

# BRITISH CUISINE



British cuisine is often overlooked, partly because of its reputation as being meagre and basic (due to the diet adopted during the Wartime period and rationing, which the country became famous for), and because it has been heavily influenced by other cuisines (this relates to trading within the empire as well as increasing wealth and technology following the industrial revolution and war, which allowed families to travel abroad). Many of the characteristics of the cuisine do stem from these events, however other qualities developed over time from the seasonality and availability of certain crops, and the historical attitudes to mealtimes and eating.

## The country is known for:

- Roast meat and 'meat and two veg' style dinners - cows, game, and sheep, among other animals, are native to England, and so meat was readily available. Roasting was a popular method of cooking these meats, as was the case throughout much of Europe, while the 'meat and two veg' format was promoted in the war period, to encourage people to use vegetables to fill up their plate, as meat was heavily rationed.
- Hearty dinners, pies, stews - being a colder climate, warming dishes have always been popular, and hearty dinners come from the traditions of banquets, as well as families coming together after a day of work/labour.
- Stodgy puddings - these again relate to the colder climate, as well as people needing to fill up on carbohydrates, particularly during the war period.
- Meals based around carbohydrates - with meat being expensive (or rationed, as was the case during the war), people historically relied on carbohydrates to fill themselves up. The most common were potatoes - a plentiful crop - as well as gruel/porridge and bread (from oats and wheat; again, these were plentiful crops).
- Bready products - because bread has long-been a part of British food, and because of the emphasis on carbohydrates, many types and forms of bread find themselves in the cuisine - crumpets, scones, bread and butter pudding, bread pudding, sandwiches, butties, Welsh rarebit, raisin bread.
- Boiled greens and root vegetables - the types of vegetables grown in Britain, due to our climate, tend to be 'greens' and 'root veg'.
- Thyme, rosemary, coriander, garlic, mint - these are some of the spices and herbs introduced due to trading and conquering very early on in Britain's history, so became staples of the cuisine.
- Dried fruit as well as apples and berries - dried fruits were a big part of Ancient Roman cuisine, as fruits from the Middle East spread through Greece to Italy. Dehydrating fruit was one of the earliest forms of preservation. The Romans regarded dried fruit as exotic and fancy, and an example of wealth. The Romans are also thought to be one of the major 'deciders' of British cuisine, as they introduced most spices, crops, and animals, to the country.
- Chocolate - after the Spanish conquest of the Aztecs, chocolate was imported to Europe. The desire for chocolate created a thriving slave market, as between the early 17th and late 19th centuries the laborious and slow processing of the cacao bean was manual. England's colonisation of countries like Africa granted them easy access to the bean. Chocolate bars have become synonymous with the country after the industrial revolution and resultant mass production.
- Afternoon tea - this tradition came from the monarchy and aristocracy in the 19th century, but quickly spread among the general public as being an indication of high society and culture.
- Adapted Indian cuisine - the British empire colonised and therefore had strong trading links with India before most other countries, and therefore has had access to many Indian spices and been influenced by the country for a very long time. Originally this led to new dishes inspired by the food or utilising their ingredients and methods, but later on, when international cuisines became popular, existing Indian dishes were merely adapted to better suit the established British palate.



# The History:

Many traditional meals, like roasted/stewed meats, pies, boiled vegetables and broths, and bread and cheese, have ancient origins, with many ingredients and cooking methods introduced by the Ancient Romans. The 14th-century English cookbook, the *Forme of Cury*, contains recipes for these, and dates from the royal court of Richard II. However, British cooking has been influenced by foreign ingredients and cooking styles since the Middle Age (from the fifth to fifteenth century).

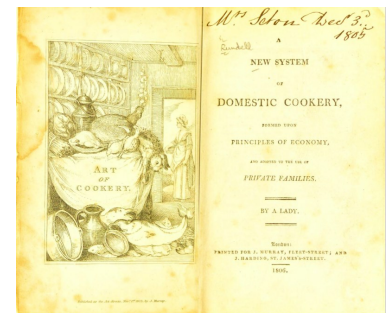
Medieval cuisine still relied on staples like cereal, with barley, oats, and rye being eaten by the poor, and wheat by the governing classes, in the form of bread, porridge, gruel, and pasta. Meat was more expensive and therefore more prestigious. Game, a form of meat acquired from hunting, was common only on the nobility's tables, while the most prevalent butcher's meats were pork, chicken, and other domestic fowl. Beef required a greater investment in land, so was slightly less common. Cod and herring were mainstays among the northern populations, and due to slow transportation, mainly featured as dried, salted, or smoked fish.

During the medieval period, a more refined cooking developed amongst the nobility. This used the most expensive ingredients, including certain meats but also exotic spices, wine, and sugar.

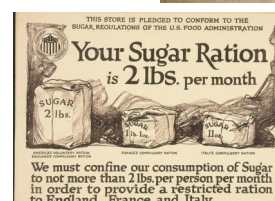
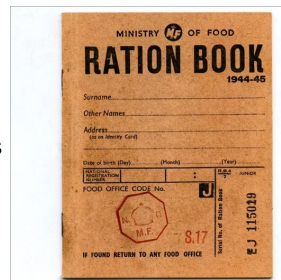


In the 16th century, printed cookery books arrived, and British tastes began to evolve more. Recipes emphasised a balance of sweet and sour, butter became an important ingredient for sauces, and herbs, which could be grown locally, started to replace spices as flavourings - herbs also meant lower classes could replicate the foods of higher society more easily. New foods, like tomatoes and potatoes, came from countries such as the Americas, which had only just been discovered. This trend - of becoming more influenced by growing agricultural and trading industries, of food culture moving down the classes, and of overall cuisine becoming more defined - continued throughout the 17th and 18th centuries. It was in the 17th century that curry also arrived, beginning as bowls of spicy sauce. The process of adapting Indian cooking continued for centuries. Anglo-Indian recipes could completely ignore Indian rules of diet, such as by using pork or beef. Some dishes, such as 'liver curry, with bacon' were simply ordinary recipes spiced up with ingredients such as curry powder. In other cases like kedgeree, Indian dishes were adapted to British tastes.

By the 1800s, British cooking had become systemised and was readily available by the middle classes. Authors had become household names; for example, Mrs Rundell's *A New System of Domestic Cookery*, 1806, had gone through sixty-seven editions by 1844, and Isabella Beeton's *Mrs Beeton's Book of Household Management*, 1861, sold nearly two million copies by 1868. Three of the major hot drinks popular in England, tea, coffee, and chocolate, originated from outside Europe and were already staple items by Victorian times. Chocolate bars were also developed and marketed - by three English Quaker-founded businesses, Joseph Fry's (1847), Rowntree's (1862), and Cadbury's (1868). Food in this period emphasised the power of the British empire and the growth of industry, and was not halted until the world wars. The first world war led to many new food products becoming available to the typical household, and a new focus on speed and ease. Kitchen servants with time to make custards and puddings were replaced with instant foods in jars, or powders that the housewife could quickly mix. American-style dry cereals began to challenge the porridge and bacon and eggs of the middle classes, and the bread and margarine of the poor. Wartime shipping shortages had sharply narrowed choice, but the 1920s saw many new kinds of fruit imported from around the world, along with better quality, packaging, and hygiene, aided by refrigerators and refrigerated ships. The second world war also had great impact, because it involved the system of rationing. Rationing left families with few rich ingredients, little protein, less food in general - all of which gave rise to even more emphasis on produce that could be grown locally, and to carbohydrate heavy, stodgy foods.



Later in the 20th century, new technology and rising disposable incomes meant travel became possible for the general public, and new forms of media expanded people's interests in different countries and cultures. Capitalism and consumerism, as well as more women working (since the war), meant convenience foods also became more popular, over homecooking. Dishes from Spain, Italy, and further afield, like China, were adopted. Indian and Chinese restaurants also became popular - restaurants that had originally only catered to their own ethnicities found their clientele diversifying. Chicken tikka masala was invented around 1971, and has become one of Britain's iconic dishes!

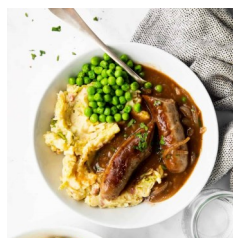


## Eating Culture:

In England, meals tend to be split into a breakfast in the early morning, a lunch sometime in the middle of the day and a dinner in the early evening. It is also popular to have a snack in the afternoon - or even afternoon tea - and biscuits with hot drinks over the day. Meals revolve around carbohydrates and have been shaped by the typical working day for individuals: breakfast is quick and simple to prepare, such as cereal or toast, and lunches are packable and handheld, for example sandwiches or pasties. Dinners are hot, cooked meals, and are a time for families to come together (hence they may be more extravagant, with a dessert). People tend to sit together for the evening meal, which can be referred to as 'dinner', 'tea', or 'supper'.

## Popular Dishes and Foods:

- **Porridge** - porridge is a hot cereal, made from oats boiled with water or milk. It is usually served for breakfast, with fruit for sweetness. It is one of the oldest dishes in British cuisine, and is associated with lower classes and being poor.
- **Full English** - this dish dates back as far as the 1300s, making it one of the longest standing traditional dishes in English history. It was an example of what the richest in society would have for breakfast, as it was high in protein, and had to be cooked (by servants). A full English usually involves toast or fried bread, baked beans, tomato, mushrooms, fried or sausages, and black pudding, as well as, sometimes, a potato product like hash browns or chips.
- **Crumpets** - crumpets are a spongy, holey bread product, served toasted with lots of butter, for breakfast or as a snack.
- **Sandwiches** - the sandwich was invented in Britain, and is popular because it is handheld and easy to pack, and involves the ever-popular-in-Britain staple, bread. Common fillings include prawn mayonnaise, egg mayonnaise, cheese and pickle, tuna mayonnaise, smoked salmon and cream cheese, and coronation chicken. Crisp sandwiches are also very popular in Britain, and involve some form of crisps being placed in between buttered bread, sometimes with cheese or meat slices in too.
- **Fish and Chips** - this meal is an example of fusion cuisine - the British combined the fish they had available with international methods of cooking. It is a common takeaway food and consists of battered white fish and chips, normally alongside (mushy) peas, and sometimes curry sauce or tartare sauce (these two both borrowed from other countries!). Another popular takeaway item usually served at fish and chip restaurants is the chip butty - chips inside a white bread roll!
- **Roast Dinners** - roast dinners typically consist of roast meat, such as chicken, turkey, or duck, with roast potatoes, greens and root vegetables, gravy, and sometimes also Yorkshire puddings (which, despite their name, are savoury). They are one of the most iconic and oldest hot meals, but are now most common for Sunday lunch.
- **Bangers and Mash** - a hot meal consisting of sausages with mashed potato.
- **Toad in the Hole** - another hot meal, this involves sausages cooked inside a large Yorkshire pudding.
- **Sticky Toffee Pudding, Jam Roly Poly, Bread and Butter Pudding, Spotted Dick, Apple Crumble** - these are some examples of hearty, traditional British desserts, which are very carby, heavy and stodgy (apart from crumble, all are based on sponges). They were designed to fill people up, and are either steamed or baked. Many of them involve dried fruit, or fruit grown in the country. They are usually served hot with custard, cream, or ice cream.



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- **Trifle, Custard, Eton Mess** - these are also traditional desserts, but were developed by the nobility, and are therefore less filling. They often are inspired by other cuisines. Trifle consists of layers of whipped cream, custard, sponge, and jam or fruits in syrup. Eton Mess is a dessert made of crushed meringue, berries, and whipped cream. Custard, a common dessert accompaniment, is also served as a dessert on it's own, with stewed fruit or bananas.



- **Jam and Cream Scones, Fairy Cakes, and Afternoon Tea** - these more dainty baked foods have become associated with afternoon tea (which, in turn, is associated with the monarchy). Afternoon tea was developed as a 'light bite' and because it was associated with nobility, was characterized by being very refined, and 'dainty'. Many afternoon tea treats are therefore very small and designed to look very cute—for example fondant fancies, Battenberg cake, etc.



- **Sausage Rolls and Pasties** - these are examples of hearty, heavy, meat-based foods that could fill people up, and also be eaten on-the-go by manual workers.



- **Biscuits and Chocolate** - biscuits and cakes have become associated with Britain because of the tradition of afternoon tea and the culture of snacking, while chocolate stems from the popular industry leaders from England, like Cadbury. Some of the most popular biscuits are digestives, hobnobs, custard creams, bourbons, and rich teas.



- **Baked Beans on Toast** - combining two different popular British foods, this dish is often eaten for lunch or as a light dinner, and consists of tinned baked beans in tomato sauce, on top of toasted bread. It is sometimes topped with grated cheese.

- **Mince Pies, Raisin Toast, Malt Loaf, Hot Cross Buns**

- these are all examples of sweet treats involving Britain's love of dried fruit and their love of dense, heavy desserts and snacks. Mince pies are common at Christmas and are a small sweet pastry filled with 'mincemeat', which is a mixture of alcohol-soaked dried fruit and nuts, and are eaten as a snack or dessert, while raisin toast and hot cross buns are examples of bread infused with raisins. Malt loaf is a sticky, dense 'bread' made from raisins and malt extract, and can be served buttered, like raisin toast/hot cross buns, or heated with custard, like a dessert.



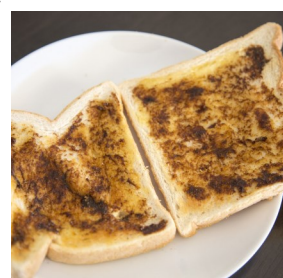
- **Steak and Kidney Pie, Shepherds Pie, Fish Pie** - potato and pastry based pies have long been a part of British cuisine. These three pies utilise ingredients that have been grown or farmed in Britain since the beginnings of its cooking culture, such as cod and beef or lamb mince.



- **Tikka Masala and Coronation Chicken** - these are Indian-inspired foods that became 'iconic' in the 1970s. Tikka Masala is a mild curry, while coronation chicken is a sandwich filling made from mayonnaise, curry spice, raisins, and cooked chicken pieces.



- **Marmite, HP Sauce, Pickle, Chutney** - these are sauces and spreads commonly associated with Britain. Marmite is a strong, salty, yeast extract, used to flavour sauces and pies but also spread on top of butter on toast and bread products. HP Sauce is a fruity tomato and tamarind extract based brown sauce, used in a similar way to ketchup to accompany many different meals. Pickles and chutneys are very traditional, and involve fruits and/or vegetables that have been cooked in vinegar, sugar, and/or spices, to produce a thick paste for serving with crackers or in sandwiches.



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