

England on a Plate

Some people say that the terrible quality of British food is what inspired us to found the British Empire. Is that fair? Let's try a tiny slice of British cooking and find out!

Paul Farrington-Douglas (UK)

The Full English Breakfast

Some see it as "Britain's great contribution to world cuisine" (*Evening Standard*). Others call it "a national disgrace" (*The Guardian*). These reactions may be extreme, but so is the meal.

People argue about exactly what should be included, but key options include fried eggs, fried bacon, fried sausages, fried black pudding (a kind of blood sausage), fried tomatoes, fried mushrooms and fried bread (or thickly buttered toast, for the health-conscious). A full English breakfast is certainly a hearty meal, not to say a heart attack on a plate. It's not a regular thing, though – for most people, it is a rare treat. It's especially good after a really hard night of partying. Serve, of course, with a big mug of English breakfast tea made with milk.



Potatoes Everywhere

The classic formula for a British main course is meat and two veg, meaning some kind of meat dish, some form of potato and one other vegetable (probably boiled to a soggy tastelessness). Potatoes come with almost every meal but in many forms. Boiled potatoes with butter. Jacket potatoes (baked in their skins). Sauteed potatoes (boiled, sliced, then fried in a pan). Roast potatoes. Mashed potatoes. Potato croquettes. Or, of course, chips.



A Trip to the Chippy

Fish and chips first became popular as street food in the 19th century, and like so much of British cuisine, it was originally invented by foreigners. The method of cooking the fish was probably brought over by Spanish and Portuguese Jews, while the way of making the chips was borrowed from the French and Belgians. Today it's a British favourite, but there are lots of regional variations. Down south, your fish 'n' chips come with salt and brown vinegar, ketchup or mayonnaise. Up north and in Wales, you might get curry sauce or gravy. You may or may not get mushy peas (cooked and mashed peas) on the side.

And that's just the start: chippies, as fish-and-chip shops are known, also sell other foods, and these, too, vary by region. In Wigan, in northwest England, you might get a pie barm (a meat pie in a bread bun), in the midlands you might order faggots (a kind of meatball), and in Cumbria, bordering Scotland, you might get a patty (minced beef and mashed potatoes covered in batter and fried). Then of course there's the chip butty (a bun filled with chips), ideally with scraps (leftover bits of fried batter from making the fish). Yum!



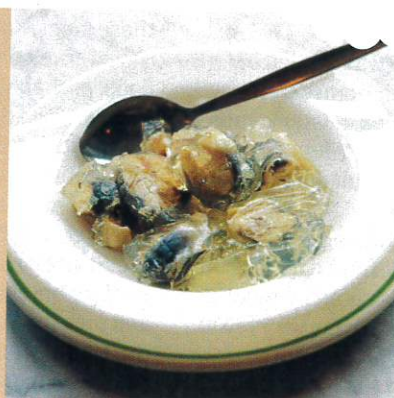
The Indian Takeaway

Indian takeaways are a British institution, started originally by Indian and Bangladeshi immigrants who came to the country in the 1970s. They traditionally serve versions of Indian cuisine adapted for British tastes. Notable among such British specialities are the vindaloo, an extremely spicy version of generic restaurant curry, and "Britain's national dish", chicken tikka masala: roasted marinated chicken chunks in spiced curry sauce.



Jellied Eels

This dish is made from chunks of eel boiled and then left to cool so the juices turn into a thick jelly, a bit like a fishy *tlačenka*. Does that sound yummy? Well, East Londoners used to think so, and until the late 20th century, they crowded into special "eel, pie and mash houses" to eat them. These days it's quite hard to find this classic dish, and for good reason. Eels used to be one of the most common foods in Britain, and they were eaten in such gigantic numbers that it caused a huge collapse of the eel population. The European eel is now a critically endangered species.



Coronation Quiche

When Queen Elizabeth was crowned in 1954, the royal household shared a new recipe to celebrate: coronation chicken, a salad of chicken in a spiced mayonnaise sauce. For the coronation of King Charles earlier this year, the royal chef created the "coronation quiche", made with spinach, broad beans and fresh tarragon. Some nationalists were outraged that the dish for the coronation of a British monarch should be a quiche. It's *French*! Others found the recipe choice amusing for different reasons: quiche has a very boring, dated, conservative image, just like Charles himself.

Crisp Sarnies

No one does sandwiches – or "sarnies" – like the Brits. They're even named after a Brit, the fourth Earl of Sandwich, who used to order them during long nights of drinking and gambling. Of course, today you can get great sandwiches in any country in the world. But who other than the British would put *crisps* in a sandwich? It's this kind of culinary genius that makes British cuisine truly great. The modern crisp sarnie has an older ancestor in the "toast sandwich". This is a thin slice of toast with salt and pepper served between two slices of bread, and it was described in Britain's most famous cookbook, *Mrs. Beeton's Book of Household Management*, in 1861.



TASK Which One?

According to the article, which of the foods...

- ... contributed to an environmental disaster?

- ... is a round piece of bread full of chips?

- ... divides people's opinions radically?

- ... is an unusual British variety of an internationally popular food? _____
- ... made some people angry? _____
- ... borrowed recipes from several European sources?

- ... is very filling? _____
- ... is not widely sold anymore? _____

DO-IT-YOURSELF GLOSSARY

In the article, find words that mean:

- embarrassment: _____
- (of a meal) big and filling: _____
- unpleasantly wet and soft: _____
- a ball-shaped piece of mashed potato covered in breadcrumbs and fried: _____
- important, deserving attention: _____
- a long thin snake-like fish: _____
- a plant with narrow leaves that have a strong taste, used as a herb: _____
- old-fashioned: _____

S Solutions in the TF and next month on the Bridge website