

The Sixth International Ethnological Food Research Conference

The 6th International Ethnological Food Research Conference was held at Karniowice, near Cracow, Poland, on 8–13 October 1985. The 46 participants represented 14 countries: Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, France, Holland, Hungary, East Germany, Ireland, Norway, Poland, Scotland, Sweden, the USA, the USSR and West Germany. Twenty-five lectures were delivered on the Conference theme of *Innovations in Food Habits*.

In his opening remarks, Professor Nils-Arvid Bringéus of Lund, Sweden, who had been President since the Group started in 1970, stressed that the study of food was one of the most basic political questions of all time. The past five Conferences as well as the present one had each explored a different aspect of this multifaceted topic, of which the basic methodological link was the study of man as a cultural being.

The first plenary session took a broad look, from the point of view of nutrition, at food ideologies in the United States and in Western Europe (Norge Jerome and Claus Rath). The two formerly disparate fields of nutrition and gastronomy had come to be linked in the States through a strong food movement to which commercial interests had responded. Starting as a middle class movement, the phenomenon had become generalised through all classes. The *nouvelle cuisine*, and the natural preparation of foods (though “natural” itself is a cultural concept which can change from period to period) were marked by inter-relating conceptions of the real, the symbolic and the imaginary. The questions were raised of whether we as human beings were really remodelled by such ideological concepts, and whether the importance of the meal-time itself (seen by G. Wiegelmann as a focus for ethnological attention) was being eroded through the habit of “grazing”, the eating of snacks and fast foods all day.

The most theoretical of the papers was that

by M. and J. Apte, which sought to define the concept of innovation – by no means an easy task – in relation to spice usage. Even the term “spice” was not easy to define, because of differing viewpoints loosely referable to “ethnic awareness”. Most other contributions were more specific, and fell into a number of groupings.

Surveys of a range of innovations in specific areas were undertaken for Poland, Czechoslovakia and Gotland. The Polish evidence (M. Dembinska) considered differences between medieval and modern cuisine with special reference to the use of spices, sugar as a sweetener that replaced honey, sauces, and butter. The Gotland data (K. Genrup) covered the previous two centuries and looked at the potato, coffee, tea, sugar, spices, the products of agriculture, hunting and fishing, and developments in oven types and in the making of porridge (rice replacing barley) under the conceptual microscope of dynamic change and constancy. For Czechoslovakia (M. Markuš) the time-span was limited to the period after the Second World War, marked by a gradual disappearance of baking ovens, an increased use of meat (including 12 forms of goulash), the decline of beerbrewing at home, and a general spread of coffee drinking.

Thematic surveys were undertaken by Arnott, Flandrin, Sjögren, Kisbán, Jobse-van Putten, Sergö, Knézy, Nordström and Haenel. M. Arnott dealt with the single theme of bread, specifying uses of stale bread and means of handling bread in ways other than through the conventional slicing. J.-L. Flandrin (editor of a new journal *Food and Foodways*) discussed French cook-books from the 14th to the 18th centuries. The point was made that the discovery of America did not at first revolutionise the alimentary system of the French, though the turkey, Jerusalem artichokes, haricot beans and pumpkins made their way in from the 17th, and maize from the 18th century. His

sources showed that the number of vanishing foodstuffs was often greater than that of the new ones introduced, the former including several items later not recognised as edible. Discussion pin-pointed the difficulty of using cook-book evidence, when much translation from one language to another took place and exact sources were not easy to localise. A further problem was the relationship between cook-book details and the actual level of consumption. A. Sjögren was concerned with the dining room, and showed how it had lost its 18th–19th century social significance amongst better-off households in a Paris quarter. The disappearance of servants had hastened this change, and also had an effect on meal preferences. E. Kisbán spoke on goulash in Hungary. There were few pre-20th century sources for it, but quantitative analysis of its later use pointed to the Great Plain as the centre from which it had originated (and where it remained popular). It was still a prominent dish there. Her method of approach showed how statistical analysis of meal elements could be used to make up for deficiencies in written sources. J. Jobse-van Putten made a study of the effects of formal food education on levelling out the dietary range in Holland. In this, organised women's groups played no small part, as well as women's magazines. Conservation methods were also influenced by the levelling tendencies. E. Sergö looked at changes in meal times in an area of Hungary where a village community had been swallowed up in industrial development. J. Knézy studied the changes in and interactions between the food of the farmers and lesser gentry in southern Transdanubia, making reference to winter and summer food and to special food eaten at harvest time. It appeared that the use of summer kitchens in the farmyard was a 20th century development. I. Nordström discussed festival meals in South Sweden around 1900, at weddings and during harvest. She commented on the system of giving gifts of food at weddings, and noted that harvest was a good time for those who had little other opportunity for special meals. Harvest meals could, indeed, have a certain quality of pioneering in innovations which later became more commonplace. H. Haenel, speaking

as a nutritionist, examined changes in nutrition habits in Potsdam over two centuries, comparing food values at higher, and lower levels, and in the army. The bad effects of adulterations and additives were touched on.

The emergence of middle-class domestic cookery in the German-speaking part of Central Europe was examined by Professor H. J. Teuteberg. As an economic historian he saw it as a by-product of the processes of industrialisation and urbanisation, which resulted in changes in the means of acquiring food and in sources of supply, and in the range of kitchen equipment available. The great expansion in the kind and number of places for eating out matched new developments in the kitchen, and was facilitated by the readier availability of money with which to pay for meals eaten outside the home. Industrial circumstances also led to increased dependence on canteen meals.

Two contributions related mainly to alcoholic drinks in the 17th to 19th centuries. U. Meiners' topic was public drinking culture – which drinks were taken, where, and on what occasions. In the 16th century, the culture of the ruling class set the pattern for the ruled. In the 17th, the higher classes came to have more private ways and urban values had greater influence. Alcohol distillation began, and brandy gained importance as wine consumption was limited through the ideas of the Reformation and through vine disease. Coffee also appeared first in harbour towns to which imports came, before it spread widely amongst the higher classes. R. Weinhold took up the theme of constancy and change in relation to beer and wine. Beer-drinking characterised North Germany from the 16th to the 18th centuries. Improvements in wine-making technology that allowed wine to be kept for over a year gave a substantial boost to the industry. A similar advance was made in relation to beer. The distilling of brandy in towns began in the 16th century.

R. Sandgruber also discussed the consumption of alcohol in Austria, but concentrated more on coffee and coffee-houses. Starting with the highest social levels in the late 17th century, coffee had become greatly esteemed by the workers also in the second half of the 19th

century, though its spread to farm-folk is still relatively recent. A. Fenton spoke on the introduction of chocolate, coffee and tea drinking to Scotland, the two first preceding the last in the second half of the 17th century. Chocolate and coffee drinking characterised the upper classes, apart from the wider drinking of these beverages in urban coffee houses, whilst tea itself became the all-prevailing drink. Even in the mid-19th century, however, tea was still rare in much of the north and west of the country. P. Lysaght dealt with tea in Ireland. There seems to have been no early opposition to its drinking by the lower classes there, and it became so much a necessity that its use is enshrined in a proverb: "Dead with tea and dead without it". Ireland is currently the largest per capita tea-drinking country (3 kg per capita per annum) in the world. In general, it would be a matter of great interest to establish why large areas of Europe adopted coffee as the major innovation, and others adopted tea. The answer could give much insight into the social and economic history of nations.

In a category on its own was E. Pocs's paper on innovations in food habits in relation to the

archaic world-view of the European peasantry, with reference to beliefs concerning the dead and the provision of food for them.

This most instructive Conference considerably raised the level of academic approach to food studies, and the publication of the Proceedings in Poland will be eagerly awaited. In conjunction with the papers were interesting visits to the great salt mine at Wieliczka, and to the Open-Air Museum at Nowy Sącz. In the latter, as well as in the Hawełka Restaurant in Cracow, delegates were treated to traditional Polish dishes. The tradition of giving insight into the food ways of specific localities, which has marked all the Conferences held so far, was maintained.

Professor Nils-Arvid Bringéus stood down as President, and Dr. Anders Salomonsson, Lund, was unanimously elected as his successor.

Alexander Fenton
Research Director
Royal Museum of Scotland
Queen Street
Edinburgh EH 2 1JD
Scotland