

Andrew Whitley: *Do Sourdough. Slow Bread for Busy Lives*: Do Book Co., 2013: 158 pp., paperback, £8.99.

For many, sourdough is *summum bonum*. Others prefer yeasted breads. Occasionally, I find the harder work involved in eating sourdough exhausting to the increasingly frail jaw and my spirits are sometimes affected by the seriousness of the process. However, on a bright day when all is well with the world, a sourdough has tremendous flavour and a stand-alone quality that cannot be matched by its yeasted colleagues. Making and maintaining sourdough cultures can also be morale-sapping: they are living creatures that demand attention. But with a little care and affection, they can last for years. I fondly remember entertaining the journalist Michael Raffael to a day of making a sourdough starter which he then took home with him. Many years later I found him still using the same starter, refreshed and refreshed to infinity. If you wish to go down this route, no surer guide will you find than this small book by Andrew Whitley – the godfather of English sourdough and wood-fired baking. True to its subtitle, it lays out timetables for the commuter or the otherwise engaged so that he or she can arrange the rising and proofing to fit with normal life. This book gives a good name to didacticism. The instructions are clear, detailed and foolproof. The layout is excellent. I am currently at war with a control panel on an electric bathroom-heater manufactured in Germany. They should have employed Whitley to make its operation comprehensible. Highly recommended.

Melanie King: *Tea, Coffee & Chocolate. How we fell in love with caffeine*: Bodleian Library, 2015: 170 pp., hardback, £9.99.

This nicely produced small book tells a familiar story, but one which stands the retelling, especially when so intelligently and enjoyably written. The processes of introduction and adoption are laid out for all to see, and plentiful quotation from subsequent pamphlets and treatises makes contemporary views of these substances more comprehensible and – no doubt about it – entertaining. The next steps – What would have happened if we hadn't taken up tea, coffee and chocolate? How did caffeine affect our mental activity – or, did it? What role did these substances play in changing the functioning of society – would it have changed anyway? – are left for another book. Let's hope it's just as pleasing.