

## Scoff: A History of Food and Class in Britain

By Pen Vogler

2020. London: Atlantic Books. 470 pages; ISBN hardback 978 1-78649-647-8; EBook 978 1-78649-648-5; £20.00

Pen Vogler's book exploring food and social class in Britain is not written primarily for academics and students engaged with hospitality management, or food and beverage education, yet this is a book that presents a massive resource for the development of understanding of the social context of eating and dining. The work shares insights into dining that rounds out the somewhat pragmatic content of the preparation and service of food and drink in hospitality education courses. Indeed, the pragmatic and uncritical, "how to do" agenda of much hospitality management education has long been a concern because it tends to squeeze out critical, theoretical content essential for the development of graduates who are reflective practitioners. Vogler's book is a rich resource of insights into the social, cultural, historical and political influences that determine who eats what, and what this says about them and the social context in which they eat and dine.

The title of Vogler's text plays with the double meaning of the word "scoff" in English. Scoff is a slang term for food or a meal, and is also a word meaning mockery of another person or persons. In this way, Vogler makes a valuable point that dining and eating are an important means by which the ruling elite use meals and the manners associated with the activity as a form of conspicuous consumption, which at the same time confirms their exclusive and elevated status and excludes those deemed to be ordinary and of lower status.

The book is structured around a series of fascinating themes, each of which then explore topics that develop an understanding of the words used to describe dining activities, and how they shape the eating experiences, but also differentiate the few from the many.

The book is well written with an accessible style that students will find comfortable and informative. Vogler uses a rich variety of information about dining habits, dining occasions and the evolution of fads and fashions entering culinary culture and disappearing or becoming less significant. The section exploring the evolution of fish and chips provides a valuable exemplar of the way the British diet has been influenced by migrants and by the diet of the poor. Battered fish was a popular dish, probably introduced by Jewish migrants, that was then combined with fried chipped potatoes, probably introduced from France but popular with the north of England's working class. As in many other aspects of a traditional British diet, the quintessentially British fish and chip meal was the by-product of international contact and immigration. *Scoff* provides a sociological, historical and cultural account of dining that will help understand that fads and fashions change and develop, and that today's norms are transient and the result of the social dynamics where eating is employed as device for establishing the elite club rules, identifying those who are members and those who are not. Given that many graduates will have careers in luxury hotels and restaurants, it is essential that they have a clear understanding of the status and symbolism that their clientele is buying into. *Scoff* helps to develop such an understanding.

Conrad Lashley

Correspondence: [Conradlashley@aol.com](mailto:Conradlashley@aol.com)

