

The Great British Sarnie

From picnic doorstops to dainty afternoon-tea treats, the sandwich has been a national favourite for centuries

RECIPES SARAH AKHURST RECIPE PHOTOGRAPHS MARTIN POOLE

'Two or more slices of bread, or a split roll, having a filling in-between,' is how my dictionary defines a sandwich, a deceptively simple explanation of something so endlessly adaptable.

Sandwiches can be sweet or savoury (and sometimes both). They can be dainty, like afternoon-tea favourite the cucumber sandwich and 'Jam Pennies' (jam sandwiches the approximate size of an old 1d coin), which are apparently favoured by Her Majesty. They can be jaw-threatening and elaborate, like the famous multilayered deli sandwiches of New York or the towering creations adored by Scooby Doo. They can come in all varieties of bread, be toasted or untoasted, simple or extravagant, healthy or quite the opposite... Whatever the format, however, they're always recognisably a sandwich.

As everyone has probably heard at some point, the sandwich got its name in the late 18th century from John Montagu, the 4th Earl of Sandwich, one of those rare moments where legend and food historians actually agree. A keen – possibly addicted – gambler, the Earl was reluctant to leave the card table, and asked for his meat and bread to be brought to him. He placed the former between two slices of the latter, the name stuck and the sandwich thrived: records show that in London by 1850 there were some 70 street vendors

selling ham sandwiches.

ANCIENT AND MODERN

Of course, this notion of bread-with-a-filling exists all around the world. While some famous sandwiches are relatively modern – the New Orleans po'boy, for example, dates back to 1929; the Vietnamese bánh mì originated in the 1950s – in other cultures, from Northern Africa to Asia, flatbreads such as injera and chapatis have existed for centuries. It's probably safe to assume then that the concept of using bread to envelop (or mop up) other foods is thus as old as bread itself. Thanks to a recent discovery of ancient crumbs in Jordan – from a tribe called the Natufians, who lived between the Paleolithic and Neolithic eras – we know bread has been around since at least 14,000 BCE – which, frankly, means a whole lot

of 'sandwiches' existed long before John Montagu ever got dealt a hand.

(One of the earliest sandwiches on record dates to around 100 BCE, when rabbi Hillel the Elder is said to have started the Passover custom of sandwiching charoset – a mixture of chopped nuts, apples, spices, and wine – between two matzahs to eat with bitter herbs.)

CRUST CULTURE

In the UK, before sandwiches were sandwiches, the handheld combination of bread and meat was probably called, er, 'bread and meat'. During the Middle



Ages, for example, thick slices of – often stale – bread called ‘trenchers’ were used as plates. Once soaked in the remains of the meal, these were also eaten – often fed to dogs, or beggars – and the term ‘trencherman’ evolved to describe a hearty eater.

In many other cultures – particularly Scandinavia – bread-with-a-filling is often actually bread-with-a-topping, resulting in the ‘open sandwich’, such as Denmark’s *smørrebrød*, the Czech *chlebičky*, Germany’s *Strammer Max* and Spain’s *montadito*. On a vaguely connected note, ‘butty’, the Great British slang word for sandwich, probably derived from the ‘battered bread’.

In 1860, in *The Uncommercial Traveller*, Charles Dickens hailed the sandwich as ‘one of our greatest institutions’, declaring it ‘as substantial as was consistent with portability, and as cheap as possible’. The latter point is a debatable ‘advantage’, but food and travel writer Helen Graves, founder of *The London Review of Sandwiches* and author of *101 Sandwiches*, certainly agrees with Dickens’ main point. ‘There’s just

something about the sandwich,’ says Helen. ‘Everything that I look for in a recipe, a plate of food – the contrasts of textures, the flavours, everything that’s good about a dish – you can get in a sandwich. And from a greed perspective, I find the sensation of biting into bread incredibly satisfying.’

BIG BUSINESS

The contrasts are also what appeal to Max Halley, the founder of Max’s Sandwich Shop, author of *Max’s Sandwich Book* (and the forthcoming ‘sequel’ *Max’s Picnic Book*) and regular guest on Channel 4’s *Sunday Brunch*. Max has a sandwich-making mantra...

‘Hot, cold, sweet, sour, crunchy, soft,’ he explains. ‘That’s what your brain is looking for in order for something to be completely delicious.’

With food fads coming and going, sandwiches have remained remarkably constant, certainly as a domestic staple, but also, particularly, for food on the move. The market may be crowded with options, we may have ‘discovered’ alternatives such as sushi and pho in

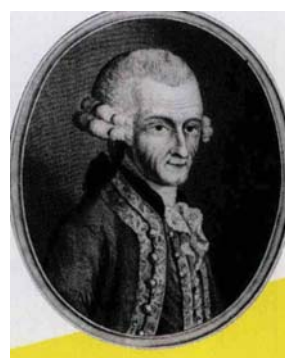
recent years, but the sandwich, be it as working lunch, quick hunger fix or train picnic, remains a huge business. Since supermarkets introduced pre-packaged sandwiches in 1980, the market has grown substantially: by 2018, the UK’s sandwich industry employed around 325,000 people and was estimated to be worth around £8bn. That doesn’t mean, of course, that such sandwiches have always been good. ‘That point where tomato soaks into the bread in a pre-packed sandwich...’ says Helen, with a shudder.

FRESH IDEAS

Now that so many of us are at home, working or otherwise, the sandwich is no doubt as popular as ever. With a little thought, though, urge Helen and Max, you can elevate what you may see as a ‘quick fix’ lunch into something altogether greater. ‘Show it some love,’ advises Helen. ‘Don’t overthink it, but don’t just slap it together. Contrasts keep your palate interested. The ingredients don’t have to be “the best” – and sometimes, like in a fish finger sandwich, fluffy white sandwich bread is the most appropriate.’

‘A lot of excellence in food,’ agrees Max, ‘is not highfalutin concept, or quality of the ingredients, it’s just knowing what to do with them. The most wonderful thing about sandwiches is that you can put nearly

anything in one.' There is, however, one trick he'd recommend.
 'Take your condiment of choice – hot sauce, mustard, whatever – combine it with mayonnaise, and use that,' says Max. 'Take English mustard. It's a nightmare to spread evenly, but mix it into mayo, you'll get a more even spread, and you temper it without losing the punchiness.'



John Montagu, the 4th Earl of Sandwich

PLOUGHMAN'S WITH PICKLED ONION RELISH

SERVES 2 HANDS-ON TIME 30 MINS TOTAL TIME 1 HR 45 MINS, PLUS COOLING

For the pickled onion relish (makes 3 x 370g jars)

- ◆ 2 tbsp rapeseed oil
- ◆ 1kg onions, sliced
- ◆ 300g cooking apples, peeled cored and diced
- ◆ 10 whole cloves
- ◆ 5 tbsp tomato purée
- ◆ zest and juice of 1 lemon
- ◆ 250ml white wine vinegar
- ◆ 375g caster sugar

For the sandwich

- ◆ soft butter, for spreading
- ◆ 4 slices walnut cob, or any brown bread
- ◆ 2 slices thick cut honey roast ham
- ◆ 60g mature cheddar (we used Barber's mature cruncher cheddar), sliced
- ◆ handful rocket leaves
- ◆ pickled onion relish, to taste

- 1 For the relish, heat the oil in a large pan and gently sweat the onions and apple with the cloves for around 15-20 minutes, or until soft. Add the tomato purée and cook for a further 2 minutes, stirring, then add the lemon zest and juice, vinegar and sugar. Bring to a simmer, stirring to make sure that the sugar dissolves fully, then bubble gently for 45-50 minutes, or until the liquid has reduced and thickened. When you drag your spoon across the bottom of the pan, the mixture should stay apart, without running back into the centre. Remove from the heat and transfer to sterilised jars. Seal and leave to cool.
 - 2 For the sandwiches, butter the bread and top two of the slices with the ham, cheddar, rocket leaves and a good dollop of the relish. Top with the final two slices of bread. Slice and serve immediately.
- 498cals; 18g fat (10g sat fat); 28g protein; 6g fibre; 53g carbs; 15g total sugars; 2.9g salt ➤

» **GET AHEAD**
 Sealed jars of relish keep for up to 1 year in a cool dark place. Once opened, store in the fridge and eat within 4 weeks.

CORONATION CHICKEN & MANGO PICCALILLI

SERVES 2 HANDS-ON TIME 45 MINS TOTAL TIME 1 HR, PLUS COOLING

For the mango piccalilli (makes 2 x 454g jars)

- ◆ 300ml apple cider vinegar
- ◆ 1 tbsp flaky sea salt
- ◆ 1 tbsp coriander seeds
- ◆ 1 tsp cumin seeds
- ◆ 2 tsp mustard seeds
- ◆ 1 tsp whole black peppercorns
- ◆ 2 bay leaves
- ◆ 1 small cauliflower, approximately 400g, cut into small florets
- ◆ 10 radishes, halved
- ◆ 10 small shallots, peeled and halved
- ◆ 2 red chillies, sliced
- ◆ 1 mango, peeled and cut into 1cm dice
- ◆ 125g light brown sugar
- ◆ 1 tbsp mild curry powder
- ◆ ½ tsp mustard powder
- ◆ 1 tbsp ground turmeric
- ◆ 1 tbsp cornflour

For the coronation chicken

- ◆ 75g light mayonnaise
- ◆ ½ tsp curry powder
- ◆ juice of ½ lemon
- ◆ 30g sultanas
- ◆ 200g cooked chicken breast, shredded

For the sandwich

- ◆ soft butter, for spreading
- ◆ 4 slices rustic white loaf
- ◆ handful baby leaf spinach

- 1 To make the piccalilli, put the vinegar in a large pan with the salt, whole spices and bay leaves. Heat over a medium heat until simmering, then add the vegetables. Simmer for 5 minutes, then add the chillies and mango. Cook for a further 2-3 minutes or until the veg is tender. Drain into a colander over a bowl, reserving the vinegar.
- 2 Return the vinegar to the pan, add the sugar and heat gently until dissolved. Mix the curry and mustard powders with the turmeric and cornflour in a small bowl, then add 4 tablespoons of cold water to make a paste; pour into the pan. Bring to the boil over a medium heat then simmer for 5 minutes, stirring continuously, until the mixture thickens. Stir in the cooked veg and continue to cook for a further 2 minutes. Remove from the heat and transfer to sterilised jars. Seal and leave to cool. Ideally leave for 3-4 days to allow the flavours to develop.
- 3 For the sandwiches, mix the mayo, curry powder and lemon juice together; add the sultanas and chicken, season well.
- 4 Butter the bread and top two of the slices with a handful of spinach leaves. Divide the chicken between the two and add a good amount of the piccalilli. Finish with the final two slices of bread. Serve immediately.

■ 630cals; 20g fat (5g sat fat); 42g protein; 4g fibre; 69g carbs; 19g total sugars; 2.4g salt



» **GET AHEAD**
 Sealed jars of piccalilli keep for up to 1 year. Once opened, store in the fridge and eat within 4 weeks.

HOMEMADE FISH FINGER AND TARTARE SAUCE

SERVES 2 HANDS-ON TIME 25 MINS TOTAL TIME 25 MINS, PLUS 1 HR RESTING

For the fish fingers

- ◆ 75g plain flour, plus extra to dust
- ◆ ¼ tsp fast-action dried yeast
- ◆ pinch sugar
- ◆ 150ml beer
- ◆ vegetable oil, for deep-frying
- ◆ 250g skinless cod fillets (or any white fish), cut into chunky strips

For the tartare sauce

- ◆ 75g light mayonnaise
- ◆ 30g gherkins, diced

- ◆ 1 tsp miniature capers
- ◆ zest and juice of ½ lemon
- ◆ 1 tbsp finely chopped flat-leaf parsley
- ◆ 1 anchovy fillet, finely chopped

For the sandwich

- ◆ soft butter, for spreading
- ◆ 4 chunky slices white farmhouse loaf
- ◆ handful soft lettuce leaves

- 1 For the batter for the fish fingers, put the flour in a bowl with the yeast, sugar and a pinch of salt. Add the beer and whisk until you have a smooth batter. Set aside for around an hour.
 - 2 Meanwhile, make the tartare sauce by mixing together all of the ingredients. Season well and set aside until required.
 - 3 Fill a wide pan with vegetable oil until it's about 4cm deep. Heat until the oil is around 180°C. Dust the fish fillets with flour and then dip in the batter, holding them above the bowl to allow the excess to drip off. Drop in the hot oil and cook for around 4 minutes, or until golden brown. Don't overcrowd the pan; cook in two batches if necessary. Transfer to a board lined with kitchen paper.
 - 4 Butter the bread and add some lettuce leaves to two slices. Top with the fish fingers and the tartare sauce, and top with the remaining bread. Serve immediately.
- 703cals; 26g fat (4g sat fat); 35g protein; 4g fibre; 76g carbs; 7g total sugars; 2.2g salt ■

» **GET AHEAD**
 Prep to the end of step 2 about 1 hour before cooking.



THE FISH SANDWICH

