

Darra Goldstein: *Beyond the North Wind. Russian Recipes and Lore*. Ten Speed Press, 2020: 308 pp., hardback, £25.00.

Darra Goldstein is a reliable guide to things Russian and this is a cookery book to treasure. It is not Moscow and mainstream but from the icy north – Murmansk, the Barents Sea, places like that. Almost every recipe provokes you to action, even if this means sprouting grain, cooking apple meringue for 6 hours, collecting 350 dandelion flowers for a syrup, or perfecting your rusty technique to turn out two dozen *pirozhki* (filled with sauerkraut and dried mushrooms in her version). This is the book to turn to for grain cookery, for interesting preserves and pickles, and for tasty things to do with beetroot. All these subjects are worth exploring. Darra's easy prose, and vast well of knowledge, help you painlessly along the track. The photographs (by Stefan Wettainen) inspire too. I have always been privately dismissive of this cookery, now, I'm converted.

Kirstine Richards: *The Seagull Hotel: 1945 Two Young Women Start a New Enterprise in Exmouth*. YouCaxton Publications, Oxford and Shrewsbury, 2016: 224pp., paperback, £10.00.

I had first learned of this book when my interest had been piqued by an article published in the *Spectator* in 1955 written by Raymond Postgate, the founder of the *Good Food Guide*. In it, he had listed a dozen provincial restaurants where, in his estimation, you could guarantee a 'definitely fine meal'. Many of his choices were the usual suspects, but I had never heard of the Seagull in Exmouth. A search for more information yielded details of this memoir. Postgate describes the restaurant thus: 'This, in Morton Street, is primarily an hotel, and restaurant-seekers must bear that in mind; unless they can order beforehand they must take the table d'hôte, and in the season children with parents come first. But Mrs. Richards's Danish and French food is outstanding. This year's successes: lobster Thermidor, scallops Périgourdines, and a properly made Wiener schnitzel. The wine list begins at a low price with a sound claret.' The account we have in the book under review was written some time after the event and published after the author's death by her two children. It tells the story of two women, the author, aged 33, and her German business partner, some six years younger. Kirstine Richards was of Anglo-Danish parentage who had, in her twenties, moved down from her native Edinburgh to the small Devon town of Honiton. There, she had run a successful café in the years before the War. Her partner-to-be, Gerdy, had joined the staff when she had been sent to safety in England by her worried parents in Bonn. Both women had then met and married two medical students who were holidaying in the district. Both women bore two children. Then both lost their spouses at the very end of the conflict: Kirstine's dying in Burma in 1945; Gerdy's in Hertford, where he had been tending the sick and wounded as a conscientious objector.

Unwilling to take exploitative employment, with little by way of pension or insurance, the two hatched a scheme to buy a former hotel ruined by military occupation in the seaside resort of Exmouth a few miles downriver from Exeter. There follows an excellent account of the obstacles surmounted in the postwar years: rationing of food and building materials, dealings on the black market, coping with ingrained sexism, access to capital funding, finding a way through the thickets of staff and management. There is much here about staff (as with all such memoirs) and about customers who, as was then the custom, were not really charged enough to make a profitable business. The partners were joined by Kirstine's older sister who was a good, though eccentric, cook, but then the partnership was sundered after half a dozen years as Gerdy could stand the style of life no more and hankered after settled domesticity. Then, Kirstine was left to soldier on alone when her sister moved on too. The Seagull is another instance of the glorious tradition of the English amateur keeping the flame of good cooking burning brightly and the book goes some way to explaining how such a restaurant might arise in very unexpected circumstances – in part, at least, to other English amateurs embodied in the local branch of the International Wine & Food Society. In the end, it was undone by its origins – an amateur has only herself to rely on – so although the building still stands, a large Victorian house in the manner of Ladbroke Grove, the hotel did not survive. Kirstine, too, tired of the life but found it impossible to sell as a going concern (purchasers were unsure they could do justice to her reputation). She therefore converted it into flats before going on herself to a rewarding second career with the Agnostic Adoption Society. Compulsory reading.

Janet Chrzan and Jacqueline A. Ricotta, eds.: *Organic Food, Farming and Culture: An Introduction*: Bloomsbury 2019: 320pp., hardback, £79.26.

Had text books been this student-friendly in my day I would have approached some of my studies with far more enthusiasm. The wide range of features that the editors present here is aimed at engaging the reader and stimulating interest in the story of organic farming. This they achieve in no small measure. The editors are respectively an assistant professor of nutrition at the University of Pennsylvania and professor of horticulture at Delaware Valley University. They offer here an eclectic mix of academic research, acute observation by those whose field of study this is and simple straight-forward 'hands on' accounts by the people who are out there actually working the land. I did not start by reading this book from end to end. Initially, I just dipped in and out when a heading, a picture, or a name caught my attention. Nevertheless, the history of the organic food movement, its struggle to be perceived as a sensible alternative to the current chemically driven agri-industry, and its slow but steady emergence as a plausible alternative to become part of a diverse agricultural economy for the world of the future, is all contained in this volume. Having