

## BOOK REVIEWS

Alison Locker: *Freshwater Fish in England. A Social and Cultural History of Coarse Fish from Prehistory to the Present Day*. Oxbow Books, 2018: 156 pp., paperback, £38.00.

The best books tell you things you ought to have known, have forgotten, have slipped the mind, as well as offering material that you would never have thought about in a million years. Alison Locker's is a best book. The author's speciality is fish bones: analysing the spoil sieved from archaeological deposits to see what sort of thing our ancestors were eating. Allied to this microscopic inspection, techniques of isotopic analysis of human skeletons to see what proportion of their diet was fish, meat or otherwise based, have meant that we have a more nuanced view of prehistoric and more recent foodways (earlier archaeological sites, for instance, were not subject to any form of sieving, thus tiny fish bones were overlooked). But her book is not all about digs and early man, nor just about eating freshwater fish, but ends with a long account of angling (when we had long since given up the idea of a tasty chub dinner). It is full of nice points: from the relative aversion of pre-Romano-British populations to fish as food (perhaps sometimes connected to taboos), the importance of status and display in the Roman adoption of fishponds and all that apparatus of convenience in supply, the role of the Church in medieval fish consumption, the 'privatization' of freshwater fish supply by our medieval hunting nobility, the intrusion into the fish market of sea fish with improved means of transport and preservation, and the great expansion of coarse fishing as a working-class pastime. This last, increasingly, had nothing to do with the table and everything to do with the weighing scales and taxidermist. It will be the book to turn to.

Brenda Assael: *The London Restaurant, 1840–1910*: Oxford University Press, 2019: 244 pp., hardback, £65.00.

There is a great deal to admire in this short book, not least the author's close attention to a wide range of sources, most especially the trade press for the period in question. She has been well served by various London libraries (Guildhall, Bishopsgate, etc.) but should not be denied credit for unearthing some scrumptious cuttings about restaurant economics, staff, hygiene and myriad other topics. She stresses that her book is not a contribution to the history of food, but nonetheless it can't help being that, even if but tangentially. There are good chapters and bad: the best are those to do with names and descriptions of eating houses (chophouses, taverns, dining rooms, cafés, and so on), with waiters and waitresses and with health and regulation. Her chapter 'Running the Restaurant' is also rich in anecdote. Less good are the chapters