Derek J. Oddy, *From Plain Fare to Fusion Food: British Diet from the 1890s to the 1990s*, Woodbridge: the Boydell Press, 2003, pp. xiv +269, [price], ISBN 0 85115 934 0

Emeritus professor of economic and social history at the University of Westminster, Derek J. Oddy has spent forty years writing and editing studies of diet and health in Britain and Europe, with an emphasis on economics and food policy. From the collection he edited with Derek Miller in 1976, *The Making of the Modern British Diet,* to that he compiled with John Burnett in 1994, *The Origins and Development of Food Policies in Europe,* Oddy has pursued his project with remarkable focus. *From Plain Fare to Fusion Food* is the product of an expertise honed over much more than a generation, and it shows.

The opening chapter, 'Plain fare: diet during industrialisation' successfully summarises in ten pages the salient aspects of the British diet before and amid the changes wrought by mechanisation, mass production, mass transit and urban growth. Chapter two is a production-oriented account of 'Food supply, shops and food safety, 1890 to 1914'. The subsequent chapter, 'Nutrition, environment and health before 1914' complements its predecessor in treating the facts of food consumption. The objective prose through which the appalling facts of British diet before the first war are relayed is occasionally punctuated with vivid and well-chosen quotations such as the following from the 42nd L.G.B. *Annual Report* on Infant Mortality:

> In one or two-roomed homes where the only storage for food is a cupboard in the recess by the side of the fire, it is extremely difficult, and sometimes almost impossible, to keep milk in a fit state for an infant's food, especially in the summer. (p. 49)

Notable too is the excellence of Oddy's statistical analyses contained in 49 tables and two figures. Oddy has collated data from a large number of scientific studies to offer factual accounts of, in this chapter, pounds and ounces of bread, potatoes, sugar, cereals, fats and meat consumed weekly per head between 1887 and 1913 (p. 56), arranged by income (p.59) and by gender (p. 62).

'The Great War and its aftermath, 1914 to 1921: discontent on the food front' examines a period in which food became particularly highly charged politically. The various strategies devised to govern its consumption included voluntary restraint, and subsequent rationing, which had the injurious effect of reducing diet to a turn-of the-century standard while improving distribution to a limited extent.

Chapter five, 'Food and Food Technology in the Interwar Years' explores increased production capacity, the growth of dietary supplements and vitamins, the consolidation of supply into multiple retailers, the importance of refrigeration technology for the sale of dairy products and innovations in frozen foods. The innovations in branding and marketing foods made during this period are introduced here through a discussion of the use of emergent materials and techniques such as cellophane and canning. The benefits of technological development were limited by a reliance on imported foods. Nor did technology successfully ameliorate nutritional privation as shown in Oddy's chapters 'The Question of Malnutrition between the Wars' and 'The Second World War: the Myth of a Planned Diet, 1939-1950'. Advancements in nutritional science showed what some people could not countenance - that malnutrition could occur in Britain - while not wholly eradicating the problem. Oddy demonstrates that the interplay between various players including the Ministry of Health, the Medical Research Committee (previously Council), the Economic Advisory Council and the British Medical Association's Nutrition Committee was erratic at best. Thus the country was unprepared in terms of food policy for the Second World War, during which an emphasis on carbohydrates was not a successful way to maintain the nation's health even while reduced sugar consumption was a positive outcome of rationing. The British Restaurants set up for those workers without a staff canteen offered food off-the-ration but remained unpopular due to public unfamiliarity with eating outside the home. In retrospect, however, the increase in communal eating in a variety of contexts was deemed to have had a positive impact on lingering malnutrition.

'The Revival of Choice: Food Technology, Retailing and Eating in Postwar Britain' is a reprise of chapter five and opens with the maligned housewife with a tin opener, and continuing experiments with freezing and chilling techniques. Despite the continuance of some rationing

until 1954, openness to novel forms of consumption flourished. In 1950, Elizabeth David published *Mediterranean Food* while Constance Spry and Rosemary Hume reopened their Cordon Bleu cookery school. The next year, the Festival of Britain introduced its visitors to the milk bar, the *Good Food Guide* was launched and Elizabeth David's *French Country Cooking* appeared. Hume and Spry subsequently collaborated on their own guides to cooking and entertaining, and coffee bars and supermarkets proliferated with the latter shifting the balance of power away from manufacture to retailing. The effects of a demographic shift towards smaller households and the continuance of paid work by women outside the household, combined with the conjunction of frozen foods and domestic refrigerators, were amplified by the development of television advertising from 1955 onwards. The development of motorway service stations from 1959 (part of a larger trend in eating away from institutional providers to wholly commercial ones) and the acceptance of microwave technology in the 1980s fuelled the spread of the ready meal. Chapter nine on nutrition since the Second World War notes several symptoms of affluence including the increase in energy from fat rather than from carbohydrates, the increase in life expectancy and height and the spread of dieting among young women and girls. Also noted are an inexplicable increase in food poisoning, steadily from the late 1960s and dramatically during the 1990s, and the inadequacy of health education.

Although authoritative, this book is not as inclusive as its title. Oddy admits that 'vegetarianism is barely mentioned, there is almost no reference to food allergies or food fads and even "organic food" is largely ignored' (p. xi). These trends are dismissed as 'various minority interests' but for once, this is merely asserted, not proven. Readers are asked to accept that vegetarianism has steadily increased its constituency over the period of Oddy's career without becoming anything more than a minority interest, and we must discount the hype around organics as merely that. Or must we? Oddy himself admits in this conclusion that 'this demand for alternatives has become more than a mere crank fad, as the increasing allocation of shelf space for organically produced foods has demonstrated'. (p. 234).

Furthermore, Oddy relentlessly pursues empirical evidence of production and consumption, but consumers do not ingest food and drink alone. Cultural historians will be aware that in the realm of signs where ideas and myths about food are forged, vegetarianism and the organic movements are writ large. Oddy's 16 plates are mainly advertisements from the Advertising Archives and cartoons from Punch, so he cannot be said to have wholly ignored representations and discourses surrounding food. However, in its failure adequately to engage with recent cultural trends Oddy's narrative can seem old fashioned, for example in the cynical critique of TV chefs: what they 'offered as "Modern British cooking" was not based on traditional family dishes but rather on an invented, plate-decorative cooking drawn from restaurant practice, and quite unlike the traditional roasts and pies for which Britain was famous' (p. 232). This almost curmudgeonly view continues in the author's cursory treatment of foods derived from wider ethnic diversity in Britain, and a consequent openness to novelty in eating. In Oddy's critique of 'mixtures of Pacific, Indian and European dishes' swathed in 'packaging, designer artwork, printing, aluminium foil, plastic and, when that was removed, they [consumers] found food bulked out with water, extenders, colourings, phosphates and other additives' (p.233), his use of the phrase 'fusion food' is purely derisory.

In this definitive study, exhaustive archival research of the period up to 1950 gives way in later chapters to a more subjective approach and techniques of cultural analysis that do not match Oddy's skill with statistical and documentary sources. Oddy is shown to have succumbed to the difficulties he refers to in his preface associated with writing the history of the recent past but this is nevertheless an important, scholarly and useful social history.

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(1,388 words.)