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PPC ONLINE

The good news for readers of *PPC* is that the publisher, Catheryn Kilgarriff at Prospect Books, has put the entirety online, using the services of Exact Editions, which offers digital subscriptions to individuals and institutions. They can be found at:
<https://shop.exacteditions.com/gb/petits-propos-culinaires>.

BREAD

Through the kind offices of Vicky Hayward in Madrid, I composed a short account of my involvement in bread baking in the 1980s – so long ago – and my construction of a wood-fired oven in the garden here at Allaleigh, for the enthusiastic Spanish bread periodical *Pan*, which has articles about new-wave bakers and plenty of old wood-fired ovens on the Peninsular. This gave me occasion to realise how far bread baking has come in Britain in recent years: sourdough here, sourdough there, sourdough everywhere. My horizons are limited to this little corner of the West Country, but the comment holds good for every level of enterprise from the inspirational (Andrew Whitley, Richard Bertinet and Dan Lepard) to small towns and even villages throughout the land. Down here, James Crowden, of cider fame, drew my attention to the Quernstone Bakery in Horrabridge, off Dartmoor <https://www.quernstonebakery.co.uk>, where Esme and Egoitz (from the Basque country) are making impressive loaves. A little further west, by the sea at Bude, the Electric Bakery, run by Alex Bluett and Christine Apiou (with cakes made by Marja Pelto), is cooking lots of other stuff than bread, but this latter is really serious – and soon to be made with wheat grown, so to speak, on the premises <https://www.electricbakery.co/>. Then in Totnes itself, there is the Almond Thief, founded by Dan Mifsud which has now been baking matchless sourdoughs for six years (and they, too, are starting to bake with wheat grown and milled within three miles of the bakery) <https://www.thealmondthief.com>. If you go to the Friday market in Totnes, there are always small bakeries with stalls – so different from the situation in, say, 1995. In Dartmouth, the French baker Julien Picamil has built up a successful boulangerie at Saveurs (watch his YouTube lessons on various sorts of baked goods, for example puff pastry <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Vj8YlnRarJU>). Talking of YouTube, and idle amusement when at your desk: watch the Turkish chef Salt Bae (famous for his gold-leafed £650 steaks, don't ask), for instance <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1_qgMtyx4Cw>. MPW had nothing on this degree of attitude. Even in our own home of Blackawton, a new arrival to the village has started baking very acceptable sourdough every Friday. Sometimes, change is for the good.

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†KENNETH BELL

This great British chef and restaurateur died in September. His restaurants were memorable, his cooking significant, especially at the time, and he was a most attractive companion. I wrote an obituary for the *Guardian* which I reproduce below:

'The chef and restaurateur Kenneth Bell, who has died peacefully at the age of 94, was one of a handful of cooks who brought sunshine and hope to a land still mired in gastronomical gloom in the first decades after the second world war. His name attaches to two enterprises in chief, the Restaurant Elizabeth in Oxford from 1958 to 1966, and Thornbury Castle north of Bristol from 1966 until his retirement in 1986, and to a third at one remove when he opened Popjoy's restaurant in Bath in 1973 and installed the young couple Stephen and Penny Ross to run the show in the elegant two-story Georgian mansionette next door to the Theatre Royal. Both were exceptional places to dine. Borne up by an enthusiasm for French and Mediterranean cooking, he weaned many an epicurean, if not hedonist, Oxford don from the tired ornamentation of the college high table, as well as giving indigent students a taste for proper cookery. When he moved to Thornbury, the only sign of commerce was a small panel at the castle lodge announcing 'K. Bell: Restaurateur', but the happy traveller was able to eat his or her fill in the last castle to be built in Britain, erected by a Duke of Buckingham who shortly thereafter lost his head to Henry VIII, who promptly installed Anne Boleyn for a weekend break.

'In his early years his dishes were often robust interpretations of French provincial cuisine (one of his favourite books was *French Country Cooking* by Elizabeth David, published in 1951), shot through with the colours and flavours of the south in items such as prawns, rice and aioli, or a good paella (an apt choice as his staff at front of house were all Spanish). England was not ignored, however, for he was an early proponent of the restaurant standards crème brûlée and syllabub (which an early Good Food Guide had to gloss as 'a kind of cold zabaglione', so unused were we to the idea of such things coming from English cookery).

'When at Thornbury, his style put on a certain weight, cream sauces were much favoured: stuffed breast of chicken with Pernod and cream was a signature dish; cream-laden dauphinois potatoes were constant companions. But he was also an enthusiast for mousses and mousselines, even wrapping a salmon mousseline in pastry. It was his salmon mousse that he produced for a memorable dinner at Maxime in Paris in 1976 when the guide editor Egon Ronay took five British chefs to cook a meal for French gastronauts. 'It could have a little more herbs,' was the Gallic verdict.

'Kenneth Bell was the third of four children of William Bell, an Edinburgh solicitor, and his wife Ella (née Phillips) whose family were brewers in

Hertfordshire. Schooled at the Edinburgh Academy, he missed the second world war by a whisker, but did his national service in the Royal Artillery. He thought to become a regular soldier, as were many of his mother's family, but was rejected on grounds of deafness. Nothing daunted, and perhaps with brewing and catering in mind, he enrolled at the Ecole Hotelière in Lausanne in Switzerland. There he graduated top of his year, unusual, then, for a Briton.

'Not long after, in the early 'fifties, he took a job managing the Old Bell in Malmesbury, by their account the oldest inn in England (founded in 1220), with a view perhaps to purchase, but this was denied him and instead, he gained a wife, Jill (née Hawkins) then a nursing sister at Malmesbury hospital. The possibility of inheriting his father-in-law's Bristol engineering business did not charm him as much as the sight of George Perry-Smith's pioneering menus at the Hole in the Wall restaurant in Bath, where they were then living. This was the impetus to taking a lease in 1958 on a first-floor tea-room opposite Christ Church in Oxford and starting the Restaurant Elizabeth, with a non-English-speaking Spanish waiter Antonio Lopez (who eventually took on the restaurant himself) as his staff. For seven years, the oak-panelled small dining-room resounded with plaudits. So emphatic and recognizable was the style that when Lopez continued the business, old customers could return a decade later and still think Bell was in the kitchen.

'Thornbury Castle was a different cup of tea. Kenneth Bell bought it at his second attempt, the ancestral occupants having first preferred an unsuccessful scheme to turn it into a golf course. Its twisted, ornate and fantastical Tudor brick chimneys, its semi-ruined composition (the Victorians having built a house within a ruin), marked it out as singular. Kenneth installed his burgeoning family in the rooms upstairs and set about cooking for a dining-room in the base of a massive corner tower. In time, the Castle would gain a vineyard (Mueller-Thurgau grapes) as well as a piggery filled with wild boar-cross swine (which sometimes escaped); but he would also gain plaudits from the world at large. Egon Ronay restaurant of the year (the first such award) in 1967; a Michelin star in 1974 (the first outside London); and, the final touch, an MBE for services to catering in 1973. It was said that he was put up for this by Ronay himself, having been asked if there was anyone worthy of the honour from the world of cookery.

'If his relationship with two guides was amicable, it was not quite so much with the third, the Good Food Guide which in the middle 'seventies starting cataloguing a range of defects in the Castle's offerings. This may be the reason for his joining with other top men in the hotel and restaurant world in a letter of complaint to *The Times* about the then-editor Christopher Driver. It had little discernible effect.

'Kenneth sold Thornbury to an American, Maurice Taylor, in 1986 who promptly took on local colour by buying a manorial title so he could call

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himself the Baron of Portlethen. Kenneth moved to the Dordogne for a decade before returning to Bristol and Cornwall in his later years.

'He is survived by his wife Molly (née Davy), his three children Simon, Fiona and James by his first wife, and his step-daughter Jane Davy.'

†NACH WAXMAN

It is with immense regret that I record here the loss of this giant of the world of books, whose Kitchen Arts bookshop on Lexington Avenue in New York City was simply the best place in the world to browse books about food. *PPC* and Prospect Books owe him so much for his constant support. I am grateful to Philip Hyman for this notice of his life and achievement.

Nach Waxman (1937–2021)

'Nach Waxman was one of the most influential figures in the galaxy of American food professionals. He was unique in that he was neither a chef, a journalist, or an entrepreneur but a man of letters – *Kitchen Arts and Letters* to be precise. That, indeed, was the name he gave to the bookshop he opened in New York in 1983. But Nach didn't just sell books. One went to the shop to discover books and to listen to Nach explain why one might be preferred to another and how, if you wanted to know more, you might look elsewhere entirely.

'He was much more than an erudite guide to the literature of cookery. Before opening *Kitchen Arts and Letters* he worked as an editor in several publishing houses and a look at the books he edited is revealing as to the man's personality and interests.

In 1970 Nach edited a collection of photographs by Charles Steinhacker published under the title *Superior: Portrait of a Living Lake*, a book which, Nach wrote, had "a strong conservationist bent." Nach shared that "bent" and, indeed, the family asks that those who want to honour his memory make a donation to the *The Nature Conservancy* <https://www.nature.org/en-us>.

'In 1977 Nach was responsible for producing a new and complete edition of Richard Wright's *American Hunger,* something which bore witness to his lifetime concern with social justice and freedom of expression.

'Lastly he worked with two fledging authors on a book few editors believed in, William Shurtleff and Akiko Aoyagi's *The Book of Tempeh* (1979). A book about a soy-based food which, the authors thought, could change the American diet. This is the very kind of book one finds at *Kitchen Arts and Letters*. One which might appeal only to a limited audience but made one think about the foods we eat ... and don't eat.

'Though Nach didn't collect cookbooks; he did collected food-related ephemera, namely trade cards of the late nineteenth century. *The Waxman Collection of Food and Culinary Trade Cards* is now housed in the Cornell

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University Library. Nach arranged his collection of over six thousand cards thematically. Under the heading "Condiments", for instance, were cards that pictured various bottled sauces, under the heading "Fats and Oils" were cards printed to promote butters, butter substitutes, shortening, lard and oils. Nach enjoyed collecting these cards because, in addition to their archival value, they were entertaining. He called the cards he grouped under the heading "Vegetable People", for instance, "A special design category" which, he wrote, "cut across a wide variety of subjects. Popular from the early days of American trade cards, these caricatures employ the images of vegetables or fruit to which are added arms, legs and facial features to portray humanlike figures. They remain a favorite of the collections."

'Oddly, Nach may not be remembered for his editorial or artistic interest or the fact that he ran a bookshop which furnished customers with ideas as well as books but, perhaps appropriately enough, for a recipe – Brisket. Google "Waxman brisket" and you will get over a million and a half "hits" whereas if you Google "Waxman cookbooks" a little less than a respectable eight hundred thousand come to the screen! What is often referred to as "Waxman's famous brisket recipe" had the particularity of calling for an exceptionally large number of onions, braising the meat in its own juices and slicing it halfway through the cooking process!

'It is worth noting that in the many articles that paid homage to Nach one term came up repeatedly – "beloved." Indeed, he was and he will be sorely missed.'

DUTCH VEGETABLES

Readers will have seen reports in their newspapers over the summer of the

successful restoration of a painting by the Dutch artist Joachim Beuckelaer. I asked Malcolm Thick to kindly comment on the goods arrayed before the eyes of the spectator. His note, compiled with the help of Jane Card, reads as follows: 'The late sixteenth-century painting *'The Vegetable Seller'* by the Dutch artist Joachim Beuckelaer has been restored and is back on show at Audley End. Layers of old varnish and later additions have been removed, including

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one which revealed that the woman selling the produce was not smiling. She now sits serene amongst her produce. A stout apron protects her expensive-looking red dress. Her sleeves are rolled up showing strong forearms – she means business.

'This picture is one of several painted by Beuckelaer on the same theme – a market stall with a profusion of produce and a woman stallholder seated prominently in the middle of the vegetables and fruit, and the picture. This is a depiction of purchasable abundance – giant cabbages and lettuces sit next to main-crop carrots, parsnips and artichokes. The woman tips a basket of cherries towards the viewer – other versions of this picture by Beuckelaer also feature cherries prominently. All the produce on display could have been grown in Dutch market gardens, there is nothing exotic here. Nevertheless, this abundant display could not have been seen as Beuckelaer depicts it, cherries are not ripe at the same time as carrots are mature, the walnuts – they look like fresh "wet" ones – would not by ready until autumn, and neither would the pears. By putting all the produce together, the artist is celebrating the full range of produce the rapidly expanding market gardens of the Netherlands could supply. Like the flower-paintings of the next century, the picture celebrates the skill of the gardener in growing the produce and the skill of the artist in depicting it. The painting demonstrates the sophistication of the Dutch economy of the time. International trade was generating wealth, some of which was spent on paintings, while domestic markets were served with produce such as that displayed by Beuckelaer by an efficient water transport network. This network carried boats full of dung from the streets and laystalls of Dutch towns to the gardens, which no doubt is reflected in the quality of the vegetables and fruit depicted in the painting.

'Of course, I write as an historian of commercial gardening, others who are art historians may see in the picture a cauldron of sexual innuendo – the fleshy corrugated leaves of the cabbage, the knobbly ridge-cucumbers, the long pointed carrots angled towards the cherries – pure filth!'

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