

Petits Propos Culinaires 84



*This issue seems preoccupied with prehistoric foods. Here we see Mrs Chryssi Trakaki preparing xinochondros in the village of Kakodiki on the island of Crete. More details are in the paper by Soutana Valamoti and Stella Anastasaki, below.*

# Petits Propos Culinaires 84

Essays and notes on food, cookery and cookery books



Prospect Books December 2007

THE COVER ILLUSTRATION is a photograph of *Core*, part of Gayle Chong Kwan's *Journey to the Centre of the Earth* at London Bridge station. It was commissioned by Platform for Art, London Underground Ltd's arts programme. Amplification of this work is given in the first contribution to this issue, by Donna McDonald.

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In case it was not self-evident, any unsigned contribution to this journal is written by Tom Jaïne.

ISSN 0142-4857

Published in Great Britain in 2007 by Tom Jaïne, Prospect Books, Allaleigh House, Blackawton, Totnes TQ9 7DL.

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Typeset in Hoefler Text by Tom Jaïne.

Printed and bound in Great Britain by the Cromwell Press, Trowbridge.

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# NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

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DONNA McDONALD is a writer and arts administrator who lives in London but works throughout Britain. She is the author of *Illustrated News: The Canadian Pictures of Juliana Horatia Ewing*, *Lord Strathcona: A Biography of Donald Alexander Smith* and other books.

ALICIA RIOS and SIMON COHEN are part of Alicia's food art collective which she describes thus: 'Like an amoeba, Ali&Cia expands, contracts, adapts, absorbs and reflects in response to the circumstances of each work's context. Co-founder Bárbara Ortiz has been the artistic director on all projects to date. Also currently involved are Simon Cohen, in research and production, and the documentary makers Diego Vega and Miguel Eraso.'

ANDREW SIGAL is a culinary historian living and working in Oakland, California. His research area is the cultural factors that cause cuisines to evolve.

SOULTANA MARIA VALAMOTI is an archaeobotanist and lecturer at the Aristotle University of Thessaloniki. She has published extensively on the archaeology of plants, for instance *Plants and People in Late Neolithic and Early Bronze Age Northern Greece. An archaeobotanical investigation* (2004).

CAROLINE YELDHAM has 19 years of re-enactment experience, specializing over the last 14 years in medieval and Tudor cookery. Caroline ran the Tudor Kitchen at Kentwell Hall for three years, providing authentic food for up to 100 people a day from a Tudor kitchen, using wood fires, charcoal fires and wood-fired ovens for baking.

## A PLANNING UPDATE

Since *PPC 83*, our views on local planning matters have been universally rejected. In Dartmouth, the Lidl supermarket is constructed and open for business. Work has commenced on the Sainsbury site on the other side of the road. Already, the last surviving butcher in the town is open mornings-only for most of the week. If the townspeople thought the Lidl building programme would bring them work, they were soon disabused. The entire kit was transhipped from Germany and bolted together by a German team. Even the parking-lot landscape – a matter of a green bank or two – was undertaken by gardeners from across the Channel. Presumably the salesforce will be local, but who knows?

With regard to the proposed settlement in fields at Allaleigh, the matter came to a head at a four-day public enquiry conducted by a representative of the Ministry's planning inspectorate at Bristol. He ruled that the appellants should be allowed temporary permission for three years, that the number of dwellings (all benders or yurts of soft materials without foundations or footings, therefore technically not permanent) should be limited to ten (they had asked for fifteen), and that only members of the owning co-operative, their partners and offspring, should be entitled to reside. The episode is now closed. We have embraced their presence here. But there remain some interesting questions.

It can be argued the decision stemmed from a strict interpretation of current legislation. The local authority had skimmed its attention to enforcement details. Had the inspector ruled against the hippies, he reckoned them still entitled to build and maintain as many structures as they would if their arguments carried. What would be the point, therefore, in his rejecting their application? As this technicality seemed to us neither pettifogging nor insubstantial, we were astonished that the various legal experts gathered by both sides seemed never to have considered it until it was brought to their notice by the inspector himself. Many thousands of pounds in fees were thrown away by a single conning of the Act in question.

It was also clear from the tone of the inspector's report that he wholly supported the appellants' wider arguments. His decision did not seem influenced (that technicality aside) by specifically planning considerations. Had an analogous permission been sought by a conventional developer, it is certain it would have been rejected. Not one criterion for building in

the countryside was satisfied. However, the applicants were able to plead exemption from such criteria on the grounds of their intentions. They have achieved a very light carbon footprint; the world as we know it is about to end; society will soon be reordered along the lines sketched out by this pioneer settlement. It was unclear whether the inspector possessed any knowledge of peak oil, global warming, societal reorganization or permaculture (the agricultural and social model the applicants have adopted) but that ignorance mattered not one jot to him.

## A NEW FOOD HISTORY COURSE

I was reminded, when reporting in the last issue on the Brighton University gastronomic MA, that the University of Exeter is also promoting a new Master's in the history of food. This is within the Classics Department and is founded, obviously enough, on the history of food in ancient Greece and Rome. To quote, 'The aim is to study food and eating in different cultures, in particular in ancient Greece and Rome and in modern Britain, France and Italy. We will explore ideas about the natural world and farming (such as the ethics of keeping and eating animals, the nature of fish); the importance of cereals and vegetables; and questions of gender and politics in the organization of eating on both a domestic and a national scale. Health and diet play an important part.' For those of you who wish to know more, visit the site ([www.huss.ex.ac.uk](http://www.huss.ex.ac.uk)). The MA is masterminded by Professor John Wilkins, world expert on food in Greek Comedy and on the writings of Athenaeus and Galen.

## THE JANE GRIGSON TRUST

The Trust has a new and smart website ([www.janegrisontrust.org.uk](http://www.janegrisontrust.org.uk)). Those of you who would wish to apply for a bursary from the Trust may wish to visit it and see how to further your application. Readers will probably know (I may have even have mentioned it myself before) that the Jane Grigson Library of books, and some manuscripts, moved from London's Guildhall Library to Oxford Brookes University in 2005.

## THE CRUSTASTUN STUNNER

I had an entertaining afternoon promoting *Persia in Peckham* on the television programme *The Market Kitchen*. While at the studio, a world

of gastronomic endeavour passed before my eyes, none more memorable than the remarkable humane shellfish killer demonstrated by the inventor, Simon Buckhaven, and his wife Charlotte. Simon also floored me by addressing Sally Butcher's Persian family in fluent Farsi. I give below the Buckhavens' description of their machine. Their accounts of the inefficacy of our traditional methods for killing crab and of the length of time it takes a lobster to die in a pot of boiling water were sobering indeed.

'Chefs, cookery writers and all who enjoy shellfish, will welcome the development of the world's only humane electronic stunner for lobsters, crabs and langoustines. Cooking or cutting up a live animal can never be humane, and that is why legislation in the Western world has made it obligatory to stun or anaesthetize food animals prior to killing. This requirement has never been applied to shellfish because of the perception that they are incapable of feeling pain or distress. Now however, attitudes are changing. So far, legislation in New Zealand, Australia, Italy, Switzerland and Austria has recognized higher crustaceans as sentient animals requiring protection from inhumane treatment, and the influential European Scientific Panel on Animal Health & Welfare now endorses this view.

'The Crustastun is a British invention, developed with the help of Bristol University and the Silsoe Research Institute. It electronically anaesthetizes shellfish in less than half a second and kills a lobster (whilst stunned) in 5 seconds, and a crab in 10 seconds. By comparison, a lobster takes 2–3 minutes to die at 100°C, a crab 4–6 minutes. (Killing takes considerably longer in water heated slowly, a method suggested by some cookery writers.) It is hoped that this invention will outlaw from all kitchens the cooking, butchering, drowning and spiking of live crustaceans. Informed chefs, restaurant critics and food writers, to whom the public listen with respect, should no longer feel it necessary to tell readers and viewers that the only way to prepare a crab or lobster for eating is to use methods which most people in the 21st century regard as barbaric. Not only kinder, electronic stunning destroys bacteria, prolongs freshness and has been found to improve texture and flavour. The counter-top unit is being taken up by a number of well-known shellfish restaurants, where diners can enjoy their even-better-tasting *homard dans sa nage langoustine*, confident that all the ingredients have been dispatched *à la nouvelle méthode anglaise*.'

If you want to know more about this you can go onto the website [www.crustastun.com](http://www.crustastun.com).

## PIERRE D'ARGENT

While always fearing to bring old news from Ghent to Aix, we have experienced so welcome an addition to our household stores that I am loath to let it pass. Search on the Internet seems to indicate no more than a half-life in the public sphere, so here goes. Pierre d'Argent is a cleaning paste made from powdered clay, natural soaps, glycerine and vegetable fat that renders hard surfaces as bright and shining as when they were new. Copper, brass, silver, steel, aluminium, ceramic tiles, glass (even leather and some textiles) are cleaned in a flash. It seems, the name might help, to originate in France. It is sold through mail-order and some green stores. It is the talking-point of washing-up.

## VANILLA

This hand-bound pamphlet of 48 pages, subtitled 'A Journey in Mexico to find the Fragrant Orchid Bean', is by Corinna Sargood, the illustrator of Patience Gray's *Honey from a Weed* and designer of several luscious covers for Prospect Books. The text is an expansion of a piece that first saw the light of day in Ed Behr's *Art of Eating*; it has been illustrated by the author. The binding in hand-printed linen was executed by Corinna's daughter at the Black Cat Bindery in Castle Cary, Somerset. Copies of the limited edition are available at £50 and anyone interested in their purchase should write to the author at 17 Paul Street, Frome, Somerset BA11 1DT.

## RECENT PROSPECT BOOKS

*Persia in Peckham* has been short-listed for the André Simon Award; it was also named as the *Sunday Times* Cookery Book of the Year and featured widely in the round-ups before Christmas. *Spices and Comfits* by Johanna Maria van Winter has now appeared and may be purchased from me at Allaleigh (there will be a substantial discount for subscribers, for the book is not cheap). I am working hard on Peter Brears' *Cooking & Dining in Medieval England*; it promises to be a cracker. *Early Vegetarian Recipes* by Anne O'Connell is almost ready for the off. This is a little volume in the series 'The English Kitchen' and gives the texts of vegetarian recipes dating from before the 1920s.