

PROSPECT BOOKS AND PPC

The ownership of Prospect Books and PPC is transferring from myself to Catheryn Kilgarrieff, owner of Marion Boyars Ltd. The aims and direction of the enterprise are expected to continue along the lines established in 1979 by the founders Alan and Jane Davidson. I hope to continue a certain involvement, but without the worries of perpetual failure. If I might quote from a letter I addressed to Prospect's authors which accompanied their latest royalty payment: 'It goes without saying that the last 21 years have been pure delight as far as I am concerned. There are some of you who may wish that there'd been less delight and more sales, and one reason for the transfer of power to Catheryn is that she indeed may breathe dynamism and energy into those mysterious functions of publishing and selling. I assure you that I have always tried my hardest, but that does not necessarily mean I have been successful. But I think that I can truly claim that all the books that have been produced since 1993 have each, in their turn, been my favourite children, and it will be a wrench to cast them abroad on a wider sea. Although by no means old, intimations of mortality are never far distant, and not one of my own children wished to make it a dynastic affair. So, "Strike now," my spirit commanded. And I struck.' And those sentiments I expressed with regard to issue #100 should be repeated here too.

BOOK SELLING AND FOOD HISTORY

As my time of despotic control of the contents of these pages draws to a close, I must take the opportunity to have a last gigantic whinge. I like a whinge. At our book stall at the last Oxford Symposium, where we enjoyed our usual ecstatic reunion with symposiasts past and present, I was interested to observe that the nature of the attendees seemed to be changing. There were more of them, for one thing, and there were many new faces. Our usual practice is to take a van-load of Prospect books, and of course to accord pride of place on the stall to things published since the last Symposium. This year we had four historical titles: Constance Hieatt's matchless epitome of medieval English recipes; Ken Albala's and Tim Tomasi's new and startling translation of the *Livre fort excellent de Cuisine*; Peter Brears' incredible *Traditional Food in Yorkshire*; and, finally, our inexpressibly handsome *High Society Dinners* by the pioneer Russian commentator, Yuri Lotman, translated with such aplomb by Marian Schwartz and edited with wonderful thoroughness by Darra Goldstein (here ends the sales pitch). You have to agree that, for a small publisher, this is an arresting range covering a surprising number of bases. We managed to sell six copies. We succeeded in selling not one copy of *High Society Dinners*, and yet this was a Symposium that had a keynote address from the incomparable Anya von Bremzen on her experience of post-revolutionary Russian food.

Although the discipline of Food Studies appears to burgeon on both sides of the Atlantic, it seems preoccupied by politics, sociology, gender and other ‘issues’ and to care less about history. In case you think we returned penniless from Oxford, I should add that sales of other titles were well up to their usual level. I could also note that the much less academically endowed Leeds Symposium on Food History (with less than half the number of symposiasts) managed to snap up sixteen copies of only two of this quartet – neither Brears’ *Yorkshire* nor Lotman was then published.

The apparent indifference of the Oxford symposiast to traditional food in Yorkshire has, alas, alack, been mirrored by the wider constituency of the British book trade and broadsheet journalism. Glorious exceptions have been the *Times Literary Supplement* which published a short review by the revered Paul Barker, and BBC Radio 4’s *Food Programme* which is soon to air an interview with Peter Brears. BBC Radio Leeds is also going to broadcast an interview with him, prompted I think by the coverage in the *Yorkshire Post* – none of the national broadcasters responded positively to my telling them of the imminent arrival of the book, even though it would have been a natural for their local news magazines. The book trade’s response has been even more lacklustre. You would think that Waterstones, the last surviving big bookshop in Leeds, would contemplate stocking this title, but not a bit of it – at least, at the time of writing. You might think that such a book – and I assure you its quality is unsurpassed – would have some interest for the foodist public and provoke a sale or two in Books for Cooks, reputedly the foodists’ paradise. Not a bit of it. So far, I think we might sell more copies in America than in Britain.

And were I to go on to discuss the British trade and press response to *High Society Dinners*, I would be similarly downbeat. However, light was discernable from the catalogue of Corti Brothers, the high-class food and book emporium of Sacramento, who have listed it in the following terms: ‘Reading about food sometimes is better than actually eating it. It is a pleasure that can satisfy anytime, anywhere. From PROSPECT BOOKS, the English publisher of *Petits Propos Culinaires*, the amazing little food quarterly founded by Alan Davidson and Elizabeth David, comes a work translated from Russian, but edited by the former editor of *Gastronomica*, Darra Goldstein. Written by Yuri Lotman (1922–1993), it is a compilation of a year’s menus from Petr Pavlovich Durnovo, a nobleman at the highest level of Russian society during 1857–1858. When *High Society Dinners* appeared in Russian in 1996, it was ground breaking. Lotman had delved into the meal as the understanding of daily life, a life which he could not have imagined and that for us is now unthinkable. This is a gastronomic journey of the highest order and one that illuminates and delights at the same time. If you will, with Darra Goldstein’s notations, this is a crash course in very “grande cuisine”.’

I sometimes lie in bed trying to work out a justification for food history. Political developments are hardly susceptible to an exclusively digestive narrative; nor can the causes of artistic change be derived wholly from an analysis of the daily fare of painters. But even so, none of us is immune from the siren call of the table, whether it be for the company experienced while dining, or the satisfaction (or its opposite) obtained from the food thereon. When musing on the clauses of the Great Reform Act, Earl Grey was probably turning over, with half his mind, the gustatory possibilities of the day. And, on a wider canvas, Blake Perkins reminds us below of George Orwell's sound judgement on the importance of diet in any assessment of social change, just as Napoleon's adage re armies and stomachs is now a truism. But even if Waterloo was not decided by the quality of Wellington's dinner, some appreciation of the nature of that dinner will certainly increase our empathy for the great commander. Food history may have a big interpretive role in understanding the larger tides of history (the shift from hunter-gathering to settled agriculture might be a biggy) but it is also central to that empathy for which many of us hunger – whether of another place or another time. Few of us would ignore the eating habits of our friends: they contribute a certain tithe to our view of them. Nor, then, should we ignore those of our forebears. I have thought of placing an advertisement for Constance Hieatt's *Culinary Recipes of Medieval England* suggesting that most medieval historians should buy a copy just so that they are familiar with what their subjects dined on. I do wonder how many are. Yet it seems to me they should be.

THE ART OF EATING PRIZE

We have not heard much about Ed Behr and his esteemed magazine, *The Art of Eating*. Evidently it is still going strong but somehow the mailman doesn't drop it at my door. Its health is so vigorous, indeed, that it has announced the creation of a prestigious annual prize for the best food book published in the USA. The lucky winner will be \$10,000 richer. The judges, we read, will be Nancy Harmon Jenkins, Harold McGee, Garrett Oliver, Daniel Patterson, Tejal Rao, Lucas Wittmann, and Winnie Yang. Nominations will open on September 30 and close on November 30. Publishers may each nominate three books. There is no charge for nominating a book. Five independent bookstores specializing in food – Rabelais, Kitchen Arts & Letters, The Cookbook Stall, The Book Larder, and Omnivore – will each nominate up to two books by self-publishers. In addition, each judge will nominate two books. The judges will announce a long list of 12 books on February 2, 2015, and a short list of six books on February 17. The winner will be announced on March 2. Further information is available at www.artofeating.com.

GLOBAL FOOD HISTORY

We were sent notification of a new journal. Yet more evidence of how fast this whole field of studies is expanding, with many new and significantly backed entrants to the market. This has to be a good thing. Whether it is a *really* good thing may depend on your taste in reading. The text runs as follows: '*Global Food History* is a new, peer-reviewed, academic journal that aims to present works in food history from leading scholars in the field. Launching in 2015, the journal will be of interest to those engaged in the study of the cultural, social and economic history of food.' The publisher is Bloomsbury.

THE OLD FOODIE

This website (<http://www.theoldfoodie.com>) is the work of Janet Clarkson, the author of a couple of those excellent Reaktion Edible Series (*Pie* and *Soup*). It is worth a visit for she is curious and enthusiastic and you will always learn something, particularly about recipes.

SAM PICKARD

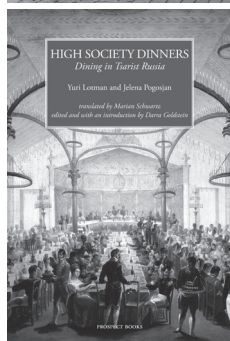
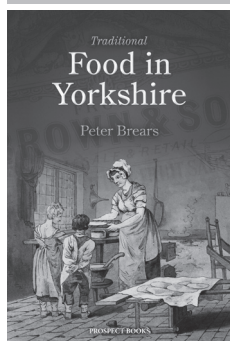
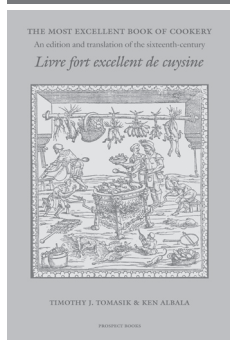
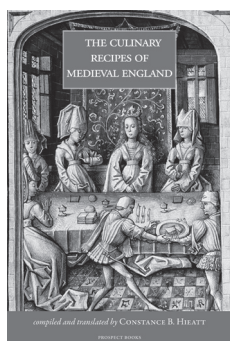
Sam Pickard is a fabric designer from north Devon. Her chief attraction for readers of *PPC* is that she produces a very fine-looking pair of linen napkins adorned with facsimile recipes from Robert May's *Accomplisht Cook* and a six-foot table runner printed with its title-page, the table of contents, and some printers' ornaments. The price is £28 for a pair of napkins and £55 for the runner. <http://www.sampickard.co.uk/NewFiles/Shop.html>.

SYMPOSION JOURNAL

Another website on which to idle is <http://www.symposionjournal.com> edited and published by Panos Kapetanakis in North London. It intends to recirculate and republish material relating to food and food studies that deserves a wider audience. The site is very handsome.

TURMERIC

To a degree, e-books are not the go-to format for cookbooks. They may have swept all before them in hot sex, romance and horror, but the stove remains inviolate. However, here we have a fine e-book from the knowledgeable word-processors of Colleen Taylor Sen and Helen Saberi. The subject is not just turmeric in cookery, but in the medicine chest as well (and even in the beautician's hold-all). To buy this you can go to Amazon and it will cost you no more than £4.80.



RECENT PUBLICATIONS

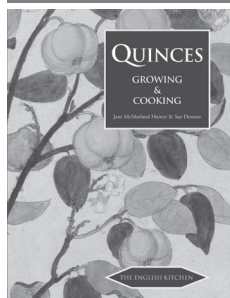
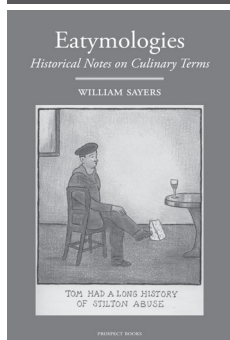
This may serve as a reminder of the latest work to come out of Prospect, plus two forthcoming in the near future.

The late Constance Hieatt's book (£30, ISBN 978-1-909248-30-4) is an epitome of all extant English medieval culinary manuscripts, in other words, she has presented the reader with what was in her view the best recipe for each dish represented in those MSS.

Ken Albala and Timothy Tomasik have translated the text of a sixteenth-century French book, one of a significant family of works (£18, ISBN 978-1-903018-96-5). The original text is on the left-hand page. It enables the English reader to form an assessment of French cooking at the time and allows readers of any nationality to consider the accuracy of the general view that nothing much happened in French cookery in the early Renaissance period. Ken Albala is an enthusiastic historical cook, so has included some notes on the recreation of the dishes they have translated.

Peter Brears wrote the first version of this book some twenty years ago, but this edition is greatly enlarged and adorned with more of his unique drawings (£25, ISBN 978-1-909248-33-5). I have long wished to publish an authoritative survey of English cookery, county by county, but have never assembled or cajoled the workforce necessary for the task. Peter, with Northumbria under his belt and Lancashire or the Lake District on the horizon, may be the man.

Yuri Lotman and Jelena Pogosjan's book, first published in Russia in 1996, is here translated by Marian Schwartz and edited by Darra Goldstein (£30, ISBN 978-1-903018-98-9). It is culinary history like no other. Lotman was a cultural historian and semiotician and while reproducing the menu book of an aristocratic household in St Petersburg for a single year (1857–8) he threw into the mix extracts from diaries, correspondence and newspapers in order to explore the context of the meals. It makes an enjoyable and unexpected book.



This year's volume of papers from the Oxford Symposium on Food and Cookery (note that these were the papers given to last year's Symposium) explores many aspects of material culture. It may be objected that the format of the series, which does not extend to large-plate colour photography, is less well suited than usual as there are some interesting objects under discussion (£30, ISBN 978-1-909248-40-3).

William Sayers' papers on the history of English food words have entertained readers of *PPC* for some years past. I reckon that the etymological route is an important one for food history, especially because of the ephemerality of the finished object, the dish on the table. People like Sayers, Anthony Buccini (whose papers at the Oxford Symposium are consistently the most arresting) and Peter Graham (who is meditating a work on the subject) offer new and enlightening perspectives (£25, ISBN 978-1-909248-38-0, it should be with us in a month or two).

Jane McMorland Hunter and Sue Dunster have written an instructive addition to our series, *The English Kitchen*. Everyone loves quinces, but usually has no more than three recipes in their quiver. This book helps the curious cook extend his or her range. And the authors help too in the gardening department. If you are like me, and have your quince tree periodically rendered unproductive thanks to wilt or blight, then you will be glad of the guidance (£9.99, ISBN 978-1-909248-41-0, it should be with us in a month).

ANNE WILLAN

One summer pleasure was to linger over Anne Willan's memoir, written with Amy Friedman, called *One Soufflé at a Time* (St Martin's Press, \$27.99, £18.99). It is important that people who have played a role, especially an important role, in the formation of our culinary taste, and in the education of those who gratify that taste, should leave us a record of their actions and ambitions. Food, and the whole culture surrounding it, is so evanescent that reconstruction becomes difficult after a very short while. I was reminded of this when proposing various twentieth-century individuals for the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*. It was virtually impossible to discover anything about

them. Of course, the situation, at least as far as newspapers and journalism are concerned, is very different today, but it was not so long ago that great men and women would work and die without so much as an ink blot in their memory. Not so, providentially, Anne Willan, who is very much with us and still active in her sphere. Her memoir is full of everything you can imagine: travel, family life, personalities (in spades, what with chefs and their antics) and useful facts and reflections that will help us understand the way things were at the end of the last century. Anne Willan is wonderfully sunny and positive (even if, when meeting her, you sometimes worry that you may not have cooked that last dish *quite* correctly). A sense of well-being shines forth from these pages. And there are also plenty of recipes. Many will know that Willan recipes work.

BLOOMSBURY

I have already adverted to the Bloomsbury proposal to publish *Global Food History* and it is evident that the firm is piling into food studies in a big way, perhaps a reflection of their purchase of Berg (big on sociology and food) as well as their wish to build up their academic side. Three large books have come my way. The first is *Food Words. Essays in Culinary Culture*, edited by Peter Jackson, the historian of milk, among other things, and who contributes essays too (Bloomsbury Academic, £60). The topics, arranged alphabetically, are many and various: Anxiety (food scares), Authenticity, Commodities, Sex, Time, Tradition and many more. The contributors are often involved in the CONANX project at the University of Sheffield (Consumer Culture in an Age of Anxiety) and the tone is usefully academic and aware of other people working in the field (useful, therefore, for the bibliography). I am not sure I recommend it for light reading. The second is *The Handbook of Food Research*, edited by Anne Murcott, Warren Belasco and Peter Jackson (Bloomsbury Academic, £80). I note that this is also available as an e-book at £79.99 which pottiness may encourage a slight sympathy with Amazon vis-à-vis Hachette, however uncomfortable that makes you. This is more of a structured series of essays exploring the place of food in the modern world in four parts (Historical Essentials; Frameworks of Provision; Buying and Eating; Contemporary Issues, Problems and Policy). It is deeply sociological, but has an extensive bibliography. It is useful but not readable – in the sense that Vasily Grossman is readable. The third book from Bloomsbury is Ken Albala's compilation (Prospect having contributed a few, hurrah!) *The Food History Reader* (£75, paperback £24.99). This is aimed at students and I advise you not to try answering the model questions at the end of each section: much too hard. By the way, Jeffrey Pilcher's 4-volume compilation of food history writing from Bloomsbury (which I have not seen) will cost you £595.