

Exploring the spices of the east: how curry got to our table

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Every migrant to our shores brings with them the flavours and dishes of home, every trader searches for exotic and exciting new taste sensations. Britain's culinary history has been shaped by migration, trade and empire.

Subject knowledge and information

How curry, exploration and empire building are linked

At the end of the Tudor period developments in navigation and ship building led the merchants of England to begin to explore and develop trade routes by sea. They were following in the footsteps of the Portuguese and the Dutch. Different groups of merchants set up consortiums to finance exploration and spread possible losses. This was the time of the merchant traders. There were a number of companies, the names of which show how trade was developing across the world. The first such group was the Company of Merchant Adventurers to New Lands, granted a charter by Mary Tudor in 1551. This became the Muscovy Company, trading with Russia. Other companies were the Hudson Bay Company – Canada (1668), Company of Royal Adventurers Trading into Africa – West African Coast (1670), the Virginia Company of London – North America (1606). The largest company of all was the Governor and Company of Merchants of London Trading into

the East Indies, otherwise known as the East India Company. This was granted a charter by Elizabeth I in 1600. It was set up to capitalise on trade with India, China and the spice islands of Indonesia. While trade by ship was long and inherently hazardous it was far more lucrative than using overland groups. A single ship-load of peppers could make the consortium a fortune, literally. Captain James Lancaster brought back the first consignment, a cargo of 500 tons of pepper. He was duly knighted by James I. Sadly, however James had just brought a year's supply from the Dutch!

Spices were used in Britain from the Roman period and were important sources of flavourings. Most came across the long, extended land routes across Asia and the Middle East. It wasn't until more extensive trade developed with the Far East that the terms '*currie and pilaw*' made it into recipe books. As England's involvement in that area grew, new foods or cooking styles began to be seen.

Early pioneers in making curries

The *Forme of Cury* is a cookery roll that dates from the 1390s. The word 'cury' here comes from Middle English and means cookery. It includes reference to spices and rice that could only have come from the east. These include *cubebs* (tailed pepper) from Java, *galyngal* (ginger-type root) from Thailand and *grains of paradise* (cardamon) from Indonesia or India.

Timeline

1390s	1732	1745	1773	1810	1920s	1960s/1970s
Spices and rice	Pilau, curry powder, pickles, recipes of Sarah Tully	First recipe curry Hannah Glasse	Mrs Norris's curry in restaurant and delivered	First curry restaurant run by Indian, Sake Dean Mahomed	Beginnings of Indian restaurants: Shafi and Veeraswamy, both in London	Immigration creates new 'curry houses' run by predominantly Bangladeshi chefs

In 1732 Sarah Tully married Richard Hoare, Lord Mayor of London and banker. At the same time, she started a recipe book. Hoare's bank was involved with the East India Company and Sarah's recipe book reflects this link to the east. She has a recipe for 'A *pilau after the east India manner*' and uses curry powder and pickles. Interestingly Sarah knew how to write pilau correctly, thus demonstrating a direct link to India. Our next author used phonetic spelling for her dishes.

The earliest printed recipe for curry that we have in the cookery book of Hannah Glasse. *The Art of Cookery Made Plain and Easy* was printed in 1747 and became a best seller. Hannah provides a recipe to 'make a currey in the Indian way' as well as 'pellow (*pilau*) after the Indian way'.

In 1773 Mistress Norris of Haymarket sold 'true Indian curry paste' and delivered dressed curries, rice and Indian pilaw to personal homes.

The first Indian restaurant run by an Indian was the Hindoostane Coffee House in London. It was opened by Sake Dean Mahomed providing a superior dining room and luxury smoking club. Visitors could dine on *pinapple pillao* for one pound sixteen shillings or *lobster currey* for 12 shillings. Sake and his wife also undertook to deliver meals to people's houses. Sadly, many of those enjoying curry already had their own servants to prepare it so the Hindoostane Coffee house only lasted two years. Sake however capitalised on his Indian heritage by moving to Brighton and creating a prestigious steam vapour bath experience including aromatic steams and 'champi' (shampoo) massages. He became the shampooing surgeon to George IV and William IV.

Victoria was most intrigued by Indian culture and had a number of members of deposed Indian royalty living at court such as Maharaja Duleep Singh and Princess Gouramma of Coorg. She had an Indian dining room built at Osborne palace by Indian craftsmen and learnt Hindustani (Urdu) from her 'Munchi'. Abdul Karim came as a waiter for her Golden Jubilee but became her secretary and confidant. Curry was regularly served for Victoria.

1920s saw the growth of Indian restaurants after the British Empire Exhibition of 1924. Veeraswamy's in Piccadilly

opened its doors for the first time in 1926 and is still trading successfully today. In 1960s immigration from India and Pakistan led to a growth of Indian restaurants as curry became a favourite across the nation. Chicken Tikka Masala and Balti dishes are dishes that were adapted specifically for the British market.

Activities

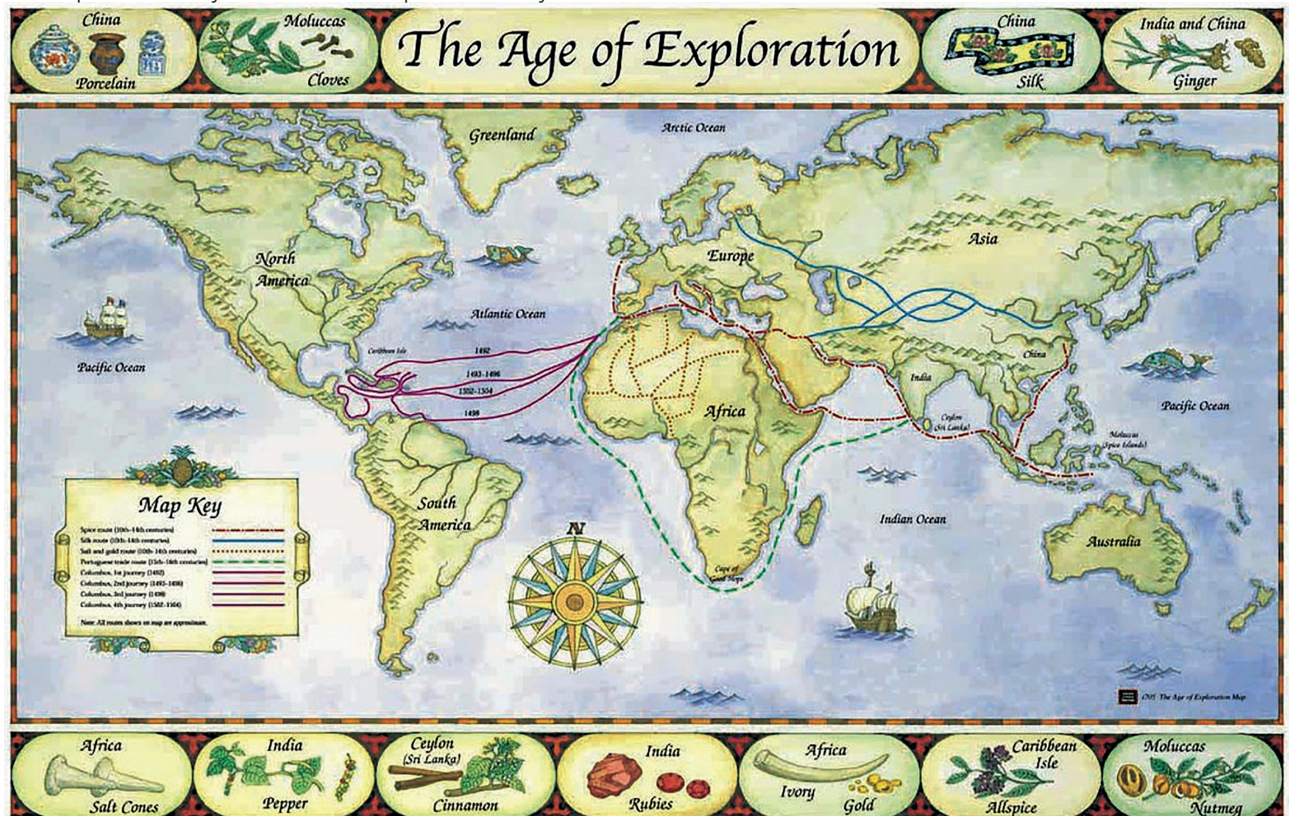
Investigating curry spices



1. Buy samples of spices, both ground and in seed form, and allow the children to feel and smell them (checking for allergies beforehand). *What do they make them think of? Are there any that they recognise? Can they name any? Can they match ground and non-ground spices? Which parts of the plant are being used (berries, bark, seed, root)? Which do they like or not like and why is that?* Add labels to the pots of spices.

Name	Place	Finding the spices
Cardamon	India	Cardamon harvesting www.youtube.com/watch?v=pbwgur2fogA
Ginger	India, Indonesia, China	Ginger and sweet making in Indonesia https://eu.gingerpeople.com/sources/
Black pepper	India	Black pepper production www.youtube.com/watch?v=mMbhgxyIDUQ
Mace and nutmeg	Moluccas (Spice Islands – Indonesia)	The nutmeg tree www.youtube.com/watch?v=PX_cl2vphoE
Cloves	Moluccas (Spice Islands – Indonesia)	Harvesting cloves www.youtube.com/watch?v=RXrOIWsYSec
Cumin	India, China	Cumin in India www.youtube.com/watch?v=8HmkEpGU3l4
Turmeric	India	Digging out a turmeric root www.youtube.com/watch?v=yZ-LGVy0pmc
Cinnamon	Sri Lanka	Cinnamon quill production www.youtube.com/watch?v=DPCsk_fN1S4

Red: spice route by land Green: Spice route by sea Blue: silk road



2. Split your class into eight groups, one per spice. Each group watches a video about harvesting their spice. They need to present the information about this to the rest of the class. They can do this as role play or through a presentation using illustrations and text. They must tell the class what part of the plant is harvested and how this is done. They should also include whether the plant has to be processed in some way once it is harvested e.g. dried, cut, etc.
3. Further challenge – research the uses of this spice, both culinary and medicinal.

they would if they were fresh? Why do they think people were bothering to bring them all this way?

This map allows children to see the sea routes to and from Britain and the duration of voyages (click on the video of the fourth map).
www.theguardian.com/news/datablog/2012/apr/13/shipping-routes-history-map

Finding the people



Where do the spices come from?

Explain that many of these come from an area we used to call the far east. Now they arrive by plane or as sea freight on supertankers. When they first came to this country they came overland on the silk and spice trail. Then sailing ships brought them. The journey there and back could take up to a year although it got faster as ships got better.

1. Place the spices on the places they originated from. *What do children notice about where these spices come from?*
2. With a large map (try to get a floor one if possible) trace the land route with models or pictures of horses and camels and the seventeenth-century sea route with a sailing ship. *Are these spices from near or far away? Do they think it was easy or hard to get the spices from Asia to Britain? What effect do they think this had on the cost of the spices (expensive)? Do they think the spices would be as good after travel for six months to a year as*

1. Show the children images of Sarah Tully and Hannah Glasse and ask them to suggest adjectives to describe each of the women. *What is the same and what is different?* At the time these recipes were written, India was part of the British Empire and lots of British people lived in and travelled backwards and forwards from India. Sarah married a rich man with a large household and began to keep a personal recipe book. Hannah was a working woman. She published her book, *The Art of Cookery Made Plain and Simple*, for women and their servants in smaller households. Hannah gives us the first recipe for a curry. Add adjectives to the

pictures and in speech bubbles get each to explain why they are writing down their recipes.

2. Talk to the children about recipes and what they are. Show a copy of Hannah's curry recipe.

To make a Currey the India Way.

TAKE two Fowls or Rabbits, cut them into small Pieces, and three or four small Onions, peeled and cut very small, thirty Pepper Corns, and a large Spoonful of Rice, brown some Coriander Seeds over the Fire in a clean Shovel, and beat them to Powder, take a Tea Spoonful of Salt, and mix all well together with the Meat, put all together into a Sauce-pan or Stew-pan, with a Pint of Water, let it stew softly till the Meat is enough, then put in a Piece of Fresh Butter, about as big as a large Walnut, shake it well together, and when it is smooth and of a fine Thickness dish it up, and send it to Table. If the Sauce be too thick, add a little more Water before it is done, and more Salt if it wants it. You are to observe the Sauce must be pretty thick.

How is this different to more modern recipes? It does not contain many weights as measurement, for example. I am sure that not many of today's kitchens use a clean shovel when cooking either. (What looks like an f is an s!)

3. Ask the children if they have any favourite or family recipes. Create a class recipe book with family or personal recipes; illustrate and include photos. If your school is in an area where there is not a lot of home cooking send children to gather information from staff.
4. Perhaps ask a parent to come in and make a curry with the children or ask the school cook if curry can be on the menu one week.

Hannah's book can be found online here
https://openlibrary.org/works/OL1646026W/The_art_of_cookery_made_plain_and_easy
 Sarah's recipe can be found here
<https://recipes.hypotheses.org/tag/sarah-tully>

Where can we go out to eat curry?

Sake Dean Mohamed opened the first Indian restaurant run by an Indian although he called it a coffee house. This was a place for men to meet up and have a meal and a drink. He also included a smoking room. He wanted to make it look exotic and different.

A contemporary described it thus:

A room was set up for smoking from hookahs with oriental herbs. The rooms were ...furnished with chairs and sofas made of bamboo canes ... views in India, oriental sports and groups of natives decorated the walls.

(The Epicure's Almanack Ralph Rylance
<https://londonist.com/2016/06/the-story-of-london-s-first-indian-restaurant>)

Sake Dean Mahomed



Why do you think the City of Westminster put up this plaque? What made this place significant?

Veeraswamy from respectively the 1920s, 1950s and 2005 onwards



The Veeraswamy restaurant was started about 100 years after Sake Dean Mohamed's restaurant. It was very successful and is still going.

Here are some images of the interiors over time. India became independent in 1947 and the colours of the Indian flag are green, white and orange. That might explain the furniture in the 1950s décor. Point out examples of Indian architectural features or decorations in the first two images.

1. What impression do these images give the children? Have the children visited a restaurant with waiter service? Did they enjoy it? What did they like or not like about it? What do they think the owners of the restaurants were trying to do with their decoration?
2. Arrange a visit to a local Indian restaurant, preferably one that has been there for some time. Use this to gather some oral history. Ask the children to interview the owners. *How long has the restaurant been opened? Who is the owner? Are they the original owner? Who started the restaurant and where did they come from? Where do the chefs come from? How has the restaurant changed? Why did they start the restaurant?*
3. Take photos of the restaurant, chefs and waiters. Use these to create a voiceover slide show (try Shadow Puppet app) or make a film of the visit.
4. Create a poster advertising the restaurant using some of the extravagant language from Sake Dean Mohamed's advertisement. ('Indian dishes of the highest perfection. Allowed by the greatest epicures to be unequalled to any curries ever made in England.')

Hannah Glasse and Sake Dean Mohamed both had google doodles made for them. Edward Palmer was a trader of chutneys and spices with an English father and Indian mother and the founder of the Veeraswamy restaurant. *Can the class create a google doodle for him or Sarah Tully?*

You can find the images in the google doodle archive here – Hannah: www.google.com/doodles?q=hannah%20glasses
Sake Dean Mohamed: www.google.com/doodles?q=sake%20dean%20mahomed

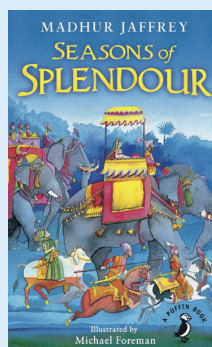
Key vocabulary

Pilau, curry, kebab, chutney, naan, chapati

English words from Indian

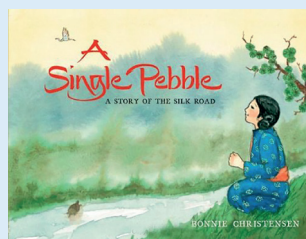
- kedgerree from *khichdi* or *khichri*
- piccalilli from Paco-Lilla (Hannah Glasse) Indian pickle
- mulligatawny soup from the Tamil *milagay* (chilli) or *milagu* (pepper) *tanni* (water)

Books to read alongside



Seasons of Splendour
by Madhur Jaffrey

A Single Pebble, a story of the Silk Road by Bonnie Christianson (I like to read this with little artefacts linked to the story that I add to a box as we go along)



Conclusion

The history of the food we eat and what it tells us about ourselves and our relationships with others is fascinating not least because we have the prospect of trying out our investigations. I have used an Anglo-Saxon recipe for bannock-type griddle cake and a Stuart one from the time of the Great Fire of London for small cakes. They certainly add another perspective to history lessons. This enquiry has shown us how closely intertwined we have been with India, its cuisine and its culture, for a long time – so investigate, eat, enjoy.

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