

The 2012 Oxford Symposium on Food and Cookery attracted some 200 participants including attendees from throughout Europe and more than a dozen countries including China, Japan, South East Asia, Australia, Russia and North and South America. When we assembled in St. Catherine's College on Friday 6th July 2012, the subject under discussion was "Wrapped and Stuffed Foods."

Our Friday keynote address - delivered for the second year running in association with the Jane Grigson Memorial Trust - was provided by chef-restaurateur David Thompson, author of the seminal books on Thai food and the street-foods of South East Asia, illuminating the traditions and sacred rituals of Thai cooking followed by a dinner under the supervision of chef-proprietor and FT columnist Rowley Leigh of London's Café Anglais.

Our opening plenary address by Laura Shapiro - writer, journalist and Julia Child's biographer, bravely fighting alaryngitis to deliver it, studied the Pillsbury Bakeoff phenomenon in the US as an amusing reflection of the progressive commercialisation of the baking process (and the prevalence of stuffed dishes in the competition). Later in the day Professor Harry West of SOAS introduced the first trial of a new plenary panel-led group discussion format, which was a great success with the open microphone approach working brilliantly for the entire Symposium audience. On Sunday morning, Professor Barbara Santich of the University of Adelaide fascinated everyone with an exploration of the Aboriginal use of paperbark as a cooking-container.

Parallel paper-sessions on Saturday and Sunday included 42 papers, which variously addressed the origin of haggis, Europe's many varieties of air-cured sausage, Rabbinical kreplach, lasagna, yufka, dolma and the use of that most energy efficient and frugal of portable ovens, the Balkan *gastra*. There was a discussion and tasting of Danish bog-butter - butter buried in peat for conservation purposes; and a paper on the therapeutic properties of wrapping *dolma* for the women of Anatolia was followed by a study of the Korean use of food-wrappers from fish skin to lotus leaf. The origins of certain types of Chinese dumpling as possible substitutes for human sacrifice contrasted with a discussion of commercial production in Russian of Siberian pel'meni, stuffed dough-balls. Discussion of Samuel Pepys' venison pasties was balanced by explorations of the origins of

Jewish knish and the introduction of Eastern European *pierogi* into the US as snack-food.

Meals throughout the weekend were designed, as usual, to illuminate the subject under discussion: notably a lunch based on artisan German artisan products including würst, beer and the finest saurkraut, and a Saturday night Turkish feast of stuffed vegetables with the enthusiastic participation of the Gaziantep Chamber of Commerce. Sunday's lunch featured sandwich recipes submitted by some of the Trustees – about some of which the less said the better!

Light-hearted highlights of the weekend were a fundraising Mad Hatter's tea-party to mark the anniversary of the publication of *Alice in Wonderland* and a head-wrapping event devised by Trustee and performance-artist Alicia Rios. Additional highlights included Trustees Anissa Helou and Jane Levi's introductory film on international stuffing and wrapping techniques, a demonstration of extraordinary manual dexterity; and to close, performance artist Bobby Baker entertained Symposiasts at the final session to an interactive food-performance, *Lemon Lips*, questioning our ability to see, feel and taste.

As a result of last year's fundraising activities, most of our past papers are now downloadable free from the net, while symposiasts and others who share our interests are encouraged to keep in contact with one another and exchange ideas through participation on both Facebook and Twitter. We saluted Tom Jaine of Prospect Books for his generosity in making the digitisation of past Papers possible, and in the subsequent Friends fundraising drive, focussed in particular on planned enhancements to the online paper and our website, raised almost £6,000.

The Oxford Symposium, mindful of its primary function as an independent forum (the only one of its kind) for discussion of the world's foodways in the light of the past as well as the present, now enters its fourth decade with renewed vigour at a time when the wisdom of the globalisation of the world's food-supply is increasingly called into question. We are currently directing our energies to a complete redesign of our website under the direction of Trustee and award-winning designer Jake Tilson while developing our presence in the electronic media. We see this as a method of increasing our influence and reaching a wider audience

for what lies at the heart of our activities, the gathering of minds which takes place throughout the weekend itself.

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