Science

C6th

Agricultural Advances

The availability of food improves in Northern Europe due to the technological advances in agriculture - consequently population numbers increase rapidly.

C10th

Spices

Spices that were claimed to have medicinal properties were first imported to England from East India.

C12th

Rabbits

Rabbits from the continent are introduced to provide a new source of protein.

1348/49

Black Death

The Black Death destroys much of Europe, killing almost 60% of the population in some areas. England suffers severe weather and crops fail. Food is therefore short, and hunger makes people susceptible to disease.

1493

Garbellars

Garbellars are employed by the London Grocers’ Company (1429) to garbel (inspect) groceries and to seize and destroy poor quality products.

1800s

Bicarbonate of Soda

Bicarbonate of soda, a food additive still used today, is found to release carbon dioxide gas in the presence of some acids such as sour milk or buttermilk. Unfortunately, most of the gas is released in the bowl - and not during baking!

1826

Wholemeal Bread

The military were advised to eat wholemeal bread as it had been found to be a healthier option than the white variety that the aristocracy were eating.

1835

Baking Powder

For the first time, Victorian cooks can reach for a pre-packaged baking powder. “Royal Baking Powder” mixes the alkali bicarbonate of soda with the acid cream of tartar. Inert starch powder was used to carry the active ingredients and delay release of gas.

1845

Potato Fungus

A fungus on potatoes brought famine to Ireland and also parts of England and Scotland. Potatoes were the poor family’s main or only food, so consequently many working people suffered poor health and died.

1847

Chocolate

The first British chocolate bar was manufactured by Fry’s. However, it wasn’t like today’s chocolate: it was grainy, soapy and gritty, and also a relative luxury, as there was high duty on cocoa and sugar.

1860

Food and Drugs Act

The first British Food and Drugs Act was passed. This was intended to prevent manufacturers using harmful additives in food, such as copper in green pickles and brick dust in cocoa. However, the Act wasn’t very well administered.

1861

Mrs. Beeton

Mrs. Beeton’s Book of Household Management was published. This book was very popular with young, middle-class wives. During the Victorian era the growth in popular education and the emphasis on self-improvement led to many recipe books being produced.

1920s

Pasteurised Milk

Milk became pasteurised and bottled, bringing a higher standard of hygiene.

1928

Frigidaire

Frigidaire launched an advertising campaign on the back of the Government’s action to ban the use of certain preservatives in food:

The advert read as follows:

‘When Pure Food is NOT! Preservatives used to retard the natural processes of decay. Most women think it is perfectly easy to detect decay in time. The truth is far different. It is there 36 hours before you can detect it. Would you let your family eat such food, mouldy food, DECAYING food?’

1929

Wholemeal Flour

Scientists identified the benefits of wholemeal flour but this did not change our preference for white bread.

1934

Water Supplies Act

The Rural Water Supplies Act was passed. 2,000 parishes were supplied with piped water within 10 years. Scientists realised the importance of hygiene for health.

1939

Ministry of Food

The Ministry of Food run by Lord Woolton was set up to improve the health of the men and women on whom the war effort depended. British health departments were giving mothers and infants free milk, cod liver oil and vitamins.

1941

Calcium

Calcium was added to flour to prevent rickets which had been detected as being common in women joining the Land Army.

1956

National Loaf

The National Loaf was abolished. New laws were introduced whereby all flour other than wholemeal had to be fortified with calcium, iron, Vitamin B1 and nicotinic acid.

1963

Bread and Flour

Bread and flour regulations were introduced - they determined the composition and additives in bread and flour.

1981

Bread Consumption

The Government health report on bread and flour concluded that bread consumption should be promoted to replace some of the fat and sugar in the British diet.

1986

Additives

From January 1986 all foods had to have any additive names or E-numbers (except for flavourings) listed in the ingredients.

1988

BSE

BSE is made a notifiable disease in Britain and the compulsory slaughter of BSE-affected cattle begins.

1990

Beefburger

Conservative minister John Selwyn Gummer feeds his daughter a beefburger. Among mounting concern about BSE, this photo-opportunity was intended to reassure the world that there was strong scientific evidence that British beef was safe.

1991

Nutrition Task Force

The Government White Paper on The Health of the Nation led to the formation of the Nutrition Task Force which recommended that the energy obtained from fat be reduced in favour of the energy obtained from cereal-based foods. It recommended that bread consumption should be increased by 50%.

1996

GM Foods

Britain’s first genetically modified food appears on supermarket shelves: tomato puree containing “flavr savr” tomatoes. These tomatoes were genetically modified to delay ripening. This reduced wastage and, the industry claimed, improved flavour.

1998

Calcium

The Government decided that white and brown flours should continue to be fortified with calcium.

1999

GM Crops

The Government commissions a five-year experiment, to test the effect of GM crops on field ecosystems. In farms throughout Britain, fields are split between conventionally-bred and GM crops - sometimes to be ripped up and trampled by protesters.

2001

Foot and Mouth

The UK was hit by an unprecedented Foot and Mouth outbreak affecting sheep and cattle and lasting 32 weeks. Over 4 million animals were culled.

**Technology**

200 AD

Roman Kitchens

A typical kitchen in Roman Britain at this time would have had a raised hearth where most of the cooking was done. This was a masonry construction 1about the height of a table where the charcoal was placed. The vessels where the food was cooked were supported by iron tripods or grid irons. Some recipes from this time refer to the smoking of food, so wood would also have been used. Tables of stone or wood for the preparation of food are also mentioned, as is water for cooking and washing up.

C8th

Horses

Horses are used more for pulling farm implements due to the development and availability of horseshoes which help the horses on tough ground thereby increasing productivity.

C17th

Roasting Jack

Meat was roasted on a jack, a mechanical device which was either clockwork or weight driven. Later on a fan was put into the chimney, and this was rotated by the rising hot air and gases.

1748

First Fridge

William Cullen at the University of Glasgow demonstrated the first known artificial refrigeration, but he didn’t put his discovery to any practical use. It was an American inventor, Oliver Evans, who in 1805 designed the first refrigeration machine.

1780

Open Cooking Range

Thomas Robinson designed the first open cooking range - ‘open’ as the fire wasn’t enclosed. There was an oven on one side of the grate and a hot water tank on the other side. It did have one disadvantage - the food on the side nearest the fire burnt easily. Cast-iron open ranges were commonplace in upper- and middle-class homes by the 1830s.

1802

Closed Top Range

A closed-top range was patented by George Bodley, a Devon iron-founder. It was called a ‘Kitchener’ range. It had a cast-iron hotplate over the fire with removable boiling rings.

1850s

Railways

The introduction of the railway system throughout Britain meant that food could now be carried right across the country quickly and efficiently.

1860s

Ice

An ice well was built underneath central London. This was before the days of artificial refrigeration when London had a large need for ice during the summer. It was 34 feet across and 42 feet deep and held about 700 tonnes of ice. With that sort of volume there was enough ice to keep itself cold for a few months.

1865

Meat Canning

The first large-scale meat canning factory was set up by the Admiralty. Experiments to try to can meat in bulk to feed sailors and soldiers had been in progress in England since 1813 when Peter Durand invented canned food for the British Navy.

1891

Electric Kettle

Crompton and Company developed the electric kettle in England. The earliest examples of electric kettles all had the element in a separate chamber underneath similar to traditional vessels which boiled water and had the fire underneath the pot.

1924

Brit-Fridge

The first British Frigidaire was sold. Refrigerators had been introduced to Britain in the 1890s. Frigidaire, an American company, invented the first self-contained refrigerator.

1939

Sliced Bread

The process of slicing and wrapping bread was prohibited during WWII and up until 1950 as an economy measure.

1950

Food Mixer

The Kenwood Chef food mixer was made and launched in Britain. It was the brainchild of RAF Engineer Kenneth Wood, who got his idea for the Chef and other kitchen gadgets from his world travels. Home baking became a much easier task.

1952

Espresso Coffee

The first espresso coffee machine was imported into Britain. Coffee bars were very popular at this time.

1953

Electricity Board

In a display in a Warrington showroom, the Electricity Board featured the Three Wise Men bearing gifts of a washing machine, an electric cooker and a refrigerator!

1953

What Women Want

The Electrical Association for Women (set up in 1924) carried out a survey to inform manufacturers what women wanted in the way of electrical appliances for the home. The survey found that generally what was important was durability. However, this was ignored and planned obsolescence was introduced into household appliances.

1965

Chorleywood Process

The Chorleywood Bread Process came into general use. This substantially reduced the time taken in producing bread. Three quarters of our bread is produced in this way today.

1958

Microwave

The first commercial microwave oven was sold in the UK. The microwave oven was a direct offshoot of the development in 1946 of the magnetron - a device that produces electromagnetic radiation and was first used in radar. The first domestic microwave cooker was sold in 1974, and nowadays 30 million microwave ovens are sold every year throughout the world.

1986

Irradiation

The Advisory Committee on Novel and Irradiated Foods in the UK approved irradiation as a safe and satisfactory method of food processing. Food irradiation is the process of exposing food to a carefully controlled amount of ionising energy to improve food safety and reduce spoilage. The foods it can help preserve are poultry, red meat, seafood, dried herbs and spices, certain fruit and vegetables, bulbs and tubers, cereals and grains. In the UK irradiated foods and ingredients must now be identified with the words "irradiated" or "treated with ionising radiation".

Culture

43 AD - 410 AD

Pies

Pies were eaten by Roman centurions. They consisted of meat wrapped in a primitive kind of pastry which kept the contents warm on long marches.

C2nd

Roman Diet

The diet of a Roman would consist of the following - for breakfast: bean meal mash and unlevened breadcakes; for lunch: fruit, a sweetmeat, cheese and wine; in the evening: the convivium - might be a mixture of meat and fish, some vegetables and cereals.

C5th

Roman Legacy

Britain returns to Saxon rule after the Romans return home. However, we can thank the Romans for introducing cabbages, peas, cherries and oyster farming into Britain.

C7th

Leeks

A Welsh army - each man wearing a leek to identify him from the enemy - attracts and defeats a Saxon army. The leek then becomes the national emblem of Wales.

1066

French Wine

After victory in the Battle of Hastings, William the Conqueror distributes English estates to his Norman friends. French language infiltrates Britain - Boeuf, mouton, veau, porc and poularde will later become beef, mutton, veal, pork, and poultry.

C11th

Domesday Book

The Domesday Book lists almost 6,000 English water mills used for grinding grain to produce flour for the population south of the Severn and Trent Rivers.

C12th

Wine

French wines are introduced to Britain. They are cheaper than our own and result in the decline of the English wine industry. England begins to import sherry from Jerez, Spain and port wine from Portugal.

C13th

Bread Laws

The first laws that regulate the price of bread in England come into force. Later during this century, and for the following six centuries, the statute ‘The Assize of Bread’ fixed the size, weight and price of loaves, in relation to the price of wheat.

C13th

Export

The English export grain - wheat, barley and oats - to Europe. The grain is collected in estate barns and in towns and then carried in large wagons to the ports.

1290

Oranges

Oranges were first imported from Spain. The ships which brought them also carried spices. Oranges were frequently imported by tens of thousands per ship, sometimes as many as a hundred thousand at a time, as happened in March 1480. The oranges imported at this time were probably a bitter variety.

1348

The Plague

The Bubonic Plague, which had been sweeping across Europe, arrived in Britain through the southern coast ports. Known as The Black Death it severely reduced the density of the population. In the early 14th century there were more fishmongers than butchers in the UK, but after 1350 this trend was reversed.

1387

Banquets

England’s Richard II invites the country’s rich barons to dine with him. 200 cooks prepare a banquet to feed 2,000 guests. The menu includes - 1,400 oxen lying in salt, 120 sheep’s heads, 13 calves, 12 boars, 200 rabbits, 144 partridges, 1,200 pigeons, 720 hens and 11,000 eggs. For pudding - a three foot high marzipan castle.

1390

Recipe Book

The Forme of Cury, said to be England’s first recipe book, was written for the household of Richard II.

1467

Feasting

The Archbishop of York is appointed and a feast ensues of 105 oxen, 6 wild bulls, 1,000 sheep, 304 calves, and 400 swans.

1540s

Sugar

Coarse sugar is purified at a refinery in London into white crystalline cones each up to 14 pounds in weight.

1563

Potatoes

English sea captain John Hawkins is credited with having introduced the potato to England. It was slow to catch on, mainly because people found out it was a member of the nightshade family, a poisonous group of plants. The potato’s popularity did increase after a reintroduction by Sir Francis Drake who gave them to Sir Walter Raleigh.

1650

Tea

Tea was introduced into Britain at this time. Coffee had reached England before this and it was through the coffee houses that people were first introduced to this new drink. The first tea used in England came from China, with the first Indian tea being sold in London in 1839.

1815

Corn Laws

The Corn Laws were passed to protect British Wheat Growers. The duty on imported wheat was raised and price controls on bread lifted. Bread prices rose dramatically.

1858

Fish and Chips

John Lees opened a fish and chip shop in Oldham and in 1863 Joseph Mallin opened a Fish and Chip shop in the East End. (There is actually some debate as to which was the first to be opened). By the early 1900s there are more than 30,000 chippies in Britain.

1890s

Chocolate Bars

Cadbury’s produced the first milk chocolate bar, prompted by the increased import of Swiss chocolate.

1900s

Sausages

Mass sausage production began and independent makers were phased out. Sausages were now made from small amounts of cheap meat bulked out with fat and filler.

1913

Ice Cream

Walls began making ice cream and sold it in the shops where they normally sold their meat products during the months of May, June and July.

1926

Indian Restaurant

Veeraswamy, one of the first and certainly the most well-known Indian restaurant was opened in Regent Street, London by an Englishman, Edward Palmer. He employed chefs from India and served hot curries as well as French and Ceylonese dishes. High society met there, for example, Prince Edward, King Gustav of Sweden and Charlie Chaplin.

1928

First Chippie

The first sit down fish and chip restaurant was opened in a simple wooden hut in Guisely near Leeds - the proprietor was Harry Ramsden.

1930

Wonderbread

Sliced bread first appeared in Britain under the Wonderbread label.

1937

Free School Milk

Free school milk was provided from 1937 to 1979.

1939

Instant Coffee

Instant coffee was first sold in England. This changed our coffee drinking habits. Coffee essence, for example, Camp, which had been sold since the 1850s was now used for cooking, and instant coffee was hereafter drunk in vast quantities by the British.

1940

Rationing

Rationing was introduced in January 1940 and was gradually extended during the war. Food was the main item. A council was set up to work out how much nutrition different people needed. Children and pregnant mothers received more. The foods that were rationed were meat, fats, cheese, butter, milk, eggs and sweets. Bread, potatoes and vegetables were never rationed. Rationing led to an improvement in people's health as they could not eat fatty foods and had to eat more vegetables, potatoes and bread. Fish and chips was one of the few meals not to be rationed during WWII. The forces ate them for energy, and fish and chip vans were laid on to take meals out to the evacuees.

1942

National Loaf

The National Loaf was introduced. It was roughly the same composition as the brown bread of today. This was due to a shortage of shipping space for white flour.

1946

Food Cuts

Ben Smith, Minister for Food, announced cuts in bacon, poultry, egg rations and withdrew completely the availability of dried eggs. There was a massive outcry.

1947

Winter of Discontent

Rations were lower than they had ever been during the war. The 1946/47 winter months were labelled ‘The Winter of Discontent’.

1947

Self Service

Jack Cohen launched Tesco self-service stores, which revolutionised shopping in the UK. Another 20 new Tesco stores were opened in 1950. Business continued to grow and by the end of the 1990s supermarkets were so large that they were usually sited on purpose-built retail parks.

1954

Rationing Ends

Rationing ended. With some foods rationing had already finished, for example, sugar rationing ended in 1949.

1974 - 1979

Subsidised Foods

Under the Control of Inflation Act 1973 - wages and prices of most goods were subject to governmental control. In order to keep prices down the government subsidised staple foods - including bread. The price of a large white sliced loaf in 1974 was 14.5 pence.

1988

Salmonella

Edwina Currie claimed that most of Britain's eggs were infected with salmonella. Sales of eggs fell at the time by 10 per cent to 27 million a day. 5,000 small producers went bust.

1996

Online Shopping

Tesco became the first supermarket to offer shopping online.

2000

Fishing

The European Commission proposed massive cuts of up to 74 per cent in Britain’s fish catches - 74 per cent cut in hake catches allowed in the North Sea, a 56 per cent cut in cod and a 35 per cent cut in whiting. The crisis was partly due to overfishing but also to the fact that cod were at the bottom of their seven-year cycle and that the North Sea is becoming warmer.

2001

Metric Martyr

Greengrocer Steve Thoburn was prosecuted for selling his fruit and veg in pounds and ounces and refusing to use kilos. He went against the European directive which came into force on 1st January 2000 requiring shopkeepers to weigh loose goods on metric scales.