



Fish and chips

Für die einen ist es eine Kindheitserinnerung, für die anderen ein wöchentlicher Genuss. **INEZ SHARP** erinnert an die Anfänge von *Fish and Chips*. medium

Every Friday afternoon around half past five, Mum would send one of us round to Hammond's, the fish-and-chip shop. For sixpence, you could get a piece of rock salmon in batter; a portion of chips cost a penny. Everything was wrapped first in clean paper and then in newspaper to keep it warm. We ate the fish and chips with salt and vinegar. These are the childhood recollections of my uncle, Thomas Sharp, a man who grew up in a poor area of London in the late 1930s.

The tradition of a fish-and-chip supper is familiar today to millions of British families — though, of course, with higher prices and without the newspaper. It is hard to imagine a time when this quick, tasty meal was not available. In fact, though, fish and chips as a meal are only around 150 years old.

Fish and chips were sold separately for years before anyone had the idea of combining the two. According to John Walton in his book *Fish and Chips and the British Working Class, 1870–1940*, it was probably London's Jewish community that started the trade in fried fish around the mid

19th century. Cooking it in fat had the advantage that it stopped the fish going bad. At about the same time, small shops offering fried potatoes appeared in the industrial towns of northern England.

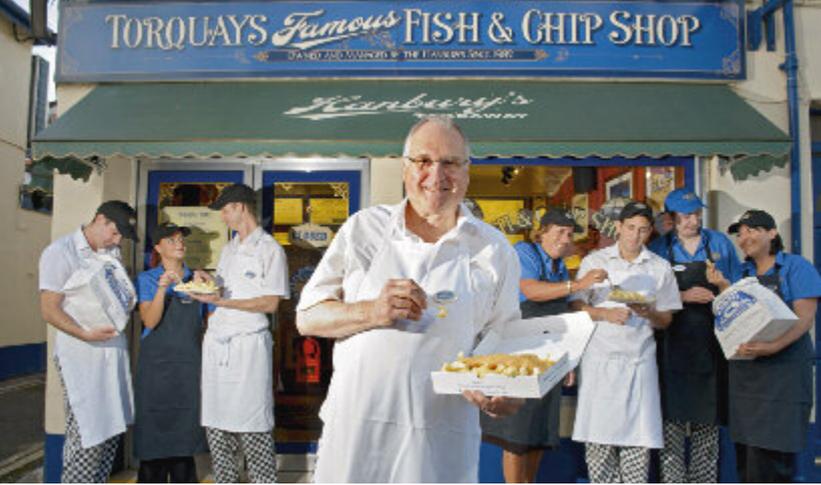
The concept of frying small pieces of potato had come over from France, where the very first recipe for this dish was published in 1755. The English chip shop had nothing in common with these cultivated origins except for the main ingredient. "Chipped potatoes" were often sold from the front rooms of working-class homes by women trying to earn some extra income.

"An old boiler filled with rank lard set up on a block of bricks, with a small coal fire underneath," is how Colin Spencer describes such a business in his book *British Food*. It was a meal for the poor — cheap and satisfying — and it was produced in an environment where nobody could afford to care about hygiene and the smell of fish or fat.

Between 1870 and 1890, someone had the idea of bringing these two types of food together, and what Walton calls "the momentous marriage of fish and chips" took place.

Fish and chips: still a favourite meal for millions in Britain





David Hanbury, the owner of Hanbury's, and his staff enjoying some of their food

Exactly when and where this happened is not known, but we do know that the trade spread fast. By 1914, 800,000 meals of fish and chips were being sold across Britain each week.

The expansion of the fish-and-chip trade at this time was supported by improvements in technology. By the 1890s, British fishing fleets were sending fast steam-powered boats to the waters around Iceland. Here, they caught plentiful cod, which was frozen immediately and sent back home. The excellent British rail service allowed the fish to be distributed quickly and efficiently. At the same time, inventions such as the industrial “wonder potato peeler” ended one labour-intensive aspect of the fish-and-chips trade.

Until the 1950s, fish and chips was mainly a working-class meal. It was something hot that was easy to eat while walking home after a day at the factory. The terraced houses of industrial towns were often so small that cooking at home was a challenge. The business idea, Walton says, was attractive to “small, back-street entrepreneurs”. Also, there were few other food vendors with whom to compete.

By the time competition did finally arrive in the form of cafes and hamburger restaurants in the 1950s and 60s, the fish-and-chip tradition had grown and was strong enough not to be destroyed. Today, there are around 11,500 fish-and-chip shops in Britain.



Sarah Martin visited Hanbury's, a famous fish-and-chip shop in her home town of Torquay (see Spotlight 9/11) on England's south coast.

This year, Hanbury's fish-and-chip restaurant came second in the industry's National Fish and Chip Awards. I visited the restaurant on a sunny spring day to test the cooking. Hanbury's, in a quiet side street in Torquay, is only a few minutes' walk from the sea. It has a restaurant and a takeaway, both immaculately clean.

The atmosphere was friendly, and during the lunchtime when we were there, it was fully booked. Hopeful customers were greeted by the head waitress with a friendly “Yes, darling?” and then just as pleasantly turned away: “Table for two? Sorry, we're fully booked, but there is the takeaway next door.”

All seated and ready to go, we ordered our lunch. We decided to take the most popular fish-and-chip meals: cod and chips with mushy peas for me; and for my companion, sea-bass fillets with chips and petits pois. A basket of bread with generous portions of butter were delivered to our table to keep us going during the 20-minute wait for the main course. And, of course, I ordered a pot of tea, the essential accompaniment.

When it arrived, the food looked delicious: there was a generous portion of cod in a thin, crisp coating of batter complete with a small wedge of lemon. And then there were the perfect, hand-cut golden chips. There was also a small pot of bright green mushy peas and another containing tartare sauce. The sea bass looked equally appetizing, grilled to perfection with another large portion of chips and the tiny French peas.

The fish was succulent and, to my surprise, there was no grease anywhere on the plates. The mushy peas flavoured with mint complemented the fish perfectly. The only downside was the tartare sauce, which had too much vinegar for my taste.

We couldn't eat all our chips, but every scrap of fish was devoured. There was definitely no room for a dessert. We paid the bill and left, knowing that we would be back very soon.

accompaniment [ə'kʌmpənɪmənt]	hier: Ergänzung
brick [brɪk]	Ziegel
chip [tʃɪp]	hacken, kleinschneiden
coating ['kəʊtɪŋ]	Hülle, Panade
cod [kɒd]	Kabeljau
companion [kəm'pænjən]	Begleiter(in)
crisp [krɪsp]	knusprig
devour [di'vaʊə]	verschlingen
entrepreneur [ˌɒntrəprə'nɜː]	Unternehmer(in)
grease [ɡriːs]	Fett
immaculately [ɪ'mækjələt]	makellos
lard [lɑːd]	Schweinefett
mushy peas [ˌmʌʃi 'piːz]	weichgekochte Erbsen
peeler ['piːlə]	Schäler
petits pois [ˌpeti 'pwaː]	feine Erbsen

plentiful ['plentɪfʊl]	reichlich
rank [ræŋk]	ranzig
recollection [ˌrekə'leɪʃən]	Erinnerung
rock salmon in batter [ˌrɒk ˌsælmən ɪn 'bætə]	in Teig ausgebackene Schillerlocke, Bernsteinmakrele
sea bass ['siː bæz]	Seebarsch
succulent ['sʌkjələnt]	saftig
takeaway ['teɪkəweɪ] UK	Imbiss
tartare sauce [ˌtɑːtə 'sɔːs]	Remouladensoße
terraced house [ˌterəst 'haʊs]	Reihenhaus
Torquay [ˌtɔːkiː]	
turn away [tɜːn ə'weɪ]	abweisen
vendor ['vendə]	Verkäufer(in)
vinegar ['vɪnɪgə]	Essig
wedge [wedʒ]	Stück