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BOOK REVIEWS

Laura Shapiro: *What She Ate. Six Remarkable Women & the Food That Tells Their Stories*: 4th Estate, 2018: 307 pp., hardback, £14.99.

A new book from Laura Shapiro is always welcome. She is eminently readable; she accords her subject the respect it deserves, and the hard work of fossicking among archives, libraries and other sources too. And she has an eye for topics, the present title no exception. Her six women are Dorothy Wordsworth, Rosa Lewis, Eleanor Roosevelt, Eva Braun, Barbara Pym, and Helen Gurley Brown. In most of these accounts there's a touch of pathos, if not tragedy, in the connections of the main characters and the kitchen. She tells of the decline of Rosa Lewis of the Cavendish Hotel from the premier private cook of pre-First World War London to the cartoon, bibulous Cockney of the Second; Helen Gurley Brown, who I had always thought of as the woman who could do everything, is portrayed as an orthorexic, borderline anorexic with a very worrying attitude to food, prose style and normal life; Eva Braun was another woman with issues – she must remain slim, but never loath to down some more champagne; and Eleanor Roosevelt seems to have wrapped her unhappy marriage in shrouds of bad food. The most cheerful chapter is devoted to Barbara Pym: showing that there was yet hope for good British cooking. I found each of these revealing, if only in their emphasis on the trouble with food. The most sensational, for me, were the Americans – Roosevelt and Gurley Brown – but the tale of Dorothy Wordsworth's decline into a guzzling madwoman was impressive too. And instructive as well as amusing is the author's account of her own irrational approach to the kitchen once she had married: from normal to manic via one easy ceremony. Because the intent of the book is to link food to an individual's life story, there are moments when the reader may detect a whiff of special pleading. After all, the subjects themselves would not have had the first idea what she was talking about, and the connection she seeks is difficult for anyone to unpick. But the effort is worth it. Bravo. A Prospect Book supporter, however, would be surprised that there is no mention of *À la Pym: The Barbara Pym Cookery Book*, written and compiled by her sister Hilary and Honor Wyatt (an earlier version of which had been published in America in 1988).

David W. Gutzke and Michael John Law: *The Roadhouse Comes to Britain. Drinking, Driving and Dancing, 1925–1955*: Bloomsbury Academic, 2017: 181 pp., hardback, £91.80.

It may be a consolation that you can buy this for £85 on Amazon, or £73 direct from the publisher online. The way we are being held to ransom by academic publishers is regrettable. No private individual could contemplate

purchasing this, so sales are restricted to university libraries and are thus minuscule. A shame, because this most accessible monograph is full of grand facts and figures about a particular form of public catering that has been ignored and is yet of immense interest. The authors hail from America and Britain respectively, one an historian, the other an historical geographer. The first has written on women drinking in public in Britain in the early twentieth century, the other on the symbiotic rise of suburbia and private motorized transport. This is a great combination of skill sets and allows us a pleasingly direct account of the rise of the roadhouse in England (principally of course in London and the south-east) after 1925 and its short moment of efflorescence (the long decline set in by 1935). The super roadhouse was a garage, a filling station, an hotel, a dining-room, a ballroom, a swimming pool, a tennis or badminton or squash court, perhaps a shooting range, a thoroughbred dog kennel and a tea garden: all rolled into one and provided with a massive, discreet, shaded, car park. All sorts of things went on there: canoodling, swimming, drinking, dancing. They were not always licensed – you packed your car boot full in a massive BYO operation, or the roadhouse went out and bought it for you from a licensed premises nearby. Their great success hinged on a series of fine summers at the beginning of the 'thirties when everybody could swim in the open air and indulge in southern comforts. They complied with the modernist urge for outdoor activities. Our authors survey the highs and lows of the form; they investigate their relationship with America and things American – the British roadhouse was not the same as the American; the British grafted some of the country club concept onto a motorized base. Our authors also do a fine job of combing literature and fiction for roadhouse influences (*Brighton Rock* for example, and Patrick Hamilton). Not least, they guide us to *Roadhouse* (1935) a novel by Monica Ewer, which is a must-read for period colour and fun. (The curious can access an Australian version of the book, packaged with *Australian Woman's Weekly* in 1935, at <https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/55183489>.) Interestingly, the only alteration I have noticed with the British version is that the British heroine Alison changes her name in Australia to Patsy. Anyway, highly priced or not, I recommend this study to your attention. Just think: the super-roadhouses (the Thatched Barn on the Barnet bypass or the two Aces of Spades on the Great West Road and the Kingston bypass) had carparks that would hold up to 2000 vehicles.

Mark Dawson, Laura Mason and Janet Pickering, eds.: *The Domestic Dairy. Aspects of British Dairying History*: Leeds Symposium of Food History and Traditions, 2018: 131 pp., paperback, £10.00.
This is a welcome rescue of papers delivered to the Leeds Symposium in 2006 as well as in 2015. Note too the slight change in the official name of the Leeds