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MOSCOW SYMPOSIUM, November 2018

This is hardly advance notice, but the event may not be familiar to readers, who may care to be involved in any subsequent gatherings. There is little doubt that the food historian can now spend his or her life much like Morris Zapp in David Lodge's *Small World* jetting from one food-studies affair to another. The days when it was St Antony's or nothing are long gone. At any rate, the fourth symposium of the Russian Academy of Gastronomic Knowledge and Culture is taking place at Lomonosov Moscow State University, 15–17 November 2018. The range of topics up for discussion is almost infinite, provided they have to do with food. The requisite email for information is <akademiagastronomia@gmail.com>.

AMSTERDAM SYMPOSIUM, November 2018

The information arrived too late for the last issue, but here is another symposium you may have to miss – and it's on the same day as that in Moscow. The organizers are based at the University of Amsterdam (particularly the Special Collections); the subject up for discussion is the relation between nutrition, health and culture; the website that will tell you more is <http://bijzonderecollectiesuva.nl/foodhistory/amsterdam-symposium-on-the-history-of-food/>. As a footnote, and perhaps another lost weekend, Karl-Heinz Wüstner (who I met at the IEHCA conference in Tours earlier this year – you see, it is a way of making friends too) reported the other day on his excursion to Bordeaux to a conference organized by the Bordeaux Montaigne University on 'Food in Great Britain and in France: How Representations and Practices Have Changed, 18th–21st centuries.' He had a high old time, in a beautiful city: learning, gastronomy and tourism, all in one fair package.

FEAST

The latest issue of the online journal *Feast* is now available. Its title is 'Consuming Children' and 'seeks to examine the tension between children as consumers and children as consumables, recognizing that the figure of the child can perform as both actor and goal in food-related transactions.' It can be reached via < http://feastjournal.co.uk/issue/children/#content>. I liked especially 'Food and Community in American College Girl Fiction', by Dawn Sardella-Ayres. I hope she will not be affronted by it having put me in mind of Philip Larkin's schoolgirl romps, particularly as it is an enlivening survey of a literary genre as well as greatly informative as to food.

OXFORD SYMPOSIUM, 2019

I have had notification of the call for papers for the next Symposium at St

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Catherine's College, Oxford. I give the text below. The subject is enticing. The event is always enjoyable, with many possibilities, apart from the papers, for those who attend.

'The subject of our 2019 Oxford Symposium on Food & Cookery at St Catherine's College, Oxford on 12–14 July 2019 is Food & Power. Anyone interested in presenting a paper should submit a proposal of 500–1000 words by 31 January 2019 to Mark McWilliams at editor@oxfordsymposium.org.uk and include their contact information.

'Paper-proposers for Food & Power are invited to consider the many ways in which food can express power – both hard and soft. The theme is rich, and we encourage breadth, depth, and imagination in crafting proposals that investigate power dynamics in concrete ways. Hard power implies both the activities of governments, non-governmental organizations, corporations and corporatism, and transnational entities and the realities of wealth, subsistence, and poverty. Soft power implies more personal expressions, whether through choices in individual relationships, questions of gender and ethnicity, performances of class through etiquette or other indicia of status. Mass media and cultural attitudes fall somewhere in-between, dependent on both individuals and societal structures.

'We look forward to proposals addressing joyous, as well as oppressive, expressions of power in and through food. Possible topics might include (although are not limited to):

performative eating (or fasting), such as a medieval feast, a wedding banquet, a chi-chi restaurant meal, a traditional holiday meal, a religious observance, or a hunger strike;

authoritative voices, whether cookbook authors, medical and dietary experts, food critics, mass media personalities, and social media influencers;

starvation or hunger as a weapon of war or to control public dissent, and its opposite, "bread and circuses" used as a tool of political and social control;

inequalities in food access, whether between social groups, regions, or nations, and the value of food aid, food banks, and subsidies;

(in)justice and barriers in markets, including free trade and fair trade issues;

corporate control of agriculture, food processing and pricing, and reactions;

hierarchies in the kitchen, at the table, and on the table, whether a measurement of the importance of certain people or a perception of the values of certain foods;

slavery, colonization, and the role of enslaved and colonized peoples (and the colonizers) in shaping tables throughout the world;

- the exploitation of labour, whether migrant or through unfair or inadequately compensated work;
- food as a source of pride, identity, discrimination, or assimilation for diasporic and immigrant communities;
- the power of guilt and shame, whether relating to dietary choices, environmental concerns, or body image and eating disorders;
- the power of taboos, religious proscriptions, or fads in shaping culinary culture;
- gender issues, such as the traditionally male professional chef versus the female domestic cook;
- food used as reward or punishment, whether on an individual, domestic, institutional, national, or international scale.

'Food has the unparalleled power to define our place in society; it communicates provenance, ethnicity, religion, ideology, and aspirations. Respect for culinary habit and farming traditions has the power to encourage respectful tourism, reinforce national pride, and preserve regional diversity, thereby diluting the effect of industrialization of farming and the globalization of the food-supply. But perhaps most importantly, food – the cooking and serving of a meal – has the power to connect family and society, to tell a story of strangers or enemies coming together, to change mood, trigger memories, create emotions, touch the heart and, most powerfully of all, to express love.

'We look forward to your ideas for Food & Power, whether in its good or bad, joyous or oppressive, sacred or profane manifestations.'

TASTES OF HOHENLOHE

The next issue will include an informative piece by Karl-Heinz Wüstner on German pork butchers in England in the years before the First World War. These men and women came mainly from the small district of Hohenlohe and Karl-Heinz has been indefatigable in unravelling their history. A by-product of his activities has been a book of Hohenlohe recipes, combined with an account of Hohenlohe migrations to Britain and the United States. The text is in both English and German and includes recipes from manuscript cookery books as well as those handed down to the present generation, plus a menu for a traditional Hohenlohe wedding feast. All in full colour. Copies cost £6, £2.50 p&p. They are available from Mrs Jenny Towey of the Anglo-German Family History Society, 4 Channel Heights, Bleadon Hill, Weston-super-Mare, North Somerset BS24 9LX (Tel. 01934 248399). Email <jenny@towey.me.uk>. For credit card purchases visit the Society's online bookshop at <www.genfair.com>.

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AGRICULTURAL MATTERS

I have to report that our experiment with Dexter cattle is over. We found it difficult to cope. In part, the cause was the need to combat bovine TB in the region. Regulations have it that herds must be tested every twelve months. The test is a tuberculin reactor skin test. Should an animal test positive, it has to be removed forthwith for slaughter and the testing regime becomes more stringent: once every sixty days and two consecutive clear tests before movement restrictions are lifted. To test the cattle, they must be penned; then each beast is put through a crush to hold him or her still while the vet does his business. Three days later, the process is repeated so that the scrape can be inspected for a reaction. Our wider intention had been to have half a dozen cattle free-ranging over about ten acres of scrubby hillside – their constant attentions would beat back the invading bracken and bramble on ground that was too steep for any of our machines, and too extensive for it to be sickled and scythed. We built them a handsome house for stormy weather and teatime snacks which could also act as a corral for such things as TB testing. The first group that we bought from our neighbour Robert Perry consisted of two elderly matrons, past calving age, and four young ones. The old ladies would act as shepherds and tranquillizers. However, they were quite old and arthritis began to get the better of them. In the end, they had to go. Reconstruction of the group was stopped midstream by Robert Perry's herd testing positive for TB and thus not available for reinforcements. This situation lasted for most of a year. We failed to locate any other Dexter cattle for sale at a convenient distance. So when we were once again permitted to take from Robert Perry, we made the strategic error of not bringing in some old girls as well as young ones. We therefore had a handful of steers and heifers when we too had one test positive. (Who can tell the source of infection? They had had no contact with other cattle for 18 months; but deer and badgers are regular visitors to, or indeed inhabitants of our valley.) At any rate, this put us on the accelerated regime and I cannot describe the fun and games that we had to gather them safely in their pen. The onus, I confess, fell on my son-in-law Paul Adams: younger and more limber. Tales of escaping cattle are as tedious as fishermen's yarns, so I will not indulge my fancy, but in short, after torn hamstrings, broken gates and fences, sleepless nights and frustration, we decided (once the two successful tests had been achieved) to dispose of the animals. This we have done.

Other that this, our larger preoccupation has been how to improve our grassland as well as those parts of the holding that are cultivated for fruit and vegetables. Given that none of us went to agricultural college, nor has ever worked on a farm, it means that much relies on reading – of which I have had a bellyful. I started with a bit of history: James C. Scott's *Against the Grain.*

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A Deep History of the Earliest States (Yale University Press, 2017: 312 pp., hardback, £20.00). This looks at the formation of states in early Mesopotamia and its connection to the shift from hunter-gathering to settled agriculture. It's arresting and invigorating, quite marvellous. One liked most the contrast between the foetid conditions of human settlements (disease, malnutrition, conflict, etc.) and the arcadian life-style of the earlier gatherers – and their better nourishment. Something of this dichotomy fed into the next book: Isabella Tree's *Wilding. The return of nature to a British farm* (Picador, 2018: 362 pp., hardback, £20.00). The author describes the conversion of the Knepp Castle estate in Sussex from a successful, but not profitable, intensive arable and dairy enterprise (covering 3,500 acres) to something closer to its wild original (i.e. prehistoric). Modern tinkerings with the river and its course were dismantled; much ground was left to become a sort of forested savannah; nineteenth-century parkland was reclaimed from the (wartime) plough; and livestock was allowed to roam where it fancied. The livestock was carefully chosen: old breeds of cattle, pigs, deer and horses; definitely no sheep (as they are a 'modern' species introduced from the Middle East). The writing is excellent, the questions raised cogent, the information intriguing. It is a very satisfying book. It is most eloquent on the return of 'nature' (vertebrate and invertebrate) to the trees and fields – a constant refrain of many advocates organic agriculture and permaculture – and as we seem to face a new great extinction, it is persuasive. In terms of food production, Knepp offers some, but not much, meat: certainly not enough to keep the population well fed. And it produces no grain or other vegetable product. So wilding is not a total solution and I was uncertain what the author thought should be done about the rest of the country. There is however an argument that if we were to follow the super-intensive, micro-agricultural, market gardening route, we could produce far more on far less land (and employ many more people in the sector) thus allowing lots and lots of the country to revert to a wilder state.

The view of Perrine and Charles Hervé-Gruyer's *Miraculous Abundance. One Quarter Acre, Two French Farmers and Enough Food to Feed the World* (Chelsea Green, 2016 (originally published by Actes Sud as *Permaculture. Guérir la terre, nourrir les hommes*, 2014): 254 pp., paperback, £18.99) is that microfarms encompassing intensive market gardens (as well as permacultural forest gardens, etc.) have a productivity far beyond that of our current industrial, monocultural, chemically-based agriculture. They depend on manual labour, not machines; they improve the soil, not deplete it; they take up much, much less space. Their experimental farm at Bec-Hellouin in Normandy is a European standard-bearer. They are natural publicists. Their book is full of revelation, though don't read it for detailed instruction. There are plenty of practical observations, but you may get closer detail from two North American writers. The first, and most famous, is Eliot Coleman whose classic work is *The New Organic Grower. A Master's Manual of Tools and Techniques for the Home and*

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Market Gardener (Chelsea Green, 1995). The second is by a younger man from Canada who has had great success – Jean-Martin Fortier, *The Market Gardener. A Successful Grower's Handbook for Small-scale Organic Farming* (New Society Publishers (British Columbia), 2014: 222 pp., paperback, $24.95). These both garden along the lines described for Bec-Hellouin and give lots of practical tips. They are, of course, gardeners, not farmers, so no livestock, no forests.

Eliot Coleman's farm was 60 acres in Maine, which he bought from the pioneers of self-sufficiency and back-to-the-land, Scott and Helen Nearing, in 1968. The Nearings had moved to Maine in 1952, having already put in twenty years of toil in Vermont. Their account can be read in *The Good Life* (combining *Living the Good Life* [1954] and *Continuing the Good Life* [1970]; Schocken, 1989: 412 pp., paperback, $16.95). Nearing (1883–1983) was an economist, socialist (once Communist) and pacifist who was hounded out of academe and eventually, with a new younger partner, took to the Vermont hills where they accumulated a fair bit of land that produced large quantities of timber and maple syrup as well as giving them space to put up solid and generous stone buildings and ground to cultivate. They were vegan and had no truck with animals, save one cat. When they moved to Maine, they swapped maple syrup for high-bush blueberries as their cash crop, but roughly speaking replicated their lifestyle and surroundings. They lived off-grid; they divided their waking day into four hours of 'bread labor', four hours of doing your own thing (writing for him, music for her), and four hours of socializing or chilling out. He produced many books (all self-published) and would receive countless visitors (some of whom wasted his time, others who worked for the fun of it). Their contributions are celebrated in the Good Life Center which occupies their last house in Harborside, Maine (http://goodlife.org/about/). An account of living next door to the Nearings is to be found in Jean Hay Bright's *Meanwhile, Next Door to the Good Life* (Brightberry Press, Dixmont, Maine, 2013, revised 10th anniversary edition: 370 pp., paperback, £14.34). This may be a trifle long, but takes one back to the post-1968 world of self-sufficiency with a vengeance. An alternative take on Eliot Coleman's early days can also be found in his daughter Melissa Coleman's memoir *This Life Is in Your Hands: One Dream, Sixty Acres, and a Family Undone* (2011). Scott Nearing must have been quite terrifying to encounter, but his books are worth reading, even if somewhat prescriptive. There is none of the happy-go-lucky feeling that saturates the account of our own John Seymour's *Self Sufficiency*.

I seem to have been swept up by American enthusiasms, but a corrective soon turned up in Robert Elliot's *The Clifton Park System of Farming and Laying Down Land to Grass* (last trade edition, Faber & Faber, 1943; current reprint by CreateSpace Independent Publishing Platform, 2015: 162 pp., paperback, £4.67) which is a pioneering account of how best to manage your grassland as worked out in the Scottish borders at the end of the nineteenth century. The book was first published in 1898 and has been a bible of the organic

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movement since then. He advocates a complex mix of plants for permanent and semi-permanent pastures. They sound very similar to the herbal leys that have been discussed at length in the farming soap opera *The Archers* in the last couple of years. Another English pioneer, this time of small, mixed farms, is George Henderson. He wrote three books of note, one of which was *Farmer's Progress: A Guide to Farming* (Faber & Faber, 1950, but which I retrieved from the Soil & Health Library < https://soilandhealth.org/> which has a grand online archive of early agricultural material). He and his brother set up east of Oxford, on the edge of the Cotswolds, at the economic and spiritual nadir of British farming. They only had 80 acres, yet by dint of hard work (rise at 4.30, to bed late at night) and careful husbandry (constant manuring, constant improvement of the soil) they managed to first buy their own farm, then buy two other holdings as well. Their economic foundation was poultry (low capital, high return of manure); their aim was to be stockbreeders, always improving conformation, etc., by close attention to bloodlines – their flocks and herds were all home bred; they managed to achieve higher output and profitability than any of their neighbours. Legends in their lifetimes. Mr Henderson is as prescriptive at Scott Nearing, though their politics would have been at serious odds.

Just to add balance to these two British authors, I threw in Forrest Pritchard's *Gaining Ground. A Story of Farmers' Markets, Local Food, and Saving the Family Farm* (Lyons Press, 2013: 320 pp., paperback, £14.64) which gives some account of bringing a failing family farm not far from Washington DC back into the real world through organic pasture-based husbandry and direct marketing. It is perhaps more about the marketing than farming, but is still of some interest. More practical and invigorating was perhaps Sepp Holzer's *Sepp Holzer's Permaculture. A Practical Guide for Farmers, Smallholders & Gardeners* (Permanent Publications, 2010: 220 pp., paperback, £19.95) which describes this ebullient Austrian farmer's work on top of an Alpine mountain. Great stuff, full of ideas, it could fill a whole month's worth of long, dark evenings with schemes and projects. Holzer's particular forte is *Hügelkultur,* where he constructs raised beds in the form of mounds on a base of decaying logs, branches and brush. They may be straight or sinuous, tall or shallow. They allow perhaps more freedom than rectangular raised beds contained by perimeter walls; they are also less tidy. He is also good on terracing – as you might be up a mountain.

Going back to permaculture, as we were, led me on to the classic by Robert A. de J. Hart: *Forest Gardening. Rediscovering Nature & Community in a Post-Industrial Age* (Green Earth Books, 1996 (1st ed. 1991): 212 pp., paperback). This lays down rules for the permacultural nirvana of trees and plants in a single ecosystem, as worked out in his garden in Shropshire. It does inspire, especially as we have several copses and hedgerows which might be made more productive, and ornamental, by this method. My neighbour Margaret

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Crocker, who is much better informed than I, reckons it not so easy (or, perhaps, productive) in Britain as it might be in warmer climes. But we shall experiment come spring 2019.

My small attempt at better informing myself ended with two books by Philip Oyler (1879–1973): *The Generous Earth* (1950) and *Sons of the Generous Earth* (1963). He was a strange man. Involved in early twentieth-century occult mysticism – Madame Blavatski, Gurdjieff – he seems to have been the relatively benign original of Anthony Powell's other-worldly Dr Trelawney in the *Dance to the Music of Time*. The less benign Aleister Crowley also contributed to the character, more so as he became a darker figure in later volumes. Oyler, however, moved away from mystic poesy and the like and refashioned his career as an estate manager, with special skill in bringing failing estates back to life. This took him in the 1930s to France, to Grez-sur-Loing (formerly Grès-en-Gâtinais) not far from Fontainebleau where he was charged with reconstruction of a property for the American millionaire Theo Pitcairn. Grez was a favoured resort of many artists and writers as well as the home of the composer Delius, whom Oyler knew well. After this project, in search of relaxation, he headed south towards the Dordogne and was captivated by the life, society and agriculture that he found there. Eventually, some time after the War, he was to settle there permanently. His first book caught the imagination of the Elizabeth David-reading generation, just as did the travelogue *Three Rivers of France* by Freda White, published by Faber in 1952. It is a long paean to the glories of French country living, country cooking, country winemaking – anything, in fact, so long as it is French and relatively primitive. His view of French peasant life was rosy in the extreme, but it chimed with his views on farming, which can be inferred from his early membership of the Kinship in Husbandry group (founded by H.J. Massingham, among others) which was itself a precursor of the Soil Association. I recall from my own youth just what an impact his description of a rural arcady had on people like my stepfather, George Perry-Smith.

Meanwhile, we have a pile of 60 tons of compost to spread on a couple of fields. Without cattle to create manure, we have to find our soil improver elsewhere.

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