

Her Edit

FOR THE INDEPENDENTLY MINDED WOMAN



Issue Three
January/February 2014

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The Food issue

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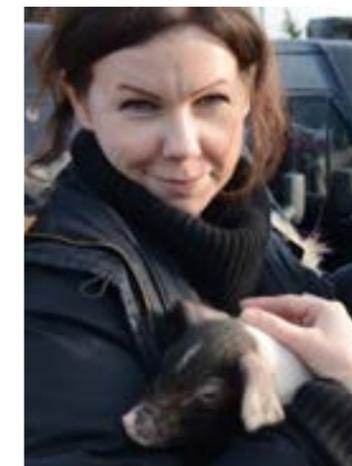
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Audrey Boss
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thank you

Anna Evans at the Royal Court Theatre
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front cover image ©Johan Persson
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Welcome to Her Edit

When I was a small child one of the staple puddings my mum gave me was a sliced apple with evaporated milk. She would carefully peel the fruit so the skin remained in one piece then, with eyes closed and great excitement, I would throw it over my shoulder. Together we would expectantly peer at the floor for the big reveal. The length of pale green flesh on the floor would form something like a letter and that would be the first letter of the name of my future sweetheart.

At least that was the theory. Forty years and a lot of apples later, the theory has yet to be proved, but this remains one of my most vivid food memories. Food doesn't just nourish our bodies, it can nourish our souls.

We use it to celebrate, commemorate and comfort, and women's relationship with food is especially powerful. From Eve to Snow White food functions as metaphor and allegory. It is traditionally women who buy it and cook it in the home, yet all the major supermarkets are headed by men. As one industry persuades us to consume, another one urges us to forego.

For our January issue, Her Edit wanted to celebrate women who are bringing a different perspective to food and drink. Please share with us your food memories and thoughts on our blog page <http://www.heredit.com/her-comment/>, tweet or get in touch at editor@heredit.com and a happy new year to you all.

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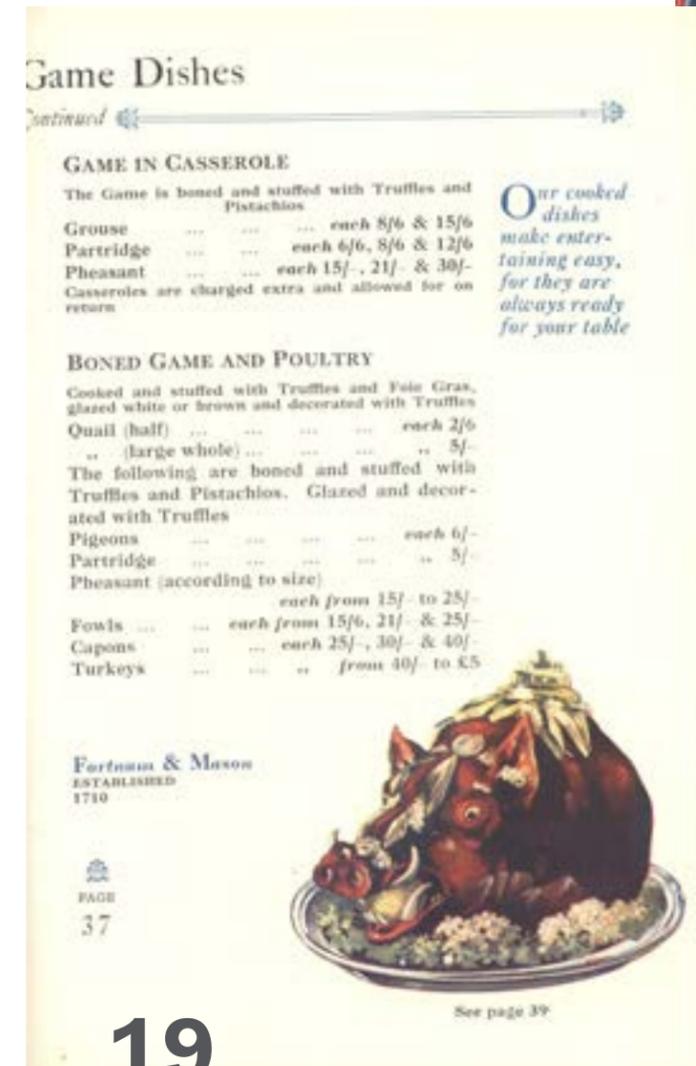


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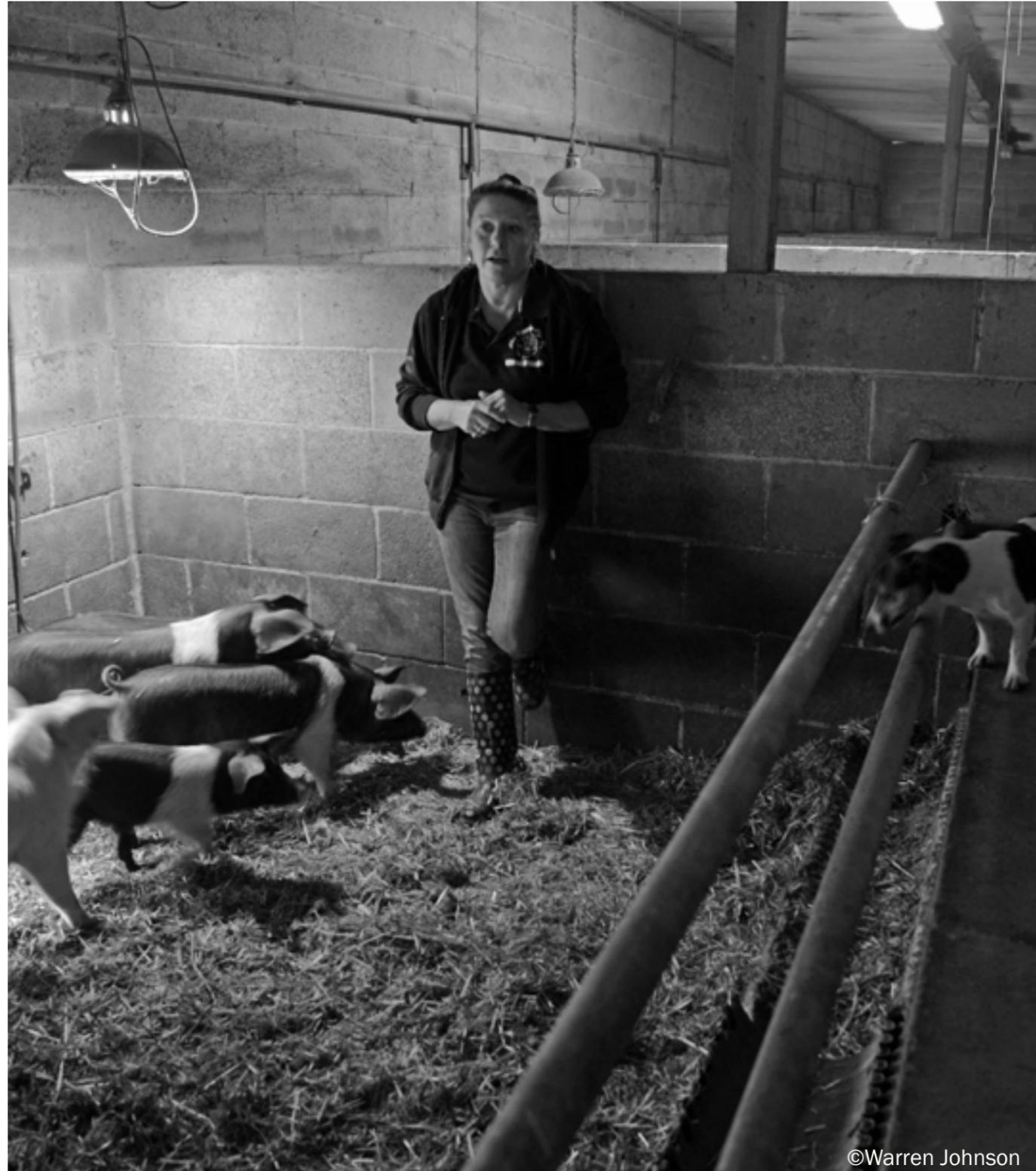
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©Warren Johnson

Pearls before swine

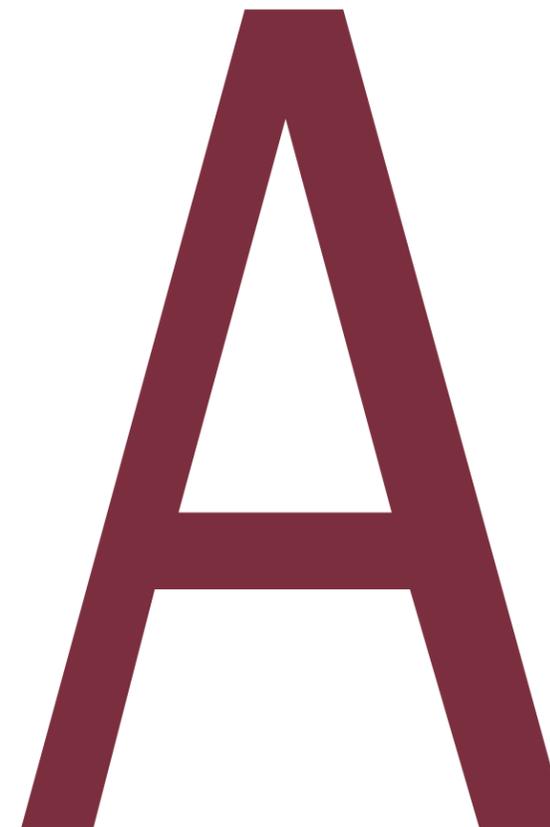
In 2007, Tracy Mackness left an open prison with 30 pigs and a plan to become a pig farmer. Her Edit went to visit her farm, meet the pigs and hear the remarkable story of an extraordinary woman.

As a hardened urban dweller for almost all my life there were two things I was completely unprepared for when I went to visit Tracy Mackness's pig farm in Essex. Firstly the smell – more pungent and pervasive than I could have imagined – and secondly how engaging pigs could be.

At the beginning of her autobiography, *Jail Bird*, Mackness describes the moment she met Bidy, a 'beautiful pink and black saddleback sow', at East Sutton Park open prison in Kent. It was 'love at first sight' and, like the best love affairs, an encounter that was to transform Tracy's life, but clearly Tracy's reactions matched my own.

'I took a deep breath. Which was a mistake, because it still smelt of shit whether I'd fallen in love with a pig or not.'

Tracy met Bidy whilst serving a ten year prison sentence for 'a lorry load of puff'. Her journey from convicted drug dealer to respected pig farmer and business woman has been well documented through her book, numerous media appearances on programmes such as Radio 4's *Midweek* and the hundreds of speaking engagements she undertakes each year to organisations like the Women's Institute.



Her Story



©Warren Johnson

It is a redemptive story that would gladden the heart of any Home Secretary, but beyond the 'bad girl made good' fairy tale is an unapologetically vocal, determined and searingly honest woman who takes her business and the welfare of her animals very seriously.

During her jail term, Tracy studied four NVQ courses and absorbed as much as she could about breeding pigs, taking a course on sausage making and learning how to write a business plan and manage accounts. She bought 30 pigs from the prison and in around seven years has grown her business to include a farm in Essex housing 700 pigs, a shop in her home town of Romford and a fleet of 14 vans which take her premium range Giggly Pig sausages to farmers' markets across the south east.

Perhaps not surprisingly in a male dominated occupation, Tracy met with a lot of antipathy from other pig farmers at first.

'I went to the abattoir and was having trouble reversing the trailer. All the other farmers there sat in their cars and not one of those men offered to help me.

'I didn't believe in destiny before, but I do now. I was always destined to be a pig farmer.'

They had an attitude of 'what does she know', but I learnt more in the prison than if I'd just gone to college because not only did I get the qualifications, but it gave me the experience too. Next time I turned up at the abattoir with a new truck and trailer and then they

realised I was doing well it was a bit different. It has got better.'

At the heart of Tracy's business is the welfare of her animals. Recently she was a guest on BBC1's Newsnight where she spoke out against proposals to relax legislation on swill-feeding for pigs. The Pig Idea initiative, supported by people such as Hugh Fearnley-Whittingstall, suggests we could simply feed pigs the vast quantities of food we usually throw away.

But Tracy argues that feeding pigs what would essentially be unregulated food waste would leave the farming industry open to a disaster such as the Foot and Mouth Disease epidemic in 2001 argues. The Giggly Pig animals are fed quality concentrate pig pellets and bread and cake trimmings supplied by a local baker and they clearly thrive on it.

'If you go to a normal pig farm, the pigs run away. Here they come up to you. They have a good life. That's my focus - as long as they're with me, they have a good life.'

Knowing Tracy's disappointment at not having a family of her own - apart from her four terriers, Sausage, Mash, Chops and Gravy whom she clearly adores - watching the sows with their litters, I wonder if being a woman brings a different perspective to animal husbandry. Tracy concedes it does.

'Most farmers would produce three litters a year and so could I, but with two litters you give the

Tracy Mackness



©Warren Johnson

mother some time to rest and get some weight back on. It's enough for me. I'm not greedy.'

Given Tracy's warmth and obviously compassionate nature, I have to ask the obvious question for someone who buys their meat in a plastic wrapper of what happens when the pigs begin the journey to their inevitable end. She admits she finds it hard.

'I do get too attached. I don't know how much longer I can do it.'

Clearly a pig farmer's life requires hard work and dedication and the latter part of Tracy's book is peppered with three o'clock morning starts and solitary sausage making in the early hours.

'It's hard. It's full on. There's never a day off. I buy my Sunday papers and they don't get read until Tuesday.'

Tracy's journey inevitably screams adjectives such as 'inspirational' and it is, but it is one she believes has been mapped out for her.

'I didn't believe in destiny, but I do now. I was always destined to be a pig farmer, I just took the long route'.

But what I find most inspiring about Tracy is her uncompromising approach to what she does, her conviction in the way she cares for her livestock and the integrity of the products she sells. The veracity of our farming industry

remains under close scrutiny and established methods of food production are open to discredit and I wonder whether her perspective suggests a way forward.

Finally I suggest to Tracy that her mum must be very proud of her.

'She is now, but she was ashamed when I went to prison. She wouldn't go out of the house. Now she goes to farmers' markets and sells my sausages to Jack Straw.'

Read more about Giggly Pig and where to buy Tracy's award-winning sausages at <http://www.gigglypig.co.uk/>

Kathy Jordan - paying it forward

Kathy Jordan has been running the Jordan Wine Estate in South Africa with her husband Gary since 1993. Conscious of working in a male dominated industry, in October 2012 Kathy launched the Women in Wine initiative, a wine-mentoring programme initially for South Africans, but now also for international candidates. Kathy tells Her Edit why it's important for her to share her passion and opportunities with other women.



©Kathy Jordan

‘Because we so profoundly personalise success, we miss opportunities to lift others onto the top rung... We overlook just how large a role we (society) all play in determining who makes it and who doesn’t’. Malcolm Gladwell, Outliers: The Story of Success

I was given the opportunity to make a career change into the wine industry; a derelict wine farm and the chance to study at UC Davis and work in California, set the wheels rolling on an exciting second career – the beginning of my journey into wine.

Each year on 9 August, South Africans celebrate Women’s Day, a day declared by former President Nelson Mandela to honour the courage and determination of thousands of South African women of all races who marched to the Union Buildings in Pretoria in 1956 in protest of the Pass laws.

Now more than ever, while the world mourns the passing of Madiba, it is important to remember how intensely he promoted the crucial contribution women make to society.

Mandela said,

‘Freedom cannot be achieved unless women have been emancipated from all forms of oppression. As long as the nation refuses to acknowledge the equal role of more than half of itself, it is doomed to failure.’

‘There were virtually no black women working in the wine industry’

In the early 90s, at the beginning of my wine career, women were scarce in the industry - it was an unusual career in a relatively conservative trade. Due to African tradition and the residue of Apartheid, there were virtually no black women working in the wine industry. Since then progress has been swift with many young black women taking an active interest in wine appreciation and forging careers in this business.

As a woman, it has been challenging making inroads into this area, but the trials have been far outweighed by the generosity of time and knowledge of people whom I have met, and the inspiring and sociable nature of the wine industry. In acknowledgment of the opportunities I received, and in celebration of what women are achieving

in the industry, the Jordan Wine Estate Women in Wine Initiative was launched in October 2012 to offer more women the opportunity to further their careers in wine. One aspect of the initiative offers an annual bursary to a young black South African woman to attend the Wine and Spirit Educational Trust courses.

Already our first successful candidate, Lungiswa Sithole, working in the hospitality industry in Cape Town, has passed her Level 1 course and is now starting on Level 2. Lungiswa’s enthusiastic passion, for wine and learning, made her an obvious choice as our first candidate. This means that Lungiswa regularly visits Jordan Wine Estate where she takes part in the activities on the farm, experiencing the seasonal activities on a wine estate.

The international aspect of the Initiative was promoted through Jancis Robinson’s website. Because of her incredible following, I received countless applications from very strong and capable women – it was amazing to be able to make my selection from these. In fact, the quality of applicant was so good, that instead of only inviting one candidate for next year’s vintage I eventually decided on two women.

Both candidates, Regine Lee, from the USA and Laura Atkinson from England, are presently involved in either wine education or marketing and sales in the UK and internationally and are eager to experience a harvest hands-on and visit the winelands of the Western Cape.

South Africa is a land of incredible opportunities and I am proud to share our beautiful country and uniquely South African experiences with our visitors.

Read more about the Jordan Wine Estate at <http://www.jordanwines.com/>



**Previous page: The Jordan Valley
This page: Kathy Jordan and Lungiswa Sithole**

©Kathy Jordan

Sweet like chocolate

Women and food and the politics of dieting

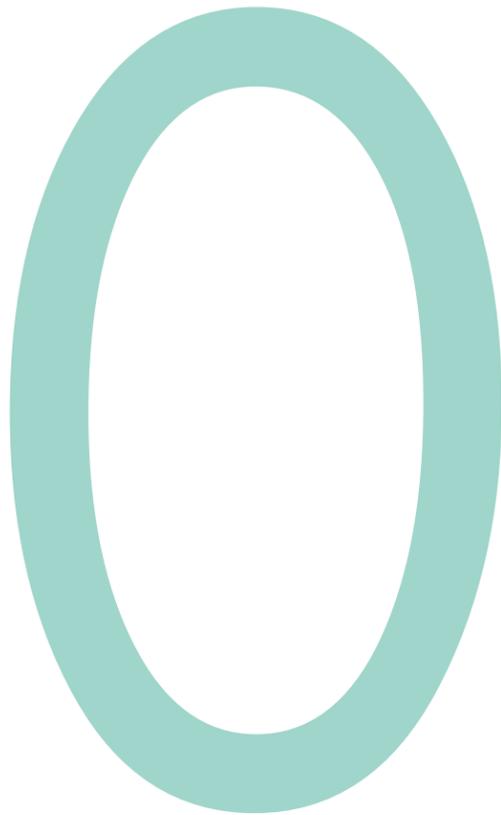
Audrey Boss founded the No Diet community Beyond Chocolate in 2000 with her sister, psychotherapist Sophie Boss. Their mission is to 'empower women to know and trust their bodies' by ditching diets, taking a new approach to eating and helping them feel confident about the way they eat and the way they look. Here Audrey shares the joy of being free from the tyranny of 'the diet'.

Only a hundred years ago, putting a bowl of soup and slice of bread on the table would have required hours of back breaking labour – boiling bones for stock over a hot, smoky, open fire, scrubbing, peeling and chopping ingredients to add to it; mixing, kneading, proving and baking the bread in a wood fired oven that needed to be lit, stoked and kept going. Our great grandmothers were literally chained to the kitchen sink.

I know, the metaphor is anachronistic considering they had to make do with wells and buckets back then, but bear with me, I need it for later.

Compare that to the time it takes to nuke a carton of soup while you bung a slice of bread in the toaster and the mind boggles. Isn't it amazing to think how processed food, microwaves and toasters have catapulted women out of the kitchen and into positions of power and influence they just didn't have the time, resources or energy to attain a century ago? Women today can put food and a salary on the table. We're free now, right?

This month, millions of women will start a new diet. Weight loss will be their number one New Year's resolution. They will hand over their hard earned cash to join a slimming club or an online diet plan and pay diet experts to tell them what, when and how much to eat. They will restrict or cut out certain foods and even entire food groups. They will dedicate time, resources and energy to counting, weighing, measuring and tracking their every mouthful. They will spend more money on low calorie, low fat, low carb diet foods, meal



©Audrey Boss

replacement bars and shakes, vitamins, herbal integrators and 'super' foods of all types. They will spend hours gathering in church halls and online to discuss their progress - or lack of progress - swap 'cheat treat' recipes and cheer each other on with gritted teeth.

Their lives will go on hold while they focus on reaching their target weight. They are still in chains. It's just that they've swapped the kitchen sink for the bathroom scales. Most of them will barely last the month. Being 'on' the diet is always followed by being 'off' the diet.

The end of restricted and controlled eating is often the start of the exact opposite. We can't get enough of all those naughty foods we weren't allowed to eat, so we go from not eating enough to eating too much and lose control - unwilling or unable to stop.

We drag the scales behind us on our way to the kitchen and beat ourselves up for being fat, greedy and lazy as we eat more. We resolve to start a new diet tomorrow...on Monday... after Easter. We suspend our lives until we reach that target weight.

When we spend all our time and resources and energy trying to eat less and giving ourselves a hard time when we don't, we have nothing left. No time, no resources, no energy to build empires, climb mountains, defeat evil and bring peace and happiness to (wo)man kind.

While we are kept small and busy (and poor) by the business of trying to be smaller than we are, the men stay at the table drinking port and smoking cigars and busy themselves with running governments, multinational corporations, wars and our lives.

'This month millions of women will start a new diet.'

When I stopped dieting and unchained myself from my bathroom scales I never imagined the time, resources and energy that it would free up. Instead of putting my life on hold until I hit some magic number, I started living it and getting stuff done.

In the 15 years since I stopped dieting, I have written two books on the subject of women's relationship with food and founded the largest 'No Diet' community in the UK supporting thousands of women to ditch the diets and approach weight loss in a radically different way.

I have demonstrated against and spoken out about the slimming clubs and their diet 'food' and I teach women how to get back into the kitchen – without the chains - so that they are in charge of what and how much they eat.

It's not an empire, they're not mountains, I haven't defeated evil (yet) and we are still a way off universal peace and happiness, but I couldn't have done any of that in chains and dragging the bathroom scales behind me.

Find our more about Beyond Chocolate at their website www.beyondchocolate.co.uk

Food for thought

The day after the Her Edit team agreed on the theme of food for the January issue, I saw some publicity for a new play *Gastronauts* at the Royal Court Theatre. Billed as a theatre adventure with food and music, it was irresistibly serendipitous. Her Edit spoke to one of the authors, Nessah Muthy, about how the piece came about and the pleasure and politics of food.

Gastronauts takes you on a journey through the production, preparation and retail of food and touches on our emotional relationship with what is essentially fuel, but in reality is, in turns, a pleasure and a tyranny. Proust's madeleine becomes a cup of lentil soup which tastes just like granny's; a gay dinner date touches on futures contracts and the parity of trade between suppliers in developing countries and corporations in the west; a pear and vanilla cake evokes the loss and despair of a funeral tea.

Behind the series of hugely entertaining and thought-provoking vignettes is a robust interrogation of how we have become a world where 1.3 billion tonnes of food is wasted, while 870 million people are chronically undernourished.

Nessah Muthy says she began to conceive of the play after the 'horse meat scandal' early in 2013. The revelation that what we buy from the supermarket is not necessarily what it claims to be, led Nessah to explore the food industry and the less pleasant aspects of what should be life-affirming and a pleasure. Originally from a working-class family in Epsom, Surrey, Nessah's career has progressed at giddy speed since she finished her studies at the Central School of Speech and Drama and University of Birmingham where she secured an MPhil in Playwriting Studies.

'food is dark and it's dirty and it's dangerous'

Gastronauts is her second production at the Royal Court Theatre where she works as an usher. Her first, *Hungry*, which touched on the 'hidden homeless and hidden hungry' appeared there in the summer.

Nessah is just 25 years old, but a clear political consciousness runs through her work. A missionary trip to Africa focused her attention on another aspect of food. 'There was so much immediate poverty, but people who had absolutely nothing offered you food by way of hospitality. You realised that they were actually giving you their own dinner.'

Nessah's pitch for a 'theatrical dining experience to explore our current relationship with food' prompted the interest of playwright April de Angelis and together they wrote



A scene from *Gastronauts*, featuring Justine Mitchell and Nathaniel Martello-White ©Johan Persson

Her Practice



Writer and co-author of *Gastronauts*, Nessah Muthy.
©Johan Persson

Gastronauts, wondering ‘could we have a feast’ whilst covering issues such as genetically modified food.

The play was produced through a series of workshops and extensive research, including visits to food banks and to *Dans le noir*, a dining experience in the dark.

They spoke to a food futurologist – someone who predicts trends in food and advises brands on what might be the next food fashion.

Nessah says:

‘She said ‘food is dark and it’s dirty and it’s dangerous’ and these words stuck in my brain. We live in an age of mistrust – whether the horsemeat scandal or phone hacking.’

The process of carrying out the research for *Gastronauts* and uncovering some of the darker truths about the food industry has ‘bled a lot’ into Nessah’s life, and in September she became a vegetarian.

‘You can’t switch it off. Every day we found out some hideous fact. You began to wonder what you could eat with a clear conscience. I became a vegetarian because I didn’t know enough about what I was eating.’

Nessah’s thoughts and perspective on the issue reflect her down to earth attitude and working class background. In his garden, her grandfather grew amongst other things beans, rhubarb and marrows and would offer the surplus to neighbours, a lovely reminder how food

can be socially cohesive. The foods which evoke memories for Nessah are roast dinners and her mum’s scones, but she describes chocolate as her vice.

‘Food has different functions, not just the basic function of nourishment – it’s palpable in inducing memory and activates all the senses. It functions personally and politically and it’s universal.’

After my conversation with Nessah at the theatre, I went to visit the Saatchi Gallery. A painterly, expressive almost graffiti or cartoon-like rendition of a feast laid over a paradigm of the Last Supper, by Eddie Martinez, has a table laden with the signifiers which punctuate our daily lives. The roast turkey, the ice-cream sundae, the full English breakfast, the bottle of wine – a food for every celebration and every consolation.

So what next for Nessah? She continues working as an usher at the Royal Court which she describes as ‘phenomenal opportunity’ to watch theatre, meet artists and learn. Nessah is currently working on a new commission and tells me her next work may be around working class identity.

‘I suppose I write about what terrifies me.’

Nessah Muthy



A scene from *Gastronauts*, featuring Justine Mitchell, Nathaniel Martello-White, Andy Clark and Imogen Doel
©Johan Persson

Everything she wants

Andrea Tanner is the archivist of one of the most famous retailers in the country if not the world, notably known as 'the Queen's grocer'. Fortnum and Mason's reputation for the quality of its merchandise is matched only by the wealth of its clientele, but here Andrea shows how the store has always moved with the times offering everything from the exotic to ready meals for its discerning customers.



©Fortnum and Mason

Fortnum & Mason of Piccadilly have been grocers and tea merchants since 1707, trading from the same spot in St. James's. Legend has it that they were founded by two young men; William Fortnum – footman to Queen Anne - and his landlord Hugh Mason, a livery stables keeper. One of the perks of William's job was to empty the candlesticks of the half burnt candles each evening. Being a thrifty and enterprising lad, he took them home, reconstituted the candles, and sold them to the ladies of the court- who had to pay for their own heat and light. Within a few years, they were notable tea and spice merchants, boasting of being a magasin de comestibles.

The Fortnum family effectively died out at the end of the 1890s, (that's the price you pay for marrying your first cousins, generation after generation), when the store was taken over in a customer/management buy-out.

The Fortnum and Mason archive was almost entirely destroyed in bombing in the 2nd World War, and has been reconstituted in a piecemeal fashion, but the catalogues give an insight into what women bought from the company and their influence on the store's offer and character over time.

The earliest surviving catalogue dates from 1849 and tea and coffee head the first page. By this time,

the Indian plantations had been producing tea for over ten years, and teas from the sub-continent feature prominently, although few prices are given. Perhaps if you had to ask, you could not afford to shop in Piccadilly. There is evidence at this time of a growing taste for foreign delicacies (reindeer tongues, Parmesan cheese, French chocolate...), and for labour-saving dishes. Ready-made sauces were already a staple, to save the busy cook or housewife time, but also to give the unconfident cook failsafe solutions to otherwise complicated concoctions. They included, "Indian Curry Gravy, for making in a more expeditious manner, a dish of Curry, after the Indian way, and very economical." The tin had made its appearance by now, imprisoning everything from salmon and lobster to pheasant and peas, and clearly there was a need to educate kitchen-consumers on how to handle this new technology:

"TO OPEN THE CANISTERS – First stab a hole with the butt-end of the knife near the upper rim of the Canister; then insert the blade as far as it will go; the handle towards you (the claw resting against the canister as a lever), when the blade will be found to cut through the tin with perfect ease."

The tin meant that you could be as international a cook (or heater-up) as your budget and



taste allowed and bask in the reflected glory of setting perfectly cooked exotic items in front of family and guests. If the women who wielded the order forms had not demanded these goods, then Fortnum's would not have made or stocked them.

The early 20th century saw a movement towards the industrialisation of food preparation, with many companies offering ready-made (to those who could afford it) what once would have been undertaken by the housewife or her staff. Former labour-intensive

'The tin meant you could be as international a cook... as your budget and taste allowed'

dishes came ready-made, freshly-prepared, or else dried, bottled, tinned or frozen. The rampant indulgence and theatricality of upper class Edwardian eating habits is evidenced in the 1910 Christmas catalogue, in which Fortnum's took the labour out of many seasonal tasks, from the 12lb pudding (a snip at 18 shillings (90 pence)) to 'most lavishly decorated' Christmas trees and pre-filled Christmas stockings.

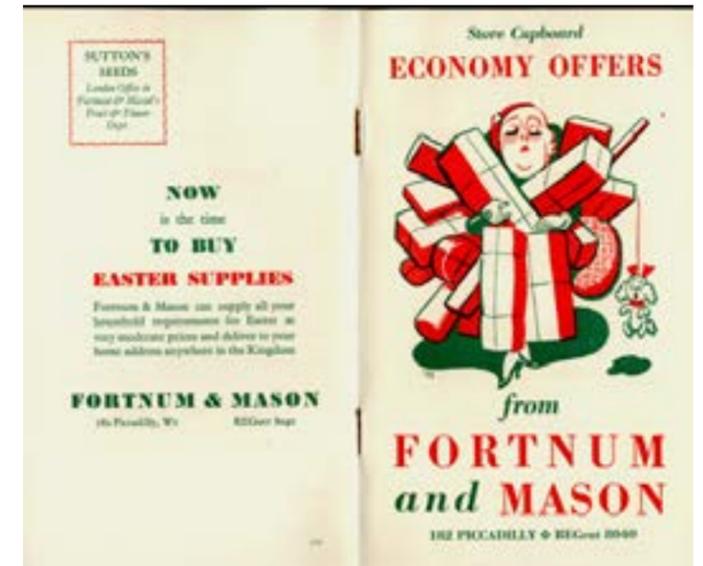
In the 1920s and 1930s the demand for ready-cooked dishes soared, as those still with money to spend splashed out on cocktail parties, balls, lavish picnics and dinner parties. There were fewer women to help out in the kitchen –many housemaids and scullery maids had found work in other areas between 1914 and 1918 and would never return to domestic service, preferring the paid holidays, regular hours and freedom of factory or office work. Fortnum's stepped in to provide these reduced households with the wherewithal for her ladyship's ball – right down to the liveried servants and the cloakroom tickets.

As the rich partied to the sounds of New Orleans Jazz, there are signs in the catalogues that the world-wide depression was hitting the women who shopped at Fortnum's. New store cupboard catalogues were

directed at careful female customers, encouraged to be thrifty by having all the bottled, tinned and dried ingredients to hand.

The lobster and crab soup was joined by the more humble mock turtle, gravy – and the unappealing giblet soup. For the first time, carbohydrates to bulk out dishes appear in industrial quantities, including macaroni, tapioca, rice, sago and beans. Tea and coffee bought in quantity are discounted, and cheap alternatives to the cocktail party drinks and nibbles are offered.

The records that survive hint at what women customers wanted to cook and serve, what they were unconfident of cooking themselves, and what they were keen to experiment on in the decades before the 2nd World War. They demonstrate the speedy adoption of tinned and bottled products, and of ingredients from across the Empire to save time and effort and reduce the hours spent slaving in an increasingly technological kitchen. The next time we feel guilty about buying a ready meal, perhaps we should remember our predecessors, who – on the evidence here - embraced everything new and time-saving with enthusiasm and alacrity.



All images ©Fortnum and Mason

Only here for the beer

Sophie Atherton is a freelance journalist and the first woman in Britain to become an accredited beer sommelier. She writes regularly for national media and specialist publications such as The Campaign for Real Ale (CAMRA) publication BEER and The Publican's Morning Advertiser. A champion of feminism and good ale, Sophie talked to Her Edit about the brewing industry and makes some recommendations for novice beer drinkers.

Is there a 'gender divide' in the beer market - what percentage of consumers are women?

Yes. Most beer is drunk by men, but there are signs that things are starting to change. CAMRA (The Campaign for Real Ale) reckons more than a third of women have tried real ale (beer that continues to ferment in the cask or bottle it is served from) which is twice as many as three years ago. It also has more than 30,000 female members - so while a man might still be more likely to order a beer than a woman, there's no shortage of female beer lovers. My own experience bears this out as I'm definitely meeting more women who love beer, or want to try it, and there's also been an increase in the number of women brewing.

When did men become beer drinkers and women wine drinkers? Or is that particular to British culture?

I've always been a beer drinker so it's a bit of a mystery to me! Maybe it came with the rise in popularity of mass-produced lager which can be quite gassy and make drinkers feel bloated - something which beer sceptics often tell me is their reason for

not liking beer. Or it could be because of the very successfully perpetuated myth that wine has fewer calories than beer coupled with the constant pressure on women to diet that has made them turn to what they wrongly believe to be the low calorie option.

Is the brewing industry male dominated and what are the most common misconceptions about women brewers?

The brewing industry is still male dominated, but there are more women brewers now than there's been for a long time (in the Middle Ages it was mostly women who brewed - making beer for the household and selling the surplus).

It is genuinely a very friendly industry though and while there is some sexism I haven't encountered any especially heinous examples. However, it is depressing that often when I come across beer labelling (pump clips or bottle labels) that objectifies women, it has been designed or approved by a woman - who will then claim it's not sexist or offensive for that reason. So, as for misconceptions about women brewers and/or women

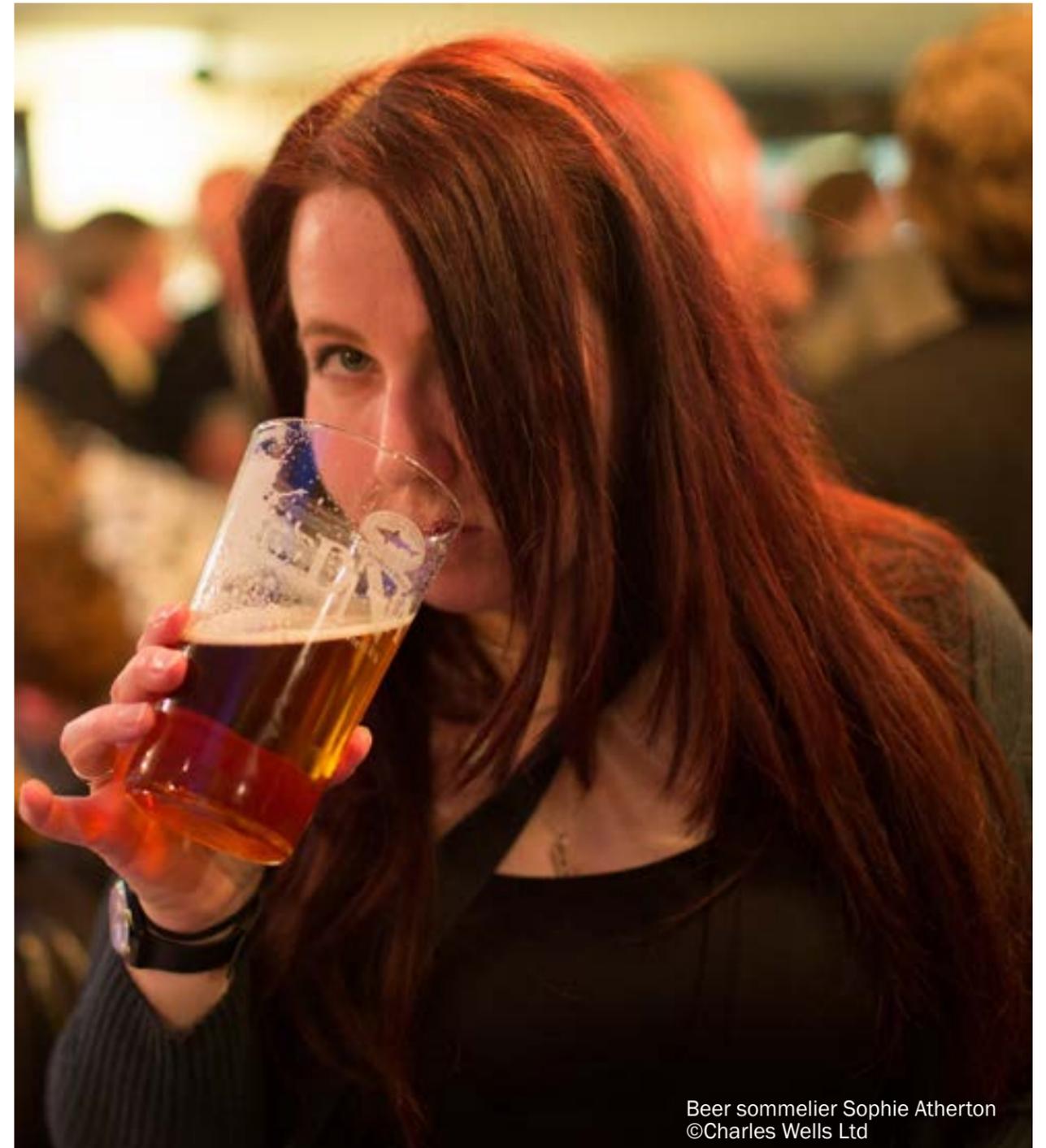
in the brewing industry - firstly they aren't always feminists, secondly people think women aren't physically strong enough to brew because it can involve lots of heavy lifting and digging out spent grain from mash tuns and is generally is hard graft. Brewers - male or female - certainly need to be fit and strong.

Just as men and women are supposed to see colours differently, do they also have different palates?

It has been said that women's palates are better than men's and therefore women make better tasting experts and judges. Whether that is really true I don't know - but I am getting more and more invitations to judge beer competitions!

Is it the taste of beer or the way it's marketed that puts women off?

There is no generic 'beer flavour'. There are actually around 100 different styles of beer, thousands of beers within those styles, and as a result, a flavour to suit everyone - so it has got to be the way beer is marketed, advertised and portrayed that puts women off rather than the taste. This is



Beer sommelier Sophie Atherton
©Charles Wells Ltd

Sophie Atherton

a crying shame as it really is The Best Drink in the World!

We want to celebrate the first anniversary of Her Edit is there a particular beer you'd recommend as the 'champagne' of beers?

There are some beers that are made with champagne yeast you could try. Bosteels Deus is probably the best known, but I must confess I've yet to taste it. If it were up to me I would celebrate with a bottle of Brooklyn Brewery's Sorachi Ace - which is a style of beer called a saison - originally a farmhouse brew from Belgium. I first had it at the Brooklyn Brewery in New York and it was one of the most incredible beers I've ever tasted. It's beautiful smoky, but bright yellow and has a very refreshing lemony herbal flavour from the sorachi ace hop used to flavour it - and from which it takes its name. A 750ml bottle will set you back around £15 - so it's cheaper than champagne and worth every penny.

Would you recommend different beers for different courses as with wine? If so, how would you match a beer for a Burns Night supper of Cullen skink, a classic Scottish smoked fish soup with velvety leeks and potato; a main course of haggis, neeps, tatties and whisky sauce and a classic Scottish rich fruit pudding dessert of a Clottie Dumpling with clotted cream?

Absolutely - but noting that beer is far more versatile than wine is.

With the cullen skink I'd want something to complement the

flavour of the smoked fish but also to cut through the often creamy quality of the dish. I would serve either a wheat beer or a smoked beer (rauchbier). So Schneider Weisse Original - a Bavarian wheat beer; or Aecht Schlenkerla - a German smoked lager.

I would match the haggis, neeps and tatties with Williams Brothers Fraoch - a beer flavoured with heather instead of hops and made to an ancient Scottish recipe. I had this pairing at a dinner last year and it was perfection. The gentle carbonation of the beer douses the peppery heat of the haggis and the spicy flavours from the meat bring out the beautiful floral character of the beer.

I still find dessert pairings tricky as I don't have a hugely sweet tooth, but with the Clottie pudding I might try Tring Brewery's Death or Glory, a strong ale with spirit-like character. Or I'd go mad and hunt down a bottle of the mega-strong Samuel Adams Utopias which this year (it is a limited edition brew released annually) enticed me with a whisky-like aroma and had a sweet and spicy flavour - like a sugared, alcoholic prune, that might be a good like-with-like match for the clottie.

What makes a great all-round all occasion beer and how should it be served?

The answer to this largely depends on the drinker's preference. People often ask me what my favourite beer is and it genuinely depends what mood I'm in and whether I fancy something light or dark; hoppy or

malty. So there's really not just one beer for all seasons.

Having said that, we are blessed in the UK with the tradition of low ABV cask ales brewed in a huge range of flavours and styles. You just need to find a pub that keeps them well - being in the Good Beer Guide or having Cask Marque accreditation is a good sign. Cask ale should be served cool, not cold and certainly not warm. Around 12 degrees is the best temperature. It needs to be fresh and full of life. Once a cask is opened it has a shelf life of around three days - after which unsold beer should be discarded.

Serve in a scrupulously clean glass branded for the beer being poured or without any branding.

Good pubs will let you try before you buy, but here's a few suggestions for top British cask beers to look out for: Adnams dark, fruity Broadside (4.3%); TROPICALLY fruity Cornish pale ale St Austell Tribute (4.2%); In Wales look out for Brains Dark (3.5%) a delicious chocolatey dark mild; Classic bitter Wadworth 6X (4.3%) from Wiltshire; or head to Kent and hunt down some Gadd's No. 5 best bitter (4.4%) made with local hops.

There's also a lot of very good bottled beer for drinking at home, but avoid anything in clear glass as exposure to light impairs the flavour.

Read more about Sophie and her work at www.sophieatherton.co.uk or read her blog <http://afemaleview.net/>

Her Agenda

Adding some BITE

The Cotswolds Food Festival takes place in and around the North Cotswolds, with miniBITE foodie events also taking place throughout the year across the UK

BITE
1 - 9 February in the North Cotswolds and then around the country
Visit <http://www.thebite.co/>

Ale and hearty

If you've read Sophie Atherton's tips, then take this opportunity to sample over 300 of the finest cask conditioned craft ales, 75 traditional ciders & perries, a selection of bottle conditioned ales and some of the best imported beers around.

The Manchester Beer and Cider Festival 2014
22 - 25 January
Visit <http://manchesterbeerfestival.org.uk/>

Absolutely shucking

Rye Bay Scallop Week in Rye, East Sussex offers the perfect opportunity to indulge in seafood delights. Restaurants in Rye will be showcasing an array of different scallop dishes, along with tasting events, cookery schools and demonstrations.

15 - 23 February
Visit <http://scallop.org.uk/>

Rhubarb, rhubarb

Yorkshire's famous forced rhubarb has joined the ranks of Parma ham and Champagne as one of Europe's protected foods. Join in the celebrations at the Wakefield Festival of Food Drink & Rhubarb at Wakefield Cathedral Precinct.

Through February
Visit <http://www.experiencewakefield.co.uk/>

Meet the cru

A tour of central London's first winery with an opportunity to learn about the wine making process and taste the results.

8 February
Visit <http://www.londoncru.co.uk/>

Take that to the bank

In 2012-13 foodbanks fed 346,992 people in the UK. The Trussell Trust helps people in crisis through its network of foodbanks.

For more information, to find out how to set up a foodbank in your area or to donate, visit <http://www.trusselltrust.org/>

Her Edit

FOR THE INDEPENDENTLY MINDED WOMAN

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