

dinner, rapidly whisking the crisply roasted piglets away in the boot of their cars.

History is full of conundrums. Unravelling mysteries is meat and drink to the food historian. Why, for instance, should bream, a sea fish, be traditionally served in Madrid – a land-locked city in the centre of a country of difficult terrain, surrounded by mountains, and a long way from the coast – on Christmas Eve? Or, the connection the English have to salt cod? Or, the link between maize and pellagra – a nasty disease which eventually kills you? The answers are to be found in *Delicioso*, but don't be fooled, this is no 'rag bag' book full of random anecdotal tales. Sevilla cleverly overcomes that problem of too much unrelated but fascinating information, garnered during those long hours of research, that doesn't easily slot into the historical timeline. Instead, she turns them into short discrete essays, each throwing light into those odd culinary corners of Spanish food history.

Sevilla shows precisely how the history of Spain is reflected in its food. Geographically it would always have been a country of consequence but it was the search for black pepper that resulted in the discovery of America in 1492, followed by the succession of the Habsburgs to the throne in 1516, that brought Spain to the very forefront of international affairs. From then on until the nineteenth century the steady flow of foodstuffs from the New World rendered seismic change to the diets of both rich and poor – and not just in Spain but, ultimately, to the whole of Europe. The slow absorption from the Americas of such products as potatoes, tomatoes, maize, chilli peppers and beans brought about a recognizable national cuisine with which we identify the Spain of today. All is detailed here.

I hope you will have detected my enthusiasm for *Delicioso* – the first book written in English that traces the history of the food of Spain from antiquity to the present day. Brought together within its pages is the story of this cuisine, interwoven with the causes affecting its development, the characteristics of the food and the country's ongoing and changing relationship towards its food culture. Skilfully written with passion and originality plus a deep understanding of the subject matter, *Delicioso* is an outstanding book with an immediate claim to space on any serious cook's bookshelf.

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David Smith: *The Cooking Colonel of Madras*: published by the author, 2018: 262 pp., paperback, £9.99 (available through [lulu.com](https://www.lulu.com) and [amazon.co.uk](https://www.amazon.co.uk)). Arthur Kenney-Herbert (1840–1916), better known as 'Wyvern', is a favourite cookery writer. His *Culinary Jottings for Madras* should be on everybody's bookshelf, especially that edition published by Prospect Books and introduced by the late Lesley Forbes. David Smith may be familiar to readers from his websites <[curryhouse.com](https://www.curryhouse.com)> and <[goforanenglish.com](https://www.goforanenglish.com)> as well as for his books,

the most recent (before the one under review) was *Quick Meals from The Curry House*: evidence perhaps that he is an enthusiast. His handy biography relies on a close reading of the Colonel's printed output as, unfortunately, manuscript resources have not come to hand. But this is nonetheless useful, and interesting too. It is helpful to have a summary of the contents of his second book, *Furlough Reminiscences* (1880), which contained impressions of the English social season while home on leave – this book, like his *Culinary Jottings*, was at least in part a compilation of earlier newspaper columns. It is also really helpful to have a summary of his career after leaving the Indian army in 1892. We all know of his Common-Sense Cookery Association and its role in educating ladies and young women in cookery, but are less likely to be aware of his activities in the fields of domestic staff agency, or advising on the supply of cooked foods to blocks of flats for young professionals (either female or male), or his involvement in the production of vegetarian meals and their distribution by means of insulated containers to subscribers in the capital. Mr Smith is also to be thanked for his useful notes on Wyvern's journalistic endeavours once back in England, particularly his account of three important theoretical articles in *The Nineteenth Century* in 1892: 'The Art of Dining', 'The Art of Cooking', and 'The Art of Household Management'. Enthusiasts everywhere will value this able compendium.