

A Provisional Note on Ethnological Food Research in Britain

THERE IS NO OVERALL RESEARCH PROGRAMME for Britain as a whole, but some ethnological food research is being carried out in parts of the country.

In Scotland work is proceeding on the daily food of farm workers and the rural population in general, carried out in the Scottish Country Life Section of the National Museum of Antiquities of Scotland. One article has been published on the place of oatmeal and barley meal in the rural diet (Fenton 1971) and another more detailed study on the place of oat meal in the diet of Scottish farm servants in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries is due to appear shortly, in Hungary. A questionnaire on the killing of pigs and curing of pork has been circulated and a preliminary study of pork in the rural diet of Scotland is to be published, in Switzerland. Social and economic considerations are also dealt with in these articles. Further work on the potato, cabbage and kail, milk and milk products, and famine foods, is in progress.

In England there have been few regional ethnological studies, apart from one on oat bread in Northern England (Atkinson), but a number of general books have been published, some of them arising out of questions of social welfare or economic history. A selection is included in the accompanying bibliography.

In Wales, Mrs. S. M. Tibbott of the Department of Oral Traditions and Dialects of the Welsh Folk Museum has been concentrating for the last three years on the collection of oral evidence on the preparing and cooking of food in the regionally different districts of Wales. Recording is done on tape, augmented by cine film and still photographs, the aim being to establish a complete picture of the eating habits throughout Wales about 1900, in relation to terrain, climate, preponderating cereal crops, farm size and social status. The diet of the inhabitants of industrial (slate-quarrying, coal-mining) areas, and of coastal districts is also considered.

Detailed questionnaires are used to get a complete picture of the foods and eating habits of particular households throughout the year, with information on the recipe and method of preparation of each dish, the utensils used in preparing and cooking it, the person responsible for making it, and any special occasions on which it was eaten. Terminology is also studied in detail.

From the point of view of method, such regional studies permit comparisons to be made and outside influences, as well as rates of change in the dietary emphases, to be assessed. Social considerations such as the relationships between farmers and servants were often expressed through differences in foods and eating habits. The data being collected in Scotland also throws light on this kind of problem.

The following films have been made in Wales of traditional methods of cooking: 1. Baking bread in a wall oven; 2. Baking bread in a pot oven; 3. Baking bread on a griddle iron; 4. Two different methods of preparing and baking oatcakes; 5. Preparing and baking other Welsh traditional dishes, e. g. *llymru*, *brwes*, *siot* etc.; 6. Butter-making; 7. Bacon-curing, the preparation of brawn and faggots; 8. Toffee-making; 9. Home-brewed beer¹.

1. I am greatly indebted to Mrs. Tibbott for supplying the data of which this is a digest.

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