

Preface

There are probably as many reasons for writing a book or books as there are writers. The reason for my writing this book about the first hundred years of the Nobel Banquets came to me when my daughter and I were watching the prize-giving ceremony in 2001, not so much because it was the centenary as because my daughter, then ten years old, said something that stuck in my mind.

When the prizes were being handed out and the television commentator remarked that one of the laureates did research on the human brain, she said: “Good, keep doing that brain research, it’s needed.” This comment came straight from the heart because a close member of the family had suffered a stroke and had to spend time convalescing, which had had repercussions on the rest of the family. That was the very moment when I got the idea to write about the Nobel festivities, not only because it was the centenary year but also because no one had previously written about the way the banquets had developed. I described my plan to my former restaurateur, Lars-Göran Andersson, who thought it was a good idea. With his help, I then got in touch with the Nobel Foundation and they, too, liked the idea. After that I only had to start writing. Another reason for choosing to study the banquets was my own personal involvement as I had worked in the kitchen there for a number of years, and food and drink have been my great interest ever since I was about ten years old.

This book is dedicated to the memory of Wilhelm Odelberg, that wonderful man who, to my very great surprise, also took an interest in my work. If ever there was a man who deserved to be called “Mr Nobel”, it was him; he attended all the banquets between 1959 and 2001. Wilhelm was a fantastic source of information, particularly for Chapter 4, which describes the development of the banquets, since he had been present at so many of them. When he fell ill, he telephoned to tell me and we agreed that he would continue to help me, but as he could no longer manage personal meetings, we developed a system by which I wrote down my question(s) on a postcard and sent it off and he telephoned me when he felt strong enough — and that was usually the

same day he received the card. What turned out to be our last conversation took place on the day before he died, when he was still in good spirits and was himself working on an article. Besides his knowledge of the banquets, he was a very humble man who kept himself up to date on current affairs in the world and who had a broad and open mind as well as great human warmth. Since we had both studied history and archaeology for our degrees, our conversations were always about much more than just the banquets.

The book is organised as follows: After this introductory preface, there is quite logically a chapter that describes the background to the Nobel Prizes. The next chapter is called “The Gastronomic Man” as it deals with the causes and factors that influence people’s choices of food and drink. This is followed by Chapter 3, which discusses the gastronomic mix of countries that were present at one and the same time in the Blue Hall of the Stockholm City Hall at the 90-year and 100-year jubilees. Chapter 4 presents the development of the banquets themselves over the first 100 years, while Chapter 5 deals with the menus. This chapter also includes the Court’s banquets for the laureates on 11th December because the first of them was given in 1904 and they have been given ever since and are closely connected with the Nobel festivities. Another reason for including them is that I wanted to compare the menus for these two banquets since both are given in honour of the laureates. I have divided Chapters 4 and 5 into ten-year periods for the simple reason that it was easiest to present the material in this way to make it more readable and more easily comprehensible for the reader. I also chose this system to make it easier for readers to find any particular year they are interested in. The menus for each ten-year period, however, are presented together, but I refer anyone who is interested in one particular year to Appendix 1, where all the menus are listed year by year in French. Chapter 6 is a short conclusion. It is also quite possible to read each chapter separately, if you so wish.

No book writes itself and even though only my name is on the cover, this book would never have materialised without the help of all the people who answered my inquisitive questions. Writing a book is not entirely painless and is sometimes a complicated process; at times one finds oneself lost in an unbelievably muddled world of ideas that manifest themselves in various ways.

First and foremost, I want to thank the people who are close to me every day and who are still there: Iván and our daughter Rubi. Many thanks for putting up with my whims and fancies and all that they have involved. My thanks to my sister Helene Söderlind, who is geographically quite a long way

away, for patiently reading the first drafts that I sent her. It couldn't have been easy for her to read these chapters since her personal interests have never been in the kitchen region — and never will be! I thank Johan Söderlind for his help with computers and their technicalities, which I do not master. My grateful thanks also to Marianne and Ove Söderlind (my parents) for their never-failing interest in all that I have done.

The embassies of the following countries are sincerely thanked for having provided me with invaluable information concerning their countries' eating and drinking customs: Argentina, Belgium, Canada, Columbia, Denmark, Mexico, Nigeria, Norway, Poland, South Africa, Switzerland.

I thank their Majesties the King and Queen of Sweden for giving me permission to study the menus for 11th December despite their private nature, and for allowing me to publish them.

My thanks to First Marshal of the Court Johan Fischerström and Surveyor of the Court Ingela Lilliehöök at the Royal Court for all the help I received concerning the missing menus for December 11 after 1950, for all the answers to my other questions and for their kind interest. I also thank Monica Friberg, who worked at the Royal Palace Household, for her great kindness in helping me to borrow photographs and obtain information, and for her interest in my project. My thanks to Court Photographer Alexis Daffos for his help with the Court menus and for his interest.

I give my thanks to Jan Brunius and Lars Wickström at the Palace Archives for their kind attention and helpfulness and for the great interest they showed in my ideas for this book. What would the December 11 menus for the years 1904-1950 have looked like without your help?

I thank Ulla Hager for her help in translating the French menus, mainly for December 11, although we do not know each other and have not even met. Your help has saved me a great deal of time. My thanks to Carl-Henrik Wendt for arranging the contact.

Many thanks to my fellow doctoral students at the Department of Economic History, Therese Nordlund, Sven Hellroth and Ursula Hård, for their moral and mental support in our daily toil, and to Therese in particular for all her proof-reading and for her penetrating comments on my rough drafts. I thank my colleague Jonathan Metzger for having the kindness to read and comment on the section that deals with Jewish food in Chapter 3, and I also thank Per Simonsson for all his technical computer help.

I am grateful to Björn Sandahl, historian and fellow doctoral student, for

always believing in my idea (unlike some others) that it is possible to write about gastronomy from a historical perspective, and for having supervised me during my undergraduate studies at the university. Without your support neither my essays nor this book would have been written (not by me, at any rate).

My thanks are due to Tove Kjellander at the university library for her never-failing interest in my project and for our very rewarding email correspondence. I hope it will continue for many years to come.

I am most grateful to Torbjörn Boström, the photographer who worked with me in connection with photographing the Nobel menus for the years 1920 and 1945. I hope we shall continue to collaborate in the future. I also thank Gunnar Eriksson, head chef for the Golden Hall, Blue Hall and Stockholm City Hall kitchens, for his interest and great help while photographing the above-mentioned menus.

My thanks to Holger Edström, who showed great generosity and kindness in allowing me to use the photos he took in 1991.

I thank the Sandviken School of Catering for two wonderful high-school years in the early 1980s. What creativity!

Many warm thanks to Trygve Carlsson, chief editor at Carlssons publishing house, for all his trusting confidence and enjoyable discussions and for believing in me and my ideas about this book.

I am grateful to Maria Asp at the Royal Academy of Sciences for her great help in locating for me the unique menu for 1907.

My thanks also to Anders Bárány at the Nobel Museum for the interest he showed in my work and for reading and commenting on all of it. That was worth its weight in gold.

Last, but definitely not least, I thank the Nobel Foundation and Lars-Göran Andersson for their enormous support and their great interest in my project. Believe me, that was worth a very great deal!

In my last conversation with Wilhelm, he expressed the hope and wish that I would manage to collect all the material for a book and that it would be an enthralling book. I leave it to you, my reader, to decide how enthralling it is.

Happy reading!

Ulrika Söderlind
Spånga, Sweden
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