

The Kitchen in History. By Molly Harrison.

Pp. 142. Illustrated with 75 photographs and 49 line drawings, index, select bibliography.

New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1972. \$7.95 cloth.

Reviewed by Janet Langlois.

Ms. Harrison has arranged her book on the British kitchen much like the period rooms of the Geoffrye Museum in East London whose curator she was for twenty-eight years. Chapters highlight specific eras--the prehistoric, Roman Britain, Anglo-Saxon, the Middle Ages--or specific centuries--the sixteenth through the twentieth--and are based on descriptions of kitchen utensils and equipment, "the real, the most solid evidence we have of the day-to-day work of the kitchen" (p.2).

Excerpts from account ledgers, diaries, recipe books, letters, bills of sale further indicate the social significance of the concept "kitchen." Ms. Harrison puts it, "This book is not concerned with the kitchen just as a room, but rather as a centre of influence" (p.1).

Ms. Harrison has combined folklife techniques with foodways research to produce a unique book whose object, the kitchen, is a microcosm of cultural food patterning, of class relations and status, of the role of women in western civilization through time.

The Kitchen in History is readable, designed for educative appeal, and thus is lacking detailed scholarly aids most researchers would find welcome. Source material is not adequately footnoted or glossed. An example:

English people have always been noted as great eaters. A sixteenth-century writer commented, 'Our English cannot live by roots, by water herbs or such beggary baggage', and complained that the great rise in the price of meat meant that ordinary people could not afford to buy it. (p.47).

On such a timely subject, it is disappointing that exact references have not been included.

Glosses on "pig's pettitoes" (p.47), "musk confects" (p.48), "4 gallons of Malmsey" (p.55), or "Polish starch" (p. 83) would make the reading of old recipes less frustrating.