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almond cakes and many more. Here you will find such delicious-sounding recipes for orange flower Jaffa cakes, cup cakes with fairy butter, lavender snaps, saffron and rosewater biscuits, rose petal éclairs, floral panforte, chocolate combined with lavender, even a rose Valentine cake for lovers. Amongst the non-sweet recipes there are biscuits made with cheese, saffron and sesame and others with walnut and garlic flowers and a saffron and onion tart.

There are clear instructions too on how to make lavender sugar, how to crystallize flowers and how to dry them for use in cooking. There are also warnings and advice that we should carry out our own research on the edibility of flowers. The author puts it like this 'do not eat anything that you cannot identify simply because it smells as though it would taste good.' A great deal of research has gone into this book, its tracing of the history of recipes as well as sources where one can obtain commercially produced flower essences – not surprisingly mostly from Paris and other parts of France.

Many of the flavours Bissell gives in this book are familiar to Maltese cooks – in particular lemon, orange and tangerine rind and orange flower water which are to be found in many traditional recipes. Saffron has featured throughout our history, for it is believed to have been introduced to Malta by the Phoenicians and was greatly loved by the Knights Hospitallers. Probably, because of its high cost, we have not devised many recipes using it except for our famous *ross fil-forn*. In *The Floral Baker* Bissell gives a number of recipes using this treasured flavour in biscuits, breads and tea-breads. Maltese food writers will also greatly welcome Bissell's inclusion of four of our best-loved sweet recipes.

Helen Caruana Galizia

Helen Leach: *Kitchens: The New Zealand Kitchen in the 20th Century*: Otago University Press, 2014: 332 pp., paperback, $NZ49.95.

New Zealanders are indeed fortunate to have Helen Leach as guide, guardian and safe-keeper of their gastronomic past. Although trained as an archaeologist, since 2000 she has devoted her considerable skills and energy to researching and documenting the cooking and eating practices of New Zealanders in the past two centuries. Her research has yielded three earlier books: *The Pavlova Story* (2008); *From Kai to Kiwi Kitchen: New Zealand Culinary Traditions and Cookbooks* (2010); and *The Twelve Cakes of Christmas* (2011). Along the way, she has gathered a vast collection of cookbooks and all kinds of kitchen artefacts, many of which illustrate her most recent publication.

Kitchens is the culmination of this research, an unduly modest title for such a wide-ranging book. It is not only the history of kitchens in the twentieth century, decade by decade, but also a history of meals and cooking, of eating and diet and food supply, and of domestic family life, all informed by the changing social and economic contexts of an eventful hundred years. Leach

shows how knowledge and theories about health were reflected in kitchen design (separate sculleries and open shelves beneath the sink in the early decades, to minimize disease risk), how the introduction of new appliances influenced eating habits and how changes in ingredient availability affected cooking practices. For example, reduced supplies of cream of tartar at the start of WWII meant substituting acid phosphate in baking powder; unlike cream of tartar, acid phosphate releases carbon dioxide only when heat-activated, so cake recipes were modified, baking beginning in an unheated oven.

For each decade Leach highlights the significant innovations – Ranzware in the 1940s, Formica in the 1950s, electric frypans in the 1960s, the appearance of 'quick and easy' cookbooks in the 1970s, the launch of 'foodie' magazines and acceptance of meatless meals in the 1980s. Each chapter follows a similar structure, examining the menus, meals and dishes prepared and served, the kitchen equipment that produced them and the kitchen layout. This methodical approach enables her to incorporate a diversity of detail and illustrates to great effect the gradual evolution of, say, menus and kitchen design, along with the reasons for the changes. Over the course of the century menus were simplified, from five courses to two for dinner; hot cooked puddings were replaced by fruit, ice-cream and baked items, such as cakes and squares; the obligatory potato accompaniment of the first half of the century was successfully challenged by rice and pasta. These changes are not unexpected and are consistent with trends in other Western countries; what stands out in Leach's analysis is the meticulous attention to detail and her focus on everyday family meals – or the closest approximation available – from breakfast through to lunch and dinner.

Kitchens, meanwhile, decreased in size during the first half of century then began to expand, partly to accommodate the plethora of new appliances, from freezers to dishwashers to breadmakers, but also because, as Leach effectively demonstrates, the early idea of the kitchen as functional workplace, a model of efficiency, gave way to that of the kitchen as a site of entertainment. And as the equipment changed, so did cooking and eating habits; with the conquest of the refrigerator, consumption of ice-cream almost doubled between 1958/59 and 1969.

It would be difficult to imagine a more fact-filled, evidence-based study, but *Kitchens* is also a personal book, enlivened with recollections and anecdotes – being allowed to have butter or jam, but not both, during the years of rationing in the 1940s; the utility of the long-lived Parsmint chopper; the benefits of two new appliances, crockpot and microwave, in simplifying meal preparation for her, as a working mother in the 1980s.

The tone of the book throughout is measured and uncritical, but Leach's appreciation of a longer perspective allows her to offer a more sanguine view of the end-of-century scourge of rising obesity levels, implicitly associated with

increased consumption of high-fat foods such as meat pies and sausage rolls. She points out that menus in the first three decades of the century included many fried items – croquettes, rissoles, fritters – but obesity was rare. Most telling, however, is the image juxtaposing a 1950s patty pan (cupcake) tin with a 'giant Texas muffin pan' introduced in 1994, to produce muffins that are effectively twice as large.

Although *Kitchens* focuses exclusively on New Zealand, its analysis of trends that have parallels in many other countries extends its relevance well beyond national borders.

Barbara Santich

Hermione Eyre: *Viper Wine*: Jonathan Cape, 2014: 448 pp., hardback, £14.99.

It is somehow typical of the fervid ingenuity of the editor of this journal, that he should invite us to write a considered review of Hermione Eyre's *Viper Wine*, a magic-realist novel about what one might call in anachronistic retrospect one of the most glamorous couples of the 1630s, Sir Kenelm Digby (alchemist, savant, courtier, recusant, polyglot, epicure, and lover) and his wife Venetia (wit, courtier, beauty, recusant, patron, muse). One of us is a cultural historian and historical novelist with a particular interest in the 1630s, the other a scholar of recusant Catholicism in Britain,[1] together we have edited Digby's (posthumously published) compilation of recipes *The Closet Opened* for Prospect Books.

Three thoughts remain after reading this vastly energetic and often very finely written novel: the first is that it is a considerable success and, by approximations and brilliance and magical anachronisms, often comes very close indeed to what we can deduce of the texture of life in 1630s London, although to present the Digbys simply as celebrities in a contemporary sense is something of a dangerous reduction of them both. Venetia's adult life becomes a very twenty-first century fable of beauty sought at any cost, with seventeenth-century procedures, real and invented, standing in for Botox and cosmetic surgery. Second, one remains astonished at the power of John Aubrey as a writer: his few pages of jottings about the Digbys in his *Brief Lives* – jottings never designed as more than research notes for another author, for all their careful distinction between fact and rumour – have defined the Digbys for posterity more than all the writings which they themselves left and commissioned, the numerous portraits, the houses and bequests and monuments. Thirdly, that there are aspects of the seventeenth century which seem now to elude our collective imagination, like radio stations which remain off-air however carefully the receiver is tuned. This otherwise successful novel gets into serious trouble whenever it approaches the subject which was probably most important to the Digbys themselves, and to the