



Taste: The Story of Britain Through Its Cooking

Kate Colquhoun

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A colorful social history of Britain chronicles the culinary evolution of its food, tracing the development of both aristocratic tastes and street food across the country; looking at kitchens, ingredients, equipment, and preparation techniques from pre-Ro

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Wendy says

A bit more than I'd planned on , but interesting nonetheless.

I picked it up for a refresher on TudorBethan and to fill in some detail on the Victorians, but I ended up reading most of it anyway. I found the section on rationing and the World Wars to be fascinatingly new.

It can be a bit "British" for American readers. I'm a Anglophile, but the author lost me for a bit while waxing rhapsodic over the scent of a freshly-boiled pudding and I'm still not entirely sure what Salad Cream is. The rise and fall of the vegetable and the increasing and decreasing fondness for "things in tins" was interesting to watch over the long haul.

The Modern (post 1950) section seemed a bit rushed, and spent a lot of time referencing well-known cookbooks and TV presenters that were utterly unfamiliar to me. But the more "historical" sections were both detailed and readable.

Chrys says

A thoroughly diverting trawl through the history of Britain through food. The waves of invaders adding their spices, dishes and methods, the weird food fads, what the people of the time wrote about food and how it was prepared and eaten. Although chapters sometimes have the tendency to launch into long lists of food (sometimes hunger inducing sometimes definitely not) it's fascinating to see the evolution of what we have available to satisfy our appetites after centuries of development.

Sherry Mackay says

Very informative book. I enjoyed lots of it but struggled with the later chapters. It just didn't seem as interesting as the medieval ones for instance. There are many fascinating facts and stories about food and eating habits of the English and French (since they were intertwined). It is a great book just for delving into now and then if you can't take the time to read it all at once. It was amazing to find out that modern eating habits of 3 separate courses is a fairly modern invention. Also that sweets at the end of a meal is a modern idea too. Everything used to be chucked on the table at once and you ate whatever was in front of you. Too bad if you wanted a dish that was down the other end of the table! I think I prefer the modern way so I get a bit of everything. Some readers have bagged the food history book by Clarissa Dickson-wright but I liked both of these books, and would recommend clarissa's if you enjoyed this one.

Johanne says

Enjoyable look at the changing nature of arguably English rather than British cooking. Some of the areas I'd never considered - the shift from sweet and fruit based "savoury" dishes, the evolution of formal dining and of course the differentiation of male chefs versus (largely) female cooks. Recommended for anyone with an interest in food and cooking

Marie Ashton says

I found this fascinating and regularly tired my husband with various facts. It's amazing how much of what we have thought of as new in recent years were eaten by others in Roman and Medieval times. Agree with other comments that it does trail off a bit at the end and loses the same level of momentum.

Deodand says

Like others who read this book, I occasionally had to close it and go get something to eat. There are some tasty-sound descriptions of food going back to British prehistory. Occasionally the book devolves into lists of types of food but Colquhoun does her best to keep it interesting. You can tell she enjoyed writing about the high-class Medieval tables of infamy with their double-digit courses.

I was surprised to learn how old are some of the everyday dishes we eat.

caitlin says

Any book that offers a recipe for flamingo...

Wealththeow says

An absolutely fantastic history of food in England, beginning in the Stone Age up through the ages as the British learned to cook and refine ingredients.

Janine Skeoch says

A very interesting read if you love food and have an interest in the origins of cookery. I agree the first part was more fascinating than some of the later chapters. I can't believe some of the food that was consumed, and how elaborately it was presented. As for hygiene and safe cooking practices right up to relatively modern days ... well, many people must have become mighty sick, and possibly died! So much of the food, particularly varieties of "meat", we would never, ever, consider eating today.

So, all in all, an enjoyable read, although I did tend to skip over certain parts as some of it was quite repetitive. Would have been nice if there were more pictures too!

Becka says

Absolutely wonderful read for Anglophiles and foodies. It's a considered a reference book, so it may prove too dense for some readers, but it was worth it. It would help to already be familiar with some British dishes, as the author doesn't always explain what they are. Also, I couldn't read more than 10 pages or so without getting hungry - so bedtime reading may not be favorable.

Kevin says

I am no chef. I most certainly do not read cookery books. But I found this most interesting. Perhaps, because I have not read anything like this before it captured my attention. If you read this, then read it alongside: ENGLSIH SOCIAL HISTORY by G.M. Trevelyan. How we lived coupled with what we eat, fantastic.

Jennifer says

This is an English book written for an English audience. I'll admit that I didn't know many of the dishes and names mentioned, and can only assume that a typical Brit (or an Anglophile) would.

I found many surprises in here, one of which was how long ago "traditional" English cooking seemed to have ceased being popular, at least in the cities. I was also astonished, and saddened, at the plight of the poor during the 19th and early 20th centuries, and how little was done about their lack of sustenance.

Jake Goretzki says

Well researched and with enough anecdote to feel like decent, leisurely social history. Can still feel rather 'one damn thing after another' (from sweet and savoury to savoury; from many ingredients to few ingredients; from heavy sauces to light sauces; from X court chef to Y).

I would have liked a bit more weight on the twentieth century (though nice to see Abigail's Party in there) - any account surely needs to mention George Bowling eating a sausage in 'Coming Up For Air'.

But enjoyable. NB I still don't understand why anyone can eat 'Sunday Roast' (which is frankly an abomination).

Scott Johnson says

This was very enjoyable, but I did have one problem: Pages that were nothing but endless lists of names of

foods. I get what the author was going for, but after the 12th royal feast being described in minute detail, it gets really tiring. I feel like you could get your point across just as well without listing every single one of the 52 dishes included in the first course of this one feast.

Trim the fat and this is a fine book. I particularly liked that, unlike most books, it looked at both what the wealthy and the poor ate simultaneously and how food fashion trickled down between classes. But it really needs those enormous lists gutted; I can say with confidence that the book would lose nothing because after a while I literally just skipped those passages and my enjoyment (and understanding) of the book was not impacted at all.

CharlotteReads says

Detailed and fascinating look at history, the history of food and culture.

Kara says

An excellent microhistory, using England's (surprisingly) changing menu to explore its history.

From Neolithic farmers' proto-breads to today's on-the-go worker's take-out curry, England has seen the food on the table constantly evolving with new inventions and new imports.

We see here how the history of food is as much the history of immigration and out-of-the-box thinking as much as it is about what is available in the backyard, so to speak.

Bill says

This book is an historical undertaking tracing the history of British cooking from the Neolithic to the present. Through this book I learned that food changes every few generations. The lost dishes of my youth are part of the historical cycle of constantly changing tastes and new ideas as to what constitutes a good meal. If you are an American as I am you may need a dictionary as the book is filled with Briticisms especially as to defining what is on the author's table. Very readable and very enjoyable.

Jennifer says

the beginning part was fascinating - reading about feasts that included dolphin and whale and the huge variety of insane food that was eaten in the middle ages. and i never really realized just how extensive rationing was during wwII. but the more recent the history, the less interesting and it felt as though the author herself was less interested in the modern chapters. which is understandable. Stuart-era dining habits are cooler than those of the 1970s.

Shawn Thrasher says

This was a gift, and ended up being a fortuitous one. Not necessarily something I would have picked up on my own, but I found it quite good.

Gillian says

I keep coming back to this book whenever I want something really interesting and thought-provoking to read! It's quite a hefty read but I've still managed it several times and would highly recommend it to any food/cookery geeks as it gives surprising insight into social history through the food that we ate and the methods in which we prepared it. Certainly some food for thought anyway (muahaha!).
