

## History of the Word: Mayonnaise

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I wonder if you love it as much as I do when the weather changes, and it begins, again, to be time for salads rather than soup?

And salads reveal a surprising number of cultural differences between the French and the British. First, of course, is the point in the meal where you eat them. The English style is to eat everything together; the salad or vegetables accompany the main dish and are served at the same time. But, in France the tradition is to offer a salad after the main course, to clean the palate before tasting the cheese or, finally, the dessert.

And what is the salad dressing you use? A little sour wine, perhaps? For that is the literal translation of what we also call 'French dressing', or *vinaigrette*. Or maybe a little, creamy mayonnaise.

We probably all know exactly what mayonnaise is, and have maybe even tried beating raw egg yolks and olive oil together in an attempt to make it ourselves. But I wonder how many know the history of the name, and its connections with a court-martialled British Admiral?

The luckless Admiral was John Byng, and he was forced to carry the blame for the surrender of the Mediterranean island of Minorca in 1756, when it had been under British control for nearly fifty years. Byng's crime was his failure to disperse the French fleet laying siege to the island's capital and major port.

Meanwhile, the chef of the victorious French Admiral was preparing a victory feast when he suddenly discovered there was no cream available for the sauce he had planned to make. He cunningly substituted olive oil, and created not just a grand banquet, but a masterpiece of French cuisine, which took its name from the Minorcan capital, Mahon: hence Mayonnaise.

Thanks for listening! *A bientôt.*