

HUMMUS

The shocks experienced regarding the recent hummus crisis – where the withdrawal of supplies from several supermarkets (thanks to a metallic taste still to be explained) led in turn to an exhaustion of stocks at other, smaller, outlets – were at least twofold. The first was the assertion that at least 41 per cent of English households had a carton of hummus in the refrigerator (a less worrying statistic than the alarming percentage of people who eat potato crisps for breakfast). The second was that the majority of England's largest supermarket chains drew their supplies of own-label hummus from the same manufacturer. A similar pattern emerged when a batch of Yeo Valley yoghurt was withdrawn for some reason. Then, it transpired that Yeo Valley was also the source of vast numbers of own-brand supermarket yoghurts. A good reason for eschewing all food manufacturers in my view. I suppose my first exposure to hummus was a visit to the Lebanon in 1967. On return to London, it was readily accessible in all those Turkish Cypriot restaurants on the outer reaches of Soho. It has never occurred to me to buy a nasty little tub of it from Sainsbury, though cooking chickpeas until tender has sometimes been a mammoth and unrewarding task.

SERVICE CHARGES

Every month, especially if you are a *Guardian* reader, seems to produce a new scandal concerning the treatment of the service charge. It is impossible to produce a succinct account, save to observe that too many establishments seem to levy a service charge from their customers and fail to pass it on to their staff. Either they retain it to defray management costs, breakages or other irritating (to them) financial hiccups; or they have the effrontery to use it to contribute to the staff's basic wage. The doublespeak and false logic that accompany these actions is shaming to report. It would be bad enough if they were confined to the netherworld of proper catering – the chains, the fast food outlets and so forth – but when it is discovered that the high pinnacle of gastronomy, the Gavroche in the West End, is up to the same tricks and subterfuges, then the spirit rebels. For forty years, I have battled against this pernicious chicanery in hotels and restaurants. Every bill presented to a customer should have a clear statement that the bill is the bill (Brexit is Brexit I seem to hear), that the price on the menu is the end price too. No service charge (or extra VAT taxation, but that is a battle now long since won) is levied or expected. Cash tips are not expected and will often be returned. The end result of such a policy is that people do still give tips and the staff can expect to see a general yield of about 2.5% on turnover. This should be pooled, then distributed to every worker equally on the basis of shifts undertaken. Wages should be adequate from the get-go. Tips should be a nice little extra.

ENGLISH FOOTBALL AND MEAT-EATING

Jermain Defoe, the thirty-four year-old who scored the winning goal in England's World Cup qualifying match with Lithuania (not exactly England vs. Germany) at the end of March, ascribed his continuing fitness and renewed hunger for victory to a vegan diet. It is not recorded whether he also had vegan-approved football boots. My inference is that his veganism stops short at the dinner table. A plant-based diet, but not necessarily lifestyle, is all the current rage in the Western world. Great claims are made for it, and it gains ethical credit by pointing up the fatuities and cruelties of industrial meat and dairy production as practised in large parts of the world. Katy Keiffer's *What's the Matter with Meat?* (Reaktion, 2017) offers sufficient ammunition for a battery of vegan howitzers, but fails, I note, to include Simon Fairlie's well argued *Meat: A Benign Extravagance* (Permanent Publications, 2010) or, indeed, any of Colin Tudge's excellent discussions of mixed farming to balance her argument. We have a tiny smallholding here in Devon. Enough to support sheep, pigs in shrubby woodland, and a few cows. A landscape view of one portion of the land shows clearly enough that it is often vertiginous, always spiritually reviving and, in this photograph, implausibly manicured after a visit of a grassland topper attached to a very expensive Swiss mountain tractor.



This ground in some places is too steep for an older man to walk without blowing like a walrus; it's certainly too steep for conventional tractors. But it can make ideal pasture, even if improving the grass is difficult without



means of spreading lime, manure and other enrichments save by broadcasting out of a shoulder-born sack or barrowing it achingly across the slopes. We tended at first to have insufficient stock on it, which caused the English jungle of bracken and bramble to encroach on sizeable areas. Now we are attempting to beat this back, in the first instance with a magic tracked flail mower that operates by remote control and can cope with any incline or irregularity, and in the second by introducing stock – Dexter cattle – that can roam the space at will, are hardy enough to

withstand living out in all weathers save the most extreme, and which do not need feeding of concentrates and other manufactured foods. Our hope is we can achieve a balance between stock and jungle that works in our favour, not the brambles'. Goats were candidates for the role, but long experience of



these creatures in easier circumstances had steeled the family's hearts against them. Sheep are allowed on the more favoured tracts, but are forever getting tangled in brambles ram-in-thicket style (though Abraham's ram may have been a goat). So cattle it is, with a shed for dispensing hay, sheltering from cloudbursts and gathering for functions such as TB testing.

This of course condemns us to the non-vegan side of things, but seems a reasonable way of stewarding the land we have. But our real responsibility is to leave that land in better heart than we found it, and this is astonishingly difficult, as well as back-breaking. We lose much sleep in thinking about it.

THE JANE GRIGSON AWARD

It is with much satisfaction that I can report that Vicky Hayward has received this award for her forthcoming translation of the *New Art of Cookery, Drawn from the School of Economic Experience* by Juan Altamiras first published in Spain in 1745. Readers will have always been interested by Vicky's book reviews in previous issues (as well as this one). I have lifted (without permission) the *Bookseller's* report of the award, which is as follows: 'An "unusual" influential recipe book originally published in 1745 by a Spanish Franciscan friar and translated into English has won the 2017 Jane Grigson Trust Award.

'Vicky Hayward won the £2,000 prize for *The New Art of Cooking: A Spanish Friar's Kitchen Notebook*, which will be published by Rowman & Littlefield in June this year.

'Hayward translated the influential recipe book, originally published in 1745 by the Spanish Franciscan friar Juan Altamiras, and interweaved with it a new narrative which helps the reader to encourage eighteenth-century Spain, its everyday life and food culture.

'The judges were made up of Geraldene Holt author and chair of the Jane Grigson Trust (JGT); Henrietta Green, food writer and broadcaster and trustee of the JGT; Felicity Cloake, *Guardian* food writer and *New Statesman* columnist, trustee of the JGT; Matthew Fort, food critic and author, and Diana Henry, *Sunday Telegraph* food writer and author.

'They said of the winner: "The judges considered this unusual book to be in the spirit of Jane Grigson, carrying its scholarship lightly. The biggest surprise was how delicious the food of an eighteenth-century Spanish monastery actually was."

'The two runners-up were husband and wife team Bronwen and Francis Percival for *Reinventing the Wheel: Milk, Microbes and the Fight for Real Cheese* (to be published by the University of California Press in September 2017) and artisan ice cream maker Kitty Travers for *La Grotta Ices*, to be published by Square Peg in Spring 2018.

'Created in memory of the distinguished British food writer Jane Grigson,

the £2,000 award is made to a first-time writer of a book on food or drink which has been commissioned but has not yet been published. The two runners-up receive £100 of book tokens and all shortlisted authors receive copies of *The Best of Jane Grigson*.

‘Holt said: “Towards the end of her life, Jane Grigson wrote ‘it is this association of food ... with every aspect of existence that makes me happy to be a food writer.’ Each short-listed writer tells a fascinating story of their chosen area of the food landscape. Yet there are intriguing links between them that illustrate the shared common ground of our food. The writers also reveal new facts and insights that shed a welcome light on their subjects: the nature of real cheese, the cooking of an eighteenth-century Spanish monk, and a practical guide to making superb and unusual ice-creams. Jane would be smiling. Following a careful consideration of the work of all three finalists, the judges decided that the winner of the award for 2017 is Vicky Hayward for the *The New Art of Cooking*.”’

FOOD JOURNALS

Were you to do no more than keep your finger on the pulse of food writing and journalism via the pages of *PPC* (and I admit the pulse would be rather faint), you would be aware that there is a vast reservoir of material for your delectation. Online, for example, there is Silvana de Soissons’ *Foodie Bugle* (<http://thefoodiebugle.com>); the heavyweight *Feast* (which is about to publish its third issue, the topic being ‘The Meal’ – and will then ask for submissions for its fourth issue on ‘Rooms for Food’ – <http://feastjournal.co.uk>); and most recently, the projected arrival of *The Tenderloin Journal* (again online), edited by Pei-sze Chow and Megan Bradshaw. As if to show our ignorance of the wealth of such things, they observe that their work is inspired by ‘*Asymptote*, *Guernica*, *Lucky Peach*, *The Lunch Lady*, to name a few.’ It is good to note that they plan a piece by Vicky Hayward in the inaugural number, as well as an account of the inspired lunacy of miniature food artists Akiko Ida and Pierre Javelle: which can be seen at <http://minimiam.com> – well worth a visit.

This by way of introduction to the arrival of a portfolio of print food magazines, courtesy of Prospect’s trade distributor Central Books. Central have a useful corner in the distribution of little magazines and special-interest journals to the bookshop trade (not newsagents). This helps us with sales of *PPC* and a sight of their magazine catalogue is always a revelation – so many things, so few readers, how can anyone manage to make a go of that? Their range has been further extended by the accession of Antenne Books of London to their client list. Antenne specialize in books about art, etc., including many single-issue or small circulation ‘magazines, fanzines, artzines or bookazines’ (all new terms to me).

The first example comes from Brooklyn in New York. *Put A Egg On It* is edited by Sarah Keough and Ralph McGinnis, comes out twice a year, costs \$8 an issue and has been running for 13 issues. Mostly, it's very American reflections on restaurants (all of course highly unlikely or tuckered away), some very poor food art, and a little clutch of recipes. The longest article is a transcript of a lunchtime conversation between four unlikely and fairly forgettable people. Its format is small and colours are *fade*.

More conventional, and English, is *Noble Rot*, the organ of the wine bar and restaurant of that name in Lamb's Conduit Street, London. It too has achieved issue no. 13, costs £9, comes out three times a year and is edited by Dan Keeling and Mark Andrew. If you can survive the self-satisfaction, it does contain recipes from pukka chefs such as Jacob Kenedy, Tom Kemble and Stephen Harris, and relatively informative articles about wines and producers (to be swallowed with a necessary side-dish of over-the-top wine-speak). What must be avoided is the marathon lunch with restaurant critics Giles Coren and Marina O'Loughlin. The roster of writers is interesting and they squeeze plenty of variety into their 112 pages. But the trouble with wine and food is that everyone is so damn pleased with themselves.

The Gourmand. A Food and Culture Journal hails from London, is edited by David Lane and Marina Tweed with a very large supporting team, costs £12, is issued twice a year and has surprising heft. There's plenty of photography, including a hark back to *Rude Food* by Harry Peccinotti, the man behind the Pirelli calendars; there's a piece on beloved kitchen items by Alice Waters, a nice piece of pop history on Brian Wilson of the Beach Boys and his venture into health foods, another on the Japanese artist Yayoi Kusama and her preoccupation with pumpkins and an amusing set of memories from a chap who cooks for outside caterers. It's rather good, but the cover is awful.

FFF Zine. World's Dishiest Magazine, volume 2, seems to have an Australian editor in Zac Bayly but appears to inhabit a rootless Anglophone world. It appears annually and costs £15. FFF stands for Food for Fashion. The printed book's origins seem to lie in Instagram and other online formats. There's a great deal of suggestive food-and-fashion photography, a relentless concentration on personality and generally it left me without a will to live. Were I fifty years younger, my views might be different.

Luncheon is emphatically from London. Appearing twice a year, costing £10, it is edited by Frances von Hofmannstahl and Thomas Persson and appears to lack for nothing to make a splash. I have never been sure about name dropping. If you yourself are famous (or of an elevated cadre) and you keep on remarking that Wallace Shawn did this or Leonora Carrington did that, does that make you just as shameless and revolting as when I get on to my vein of reminiscence after too many glasses of wine? I think it probably does, so once more the big problem with this production is that everyone, even the

advertisers (of which there are not a few) is so darned pleased with themselves. It is quite difficult to read without exploding. There is a strong cross-over between food and fashion, perhaps more seemly than *FFF Zine's*, but still fairly pointless, though explained perhaps by Thomas Persson's connections with the fashion industry. The photographs by Snowden that crop up every few pages are possibly explained by Frances von Hofmannsthal being the late Lord Snowden's daughter. There are some nice general interest pieces about oysters, about Freya Stark, about Tessa Traeger, oh! and lots of others, though precious little, in the end, about food. It leaves me in the same condition as after too long a session in a fashionable waiting-room constrained to a diet of *Vogue* magazine. A realization that life has defeated me, I will never be so glamorous.

SERENDIPITY

To make myself feel better, I tell of a village jumble sale which left behind it the usual pile of unsold items for the rubbish dump or bin bag. Among them were three acetate records in brown card sleeves. Each was annotated by hand, 'Davie Jones & Lower Third'. A volunteer with sense and time on his hands established that these were indeed studio recordings of David Bowie in 1965 (he released two singles as Davy Jones and The Lower Third). Their value beyond the jumble sale was far greater than the charity organizers can ever have hoped.

AMSTERDAM SYMPOSIUM ON FOOD HISTORY

A new symposium has appeared that states its mission to 'become an annual point of assembly and an exchange of knowledge in the field of food history. It intends to stimulate debate and research that bridges the gap between different disciplines. Submissions are encouraged to use an interdisciplinary approach, in which theory and methods from diverse (social) sciences are appropriated or from other disciplines that take a historical stance. Another aim is to transfer academic research to a wider public and stimulate research using the Special Collection of the University of Amsterdam.' Its meeting this year is to discuss 'Making Sense of Taste' – a wide-ranging venture if ever there was one. If you want more information, go to <http://bijzonderecollectiesuva.nl/foodhistory/amsterdam-symposium-on-the-history-of-food/> It will take place on 17–18 November 2017.

DUBLIN GASTRONOMY SYMPOSIUM 2018

For once I am in time to give you warning of this event scheduled for 29–30

May 2018 and set to discuss 'Food and Power'. Again, a wide-ranging topic, which I note includes as a mischievous possibility (according to the organizers) 'Power struggle within academia: the battle for food studies to be accepted as a discipline'. Anyone who thinks they have something to say (and the Dublin affair is always a cheerful place to say it) should send a 250-word abstract to mairtin.macconiomaire@dit.ie by 14 September 2017. If accepted, the submission date for completed papers will be 1 February 2018. The author style sheet is available at http://arrow.dit.ie/dgs/information_for_authors.html.

GASTROPHYSICS

A welcome arrival has been Professor Charles Spence's new book *Gastrophysics. The New Science of Eating* (Penguin Viking, 2017, 430 pp., hardback, £16.99). He defines the term as 'the scientific study of those factors that influence our multisensory experience while tasting food and drink.' To be expected, then, that for him cooking can only go so far in satisfying our urge to eat enjoyably: the process is more mental than physical. *PPC* readers have seen a couple of his articles on ways of seeing food and its presentation and how they affect our enjoyment or, even, our basic perception. In these pages, he gallops (always galloping, very cheerfully) through the whole series of factors that intrude on the apparently simple act of ingestion: taste, smell, sound, touch, sight, atmosphere or ambience. And then he turns to practical examples of tweaks and magic tricks that can enhance or improve the dining experience, for instance on aircraft (interesting that, especially as most of them have now given up entirely on any form of catering), or by making your ingestion more of a personalized experience. Because it is so winningly composed, you will have difficulty putting this down before dinner is served and every page will produce some unexpected fact – which may, of course, depress you as it deprives the reader of another milligram of self-determination. The whole business of science and food has me worried silly. Yes, the likes of Heston Blumenthal are jolly good fellows who are actually changing the nature of our encounters with breakfast, lunch and supper, but the real people behind it are the food processors, the manufacturers (who fund most of Spence's work, as he admits). I can't avoid the thought that they are not jolly good fellows and that they will be the ruin of us all. So should we cover our ears, run to the far corner of a field and listen to none of it?