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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

leafed through its pages, the miscellany on offer was enough to make me slow down and begin to read more carefully with a developing curiosity.

It is divided into four parts. The first tells us something of the history and evolution of organic farming; how, in traditional cultures and in spite of quite dense populations, people have always managed to develop sustainable systems based on organic farming and that these systems still feed many millions of people throughout the world. The second is entitled 'Organics in Practice' and usefully propels us away from the historic towards the very practical issues that are the lot of those directly involved in farming on a daily basis. The chapters in this section emphasize that wherever 'organic' farming occurs it is never the easy option. In spite of this the number of organically run farms and small-holdings continues to rise everywhere, driven, in part, by a growing public perception that both its difficulties and costs are worthwhile. This section also offers insights into how global, national and local interests may all, at their different levels, influence the way in which food production and supply to the mainstream are managed. Defining standards for organic produce, initially by private organizations and then by public regulation, means that organic produce has steadily ceased to be seen simply as something of marginal benefit. As organic products become increasingly available through standard shopping outlets and part of the mainstream food-supply chain, those applied standards act as a sort of public endorsement and an encouragement to buy. Interspersed with the various case studies are short profiles of individuals working in the field. These accounts by real people are very refreshing and give balance to some of the drier, more academic studies. Part 3 looks at the philosophies which drive modern day organic farming. It encourages readers to examine their own human values, perceptions and expectations, and how we might apply them to such issues as food sustainability, land ownership and equity. We are invited to consider where we stand on some hard questions, perhaps confronting students with such propositions for the first time. If we believe we have the right to harness and harvest natural resources do we not also have a responsibility for maintaining them? Is there ever likely to be sufficient political will and a fair marketplace so that organic farming really can feed more of the world? Are we able to make the huge philosophical shift away from an industrial view of agriculture to one that believes the land has an important function over and beyond its ability to simply supply food? Enormous questions are being asked of the young people at whom this text-book is aimed; ones which we need them not only to try to answer but also to shoulder the responsibility for getting them right. The final part dwells upon more practical matters such as how institutions might feed their clients with more organic food and discussion on marketing, promotion and consumer values. The authors have guided the student of organic farming through its history to a multi-faceted view of the subject. They have considered the practicality of organic farming.

They conclude with the hope that 'this volume has provided readers with the intellectual wherewithal to ask the social, cultural and scientific questions necessary to create a more sustainable, supportive, secure and biologically diverse agricultural economy.' Amen to that.

Di Murrell

Jonathan Morris: *Coffee: A Global History*: Reaktion Books, 2018: 208 pp., hardback, £10.99.
Demet Güzey: *Mustard: A Global History*: Reaktion Books, 2019: 144 pp., hardback, £10.99.
Anastasia Edwards: *Biscuits and Cookies: A Global History*: Reaktion Books, 2019: 136 pp., hardback, £10.99.
Clarissa Hyman: *Tomato: A Global History*: Reaktion Books, 2019: 144 pp., hardback, £10.99.

Another four contributions to Reaktion Books' apparently endless catalogue in their 'The Edible Series'. Each explores the history of a particular food item or beverage. The trick, for the author, is to be informative and readable yet succinct. One assumes that in order to conform to the parameters of size and shape imposed by the series format the books can only contain a certain number of pages and illustrations. A book about coffee may have rather more to say for itself than, for instance, one about tomatoes with, one suspects, the author sometimes forced to sift through a wealth of detail for those gems that will spark the reader's interest. For this reason these little books cannot be judged on the basis of how much information they may contain. Rather I look for 'readability'; do they hold my attention? am I learning something new? is my interest sufficiently peeked to motivate me to find out more?

Coffee is by Jonathan Morris, an historian rather than food writer. He tracks the drink from its first appearance among Sufi sects in fifteenth-century Asia through to the coffee aficionados of the twenty-first. Who drank it; how it was prepared; where it was drunk; and what it tasted like – all is documented here. It describes the infrastructure within which the beans are processed, traded and transported and discusses the geopolitics which link the coffee farmers with those who drink their product.

Morris divides the development of coffee into five specific eras starting with its earliest cultivation on Yemen's hillsides and no more than a locally drunk beverage to it becoming a European colonial commodity during the eighteenth century. He tracks its development into industrial product during the nineteenth century when huge plantings in Brazil aided the birth of a mass-market in the USA. Finally, by the mid-twentieth century, it had become a global commodity. In our times a reaction against 'commodification' brings a re-evaluation. Today sees the rise of the *barista* and coffee reclassified as a 'speciality beverage'.