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†MARY PRIOR

It is with much sadness that we record the death of Mary Prior on 7 December last year. Martin Dodsworth contributed an obituary to the *Guardian* which I reproduce below:

> In my friend Mary Prior's first book, *Fisher Row* (1982), a photograph shows 'Mrs Rose Skinner and Miss Jean Humphries emptying a boat at Juxon Street, 1956'. They are working hard shovelling coal. The picture sums up her concerns as a historian – the lives of working people and of ordinary women. Mary, who has died aged 89, is best known for the ground-breaking *Women in English Society 1500–1800* (1986) which she edited. Hitherto most women's history had been concerned with moneyed people or those who had been in trouble with the law. Mary and her colleagues worked patiently in archives to reconstruct the unsensational lives of female traders, bishops' wives, nursing mothers and others whom history had largely forgotten. In 2010 the journal *Women's History* dedicated an entire issue in her honour.
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> Mary became a historian in mid-life. She was a New Zealander, born of missionary parents in China. In the early 1940s she studied at Otago University in Dunedin, met the gifted logician Arthur Prior (later to teach at Christchurch University) and married him. The family eventually moved to Britain, first to Manchester, then, in 1965, to Oxford, where Arthur was fellow at Balliol College. He died in 1969. Mary became a doctoral student at St Hilda's, supervised by Joan Thirsk; the thesis became *Fisher Row*. The book studies a small community of river and canal people over a 400-year period; tracing change through generations of the same families in eloquently simple prose, as much sociology as history. She came to know and win the respect of descendants of several of those families.
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> She was a small, unassuming figure, of quiet determination and high principle. This is reflected in *Rhubarbaria: Recipes for Rhubarb* (2009), one of the few English cookery books to have been translated into French. Rhubarb was part of her New Zealand childhood, and part, too, of her life in Shetland, which she visited every summer from Oxford. But the other thing about rhubarb was that anyone could grow it. It was honest stuff, and didn't deserve the condescension with which it was often treated – like women, like working people.
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> She is survived by her children, Martin and Ann.

†CONSTANCE B. HIEATT

It is with great regret that I report the death of this giant of medieval culinary history. Her last book was *Cocatrice and Lampray Hay*, the manuscript of which she delivered in a timely and error-free manner. When it was first mooted, I had warned her of a certain hesitation between delivery and appearance in print, but it was with some alarm that I received my first intimation that she was not in the best of health. In the event, she saw everything but the finished volume. I hope she would have been pleased. As I write, there is a further manuscript in preparation (and now in the capable hands of her sister Ellen Nodelman) which comprises a digest of all known English medieval recipes. I give below an edited text of the obituary notice issued by her family, although I am sure there will be many more in journals forthcoming.

> Constance Bartlett Hieatt died at her home in Essex, CT, on December 29, 2011. A professor of English, a medieval scholar and a pioneer in the field of medieval cookery, Dr Hieatt moved back to Connecticut, where she had spent her childhood summers, upon her retirement, as Professor Emeritus, from the University of Western Ontario. Dr Hieatt continued her scholarly work and published numerous works after her retirement, including her latest *Cocatrice and Lampray Hay*.
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> Born in Boston, Massachusetts, Constance Hieatt grew up in New York City and in Connecticut, graduating from Friends Seminary, attending Smith College, and earning her bachelor's and master's degrees from Hunter College. She was awarded a fellowship from Yale and earned her PhD in 1960. Before her entrance into academia, Constance Hieatt worked in a variety of positions in print media and other businesses in New York City. After two brief marriages, to George Loomis and to Michael Bodkin, she met and married fellow-medievalist A. Kent Hieatt, then teaching at Columbia, forming a lasting partnership that took the pair from New York City to full professorships at the University of Western Ontario. They spent their summers at Wytham Abbey, outside Oxford, before they retired and returned to Connecticut, living first in a house built in back of the old family home on River Road in Deep River and, finally, in Essex Meadows. Dr Kent Hieatt died in January 2009.
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> Like her husband, Dr Hieatt began her medieval studies as a Chaucerian, but she moved on to focus her scholarly work largely on

writings in Old English and Old Norse. She also formed an interest in children's literature and taught countless undergraduate courses on that subject. She combined her fascination with things medieval with her considerable expertise as a cook to begin her trail-blazing work in medieval cookery. Her substantial publishing record reflects the variety of her professional interests. She and Kent Hieatt co-authored a children's version of *The Canterbury Tales* in the late 1950s. Later, they collaborated once again on *The Canterbury Tales*, this time the Bantam dual-language edition still in use in schools and universities the world over. Constance Hieatt also published *Beowulf and Other Old English Poems*, again familiar texts to English students past and present, as well as her translation of the Old Norse saga, *Karlamagnus: The Saga of Charlemagne and His Heroes*, and a basic text for learning Old English: *Essentials of Old English*. Dr Hieatt wrote a series of children's books as well, based on the 'Matter of Britain' or Arthurian legends, including *Gawain and the Green Knight*, *The Castle of Ladies*, *The Knight of the Cart*, and others. Among her many medieval cookery offerings was the popular *Pleyn Delit: Medieval Cookery for Modern Cooks*, co-written with Professor Sharon Butler; *Curye on Inglysch* with Sharon Butler; *Concordance of English Receipes: Thirteen through Fifteenth Centuries*; *Libellus De Arte Conquinaria: An Early Northern Cookery Book* with Rudolph Grewe; *An Ordinance of Pottage*; *The Form of Cury: The Cuisine of the Court of Richard II of England*.

In the past few years, Constance Hieatt shared her medieval expertise with her fellow residents in Essex Meadows by giving some very well-received talks on the subject, including one on medieval cookery, one on Beowulf and, most recently, one on 'The Miller's Tale' from *The Canterbury Tales*.

HERMAN(N) CAKE

When the sourdough starter for a friendship cake came back from a church function in the village, it was news to me. Then I resorted to the *Guardian* and the Internet and found it was two a penny. You receive a starter, build it up, keep a fraction and pass three fractions on to your friends while making an apple and cinnamon cake for yourself (other recipes are possible). The process is never-ending, an edible chain-letter. Some maintain its origins are Amish, others that it is German (perhaps it is both). The cake is not bad,

but there's a lot of it. It does keep well. One poster on the Net maintained her starter had been going since the 1970s when her family were in the Middle East. Can anyone trace the practice back further?

YOGHURT

Periodically we make our own yoghurt. It is hardly complicated. However, previous campaigns have usually petered out. The end-product starts well and gets worse. This present episode, however, has been more successful, and consistent, perhaps because the equipment (a salt-glazed jar, a thermometer and the Aga) has been better. I now can't imagine eating shop-bought yoghurt, even French. I find it surprising that no matter which yoghurt is bought as a starter, the result is the same. I also have been interested by the texture that we achieve. If you only heat the milk to ±100°F then start making the yoghurt in the usual way, the texture is much more slippery or junket-like than if you first boil the milk, let it cool to ±100°F then commence the yoghurt. Presumably this is because certain bacteria are killed off by the boiling.

A SAUCE OF FIGS AND DATES

Doing the editing for *Cocatrice and Lampray Hay* stimulated us to make one of the sweet sauces that fill the manuscript. The recipe chosen was for beef olives and I give you Constance Hieatt's translation:

> Take chuck beef. Cut it as thin as you can, three fingers broad and no more than a handful long; lay it in a container. Take parsley, hyssop, and savory and onions and the suet of beef; chop this small together. Take ground pepper, ground cinnamon, and salt; draw it together. Mix together the herbs and the spices, than lay your slices of beef flat and put on each one some of this garnish of seasonings; then roll each, one after the other. When it is [all] made together, then put it on a small spit and roast it.
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> Then set a pot with fresh broth on the fire. Mince onions and dates, and take currants and add to this, and also crushed maces or cloves and cinnamon. Take figs; grind them in a mortar with crusts of bread. Draw them up with wine or good ale; cast this draught into the pot, and saffron. When the pot boils, add these slices roasted before you put in your liquid. Boil it together and give forth.

If you like your meat sweet, this is for you. The texture of the chopped and ground dried fruits is delicious and the flavour quite novel. It is not for every day.

DRYING CHILLIES

Who would have thought, twenty years ago, that half a dozen chilli plants would be a fixture of many English kitchen gardens? They are so easy to grow, and nurseries make the task easier. So, come the autumn, there is a host of red and yellow gems winking at you from their corner bed and conservation comes into view. Hitherto we have frozen them. This year we tried drying some on the back of the Aga, but they were never sufficiently desiccated. So for the second batch (so large was the crop) I put them in the coolest oven for a day. My consternation on withdrawing them was palpable. They seemed dark brown and smelling of carbon. I carried on regardless, mashing them in the coffee grinder. What a miracle! No longer burnt, wonderfully fragrant, addictive to all.

RAMPANT MALES

Our ram, Julius, was let go in 2010. Last year, therefore, we did not lamb. A relief for my wife and no doubt for the ewes. This year, instead of having a ram *en permanence*, we had a visitor. He was a Vendéen, a French breed that is neither too large for our hill sheep nor too violent for gentlemanly handling. We hope for his progeny, due in the middle of spring. Among the pigs, the sad demise (though not before impregnating Isabella) of Ferdinand, the young Berkshire boar, left the sows bereft. His place has been taken by Hector, a Gloucester Old Spot–Sandy Black cross. Currently there is much discontent, but we hope that things will settle down and piglets will result.

ACETARIA

John Evelyn's discourse of sallets has had an enduring afterlife. There seems to be always one, if not two versions available at any one time. I picked up from the remainder store the collection *Directions for the Gardiner and other Horticultural Advice*, published by Oxford in 2009 and edited for them by Maggie Campbell-Culver. This compact yet handsome hardback is impressive value. The texts of *Acetaria*, *Kalendarium Hortense*

and *Directions*... are reproduced in a modern setting and given a full work-over by the editor. I envy it.

OXFORD SYMPOSIUM PROCEEDINGS

In pursuit of greater accessibility, the trustees of the Oxford Symposium are making past proceedings freely available online (via Google books). I have supplied them with PDFs of the volumes since *Fish* (1997), though excluding the most recent (so that sales of these may continue) and not including 2002 and 2003 which were not published by myself.

FRENCH SCHOOL FOOD

We are all familiar with chef Jamie Oliver's attempts to improve school food. His inspiration, Jeanette Orrey, was awarded a well-deserved MBE in the New Year Honours. While Oliver's efforts merit admiration, it was their medium that threw them into high relief. There were many who anticipated him, they just weren't as famous. And we in Britain, it seems, may have been anticipated by the French. Richard Storey sent me an interesting pamphlet *De la cantine scolaire au restaurant d'enfants* published in 1979 by the Centre de Création Industrielle at the Centre Georges Pompidou which tells of the great efforts made in France to humanize school food, improve its nutritional value and its delivery. These date back as far as the 1940s and the work of Raymond Paumier in the Essonne. *Le plus ça change*...

FITZHERBERT

Fitzherbert's *Husbandry* (1534, the author signed himself 'Master' and may be Sir Anthony or John) is a profitable read (www.archive.org/details/bookofhusbandry00fitzuoft). Andrew Dalby drew my attention to the heading of section 79 of the W.W. Skeat edition of 1882 which is, 'The .x. properties of a woman.' These are deemed to be, 'mery of chere ... well paced ... a brode foreheed ... brode buttockes ... harde of warde ... easye to lepe uppon ... good at a longe journeye ... well sturrynge under a man ... alwaye besye with the mouthe ... ever to be chowynge on the brydell.' Which clerk or printer's devil substituted 'horse' for 'woman'? Section 152 is headed 'Of delycyouse meates and drynkes' and has some enlightening reflections on the increase in luxury in Tudor England. It goes,

Howe costely are the charges of delycious meates & drynkes, that

be nowe most commonly used, over that it hath ben in tymes paste, and howe fer above measure? For I have seen bokes of accompte of householde, and brumentes upon the same, & I doubte not, but in delycyous meates, drinkes, and spyces, there is this daye foure tymes so moche spent, as was at these dayes, to a lyke man in degree; and yet at that tyme there was as moche befe and mutton spent as is nowe, and as many good householdes kept, and as many yomenne wayters therin as be nowe. This began with love and charytye whan a lorde, gentylman, or yoman desyred and prayed an other to come to dyner or soupper, and bycause of his commynge he wolde have a dysshe or two mo than he wolde have had, if he had ben away. Than of very love he, remembrynge howe lovyngely he was bydden to dynner, and howe well he fared, he thynketh of very kyndnes he must nedes byd hym to dyner agayne, and soo ordeyneth for hym as manye maner of suche dysshes and meates, as the other man dyd, and two or .iii. mo, & thus by lyttel and litell it is commen fer above measure. And begon of love and charyte, and endeth in pryde and glotony.

This might be called the potlatch effect.

DRESSING UP

This is the title of a book by Ulinka Rublack (OUP, 2010, £22.99 paperback). The subtitle is *Cultural Identity in Renaissance Europe*. I recommend you read it. It's a study of how people perceived themselves, particularly their dressed selves, and how they perceived cultural difference by dint of alternative costume, etc., etc. The author, a German now teaching at Cambridge, draws almost exclusively on German sources, especially from Nuremberg. It is an excellent introduction to the importance of costume history as well as how to read pictures. She is blessed by some arresting materials, not least the friendship albums of the later 16th century which were sort of elaborate autograph albums or commonplace books to which your friends and your betters might contribute a coat of arms, a motto or a painting. She could also draw upon a 'book of clothes' compiled from 1520 by Matthäus Schwarz, accountant and right-hand man to the Fuggers of Nuremberg, for which he commissioned portraits of himself in all sorts of clothing (and twice naked) at regular intervals until 1560. He also commented on his portraits, at first noting details of dress, later recording actions and events. It is intriguing and remarkable. Ms Rublack

is also very good on the beginnings of illustrated literature and broadsides, as well as on the way in which religious differences were pointed up by clothing as the Reformation took hold. As a book, I was not so impressed. The publisher has made little effort to edit the not very good English of the foreign author; frankly it is sometimes not English at all. Then the layout and typography makes it difficult for an old man to read – the lines too long, the face too small, the paper too reflective. Although there are plentiful photographs and reproductions, they are often so tiny that you cannot see the detail the author is describing. All of which is a pity; and another is that the many reviews quite failed to mention it. The neophyte will be put off. I will forebear from quoting some classics of academic writing and extended statements of the bleeding obvious, but it is still a book worth reading, big time.

LEEDS SYMPOSIUM ON FOOD HISTORY AND TRADITIONS

The twenty-seventh symposium, entitled 'Five a Day: Vegetables', part 1, will take place on 21 April 2012 at the Friends Meeting House, Friargate, York. The speakers planned are: Eileen White on vegetables in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries; Malcolm Thick asking to what extent did people in England eat vegetables in the early eighteenth century; Ivan Day and Peter Brears making a closer approach to salads; Ivan Day discussing sallets in early modern England; Rob Gooderidge explaining the twenty-first century Victorian workhouse garden at Ripon; and Ivan Day again on growing period vegetables. Enquiries should be addressed to C. Anne Wilson, c/o Brotherton Library, University of Leeds, Leeds LS2 9JT. The fee is a modest £20.

A SECONDHAND BOOKSELLER

As our familiar dealers in secondhand cookery retire, so we have found it difficult to know where else to turn. I have discovered a new site, however, with a very long catalogue and prices that do not scare the horses. They are called Books & Bygones, and are located at 40 Hollow Lane, Shinfield, Reading RG2 9BT. Their website is http://www.booksbygones.co.uk

OUR TRIPE BOOK

I am delighted to announce that Marjory Houlihan's *Tripe: A Most Excellent Dish*, with contributions by the late Roy Shipperbottom and Lynda Brown has been shortlisted for the André Simon Food Book of the Year Award. Of course, it's well deserved.

BRITISH FOOD IN 1930

I have just finished reading the biography of Nikolaus Pevsner by Susie Harries (Chatto & Windus, £30). It is excellent. There are some longueurs, as there will always be in a long academic life, but the material dealing with his early years in Germany, his struggle to get established in England, his writing of the *Buildings of England*, his standing and reputation among others in the field: all this is very rewarding. Here, I wish merely to share with you his comments on British food in 1930, the year of his first foray to this country. They interest me because of my slightly rose-tinted glasses when thinking of the pre-war era. My mythology is that everything was ruined by the war itself. Not if we believe Dr Pevsner: 'The meals are big enough, but they are disgusting, quite tasteless. Every day the same beans, the same Yorkshire pudding, a ghastly floury gravy and the same tough beef or mutton ... Even the sandwiches are in uniform; in no tea rooms is there anything but ham and tongue, cheese is apparently "inappropriate", and you need binoculars to see the butter.'

BAKING COURSES

Andrew Whitley has sent me his programme of bread-making courses at Bread Matters, Macbiehill Farmhouse, Lamancha, West Linton, Peebleshire EH46 7AZ (www.breadmatters.com). You can choose from one- to five-day visits and will come away enthused by the teaching, skilled in the making and relaxed by the views.

CAT FOOD

An ageing cat has meant more careful nutrition. Close inspection of the ingredients of cat food sachets seems to indicate that there is virtually no meat in them at all, the protein is all from soya. Small wonder the cat takes a dim view.

FROM GALWAY TO SOHO

This is a ballad sung by Máirtin Mac ConIomaire, who contributed to the last issue. The notes explain all.

As I was scanning the Bill of Fare,[1]
The waiter hovered beside my chair,
'We've Galway salmon', I heard him declare.
And then in a local confident tone,
'we've turbot, halibut, and sole on the bone
But our salmon is best and widely known.'
He walked away with his step so light,
His folded napkin gleaming white,
I knew, of course, he was perfectly right.

But what could a London waiter know
In a crowded café in Soho,
Where the shaded lights were dim and low.
Of the Salmon Weir and the Claddagh fleet,
In the city where bay and Corrib meet
In the twisted length of a Galway street.

And how would those tails that he wore compare
With an Aran Jacket in old Eyre Square,
Or a Báinín[2] seen at a Galway fair?
What would he know of the purple and grey
Of an autumn twilight warped on the bay,
Or the magic scent of new-mown hay?
Of the things a man can never tire,
The open hearth and the big turf fire,
Or the lowing of cows in a village byre?

Disturbing my dreams as I sat in state,
He brought me the fish disguised on a plate
Garnished with sauces up to date.
In cantankerous manner I began,
'I'd rather it fried on a sizzling pan
Or grilled with butter; I'm a country man.'

He served me the fish in Soho style,
Fidgeting there by my side a while,
On his face the ghost of a quizzical smile.

He said 'that's how I'd like it myself tonight,
In a nest of mushrooms, am I right?
In the flickering rays of the candlelight.'
'No booking of tables in advance,
No dazzling menus worded in France,
No one to give me a curious glance.
But turf sods blazing under the pot,
Potatoes flouring and piping hot,
A second helping, like it or not.'

Was he assuming the brogue of the West;
Making of me the butt of his jest?
I waited until I heard the rest.
'I played as a child by the Corrib Weir
And I watched the salmon many a year
When the day was bright and the water clear.
I saw the Cliffs of Moher in kindly weather,
The Aran Islands huddled together,
Each Currach[3] passing light as a feather.
Dun Aengus[4] battling through wind and rain,
A blackbird's song in a Galway lane,
I often think of these days in vain.'

He walked away in his black and white
With a step that seemed no longer light,
And a mist came up and clouded my sight.
When I cross the Weir in the sunset's glow
I think of him shuffling to and fro,
In that crowded café in Soho.

[1] This anonymous poem is learnt from my father, Liam Mac Con Iomaire, who first heard it recited by the late Dick Brown while on holidays in the Aran Islands in 1971.
[2] A white homespun collarless and sleeveless jacket made from un-dyed wool, from the Irish *Bán* (white).
[3] Traditional west of Ireland boat made from canvas spread across a light wooden frame and covered in black tar / bitumen.
[4] *Dún Aengus* was the name of a passenger and cargo vessel which connected Galway city with the Aran Islands for many decades.