

Monica  
**Askay**

Food historian



**Monica traces the history of the citrus fruits used to make one of our favourite spreads.**

What goes  
around

**E**arly January sees the all-too-brief Seville orange and marmalade-making season. I have written of the origins of marmalade in a previous column.

The orange originated in China. The bitter or Seville orange (*Citrus aurantium*) is thought to have reached Southern Europe as an Arab introduction, being apparently grown in Sicily at the beginning of the 11th century and in Spain during the late 12th century. The sweet, Portugal or China orange (*Citrus sinensis*) appears to have reached the Mediterranean in the early 17th century via the Portuguese. John Parkinson ('herbalist' to James I) in *Paradisi in Sole Paradisus Terrestris* 1629, writes of 'Mala Arantia Orenge', referring to the bitter Seville-type orange. He talks of the care needed to protect the plant from the cold, and to expose it to the sun in summer. He lists its uses, both medicinal and culinary. The orange is used as a sauce for many sorts of meat. Parkinson also suggests that the pips should be planted in pots and the seedlings harvested when finger-length, to be scattered among salad leaves, adding "a marvellous fine aromatic or spicy taste, very acceptable". This is certainly something I intend trying.

In the late 17th century, John Evelyn also writes about the cultivation and culinary uses of the orange. He too suggests adding orange (and lemon) seedlings to salads. Orange trees were grown in pots and kept outside in summer. Evelyn describes early conservatories for overwintering orange trees. These were initially shuttered, often temporary, timber sheds. During the 17th century these sheds were succeeded by more elaborate orangeries.

Marmalade, as we know it, developed from quince paste and

from the succade (citrus peel conserved with sugar, either dry as in candied peel, or wet in syrup.) Both fruit pastes and succades were eaten at the end of a rich meal, valued for their digestive properties.

Pippins (apples) were sometimes turned into pastes and jellies, and were often flavoured with orange and lemon zest and sometimes lemon juice. Gradually these became clear citrus jellies containing 'chips' of peel, and became known as transparent marmalades. The other type of orange marmalade, which gradually fell out of favour, was made by boiling and then beating the whole oranges in a pestle and mortar and setting the resulting thick and sticky conserve in moulds as for quince paste. These were known as beaten or smooth marmalades. Probably the first printed all-citrus recipe to appear in an English cookbook, that of Mary Kettilby 1714, was of this type.

Marmalade remained a sweetmeat to be consumed as part of the dessert course for a time. As well as possessing digestive properties, oranges (particularly candied) have long been thought to stimulate the appetite. This eventually led to marmalade, initially in Scotland, becoming part of breakfast. Gradually during the 19th century marmalade evolved from a thick sticky sweetmeat to the thinner spread we are now familiar with.



the review

**Charlotte Smith-Jarvis dines at Seckford Hall's new 1530 restaurant**

**Setting**

Seckford Hall is just a hop and a skip from the A12 at Woodbridge and incredibly easy to get to. Found along a quiet country lane, the hall is set in beautiful gardens, fronted by perfectly manicured hedging and ancient trees. There is plenty of parking too.

**Interior**

Last year the hall started to undergo a series of remarkable changes which have brought it bang up to date. New additions include comfortable lounge areas, an updated snug bar, swanky cocktail bar and a sophisticated new restaurant, 1530. The 1530 eatery is almost unrecognisable to the initiated who have dined at Seckford before.

While ornate wooden carved panels remain at the front, the rest of the space has been painted in a neutral cream tone, with elegant window dressings, interesting light fittings (including a large mosaic wall light) and very comfortable chairs filling the room.

Soft jazzy music plays in the background. Fresh roses adorn vases. And candles flicker.

**Food**

The menu at Seckford is brasserie style, with influences and flavour combinations spanning the globe.

Starters this week included tomato bavarois with rocket salad and basil pesto, and smoked mackerel rillettes with horseradish crème fraiche and beetroot salad.

I began with the duck terrine with black cherry coulis and roast chestnut salad. Presentation was understated and pretty, and the portion size was good. The terrine was firm but tender and studded throughout with pistachios and pink peppercorns which added a good crunchy texture. The cherry coulis brought sweetness to the plate, while the chestnuts in the salad added a pleasant smoky note.

My dining partner's starter of smoked salmon with pickled courgette, shallot salad and honey and lime dressing was a complete joy to eat, she said. In fact, I was told it was the best smoked salmon dish she'd ever had. The cured fish was meltingly soft, and the dressing and courgettes



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worked with it to create a "heavenly" flavour.

Onwards and upwards, and there is plenty of variety for the main event. Ribeye steak is there, as is poached sea trout with fettuccine, crayfish, vegetable ribbons and pesto.

I opted for the pan-fried cod with chorizo risotto and vermouth and clam sauce, which had been recommended to me.

The resulting dish was divine. The cod was flaky and cooked exactly right, with a crisp skin and moist interior. The risotto beneath was packed with a medley of exciting flavours, from mildly spicy chorizo, to citrus and parmesan, and lifted the flavour of the cod.

And the vermouth sauce and clams rounded the plate off excellently.

On the other side of the table there was an equal amount of praise for the Gressingham duck breast, which was nicely pink, very

well-seasoned and served with a crisp and unctuous fondant potato, savoy cabbage with bacon, and sweetly piquant cherries that made the duck sing (not literally though).

It is worth noting here that the portion sizes are very good - I could barely finish my main course, wanting to leave a little space for pud.

Desserts ranged from cheesecake of the day to the perennial favourite cheeseboard. We sampled a passion fruit bavarois with pineapple and chilli salsa, and an Italian-inspired warm grape and citrus cake with margherita semi-freddo.

Both, as with the rest of the meal, looked fabulous.

The bavarois had a fluffy, set mousse texture and a very delicate and subtle passion fruit flavour. I felt that the passion fruit jelly on top was a bit heavy set, and could have done without the passion fruit seeds in it, which were too crunchy. There also could have been a bit more zing or citrus on the plate to counter the sweetness. I really enjoyed the pineapple and chilli salsa, which wasn't overpowering or overly hot. It was an accomplished dessert but could just do with a couple of tweaks to make it perfect.

Our grape and citrus cake was very good indeed. The crumb was airy and light, and the combination of grape and citrus flavours (something neither of us had eaten before) was very good indeed, as was the aromatic semi-freddo.

**Drink**

There is a decent wine list with lots

