

BOOK REVIEWS

Jans Ondaatje Rolls: *The Bloomsbury Cookbook*: Thames & Hudson, 2014: 384 pp., hardback, £24.95.

The Bloomsbury Cookbook is a rich and colourful journey into the lives and eating habits of this group of inspired writers and artists. It begins with the days before the Bloomsbury Group was formed and ends with the Bloomsbury grandchildren being born, with each chapter in between covering times of war, travel and the extraordinary events and behaviours of members of the group. Art, poems, letters and recipes are scattered throughout the book, giving an added dimension to the stories and a personal insight into the way they lived.

Food is shown to be important from the start, with Virginia Woolf's memories of lowering a basket to the kitchen to have it either filled with food or the string cut by the angry cook. This was during her and her sister Vanessa's unhappy Victorian childhood with no mother and a difficult father, but soon they moved to their own house with their brother, after their father died, and suddenly had the freedom to do, say and eat whatever they liked.

The author seamlessly charts the beginnings of the group, the marriages of Vanessa and Virginia as well as events such as the opening of the Omega Workshop, along with the opening night's menu and recipes for the dishes. Clearly, food is not only an important part of the group's evenings together, but is also another form of expression; it is another art form to be explored. Where recipes aren't available, the author has included her own interpretations of them, such as 'Melymbrosia' which was the working title of Virginia Woolf's first published novel.

The 'Bloomsbury in Wartime' chapter, includes recipes from Helen Anrep's scrapbook as well as from Frances Partridge including wartime soup recipes and meagre Christmas lunches. Lytton Strachey's disappointment is described when bad wine and a mere chicken are on the menu for one Christmas meal and another anecdote shows some group-members' enthusiasm for bargain potted meat.

As well as the beautiful menus, impressive kitchen gardens and art, literature and poetry that flow throughout this elegant book, the complicated living arrangements and relationships of the Bloomsbury Group are constantly bubbling underneath. Hardly anyone is faithful, many are bisexual and the swapping of partners is so rife and constant that it is hard to keep up – it would be safe to assume that everyone has been with everyone at some point. As exhausting as it sounds, it seems to have worked for them as a group and most of them remained unscathed by their relationships. Only Dora Carrington seems to have died from unrequited love.

These people are so smart and creative and their philosophy seems to be to live openly, passionately without any restrictions – to eat with the Bloomsbury Group must have been a treat indeed and when you read this book, you almost feel like you have.

ALICE RICHARDSON

Mina Holland: *The Edible Atlas*: Canongate, 2014: 357 pp., hardback, £18.99. In this book Mina Holland takes you on a magic carpet ride around the world's kitchens. It is beautifully written, clearly and pleasingly laid out and is an excellent tool for anyone wishing to travel without leaving the comfort of their kitchen.

Each continent begins with a diagram or table of some sort. In Europe there is a map of the different grape regions and their characteristics and a table showing the main ingredients for each country; in the Middle East there is a map showing the spice route and the sugar journey; in Asia there is a page illustrated with spice jars, with each one containing the essential spices for each country; in Africa there is a map of different chillies and in the Americas there is a map of the merging cuisines. These are all very simple, organized and pleasing. There is also an essential kit list at the beginning (which includes a kitchen radio) and a larder list for each country. The design of the book is very neat and well thought out and the cover unfolds and becomes a map of the world, which is a nice touch.

Each country begins with a quote about the place and then the author writes of her experiences in that country or with that food. She recalls being in a Brazilian restaurant in London, when a plate of veiny hearts were brought out that she felt too squeamish to eat, showing that you don't necessarily need to travel far to have memorable culinary experiences. This book is like an armchair traveller's guide to the world of food, beginning with Apple Tarte Normande and Salmon Beurre Blanc, through Catalonia with tortillas and fish stews and onto Portuguese salt cod broth and almond cake. Some countries are broken down into regions if they have a huge amount to offer. France and Italy for example are longer sections than Germany or Scandinavia. Asia is a lovely fragrant section with descriptions of the tea rituals in India, ripening red bananas and jackfruit, Chinese soy beans and rice and the fizzy fermented flavour of Korean kimchi.

Some really interesting countries such as Morocco and Japan were a little sparse which was a bit disappointing. The only three recipes under Morocco were preserved lemons, chicken couscous and pumpkin tagine, which I didn't feel did it justice.

The book ends its journey in the Americas, with bland, comforting food such as corn on the cob and buttermilk and cornbread from Louisiana and the