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THESE FOLK KNOW FOOD.

Well known food and wine expert Egon Ronay briefed the chefs before a special luncheon at the Cafe Royal, held to boost the reputation of British cooking. They were all from the provinces, because some harsh things have been said by tourists about the food in provincial hotels; so now was the chance to show the good side of the picture. It was to be a five-course lunch, the chefs preparing one course each, proving incidentally, to a gathering of famous gastronomes, that London isn't the only place in the country for fine cooking.

Impressario Henry Sherek can distinguish high class food as unerringly as he spots good plays. As for the chefs they'd come from Glasgow, Burnley, Prestbury, Truro, and Gatwick - a pretty fair cross-section of Britain. The judges included restaurateur Charles Forte and Oil King Nubar Gulbenkian.

The general verdict of the gastronomes - Mr. Marples agreeing - was that the provinces have nothing to be ashamed of. Congratulations.