

Joy Larkcom: *Just Vegetating, a Memoir*: Frances Lincoln, 2012, 336 pp., hardback, £18.99.

Almost everybody has read a book by Joy Larkcom, and if not a book then an article. She opened our eyes to salad stuff, oriental vegetables and altogether urged us to be more adventurous in our walled gardens, allotments and *potagers*. This handsome scrapbook of a book affords a useful overview of her life and writings being a collection of many of her articles, linked together by an autobiographical commentary. There is a plethora of amusing illustration. If there is any larger lesson to be learned it is that things change quickly. Who would have thought that we would be eating mizuna as a matter of course shortly after her reporting from Japan in 1986. The men among her readers will appreciate especially some of her garden plans so that they can indulge in armchair gardening, their speciality.

Harvey Levenstein: *Fear of Food. A History of Why We Worry about What We Eat*: University of Chicago Press, 2012, 218 pp., hardback, £18.95.

We are all acquainted with the author's important studies of American eating, *Revolution at the Table* and *Paradox of Plenty*. This could be thought a coda or afterthought and stems from his realization, when writing about Americans' reactions to French food, that their own food culture was riddled with fears and apprehensions, often largely unfounded. It is highly entertaining, short and sharp, well documented, instructive and valuable. It is also quite depressing. The topics covered include the reaction at the beginning of the twentieth century to the realization that germs were a threat to life and hygiene, particularly those born by flies, with a marvellous anecdote of the monetary bounties paid to people bringing in dead flies to official receivers (one especially inventive winner found the best method of scooping the pool was to breed the flies then kill them). Then there is a chapter on milk and its hidden threats, one about bad bacteria in the bowels and yoghurt, and on the hygiene surrounding beef, E.coli and other dangers. Then there's a discussion of early battles against additives, lots about vitamins and vitamin deficiencies and a brilliant closing segment about natural foods, cholesterol, slimming and the relationship of food and early death. What's great about the book is how he ties all these tales to real people and to arresting stories. Quite first rate. The underlying conundrum, which he doesn't quite resolve, is that all these food scares have some basis in common sense and reason. The way they developed,

escalating to something never far short of hysteria, may well have been due to their wilful or well-meaning manipulation by individuals or special interests but their basic point still can't be entirely ignored. So the book does not banish all the question marks over the relationship of what we eat and how we thrive, even if it does illustrate that you should never believe everything you are told.

I still have a pile of books which never seems to diminish, but now we will have to call it a day until the next issue. High on my list is the new six-volume *Cultural History of Food* from Berg.

I should also take advantage of this half page of space to announce a latecomer to our list for 2012. Consequent on meeting the makers of television documentary on the life and work of Dorothy Hartley, to be screened this autumn, we are publishing, under the title *Lost World*, a selection of her articles for the *Daily Sketch* on crafts and country life in England which were first printed in 1933–6. These were the base material for her first book on country ways, published in 1934, *Here's England*. Of course, they resurface in various forms in all her subsequent work. The selection has been made for us, and is introduced by, the writer and photographer Adrian Bailey, who was a friend of Dorothy Hartley's in her later years. The articles will be illustrated by some of her box-camera snapshots which Mr Bailey has been kind enough to pass to us. There will be a foreword by Lucy Worsley who is introducing the TV film. Below, you can see the cover with an evocative photograph which was the work of the same photographer as our cover picture of narrowboats.

