

AN ERASMUS COLLOQUY

On 5 November 2003, but a few hours after the presentation of the Erasmus Prize to Alan Davidson, there was a workshop on changing styles and tastes in cooking and eating in industrial society at the Industriele Groote Club a few yards across the square from the royal palace where the formal speeches and reception had been so enjoyably concluded. Stephen Mennell, Johan Goudsblom, Anneke van Otterloo and Katarzyna Cwiertka were the speakers and their texts are reproduced in this issue.

SCHOOL DINNERS

The hot topic this season has been Jamie Oliver's exposé of school dinners. At first, there was in this house a certain chagrin that some young chef could swan into a room already taken by many pioneers and good workers and, casting them to one side, grab all the glory. Our village primary school took back dinner provision from a central body, employed a good cook and bought organic some years ago; the good ladies of Nottinghamshire and concerned parents such as Fiona Murray (see *PPC* 77) have been chuntering and acting on the subject for ages. Why do we listen to their message only when endorsed by TV and celebrity? This dog-in-manger response is churlish at the least. The world has united in its praise of the skill and imagination of Oliver's approach; the programmes are universally admired; all credit to one who a friend quite seriously suggested might one day be prime minister. His success, however, excites other thoughts. The revolution in the cookery, appreciation of food and general sophistication of Great Britain – a revolution we smugly assume done and dusted – is shown to be skin-deep. The vast mass neither knows nor cares. Faced with this, the middle classes are as shocked as they were after the Boer War, when the army declared that 60 per cent of recruits were below physical par. The government, trimming to the wind of opinion, now promises millions towards rebuilding school kitchens and training school cooks: electoral lies, insulting to both the liars and the lied to. But the episode does reveal the need for education more broadly based than the three Rs, as advocated by the Slow Food movement, and that we should not perhaps be quite so pleased with ourselves. Our nation, when scratched to draw blood, is often illiberal and ignorant.

JANE GRIGSON TRUST BURSARY

We have not received any notification from the secretary with regard to this year's bursary, but presume it is still vibrant and active. I therefore insert this paragraph to remind you of the availability of grants to worthy projects of research in food studies. Write to the Hon. Sec., 244 Ivydale Road, London SE15 3DF.

OXFORD SYMPOSIUM 2005

The Symposium is to be held at Oxford Brookes University, on 3-4 September 2005. The subject is Authenticity. Many improvements to the arrangements are envisaged. The registration fee is £135 or £75 for a student. Enquiries to the organizer, Patsy Iddison, 3 Upper Grotto Road, Twickenham, Middlesex TW1 4NG. Further details can, of course, be obtained from the website. E-mail <patsy@oxfordsymposium.org.uk>.

THE SOPHIE COE PRIZE FOR FOOD HISTORY 2005

This prize of £1,500 is awarded for an essay or article in English on some aspect of food history. Either unpublished work, or material published in the twelve months preceding the deadline for submission is eligible. Entries will normally be in the range of 1,500 to 10,000 words. The prize will be announced at the Oxford Symposium, 3-4 September 2005. Terms and conditions are available from Harlan Walker, 294 Hagley Road, Birmingham B17 8DJ. E-mail <harlan.w@btinternet.com>. The deadline for entries is 18 July, 2005.

†PATIENCE GRAY

It is with much regret that we announce the death of Patience Gray on March 10th at her home in Apulia. Obituaries were carried by all the broadsheets in England, but in case you have not had them available to you, I give below the text of my notice in *The Guardian*.

'Patience Gray has died at the age of 87 after a short illness at her home in Apulia in southern Italy. She will be remembered particularly for two seminal cookery books: *Plats du Jour*, written with Primrose Boyd, and published by Penguin Books in 1957; and *Honey from a Weed*, published in 1986. While *Plats du Jour* guided many aspiring hostesses towards the proper execution of French and Continental bourgeois cookery (indeed was almost the earliest 'international' cookery book aimed at the mass market, selling more than 50,000 copies in its first year

thus dwarfing the impact of such early prophets as Elizabeth David), *Honey from a Weed* was a startling, impassioned and inspiring account of the Mediterranean way of life that transcended the idea of the cookery book as a DIY manual.

'Patience was the second daughter (of three) of Olive and Hermann Stanham, and her childhood was spent near Godalming and on the Sussex coast. Her father was born Warschavski, the son of a Polish rabbi who had fled the pogroms of 1861, married a Lincolnshire farmer's daughter and then become a Unitarian minister. Military service in the Royal Horse Artillery had prompted Hermann's change of name. He ended the First World War a major (promoted to colonel after Territorial service in the '20s). While Patience's elder sister was packed off for higher domestic training at a finishing school in Switzerland and her younger sibling was allocated the role of tomboy, Patience herself was allowed to be 'the brainy one'. A certain parental shortness of funds meant she was taken up by an uncle and aunt in London who put her through Queen's College in Harley Street. There was no doubt as to her ability, even if exposure to London, books and intelligence left her dissatisfied with the usual run of country admirers and their 'anxiety-irritation in perceiving the least gleam of thought or the slightest satirical inflection' pointed in their direction, as she later wrote. But she was off to the London School of Economics and a degree under the tutelage of Hugh Gaitskell. A gap-year in Bonn (for she had been a precocious applicant to the university) and student travels with her sister to Budapest one year, Rumania the next afforded her an uncommonly broad grounding for a member of the county set.

'She never settled to a career in the 1930s sense of the word. The onset of war and the birth of her two children, while refusing to marry or live with their father (whose name she took by deed-poll just to save red faces), were perhaps factors. Office jobs were not then well-suited to maternity and she survived by temporary jobs for literary and artistic folk. Among these were the designer F.H.K. Henrion (who was in charge of the Country Pavilion at the Festival of Britain in 1951), and for Leonard Russell editor of *The Saturday Book*, a certain amount of ghosting (for whom she never disclosed), translating for the *Larousse Gastronomique*, fabric and wallpaper design for Edinburgh Weavers, and research for Richard Guyatt, then Professor of Graphic Art at the Royal College. Primrose Boyd was a colleague on the Festival of Britain job and it was she who proposed they joined forces to write *Plats du Jour*, experimenting in the mid-1950s with dishes as outlandish as goulash and paella ('the paella recipe induced a lady at a dinner party to hurl invective at me, and almost

the knives' - so relatively innocent were they of 'Continental' cookery at the time). Patience's Royal College connections put her in touch with the illustrator David Gentleman who was then just finishing his studies. His cover and drawings for the book are memorable. (It is due for reissue by Persephone Books later this year.)

'The success of *Plats du Jour* must have given her the confidence needed for her break into national journalism when in 1958 she beat 1000 applicants to the job of putting together the women's page on the *Observer*. There was little consensus among the irredeemably tweed-jacketed editorial staff as to what sort of thing might appeal to women: advice on household gadgets perhaps, but little else by way of inspiration. Handed carte blanche, Patience filled it to good effect. Women, she felt, did not want to acquire but to learn. And she set about instructing them in European art, design, thought and habits. This almost surreal embrace of modern Europe did not last beyond the arrival in 1961 of her new chief, George Seddon, who felt daily problems of shopping, buying and choosing of more import to their readers than modern architecture in Milan.

'Her leaving the *Observer*, and the passing of her children through their schooling, coincided with her falling in love with the artist and sculptor Norman Mommens. Precipitately, they embarked on a Mediterranean odyssey that would take them to Carrara, Catalonia, the Greek island of Naxos and, finally, to the very heel of Italy where they settled in a farmhouse named Spigolizzi in 1970 – each stopping-point a source of marble or tufa which Norman could work into his forceful, primitive carvings. This passage through communities of stone-workers, fishermen, refined intellectuals, expatriates and the most earthbound of peasants she described with passion and eloquence in *Honey from a Weed* (1986) – always gnomically referring to Mommens as 'the sculptor'. The darker side of life, when peasants and primitivity can overwhelm the outsider, she portrayed in her account of their season on Naxos in *Ring Doves and Snakes* published in 1989.

'*Honey from a Weed* combined learning, wide reading, folklore and cookery in a disconcerting and inimitable manner. Patience was a woman of strong emotions and opinions, her prose muscular and full of character. So, too, was her cookery. While *Plats du Jour* had been largely derived from books and home experiment, *Honey* was more in the way of field-notes of an anthropologist: but one who had gone native herself. To the last years of her life, she would not have the normal conveniences of refrigerators, gas cookers, electric light, telephones or water closets at Spigolizzi. It was only growing frailty, and the urging of her son Nicolas, that allowed some compromise with modernity.

'When she finished *Honey from a Weed* in 1983, she had no publisher in mind. The literary agent Deborah Owen tried to find a London house to take it but only succeeded once she approached the ex-diplomat and food writer Alan Davidson who ran with his wife Jane a tiny venture called Prospect Books. The final printed text is a credit to his diplomatic skills, just as the book was gloriously embellished by the drawings of Patience's then daughter-in-law Corinna Sargood. Its reception by enthusiasts for intellectual cooking both here and in America was rhapsodic and it had all the makings of a 'cult classic'. It has never gone out of print.

'Patience wrote two other books: one was a commission in 1964 by the Blue Funnel Shipping Line to compose a set of recipes for the Chinese cooks of their newly-launched passenger-cargo liner *The Centaur*, plying from Western Australia to Singapore. It will be published in the normal way by myself (now Prospect Books) later this year. The other was called *Work Adventures Childhood Dreams* and was published by Patience herself in 1999. Nearly an autobiography, it conveys much of her essence, and the prose is as sinewy as it ever was.

'Encounters with Patience were memorable. She had a way of speaking that was at once delphic, world-weary and delightfully mischievous. Her political antennae were very sensitive and to the end she rampaged against the polluters and destroyers. She adored her fans and they would travel far to reach her. Her friendships ran deep, always with people of European, not merely English, sensibilities. It looked as if she would never marry but, in the end, she did tie the knot with Norman in 1995. He died in 2000.'

FEEDING AMERICA AND OTHER LINKS

The Michigan State University Libraries and the MSU Museum have joined forces to create an online collection of early American cookbooks. So far, 76 texts are available both as full-page images and searchable e-texts. They are bolstered by a glossary and images of cooking implements from the MSU Museum collections. The resource can be reached at <http://digital.lib.msu.edu/projects/cookbooks>. It is also worth having a look at culinaryhistory.org for a few further e-texts (mostly still in progress), in many languages, though largely from the medieval and renaissance periods. <<http://www.pbm.com/~lindahl/cotgrave/>> is an facsimile of Randle Cotgrave's great French dictionary; <<http://members.aol.com/renfrowcm/links.html>> has a number of links to medieval and renaissance texts online and much else besides.

CHINA

There are two journals of Chinese food that I should mention. The first is in its twelfth volume and is called *Flavor and Fortune* edited by Dr Jacqueline Newman. It costs \$19.50 for four issues (one year) with an additional \$20 if outside the US. See: www.flavorandfortune.com. It is, in essence, a journal about Chinese cookery beyond China with an emphasis, naturally enough, on restaurants – and these may be in Japan, Latin America, Calcutta (with a bit of Indian fusion), or the USA. The tone is invariably enthusiastic, the contributors amateurs as well as academics, the knowledge deeply arcane. The second is a new journal from the Foundation of Chinese Dietary Culture. It is called *The Journal of Chinese Dietary Culture*. Its e-mail is <fcde@mercuries.com.tw>, the subscription for overseas is \$30 for two issues (one year). As it is mostly in Chinese, I am not too sure what it's about. However, the first issue has an English article by Jack Goody entitled 'The Origin of Chinese Food Culture' and a review by Annie Hubert of Akira Matsuyama's *Traditional Dietary Culture of South East Asia* (Columbia University Press, 2003) The Chinese articles do have English abstracts. This first issue relates to archaeology.

AMERICAN CULINARY HISTORY

If you go to <www.clements.umich.edu> then click on 'JBL Culinary Archive, then on SYMPOSIUM' you will get all the information you need plus forms for the First Biennial Symposium on American Culinary History and the dedication of the Longone Centre for American Culinary Research on May 13-15 2005. This is obviously a biggie for those in America.

SUPERMARKETS

Reverting to Jamie Oliver and modern food debates, a smidgeon of sympathy might be extended to Britain's supermarket giants. When we urge hoi polloi to ditch supermarket shopping and go to independent traders on the High Street, I remember how badly we were served by them in days of yore: limited stock, old stock, expensive stock was too often the case. Today, I bought fuel at my town's garage (population 6,000). When we moved there in 1973 there were four places we could buy petrol, reduced now to one. It is inescapable that the fuel-supply situation in 1973 was less efficient; it is arguable that not one of those garages made a decent profit; it is also quite likely that profit margins on their tiny turnovers were very high. We consumers have profited from this restriction of choice through lower prices. Much the same is true of

supermarkets. The margins on tomatoes in 1950 were probably indecent; and the tomatoes were rubbish. Today, Tesco may make 1 per cent. I am all for doing down the monopolists but, were our arguments to prevail, would the country as a whole be better served? A tinge of wishful thinking enters the case urged by those who would boycott. It is inescapable that the two sides of a commercial negotiation, for example the supermarket and its customers, or the supermarket and its suppliers, will each seek the best deal. Charity will not be their aim. Customers will seek the best price (which is not the same as saying Britons only like cheap food and must willingly pay more for their chicken – almost as if they should wake in the morning and give a pound piece to the chicken farmers' almoner); shops, too, will aim to secure goods at the lowest cost. If we want to change the rules, we will have to grasp the nettle as a society, not wait for the supermarkets to do it for us.

One's occasional hesitation at the absolute rightness of soft-left orthodoxies about food supplies stems from difficulties with big facts. For example: the paradigm of local suppliers, organic production, and high cost is largely that of the nineteenth century, before the abolition of the Corn Laws, not after. At that point, diet was monotonous and population was twenty million. Is it possible to recycle this model in today's circumstances, not forgetting our appetite for dietary variety as well as our higher demands for protein?

If there is a single lesson to be drawn from the school meals episode, it is the need for better education. Slow Food is here on the right track. Education is at the root of better feeding – as it is of so much else, and would that our leaders cottoned on to the fact before consigning one half of the population to a vocational hell. The other big problem is that at least half of the solution to better feeding is cooking. Since the very process of economic development seems to demand that cooking, like reproduction and other primordial human activities, should shrink into the background as we fulfil ourselves in more rewarding ways, we have a real challenge. An axiom that I would like to see accepted in all homes is that home-made is good, shop-bought is bad. This smacks of the hand-woven suits of pre-war drop-outs or the wonky pots of the amateur thrower, but at least it saves the consumer from all the dreadful ploys of the industrialized producer. Somehow we have to get cooking again – and not just as a leisure activity for the sophisticated middle classes. Somehow, I don't think we shall. The food agitators, therefore, come into their own, for it is only because we don't cook that their strictures have relevance. Quite frankly, I don't care what they put into apple juice because I press my own.

BREAD MATTERS AND PANARY

Andrew Whitley, formerly of the Village Bakery, now gives courses in bread making – and utilizes the process as a team-building device for anxious corporations in one of his programmes dubbed 'Together We Rise'. Full details from The Tower House, Melmerby, Penrith CA10 1HE or at <www.breadmatters.co.uk>. The year's programme for Panary, courses run by Paul Merry at the other end of the country in Shaftesbury, Dorset, has also been announced. Enquire of 6 Empire Road, Salisbury SP2 9DF or look at <www.panary.co.uk>.

MINCE PIE

It is quite bizarre how food history can be hijacked, then made a nonsense, by otherwise right-thinking people. The Royal Society of Chemistry, anxious perhaps to raise its public profile, maintained it had 'discovered' the original mince pie with meat in it. Henceforth, it would serve a mince pie (recreated to Gervase Markham's recipe) to all members of staff in memory of Sir Robert Boyle. Why they thought this a novel discovery is beyond me, but they earned several column-inches.