

# Food, Drink and Rail Heritage - looking at Lancashire and beyond

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# Oatcakes



In *Through England on a Side Saddle* (1695) Celia Fiennes described how she reached Garstang and was 'first presented with the (bread) which is much talked of, made all of oats'

Cooked on a 'bakestone' (thus making them more like a pancake)

**Riddlebread** was an even thinner variation of this, sometimes dried on a rack

**Throdkin** was a version with salted pork stirred through

This gets us thinking about the agriculture too of Lancashire – and I will go on to focus on the Fylde.

**Black Peas**, also known as parched peas or **Carlin Peas**, are purple-podded peas, traditionally stewed. They are typically served hot in mugs or paper bags (disposable cups if brought from a street stall), generously seasoned with salt, butter, and malt vinegar.

The peas have been grown in Britain for at least **500 years** and have been historically popular as can be dried and therefore preserved. Historically, they were synonymous with religious fasting and leniency – a traditional staple of **Carlin Sunday** (the fifth Sunday of Lent, just before Palm Sunday), hence the name.



**The wet summer of 1799** saw much of the cereal crop fail across the Western Fylde. One saving grace during the subsequent food shortage of the 1799-1780 winter was a ship full of dried peas being wrecked on the beach of Blackpool (the local population at the time being less than 500 people).

Another famous folklore tale dates the eating of black peas to **1644**. During the Civil War, Royalist forces in Newcastle were at threat of starving. Legend has it that a cargo ship carrying a massive supply of peas ran aground and these were used to feed the city.





## A note on religious festivals, celebrations and food

- **Wakes Cakes** - the tradition began with an overnight church watch, or 'wake', honouring the local patron saint. This evolved into a lively village fair featuring feasting, dancing, and sports - 'wakes cakes' likely featured at these events.
- The **Wakes Week** holiday - In northern England (especially Lancashire and Yorkshire), the mills were closed for a week or fortnight (different weeks in different towns), giving workers an annual summer holiday. The role of trains in this became very prominent.
- In 1793 James Birch's shop on the corner of Vicarage Road in Eccles began selling flat small cakes filled with currants – what we would recognise as **Eccles Cakes**.

# Chorley Cakes

Whilst Eccles Cakes typically involve a flaky or puff pastry which is sweetened, Chorley Cakes are traditionally made from **shortcrust pastry**.

One theory is that they were popularised during the Industrial Revolution as a handy way of using up pastry 'offcuts' and being dense, compact and easy to carry to work. Industry has undoubtedly shaped food, as we will see later in this presentation.

In East Lancashire, '**sad cake**' could be seen as closely linked to Chorley Cake in ingredients and appearance. It may also be nicknamed 'fly pie' (due to the currants).



# Lancashire Cheese

Traditionally, Lancashire Cheese is made by **blending two or three consecutive days of milk curds**. It is thought this came about as historic dairy farms in Lancashire were too small to produce enough whole milk in a day to produce a cheese. These small farmsteads were very much influenced by the land, which was historically difficult to drain.

The process used to create Lancashire Cheese is sometimes known as the **Gornall Method** (named in the 1890s after Joseph Gornall, a County Council employee who visited many farms in Lancashire to establish a consistent method) and involves fermenting, draining and accumulating curds over multiple days before mixing them together.



## **Creamy Lancashire**

The 'youngest' version of Lancashire Cheese, using the multi-day curd process which results in a high moisture content – meaning a 'buttery' texture. It is aged for up to 12 weeks.

## **Tasty Lancashire**

Uses the same process as above but matured for longer – anything from 3 months to 2 years. The longer the time, the more moisture the cheese loses, meaning it becomes firmer and develops a nutty tang (what we may refer to as 'bite').

## **Crumbly Lancashire**

A relatively modern variant, created in the 1950s to fit with industrial production. It does not use multi-day curds and relies on a higher amount of starter culture, meaning the milk will acidify more rapidly (and therefore the quite 'acidic' taste we may associate with Crumbly Lancashire).



# The influence of trains

Before the arrival of the railway, the Fylde was a largely self-sustaining agricultural peninsula highly influenced by the weather and localised farming.

When lines like the **Preston and Wyre Railway (1840)** - connecting Preston to the port of Fleetwood - and later coastal branches were introduced, this provided a route for the export and import of food and fertiliser (yet worth keeping in mind all freight traffic to/from Fleetwood was stopped by 1999).

**Fish Trains** - Shrimp and fish from Lytham and (typically) whitefish from Fleetwood were loaded onto dedicated 'Fish Trains'. For a time, Fleetwood was the UK's third-largest fishing port with great connections to the Lancashire & Yorkshire Railway. The 'Fish Trains' were given priority, with specialised bell codes for signaling and specially-designed rolling stock that was insulated and filled with ice. The Fleetwood-to-London fish train served the capital's **Billingsgate Fish Market**.

# The railways and growth

**Supplying fresh produce to expanding industrial towns** – historically in areas like Poulton-le-Fylde, allotments and subsistence farming were key elements of life. Yet by the late 1840s, large agricultural shows were happening - the railway holding influence as produce now had the potential of being more readily exported.

**The move from cheese to milk** – before the railways, milk generally wasn't seen as a product for export as would spoil so quickly on its journey beyond the local area. Due to this, Fylde farmers had focused historically on producing dense, heavy cheeses (like the Lancashire previously mentioned). The arrival of the railway meant that milk from the pastures of the Fylde could be served in the urban areas of Lancashire and beyond.



**Fertiliser** – by the 1860s, huge quantities of marl (lime-rich clay) could be transported to the sandier dunes on the coast such as at Layton Hawes (Blackpool). This helped transform previously unusable land/difficult to drain land into arable potential.

**Agricultural success** – Growing with Nature in nearby Pilling – market garden and believed to have one the UK's longest-running vegetable box schemes (since the early 1990s). Fiddler's Lancashire Crisps (Rufford, Ormskirk) also a notable example.



# The function (and fun) of food

**Seaside tourism and hospitality** – The Victorian and Edwardian boom in seaside leisure created customer demand and fuelled restaurant culture, for example at Lytham St Annes and the likes of the St Annes Fish Restaurant (since 1929). Fish and Chips was also popularised inland.

**Pies and pasties** – portable and potentially deriving from 'Lancashire Foots'. Lancashire Foots (never feet) were trotter-shaped pasties traditionally eaten by miners. Encasing food in pastry makes it portable and this suited it to both industry and leisure (pies and pasties were popular train and beach food).



**Blackpool Rock** - 'Fair rock' of the nineteenth century was sold at fairs and carnivals (as sugar by then was a cheap import) but it was not striped or lettered as it today.

There are various origin stories around 'Blackpool Rock', but one such theory links to ex-miner Ben Bullock, originally from Burnley, who reportedly developed the idea of a lettered holiday rock when on holiday in Blackpool in the late 1800s (holidaying in Blackpool made very much possible by train, of course). He had it made in his then Yorkshire-based sweet factory and sent to retailers in Blackpool.

