

Joyce Molyneux and Gerard Baker: *Born to Cook: Angel Food*: Adam White, 2011, 149 pp., paperback, £14.95.

This book appeared in late 2011, ready to make a timely appearance as a Christmas gift both on its own merits and also because all the profits go to the Save the Children Fund. Anyone attracted by the author's name, and also as in my case, by very pleasant memories of calm and delicious lunches at the Carved Angel in the 1970s, will find much of interest.

Prue Leith's enthusiastic introduction rightly draws attention to the wide range of cuisines drawn upon for the contents. She also refers to the author's extensive experience of teaching the skills and enjoyment of her craft.

The authorial tone is indeed gentle and encouraging; however, many of the recipes are sophisticated and require a degree of technical competence which may be somewhat daunting for the average, if keen, domestic cook. Similarly, depending on your resources, some ingredients may not be easily available. However there is also a good choice of simpler recipes, and in any case the format of the book will certainly help. The large pages are helpfully laid out, frequently with a brief description of the dish, followed by the method, and the list of ingredients highlighted to the side. Each recipe is contained within a single page, and the book remains conveniently open and flat(tish) on the kitchen work surface. Many dishes are accompanied by a colour illustration. If you wish to have an idea of what you are trying to achieve, then some are more useful than others. The depicted slice of apple and cinnamon tarte Tatin (p. 129), for example, shows clearly what you might hope to take to table, whereas the photograph accompanying the roast pheasant (p. 109) is at somewhat of a remove, being of several birds still in their feathers.

In her final paragraph Prue Leith declares that she personally wishes to cook everything in the book: all can share in its interest and aspiration.

JENNIFER STOREY

Andrew Webb: *Food Britannia*: Random House, 2011, 560 pp., hardback, £25.00.

Barny Butterfield is an artisan cidemaker who has recently won CAMRA's Champion Cider award. As you approach the farm where the cider is made the scent of fermenting apples reaches you down the muddy track giving a very clear clue as to what goes on there. But like many small food and drink

businesses Barny doesn't stand still, so when asked to supply soft drinks for a local event he made up a batch of lemonade; Sandford Orchards now makes a range of fruit-based soft drinks, as well as great ciders with layers of taste that show up mass-produced ciders for the bland products they are. This last year he even came up with a mulled cider based on an old Devon recipe with a secret ingredient which I managed to wheedle out of him. And no, I'm not letting on; you'll have to taste it yourself.

Barny isn't in Andrew Webb's book but many other great producers are. The book, born from the diary he made whilst putting together the Channel 4 documentary, *The Big British Food Map* in 2008, is a wonderful exploration of British food, ranging from the more obvious such as haggis and Whitstable oysters to the perhaps less well-known Devon cheese, Sloe Tavy (whose rind is washed in Plymouth Sloe Gin). Similar in some respects to Rick Stein's British Food Heros project, Andrew tells some great stories about a range of foods and their producers with passion and respect; he correctly states that 'the food sector today is one of incredible dynamism for those who want to seek, if not their fortune, then at least their own destiny.' One such is Richard Ord, in South Shields, whose grandfather started the family fish and chip shop in 1905. According to Andrew it continues as a chip shop with Richard moving with the times by signing up to Greenpeace's Seafish Sea Life campaign to promote sustainable fishing thereby becoming 'the closest thing to an eco-chippie you could find.'

The book also highlights the cosmopolitan nature of traditional British food, something Jamie Oliver has attempted recently, but Andrew Webb has added some of the detail, albeit tantalizingly brief at times.

For example, and perhaps appropriately for this journal, Andrew starts his journey in south-west England telling some great stories particularly about the sources and history of foods in the region. For example, from the owner of the Dorset Blueberry Company we learn that the first batch of commercial blueberry plants arrived on the *Queen Mary* from Canada in the early 1960s, having been offered to Britain by a Methodist minister who 'wanted to add a little cheer to post-war Britain.'

He is doubtful about the claim that saffron was introduced to Cornwall by Phoenician merchants trading it for tin around 1000 BC; he suggests that the distances involved are improbable. In fact, there is evidence that the Phoenicians did indeed trade with south-west England, as with other Atlantic parts of western Europe - it's a shame Andrew hadn't checked this.

The dynamism of the sector that the author correctly identifies means that a book such as this is likely to be soon out of date; in our closest town here in Devon we have seen three new food businesses start in the last year alone. And the breadth of what he tries to cover means that many of his readers will know what he has missed in their region.

Another problem with the book is that it is not sure what it is; some reviewers have said it would be a good guidebook when on your foodie travels, but given the changing face of the sector you are likely to miss out on many treats if you rely on this alone. The late Carol Trewin's *The Devon Food Book* would be what you need if visiting this county, for example, and well-maintained food websites are likely to be more up-to-date sources these days.

Others suggest that Andrew gives a lot of detail about British foods, but some entries can be frustratingly brief, for example, his story of marmalade, which fails to refer to its wonderful quince antecedents and the related trade with Portugal. So, just as I was drawn in by the author's obvious knowledge, we move onto the next story.

Some entries lapse into flippancy – describing a Pembrokeshire shellfish processing plant as ‘weapons-grade’ doesn't add a great deal to our knowledge; neither does knowing that Cheryl Cole's mum bought Tyneside stottie cakes for her when ill with malaria ...

These frustrations are in contrast to Andrew's obvious commitment to British food; he celebrates its history, for example, with reference to a range of early cookery books, as well as its decline – in 1845 there were 171 gooseberry shows in Britain whilst now there are only two. He is also a passionate advocate of the use the EU Protected Name Status for British food products to ensure standards of quality as well as to help access to European markets. I will continue to dip into this book from time to time, while wanting to add my own entries. A helpful directory at the back gives you the information to visit some of these producers and to support our dynamic food sector.

TIM HARRIS, CREDITON