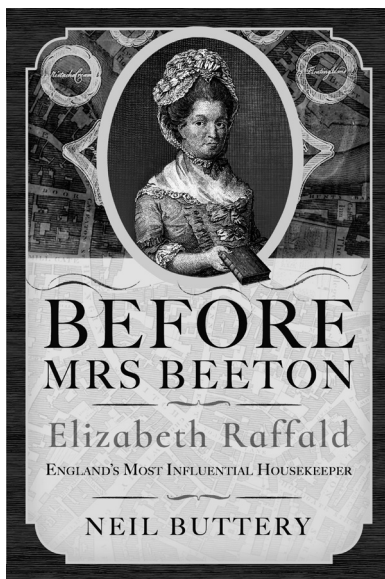


Neil Buttery, *Before Mrs Beeton, Elizabeth Raffald, England's Most Influential Housekeeper*: Pen & Sword, 2023: 201pp., hardback, £20.

This is the story of the remarkable rise and fall in the life of Elizabeth Raffald and how in 1760 she became housekeeper at Arley Hall in Cheshire, aged 25, then married and moved to Manchester in 1763. Here she set up and ran various enterprises: a confectionery and catering business, a cookery school, Manchester's first domestic servants' registry office, and the town's first A-Z business directory. She also ran a high class tavern with her husband John. Her greatest achievement

however, was to write *The Experienced English Housekeeper*, first published in 1769. By 1779 the ventures had failed and the next enterprise was a much less salubrious coffee-house. Elizabeth Raffald continued to work on subsequent editions of her book and her directory, but in 1781 she died suddenly, probably of a stroke, aged 47.

A wide ranging social history by Neil Buttery provides plenty of context and background throughout the story, vividly depicting life in the second half of the eighteenth century in the fast growing town of Manchester when social mobility was rising. Recipes from *The Experienced English Housekeeper* are seamlessly inserted into the story-telling, with the result that Elizabeth Raffald's voice is a very pleasing part of the narrative. Along the way, the tales of her having sixteen daughters, exorcising a ghost and writing a book on midwifery are considered for veracity.



Finally, there are recipes adapted from Elizabeth Raffald's book, useful tips on using eighteenth-century recipes, and notes to the text which work.

The book describes how the identity of British cuisine was created by E. Smith (*The Compleat Housewife*, 1727), Hannah Glasse (*The Art of Cookery*, 1747) and Elizabeth Raffald (*The Experienced English Housekeeper*, 1769). They pioneered a more practical approach and moved away from the dominance of French cooking. By writing with authority acquired from their experience, and providing simple instructions and options, they gave English cooks, housekeepers and housewives the confidence to cook. Raffald's *Experienced English Housekeeper* is the elegant masterpiece, which like Mrs Beeton 92 years later, became the standard wedding gift when it came out in 1769.

The introduction states that when Mrs Beeton's *Household Management* was first published in 1861, it 'blew all others out of the water' and later explains that it was able to do so because of its firm foundation in the cookery writers of the eighteenth century, and most significantly Elizabeth Raffald. However, Beeton also owes much to Mrs Rundell and Eliza Acton and many other nineteenth-century cookery writers. Isabella Beeton produced such a comprehensive guide to running a house and family, exactly what the growing middle class in Victorian England required, that all other cookery writing could be deemed superfluous by some.

The publishing firm of Ward Lock continued what Samuel Beeton started with the branding of his wife's name, and thereby keeping the Beeton name in the public's mind. In the same way Neil Buttery is playing a key part in keeping the name of Elizabeth Raffald alive and relevant today. His book is an informal and enthusiastic history of a remarkable woman.

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