

BOOK REVIEWS

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Michele Field

The initials of the reviewers signify the following: MF, Michele Field (michelefield@blueyonder.co.uk); LC, Lynn Chatterton (blchatterton@tiscalinet.it); AKD; Andrew Dalby (akdalby@hotmail.com); TJ, Tom Jaine.

Cooking in Europe 1250-1650

Ken Albala

Greenwood Press | 2006 | 153pp | £25.95

There is a 28-page introduction for students, but the collection of recipes is superlative. From ‘roasted cat in the Middle Ages’ (though Albala suggests, not a favourite dish) to red carrot sauce in the Late Renaissance (he says it was perhaps the word ‘orange’ that was not yet invented, not that carrots’ were really red), this is a book of wonderful detail.

MF

The Pig, the Olive and the Squid: Food and Wine from Humble Beginnings

Greg Duncan Powell

Murdoch Books | 2007 | 160pp | £16.99

If your Christmas friend wants to put a historical perspective on his food but would feel daunted by Albala, this is a kitchen cookbook written on the premise that what we eat has more context than we usually grasp. All this was done knowledgeably 40 years ago, but it is a good sign that stories about ‘spaghetti trees’ will be crushed again. Polpettone (Italian veal meatloaf) and ‘Spuds with green olives’ anyone?

MF

The English Breakfast: The Biography of a National Meal with Recipes

Kaori O'Connor

Kegan Paul | 2006 | 489pp | £65

This is a big buffet: five facsimiles of 19th century breakfast recipe books in one volume – more eggs in cases and kidneys in ‘balls’ than will whet today’s appetite. After 55 pages of introduction, where this breakfast style is romanticized and where 1926 is cited as the turning point towards the monotony of bacon and eggs, the recipes reassured me that most of these ‘dishes’ are not lost but now enjoyed at other mealtimes. MF

Consider the Oyster: A Shucker’s Field Guide

Patrick McMurray

Madison Press, Toronto | 2007 | 191pp | \$19.95

Oyster enthusiasts usually love them so much they gush instead of choose their words. This Canadian restaurant owner is different, and he goes some way towards explaining varieties and the confusion of what’s-its-name depending on where you buy it. I learned that oyster shells should be recycled in chicken-feed for stronger eggshells. So when there are no oysters in the house, gaze on your eggs. MF

Rogues, Writers and Whores: Dining with the Rich and Infamous

Daniel Rogov

Toby Press | 2007 | 335pp | £14.99

This is a happy surprise from an Israeli restaurant critic, though many names ‘infamous’ for Rogov were not even famous to me. He describes writers, artists and politicians associated with certain restaurants and then gives a recipe or two that matches what they usually ordered. There is no pretence that the diners were cooks or even sophisticated in their tastes. However, a rapport emerges between mental juices and other jus, and it is reassuring. MF

Cornish Fishing and Seafood

Carol Trewin

Alison Hodge | 2006 | 256pp | £14.95

Though Britain now has much on ‘local food’, few local publishers have caught the spirit and produce books on local species and fishing styles. The pages of text are many different colours, perhaps too stridently seeking attention, but Trewin catches voices that are modest about their expertise. Megrim quotas, beam trawlers, bidding systems in the fish markets, milk gravy with mackerel – should we know these things? MF

The Scented Kitchen: Cooking with Flowers

Frances Bissell

Serif | 2007 | 232pp | £9.99

There is something Martha Stewart about flowers that dominate the food as you see it, but which lend little flavour and no texture to the dish. Bissell is too pragmatic for that sort of whimsy and would set a benchmark with saffron – usually a controlling presence as an ingredient. She has none of Patience Gray's or Paula Wolfert's pleasure in weedy flowers, but for Bissell the 'lack of wildflower meadows' nowadays forestalls her considering even clover. MF

Athenaeus: The Learned Banqueters, I

S. Douglas Olson, editor

Harvard UP | 2006 | 597pp | £14.50

The first volume of a new edition of Athenaeus, unrivalled source on ancient dining, begins incoherently because of gaps in the surviving text. This is no fault of Olson's, whose translation is as readable as humanly possible. The footnotes are useful though laconic; nice format; the index much shorter than in Gulick's old edition. Let's hope for a full index in volume VII. AKD

Athenaeus: The Learned Banqueters, II

S. Douglas Olson, editor

Harvard UP | 2006 | 582pp | £14.50

Olson works with commendable speed (or had it all up his sleeve). Volume II covers bread, salt fish, Macedonian weddings, Spartan communal meals, Persian royal dinners, conspicuous consumption in Ptolemaic Egypt, and much else. Coherence is now optimal, but the footnotes are still a bit thin. Essential for food historians. Excellent value. AKD

The Last Food of England: English Food, Its Past, Present and Future

Marwood Yeatman

Ebury | 2007 | 488pp | £25

This book proves there is a limit to talking about food in personal terms, even with great esprit. I am sure every reader wishes the margins of these pages were wider, as there is so much to scribble in them – and '!!!' are indispensable. But it is entirely engaging if you are not as po-faced as Yeatman is about his cream: 'When my wife and I are asked out to dinner, we take our own cream as a precaution.' Would you blink if your guest did that? MF

101 Facts You Should Know About Food

John Farndon

Icon Books | 2007 | 196pp | £6.99

Even for practised food-fact foragers this explains several things you may not have understood clearly. Cheese has more of those feel-good chemicals that give us a chocolate buzz? Organic farming worries about where to find as much manure as it needs? How does sulphur in your food relate to your cracked fingernails? A scattergun approach, perfect for the attention-deficient (maybe there is an amino acid that helps that). MF

Allergy-free Cookbook

Alice Sherwood

Dorling Kindersley | 2007 | 224pp | £14.99

This new author has done restricted diets a favour by pointing out that entire cuisines evolved without including the 'problem' food. She tells dairy-avoiders to use South-east Asian approaches, and gluten-sensitives to metaphorically 'live' in corn- or rice-based cultures like Mexico or Japan. Her recipes are novel approaches to the conundrums of substitution. Use gelatine to give an egg-wash gloss if you are allergic to eggs. MF

How to Cook for Food Allergies

Lucinda Bruce-Gardyne

Pan Macmillan | 2007 | 224pp | £16.99

If allergies are increasing exponentially today, so are cookbooks for the niche. This has a chapter on soya allergies and, if that's your problem, it warns against products that have been emulsified and stabilized with soya lecithin – indeed, against those containing 'vegetable starch', 'vegetable gum' and much else. Designed for home cooks who are forced to use raw ingredients for the first time, the tone is fundamental. MF

Epidemiologic Principles and Food Safety

Tamar Lasky, editor

OUP | 2007 | 254pp | £ 29.99

Newspaper editors are always nonplussed if their 'food writers' have nothing to say when the front-page story is Waitrose's terrine with listeria, or salmonella in chocolate bars. It would be helpful to newspaper readers if as a crisis erupts, we could ask for more technical detail – or knew the detail ourselves. For instance, between that 'free'-ranging bird's nest and the neat cardboard box that makes ovoids look so orderly, just where have those eggs been? Start here. MF

Bread Science: The Chemistry and Craft of Making Bread

Emily Buehler

Two Blue Books, N.C | 2006 | 256pp | \$24

Americans are discovering bread-making as if they had invented it – and their approach is fine if you are someone just discovering flour baking yourself. Here the science is drawn as a teacher would on a blackboard, and the author encourages ‘approximately’ measuring and timing. If you’ve not made bread before, begin with a recipe in a cookbook you trust on other grounds. This, however, might be the book you move on to. MF

London: Authentic Recipes Celebrating the Foods of the World

Sybil Kapoor

Bonnier Books | 2006 | 192pp | £20

Last year the Swedish company Bonnier bought the fact-filled American food magazine *Saveur*, so one hoped this food book from the publisher would be less ‘coffee-table’ and more brew. It is definitely a book for London hotel rooms: it is quietly readable, with photographs to compete with the TV’s, and the recipes are ones that room-service can provide. *Time-Life* did a series like this 30 years ago and those books now are sold on Ebay. MF

My Bombay Kitchen: Traditional and Modern Parsi Home Cooking

Niloufer Ichaporia King

University of California Press | 2007 | 338pp | £16.95

If you realize that by 2020 there may be as few as 25,000 Parsi in the world, it is amazing that this is the third contemporary Parsi cookbook in recent years – and this with an introduction by Alice Waters, which is inner-inner circle. Niloufer’s gift is for thoughtful paragraphs introducing the recipes she has adapted, originally from Iran, then Bombay, and now to her own life in San Francisco. There is no end of fascinating Parsi juggling with recipes like mulligatawny and Irish stew. MF

‘The Recipe: Science, Tradition and Folklore’

Giovanni Appendino

Gastronomic Sciences | no. 1 | 2007 | pp84-91 as a pdf on www.unisgjournal.it

This is an internal journal for Slow Food’s University of Gastronomic Sciences, and because most of the contributors are teaching there, the articles vary in quality. This piece, however, linking discoveries in chemistry to changes in recipes, is a nice piece of research into the history of taste evolution.

Appendino suggests that perhaps taste is now led by the 'additives' on which high-end restaurants depend. It's a new line of thought. MF

Conserving European Biodiversity in the Context of Climate Change

Michael B. Usher

Council of Europe, Strasbourg | 2007 | 61pp | 10euro

This monograph is unforgettable once read. Though it looks at the effects of climate change on all European vegetation, the implications for agriculture, grazing animals, bees... and for us worrying about losing the diversity of food we enjoy now, are overwhelming. It's not about prices rising; it is about species changing latitudes, requiring research into their adaptability to drier or wetter, or simply by dying, taking other species with them. MF

The Table is Laid: The Oxford Anthology of South Asian Food Writing

John Thieme and Ira Raja, editors
OUP | 2007 | 384pp | £18.99

'Food writing' here means fiction and poetry. There are random insights into tastes and eating customs but all on the personal level. If you are not someone who enjoys the musings of sensitive newspaper reporters who become restaurant critics, it would be hard to go this extra step and read about charismatic street vendors and guava orchards. Do give this as a Christmas gift, as its fellow-feeling fits that time of year. MF

The Herbalist in the Kitchen

Gary Allen

University of Illinois | 2007 | 483pp | \$65

Whether you want this book or the one below depends on you and not the authors. Both try to turn the use of herbs away from the curative and towards the culinary. If you want to understand the different uses for different mustard seeds, then this is a good reference. What I dislike is nobody telling us the limits of a plant, and whether using its leaves for tea implicitly means not tossing them as a salad herb. MF

Edible Wild Plants and Herbs

Pamela Michael

Grub Street | 2007 | 236pp | £20
Kitchen-people, especially those who have a car and expect to find new herbs on short hikes, will be reassured. It is a bit hopeful (no-one should ever chase a wild plant and expect to find it) but perhaps a third of the plants cited are ones that we find vaguely familiar but do not know enough to answer 'tisane or marinade?' This is an encouraging book – and sees the ransoms beyond the garlic. MF

'Animal Planet'

Harriet Ritvo

in *The Animals Reader* | Berg | 2007 | 129-140pp | £19.99

In a book of excerpts for students, this good piece from the *Journal of Environmental History* has been reprinted. It argues that while we romanticize the lives of wild animals, we are denigrating the lives of animals on farms. Ritvo describes how the first were destroyed to protect the second, and how 'harmonious relations' with nature are so variable. What livestock feeds on and how we demonize their diets – all strangely unsettling. More please. MF

Food and the City in Europe since 1800

Peter J. Atkins, Peter Lummel, Derek J. Oddy

Ashgate | 2007 | 260pp | £55

These 21 essays are the information that last year's London Food Strategy from the London Mayor's office never scratched. They look at food for cities as a problem of supply (and all the hoopla about cities finding 'local' food? – if only it were that easy). Some pieces talk about city-based food science as part of the picture: food integrity is also handled by cities - just not the way farmers handle it. Very good. MF

The Chocolate Tree: A Natural History of Cacao

Allen M. Young

U P of Florida | 2007 | 219pp | \$24.95

Among one-product books on food, this is as good as it gets. The author is a zoologist who sees how the natural world gravitates around a cacao plantation once it exists, the complications of cacao pollination, and the questions for rainforest conservationists. It gives an ordinary chocolate cake dimensions of personality that even coffee can't match. But it is serious science, not chat. MF

Tibetan Cooking: Recipes for Daily Living, Celebration and Ceremony

Elizabeth Esther Kelly

Snow Lion | 2007 | 108pp | \$19.95

The publisher promotes awareness of Tibet and the recipes try to make Tibet seem 'normal' (not very Chinese). But the chapter on 'offering cakes' – sculptural food of dried yak cheese and butter – and another on the small mountain of sweetened grain that accompanies the New Year, are why *PPC* readers would engage with Kelly. Do tackle the fried cookies too, the flower-shaped *kbapsey* are stunning. MF

The Political Economy of Genetically Modified Foods

Robert E. Evenson, Terri Raney, eds.

Elgar Reference | 2007 | 485pp | \$126.99

These 29 essays are type-shrunk from the journals where they first appeared, but that's the only 'shrinking' they do. This is an excellent full picture of food modifications, from its genius-technology to 'consumer acceptance' (which means the West's reaction) and to 'feeding' (which means third world countries). Biotechnology and the new moral issues do not feel any easier after reading this, but you are reassured that no one is taking these steps lightly. MF

The Apple Source Book: Particular Uses for Diverse Apples

Sue Clifford and Angela King

Hodder and Stoughton | 2007 | 303pp | £16.99

A stylish book on British varieties – how to find apple nurseries, how to cider the right ones, and make Mark Hix's gorgeous Guinness fritters. But the book has no illustrations of apple varieties that would challenge an apple-buyer, nor of the trees. It's rather like a book on dogs that congratulates you on wanting a dog – but generalizes about the breeds. 'Cox' gets several recipes but just one sentence for the unlikely East Londoner who created this hybrid with rattling pips. MF

Feeding People is Easy

Colin Tudge

Pari | 2007 | 186pp | £9.99

The author is an intelligent scientist who has written brilliant books, but this is from a soapbox. He wants a Worldwide Food Club that is anti-commerce, based on a non-profit website where we connect with food producers. It is a new agrarianism. However, since the book was published other commentators have kindly ignored his big solution. It's one voice of those 'concerned' idealists who stand outside the current food chain. MF

Agri-Culture: Reconnecting People, Land and Nature

Jules Pretty

Earthscan | 2007 | 261pp | £19.99

This covers the same food problems, as does the title above, but it is worth twice the price. (It was published in 2002 but now reappears revised.) The argument is partly that agriculture is multifunctional – joining the earth's natural capital with other kinds of capital, and with our profit. Example: how the medical values of food are expanding quickly and how farmers are part of that research. MF

Food for the Gods: South Indian Vegetarian Cooking

Diana Seshadri

Lulu (Bognor Regis) | 2007 | 227pp | £14.50 (available from the author, 44 Westingway, Bognor Regis, W. Sussex PO21 2XX)

The author is an amateur cook who lived 16 years with an Indian husband in southern India. What she is trying to do is heart-warming because it is uncompromising – but compromise is needed to make the recipes workable. She says this cuisine is 'virtually unknown in the West', which shows she has spent too many hours over the hot stove and too few researching. Yet, it does provide supplementary information if you already know the results she wants. MF

Beans: A History

Ken Albala

Berg | 2007 | 247pp | £12.99

Single-story food studies can't possibly get much broader than beans – almost a category like Shellfish, as species vary so widely. But Albala decided that if he ate beans every day for a year, he would get on top of the complex tastes – and such dedication is exceptional in any single-food books I've read. Picking, hulling and adjusting the heat puts him on first-name terms with exotic beans like lablabs. If I could buy lablabs I'd introduce myself. MF

Julie and Julia

Julie Powell

Penguin Fig Tree | 2006 | 307pp | £14.99

This is not a book for most of PPC's sophisticated readers – the amateur cook Julie following 524 recipes of Julia Child's – but I think it is a sign of things to come. Books recounting someone's clumsy but heartfelt experiences with a chef's recipes – the tiny kitchen versus the well-equipped one, for instance – are sure to follow on this American success. And because we feel better about ourselves if we can 'do as well' as Julia Child, it puts another religious dimension to food. MF

Questions of Taste: The Philosophy of Wine

Barry C. Smith, ed.

Signal (Oxford) | 2007 | 222pp | £12.99

Taste is a question that wine writers handle much better than food writers, and this book (almost ignored in the general press) is a sharp 'tongue' on the subject. Ten essays on what we think we know or admire aesthetically when we speak of an enjoyable 'taste' might raise the level of food criticism – if food critics are listening. These objectivity vs subjectivity arguments are to be sipped. MF

The Post-Petroleum Survival Guide and Cookbook

Albert Bates

New Society (Canada) | 2006 | 237pp | \$22.95

I had thought I would take against this small eco-ness, but in fact its advice on what food-makers will do at the point of 'peak oil' (once cooking and refrigeration become very expensive as energy costs) is excellent. The degree to which people should anticipate 'peak oil' is the question not answered but this is sooner-rather-than-later advice. But if you wonder about food's oil-energy issues, it is a how-to book with some answers. Both how-to and don't do. MF

Food, Culture and Community

Moving Worlds Journal | 2006 | 203pp |

email mworlds@leeds.ac.uk

This University of Leeds publication is rather like a party where you drift erratically between conversations with guests. Some contributors focus on Alan Davidson's legacies, and the rest take his approach. It does show, however, signs of effort that Alan himself never showed. Ove Fossa's 'Sometimes a Sardine is Just a Sardine' is a fine piece. If you can find a copy and open a bottle of wine before you open the book, it is all congenial. MF

A History of World Agriculture

Marcel Mazoyer and Laurence Roudart

Earthscan | 2006 | 528pp | £22.95

None of us have this background. Of course, to understand what 'food prices' indicate, it should be necessary to see how historically they do fall, as well as rise (as your stockbroker must caution you). How does agricultural equipment evolve and change what we eat? – well, it is not a panel you should sit on until you have read this survey. Technology also comes into the problem of the book itself, which was published in 2001 in French. We needed it then at least as much as now. MF

The Mushroom Feast

Jane Grigson

Grub Street | 2007 | 305pp | £12.99

This 1975 title has been out of print too long, and reappears with implicit sidelines to new environmental concerns. Grigson notes that most mushrooms must develop together with forestry (so as our forests disappear...). And hothouse mushrooms are 'insipid' without onion. There were no 'primitive' mushroom tastes – the 17th century ate them first – because their earthiness is counter-intuitive. The recipes are now classics but we've used them for more than 30 years and would think that. MF

Good Things

Jane Grigson

Grub Street | 2007 | 325pp | £14.99

This 1971 title is when Grigson took our hearts. It covers the whole meal from 'warmed through' red herrings to 'eau de vie de poire' – and yet it stands up as probably one of the most genuine list of recipes ever written. Nothing here is included because the editor said 'What about cauliflower?' And nobody today, apart from a television chef, could take such an ironic, individualistic approach to parsnips, walnuts or food as a whole. MF

The Oxford Companion to American Food and Drink

Andrew Smith, ed.

OUP | 2007 | 693pp | £25

Short notices are embarrassed to discuss books so long and thorough as this one. It is different from the *Oxford Companion to Food* in many ways – it gives entries to recipes like 'Church's Chicken', to genres like 'Dips', to subjects like 'Kitchens' and to manufacturers like 'General Mills'. In other words, it is about shoppers' food, rather than Alan Davidson's 'cabinet of curiosities' and science. The best news is that readers do not have to choose between them – and if you're American, don't. MF

Agri-Food System Dynamics: pathways to sustainability in an era of uncertainty

John Thompson, et al

STEPS | 2007 | 78pp | free pdf and from www.ids.ac.uk/bookshop

This University of Sussex research explains the bind that agriculture created for itself, and how to re-accept it as a skilled 'performance'. It is not a routine. The booklet celebrates the industrial Green Revolution that took the edge off world-hunger (though other new-green organizations don't). It sees what happens next as building on that Revolution – not recreating

the problems that it solved. It also uses that brave phrase 'science of the grey', acknowledging pluses and minuses. MF

Recipes from an Urban Village

Charmain O'Brien and Dargah Hazrat Inayat Khan

The Hope Project (India) | 2003 | 148pp | Rs 295

O'Brien spent four months with extremely poor Indian Muslim women who with one pot and one flame conjured up generous food for large families. The recipes are not easy – nor is a theme about cooking as a pleasure, not a duty, and emphasizing the differences between that culture and ours. LC

Cooking with Booze: From Beer Batter to Vodka Jelly

George Harvey Bone

Snowbooks | 2007 | 144pp | £9.99

In these days when flavours struggle, it seems strange that the 'bite' of alcohol usually remains at the *coq au vin* level, or the trifle's. This is by a wine-trade man who turned teetotaler and came back to these flavours by way of his recipes. Traditional recipes like 'Black Butter' (cider in surfeit, boiled with liquorice) and a malt whisky dressing for cheese salads will endear him to *PPC* readers. MF

Creole

Babette de Rozières

Phaidon | 2007 | 359pp | £24.95

This is one of those valuable 'half-authentic' cookbooks that was published in French and then well (but not thoroughly) adapted to an English audience. I enjoyed the conch recipes but for most of us, it is a mental pleasure. Caramelizing the chicken before adding it to a stew, or blending a saffron sauce in which crabmeat provides the back-note...? What is do-able in the West Indies seems high-end gastronomy in Western restaurants. MF

Knife Skills Illustrated

Peter Hertzmann

WW Norton | 2007 | 256pp | £19.99

Most food writers do not see the limits of expertise, and that more home-cooks grow frustrated with the 'how to' techniques than 'where to buy'. This is basic instruction – and I'd trim my artichokes differently, but at least this is one way. There is no acknowledgment that Americans (like this author) not only cut up animal carcasses in their own style, but also chicken bodies. MF

A Little Bit of Butter

Peter Foynes

Cork Butter Museum <www.corkbutter.museum> | approx. 36pp | 2007

The postcards of Irish butter wrappers from this Museum are must-haves for this year's correspondence. This bright yellow booklet of more wrappers and random quotations is charm itself but doesn't tell you much about butter. TJ

Honey and Dust: Travels in Search of Sweetness

Piers Moore Ede

Bloomsbury | 2006 | 294pp | £8.99

Of all the recent books on honey, this is in some ways the most evocative. Sensitive travel writing alert to fragility of tastes, habitats and ways of life: and convinced of the absolute value of honey. Italy, the Middle East and the Sub-continent are the major subjects. TJ

The Entertaining Cookbook

Shirley Wilkes, The River House, The Strand, Lympstone, Devon EX8 5EY (Shirley@foodwithflair.co.uk) | 2006 | 100pp

Proceeds from sales go to Hospice Care Great Britain. This charity fundraiser, which won prizes in its category, is by the former cook at the River House Restaurant,

Lympstone in Devon. The recipes are redolent of the '60s and '70s and none the worse for that. Indeed some of my old family favourites from Bath reappear and give extra special pleasure. TJ

A Curry Book

Henrietta Hervey

Excellent Press | 2006 | 48pp | £8.99

This is one of a series of 'Ludlow Cookbooks' from David Burnett's small press in that town. It is a reprint of a short but pungent book called *Anglo-Indian Cookery at Home* by a lady lately returned from Madras, and first published in 1895. An engaging style and good, do-able recipes. TJ

A Sausage Book

Helen Saberi

Excellent Press | 2006 | 60pp | £8.99

Another in the series, and really useful too. Combining pertinent historical extracts and a variety of late 20th-century English household wizard wheezes, Helen Saberi has solved many a problem about what to do with sausages. As the bought varieties are so often repellent, a transforming recipe is just the ticket. TJ

A Pudding Book

Helen Saberi

Excellent Press | 2006 | 60pp | £8.99

Number three in this group, it's awfully useful. For puddings, read sweet dishes with a liberal quantity of starch (flour, rice, vermicelli, etc.), cooked every which way. It's the answer to cold, wet winter days when the first two courses have been insubstantial and a tired frame needs building up. TJ

Good Cookery from Wales 1867

Lady Llanover

Excellent Press | 2006 | 60pp | £8.99

Here, the 'Ludlow Cookbooks' have reprinted the recipe appendix to Lady Llanover's *The First Principles of Good Cookery*. That book, you may recall, consists largely of a dialogue between *The Hermit* and *The Traveller* which adumbrates the principles, but does not give much detailed instruction. It brings back fond memories of the late Bobby Freeman, Lady Llanover's most fervent modern advocate, Welsh restaurateur and writer. TJ

Countryman's Cooking

W.M.W. Fowler

Excellent Press | 2006 | 158pp | £16.95

The Excellent Press scored a culinary bull's-eye when it rediscovered this gem from the Sixties and reprinted it so sympathetically. A former pilot and sportsman, Fowler expresses the social and gender prejudices of his time most entertainingly and eloquently, while at the same time showing himself prescient in his dislike of aspects of the modern in the English countryside. It's the sort of book to read aloud to an attentive family, making you giggle and think simultaneously. Not many cookbooks do that, alas. Brilliant. TJ

Harewood House Christmas Recipes

compiled by Peter Brears

Harewood House Trust <www.harewood.org> | 24 pp | 2006

A nice pamphlet for the celebration of Christmas as if it was yesteryear. Well-trying recipes from an expert, mainly from Yorkshire or the house itself, and some instructions for sweets and decorations into the bargain. Slight in scale, but ample in ambition for the family-centred cook. TJ

LONGER REVIEWS

Christian Volbracht, compiler, editor and publisher: *Myko Libri, Die Bibliothek der Pilzbücher*. Limited edition signed by the compiler, Hamburg 2006. E-mail: Mykolibri@aol.com. Copies cost 140 euros and may be obtained via the extremely informative website: www.mykolibri.de

Myko Libri, a work mainly of interest to book-collectors, is an impeccably produced, carefully-edited bibliographic catalogue of books, pamphlets and manuscripts on fungi from the end of the 15th century to the middle of the 20th currently in the possession of bibliophile and fungi-fancier Christian Volbracht. As the avowed result of 30 years in single-minded pursuit of what booksellers describe as the *rara, rarissima* and the to-all-intents unfindable, you will understand that identification of the edible and avoidance of the inedible is not the general thrust. It is, not to put to fine a point on it, a beautiful and costly statement of possession.

Undeniably handsome, weighty – more than 500 pages coming in at just over 2.5 kilos when placed on the kitchen scales – printed on high quality paper, it comes equipped with silk headings and ribbon-marker and is bound in forest-brown with a jacket in mushroom-cap cream. Of some 2,300 mycological works in Herr Volbracht's library, about a third are listed in the bibliography. Arrangement is in alphabetical order of principal author. Titles are given in their original language along with subtitles (the only indication of the contents), bibliographic information and collector's annotations in German. A fair proportion of the works are of German origin – reflecting, it must be said, the interest taken in fungi among German-speaking nations – though French, Italian, Spanish, Russian and English are also well-represented. Apart from what can be deduced from the title, no indication is given as to whether a work includes recipes. The work includes some thousand randomly-chosen illustrations of frontispieces, covers and identification sheets, many of which are very fine indeed and some of which may be of interest to food-historians. Of particular beauty is a plate depicting *Boletus* identified as *aeneus* (possibly *B. aereus* listed by Roger Phillips as rare but edible and excellent) from Rabenhorst's *Mycologia Europea* of 1869–82 ('rarissimum', says the collector).

In his introductory pages (English translation provided as slip-in), Herr Volbracht's attributes his lifelong hunger for the elusive printed page (and not a few even more elusive manuscripts) to the pursuit in childhood of the equally-elusive forest mushroom. One must assume the work to be an

indication that the collection is now complete. And when the collector achieves completion – the perennial lover’s problem – what then? The art-collector endows a gallery. The book-collector endows a book.

There can be no doubt that a catalogue of a collection as comprehensive as Herr Volbracht’s is of value to librarians and custodians of works on natural history as well as fellow bibliophiles. Chief among these is Joachim Schliemann, owner of what his rival collector describes as the ‘famous’ Schliemann collection of mycological writings, who concedes in the publicity material for *Myko Libri* – brief quotations from admirers – that the works in Herr Volbracht’s library represent ‘the most important collection of mushroom books in the world’. And if there can be any doubt of the superiority of one collector’s activities over another’s, this bibliography provides the proof. In spades.

ELISABETH LUARD

Veronica F. and Philip N. O’Donoghue, editors, *Georgian Cookery, Recipes and Remedies from 18th Century Totteridge*. Published by the authors, New Barnet, 2007: ISBN 978-0-9556555-0-0: 96 pp., p/b, £9.50. Available from 21, Holyrood Road, New Barnet EN5 1DQ.

This little book is a transcription of a mid 18th-century manuscript of 133 household receipts. The editors reason that the unknown compiler of the manuscript was from the Totteridge area, north of London. Apart from three receipts (for ‘a fine blackin for shoos’, ‘to Prent [Prevent] ye Fly taking Turnups’ and one for Joint worms) all the recipes are concerned with either food or drink or with medical matters. In their useful introduction the editors note that many of the receipts can be found in similar or identical forms in earlier publications such as E. Smith and Kidder. Having retained the original spelling of each receipt, they have added a modern interpretation and a useful index and combined glossary. The book includes two appendices from the manuscript – a list of costs for teaching a girl in 1742–1743 and a limited family tree for 1705–1786. We are told that 21 pages had been cut from the original book and it is suggested that they may have been removed in the 19th century for prudish reasons as, with the exception of one receipt, it lacks any relating to ‘women’s problems’.

The manuscript’s writer recorded several cookery and medical receipts more typical of the previous century and few if any of these recipes will surprise those familiar with household books of the late 17th and early 18th centuries. Though most of the medical receipts rely on herbs and other

plants, some rely on ideas that might be considered folk-lore or magic, for example, receipt 24, 'A Nother Rect for ye Piles' prescribes beating a dried shoe to a powder; this is the basis of one in Robert Boyle's *Medicinal Experiments* of 1688–1694 – one of dozens of cures for haemorrhoids in Boyle's book. While distillation is pervasive in most household receipt books, frequently required in the making of medicinal waters, here they are absent, suggesting that the household didn't possess a still – something wealthier families of the period would be expected to own. This probably reflected the original author's relatively modest social status.

Generally, the editors have researched this book well but on occasions their interpretations are not always reliable – for example, receipt 92, 'to pickle pursle' has been transcribed as pickle parsley rather than purslane, receipt 122 refers to the corn of a stone horse leg for which the leg is interpreted as a 'probably a hard natural formation' and should refer to some sort of growth on a stallion's foot and 'grains of parodice' in receipt 125 should be transcribed as meleguetta pepper grains.

The book may prove to be a useful addition to local-studies researchers and those investigating the domestic lives of the rural middle class of the mid-18th century.

DAVE POTTER

Once more, we have run out of space and yet still have piles of books for notice, including all the Christmas round-ups and other things. They will have to be held over to the next issue which I promise to deliver more quickly than this last one.