PPC 125 (2023) 7-14
https://doi.org/10.1558/ppc.28069
Petits Propos Culinaires (print) ISSN 0142-7857
Petits Propos Culinaires (online) ISSN 3029-0651

†C. ANNE WILSON

News of the demise of Constance Anne Wilson in January will have affected all of us who have been involved in the pursuit of British food history in recent decades. Her role in this field was so pioneering and significant. The briefest of obituaries has been posted by the University of Leeds, and reads as follows: 'Anne Wilson, who has died aged 95, was an Assistant Librarian in the Brotherton Library from 1961 until her retirement in 1992. A Cambridge classics graduate with a London postgraduate diploma in archaeology of the Iron Age and the Roman provinces, she served as subject librarian for classics, archaeology, and ancient history, to which she subsequently added art and music. In the mid-1960s, as an additional task, she undertook the cataloguing of the John Preston collection of historic cookery books (a recent gift to the Library), which led to her developing an intense interest in food history, including its social aspects.

'One result was the publication in 1973 of her ground-breaking book, *Food and Drink in Britain from the Stone Age to Recent Times*, which Penguin Books went on to publish in paperback form. As well as enjoying popular success (leading, among other things, to an interview in the young women's magazine *Honey*), it played a significant part in stimulating academic study of what had been a neglected subject, and an American edition appeared in 1991. Other books followed, including *A Book of Fruits and Flowers* (a facsimile edition, 1984), *The Book of Marmalade: Its Antecedents, Its History, and Its Role in the World Today* (1985), and *Water of Life: A History of Wine-Distilling and Spirits from 500 BC to AD 2000* (2006).

'In 1986 she founded the Leeds Symposium on Food History and Traditions with like-minded colleagues, an annual one-day conference inspired in part by the success of the Oxford Symposium on Food and Cookery. For many years she ran the Leeds Symposium almost single-handed, in addition to editing many of its proceedings for publication. The Symposium built up a loyal following from across Britain and beyond, and, although now held in York, continues to this day under the same name.'

She also contributed several articles to this journal, not least some in its early years discussing the influence of France and the Muslim world on English medieval cookery. I was proud to be able to reprint her marmalade book at Prospect Books (it continues to be a perennial seller) and to publish for the first time her inspiring study of distilled spirits, *Water of Life*.

One cannot speak highly enough of the importance of her first book, the first proper narrative of British food history, at least since Drummond and Wilbraham's twenty years earlier. It was based on her twin expertises, archaeology and bibliography, and is a very precise account of food history through the lens of the printed British recipe book. I was a happy recipient of

a copy thanks to leaving my employment as an archivist in 1973 to go off and run a restaurant. My then head of department happened to be a university friend of Anne Wilson and thought the gift fitting. She did not realize how fitting it would be.

Nor can one ignore the great role the Leeds Symposium has played in the development of British food history. Created in emulation, you might think, of Alan Davidson and Theodore Zeldin's Oxford affair, it had points of contact and real distinctiveness. Thanks to it being in one sense an outgrowth of Leeds University's adult education department, the attendees in Leeds, and then in York, were a wonderfully diverse group of amateurs and enthusiasts. There was a very much smaller contingent of 'professionals'. I found the day in Leeds or in York was much like a giant picnic with talks. Extremely reviving. Each annual session was closely focussed, the talks chosen and arranged to construct a published volume. The first publisher was Edinburgh University Press, then came the more enterprising (in visual terms) Alan Sutton of Stroud, then Prospect Books carried on the Sutton format for several years. The viability of such material, both commercially and in terms of dragooning and editing the original input, eventually took its toll, and recent volumes have been produced by the Symposium itself. It was not just the event itself that was significant, it was also the emergence of a group of historians who would perhaps not have had the chance of public exposure had it not provided them with one. Lynette Hunter, Jennifer Stead, Peter Brears, Laura Mason, Eileen White, Ann Rycraft, Pamela Sambrook, Ivan Day, Mark Dawson are just some of the names. Of course, they would have soared to fame and fortune, one and all, but the Symposium was an important stage to them and their emergence was significant for British food history. All this was thanks to Anne's ferret-like (it sometimes appeared to me) determination. And yet her public face seemed so abashed and retiring. She will be missed.

CLAFOUTIS AND CAPONNADE REVISITED

I have been sent this note by Barbara Santich, commenting on William Sayers' contribution to the last issue:

'Intrigued but not wholly convinced by William Sayers' explanation of the origins of *clafoutis* and clabber, I went to the *Dictionnaire Languedocien-François* (1785) and found an entry for *clafoutit*, referring me to the entry for *clafi*. The latter reads: 'CLAFI, ou claoufi ; Plein, rempli, farci, qui regorge' (full, filled, stuffed, bursting with) – which seems a good description of a cherry-filled *clafoutis*. The dictionary does not offer a derivation but the *Trésor dóu Felibrige* (Provençal–French dictionary, 1878) suggests that *clafi* and variants *cafi*, *claufi*, *gaufi*, *caufli* could derive from the term *cafi* or *cafis*, an old measure of volume used in Marseille. The *Trésor de la langue française* (*TLF*) etymology cited by

Sayers refers to *clafir* but not to this possible explanation.

'I wrote about the eighteenth-century Provençal *caponnade* in *PPC* 122, concluding that it was a salad of moistened bread combined with oil and vinegar, onion and garlic and other seasonings (but not yet tomatoes!), related to the Catalan *caponada* and the Italian *caponata*. I now believe it was also related to the gazpacho of Andalusia and may have been common throughout Mediterranean Europe. In *Mediterranean Food*, Elizabeth David cites Théophile Gautier's description of the gazpacho he was offered (and ate, and enjoyed) in Andalusia in 1840. It was essentially water, vinegar, garlic, onion, cucumber, chilli (and probably oil, but he forgot to mention that), plus bread and salt, served cold. Apart from the chilli, a *caponnade* by another name! According to Spanish dictionaries, the term goes back to the beginning of the seventeenth century, at least. The eighteenth-century *Diccionario de la lengua castellana por la Academia española* defines gazpacho as 'a certain kind of soup, or dish, that is typically made with small pieces of bread, oil, vinegar, garlic and other ingredients, according to individual taste. It is eaten regularly by farm labourers and rustic folk' (my translation). This emphasizes its improvised nature and association with the poorer classes of society. The *Diccionario de la lengua española* (2022) offers a concise etymology: 'Quizá del ár. hisp. *gazpáčo, y este del gr. Γαζοφυλάκιον gazophylákion 'cepillo de la Iglesia', por alus a la diversidad de su contenido, ya que en él se depositaban como limosna monedas, mendrugos y otros objetos.' Roughly, the term is derived from the Greek word meaning alms box, into which people would drop all sorts of things, from coins to crusts of bread; the gazpacho, with no fixed formula, was somehow thought to resemble the contents of an alms box.'

RETURN TO MOBILE, ALABAMA

Philip Hyman, himself a Mobilian though now living in Paris, wrote to comment on Blake Perkins' article in the last issue about the *Gulf City Cook Book* and the style of cooking then prevalent in the city. Hyman was surprised to find no mention of another text, published in Mobile at the same time, *What Mrs. Fisher Knows about Old Southern Cooking* (1881). But then he found a very full treatment of this book on Blake Perkins' website <www.britishfoodinamerica.com> and suggested we might direct readers to this so they might add depth and texture to their appreciation of the *Gulf City* book.

GASTRONOMY

A proposal has been made, by a distinguished body of academics, for a collaborative volume investigating and analysing the process of gastronomic criticism in the decades since the *Almanach du Goût*. Rather than highlighting

individuals and their work, the volume would pursue a wider approach that looks at the relationship of gastronomic criticism to other forms of criticism; its rhetoric, values and relationship to the world that is its subject; its values; and the various clubs, societies and other groups that have promoted such activities. The editorial board have called for proposals and submissions by the end of February 2023, so this issue is too late to be helpful, but interested parties might still like to get in touch with the organizers, who can be reached via <csergo.julia@uqam.ca> or <frederique.desbuissons@univ-reims.fr>.

AHRC US-UK FOOD DIGITAL SCHOLARSHIP NETWORK

In their words, this 'provides a platform for US and UK cultural institutions, and researchers to network around the topic of food. It will map existing stakeholders, data sets and food research priorities, advise on digitization standards, run virtual workshops, link to cross-disciplinary UK and US research, and build capacity via pump priming and piloting for future digital scholarship research.' The website <https://sites.google.com/sheffield.ac.uk/ahrc-foodnetwork> provides more information. The list of institutional partners is impressive.

FOOD CRISES

A conference on 'Food Crises: Challenges, Innovations and Sustainable Change' is being organized by the IEHCA at Tours for the 14–16 December 2023. The conference is in partnership with the 'Food' Global Research Priority of the University of Warwick and co-directed by Emmanuelle Cronier (Université de Picardie-Jules Verne), Beat Kümin (University of Warwick) and Philippe Meyzie (Université Bordeaux Montaigne). Their call for submissions expired at the end of February, but those of you who may wish to attend should address their enquiries to the IEHCA at <https://villa-rabelais.fr>.

JUAN ALTAMIRAS

In her drive to foster greater appreciation of the work of the Spanish friar Juan Altamiras's 1745 book *Nuevo arte de cocina*, which she presented as a finely edited translation in 2017 (see *PPC* 118), Vicky Hayward has been producing some videos of modern-day interpretations of his recipes. The most recent one features the chef Antonio Amago, proprietor of La de Espronceda restaurant in Madrid, cooking beef or calves' cheeks in a strong and gelatinous pig's trotter broth. The film can be found at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-_-MwO3SmtM> and is very professionally executed (none of the 'Oh! I dropped it' of early TV cookery). Well worth a visit.

UKRAINE

For a few weeks now, we have had the pleasure of sharing our house with a lady from Ukraine who lived and worked as a teacher a few hours' drive away from the western city of Lviv. Her daughter and her son-in-law have been living in our village for some months, arriving not long after the invasion by Russian troops. Not least of the pleasures derived from this visit has been to experience Ukrainian food cooked by a native. In conversation with others who have hosted Ukrainians, I find that we all have developed a lust for rolled and stuffed cabbage leaves, borscht, or vast piles of pancakes filled with rice, or yoghurt, or something entirely different. It is invigorating, and perhaps these dishes will enter our repertoire when the horrible episode is done and dusted.

CATHERINE ROSE ELLIS

The author of the article on *Margot la ravaudeuse* that appeared in *PPC* 122 tells me of her 'new-ish' blog about food and sex work in French culture, to be found at <https://bellesdufour.wordpress.com> This covers a much wider period than the eighteenth century and includes pages looking at, for instance, *La Dame aux camélias* and *Boule de suif*. Expect more soon, including a discussion of the work of Colette.

SOPHIE COE PRIZE IN FOOD HISTORY

Time is running out for you to submit your entry for this year's award. The deadline is 28 April. The prize stands at £1,500 for the winner. All the necessary information is available at <sophiecoeprize.wordpress.com>; the email address is <sophiecoeprize@gmail.com>.

†JOYCE MOLYNEUX

My former business partner, mentor and friend, the chef-restaurateur Joyce Molyneux died at the end of last year. I give below the text of my obituary, first published in the *Guardian* newspaper. A slight amendment has been made as I recorded the Christian names of her father incorrectly.

The chef and restaurateur Joyce Molyneux, who has died at the age of 91, enjoyed the near universal esteem of both her professional colleagues and the wider world of home cooks and diners-out. In great part this was due to an unassuming yet friendly nature and her inveterate lack of pretence, joined to a style of cookery that tasted like heaven and was yet accessible to all. Although her career can be reduced to her having worked in just three provincial restaurant kitchens – learning the ropes at the Mulberry Tree in Stratford-upon-Avon in the 1950s, at the Hole in the Wall in Bath in the 1960s, and then twenty-five years at the Carved Angel in Dartmouth, a cool

half-century – the resonance of her activities echoed through a much broader church. She was one of the first female chefs to be awarded a Michelin star. Her kitchens were open to view from all parts of the restaurant, and were never sullied by chef-like bouts of bad behaviour as were almost expected in the rumbustious '80s. She made an early stand in favour of creative local sourcing of ingredients: a photograph from 1984 portrays Joyce and her small staff in front of three dozen purveyors, all drawn from a five-mile radius. Her cooking was often described as 'heart-warming', 'reassuring', or 'honest': attributes which endeared her to her public, especially as they never detracted from taste and flavour. In her closing decades at the stove, although she never sought the role, and although she had many male lieutenants, she might have been deemed a feminist beacon, as her staff and assistants were overwhelmingly female and went on themselves to often distinguished careers.

In her years at the Hole in the Wall, where she was employed from 1959 to 1972 by George Perry-Smith, the founder of the restaurant, her (and his) cooking was associated particularly with the books issued from 1951 by Elizabeth David. Neither would deny her influence, but in truth their sources were far more eclectic than a single writer. This association continued to be mentioned when she moved to the Carved Angel in 1974, where another intelligent lady writer, Jane Grigson, was included as a mentor. Again, she would not have disclaimed her admiration. But what joined these three women at the hip was more than recipes, it was a style of refined and observant cookery that respected the locale while never giving up on adventure or, most important of all, the taste of things. This is what made Joyce Molyneux such a favourite with home cooks – and the many thousands who dined at her tables. Her *Carved Angel Cookery Book*, written in 1990 with Jane Grigson's daughter Sophie, was in its way a best-seller, especially as Joyce's exposure to media attention was so slight.

Joyce was born in Handsworth, a suburb of Birmingham, the middle child of Maurice William Molyneux, assistant chief chemist to the firm of W. & T. Avery, scale makers, and his wife Irene Mary (née Wolfenden). In 1939, as war threatened, the three children were evacuated to Worcestershire, where Joyce was billetted with a family of three girls and attended the local Ombersley primary school and, when she was eleven, the Birmingham King Edward VI Grammar School for Girls, which had been evacuated to Worcester at the same time. She returned to her home town in 1943. Leaving school at sixteen, she stated her wish to learn cooking and was sent to the Birmingham College of Domestic Science. She recalled it being run by a 'Scottish mafia', where the standard text was the Edinburgh School of Cookery and Domestic Economy's *Plain Cookery Recipes* of 1907 (they also did *Recipes for High-Class Cookery*, but not a lot of use during post-war rationing). Her first task was to cook very small portions of 'brown stew'. Perhaps exposure to French home cooking during a school exchange with St-Dié des Vosges, in the east of the country, gave her

ideas of wider possibilities (she recalled the *oeufs à la neige* in later years).

Leaving college (where she had to resit her cookery exam), her father found her a job in a canteen at W. Canning & Co., manufacturers of electroplating equipment. A fellow-student alerted her to the chance of a job at the Mulberry Tree in Stratford where she was taken on as general assistant by the chef, who worked alone, in 1951. Douglas Sutherland was classically trained, very well regarded, and gave Joyce a thorough grounding in professional cooking over the next eight years. It was good enough for her to be able to teach George Perry-Smith (an amateur) a thing or two when she joined him at the Hole in the Wall.

When there was a change of regime in Stratford in 1959, she saw an advertisement for staff at this restaurant in Bath in the *Lady* magazine. Her application was successful and she soon realized it was no ordinary business. Perry-Smith dressed like a bohemian, had a commanding presence, insisted that his staff work both in the kitchen and the front of house (purgatory for Joyce, who was quite shy), and cooked food of generosity and spirit that did not abide by the rules of classical cuisine. Most of the staff were young women like Joyce, often indeed young middle-class slips who looked on it as a finishing school. But they always worked flat-out, and there was tremendous team spirit. Joyce survived her time waiting at table and concentrated on the kitchen. Here she was soon often in charge. As the years rolled by, and Perry-Smith took a more executive role, she was eventually offered a junior partnership, together with Heather Crosbie (later George's fourth wife). When the restaurant was sold in 1972, it was expected that she would join her two partners in a new venture.

In the event this proved to be two new ventures: a restaurant-with-rooms in Helford, Cornwall, looked after by George and Heather, and a place with sensational views of the mouth of the river at Dartmouth in Devon, soon to be christened the Carved Angel. This was run by Joyce in the kitchen and myself (Perry-Smith's stepson) front of house. I stayed in post until 1984 and, after a year or two's interregnum, Joyce was joined by Meriel Matthews (George's niece) with whom she had a most warm, profitable and satisfactory business partnership until her retirement in 1999.

The early years were never easy commercially: many were the winter nights of zero custom. But as the life of the country as a whole quickened through the 1980s, and Joyce gained a certain television exposure in the show *Take Six Cooks* in 1986, as well as plaudits and awards from guides and critics, so business began to prosper – even for so small a restaurant. There was no doubt who was the restaurateur, and Joyce grew into her role with ease and aplomb. And in Dartmouth too, a small town indeed, her work was no longer viewed with suspicion ('Such prices!') but as a matter of pride. In her retirement, she would make state visits at Easter and in the autumn.

In 1959, Joyce met Stephen Rodriguez-Garcia, a waiter from Barcelona, who was working at the Mulberry Tree. They were partners through thick and thin until his untimely death in 1994: often working in different towns, meeting only on days off, but always holidaying together in Spain where Stephen built a house by the sea in Cubelles. Apart from her excellent paellas and the odd dish with sauce romescu (long before its general popularity), her cooking did not reflect this connection. Joyce never told her parents of the true nature of her relationship.