

Peter Brears: *Traditional Food in the South Pennines*: Hebden Bridge Local History Society, 2022: 252 pp., paperback, £11.99.

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Keighley to the north, Todmorden to the west, Rishworth south and Brighouse to the east are the bounds of this region, with Hebden Bridge, Heptonstall, Sowerby Bridge and Halifax lording the centre. Inch by inch, Peter Brears is covering the north of England (generously interpreted) with his matchless studies of foods, food supply and traditional cookery. The innovation here, however, is that all the illustrations are in colour (and still for only £11.99) and that Peter has included much more of humanity in his compositions, thus making clear his candidature for nomination as a Lowry *de nos jours*. The organization is familiar from previous examples, allowing a methodical survey of food types with chapters on festivals, rites of passage, farming and food production, home life and sources of fuel. The recipes are drawn from manuscript recipe books or family tradition or, quite often, from church and chapel fundraising cookery books. On every page there is something to delight and inform, as well as sufficient material for a high tea fit for royalty. The forced encloistering of the British population during the late pandemic has had some surprising consequences, not least this excellent volume as its author sought to while away his idle hours.

Sam Bilton: *Fool's Gold – A History of British Saffron*: Prospect Books, 2022: 256 pp., paperback, £20.00.

Norman Douglas said, 'A man who is stingy with saffron is capable of seducing his own grandmother.' Sam Bilton kicks off with these words in the introduction to the recipe section of her book. Words that bring me up short and are enough to make me vow to err on the side of generosity when next I dabble with saffron. Which I soon do, because the recipes that illustrate her account are so appealing and I want to cook them all. I started to write this review in France when the sun was beating down and all one really wanted to do was sip iced water and find some shade but actually, this book is the perfect antidote to a cold and drizzly English day. Bright and colourful, with an arresting cover, which is a bit of a Prospect Books hallmark, along with a crisp clean layout and an index easy to read even on the dullest day, plus lots of attractive pictures inside; I set a lot of store by such things. This is a book that one wants to immediately pick up and thumb through. As to the content? Tracking down the history of most culinary herbs and spices is always a bit of an approximate activity. Generally, their presence has been so constant, so taken for granted, that rarely is anything very specific about them ever recorded. One catches glimpses of them in texts that have been written about other matters or