

†LESLIE FORBES

It is with much sadness that I record the death of Leslie Forbes at the end of June. Her introduction to Wyvern's *Culinary Jottings* was one of Prospect's nicest productions and it was an immense pleasure to work with her on that. She may be best remembered by readers for her pioneering 'manuscript' cookery books which were 'all her own work', *A Table in Provence* and *A Table in Tuscany*. Both were published in the 1980s by the Exeter publisher Webb & Bower. Leslie was a great woman, so enthusiastic and clever, turning her hand to so many forms of creation.

FRENCH COOKING

When we extol *cuisine bourgeoise*, it's good to know that it survives in full vigour in France today. The recipe of the day in a recent issue of *Vaucluse Matin* was for a *tarte provençale* large enough to serve eight people. Cooks were advised to buy a log of goat's cheese, some bottled sauce for chicken à la *provençale*, some ready-to-roll shortcrust pastry, three eggs and six basil leaves. Heat the oven; slice the log of goat's cheese; mix the eggs with the contents of the jar of ready-made sauce; line a tin with the pastry, pour in the mixture, dot with cheese, sprinkle with shredded basil and bake.

JANE GRIGSON TRUST

The winners of the Jane Grigson Trust Award for New Food Writers 2016 were announced in March. The text of the Trust's press release makes instructive reading. It runs: 'The Jane Grigson Trust is delighted to announce that the winner of the inaugural Jane Grigson Trust Award is Alex Andreou for *The Magic Bayleaf*.

'In *The Magic Bayleaf*, writer, blogger and actor Alex Andreou brilliantly blends memoir, travel writing and food writing to reveal the hidden art of real Greek food. *The Magic Bayleaf* will be published by Chatto & Windus in Autumn 2017.

'The two runners-up are: food historian Annie Gray for *The Greedy Queen: Eating with Queen Victoria*; freelance food writer and blogger Ed Smith for *On the Side*.

'Created in memory of the distinguished British food writer Jane Grigson, the £2000 award is made to a first-time writer of a book on food which has been commissioned but has not yet been published. The two runners-up receive £100 of book tokens. All three shortlisted authors receive copies of *The Best of Jane Grigson*.

'Seven years before she died, Jane Grigson wrote: "It is this association of food with friends and every aspect of existence that makes me happy to be a food writer. Painting, history, archaeology, architecture, the way the countryside

and town worked together in the past, where foods have come from ... all these things make the study of what we eat the least boring of occupations.”

‘Chair of judges of the Jane Grigson Trust Award, Geraldene Holt, comments: “I am sure that Jane would have been delighted to know that the three short-listed books for the award set up in her name cover food writing in its widest sense, from recipes to memoir, travel and history. This has made the books highly enjoyable to read but also quite difficult to judge, each book has its particular strengths. But after a careful discussion the judges decided that the inaugural winner of the Jane Grigson Trust Award should be Alex Andreou for *The Magic Bayleaf*.”’

‘THE WINNER: ALEX ANDREOU – THE MAGIC BAYLEAF

Alex Andreou’s family memoir promises to be a broad-ranging and absorbing account of the importance of food and tradition across the generations. His commentary on the social, political and economic contexts in Greece contrasts well with informative detail on local foods and ingredients and authentic recipes that readers will want to cook. Beautifully written and evocative, with powerful insights into the inescapable role of memory in our eating, this is a remarkably ambitious book which does not disappoint. *The Magic Bayleaf* will be published by Chatto & Windus in Autumn 2017.

‘THE SHORTLIST: ANNIE GRAY – THE GREEDY QUEEN

Annie Gray’s appraisal of the legendary nineteenth-century monarch promises to change the image of Queen Victoria for ever. In a fascinating study of Victoria’s diet from childhood to old age, we discover how her strict upbringing led to such excessive over-eating in later life that her health was endangered. By researching historical records, contemporary cooking, and customary etiquette for a royal household, a slender young woman gradually became the obese, retiring widow who was rarely seen by her subjects. The judges agree that Annie Gray’s book will be a considerable and well-deserved success with a wide range of readers. *The Greedy Queen* will be published by Profile Books in Spring 2017

‘ED SMITH – ON THE SIDE

Ed Smith’s book promises to provide a welcome focus on the part of a meal that is often overlooked by cooks and chefs – the side dish. The author demonstrates with considerable flair how side dishes – which are mainly but not exclusively vegetarian – deserve top billing rather than simply playing a supporting role in a meal. Now that we are encouraged to reduce our consumption of animal protein, Ed Smith shines a timely spotlight on an array of well-flavoured vegetables and salads, pulses and grains prepared in such fresh and appealing ways that you will be tempted to compose a meal entirely of his side dishes. *On the Side* will be published by Bloomsbury in Spring 2017.’

JANET CLARKE

I received a welcome email from Janet Clarke, 3 Woodside Cottages, Freshford, Bath BA2 7WJ (01225 723186), still trading after all these years in books about food and cookery. Her catalogue may be viewed at <<http://www.janetclarke.com>> and is full of treasures.

REGULA YSEWIJN

Regula's book *Pride and Pudding* is reviewed later on by Laura Mason. This paragraph is to alert you to her blog, a recent posting of which featured books she had bought from Alan Davidson's library. I give you the image of her purchase.



The address is <<http://www.missfoodwise.com>> and is replete with fine photographs (Regula was originally a photographer by profession) as well as interesting reports on various topics (some food historical) and adventures.

WIKI-FOOD AND (MOSTLY) WOMEN

Carolin Young is the organizer of the Oxford Symposium's Wiki-Food and (mostly) Women Project (<young.carolin@gmail.com>). This is a co-operative venture aimed at increasing and improving Wikipedia's coverage of food-related topics, especially (but not exclusively) about women. Meetings have been held in London, Cambridge (Massachusetts) and New York. Others are planned all over the world. You can read about it quickly at <<http://www.oxfordsymposium.org.uk/our-wiki-food-and-mostly-women-project>>

FRENCH SCHOOL DINNERS

It is always somehow comforting to realize that one country's preoccupations are in fact mirrored by another's. I adverted in these notes some years ago to how the French had anticipated the Jamie Oliver fuss and bother about school meals by instituting catering that more resembled real-life restaurants, thus was more attractive to their juvenile audience, in some of their schools many decades ago. Now, Philip Hyman has kindly reported on a school dinner that

was posted not far from his house in Paris. The cooks were scouring the world for indigenous fare. This particular week was the turn of Britain. ‘*Cook planet: balade autour du Loch Ness*’ was the menu’s title. ‘English breakfast salad; *Boulettes de mouton sauce Loch Ness; Céréales gourmandes; Cheddar; Pineapple cake and custard et sa crème anglaise*’ was the menu itself. Further investigation on the Internet revealed the specifications (dietetic and culinary) for this meal: ‘English breakfast salad’ proved to have been a witty, yet cold, riff on baked beans and eggs on fried bread, i.e. beans in a tomato sauce with hard-boiled eggs and croûtons. *Boulettes de mouton* were just that, and the *sauce Loch Ness* was made of puréed celery, shallots, milk, crème fraîche, Emmenthal cheese, mint, rice flour and margarine. Who says the French are chauvinist?

SANDWICH PARTIES

A pleasant interlude was lately spent reading Jenny Uglow’s *In These Times. Living in Britain through Napoleon’s Wars 1793–1815* (Faber, 2014). One benefit was her reference to contemporary diaries that were unfamiliar to me. Among these were the journals of James Oakes, a yarn merchant and banker in Suffolk (*The Oakes Diaries, Volume I, Business, Politics and the Family in Bury St Edmunds, 1778–1800*, edited by Jane Fiske, Suffolk Records Society, volume XXXII, 1990). Although laconic, the diaries contain infinite reference to dinners, teas and suppers, although rarely to their contents. However, there were three entries which amused me. They were: 1795, December 18, ‘We had a very large Party at Tea & a Sandwich Supper ... With 7 of our own Family we set down 23 to supper’; 1796, April 13, ‘Tea & Sandwich Party at Home ... staid till 1/2 past eleven O’Clock’; and 1800, December 17, ‘In the Eveng Tea & Sandwich Party at Mr Ranby’s.’ This use of the word ‘party’ seems quite early if you compare it with the examples offered in the *OED*.

THE BRITISH BULLDOG SPIRIT

While listening to the dire results of our referendum, I took solace in reading Byron’s letters home while travelling in Greece in 1811. He had finally parted company with his English servant, Fletcher, whom he had packed off to his mother in Nottinghamshire. His comments in a letter to his mother seemed apt to our present predicament: ‘Of this, and all other particulars, Fletcher, whom I have sent home with papers, etc., will apprise you. I cannot find that he is any loss; being tolerably master of the Italian and modern Greek languages ... I can order and discourse more than enough for a reasonable man. Besides, the perpetual lamentations after beef and beer, the stupid, bigoted contempt for everything foreign, and insurmountable incapacity of acquiring even a few words of any language, rendered him, like all other English servants, an incumbrance. I do assure you, the plague of speaking for him, the comforts

he required (more than myself by far), the pilaws (a Turkish dish of rice and meat) which he could not eat, the wines he could not drink, the beds where he could not sleep, and the long list of calamities, such as stumbling horses, want of *tea!!!* etc., which assailed him, would have made him a lasting source of laughter to a spectator, and inconvenience to a master.⁷

GEORGIANA HILL

When searching among English recipe-writers' productions on French cookery dating from the mid-nineteenth century, I stumbled on two books which are well worth pursuing. The first was *Cookery for English Households* by a French Lady (Macmillan, 1864) which shows signs of reliance on or connection to the work of Cora Millet-Robinet, on whom I have been working. The second was *Foreign Desserts for English Tables: A Calendar for the Use of Hosts and Housekeepers* by the Author of "Everybody's Pudding Book" (Bentley, 1862) which displays great familiarity with French practice while drawing on other repertoires as well. The anonymous author was in fact Georgiana Hill (1825–1903), who wrote many other books, the most entertaining title being *The Gourmet's Guide to Rabbit Cooking, In One Hundred and Twenty-Four Dishes* (1859). Mostly, she published during the 1860s with Richard Bentley. *Foreign Desserts* was one of her most successful, but she also covered apples, game, potatoes, pickles, preserved fruits, salads, vegetables, cakes and curries. Her *Everybody's Pudding Book* was transformed in 2012 by Macmillan into *A Year of Victorian Puddings*: a straight reprint with an added glossary but, beyond the copyright page and an abbreviated blurb, no information at all about the original book or author. Curiosity about Miss Hill led me to the Internet presence of Rachel Rich, author of *Bourgeois consumption: Food, space and identity in London and Paris, 1850–1914* (Manchester University Press, 2011). A lecturer at Leeds Beckett University, she is part of a group which maintains the website *The Recipes Project*, which revolves around recipes both culinary and medical (<<http://recipes.hypotheses.org/about>>). Dr Rich has written briefly there about Miss Hill, rescuing her from an earlier confusion with another Georgiana Hill (d. 1925), who wrote about costume and women. She has also contributed a life of Miss Hill to the *ODNB*. I hope that Dr Rich can be persuaded to write about Miss Hill for a future issue of this journal. Her works drew on wide resources: that about rabbits, for example, had Spanish recipes, nor was Italy ignored. But her chief value, particularly with the dessert book, is her close acquaintance with French cookery. Her books are also pleasing for their light and humorous tone, while paying proper attention to efficacy. Dr Rich is correct in her closing remarks about Hill, when comparing her to Beeton: 'The difference between Hill and Beeton is that Hill was writing as a cook and food enthusiast who assumed that her readers shared her passion.

Beeton was writing for women for whom she imagined the running of the home to be a serious business: “As with the commander of an army, or the leader of any enterprise, so is it with the mistress of a house.” Clearly each book found an audience and a market, but where Beeton wrote condescendingly to (imagined) morally and intellectually weak housewives, Hill chose a more neutral approach, calling herself “An Old Epicure”, and eschewing domestic advice in favour of a specialist’s approach to food preparation.’

WHAT DO RECIPES TELL US?

The last few years have seen many serious academics adopt food history as a worthwhile sub-discipline. This is to be welcomed. It has meant that the topic has been broadened out, that other sources have been drawn upon to make valid and exciting connections between the kitchen and the wider world, either relating to the economy and societal change, or plugging into intellectual and cultural shifts. The ways these connections are made, these conclusions are proposed, are sometimes remote from the brutish reality of creating a dinner for a dozen people on a guttering, spluttering fire, but that doesn’t make them the less valid, or at least the less stimulating. Wendy Wall’s *Recipes for Thought: Knowledge and Taste in the Early Modern English Kitchen* (University of Pennsylvania, 2016) is the latest such work, and highly interesting it is too. I hope to print a long review of it by Gilly Lehmann in a forthcoming issue but I cannot help myself from rehearsing a couple of questions here and now. Her study looks at cookery books and manuscript recipe collections, mainly before 1700, and what they can tell us about the wider significance of the recipe form and what it may tell us about the women who either used them or collected them. At one point, she refers to a decoration for a ‘Red Deer Pie’ illustrated by Robert May. The pie crust is adorned by two crossbow bolts. ‘Unlike pies that boast geometric or floral shapes,’ she writes, ‘this design references the deer’s status as a live creature threatened by human weapons. The red deer baked in a seasoned egg custard subtly hearkens back to the critical moment when the animal converted, with some labor and violence, into food.’ Is this a useful comment, I wonder, for any of us who might be trying to understand what went through cooks’ heads while working in the kitchen? A few pages later, she ponders the broader significance of sugar simulacra of flowers in banquetting stuff and how they might reflect the housewife’s views of the relation of art and nature. ‘As confectioners tested ways,’ she comments, ‘to position nature in relation to their kitchen artifice, they stumbled onto the hermeneutical and ontological issues that vexed poets and philosophers of the period.’ I suppose that their ‘stumbling’ may mean they did not actually consider these questions, but to what extent are we ourselves expected to disregard a natural delight in culinary deception in favour of higher philosophical thoughts?