The can opener

Canned food was invented for the British Navy in 1813. Made of solid iron, the cans usually weighed more than the food they held!

The inventor, Peter Durand, was guilty of an incredible oversight. Though he figured out how to seal food into cans, he gave little thought to how to get it out again. Instructions read: “Cut round the top near the outer edge with a chisel and hammer.”

Only when thinner steel cans came into use in the 1860s could the can opener be invented. The first, devised by E. Warner of Connecticut, looked like a bent bayonet. Its large curved blade was driven into a can’s rim, then forcibly worked around its edge. Stranger yet, this first type of can opener never left the grocery store. A shop assistant had to open each can before it was taken away!

The modern can opener – with a cutting wheel that rolls around the rim – was invented by William Lyman of the United States in 1870. Sixty-one years later, in 1931, the electric can opener made its debut.