

I always feared a misdemeanour discovered, a promise unfulfilled. In fact, her letters were more often a joy, replete with opinion, assertion and lines of new thought. She had the capacity to inspire – charmingly captured in Adam Federman’s account of the close group of young local admirers that gathered round Patience and Norman at Spigolizzi. I feel sure, however, that Patience would have been irritated by the publisher’s decision to quote her words with American spelling.

Peter Brears: *Traditional Food in Cumbria*: Bookcase, Carlisle, 2017: 412 pp., hardback, £20.00.

Just Lancashire to go and Peter Brears will have filled his quiver of studies of the cookery of our northern counties. He has already waggled his toe southwards in his work on Shropshire, and who is to say that he will not start reeling off the repertoires of foreign shires (foreign to his present abode at least, although his professional career in museums did begin in Hampshire). This *Cumbria* is arranged along the same lines as *Yorkshire* and *Northumbria*. There is, therefore, a liberal allowance of architectural and material culture to balance the recipes, the folklore and the social history, all of course illustrated by Brears’ own fair hand. Legion are the dishes explained: porridge, crowdy, spiced beef, oatcakes and bannocks, charr – potted or otherwise, a portfolio of puddings, and all manner of celebration foods. The folkloric chapters on groanings (confinement), weddings, funerals, calendar customs and Christmas to name but a few are especially rewarding. The importance of Peter Brears’ work cannot be overestimated: this is the first time that English cookery has been subjected to such close inspection. My dream, when doing Prospect Books, had always been to mastermind a county by county account of the entire realm, as Pevsner and his buildings. It was not to be, but still might be achieved. Give thanks in the meantime for Peter Brears.

Jonathan Meades: *The Plagiarist in the Kitchen. A Lifetime’s Culinary Thefts*: Unbound, 2017: 176 pp., hardback, £20.

A high point of last year’s holiday reading was this author’s *An Encyclopaedia of Myself* (Fourth Estate, 2014, £18.99). We readers sat open mouthed (but dictionary to hand) before the spate of words: clever words, sometimes ugly sounding, often needing third-party confirmation. A Meades sentence can be recognized a long way off. We enjoyed the eloquent loathing of God, faiths and their advocates, Tony Blair, Sir Stafford Cripps and Edward Heath, the astounding and apparently inevitable mortality of his childhood acquaintances, and his near-perfect recall of surroundings and personalities way back to a summer holiday in Dartmouth when five years old. Bracing and invigorating, and full of informed opinion. His new cookery book is put out by Unbound, the crowd-funding enterprise mentioned in the last