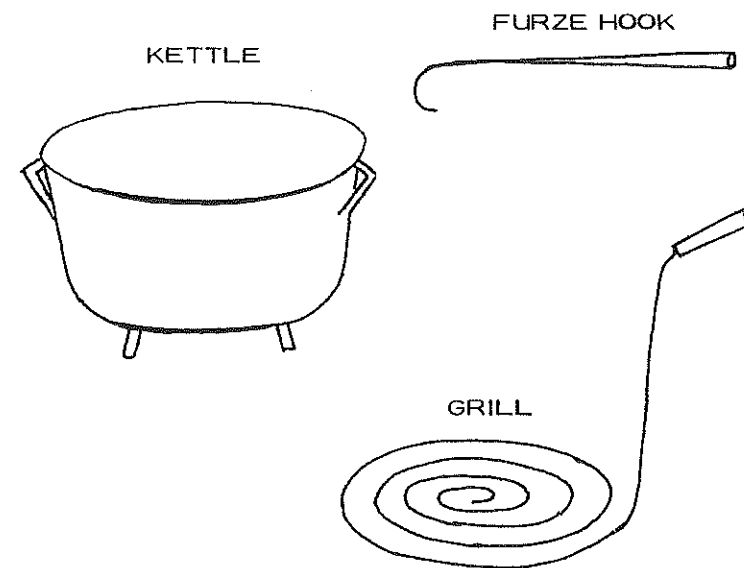
The first drawing is the large range at Tresithick

House, made by Terrill and Rogers, Redruth, who were advertising from 1873 to 1893. The second shows the small range at the Blacksmith's Cottage in Smithy Lane, Carnon Downs. Both are still in excellent condition.

The slab had three good points: (a) the heat passed over the oven, down the far side, underneath the oven and ash pan to a flue behind the ornamental ironwork, which could be unbolted and removed to sweep the chimney; dampers (D) regulated the draught; (b) by lifting off the oven door and releasing the four turnbuttons (T), the whole oven could be removed and the space cleaned; and (c) the oven could be taken to the blacksmith to be repaired when necessary.

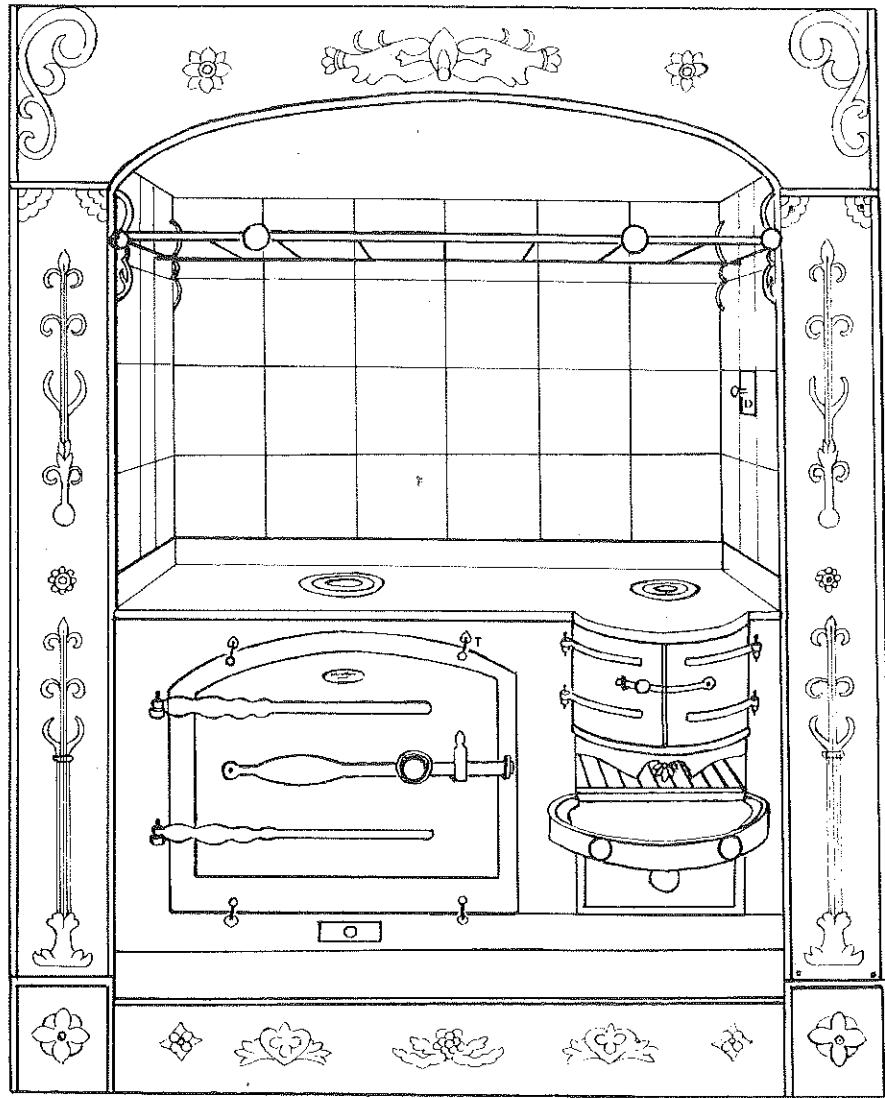
All the knobs, the front bar and supports of the airing rack are brass, the tiles round the large slab are secured by large brass screws. It was a weekly task to take the oven out, polish the brass and blacklead the ironwork.

There is a good collection of these stoves in the garden of a bungalow on Beacon Drive, St Agnes. Two are visible from the road and there are more in the back garden. Each maker had his own style of ornamentation.



# Cornish Range

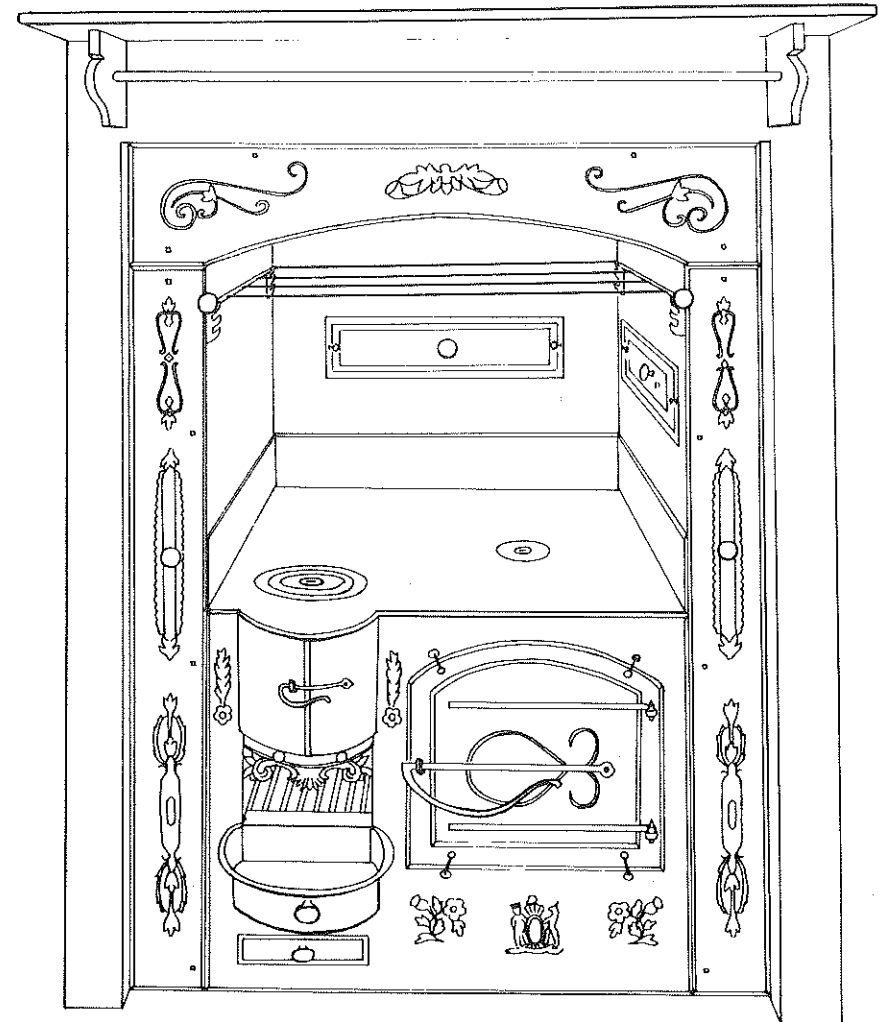
LARGE



1ft

# Cornish Range

SMALL



1ft