

English Cheese

Queso Diego Talk May 21, 2013

Cheese has been made in England since long before it was England as we know it. Primitive cheese-making tools have been found in Iron Age settlements.

The tradition of cheesemaking is embedded in the English psyche primarily because it's so good. And why is that? Britain is blessed with different types of soils, grasslands, native regional species of goats, sheep and cows, animals that evolved into their environments. Combine these factors with the year-round farming traditions of each region and challenging weather, the animals, soil and grasslands have to adapt. Cheese flavor varies depending on the time of year it is made, what the animals have been eating.

Regions of England along with Scotland, Ireland and Wales have their own specialty cheeses, made by locals with milk from local animals, reared on local pastures. The British Cheese Board states that there are over 700 named British cheeses produced in all of the UK. Some cheeses have a **PDO** (Protected Designation of Origin). For example:

- West Country Farmhouse Cheddar can only be produced in the West Country (Devon, Dorset, Somerset & Cornwall).
- Stilton can only be produced in Nottinghamshire, Derbyshire & Leicestershire. It is not made in the village of Stilton, but more about that in a bit.
- Other cheeses with a **PDO** are: Beacon Fell Traditional Lancashire, Buxton Blue, Dovedale, Swaledale, Swaledale Ewes', Single Gloucester, Staffordshire.
- Three cheeses have **PGI** (Protected Geographical Indication): Dorset Blue, Exmoor Blue, Teviotdale.

During WW II & for nearly a decade after the war, most milk in Britain was used for making a single kind of cheese nicknamed "Government Cheddar" as part of war economies and rationing. This nearly wiped out the all other

cheese production in the country. Before WW I there were more than 3500 cheese producers in Britain. Fewer than 100 remained after WW II.

Cheddar

Cheddar is probably the most consumed cheese in the world and is not protected by designation, thus the reason why it is made everywhere.

It originated in Somerset in the late 12th century and took its name either from the Gorge or the caves in the town of Cheddar that were used to store the cheese. The town also gave its name to the cheese's unique cheesemaking process called Cheddaring, in which slabs of curd are turned and piled on top of each other in a controlled method that helps drain the whey and stretches the curd. This facilitates creating a harder cheese with a firm texture.

English records go back more than 800 years showing that the King Henry II of England purchased 10,240 lbs of cheddar at a farthing a pound. His son, Prince John continued the tradition. Parliamentary records dating to the reign of Charles I (1625-49) indicate that cheddar was sold before it was even made and was only available at the royal court. It has been suggested that the Romans brought the recipe to Britain from France's Cantal region.

English cheddar is increasingly being sold at longer ages in response to changing consumer tastes in England. The more mature cheddars tend to have a characteristic sweet, nutty flavor.

It is the most popular cheese in England accounting for 51% of all cheese sales and is the second most popular cheese in the U.S., after mozzarella. Wisconsin produces the most cheddar in the U.S. with numerous creameries in other states.

Scotland produces a similar cheese called Dunlop, but if it weren't for a woman named Barbara Gilmour this cheese would never have come to be. When she fled from Ireland during the religious troubles of 1688 she brought her cheese recipe and settled on a family farm near Dunlop, in Ayrshire. The cheese she produced and sold to locals was not like anything

ever before produced by the Scots. A century later her grandson was running the same family farm and by then was not the only cheesemaker producing Dunlop; it had become a Scottish tradition. In our time this cheese has evolved into having a slightly sweeter aftertaste than cheddar and rivals several other highly touted British cheeses for its toasting and melting properties.

Record Cheddars

- President Andrew Jackson once held a party at the White House and served a 1,400 lb brick of cheddar cheese
- A 7,000 lb block was produced in Ingersoll, Canada in 1866 and was exhibited in both NY and Britain.
- In 1893 farmers in the town of Perth, Ontario produced a 22,000 lb cheddar that was exhibited at the Chicago World's Fair. It was supposed to be exhibited in Canada but the mammoth cheese fell through the floor. It was placed on a reinforced concrete floor in the Chicago World's Fair Agricultural Bldg and received the most media attention at the fair, winning the bronze medal
- In 1964 a Wisconsin cheddar weighing 34,951 lbs was made for the 1964 World's Fair in NY. A cheese this size would use the equivalent of the daily milk production of 16,000 cows.
- The largest cheddar ever made was created by Oregon members of the Federation of American Cheesemakers in 1989. It weighed 56,850 lbs.

TASTE THE MONTGOMERY CHEDDAR AND READ THIS PART:

The Montgomery family are third generation farmers in South Somerset. The farm was bought in 1911 by the current owner's grandfather. It is a West Country Farmhouse Cheddar (PDO) made from the milk of their 140 Friesian cows. They use calf rennet and an old, slow peg mill to produce the peculiar fissuring and brittleness of the cheese. Each wheel is a 60 lb cylinder, wrapped in linen and rubbed with lard before cellaring. They typically age them 12-18 months.

Wensleydale

Wensleydale cheese was first made by French monks who originated from the Roquefort region of France. They built a monastery in lower Wensleydale in Yorkshire. They brought their recipe for making cheese from sheep's milk. During the 14th century they switched primarily to cow's milk but they still used a little sheep's milk to give it a more open texture and to allow for the development of blue mold. At that time Wensleydale cheese was nearly always blue, nowadays the blue variety is rarely seen. Wensleydale is a hard cheese that is both sweet and smooth. When the monastery folded in 1540 local farmers continued making the cheese up until WW II when the gov't usurped milk for their gov't cheddar. Even after rationing ceased in 1954 cheesemaking did not return to pre-war levels.

In Yorkshire and Northeast England it is often eaten with fruit cake or Christmas cake.

Why you may have heard of it: It was mentioned by John Cleese in his Monty Python sketch called The Cheese Shop, which appeared in a 1972 episode of Monty Python's Flying Circus.

TASTE WENSLEYDALE

Hereford Hop

This pale yellow cheese is made by Charles Martell, maker of the famous Stinking Bishop. He invented the cheese in 1990 on Hunts Court Farm, a few miles from the Herefordshire border. It is made from cow's milk and is coated in toasted hops. It's a citrusy, buttery cheese with sharp flavors that juxtaposes the bitterness of the hops. Best eaten best alone to allow the taster to appreciate the various flavors.

TASTE HEREFORD HOP

Blue Stilton Cheese

Rightfully known as the ‘King of English Cheeses’, Blue Stilton takes its name from a village just south of Peterborough which was a coach stop on the Great North Road. Daniel Defoe referred to Stilton as the “English Parmesan”.

The cheese was originally sold from The Bell Inn in the village and its fame spread up and down the Great North Road. The landlord of the Inn – Cooper Thornhill – was an entrepreneur and trader and sold large amounts of Stilton into the London market. Faced with growing demand he set up an agreement with a renowned cheesemaker by the name of Frances Pawlett in the village of Wymondham to supply a somewhat different cheese which was also called Stilton. This historians believe was the forerunner of today’s Blue Stilton. Production of cheese ceased in the village during the course of the 18th century and most Stilton was then subsequently made in Leicestershire, Nottinghamshire and then Derbyshire. How the cheese evolved from its original style to the cheese made by Frances Pawlett remains unknown. Recent research has revealed that a cheese called “Stilton” was made in the village in the early part of the 18th century. A recipe from that time suggests that it was a hard pressed, cooked, cream cheese that would have been kept for some time before being eaten.

Stilton today is honored with a certification trademark and Protected Designation of Origin (**PDO**) status, meaning it can only be made in the counties of Nottinghamshire, Derbyshire, and Leicestershire to a specified recipe. The milk must come from the three counties and must be pasteurized before use. The cheese must be allowed to form its own crust, can only be made in a cylindrical shape, must never be pressed and must have the magical blue veins for which Stilton is famed, radiating from the centre of the cheese. Like many blue cheeses *penicillium roqueforti* blue mold is added to the milk which is activated once the cheese is formed by piercing the cheese with stainless steel needles, allowing oxygen to enter the body of the cheese. It is an unpressed, semi-hard blue-veined cheese made from cow’s milk into 17 lb cylinders but smaller Stiltons are made too. It is semi-smooth and creamy with a complex, slightly acidic flavor when young. It is typically sold between 9-12 weeks of age.

As it matures the texture becomes softer and creamier with a mellow flavor. It makes an excellent dessert cheese and is traditionally served with Port at

Christmas. However, it can be enjoyed all year round and is worth trying with a dark cream sherry or a sweet dessert wine. It is also very versatile and can be used in hot or cold recipes.

White Stilton (without blue veins) is still being made and like its blue brother can only be produced in Derbyshire, Nottinghamshire and Leicestershire from locally produced milk. It too can only be made in cylinders and is never pressed. It has a crumbly, open texture with a fresh, creamy background flavor and is best eaten at 3-4 weeks of age.

Queso Diego Talk on English Cheeses May 21, 2013

Other Cheeses of Note

Cheshire

Cheshire is probably England's oldest cheese on record due to its mention in William the Conqueror's Domesday Book, circa 1086. By the 18th century Cheshire was the most popular cheese in the country & was the only cheese stocked on the ships of the British Royal Navy. Back in the 1930s more than 400 farms were making 6,000 tons per year. It reached its' production peak in 1960 but still holds rank as the UK's best selling crumbly cheese. Today factories produce the bulk of Cheshire but there are still a handful of farmhouses making it according to traditional recipes and methods.

One of these farmhouses is Shropshire's Hawkstone Abbey farm run by the Appleby family. They produce one of the only handmade, unpasteurized, cloth-bound Cheshire cheeses. Farmhouse Cheshire is typically longer aged from 6-10 months, giving it a rich, full flavor.

Cheshire comes in three varieties: red, white and blue. It is dense and semi-hard, and defined by its moist, crumbly texture, and mild, salty taste. The Cheshire family of cheeses is distinct group that includes other crumbly cheeses from the north of England such as Wensleydale and Lancashire

Cheshire marries well with fruit as its buttery-rich, mellow flavor and tangy acidity balances most fruit flavors.

Gloucester

A cow's milk cheese made into two types, single or double. It has been made in Gloucestershire at least since the 16th century. It did not become popular until the 1700s. Single is made with a blend of skimmed milk from evening milking and whole milk from morning milking. It's typically aged for two months and has a semi-hard texture. Double is made with only whole milk from morning and eve milking. Typically aged for 6 or more months it has a slightly firmer texture and a stronger, more savory flavor. It has a pronounced buttery rich taste with hints of nuttiness. While Double Gloucester is more widely available the single variety is still being made in small quantities.

Gloucester cheeses all but disappeared by the end of WW II due to rationing and all milk going toward gov't cheddar. The postwar challenge of the Milk Marketing Board was to bring the old ones back to market, but in the case of Gloucester no valid recipe could be found. Experiments to produce something like the old product were disastrous until one day, answering a general call for help, an old woman who appeared to be in her 80s or 90s showed up at the factory. After she smelled and tasted the factory experiments and declaring them no good at all, she set about showing the workers step-by-step how to make real Double Gloucester. She stayed with the until they mastered the craft she had carried with her throughout her life. Then she went home and immediately died. Her name is not known.

Additional Cheeses worth seeking out:

Blues (all are cow's milk unless otherwise noted)

Blue Wensleydale (sheep's milk)

Leicestershire Blue

Beacon Blue (goat's milk)

Blacksticks Blue

Blue Vinney

Dorset Blue

Buxton Blue

Garstang Blue

Cornish Blue

Dovedale Blue

Shropshire Blue

Non-Blues (all are cow's milk unless noted)

Caerphilly

Cornish Yarg (wrapped in nettle leaves, has a light white mold)

Derby

Lancashire

Kidderton Ash (goat's milk, a silky white mold blooms through coated ash)

Chevington

Cheviot

Coquetdale

Red Leicester

Gevrik (goat's milk, white bloomy mold, a close relation to Camembert)

Northumberland

Parlick Fell (ewe's milk)

Redesdale (ewe's milk)

Stinking Bishop Washed in sparkling Perry (alcoholic drink, like cider). Despite its strong aroma, has a mild flavor similar to Munster.

Swaledale

Swanledale Ewes (ewe's milk)

Village Greeb (goat's milk)

Whitehaven (goat's milk)

Cheeses presented this evening: Montgomery's Cheddar, Wensleydale, Herford Hop and Blue Stilton.

What Cheeses Owe to a Couple of Women: