

BRITISH CULTURE & SOCIETY I

TEA IN BRITAIN



Introduction

Since the 18th century the [United Kingdom](#) has been one of the largest per capita tea consumers in the world, with average per capita supply at 1.9 kg per year. The popularity of tea occasioned the furtive export of slips, a small shoot for planting or twig for grafting to tea plants, from China to [British India](#) and its [commercial culture there](#), beginning in 1840; British interests controlled tea production in the subcontinent. Tea, which was an upper-class drink in Europe, became the infusion of every class in Great Britain in the course of the 18th century and has remained so.

History

Before it became Britain's number one drink, [China tea](#) was introduced in the [coffeehouses](#) of London shortly before the [Stuart Restoration](#) (1660) In London "Coffee, chocolate and a kind of drink called *tee*" were "sold in almost every street in 1659", according to Thomas Rugge's *Diurnall*. Tea was mainly consumed by the fashionably rich: [Samuel Pepys](#), curious for every novelty, tasted the new drink in 1660: [25 September] "I did send for a cup of tee, (a China drink) of

which I had never had drunk before". Two pounds, two ounces were formally presented to [Charles II](#) by the [British East India Company](#) that same year. The tea had been imported to Portugal from its possessions in Asia as well as through the trade merchants maintained with [China](#) and [Japan](#). In 1662 Charles II's Portuguese queen, [Catherine of Braganza](#), introduced the act of drinking tea, which quickly spread throughout court and country and to the English bourgeoisie.

Between 1720 and 1750 the imports of tea to Britain through the British East India Company more than quadrupled. [Fernand Braudel](#) queried, "is it true to say the new drink replaced [gin](#) in England?" Tea was particularly interesting to the Atlantic world not only because it was easy to cultivate but also because of how easy it was to prepare and its ability to revive the spirits and cure mild colds. The earliest English equipment for making tea date to the 1660s. Small porcelain [tea bowls](#) were used by the fashionable; they were occasionally shipped with the tea itself. Tea-drinking spurred the search for a European imitation of Chinese porcelain, first successfully produced in England at the [Chelsea porcelain manufactory](#), established around 1743-45 and quickly imitated.

Between 1872 and 1884 the supply of tea to the British Empire increased with the expansion of the railway to the east. The demand however was not proportional, which caused the prices to rise. Nevertheless, from 1884 onward due to new innovation in tea preparation the price of tea dropped and remained relatively low throughout the first half of the 20th century. Soon afterwards London became the centre of the international tea trade. With high tea imports also came a large increase in the demand for porcelain. The demand for tea cups, pots and dishes increased to go along with this popular new drink.





Afternoon Tea

Tea is not only the name of the beverage, but of a late [afternoon light meal](#) at four o'clock, irrespective of the beverage consumed. [Anna Russell, Duchess of Bedford](#) is credited with the creation of the meal circa 1800. She thought of the idea to ward off hunger between luncheon and dinner, which was served later and later. The tradition continues to this day.

There used to be a tradition of [tea rooms](#) in the UK which provided the traditional fare of [cream](#) and [jam](#) on [scones](#), a combination commonly known as [cream tea](#). However, these establishments have declined in popularity since [World War II](#). In [Devon](#) and [Cornwall](#) particularly, cream teas are a speciality. [A.B.C. tea shops](#) and [Lyons Corner Houses](#) were a successful chain of such establishments. In Yorkshire the company Bettys and Taylors of Harrogate, run their own Tearooms. [Bettys](#) Café Tearooms, established in 1919, is now classed as a British Institution.

Some scholars suggest that tea played a role in British [Industrial Revolution](#). Afternoon tea possibly became a way to increase the number of hours [labourers](#) could work in [factories](#); the stimulants in the tea, accompanied by sugary snacks would give workers energy to finish out the day's work. Further, tea helped alleviate some of the consequences of the [urbanization](#) that accompanied the industrial revolution: drinking tea required boiling one's water, thereby killing water-borne [diseases](#) like [dysentery](#), [cholera](#), and [typhoid](#).



Tea Today

In Britain, the drinking of tea is so varied that it is quite hard to generalise, but usually it is served with milk and sometimes with lemon. Strong tea can be served with milk and occasionally one or two [teaspoons](#) of sugar in a [mug](#), and is commonly referred to as [builder's tea](#). Much of the time in the United Kingdom, tea drinking is not the delicate, refined cultural expression that some might imagine: a [cup](#) (or commonly a mug) of tea is something drunk often.

In 2003, [DataMonitor](#) reported that regular tea drinking in the United Kingdom was on the decline. There was a 10.25 percent decline in the purchase of normal teabags in Britain between 1997 and 2002. Sales of ground coffee also fell during the same period. Britons were instead drinking health-oriented beverages like fruit and/or [herbal teas](#), consumption of which increased 50 percent from 1997 to 2002. A further, unexpected, statistic is that the sales of [decaffeinated](#) tea and coffee fell even faster during this period than the sale of the more common varieties. In 2011, espresso sales were higher than tea sales.

Now, people in Britain drink tea multiple times a day. As the years passed it became a drink less associated with high society as people of all classes drink tea today which can be enjoyed in many different flavours and ways.

Vocabulary Check

Write the English meaning for the following words taken from the text:

a) consumer _____

b) quadrupled _____

- c) cultivate _____
- d) revive _____
- e) spurred _____
- f) imitation _____
- g) beverage _____
- h) ward off _____
- i) stimulants _____
- j) alleviate _____
- k) delicate _____
- l) associated _____

Comprehension Questions

Write the answer to the following questions in your own words with a sentence:

- 1) When did 'China tea' first appear in London? Who drank it?

- 2) What 3 points attracted Europeans to tea?

- 3) What effect did Asian tea bowls have in Europe?

- 4) In the late 19th century, what increased the supply of tea?

- 5) What was one effect of increased tea imports?

- 6) What declined after World War II?

7) How did tea help The Industrial Revolution?

8) How did tea improve life in urban areas?

9) Since the end of the 20th century, how has the amount of tea consumed changed & why?

10) Compared with the 18th century, how has tea consumption changed?
