



Eye-witness accounts, diaries and the memories of men, women and children who lived through the Second World War are vividly brought together in **A Taste of Wartime Britain** (Thorogood, 175pp, paperback, £9.99). Editor Nicholas Webley serves up more than recipes — there are absorbing, first-hand insights into the prelude to war and the Home Front during it — but it is the ingenuity with which women managed to cook up some delicious meals despite strict rationing that most appeals. It is almost mouthwatering to read descriptions of some of the dishes they prepared, working culinary miracles with corned beef, dried eggs, potatoes and, when they could lay hold of it, mincemeat. Bacon pie, toad-in-the-hole, beef loaf, magic treacle tart, nightfighter stew — so called because there went into it vast amounts of carrots, which were supposed to be good for the eyesight — and Home Guard Soup, made virtually entirely of onions and to be served with thick bread and hot, strong tea: all helped to keep the nation marching staunchly on its stomach as well as its feet.

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They are just as popular today as when most of them were first built in the days of Queen Victoria — the seaside piers with-

out which no British coastal resort worthy of its name would be seen. Martin Easdown focuses on one part of the country in particular in **Lancashire's Seaside Piers** (Wharncliffe Books, 192pp, paperback, £12.99), to show us why we are so attracted to what are in effect elaborate jetties extending the shore into the sea. There are comprehensive histories of 28 piers and landing stages, showing that despite their delights, piers have seen their fair share of setbacks: fire destroyed Lytham Pier, Southport Pier collapsed, and an extensive length of Blackpool's North Pier was badly damaged when a large ship smashed into it. There are more than 100 photographs and images, as well as special sections covering the River Mersey and the Isle of Man, in the first, and very welcome, book of its kind to give so all-embracing a history.

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Dr. Nick Barratt is best known for his role in establishing *Who Do You Think You Are?*, the popular BBC television series aimed at taking celebrities into their family's past. With **Nick Barratt's Guide to Your Ancestors' Lives** (Pen & Sword, 282pp, hardback, £19.99), he performs a similar service for everyone who wants to discover more about their roots, describing



The Pier Pavilion, St. Annes-on-the-Sea

Spring Bros., Publishers and Printers, St. Annes-on-the-Sea.

with admirable clarity how to begin the quest and how to carry it through. So easy does he make it look, particularly with techniques for forming personal archives and harnessing modern technology, that he has doubtless sown the seeds for a whole forest of family trees.

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An extraordinary cast of characters is paraded by Henry Hemming in the pages of **In Search of the English Eccentric** (John Murray, 331pp, paperback, £7.99). We meet an ex-Hell's Angel biker who has become the reincarnation of King Arthur, a pensioner tattooed from head to foot with leopard spots, the country's leading creator of crop circles and a superhero dressed as a baked bean. By comparison well-known English eccentrics like Dame Vivienne Westwood and the Marquess of Bath, also included here, are almost normal. But this is far from an exercise in poking fun at people who happen to be different. The author clearly admires them,

*The Moorish Pavilion on St. Annes Pier, St. Annes-on-the-Sea, Lancashire, photographed here soon after it was built in 1904, is one of Britain's most striking seaside attractions. See review opposite page.*

argues convincingly that English society functions better with genuinely odd and colourful characters, and says he is worried that they face extinction. Surely not: eccentrics there will always be, for which we should be thankful.

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The old-fashioned corner shop, sadly now as hard to find as the close communities they once served, was more than a place to buy the groceries and other odds and ends — it was somewhere to meet people and have a good gossip, which is why most housewives used to go there

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