

**OVER A RED-HOT STOVE**

By His Majesty's



Royal Letters Patent.

## ROASTING JACKS,

*Upon an entire new & much approved principle, Constructed so as to require neither Line, Weights, or Pulleys, the Works being all inclosed, are protected from Injury, Irregularity, and the weather, likewise not liable to be out of order consequently well adapted for the use of Ships & Camps. The Advantages peculiar to the PATENT ROASTING JACK are, that it will act Vertically and Horizontally at the same time.*

It is particularly recommended for Kitchens & every Description.



W. Greenman, Des. & Sc. 17, Watergate Lane, St. John's Lane, London.



D 2 183

**HENRY MARRIOTT, PATENTEE,**

*No. 61, Fleet Street.*

**FURNISHING IRONMONGER,**

To the

Honorable CORPORATION of the CITY of LONDON.

Frontispiece. 1806 advertisement for Henry Marriott's patent jack. This mechanism is set up here to run two horizontal spits and three dangle-spits. Despite its name, no patent exists for Marriott's jack. Sarah Sophia Banks Collection, BM 85.95. Photograph courtesy of the British Museum. See pp. 99–124 below.

# OVER A RED-HOT STOVE

ESSAYS IN EARLY COOKING TECHNOLOGY

LEEDS SYMPOSIUM ON FOOD HISTORY  
'FOOD AND SOCIETY' SERIES

edited by  
IVAN DAY



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## NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS

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## FOREWORD

*C. Anne Wilson*

This book was inspired by two one-day symposia of the Leeds Symposium on Food History held in York in 2004 and 2005 and titled ‘Open Hearth Cookery’ and ‘Baking: from Cereal Crops to Oven-baked Goods’ respectively. Four of the chapters are based directly upon talks given at those two meetings. Of the remaining two, one has been contributed by Peter Brears and the other, on the subject of outdoor ox-roasts, has been added by Ivan Day himself.

At our Symposium on 24 April 2004 we also heard Sally Grainger speak on Roman cookery carried out over hot ashes, and in the afternoon she gave us a practical demonstration in the courtyard of nearby Fairfax House. In an adjacent area John Hudson showed us how to recreate some historic English recipes cooked over a chafing dish; while at our indoor venue Ivan offered us hands-on inspection of original spits and other hearth furnishings from earlier centuries.

At our Symposium on 16 April 2005 the first speaker was John Letts who told us about the wheat varieties of late medieval England, some of which are still grown in remote parts of Spain and Turkey. He had sourced seedcorn from there, and now cultivates the same cereals in southern England and tests the resultant flour in baking. Later, Malcolm Thick spoke about the types of bread in regular use in eighteenth-century England; and we also heard the talks by Laura Mason and Susan McLellan Plaisted, on which their chapters in this book are based, and another one by Ivan Day entitled ‘Pies, pasties and pastry.’

Previous volumes in this series ‘Food and Society’ have been issued as follows:

1. *'Banqueting Stuffe': the Fare and Social Background of the Tudor and Stuart Banquet*, ed. C.A. Wilson (1986 Symposium), 1991.
2. *The Appetite and the Eye: Visual Aspects of Food and its Presentation within their Historic Context*, ed. C.A. Wilson (1987 Symposium), 1991.
3. *Traditional Food East and West of the Pennines*, ed. C.A. Wilson (1988 Symposium), 1991.
4. *Waste Not, Want Not: Food Preservation in Britain from Early Times to the Present Day*, ed. C.A. Wilson (1989 Symposium), 1991.
5. *Liquid Nourishment: Potable Foods and Stimulating Drinks*, ed. C.A. Wilson (1990 Symposium), 1993.
6. *Food for the Community: Special Diets for Special Groups*, ed. C.A. Wilson (1991 Symposium), 1993.
7. *Luncheon, Nuncheon and Other Meals*, ed. C.A. Wilson (1992 Symposium), 1994. Now republished in paperback as *Eating with the Victorians* (Sutton, 2004).
8. *The Country House Kitchen, 1650–1900: Skills and Equipment for Food Provisioning*, ed. P.A. Sambrook and P. Brears (double volume for 1993 and 1994 Symposia), 1996.
9. *The Country House Kitchen Garden, 1600–1950: How Produce was Grown and How it was Used*, ed. C.A. Wilson (1995 Symposium), 1998.
10. *Feeding a City: York*, ed. E. White (double volume for 1997 and 1998 Symposia), 2000.
11. *Food and the Rites of Passage*, ed. L. Mason (1999 Symposium), 2002.
12. *The English Cookery Book*, ed. E. White (2001 Symposium), 2004.
13. *The English Kitchen*, ed. E. White (2003 Symposium), 2007.

The first six volumes were published by Edinburgh University Press and are now out of print; the following three by Sutton Publishing (two of them in association with The National Trust); the volumes from no. 10 have been published by Prospect Books.

## INTRODUCTION

*Ivan Day*

This book is based on papers presented at the seventeenth Leeds Symposium on Food History, but also contains two supplementary essays. In addition to the lectures, the day's activities included a handling session of period cookery equipment kindly made possible by the staff of the York Castle Museum. A number of original period spitjacks, spits and other objects relating to hearth cookery were examined at close quarters.

Before the television set usurped its role during the mid-twentieth century, the kitchen hearth was the main focus of family life. It was not only the place where food was cooked, but also the main gathering point where tales were told, clothes dried and cold hands warmed. It is too easily forgotten that the Latin word *focus* means 'hearth' or 'fireplace'. Human beings have been drawn to the 'focus' since the very earliest times as a centre for the exchange of ideas. Without it, our development as a social species would not have been the same.

In terms of food preparation the hearth was a converging point for countless activities. Not only were meat and fish broiled over the embers and roasted in its radiant heat, but dough was proved in its warmth and bread toasted in front of its flames. Generations of nameless cooks have toiled in the heat of the fireplace and it is from their almost infinite pool of experience that the art and technology of cookery emerged.

In the papers given here, David Eveleigh sets the scene by considering the development of the kitchen range. From the early modern period to the rise of gas and electricity he shows how the range allowed the key cooking activities of roasting, boiling and baking to be carried out in a single place. He demonstrates how the evolution of the range reflected that of the wider industrial revolution. Early ranges were designed and made by artisan blacksmiths, but as the Enlightenment unfolded, important

inventors, master iron founders and cooks turned their attention to improving this essential domestic appliance. His paper is illustrated with numerous photographs and images, many of them published here for the first time.

Perhaps the most archetypal ‘focus’ of all is that of the outdoor bonfire. Food cooked by the heat of an open air blaze is an elemental form of cookery enjoyed by all. Camp-fire cookery still retains its powerful appeal as a kind of culinary ancestor worship in the guise of the modern barbecue. One heroic type of outdoor cookery formerly used to celebrate key local and national events was the roasting of entire oxen. Ivan Day examines this ancient tradition and traces its roots to charitable events and fairs where very large numbers of people required feeding. He considers its social history and shows how a material culture emerged as the practice was used in the nineteenth century, not just for celebrating occasions like royal jubilees, but also for canal openings and even miners’ strikes. His essay is illustrated with many rare broadside woodcuts, early photographs and objects that have never been published before.

Peter Brears moves our attention from the ox roast in the street to the culture surrounding the royal baron of beef in the palace kitchen. He focuses on the kitchens of Windsor Castle and illustrates the development of the royal roasting ranges from the time of Edward II to the Great War. By the middle of the eighteenth century the ‘royal baron of beef’ had become a sacred symbol of national unity, and the English roasting cook treated this gargantuan cut of meat with the reverence it deserved. Cookery on such a vast scale required a specialist technology and a highly organised kitchen staff. The smoke-jacks at Windsor and the skilled cooks who used them were second to none.

Proceeding from this, Ivan Day turns his attention to the clockwork devices once commonly employed in this country for open fire roasting. These ‘culinary robots’ were among the first labour-saving devices to appear in the early modern period kitchen and transformed the working lives of many kitchen servants. He offers a basic taxonomy of the various kinds, but examines in detail the evolution of one type in particular, the wind-up spring-jack. Like the development of the kitchen range, the story of this device demonstrates the increasing ingenuity of inventors, clockmakers and entrepreneurs as the early Industrial Revolution unfolded. Once an expensive item found only in the kitchens of the wealthy, cheap spring-

driven jacks eventually made roasting technology possible even in the humble cottage kitchen.

If the Roast Beef of Old England was the chief celebration dish of a nation of cattle farmers, wheaten bread was its principal staple. To make good bread, the baker needed yeast, which we now know to be a living organism, but which our ancestors saw as a mysterious substance with almost supernatural powers, thus one of its early names, 'Godes good'. Laura Mason addresses the history of barm and leavens and illuminates how these essential ingredients were strongly linked to that other important British domestic activity, the brewing of malt liquors. She traces the history of leavening agents, from the Anglo-Saxon *beorma* skimmed from the surface of fermenting ale, to nineteenth-century chemical substitutes, such as pearl ash and hartshorn.

Once the dough had been proved, preferably in a warm place near the hearth, there would be no bread without an oven. In the final chapter, Susan McLellan Plaisted discusses some of her own practical experience of baking in historic wood-fired ovens in the United States. One of the first ovens to be used in America was a clay oven brought from England by the early Jacobean settlers of Jamestown. She goes on to show how other equipment, techniques and baking recipes from the Old World influenced the baking practices of early colonists .

Time and space did not allow an examination of many other facets of hearth cookery and this publication cannot pretend to be a complete guide to what is an enormous subject.



*Figure 1. A typical eighteenth-century roasting range from Powell's Complete Book of Cookery, c.1770.*