

Edible LONDON

—Experiencing Its Tastes & Treasures



Susan Slack and Dottie Koteski

BY SUSAN FULLER SLACK (CHARLESTON)

When judged against other great world cities, London's cuisine is in the winner's circle. After all, British fare descends from a well-respected lineage influenced by the Franco-Normans. Some say it lost its way in the Victorian era, but London today is being called the new culinary capital of Europe. It is a multicultural city and the cuisine has a strong ethnic flare. Restaurant chefs and home cooks are cooking up fresh ideas, emphasizing seasonal, organic, and locally sourced foods.

To savor the flavors of this exciting city, LDEI's London Chapter invited Dames from the U.S. and Canada to attend **Edible London**—a “four-day extravaganza.” Held May 15-18, 36 Dames and guests rendezvoused with 17 London Dames for a behind-the-scenes look at the city's thriving food-and-wine scene.

Organizer **Sue Carter** chaired the symposium, saying, “This would be a great opportunity to share our city with our North American sisters, placing the London Chapter firmly on the map within LDEI.”

Attendees checking into the Melia White House Hotel near Regent's Park in Central London were presented with a Harvey Nichols tote bag filled with British artisan foods, cookbooks, and other goodies.

Valentina Harris, vivacious president of LDEI London, recounts the vetting process for selecting the most suitable accommodations. “During each hotel visit, I bounced on the beds, checked the bathroom plumbing, and examined the thickness of the toilet paper—all with my clothes on!”

Special thanks to Renie Steves, Chrissie Walker, Hayley Matson-Mathes and Mike Mathes, and Toria and Bill Emas for photo assistance. Edible London was a photographer's dream. Check the LDEI website for additional photos and a full-text version of this article.—Susan Slack



East India Tea Company. A Thursday-morning tea-tasting was arranged at this elegant company in Mayfair. Tea Master Lalith Lenadora conducted tastings of exquisite black, green, and white teas, and explained how to brew a proper cup. The “icing on the cake” was a tasting of truffles and sweet/savory artisan biscuits (cookies), some produced from 400-year-old company recipes.

Melia White House Hotel. A welcome reception at the Melia was the official kickoff for **Edible London**. The London Dames were immediately identified by their stylish blue pashmina scarves. Everyone mingled, appreciating conversations that weren't limited to email or 140 characters. Valentina Harris reflected, “I felt it was really important to bring the U.K. Dames face to face with Dames from across the pond to share experiences and traditions linked to gastronomy and food and to form important links and friendships.”

L-R: Shelby Schafer, London Dame Clare Marriage, Marsha Palanci, and Renie Steves. Photo: S Slack. L-R: London Dame Julia Platt Leonard, Suzanne Henniger, and London LDEI President Valentina Harris. Photo: S Slack. London Dames L-R: Chantal Coady, Julia Platt Leonard, Tonia Buxton, Clare Marriage, Melanie Reeve, Caroline Anne Bennett, Valentina Harris, Pervin Todiwala, Bonnie Brulee, Sue Carter (hidden) and Sarah Thompson. Photo: R Steves.

L-R: London Dames Sarah Thompson, Sejal Sukhadwala, Pervin Todiwala, Gina McAdam, and Victa Conring Magcase. Photo: S Slack. L-R: Edible London Chair Sue Carter and London Membership Chair Chrissie Walker. Photo: C Walker. L-R: Patty Ravenscroft (wearing yellow) and Rachel Mueller. Photo: C Walker.

MEMORIES OF EDIBLE LONDON

COMPILED BY
DOTTIE KOTESKI
(PHILADELPHIA)

“Smithfield Market was a highlight. After Peter Twist told the meat cutters we were a group of top restaurateurs and chefs from the U.S., they opened up, showed us their prize cuts, and told stories about each other and the market.”—**Barbara Cook** (Houston)

“It was a culinary adventure of a lifetime, with London Dames providing a rich insight into the food, culture, and history.”—**Hayley Matson-Mathes** (Hawaii)

“Chocolate-and-cheese *canapés*. . . certainly one reason to visit London again very soon!”—**Kristen LaCount** (Boston)

“Being a chef and having the incredible opportunity to forage on Dover Farm and learn about the edible plants native to the area was fabulous!”—**Arlene Mead** (Monterey Bay)

Harvey Nichols. The group boarded an iconic, red, Routemaster double-decker bus for a trip to Harvey Nichols Fifth Floor in exclusive Knightsbridge. The flagship luxury-lifestyles store holds a fine-dining restaurant, café, bar, luxury food market, wine shop, and outside terrace on the fifth floor. We were greeted with a glass of pale-gold, sparkling Nyetimber 2009 Classic Cuvée. Representatives from Nyetimber, Edinburgh Gin, Aqua Riva Tequila (Mexico), The One Whisky, Sipsmith Independent Spirits, and Quinta de la Rosa (Portugal) poured wine and cocktails in the beautiful open space. Fifth Floor Senior Head Chef Chris Bower presented mouth-watering *canapés* and foods arranged in tiny bowls. Among the specialty foods, you could even purchase a chocolate replica of yourself after briefly standing in a 3-D scanning booth. It was a brilliantly British evening!

Smithfield Market. On Friday, a group of early risers visited Smithfield (officially, London Central Markets), the U.K.'s largest wholesale meat market—in existence since the 12th century. Sue Carter and **Jacqui Pickles** shepherded the group while former Metropolitan Police Officer and City Guide Peter Twist led everyone on an entertaining tour through the maze of meat cutters, sellers, and buyers. Breakfast at the Fox & Anchor pub included spicy bloody Marys, bacon butty sandwiches, hot porridge, or The Full Monty.



Foraging is a sensory journey. *Photo: R Steves.* The foragers savored an early-morning snack of Cornish Pasties at a rest stop. *Photo: R Steves.* Valentina Harris and Margaret Happel Perry examine a colorful foraged specimen. *Photo: S Slack.* Toria Emas and Marsha Palanci "suit up" for the group's Doves Farm mill tour. Clare Marriage of Doves Farm and Valentina Harris lead the way for a tea-tasting with foraged plants and a Doves Farm mill tour. *Photo: B Emas.* The Dames pause to admire the Marriage's curly-haired Mangalitsa pigs. *Photo: S Slack.*

The Modern Pantry. At this restaurant in the fashionable, food-friendly area called Clerkenwell, Caravan coffee roaster gave a coffee "cupping" demonstration and **Melanie Reeve**, wine expert at London's Vinopolis, presented a tasting of English sparkling wines. Chef-proprietor, Anna Hansen, spoke about her culinary journey and working with Chef Peter Gordon, the "godfather of fusion cuisine." Luncheon included several of Anna's signature dishes characterized as nose-to-tail eating and global fusion.

Doves Farm. In a simultaneous morning tour, 30 attendees traveled west of London to the Wiltshire/Berkshire border for a foraging trip and to visit the organic mill, Doves Farm Foods, owned by **Clare Marriage** and husband, Michael. Clare, Michael, and Valentina led the foragers through the sunny, pastoral countryside—with sheep, frolicking lambs, and curly-haired Mangalitsa pigs—searching for flowering herbs, nettles, elderflowers, and wild-blackberry leaves.

At Doves Farm we toured the state-of-the-art production mill. The company transforms ancient grains into cereals, biscuits, 21 different flours, and a wide variety of award-winning gluten-free products. Clare educated the group on the ancient grains and brewed hot-nettle and wild-blackberry-leaf teas from materials foraged. Valentina served a refreshing summer beverage made with fragrant elderflowers.



Clockwise: L-R: London Dame Tonia Buxton, Dorothee Rubin, Grande Dame Carol Brock, and Cleo Roccas of Aqua Riva Tequila. *Photo: S Slack.* Harvey Nichols' fabulous Fifth Floor. The company's Chief Executive Officer Stacey Cartwright. *Photo: S Slack.* London Dame Sarah Thompson and Becky Satterfield. *Photo: C Walker.* The Smithfield Market tour group. *Photo: M Mathes.* Crab and Virgin Mary Cocktails and Scotch Eggs with Tarragon Mayonnaise at Harvey Nichols. *Photo: R Steves.* L-R: Judy Rusinguolo, Teresa Farney, Patti Ravenscroft, Drew Faulkner (all Washington). *Photo: S Slack.* Off to Harvey Nichols. *Photo: R Steves.*

"From traditional Cornish pasties, handcrafted Gins, fabulous organic farmers' markets, gourmet chocolates, and crisp, dry wines to international cuisine, the British food scene has plenty to tantalize the palate!"—**Nichole Bendele** (San Antonio)

"The walk to Rococo Chocolates for the chocolate-and-cheese pairing enabled us to see the lovely village of Marylebone with its quaint shops and well-populated outdoor cafes with flowers cascading from the balconies."—**Michelle LaCount** (Boston)

"A highlight for me was high tea at The Savoy and meeting the Executive Chef, James Pare, who, coincidentally, was from Vancouver and knew a lot of people I knew."—**Elly Driessen** (British Columbia).

"Pervin Todiwala's Café Spice Namasté had to be the best Indian food I've ever tasted. London needs to know I shall return as soon as I can. It was one of the best trips of my life."—**Becky Satterfield** (Birmingham).

"The memory I still savor was the exquisite meal at The Harrow at Little Bedwyn owned by Roger and Sue Jones."—**Dottie Koteski** (Philadelphia)



The pre-dessert "boiled egg" with shortbread "soldier." Sue Jones of The Harrow. Photo: R Steves. Londoners Chantal Coady with Clare and Michael Marriage. Photo: S Slack. Carol Brock and renowned U.K. Chef Roger Jones. Photo: S Slack.

The Harrow at Little Bedwyn. Lunch was quite a memorable experience for the foragers who visited The Harrow at Little Bedwyn in the Wiltshire countryside. Winner of numerous Michelin Stars, it is one of the most highly acclaimed restaurants outside London. Award-winning Chef Roger Jones has an excellent pedigree that includes working for Her Majesty The Queen on State Banquets and Margaret Thatcher at 10 Downing Street.

A garden reception and lunch included several impeccable courses with wines perfectly matched by Roger and his business partner/wife Sue. Their world-class wine list, strong on Australian wines, has garnered numerous awards. It's impossible to mention each course, but every bite was remarkable. **Elly Driesen** (British Columbia) reminisces, "Everyone will remember the whimsical pre-dessert. It was mango passion fruit custard topped with Italian meringue and served in a white egg cup with a crispy cookie 'soldier.'" (A "soldier" is a thin toast strip for dipping into a soft-boiled egg.)



Blackdown Artisan Gin and London Dame Sarah Thompson of Blackdown Artisan Spirits. Photos: R Steves. Celebrity Chef Cyrus Todiwala and Honorary Dame Pervin Todiwala, owners/proprietors of Café Spice Namasté. Michael Mathes, Hayley Matson-Mathes, Matt Rinn, and Deborah Knight. L-R: Becky Satterfield, Arlene Mead, and Suzanne Henniger. Photos: S Slack. L-R: Michelle Lacount and Kristen Lacount. Photo: R Steves. Bill Emas, Nicole Loukopoulou, and Toria Emas at Café Spice. Nichole Bender. Photos: C Walker.

Café Spice Namasté. Friday evening was spent at the award-winning Café Spice Namasté in historic Whitechapel. We began with an English Gin tasting by **Sarah Thompson**. Sarah and husband Nathan own Blackdown Artisan Spirits, a Sussex winery-distillery. A key ingredient in their Sussex Dry Gin is silver birch sap and it takes 100 gallons of sap to make one gallon of birch syrup.

Dinner was presented by Chef/Owner Cyrus Todiwala OBE and his business partner/wife **Pervin Todiwala**. Each dish was redolent with fragrant spices that tantalized the taste buds. An outstanding Anglo-Indian version of Country Captain featured bowls of meltingly tender, slow-roasted mut-

ton in a tomato-spice sauce, crowned with cumin-flavored mashed potatoes. This dish was the main course of a menu prepared by Chef Cyrus for Her Majesty The Queen's Diamond Jubilee luncheon in 2012. Each guest received a favor bag that included Chef Cyrus' splendid chutney.

Billingsgate. On Saturday, early risers visited Billingsgate, the U.K.'s largest inland fish market, anchored at its current location at Canary Wharf since 1982. The tour was led by Danish-born restaurateur Chef **Silla Bjerrum**, co-founder of Feng Sushi restaurant chain, and C.J. Jackson, a Cordon Bleu-trained chef, cookbook author, and director of Billingsgate Seafood Training School. Silla gave a sushi demonstration to the tour participants and served them sushi and green tea.

Borough Market. Led by **Sue Haddleton**, the merged group of early- and late-rising Dames toured Borough Market in Central London, one of London's largest wholesale/retail food markets, dating back to the 13th century. The sensory kaleidoscope of colors, sounds, aromas, and flavors came from charcuterie, baked goods, ethnic foods, seafood, exotic spices, meat, game, cheese shops, cafés, street stalls, and bars within the market's confines. Lunch was from the array of tantalizing foods.



Billingsgate Market. Photo: M Mathes. Olive Cheese sticks. Photo: C Walker. Borough Market umbrellas. Photo: C Walker. L-R: Patricia Gelles, Valentina Harris, Silla Bjerrum, Mary Ellen Griffin, Barbara Cook, Hayley Matson-Mathes, and Beth Pav. Photo: M Mathes.

Marylebone Village. Leonard Carter, Sue's husband, shared entertaining stories of historic London's nooks and crannies during the afternoon bus trip to Marylebone Village, a charming area in Westminster with high-quality boutiques and restaurants. We enjoyed a talk and sausage-roll tasting at The Ginger Pig, an award-winning butcher shop, and a demonstration of the iconic AGA kitchen stove at the cook shop Divertimenti. A pioneer of fine chocolates in the U.K., **Chantal Coady**, and Manager Sam Smallman of Rococo Chocolates, teamed with **Patricia Michelson** of the renowned La Fromagerie for an extraordinary session on chocolate-and-cheese pairing. For example, Blu 61, Veneto, Italy, is a fruity blue cheese that pairs beautifully with an Academy of Chocolate 2014 Silver Award-winning Organic Milk Chocolate Bar with Salted Caramelised Almonds and Rosemary. The last stop was La Cucina Caldesi Italian Cookery School, where noted British cookbook author Sybil Kapoor gave a cooking demonstration and lecture on flavor.



London Dame Patricia Michelson and Toria Emas. *Photo: B Emas.* Cheeses displayed in the walk-in cheese room at La Fromagerie. *Photo: S Slack.* Chantal Coady and Sam Smallman present a class on the magical pairing of chocolate and cheese. *Photo: T Emas.* Chocolate-and-cheese pairing. *Photo: R Steves.*

Clarke's Restaurant. A gala dinner at this local legend eatery took place Saturday evening. Located in Notting Hill in the Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea, Chef **Sally Clarke**, one of the first female chefs to open a London restaurant, started the business in 1983. Grande Dame **Alice Waters** of Chez Panisse became her friend and mentor when Sally cooked for Michael McCarty in California. The fresh, seasonal ingredients featured at the dinner reflected the best of the U.K.: pan-roasted Scottish halibut fillet, roasted rump of Sussex lamb, Berkswell Sheep's Milk Cheese, Norfolk County asparagus, Jubilee Strawberries, and several outstanding wines.



Clockwise from top left: Teresa and Jerry Farney chat with Mary Ellen Griffin at Clarke's. *Photo: C Walker.* Honorary London Dame/Executive Chef Sally Clarke with Valentina Harris. *Photo: S Slack.* London Chapter First Vice President Jacqui Pickles. Leonard and Sue Carter. London Dame Kristine Kelly and Beth Pav. Marsha Palanci with Ashley and David James. *Photos: C Walker.* Clarke's Roasted Sussex Lamb with Honey Orange Glaze. *Photo: S Slack.*



Chantal Cody visits her cocoa tree at the Chelsea Physic Garden. *Photo: S Slack.*

Tangerine Dream Café. Sunday was the final day of an incredible culinary adventure. Breakfast was at this café on the grounds of the Chelsea Physic Garden, founded in 1673. Its goal is to conserve over 5,000 species of plants. We dined alfresco on specialties like *kedgerree*—a delicate, spiced Anglo-Indian rice dish with lightly smoked fish and a poached egg. Dessert was warm orange polenta tart.



The Savoy Kitchen Tour: Back row, L-R: Pastry Chef Craig Soeberg, Teresa Farney, Valentina Harris, Executive Chef James Pare, Elly Driessen, Dottie Koteski, (Jerry Farney in back). Middle Row, L-R: Barbara Cook, Nancy Knight, Carol Brock, Victoria Consing Magcase, Sejal Sukhadwala, and Sharon Van Meter. Front row kneeling, L-R: Deborah Knight and Gina McAdam. Elegant floral-inspired pastries grace the tea table. Sharon Van Meter, Dottie Koteski and Barbara Cook arrive for tea. Elly Driessen looks stylish in her fascinator hat. *Photos: S Slack.*

The Savoy Hotel. Several Dames went to afternoon tea at The Savoy Hotel—London's grandest of Dames hotel in Westminster. Executive Chef James Pare led a fascinating tour through the hotel kitchens. He follows in the footsteps of the great Auguste Escoffier, who took over the kitchens when the hotel opened. James pays homage by incorporating many of Escoffier's signature dishes back into the menu. Our servers filled Royal Doulton bone-china teacups with The Savoy Blend. Tea sandwiches and scones with lemon curd, clotted cream, and strawberry jam preceded floral-inspired tea pastries honoring the Royal Horticultural Society (RHS) Chelsea Flower Show opening.

Leaving London. During these four memorable days, we grazed an amazing and adventuresome trail through *Edible London*—and we're hungry for more! Two Dames say it all.

~“What an incredible, edible experience for all! What an impressive chapter to undertake this project during its formative years!”—**Toria Emas** (Chicago)

~“All the votes are in. *Edible London* was a great success! It had to happen if Les Dames was to truly become Les Dames International with chapters worldwide. And it had to be outstanding. It was!”—Grande Dame **Carol Brock.**

Special thanks to the London organizing committee: **Sue Carter, Valentina Harris, Jacqui Pickles, Gina McAdam, and Chrissie Walker.** We appreciate all the London Dames and spouses who welcomed us and hosted numerous events. LDEI Past President **Mary Ellen Griffin** (New York) concluded, “*Edible London* was truly an experience to remember, and we all know how much thought and work it takes to put together an event of this magnitude.”