



Food
Standards
Agency

HM Government

How We All Caught the Chicken Flu, Commissioned The Food Standards Agency on behalf of HM Government

In 1980s Britain, a new wave of Fast-food restaurants opened in the UK, adopting a familiar aesthetic to the previous successful American fast-food restaurants. The sudden and continuing growth of these restaurants has come from their affordability and decent quality to value ratio. Juxtaposing more traditional British high-street food, a 'Fish and Chips' shop, the now commonly referred to, 'Chicken and Chips' shop, is now the simulacrum taking precedence over the original. Consumed regularly within the UK, Chicken and Chips is now a household favourite among the average consumer in the Commonwealth, and United States.

The Chicken can be barbecued or roasted but is more distinctively known for being served deep fried, often accompanied by a side of fried chips or French fries. A standard serving includes both Chicken and Chips in a small rectangular box, lined with a piece of greaseproof paper; often with a small wooden pick to eat with, a sachet of salt and pepper and never the right amount of ketchup. Other sauces or added condiments can include Mayo, Vinegar, Hot sauce, BBQ and, most notoriously, Burger sauce. Sauces are an important element of the Chicken and Chip shop experience, highlighted by American chain '*Chick fil a*' and its named sauces. Although not available in the UK, a close equivalent to this the McDonald's new Cajun sauce.

In 2012, Chicken and Chips was added to the UK consumer basket for calculating inflation. The Market Basket/Commodity Bundle is a list of fixed items in various proportions used to track the movement of inflation in a specific market or Economy. The basket is used to track the value of currencies over a defined period, recognising Chicken and Chips as a conventional eating habit of the UK consumer since reaching over 10,000 shops in the UK alone. Its most common use is to track the progress of inflation in an economy or specific market which measures change in the value of money over time. A market basket is also used with the theory of buying price parity to measure the value of money in various places.

Chicken and Chips as a meal is now synonymous with British popular culture, as showcased throughout the early 2000s as an accompaniment to the increased interest in the rise of the second wave of the black British counterculture and more recently in the YouTube comical-awkward interview web series *Chicken Shop Date*. It is hosted and created by Ameilia Dimoldenberg whose first interview included UK Grime MC Ghetts.

Dimoldenberg is not the only influencer that has taken note of the iconic status of the Chicken Shop as recognised in famed YouTube food review programme "The Pengest Munch", directed by Elijah Quashie AKA *The Chicken Connoisseur*, famously shouted out by UK Grime artist Stormzy quoting his common saying "yeah is that good yeah" via his *Big For Your Boots* hip-hop rap music video.

A common Chicken and Chip shop shown in these web series is known as *Dixy's*.

As per the existing *Dixy's* website, the Halal fast-food chain otherwise known as 'Dixy Chicken' is said to have been founded in 1986 by Mohammed 'Mo' Chowdhury and Samuel Jackson (Meshoe). *Dixys* is a famous U.K. fast food chain, among the likes of similar popular *Favourites Chicken, Dallas / Dallas Chicken and Ribs, Morley's Chicken* (founded a year before *Dixy's*) and *Chicken Cottage*. As of 2008 it was acquired by Shakeel Arshad, the current owner of American fast-food chain *Church's Chicken*. Appearing on the *All Deff* YouTube channel popular game show *The Great Taste* (The best Fried Chicken).

Dixys is well known for its fresh cuisine and popularity as a long-term affordable favourite afternoon snack for British School children. This was more noticeable amongst the urban demographics, ethnically diverse audiences, and youth demographics. *Man like*. Likely due to the established prevalence within the geographical locations of these communities where there are diverse populations, but no official studies have been undertaken to establish solid figures to support or contradict this. Moreover, the resurgence of these chicken and chips as a staple within the community during government defunding and later closure of 750 after-school/youth clubs since 2010/2011 and alongside the 2008 recession.

The dominance of the cuisine within spaces where there are diverse populations is potential explanation for this. The resurgence of chicken and chips shops as a staple in the community could also be a result of the 2008 recession and government defunding causing the closure of 750 after-school/youth clubs since 2010 – 2011. Quickly capitalised upon by the Chicken Shop Industrial Complex, many shops now offer prices catered to the youth often operating on tight budgets, establishing deals or lunchtime offers for students. Any chicken shop worth its salt will offer 3 wings for £1, which is amongst the most economically sustainable meals for the youth operating on a shoestring.

A common saying that exemplifies, *that's a big word for Elmo*, the nations' connection with fast food is the colloquialism: 'it's just Dixys innit', Thus, solidifying its place within the British cuisine culture and as a contemporary twist on the historical British notion of 'teatime' with *Mirinda Orange Flavour* or *KA Fruit Punch* standing in as a substitute for the colonial commodity. These new high street 'Teatime shops' exist in a variety of take away options; a Kebab, a Pizza, a Chinese, and an Indian take-away, often managed by "Boss Man", the most idiomatic term for highly valued employees.

The political crinkum-crankum of *Dixys* has come from, at times, questionable Food and Hygiene ratings by The Food Standards Agency. This is a non-ministerial government department of the Government of the United Kingdom, the main objective of which is to protect public health in relation to food in England, Wales, and Northern Ireland.

Reported cases included a 2012 closure after two weeks observance and investigation, when a Staffordshire outlet was awarded two out of five stars. In 2014, the *Dixy Chicken* food chain had the worst hygiene record across the UK; a third of the outlets did not meet 'satisfactory levels' of hygiene, and more recently in 2021 a Hackney branch revealed to be host to a rat infestation.

Other controversies have included Dixy's involvement in the UK government 2019 #Knifefree campaign. It saw the usual colour printed Chicken and chips box, washed over a dark uniformed navy blue with white text that read "#Knifefree". On the inside cover the boxes had "real-life stories of young people who had chosen to pursue positive activities instead of carrying a knife", highlighting the establishment's perceived notion of a connection between ethnic communities and the meal.

Side eye

The Home Office was said to have spent more than £57,000 distributing 321,000 chicken boxes to 210 outlets in England and Wales. Social group 'The Move by Word on the Curb' protested with a demonstration outside the UK Home office, returning the boxes with written responses to resolve knife crime. Their comments on the campaign highlighted it as "embarrassing", "ill-conceived" and "borderline racist".

Dixys has also been depicted in other ways in popular hip hop culture as well as Fine art, even platformed as the subject of a painting by Nigerian-British-Nigerian artist Okikioluwa (Okiki) Akinfe, in her painting titled, ironically, as "Rabbits".
(Rabbits, 2023, Oil on Linen 60cm x 170cm)

<https://www.morleyschicken.com/>

<https://dallaschicken.co.uk/about-us/>

<https://favorite.co.uk/>

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<https://www.allcitymediasolutions.com/why-chicken-shops/#:~:text=8000%20shops%20in%20London%20and,to%20documenting%20their%20subtle%20differences.> <https://www.local.gov.uk/about/campaigns/re-thinking-local/re-thinking-local-children-and-young-people/re-thinking-local#:~:text=Since%202010%2F11%2C%20youth%20services,and%20750%20youth%20centres%20closed>.

Okikioluwa Akinfe (Artist) Archives

<https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2019/aug/19/chicken-boxes-home-office-knife-crime>