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WARWICK DEEPING'S *SORRELL AND SON*

Warwick Deeping (1877–1950) was a prolific novelist and short-story writer. He was also a doctor who gave up medicine for literature, as did his contemporaries Somerset Maugham and A.J. Cronin. Myriad Deepings can be found on the shelves of Britain's secondhand booksellers, none, hitherto, on mine. At the outset he wrote historical romance and adventure but turned to more contemporary matters after the First War. There's plenty of medicine, but unemployment, euthanasia, women and women's abuse, the class system, alcoholism, rape and shell shock also get the treatment from these more relevant novels. His most successful, *Sorrell and Son* (1925), is of interest to us here because it concerned hotels. My attention was drawn to it by John Fothergill, who commented, 'Some say what a good book Sorrell and Son was; the fellow who took an hotel and made it pay for his son's sake. Well, he was out for money primarily – not I' (*Innkeeper's Diary*, p. 80).

The briefest synopsis would explain that the hero, Captain Stephen Sorrell, M.C., has been demobilized after the War and deserted at the same time by his wife, leaving him to look after their young son, Christopher. Thrown out of work, yet needing it desperately, he swallows his pride and serves as 'boots' in a country-town inn where the evil, slatternly proprietress mistreats him, and his class, without end. His paths cross with a talented, rich businessman (and composer of musical comedies) who himself seeks a hotel that he might run along better, more satisfying lines. At this point, the reader may spy parallels with Fothergill's career (see, in extenso, below). An hotel is found in a county town somewhere in England's mid-west. The new broom takes on Sorrell as second porter and builds himself a team of loved and trusted employees. He gets rid of the commercial travellers as a client base and encourages the custom of county families, hunters and well-heeled motorists. In a word, he does what Fothergill had done at the Spread Eagle in Thame, less the intelligentsia. Sorrell has to go through various ordeals (chiefly from a head porter who exemplifies the meanness and idleness of the working class) but emerges, eventually, as manager of the enterprise. The enterprise itself has to go through similar trials (of inadequate business) before rescue in the form of the sojourn (part chosen, part forced thanks to a motor accident) of a pair of young film stars. The purpose of this suffering, as far as Sorrell is concerned, is to underwrite the educational and professional development of his son. He must be kept from the taint of the council school, he must be protected from the disdain of the private school to which he is sent (but sent back from when the headmaster appreciates his father is a porter), his focus must be kept on the ultimate goal of a solid career. Through many upsets, he achieves it – now a surgeon. His father dies (or rather, the son cuts his father's life short to spare him the lingering pain of cancer). Oh! it is a saga. Great stuff. One does wonder if

Fothergill was in any sense an inspiration à propos hotels. The point of it, for Deeping, was not so much the incidentals of hotel-keeping but rather the depiction of the class struggle and the primacy of individualism as a means of riding above the fray and gaining one's ends. I was listening the other day to an account of Margaret Thatcher's last days in office given by her private secretary and her exposition of the Premier's views sounded much like Sorrell's: ignore society and pursue your own goals, society will only be inimical to them. Deeping's portrait of class and its impact on human behaviour, again, sounds pretty similar to that summoned up by Fothergill, at least in his early phase at Thame. Fothergill may have disclaimed an interest in money, but he gave up Thame because it was making a loss; and Deeping may have cast his hero as pursuing solely profit, but he gives him a line on snobbery that might well have come from John Fothergill: 'Wasn't snobbery of a sort universal? Refine it slightly and it became a useful aspiration. Carry it still higher and it shows itself as man's love of mystery, beauty, queerness, something a little different from himself. Snobbery is the foot-stool at the feet of reverence.' There is a nice discussion of this novel, particularly as regards class and individualism, in Claud Cockburn's Bestseller: The Books that Everyone Read 1900–1939 (1972). This last is a delight, covering authors such as Guy Thorne, H. de Vere Stacpoole, Jeffrey Farnol, P.C. Wren, Margaret Kennedy, Michael Arlen and Mary Webb.

Emma Smith's memoir of her childhood in Newquay, Cornwall, after the First World War, *The Great Western Beach* (Bloomsbury, 2008) is real-life confirmation of the situation described by Warwick Deeping. Her father, an embittered man, had his early career blighted by his own father's financial travails but then attained the rank of captain, and was decorated with the DSO, during service in Flanders. On demobilization, trapped, albeit willingly, in marriage and fatherhood, he was constrained to take a lowly position as teller at the Midland Bank. For years he railed at not being treated as a gentleman, at being obliged to kowtow. His daughter observed that he hoarded any envelopes he received addressed to him as 'Esq., DSO' in the top drawer of his desk.

FRANK ANTHONY HAMPTON

I touched in the last issue on the work of F.A. Hampton, a physicist and garden writer (much under the pseudonym of Jason Hill) whose early book on wild foods is worth a look. I should have also mentioned that he wrote *The Scent of Flowers and Leaves* (London, Dulau, 1925) under his proper name, which was an important manual on this little-explored topic. John Fothergill (*An Innkeeper's Diary*) knew him and consulted him while creating his own garden at the Spread Eagle in Thame. (Fothergill was himself a gardening writer, producing his own small manual *The Gardener's Colour Book*, 1927.)

HENRY NOTAKER REVIEW

In the last issue, *PPC* 110, I ascribed a review of Henry Notaker's *A History of Cookbooks* to Malcolm Thick. I was mistaken. I should have credited it to Laura Mason. I apologize, to them and to you the reader.

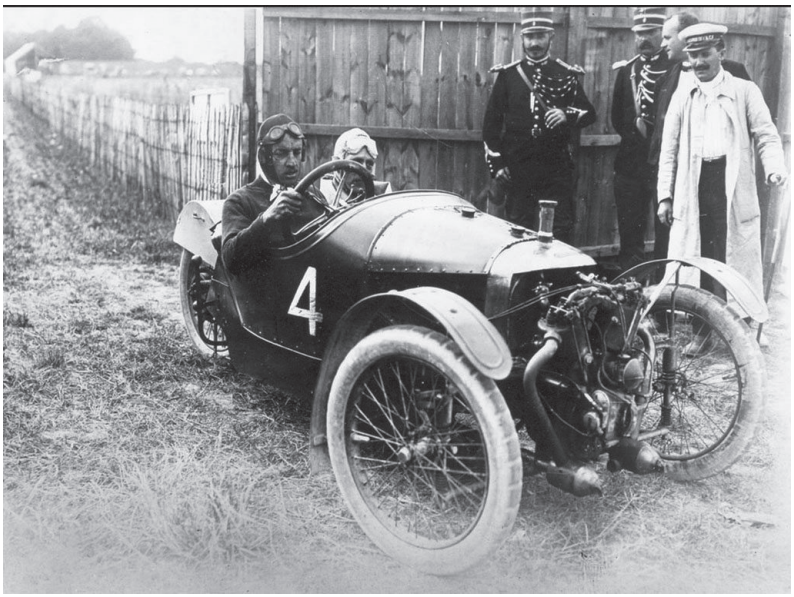
†MARK CHERNIAVSKY

I am ashamed that it has taken so long to record here the death of Mark Cherniavsky in April 2017. He was a great supporter of and adviser to *PPC* and Prospect Books from the moment of their inception in 1979/80. His characterful contributions to *PPC* over the years will have been noted by attentive readers, and students of early cookery books will have delighted in his *The Cookbook Library: Four Centuries of the Cooks, Writers, and Recipes That Made the Modern Cookbook* (2012), written with his wife and fellow-collector Anne Willan. One of his most signal contributions to Prospect was in lending his own copy of the 1747 edition of Hannah Glasse's *Art of Cookery* for facsimile reproduction. Mark Cherniavsky was a man of the world, literally so – working for many years for the World Bank – and his practical take on things always impressed me on our occasional encounters at conferences and in London. His involvement in Anne Willan's La Varenne cookery school, and their creation of a memorable home for it at the Château de Feÿ in Burgundy will live on in people's memories either through visits and courses attended, or through the pages of Anne's memoir *One Soufflé at a Time*.

SOME EARLY BRITISH GUIDEBOOKS

Reading John Fothergill and his diaries provoked a small purchase of hotel guidebooks he had mentioned. The most interesting, because least known, is that issued under the title *Traveller's Food Club*. I give a more extensive account of this later in this issue. The two others are *Signpost*, which appeared over the name of W.G. McMinnies, and Ashley Courtenay's *Let's Halt Awhile*.

Signpost – An Independent Guide to Pleasant Ports of Call in Britain, Ireland and the Channel Islands, was originally, when first published in 1935, have been subtitled *The Road Houses, Country Clubs and Better and Brighter Inns and Hotels of England*. When issued in America, in 1938 by Ives Washburn, the title ran, *A Confidential Motor Guide to British Inns.* There was a satellite Irish edition in 1950. Excluding the war years, editions of the main guide were by and large annual until the final issue in 1970, at which date its compiler was aged 83. William Gordon McMinnies (1886–1982) was the son of a cotton manufacturer. I have been able to find few facts about his life. Educated at Eton 1900–1905, then at Magdalen College, Oxford 1906–1909, he took part in the first motorcycle event at Brooklands in 1908 and was a competitor in the Isle of Man TT motorcycle races in 1908, 1909 and 1910. He rode a Triumph



machine and came fifth in 1908, fourteenth in 1909 and fifteenth in 1910. He seems to have turned journalist and stayed with his first enthusiasm on the staff of *Cyclecar* magazine, soon to become *Light Car & Cyclecar*, which he edited for a time. He was evidently acquainted with H.F.S. Morgan, the founder of the Morgan motor company, as he drove a works Morgan to victory in the 1913 Cyclecar Grand Prix of France at Amiens. This *grand prix* should be distinguished from that organized for big cars near the same town (attended that year with plenty of fatalities: 'Bigio was killed testing his Itala before the race. In a separate incident before the race, Paul Zuccarelli was killed when his Peugeot crashed into a cart, and a spectator was killed when Kenelm Lee Guinness's Sunbeam crashed into a river'– to quote Wikipedia). Cyclecars ran a shorter route, only 262 kilometres. Of around 28 starters, only seven finished. The official winner was Robert Bourbeau driving one of his own Bédélias, however the first actually across the line was McMinnies. Unfortunately, his Morgan was a three-wheeler thus not a true cyclecar and he was proclaimed winner of the motorcycle and sidecar competition. But in Blighty he is celebrated as the man who won everything. There is a picture of him half-way through the race (purloined from the Morgan Club's website, https://www.mtwc.co.uk/library/photo-gallery/1913-amiens-cyclecar-race-centenary).

When the War came in 1914 he joined the Royal Naval Air Service and ended up a Flight Commander. His experience of the air allowed him to write a manual, *Practical Flying: Complete Course of Flying Instructions* (1918). This has been reprinted in the modern era. McMinnies married Joyce Millicent

Kermode, they had one daughter (b. 1917) who was married in turn in 1939 to Ian Orr-Ewing (1912–1999), later Lord Orr-Ewing, a Conservative politician. (He was one of three EMI scientists who built the first production television set in 1934. He was a rare bird in the Commons, a trained scientist at home with technology.) That McMinnies was in vigorous health in old age is indicated by his challenge, reported in *Motor Sport* in 1974, to H.F.S. Morgan's son to see who could travel the furthest in one day: McMinnies (*aet.* 88) by train, Morgan junior by car. The motor won, but not by much.

Signpost died with McMinnies. More than 500 pages in each edition, he accorded a full page and a photograph to most entries, two pages and two photographs to those especially favoured. There were also appendices of short listings, *sans* illustration. It is never admitted, but the presumption must be that the places described paid a fee. In a short account of the guide included in the 1939 edition, McMinnies claims that he always paid the bill in full. He also reckoned to subject each entry to an annual inspection. Apart from letters from readers, he does not seem to have had assistance in his efforts. While signs of corporate favour are occasionally evident (he plugged many places owned by Usher's Brewery of Trowbridge, for example), there does seem genuine effort to seek out hotels that merit inclusion because they satisfied his criteria and to ignore those that did not. He talks of as many failed journeys of discovery as successful ones. The tone of entries is laudatory, not a whiff of criticism – but what would be the point of criticism when offering recommendations? The book has some merit for the time-traveller, however, if only to catch a feel of each place. I get the sense from Mr McMinnies himself that he did all this for the love of the open road. In this he reminds me of that other great guide-book compiler, the late Richard Binns, whose French guides we all so enjoyed in the 1980s: *his* particular itch was reading maps. The authors of *The Roadhouse Comes to Britain* (see Book Reviews, below) latch on to McMinnies' early editions because he was keen to include the new catering format of the roadhouse, as well as a new emphasis on country clubs, in his catalogue. But his investment seems to have been in a diminishing asset. By the 1939 edition, the number of roadhouses (which in 1935 had totalled 40) had reduced to a mere five. And of country clubs there were none. Our roadhouse historians suggest that some of this may have been to a reputational shift: roadhouses had become associated with criminal behaviour, too much drinking and subject to an invasion of the lower middle classes. The *Signpost* entries deserve close reading. There is not a hint of the reason for inclusion or exclusion (payment or non-payment or any fees), but the book gives a conspectus of what was available outside the main cities and commercial centres: the range of catering types, the styles of establishment, and something on the owners too. There is a marked lack of restaurants without accommodation (a short entry for the Rogano in Glasgow is an exception to almost every rule in the McMinnies book).

The other great British hotel guide that saw the light in the '30s was written by Ashley Courtenay. The very first iteration of the series was *Let's halt awhile: Being some recommendations from personal experience as to where to eat and sleep in Kent and Sussex, with digressions into Surrey* (Volume 1, 1934), and *Let's halt awhile in Devon and Cornwall* (Volume 2, 1938). Thereafter, there was an approximately annual issue (save during the years of war, when there were but two) until the 1970s. The record gets a little hazier at the end of the century when the British Library's holdings dry up, but regular issues seem to cease in 1971. The book underwent a change of names, *Ashley Courtenay's Hotels of Distinction* is one, and then it comes under the *Daily Telegraph*'s protection in its very last years, the final volume being for 2002. By this time, the compiler was Peter Fuller. Ashley Courtenay Ltd was incorporated in 1933 and dissolved in approximately 2001/2.

Just as with McMinnies' *Signpost*, the Courtenay guides proclaimed 'recommendations based on the personal hotel experiences of Mr. and Mrs. Ashley Courtenay in England, Scotland, Wales, Ireland and the Channel Islands – a guide to some 700 Hotels and Inns visited annually and recommended for 1956 by the author and his wife' (1956 ed.). And like *Signpost* too, they produced stand-alone Irish volumes on an occasional basis. There were photographs of most entries, although being smaller than *Signpost*'s these were sometimes less informative. The tone is once more upbeat, although there is marginally lighter stress on outdoor activities. McMinnies must have had very strenuous holidays. And the relationship of the entries to the guide's compiler bore some similarity to that we have already suggested for *Signpost.* In other words, provided the hotel met Courtenay's criteria, it would get an entry, for which the hotel presumably paid a fee. As with the other book, there are signs of corporate connections, for example with Trust Houses, or with the Reading brewers Simonds.

Ashley Courtenay (1888–1986) was a vicar's son, educated at Haileybury and Emmanuel College, Cambridge. Before the First World War, he worked in advertising. In that conflict he was in the Royal Naval Air Service but served in the Duke of Westminster's squadron of armoured Rolls-Royce cars, 'This consisted of driving up to the front, firing machine-guns and then reversing at 20mph.' He then returned to advertising, starting his own agency after working initially for the General Electric Company. It is reported that he then worked as a hotelier, successively in Guildford, Devon and Hertfordshire and began to write a hotel column for the *Morning Post*. This all before founding Ashley Courtenay Ltd in 1933, which appears to have been a full-dress advertising agency which at one stage employed John Freeman, later to find fame as the interviewer on *Face to Face*. Freeman recalls working on the Chubb Locks and Lanson Champagne accounts. It was in 1934 that Courtenay issued his first (self-published) guide, already mentioned. Luck would have it that there was a story in the *Independent* in 2003 about a couple who were reviving a Sussex

teashop that first opened in 1926. They also acquired the original visitors' books which included this message from Ashley Courtenay after he had taken a satisfactory tea on 27 June 1926. 'The secret of success through advertising,' he wrote, 'is not by spending lots of money, but by first of all having something worth advertising and then by making such advertising as you do (however little it is) so attractive that you induce people to "sample the goods". This you are effectively doing at Beam Ends.' There speaks the advertiser and it only underlines that the beating heart at the centre of the Ashley Courtenay guides was advertising and publicity (rather than the love of tarmac as may be the case with McMinnies). Certainly Courtenay offered his readers some sort of booking service and personalized recommendations, and certainly at the end of the company's life it was organizing consortia of hotels and inns to provide centralized reservations and public relations.

Neither *Let's Halt Awhile* nor *Signpost* were consumer guides in the sense of dishing out brickbats while lavishing praise. They did not act as a newspaper restaurant critic will act today. This does not mean they were useless: they would not have flourished so long if they had been. But to the Raymond Postgates, and even the Egon Ronays, they were suspect. And to the student of hotels past, their testimony is a trifle one-sided. They are also not a lot of use for food (but excellent for makes of mattress). They offer little detail and rarely discuss places that were not principally hotels. In their defence, they did not accept advertising nor, generally, third-party sponsorship (at least until the closing years of Ashley Courtenay).

Ashley Courtenay himself died at a great age while on a wine-tasting cruise in the Mediterranean and Black Sea in the company of his third wife.

PHTHALATES

No, I am not sure what they are – but they appear to be noxious and bound up with the intrusion of plastic into our bodies, diet and environment. You will ingest more of them if you eat in fast-food restaurants. I could think of many other reasons for avoiding such places, but this might help tip the balance for those who hanker after a Big Mac. I have never comprehended anyone secretly desiring such a thing: it's worse than tomato ketchup.

ULTRA-PROCESSED FOODS

Britain leads the way in the consumption of this category of food: 'made in a factory with industrial ingredients and additives invented by food technologists and bearing little resemblance to the fruit, vegetables, meat or fish used to cook a fresh meal.' While 50.7% of our food purchases fall into this category, southern Europe fares better, with between 10% and 20%. France and Italy, countries which straddle the north–south divide manage 14.2% and 13.4%

respectively. Other northern states are not brilliant, usually well over 30% (exceptions are Hungary and Slovakia). Ultra-processed foods feed into the obesity complex. As most of them taste repellent, and are rarely addictive (has anyone ever contemplated being addicted to Cadbury's chocolate, for example, or Mr Kipling's cakes?), whatever the experts say, one can only agree with Angela Hartnett in denying that Britain has attained a 'food culture' in recent years. Food culture? My eye. We consume as much, or more, filth as we ever did, irrespective of the witterings of chefs and their cousins on television and in the press. What we need is education and time, both resources that we lack across the board.

PETER GRAHAM

https://chez-gram.com is a new website created by the writer Peter Graham, long resident in south-west France in the village of Mourjou (see his Prospect Books edition of the same name). For years he has either written excellently on food, travel and film. Much better than me, however, is him in his own words, taken from the website: 'Food loomed large in my life from a very early age. For that I must chiefly thank (or blame) my mother, an excellent cook who managed to produce culinary wonders with the simplest of ingredients. Evacuated to Wakefield (Yorkshire) as an infant for part of the war, I was stuffed with stodgy pastries by the hard-working local women. Despite that, I never developed a sweet tooth, so when sweets came off rationing in 1953 I didn't join the bevies of young children who took confectioners by storm. Instead, I was lucky enough to taste good French food during my annual visits to my French godmother in Paris. She was a film producer and left me for most of the time in the capable hands of her live-in maid, Marguerite, who was from Savoie. Marguerite, noting my greed, born of wartime deprivation, liked nothing more than making a six-egg omelette, eating a small corner of it herself, and urging me to finish the rest. Up to that point in my life, eggs were either powdered or preserved in isinglass, and I vividly remember even now their unpleasant 'strawy' taste. In France, eggs came off rationing relatively soon after the war, partly because of the very large population of egg-producing farmers. So an omelette (of whatever size) had the genuine eggy taste.

'My mother, who had holidayed several times in France, made straightforward French cuisine at home, and made lavish use of such 'exotic' ingredients as garlic, to the bemusement of school chums I invited round and the disgust of my paternal grandmother if she was aware that garlic had gone into her food (most of the time my mother kept quiet about that, and grandma would pronounce the dish delicious).

'The other feature of my life has been film – no doubt because my godmother gave me a small part, as 'Lord Peter' (!), in *Au revoir, Monsieur*

Grock, an unremarkable biopic she produced about the celebrated clown, Grock (1880–1959). I spent a great deal of time hanging around Paris studio lots waiting to be called on set. Although, then aged nine, I was bored most of the time, I was bitten by the film bug. After reading classics at King's College Cambridge and being invited to take up an academic career (I'd become quite an expert on Greek particles), I decided instead to emigrate to France immediately after graduating in the hope that my godmother would get me into film-making. While at Cambridge I'd co-directed with Shama Habibullah (Waris Hussein's sister) an undistinguished and derivative film about a freshman coming to terms with loneliness. Once in France, I made a medium-length documentary on Edith Piaf, which was followed by *Gunpoint* (which can be viewed in full on YouTube), a short film on the organized massacre of tame pheasants in Sologne. Film remained a central concern: I compiled *A Dictionary of the Cinema* (Tantivy; 1964 and 1968) and wrote *The New Wave: Critical Landmarks* (Secker & Warburg, 1968; an enlarged second edition, *The French New Wave*, was published by Palgrave in 2009, with a contextualized introduction by Professor Ginette Vincendeau). I contributed film reviews and film festival reports to the *Guardian*, the *Sunday Times* and *Films and Filming*.

'But I continued to take a keen interest in the subject of food and wrote on food, wine and restaurants for the *International Herald Tribune*, the *Sunday Times Magazine*, the *Guardian* and various other publications. I suggested to Penguin that I translate Jacques Médecin's *La Cuisine du comté de Nice* into English. Following an enthusiastic reader's report by Elizabeth David, Penguin published the book as *Cuisine Niçoise* in 1983. I have since translated five other books on a wide variety of subjects, ranging from art, film and the history of psychoanalysis to a biography of Aristides de Sousa Mendes, the Portuguese consul in Bordeaux who, in 1940, saved the lives of thousands of Jews by signing visas allowing them to leave France for neutral Portugal.

'I next suggested to Penguin that I should write a book about cheese. The response was that the market was already swamped with books on cheese, but that a book of cheese recipes would be a good idea. I imagined that the number of recipes calling for cheese must be quite small – mistakenly, as it turned out. My *Classic Cheese Cookery*, a chunky 401pp paperback, was published in 1988 and won the André Simon Memorial Prize.

'On moving to the southern Massif Central of France in 1978 I became very interested in the cookery of the Auvergne. After extensive research in libraries and interviews with local restaurateurs and farmers' wives, I wrote *Mourjou, the Life and Food of an Auvergne Village* (Viking; 1998). Somewhat to my surprise, a French literary publisher founded by Jean Cocteau, La Table Ronde, decided to have the book translated into French (by me). It came out in 2000 as *Mourjou, traditions et recettes d'un village d'Auvergne*.

'As for the contents of this website, which will contain illustrations by the late Peter Campbell (who was responsible for the evocative line drawings used in the English edition of my Mourjou book), entries will vary in length from a few lines to several pages. They will in some cases include recipes. They will reflect my enthusiasms (for *tarte Tatin*, for example) and aversions (to Big Macs), and range in tone from celebration to rant. I will draw on my experiences as a restaurant critic and my encounters with professional chefs. My interest in the etymology and origins of food-related terms will become apparent. For example, the French and Italian words for a sow are *truie* and *troia* respectively: they both derive from the ancient city of Troy. I shall explain how. Doughnuts in French and German – *pets de nonne* and *Nonnenpfürzen* respectively – both translate literally into English as 'nun's farts', sometimes Bowdlerized to 'nun's puffs': why? As far as possible, I shall give false etymologies a wide berth.'

FOOD STUDIES AT TOURS

The IEHCA has announced a new master's degree course for the next academic year in food cultures and traditional societies (*la patrimoine*). Its intention is to instruct in the promotion of gastronomy, tourism, local produce and more generally, local, sustainable and healthy food practices. The course will be centred on the Villa Rabelais, headquarters of the IEHCA and its excellent library. Those interested in participating (it sounds somewhat like a French version of Slow Food's curriculum) should apply forthwith. It's not long to the next academic year.

SYMPOSIUM OF AUSTRALIAN GASTRONOMY

The 22nd Symposium will be held in Parramatta over 16–19 November 2018 at the Female Orphan School, Western Sydney University. The them this year is Out of Place, in their word, speaking 'to locale, to physical characteristics, climate, soil, hydrology, landforms and so forth, along with the cultural;, social, economic and political forces that have shaped food production, distribution and consumption at the level of place. "Out of place" can also relate to "not of a place", to not belonging and to food and foodways that no longer have a place at our tables.' The deadline for proposals for papers has now passed, but full details are available at <http://www.gastronomers.net>.

FEAST

There is another issue of *Feast* online at < http://feastjournal.co.uk/issue/spaces-for-eating/>. As the address makes plain, the subject is 'Spaces for Eating' and the prologue reads: 'Spaces for Eating marks the final edition in a series of

online publications exploring the larger framework of Setting the Table. The edition investigates the architecture, environments and landscapes in which food is prepared, purchased, shared and consumed. Exploring the spaces designed or designated for eating, the contributing authors pursue places of consumption as expressions of cultural value, tradition, and changing fashions reflecting our ongoing construction of "Spaces for Eating" and our continually changing relationship to their differing forms.' The high point, for me, of the issue is an essay by Fanny Louvier, '"Not fit to eat in the same room as other human beings": spaces for eating in British servants' autobiographies, 1900–1939'. It's excellent stuff. Ms Louvier is doing a D. Phil. at Oxford on the personal experience of domestic service in England and France 1900–40, based on autobiographies of the servants themselves.

SOLES DE GUÉRETS

When translating Madame Cora Millet-Robinet (*The French Country Housewife*, Prospect 2017), there was the occasional recipe title that flummoxed me – in other words, it seemed to have no rhyme or reason. One in particular, that provoked an overlong footnote on my part, was for a fritter made from a buckwheat *bouillie* (or thick porridge). Madame called this dish *Soles de guérets*, and the recipe went like this:

> Make a well-cooked and thick *groux* [buckwheat *bouillie*] (see *Buckwheat flour*, page 316 above); let it cool in a shallow dish; cut it into slices 2 centimetres thick; dust them with flour; deep-fry them in really hot fat; dust with sugar. Serve very hot. It's an excellent dish.

My portentous footnote read as follows:

> In later editions, Mme Millet-Robinet explains her interpretation of this name for fried buckwheat *bouillie*. The element *guéret*, she says, refers to fallow land, in which the buckwheat was sown as a catch crop. The *sole*, in her view, comes from the shape the *bouillie* takes when it is poured into a shallow dish or soup plate and then removed to be sliced: a little like half a flatfish or sole. This explanation is confirmed by the folklorist Paul Sébillot in his *Coutumes populaires de la Haute-Bretagne*, Paris 1886, p. 336. He writes (in translation), 'They also fry slices of cold *bouillie* in the pan, which are cut into squares or thin slices which resemble small soles in shape. So they amusingly call them "*soles de guéret*".' The Norman historian Jean Seguin, in his *Vieux mangers, vieux parlers bas-normands* (Avranches, 1938), suggests the name is specifically Avranchin. Another from the same province, André Guérin in his *La Vie quotidienne en Normandie au temps de Madame Bovary* (Hachette, 1975), makes reference to salmon, saying, 'Cold, the left-over *bouillie*

is fried the next day as "salmon" browned in butter [my translation].' An alternative view of the phrase is entirely agricultural. A three-course rotation (in French, *assolement*) saw the arable land divided into three sectors or *soles*: the *sole de blé* was that part sown with winter grains (wheat, rye, or a mixture of the two); the *sole de mars* is sown in spring with oats, barley, peas and so forth; and the *sole de guéret* is the fallow or *jachère*. So the name of the dish may simply refer back to where the grain, buckwheat, was sown as a catch crop or *surcharge*. Or, indeed, the name may refer to both possibilities at once.

Philip Hyman, who knows more about such things than I, very kindly sent me a recipe for *soles de guérets* in a book entitled *La Cuisinière des restes et des potages, purées, sauces, ragouts, etc.* by Mlle Virginie Étienne (Delarue, Paris, 1874; but it was first issued by Passard with the title *La Cuisinière parisienne et provinciale* in 1869). The dish is described as a variant on buckwheat *bouillie à la manselle* or *manière du Maine*. The method is as described by Mme Millet-Robinet, and it closes with the comment, 'ces beignets se nomment soles de Guérets.'

My Madame does not make plain how significant was buckwheat to the diet of those regions close to her in Poitiers, in particular Maine, the right bank of the Loire and down to the Vendée (even if we usually associate it with Brittany), although Mlle Étienne makes plain that her dish is from the province of Maine and no other. This importance is described and given substance in the *Inventaire du patrimoine culinaire de la France. Pays de la Loire* (Albin Michel, 1993).

FOOD, DRINK, AND TABLE MANNERS IN THE BAYEUX TAPESTRY: A NOTE FROM WILLIAM SAYERS

Reproduction technologies have made possible a fresh round of facsimile editions of the Bayeux Tapestry in French (2013) and German (2018), while the best-known English equivalent has been reissued (2004), albeit with an earlier commentary (from 1985).* Correspondingly, both the material and historical analysis of the embroidery have made impressive advances in the last half-century. Among the wealth of detail in this textile marvel is the attention to real-life activities in the wings of the greater political and military events, not only in the margins, above and below, of the work but also in scenes that frame the major happenings. Food and drink would not be expected to figure largely in the story of a massive military invasion, yet there are several revealing scenes that illuminate day-to-day life in ways not available in other mid-eleventh-century iconography, the archaeological evidence, or literary depictions. For

example, did you ever wonder how to hold an ox or aurochs horn, full of beer, when invited to a medieval feast?

The answer is found in the pre-invasion scene of Harold Godwinson in the great hall of his estate at Bosham near Chichester (Fig. 31). He is conferring with his counsellors, some with typical English soup-strainer moustaches. The courtiers all gesticulate and, one assumes, speak, while Harald listens attentively. The five men are seated at a table mounted on a number of pillar-like supports. This may well be a preprandial conference as the only recognizable food is a globular loaf of bread (as determined by comparable scenes). Two drinking horns are seen. One rests on the table in some kind of support, obscured by the hand of the man on the far right. On the far left, another has raised a horn to his lips. He grasps it not around the middle with his fingers and thumb but rather rests it daintily on his palm and outstretched fingers, with the pointed end of the horn rising over his head. Harold himself, in the centre, is poised to drink from a bowl. It likely contains wine, while the horns probably contain beer. Another similarly sized bowl on the table holds two further objects. Spices?

The next relevant scene is after the Norman invasion, at the army's first encampment (Fig. 32). We should assume a field kitchen with collapsible, portable equipment. Some of the food may be thought to derive from the troops' plundering of the countryside for cattle, sheep, and swine, depicted in the immediately preceding scene. Two cooks or cook's boys (to judge by their close-cropped hair, the sign of subaltern status), dressed in livery-like breeches and hose, are seen tending a cauldron suspended by two rings from a stout rod laid in the forks of two uprights. The forks are finished pieces, not rough-cut from a neighbouring woods. The lads grasp the uprights with both hands and have possibly just brought the pot to the flames and are adjusting the supports. The fire itself has been laid in a box-like device on legs at about the height of the lads' knees. The green, brown and white bands on the sizeable cooking pot do not suggest metal, and ceramics may be imagined. Since the Latin captions that run along the top of the embroidery mention only meat, this may well be the boiled contents of the pot, rather than gruel. Above the heads of the cooks seven skewers are seen, with spitted fowl or cuts of meat at the lower ends. Since there is limited effort at three-dimensionality in the depictions, the spits may be thought to have been placed over the fire from the other side of the cauldron, perhaps braced by a rectangular device of the same breadth as the array of skewers. To the right, also outdoors, is seen a square portable oven with handles, mounted on a tripod. With a forked crook, a baker is removing rolls or cakes and placing them on a tray held in his other hand. Bread would have been a staple for all social classes and was often placed under meat and fowl at the table, with a view to both tidiness and preserving the rich juices. Next, servants are seen carrying skewers with meat and fowl through the impressive entrance to a doubtless commandeered English manor house.

In the adjacent scene four knights, without their body armour and distinctive Norman helmets, are seated at a rudimentary table consisting of two kite-shaped shields laid on a simple trestle. On the inner sides of the shields are set out bowls, bread, and knives (the only tool for eating). The stylization in the depiction of objects that results from the embroidery technique makes the identification of some items difficult. From the left servants are now bringing the skewers with birds and offering them to the soldiers. Toward the other end of the makeshift table, one of the knights seems to be summoning comrades to dine by sounding his horn, held differently than the drinking horn, which it otherwise resembles.

Senior officers of the invading army are seen in a separate scene, grouped around half of what may be a circular table. The six figures are dominated by a cleric, very likely Bishop Odo of Bayeux, the half-brother of Duke William. His tonsure is evident as is his ecclesiastical dress. He appears to be blessing the food. Odo figures prominently in the wall hanging and it has been generally agreed that he must have been the major force behind its creation, in the third quarter of the eleventh century. Three of the men are dressed like the knights; two others are more richly attired. In the foreground a servant is seen bowing to the diners, with what appear towels over his arm, so that the vessel he carries at eye level may be a basin in which diners would wash their hands. As well as the bread and knives seen in earlier scenes, there is fish on the table. This must mean that it is a fast day and this has encouraged scholars to date the scene to Friday, 6 or 13 October, 1066, the eve of the Battle of Hastings. The fighting men seem to have been exempted from fasting, no doubt in order to keep up their strength. Two of the diners hold wine bowls (a wine cask is earlier seen among the supplies being loaded for the invasion, Fig. 37). One points towards the upper right of the tapestry, where the bishop's name figures. Most of these characters are caught in the course of making some gesture, which adds dynamism to the scenes. In particular, such movement on the right-hand side of panels generally serves a narrative bridging function, while also remaining plausible within their specific circumstances.

Duke William is not seen eating, although he figures in the immediately following panel with his advisers, including Odo. Curiously, in none of the scenes reviewed here (with possibly one exception) is anyone seen actually eating or drinking, that is, with something in or entering his mouth. This may be a fastidious touch, a means to preserve dignity, avoidance of a technical sewing difficulty that could have reduced the clarity of image, an effort to keep the focus on events under discussion at the tables, or have some other reason not apparent to us.

As with the embroidery as a whole, these are lively, everyday depictions, with a high degree of verisimilitude. Each vignette is filled with a unique action, sharply defined, yet successful as a metonym of the larger operation that it

represents, e.g., baking bread for an entire army. The Bayeux tapestry promotes a keen awareness of military logistics, not least of the kitchens, food and drink, and provisioners, cooks, and servants needed to support an undertaking on the scale of the Norman invasion of England. One might imagine the cooking and dining scenes to be without greater ideological objective, other parts of the tapestry seeing to that. But in subtly effective ways these readily recognized pictures of common activities evoke a sense of custom and convention, the agreed-upon status quo, and in so doing add to the aura of legitimacy surrounding William's claim, plausible in political and dynastic terms, to the English throne.

* Pierre Bouet, François Neveux, and Sylvette Lemagnen, *La Tapisserie de Bayeux révélations et mystères d'une broderie du Moyen Âge*, Rennes: Éd. Ouest-France, 2013; Pierre Bouet, François Neveux, and Sylvette Lemagnen, *Der Teppich von Bayeux: ein mittelalterliches Meisterwerk*, trans. Heike Rosbach and Hanne Henninger, Darmstadt: Theiss, 2018; David M. Wilson, *The Bayeux Tapestry: The Complete Tapestry in Color,* New York: Thames & Hudson, 2004. Readers are encouraged to consult one of these or other reproductions to corroborate the remarks of this note. References to figures are to the Bouet/Neveux edition and naturally represent a judicious framing of the uninterrupted linear advance of scenes in the tapestry.

NEW FROM PROSPECT BOOKS

Two titles have arrived from the printers. The first is another instalment of Jane McMorland Hunter's survey of the productive trees and bushes in our garden, once more in cooperation with Sally Hughes. Their subject this time is *Cherries and Mulberries. Growing and Cooking*. The subject is a winner – who has not tried to produce something from both species? – my own record is dismal – and even if you buy or steal the fruit, the recipes are full of interest and just ask for your attention. A really useful handbook.

The second is called *A Persian Cookbook: The Manual. A 16th century Persian cookbook by Bavarchi*. It is a translation by Saman Hassibi and Amir Sayadabdi of 'the earliest classical cookbook in Persian to have survived.' Its author, who wrote it in 1521 as a gift to his patron after being allowed to go on a pilgrimage to Ardabil, was himself a professional cook, as had been his father. The book covers a whole gamut of dishes and this edition has been ornamented by handsome photographs by Nadia Mackenzie of both ingredients and finished dishes (cooked by the intrepid publisher). I look forward to a proper review of this in the next issue by Sally Butcher of Persepolis.