

# 7 days

The stories that shaped the week

## Making a meal of it

MPs don't know if the Scotch egg is more than a snack. So what do the people who make them think, asks **Kasia Delgado**

In a year as strange as 2020, perhaps it is fitting that this week the most hotly debated topic in the UK has been the Scotch egg. This humble ball of egg, meat and breadcrumbs has for days graced front pages, radio shows and television news segments. The matter in question: is it a meal or a snack?

The furore began when Cabinet minister George Eustice said that a Scotch egg would count as a substantial meal, and could therefore be served with alcohol by pubs in tier two areas.

Michael Gove, perhaps unaware of the hornet's nest he was kicking, said shortly afterwards: "A couple of Scotch eggs is a starter, as far as I'm concerned." He later changed his mind and agreed that it could be a substantial meal, and perhaps he had too big an appetite as a "hearty trencherman".

Nobody, then, is any clearer on the topic - but what is clear is that the very nature of the Scotch egg has changed over the years since it was invented.

Luxury department store Fortnum & Mason claims to have created the dish in the mid-18th century, touting it as an easy snack for the well-to-do traveller passing through London's busy Piccadilly. However, this isn't necessarily the truth. "I'm sure they started life as part of dinner, not as a traveller's food," food historian Annie Gray (*inset*) said in 2015. "Plus, if you're rich enough to shop at Fortnum's, you'd be stopping at an inn for lunch, not stuffing an egg in your pocket."

There is another theory that Scottish farmers invented it as an inexpensive

dish, hence the "Scotch" part of its name, but others believe it has nothing to do with Scotland and arrived here from India, after British soldiers returned home from the colony having enjoyed the dish nargisi kofta - an egg wrapped inside lamb mince and fried.

Whoever we have to thank (or blame, depending on one's taste buds), the Scotch egg appears to have enjoyed life as a substantial meal in certain homes in Victorian Britain. In Mrs Beeton's 1861 *Book of Household Management*, she advised to serve one for supper with "good brown gravy". The sausage meat could also, she suggested, be replaced with pounded anchovies.

As time went on, Scotch eggs became more of a snack; smaller, portable, easy to have at a picnic or at a pub with your pint. Recently, however, it has risen in the foodie ranks, with gastropubs and delis across the UK serving hearty items bigger than a fist.

Heston Blumenthal loves a Scotch egg. "They remind me of picnics as a child," the celebrity chef tells *i*weekend. "We used to go to Windsor Great Park in summer and there was always a Scotch egg in the hamper, so there is a lot of nostalgia attached to it for me."

Instead of being content with a hard-boiled picnic variety in his restaurants, he wondered whether it would be possible to develop one with a runny yolk. "After a lot of trial and error, we developed a recipe which we use for the quail's egg ones we serve at the Hind's Head in Bray. We were the first to do this and they've become ubiquitous now in pubs and restaurants across the world. They've got to be served with a



**Heston Blumenthal (above) created a Scotch egg with a runny centre (top) for the Hind's Head**  
APR KRISTY NOBLE

**Nobody ever says: 'Let's go for a Scotch egg' as you might say 'Let's go for a curry'**

relish made from mayonnaise and hot dog mustard for me."

Clearly, not all Scotch eggs are created equal. For David Laing, who owns Scotch egg company The Clucking Pig in Redcar, it can certainly be a meal if it's high enough quality. He uses rare-breed pork, game or venison to swaddle a large free-range egg. He says plenty of his clients eat them as the main dish, with a bit of salad on the side. "Ours are quite large so sometimes people even share them with their families," he says.

What adds meal-worthy substance to his eggs is the breadcrumb layer. Some supermarket varieties might use panko breadcrumbs, which are light and crisp, but Laing "blitzes" a rustic loaf.

Size matters for London butchers HG Walter, too. "Our Scotch eggs are bite-size and easily snackable," says a spokesman, "but more often than not you've found yourself scoffing a whole pot of six before you even realise you've

started. Our regular-sized ones are perfect for a light lunch."

The Gourmet Scotch Egg Company in York agrees. "We view Scotch eggs either way," says Kate Dawson, who makes the dish herself for the business, "but they can be a substantial snack if you have one of ours. They are the size of tennis balls, but they can also be served with salad, chips or potatoes and you have a meal. We've seen many restaurants doing this."

Louise Wagstaffe, an experienced chef who founded social enterprise Delicious By Design, feels the nation might be asking the wrong question about Scotch eggs. "Perhaps the question should be: how is it that we've failed to support our hospitality industry to the point where restaurateurs and landlords are desperately trying to redefine a Scotch egg as a substantial meal in order to open their doors?"

"Every chef who has a Scotch egg as part of their offer knows whether or not they would call it a substantial meal," she adds. "For me, a Scotch egg is a wonderful snack. Coupled with a lovely summer salad, it would make a light lunch. However nobody ever says: 'Let's go out for a Scotch egg dinner' in the way you might say 'Let's go for a steak' or 'Let's go for a curry'."

The novelist Ian Rankin offered a very different perspective when he tweeted this week that his venerable character detective Rebus has a particularly good recipe for Scotch eggs:

"Put eggs on to boil. Pour a Scotch while you wait. Keep drinking. Throw away the eggs." Hang on... drinking without food of any sort? Well, that just won't do at all.

### iNewsQuiz

- Which animated character will adorn a commemorative 50p coin?
- Who had a Major accident that left him needing a walking boot?
- More than 1,000 people signed up for an "egg-throwing contest" at the unveiling of a statue of whom?
- What connects Lewis Hamilton, Prue Leith and Margaret Atwood?
- Which country said it had landed a robot probe on the Moon?
- What pantomime role will Olivia Colman play in BBC Two's version of *Cinderella* this Christmas?
- A statue of whom appeared on the empty Edward Colston plinth in Bristol in a tribute to the actor Dave Prowse?
- Alien, Sausage, Dragon, Seahorse, Viking, Blob, Swan, Bush Baby - all will appear in which TV show?
- What did German divers searching the Baltic for discarded fishing nets stumble upon?
- Whose son is set to join a Formula One team for the first time next year?

Answers below

**1** NewsQuiz answers **1** Raymond Mabeau **2** The Snowman **3** Margaret Thatcher **4** All will appear **5** Margaret Thatcher **6** The Fairy Godmother **7** Darth Vader **8** The Masked Singer **9** An Enigma cipher machine **10** Michael Schumacher

## IT'S BEEN A GOOD WEEK FOR...

**BTS** The South Korean boy band (right) have become the first group to have a foreign-language song enter the US charts at No 1. 'Life Goes On', sung predominantly in Korean, topped the US Billboard 100 chart in its debut week.

**Transformational biology** A 50-year-old biological challenge has been solved by AI researchers at Google, which could accelerate the development of drugs for cancer and other diseases. Researchers will be able to predict the shape of proteins, and understand how they perform specific tasks in the body, in days rather than years in the once-in-a-generation breakthrough. The development could also help feed the world and even solve the plastic crisis.

**Sore eyes** An effective new treatment to restore vision is on the horizon. It works by injecting genetically modified stem cells into the eye to mend damaged retinas.

**Rewilding** Beavers have built their first dam in Exmoor in more than 400 years, following river restoration work by the National Trust. The dam at the Holnicote Estate near Minehead has been made by the first beavers to be released into the wild by the trust in its 125-year history.

**Maggie O'Farrell** (inset) The author's lauded book about the short life of Shakespeare's son, Hamnet, was named Waterstones book of the year.

**Osteoporosis sufferers** Scientists have identified a gene that plays a key role in the ageing of bone, tendon, ligament and cartilage, which they hope can be used to treat age-related diseases connected to the skeletal system.

**Andrea Levy** The late author of the prize-winning Windrush novel 'Small Island' will become the first writer of colour to have her pen added to the Royal Society of Literature's historic collection, which includes writing implements owned by George Eliot and Lord Byron.

**Stéphanie Frappart** The French referee (right) made history as the first woman to referee a men's Champions League game. She officiated in the match between Juventus and Dynamo Kiev. She previously refereed Liverpool and Chelsea in a Super Cup game in 2019.



**Letters from strangers** An unwell 10-year-old from Chartham in Kent, Abbie Paice, received thousands of birthday cards and presents from well-wishers around the world after her mother shared on social media that she loved receiving letters in the post.

**Inspirational teachers** Ranjitsinh Disale, a teacher from a village school in India, who fought for the education of girls, won this year's Global Teacher Prize. He gave away half of the \$1m (£740,000) prize, sharing it with the runners-up. Jamie Frost, a UK teacher who ran a free maths tuition website, was awarded a one-off Covid Hero prize.

**Green living** Hundreds of Scottish homes are to become the first in the world to use 100 per cent green hydrogen for heating and cooking in a trial that could lead to households across the country replacing fossil fuel use.

**Hope** After her work dried up, Helen Proudfoot, who works for adventure company Active England Tours, cycled a 1,000km route from Scotland to Dorset, seeking out villages and hamlets called Hope. Along the way, she raised money for The Bike Project, a charity that donates refurbished bikes to refugees.

**Sir David Attenborough** The broadcaster and natural historian, 94, will receive a lifetime achievement award at the Rose d'Or Award in recognition of his 60-year career. The awards, set up in 1961, celebrate achievement in entertainment programming.

**Climate change** Global emissions goals are now within "striking distance" following pledges of action from big polluters such as China and the US, a think-tank has said. If all nations meet their net-zero emissions targets, the world is heading for 2.1°C of warming by the end of the century - just short of the Paris Agreement goal of limiting warming to between 1.5°C and 2°C.

**Heritage highlights** The 5,000-year-old sarsen stones at Stonehenge were illuminated with images of unsung heritage champions from across the UK who have worked to keep the UK's heritage accessible during the pandemic.



**Stuart Bee** The 62-year-old sailor from Florida was rescued after clinging to his capsized boat 86 miles off the US coast for almost 48 hours.

## iweekend

### FREE TROLLS TOY FIGURE PLUS 20% OFF DVD AND BLU-RAY THIS CHRISTMAS

To celebrate the fabulous range of titles available on DVD and Blu-Ray™ this Christmas, we have teamed up with **Universal Pictures Home Entertainment** to bring readers a festive surprise. Claim a brilliant stocking filler toy, your very own **Trolls 'Puzzle Palz' figure**. There are multiple characters available and your gift will be chosen at random. There's no limit on how many you can redeem, so pick up one for the entire family.

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## What we learned this week

- TRANSPORT** Almost half of the bridges on England's 9,000 busiest roads have poor sections in a poor condition, requiring repairs that could cause traffic chaos.
- TECHNOLOGY** Britons are among the least likely to take up new technologies and replace their existing gadgets, a study into global consumer habits has found.
- EDUCATION** If teaching about climate change is not based in science, it could become a "moralistic quasi-religious", the chief inspector of Ofsted warned.
- COMMUNICATION** The slowest street for broadband in the UK, Queens Road in Weybridge, Surrey, is 5,330 times slower than the fastest, Dale Lane in Appleton, Cheshire.
- TRAVEL** Berney Arms in Norfolk was Britain's least-used railway station in the past year, with just 42 passengers between April 2019 and March 2020.
- LITERATURE** A book of 110 blank pages, Why Salvini Deserves Trust, Respect and Admiration, is now a bestseller. It is about Italy's far-right politician Matteo Salvini.
- CULTURE** Black Lives Matter topped ArtReview magazine's Power 100 list, usually given to artists, in recognition of the toppling of statues of historical figures.
- FOOD** Singapore's food regulator has let a US company sell lab-grown "chicken bites" in a world first that could pave the way for this type of meat to be sold elsewhere.

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