

IN SEARCH OF GOOD ENGLISH FOOD

How come it is so difficult to find English food in England? In Greece you eat Greek food, in France French food, in Italy Italian food, but in England, in any High street in the land, it is easier to find Indian and Chinese restaurants than English ones. In London you can eat Thai, Portuguese, Turkish, Lebanese, Japanese, Russian, Polish, Swiss, Swedish, Spanish and Italian-but where are the English restaurants?

It is not only in restaurants that foreign dishes are replacing traditional British food. In every supermarket, sales of pasta, pizza and poppadoms are booming. Why has this happened? What is wrong with the cooks of Britain that they prefer cooking pasta to potatoes? Why do the British choose to eat lasagna instead of shepherd`s pie? Why do they now like cooking in wine and olive oil? But perhaps it is a good thing. After all, this is the end of the 20th century and we can get ingredients from all over the world in just a few hours. Anyway, wasn`t English food always disgusting and tasteless? Wasn`t it always boiled to death and swimming in fat? The answer to these questions is a resounding `No´, but to understand this, we have to go back to before World War II.

The British have in fact always imported food from abroad. From the time of the Roman invasion foreign trade was a major influence on British cooking. English kitchens, like the English language, absorbed ingredients from all over the world-chickens, rabbits, apples and tea. All of these and more were successfully incorporated into British dishes. Another important influence on British rain gives us rich soil and green grass, and means that we are able to produce some of the finest varieties of meat, fruit and vegetables, which don`t need fancy sauces or complicated recipes to disguise their taste.

However, World War II changed everything. Wartime women had to forget 600 years of British cooking, learn to do without foreign imports, and ration their use of home-grown food. The Ministry of Food published cheap, boring recipes. The joke of the war was a dish called Woolton Pie (named after the Minister for Food!). This consisted of a mixture of boiled vegetables covered in white sauce with mashed potato on the top. Britain never managed to recover from the wartime attitude to food. We were left with a loss of confidence in our cooking skills and after years of Ministry recipes we began to believe that British food was boring, and we searched the world for sophisticated, new dishes which gave hope of a better future. The British people became tourists at their own dining tables and in the restaurants of their land! This is a tragedy! Surely food is as much a part of our literature. Nowadays, cooking British food is like speaking a dead language. It is almost as bizarre as having a conversation in Anglo-Saxon English!

However, there is still one small ray of hope. British pubs are often the best places to eat well and cheaply in Britain, and they also increasingly try to serve tasty British food. Can we recommend to you our two favourite places to eat in

Britain? The Shepherd`s Inn in Melmerby, Cumbria, and the Dolphin Inn in Kingston, Devon. Their steak and mushroom pie, Lancashire hotpot, and bread and butter pudding are three of the gastronomic wonders of the world!