

= Welsh cuisine =

Welsh cuisine encompasses the cooking traditions and practices of the country of Wales and the Welsh people . Whilst there are a large number of dishes that can be considered Welsh due to their ingredients and / or history , dishes such as cawl , Welsh rarebit , laverbread , Welsh cakes , bara brith and the Glamorgan sausage have all been regarded as symbols of Welsh food . There is some variation in dishes around Wales , but the most pronounced difference is in the Gower Peninsula , an isolated rural area which was heavily influenced by Somerset and Devon . There the dishes created included whitepot and often incorporated pumpkin .

While Wales has imported throughout the centuries some culinary practices and dishes from its British neighbors , uniquely Welsh cuisine grew largely from the lives of the Welsh working folk , such as farmers , shepherds , and peasants , as these Welsh working people tended to be more isolated from outside culinary influences . Welsh common folk were instead influenced by the food that they could produce based on what little ingredients they could produce or afford , all while having little or no contact with neighboring English cuisine and English society . Welsh Celts and their more recent Welsh descendants originally practiced transhumance , moving their cattle to higher elevations in the summer and back to their home base in the winter . Once they settled to homesteads , a family would have generally eaten meat from a pig primarily , keeping a cow for dairy products . Vegetables beyond cabbages and leeks were rare .

In Wales , beef and dairy cattle are raised widely . Sheep farming , however , is extensive in the country , and lamb is the meat traditionally associated with Wales . Other important produce includes seafood ? especially close to the coast , where fishing culture is strong and fisheries are common . This is exemplified by the use of cockles and laverbread in Welsh cuisine . The leek , the country 's national vegetable , is also used frequently in Welsh cuisine . Since the 1970s , the rise of the gastropub and high @-@ end restaurants has given Wales five Michelin @-@ starred restaurants .

= = History = =

There are few written records of traditional Welsh foods ; recipes were instead held within families and passed down orally between the women of the family . The lack of records was highlighted by Mati Thomas in 1928 , who made a unique collection of 18th century " Welsh Culinary Recipes " as an award winning Eisteddfod entry .

Those with the skills and inclination to write Welsh recipes , the upper classes , conformed to English styles and therefore would not have run their houses with traditional Welsh cuisine . Upper @-@ class households would take on any English fashions , even adopting English names . The traditional cookery of Wales originates from the daily meals of peasant folk , unlike other cultures where meals often started in the kitchens of the gentry and would be adapted .

Historically the King of the Welsh people would travel , with his court , in a circuit , demanding tribute in the form of food from communities they visited as they went . The tribute was codified in the Laws of Hywel Dda , showing that people lived on beer , bread , meat and dairy products , with few vegetables beyond cabbages and leeks . The laws show how much value was put on different parts of Welsh life at the time , for example that wealth was measured in cattle ; they also show that the court included hunters , who would be restricted to seasonal hunting sessions .

Towards the start of the 11th century , Welsh society started to build settlements . Food would be cooked in a single cauldron over an open fire on the floor , it would likely be reheated and topped up with fresh ingredients over a number of days . Some dishes could be cooked on a bakestone , a flat stone which could be placed above a fire to heat it evenly .

Gerald of Wales , chaplain to Henry II , wrote after an 1188 tour of Wales , " The whole population lives almost entirely on oats and the produce of their herds , milk , cheeses and butter . You must not expect a variety of dishes from a Welsh kitchen , and there are no highly @-@ seasoned titbits to whet your appetite . " The medieval Welsh used thyme , savory , and mint in the kitchen , but in general herbs were much more likely to be used for medicinal purposes than culinary ones .

Towards the end of the 18th century , Welsh land owners divided up the land to allow for tenant @-@ based farming . Each small holding would include vegetable crops , as well as a cow , pigs and a few chickens . The 18th and 19th centuries were a time of unrest for the Welsh people . The Welsh food riots began in 1740 , when colliers blamed the lack of food on problems in the supply , and continued throughout Wales as a whole . The worst riots happened in the 1790s after a grain shortage , which coincided with political upheaval in the form of forced military service and high taxes on the roads , leaving farmers unable to make a profit . As a result of riots by colliers in the mid 1790s , magistrates in Glamorgan sold the rioters corn at a reduced price . At the same time they also requested military assistance from the government to stop further rioting . Due to the close @-@ knit nature of the poor communities , and the slightly higher status of the farmers above the labourers , the rioters generally blamed the farmers and corn merchants , rather than the gentry .

The majority of food riots had ended by 1801 , and there were certain political undertones to the actions , though lack of leadership meant that little came of it . By the 1870s , 60 % of Wales was owned by 570 families , most of whom did no farming . Instead , they employed workers , who were forced to vote Tory or lose their jobs .

Around the end of the 19th century , the increase in coal mining and steel works around Wales led to the immigration of Italian workers . The workers brought families who integrated their culture into Welsh society , bringing with them Italian ice cream and Italian cafes , now a staple of Welsh society .

In the 1960s , isolated communities were unable to access produce that the majority of Britain would such as peppers or aubergines . Artisan Welsh produce was limited or non @-@ existent , farms rarely made their own cheese , and Welsh wine was of poor quality . By the 1990s , historical Welsh foods were going through a revival . Farmers ' markets became more popular , Welsh organic vegetables and farm @-@ made cheese started to appear in supermarkets . Other modern Welsh characteristics are more subtle , such as supermarkets offering salty butters and laverbread or butchers labelling beef skirt as ' cawl meat ' .

Restaurants are promoting the quality of Welsh ingredients , encouraging people to purchase Welsh produce and creating new dishes using them . This has meant that Welsh products can find their way into the higher @-@ priced delicatessens of London or North America . However , the regular diet of Welsh people has been more influenced by India , China and America . The most popular dish is chicken tikka masala , followed by burgers or chow mein . As a result of the popularity of these sorts of foods , Wales has the highest fat consumption in Britain , and therefore the highest levels of obesity .

= = Regional variations = =

There are some variations in the foods that are eaten around the different areas of Wales . These variations trace their roots back to medieval cooking . Ingredients were historically limited by what could be grown ; the wetter climate in highland areas meant that crops were restricted to oats , whilst the more fertile lowland areas allowed the growth of barley or wheat . Coastal inhabitants were more likely to include seafood or seaweed in their meals , whilst those living inland would supplement their farmed cereals with the seeds of land weeds to ensure there was enough to eat .

The invasions of the Romans and Normans also had an effect on the fertile areas which were conquered . The people there learned more " sophisticated eating habits " . Conversely those who remained in wilder areas kept the traditional approaches to cooking ; tools such as the pot crane continued to be used as late as the 20th century .

The only region that has a significant difference from the rest of Wales is the Gower peninsula , whose lack of land transport links left it isolated . Instead it was strongly influenced by Somerset and Devon on the other side of the Bristol Channel . Dishes such as whitepot and ingredients such as pumpkin , rare elsewhere in Wales , became commonplace in Gower .

= = Produce = =

Welsh food can be better traced through the history of its foodstuffs than through the dishes themselves .

= = = Meat and fish = = =

There are a number of local Welsh breeds of cow , including the Welsh Black , a breed which dates back to at least 1874 . Cattle farming accounts for the majority of agricultural output in Wales ? in 1998 the production of beef contributed 23 % of Welsh agricultural output , whilst in 2002 25 % of agricultural output was in the production of dairy products . Welsh beef has a European Union Protected Geographical Indicator , so it must be wholly reared and slaughtered in Wales .

Pigs were the primary meat eaten by early Welsh folk , which could be preserved easily by salting . By 1700 , there were a number of different Welsh breeds of pig , with long snouts and thin backs , generally light coloured , but some were dark or spotted . Today , pigs in Wales are either farmed intensively , using the white Welsh pig or Landrace pig , or extensively , where Saddleback pig , Welsh pig or crossbreeds are farmed .

The Welsh uplands were most suited to grazing animals such as sheep and goats , and the animals became associated with Wales . Sheep @-@ farming on a large scale was introduced by Cistercian monks , largely for wool , but also for meat . By the start of the 16th century Welsh mutton was popular in the rest of the UK . Once modern synthetic fibres became more popular than wool , Welsh sheep were raised almost exclusively for meat . Towards the end of the 20th century , there were more than 11 million sheep in Wales . The most popular breed of sheep is the Welsh Mountain sheep which is notably smaller than other breeds but better @-@ suited to the Welsh landscape and only rears one lamb , rather than the lowland breeds which rear two or more ; the mountain sheep are regarded as having more flavoursome meat . Welsh farmers have started using scientific methods , such as artificial insemination or using ultrasound to scan a sheep 's depth of fat , to improve the quality of their meat .

Coastal areas of Wales , and those near rivers , produce many different forms of fish and shellfish . Traditional fishing methods , such as wade netting for salmon , remained in place for 2 @,@ 000 years . Welsh coracles , simple boats made of a willow frame and covered in animal hides , were noted by Romans and were still in use in the 20th century . Once landed , fish would generally be wind @-@ dried and smoked , or cured with salt .

Herring , a fish which takes well to salting , became a well established catch ; the busiest harbour was Aberystwyth , which reportedly took up to 1 @,@ 000 barrels of herring in a single night in 1724 . Many other villages also fished for herring , generally between late August and December . Herring , along with mackerel , trout , salmon and sea trout , were the main fishes found in Welsh cuisine . Salmon was abundant and therefore a staple for the poor . Trout , which would dry out quickly when cooked , would be wrapped in leek leaves for cooking , or covered in bacon or oatmeal . Many fish would be served with fennel , which grew wild in abundance in Wales .

Lobster fishing was done on a small scale especially in Cardigan Bay , but was reserved almost exclusively for export . Welsh fisherman would be more likely to eat the less profitable crabs . Cockles have been harvested since Roman times and are still harvested in a traditional manner with a hand rake and scraper . Cockle picking still happens in the Gower peninsula , but due to the difficulty in getting licences and reduced yield , villages near the Carmarthen Bay no longer gather them .

= = = Dairy products = = =

As cattle were the basis of Celtic wealth , butter and cheese were generally made from cows ' milk . The Celts were amongst the earliest producers of butter in Britain , and for hundreds of years after the Romans left the country butter was the primary cooking medium and basis for sauces . Salt was an important ingredient in Welsh butter , but also in early Welsh cheeses , which would sit in brine during the cheesemaking process .

The Welsh were also early adopters of roasting cheese . An early incarnation of Welsh rarebit was

being made in medieval times , and by the middle of the 15th century Rarebit was considered a national dish . The acid soil of Wales meant that the milk produced by their cattle created a soft cheese , which was not as good for roasting , so Welsh people would trade for harder cheeses such as Cheddar .

The best known Welsh cheese is Caerphilly , named in 1831 but made long before that . Originally a method for storing excess milk until it could be brought to market , it was a moist cheese that would not last very long . Production of the cheese was halted due to milk rationing after World War II , although it was still made in England . There , the cheese was produced very quickly and sold early in its maturation process , creating a dryer cheese . In the 1970s , production of Caerphilly returned to Wales and over the following few decades a variety of new cheeses have also been produced in Wales .

= = = Cereals = = =

As far back as the Iron Age , Welsh folk were using wild cereals to create a coarse bread . By the time the Romans invaded , Celtic skills with bread had progressed to the point that white or brown breads could be produced . The Roman invasion led to many Welsh people moving to the less hospitable uplands , where the only cereal crops which could be grown were oats , barley and rye . Oat and barley breads were the main breads eaten in Wales up until the 19th century , with rye bread created for medicinal purposes . Oats were used to bulk out meat or meat and vegetable stews , also known as pottage .

The Welsh also created a dish called Llymru , finely ground oatmeal soaked in water for a long time before boiling until it solidified . This blancmange styled dish became so popular outside Wales that it got a new name , flummery , as the English couldn't pronounce the original . A similar dish , sucan , was made with less finely ground oatmeal , making a coarser product .

= = = Vegetables = = =

Celtic law made specific provision with regards to cabbages and leeks , stating that they should be enclosed by fences for protection against wandering cattle . The two green vegetables were the only ones mentioned specifically in the laws , though uncultivated plants were still likely to be used in their cooking . The leek went on to be so important to Welsh cuisine ? found in many symbolic dishes including cawl and Glamorgan sausage ? that it became the country 's national vegetable .

Potatoes were slow to be adopted amongst Welsh folk , despite being introduced to the UK in the 16th century ; only in the early 18th century did they become a Welsh staple , due to grain failures . Once the potato did become a staple , it was quickly found in Welsh dishes such as cawl , and traditions grew around their use . One tradition , which was still in place at the start of World War II , was that villagers could plant an 80 @-@ yard (73 @-@ metre) row of potatoes in a neighbouring farmer 's field for each labourer the household could provide at the time of harvest .

= = Welsh dishes = =

Whilst there are a large number of dishes that can be considered Welsh due to their ingredients , there are some which are quintessentially Welsh . Dishes such as cawl , Welsh rarebit , laverbread , Welsh cakes , bara brith (literally " speckled bread ") or the Glamorgan sausage have all been regarded as symbols of Welsh food .

Cawl , pronounced in a similar way to the English word " cowl " , can be regarded as Wales ' national dish . Dating back to the 11th century , originally it was a simple broth of meat (most likely bacon) and vegetables , it could be cooked slowly over the course of the day whilst the family was out working the fields . It could be made in stages , over a number of days , first by making a meat stock , then by adding the vegetables on the following day . Once cooked , the fat could be skimmed from the top of the pot , then it would be served as two separate dishes , first as a soup , then as a stew . Leftovers could be topped up with fresh vegetables , sometimes over the course of weeks .

During the 18th and 19th centuries , the amount of meat used in the broth was minimal ; instead it was bulked out with potatoes . Today , cawl would be much more likely to include beef or lamb for the meat , and may be served with plain oatmeal dumplings or currant dumplings known as trollys . Traditionally cawl would be eaten with a " specially @-@ carved wooden spoon " and eaten from a wooden bowl .

The predilection of the Welsh for roasted cheese led to the dish of Welsh rarebit , or Welsh rabbit , seasoned melted cheese poured over toasted bread . The cheese would need to be a harder one , such as cheddar or similar . Referred to as Welsh rabbit as early as 1725 , the name is not similar to the Welsh term caws pobi . Welsh folk rarely ate rabbit due to the cost and as land owners would not allow rabbit hunting , so the term is more likely a slur on the Welsh . The name evolved from rabbit to rarebit , possibly to remove the slur from Welsh cuisine or due to simple reinterpretation of the word to make menus more pleasant .

Laverbread , or Bara Lawr , is a Welsh speciality . It is made by cooking porphyra seaweed slowly over the course of up to ten hours until it becomes a puree known as laver . The seaweed can also be cooked with oatmeal to make laverbread . It can be served with bacon and cockles as a breakfast dish , or fried in to small patties . Today , laverbread is commercially produced by washing in water , cooking for about 5 hours before chopping , salting and packaging .

The Glamorgan sausage is a Welsh vegetarian sausage . It contains no meat or skin , instead it is made with cheese , generally Caerphilly , but sometimes cheddar , along with leek or spring onion . This mixture is then coated in breadcrumbs and rolled into a sausage shape before cooking . Glamorgan sausages date back to at least the early 19th century , at which point the sausages would have contained pork fat .

Welsh cakes , or pice ar y maen meaning " cakes on the stone " , are small round spiced cakes , traditionally cooked on a bakestone , but more recently on a griddle . Once cooked , they can be eaten hot or cold , on their own or topped either with sugar or butter . The dough which is mixed with raisins , sultanas and sometimes currants , is similar to shortbread , meaning they can have the consistency of biscuits when cooked on the griddle , and slightly more like a cake when cooked in the oven .

Bara brith is a fruit loaf originating from rural Wales , where they used a mortar and pestle to grind the fresh sweet spices . Historically it was made with yeast and butter , though recently it is likely to be made with bicarbonate of soda and margarine . The fruit included would be dried raisins , currants and candied peel , which would be soaked in cold tea before cooking . Generally served sliced with butter during afternoon tea , it is often known as Welsh tea bread . Bara Brith translates to " speckled bread " , but it is also known as teisen dorth in South Wales , where sultanas are included in the recipe , or as torta negra when Welsh settlers brought it to Argentina .

= = Beverages = =

Wine and beer , especially of the home @-@ made varieties , were central to socialising in Wales , as they were in England . This remained the case even when tea gained popularity in England , supplanting the home @-@ made alcohol . Beer is now the national drink of Wales , although Welsh beers never gained the status of other British beers , such as stout or English ales . This was in part due to the breweries keeping promotion of their products to a minimum so as not to upset the temperance movement in Wales .

The temperance movement remained a strong influence though , and when new breweries were set up , the outcry led to the Welsh Sunday Closing Act in 1881 , an act that forced the closure of public houses in Wales on a Sunday . Wales ' passion for beer remained ; the Wrexham Lager Beer Company opened in 1881 , as the first lager producer in Britain . The Felinfoel Brewery made a deal with the local tin works and became the first brewery in Europe to put beer in cans .

The Welsh also have a history of producing whisky , in a similar manner to other Celtic people such as the Irish or Scottish but on a smaller scale . Distillation began for commercial purposes before 1750 , by families who went on to emigrate to America and help found the Kentucky Whiskey industry . Always a niche industry , by the late 19th century , the main whisky production in Wales

was at Frongoch near Bala , Gwynedd . The distillery was bought by Scottish whisky companies and closed in 1910 when they were attempting to establish brands in England . In 1998 the Welsh Whisky Company , now known as Penderyn , was formed and whisky production began at Penderyn , Rhondda Cynon Taf in 2000 . Penderyn single malt whisky was the first whisky commercially produced in Wales for a century and went on sale in 2004 . The company also produces Merlyn Cream Liqueur , Five Vodka and Brecon Gin .

Welsh vineyards were first planted by Romans , but in the 1970s , modern vineyards were planted in South Wales with the intention of creating Welsh wine . Despite a slow start , by 2005 Wales had 20 vineyards , producing 100 @, @ 000 bottles a year , primarily white wines , but also a few reds . According to the Wine Standards Board , by September 2015 , there were 22 operational vineyards in Wales. and there were almost 40 hectares (99 acres) of vines planted in Wales .

By 2005 the Welsh bottled water industry was worth as much as £ 100m . Popular brands include Brecon Carreg , T? Nant , Princes Gate and Pant Du .

= = Eating out = =

The number of restaurants in Wales has significantly increased since the 1960s , when the country had very few notable places to eat out . Today , Wales is no longer considered a " gastronomic desert " ; as of 2016 , it has five Michelin starred restaurants and other award systems such as TripAdvisor and the AA have included Welsh restaurants in their lists . The most significant increase in restaurants has been at the high end , but there has been growth and improvement in quality across the whole range of Welsh eateries .

Many Welsh restaurants attempt to showcase their " Welshness " , but few include historic Welsh dishes besides cawl . Instead , they showcase their Welsh ingredients , creating new dishes from them . There has also been a rise in Asian cuisine in Wales , especially that of Indian , Chinese , Thai , Indonesian and Japanese , with a preference for spicier foods . Finally there has been a significant rise in " gastropubs " , as there has around the United Kingdom , with the first in the country credited as the The Walnut Tree in Llanddewi Skirrid .