

News Release



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Decree on method of making the perfect cup of tea will honour great writer

To honour George Orwell on the centenary of his birth later this year, the Royal Society of Chemistry is to decree the definitive method by which the perfect cup of tea should be made and served.

The RSC will also try to persuade cookery book publishers to include the resultant recipe in future publications, thereby fulfilling Orwell's published wish that the step-by-step preparation of the national drink be properly defined.

Orwell, best known for his books *Animal Farm* and *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, wrote the celebrated essay *A Nice Cup of Tea* three years before his death. In the essay, which stands alongside masterpieces such as *A Hanging* and *Shooting an Elephant*, Orwell expresses surprise and concern that the extremely serious matter of tea brewing is not featured in cookery books, a situation that has not changed.

Orwell says: "This is curious, not only because tea is one of the mainstays of civilisation in this country but because the best manner of making it is the subject of violent disputes."

Now, to celebrate his 100th birthday, the RSC is to remedy the oversight.

The effort to define what exactly makes the best cup of tea is also the RSC's way of saying that it does not bear ill will for Orwell's negative opinions of scientists and of chemists in particular.

"This is a gesture to show that we do not bear a grudge against Orwell despite the fact that he publicly scorned chemists and other scientists in his essay *Science*," says Dr Cristina de Matteis, who chairs the RSC Committee for the Promotion of Chemistry to the Public.

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The Royal Society of Chemistry is the Professional Body and Learned Society for chemistry in the UK with 46,000 members world-wide. It is a major international publisher of chemical information, supports the teaching of chemistry at all levels and is a leader in bringing science to the public.

All of the RSC's news releases and other press information can be found at the on-line press office at www.rsc.org

The RSC is to consult its own drinks and flavour specialists in order to identify ways to prepare and to serve the unbeatable cup of tea. The RSC will also be seeking the tea-making views of the general public through its local branches around the UK.

Orwell defines in his essay the way to make a perfect cup of tea, saying: "I find no fewer than eleven outstanding points. On perhaps two or three of them there would be pretty general agreement but at least four others are acutely controversial."

He asserts that Indian or Ceylonese teas must be used, dismissing China tea as having no stimulation. "One does not feel wiser, braver or more optimistic after drinking it."

He insists that the tea should be strong, claiming that six heaped tea spoons are required for a quart pot.

The novelist insists that no strainers or tea bags (muslin at that time) should be used and that it is perfectly right that leaves should reach the cup and he says it is all right to eat them in considerable quantities. Also he insists that a cylindrical breakfast cup must be used, not a flat-based cup.

He is adamant that the tea should be poured before the milk, claiming that it is the only way by which to regulate the amount of milk.

His last point is that sugar should never be taken. "How can you call yourself a true tea-lover if you destroy the flavour of your tea by putting sugar in it? It would be equally reasonable to put in pepper or salt. Tea is meant to be bitter just as beer is meant to be bitter."

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Notes for Editors

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1) The Royal Society of Chemistry is the Learned Society for chemistry and the Professional Body for chemists in the UK. With 46,000 members world-wide, it can trace its history back to the Chemical Society founded in 1841. The RSC is a major international publisher of chemical information, supports hundreds of chemical meetings a year and is a leader in communicating science to the public.