

Jane Joseph & Guy Poltock. *Fit for a Queen. A recipe book researched from the handwritten manuscripts of Ada Parsons (1888-1958) head cook to the Earl of Strathmore c.1912 to 1916*: Cranfield University Press, 2011, 150pp., hardback, £35.00.

Jane Joseph and Guy Poltock are grandchildren of the redoubtable Ada Parsons who was cook to the late Queen Mother's family in the early twentieth century. Her career started with working for the Marquess of Winchester. (I recall encountering him years ago in the records of The British South Africa Company – the creature of Cecil Rhodes. He was remarkable for his longevity and astonishing activities in several fields. He courted bankruptcy when involved in the affairs of the 1920's spiv, Clarence Hatry, and he managed to get married at the age of 89 to the marvellously named Bapsybanoo Pavry, England's only marchioness of Indian birth. He left her after a few months' cohabitation and took up with Eve Fleming, Ian Fleming's mother. May we all be so vigorous. End of digression.) Ada Parsons went on to work for the Dalgety family and then for the Bowes-Lyons, the earls of Strathmore, in Hertfordshire and at Glamis. A nice memoir of Ada is succeeded by fifty-odd recipes transcribed from her notebooks. The character of the dishes is much as you would expect and the practical detail is (again as you would expect) kept to a minimum. The Queen Mother doubtless responded well to the orange gin recipe (three Seville oranges steeped in a quart of best gin). The final section is a choice of lunch and dinner menus with a party at the end. They whooped it up at Glamis, I'll bet. A nice period piece.

Alasdair Scott Sutherland: *The Spaghetti Tree. Mario and Franco and the Trattoria Revolution*: Primavera Books, 2009, 255 pp., paperback, £14.99.

I was meant to write a foreword for this but somehow it fell through the bannisters. This may be the reason why he didn't send me a free copy and it has taken me some time to get around to buying one. For those of you interested in the rise of Italian cooking in this country, it is essential reading. In the end it gets quite tedious as one restaurant begets another, and on and on through fifteen begets before we get to the end, but at the start of it all he's got lots to tell us that we didn't know before. Mr Sutherland has been very energetic in talking to staff and prime-movers in the restaurant explosion that followed the opening of the first Terrazza in Soho. He's also collected lots of snapshots. There are survivors of this sixties wave;

for example, La Famiglia, close to where the Davidsons used to live in Chelsea (which is where I last took Jane to lunch). But now of course Italian cooking has moved on and Sutherland is quite interesting in discussing points of comparison between the English interpretation (River Café) and the Italian. What is sometimes difficult to unscramble is the significance of the food in contrast to the impact of the Apicella interiors on British Italian restauration. A restaurant that makes a speciality of a variation on Chicken Kiev is hardly *echt*-Italian even if other aspects of their cooking were. But the design, well that was something else.

Bridget Henisch: *The Medieval Cook*: The Boydell Press, 2009, 251 pp., hardback, £25.00.

I am guilty yet again of inefficiency and have failed to alert you to this valuable book that was published by Boydell two years ago. Bridget Henisch is an attentive and sensitive reader of medieval sources and can tease a cogent narrative from the most disparate of indications, be they written or illuminated. It sometimes makes us common or garden browsers blush with shame. She expresses the aim of the book succinctly at the outset, 'the aim of this study is to consider medieval cooks in the context of time and circumstance, to show how they were presented in the art and commentary of the period, how they functioned, and how they coped with the limitations and expectations which faced them in different social settings.' So in six chapters, she looks not only at grand cooks, but cottage cooks; at simple cooking and the most elaborate feasts; at street food and food purveyors; at home cooks and courtly cooks. The closing chapter is on the cook in art. There are plenty of really enjoyable illustrations. I particularly liked the misericord of a kitchen quarrel from Bristol cathedral: it reminded me of home. In general, as with her earlier works, Mrs Henisch concentrates on narrative sources rather more than dry financial or legal records. This is not meant in any way as a criticism, merely a reflection on its entertainment value because it is not easy to get worked up over a pipe roll. Well recommended.