

Written evidence submitted by Dr. Nathan Abrams, Professor in Film, Bangor University (BFD0039)

Written evidence submitted by Dr. Nathan Abrams, Professor in Film, Bangor University. I am submitting evidence because the representation of food, and its values, in popular culture is a longstanding interest of mine having formed the basis of various publications.

Executive Summary

The potential offered by the history and values of British food, particularly as projected in popular culture (film, television, literature), presents opportunities in promoting and marketing British products abroad.

1. This submission is in response to the question: What opportunities and challenges exist in promoting and marketing British products abroad?
2. This submission recommends that while promoting and marketing British products abroad can be done on the grounds of taste, quality and geographical origin (e.g. Cornish pasties, Arbroath smokies, Stilton, Melton Mowbray pork pies and so on), further opportunities are presented by the historical reputation of British food, as well as the cultural values such foods offer.
3. Despite the contemporary stereotype of poor British cuisine, in fact British culinary prowess and gastronomy has been recognized through the ages. For example, the seemingly insulting French moniker *rosbifs* derives from the popular English style of cooking beef.
4. Food carries with it certain connotations which promote a set of values. Fish and chips, for example, might represent the quintessentially British takeaway dish, with associations of comfort and/or un-healthiness, but since its origins lie in Jewish refugees to the United Kingdom, the foods can also connote the positive notions of inclusivity, multiculturalism, and asylum. Such historical background can be attached to food as part of its promotional and marketing campaign.
5. The cultural representation of Britain through food in popular culture should also be exploited. Foodstuffs are intimately related to British identity and culture in popular culture. Britain has been represented and stereotyped in popular culture through food, drawing upon the connections between food and cultural traditions, history, identity, the past and nostalgia. Here we might mention the ubiquitous ‘cuppa’ – even satirised in the *Asterix* comic books. Another example is the James Bond franchise which projects a sense of culinary sophistication (note what he eats and drinks) and knowhow. Bond spots an enemy in *From Russia with Love* (1963) because he eats red wine with fish. (‘Well, that should have told me something’, he says).
6. At the same time, films such as the Bond franchise offer a valuable opportunity for product placement of British foods such as high-end British products (e.g. single malt whiskey which has been glimpsed in the films). The television series/film *The Trip* (2010) showcases contemporary British cuisine at its best.
7. No systematic study of the use of food and drink in British popular culture, particularly in terms of film and television, has been undertaken as far as I am aware. Such a study would help to locate and contextualize where and how food and drink has been deployed in British films and television and to what effect. In addition, it would help to isolate the values projected by British food and drink thus providing the basis for the promotion and marketing of British goods abroad.
8. One of the reasons for the lack of such a systematic study is the few number of British feature fiction films that are about food in comparison to other countries. The production

of films along these lines could be increased as part of a larger promotional and marketing campaign.

9. Yet, given the number of food scenes in the classics of English literature there is no shortage of material to be exploited. Charles Dickens, Evelyn Waugh, Virginia Woolf, Roald Dahl, JK Rowling, CS Lewis, JRR Tolkien, Lewis Carroll, Judith Kerr, Len Deighton and Ian Fleming offer some examples of well-known books with key dining sequences. Literary tie-ins also offer opportunities for promoting and marketing British food such as 'butter beer' or Willy Wonka's chocolate.

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