

RURAL HISTORY TODAY

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Life, labour and legacy

In memory of Professor Alun Howkins, who died on 12th July 2018, Nicola Verdon investigates the history of Burston Strike School.

On a warm day in the middle of August 2018 family, friends and colleagues packed into the main room of Burston Strike School in Norfolk to celebrate the life and times of Professor Alun Howkins. Accompanied by Vic Gammon on his melodeon the gathering sang, at Alun's instruction, *Jerusalem*, *The World Turned Upside Down* and a range of socialist anthems including *The Internationale* and *The Red Flag*.



Child Strikers, 1914. Image supplied by Burston Strike School.

This was not the first time the venue had reverberated to such songs. The school, built on donations from trades unions, Friendly Societies, Miners' Lodges and socialist societies, was declared open by local teenager Violet Potter in May 1917 in front of a crowd of 1200. To the accompaniment of *The Red Flag*, she declared it 'To be forever a school of freedom'. In August 1939, the school was the venue for the funeral of Tom Higdon, the Burston teacher who along with his wife Annie, had been dismissed by Norfolk Education Committee on 1st April 1914, triggering what became known as the 'longest strike in history'.

A labouring man

Alun first visited the strike school in 1974 when he was researching his PhD thesis at the University of Essex

under the guidance of Paul Thompson. This went on to be published as *Poor Labouring Men: Rural Radicalism in Norfolk 1870–1923* (Routledge, 1985). In it, he outlined the growth of rural radicalism and trade unionism and how this was closely embedded in the culture and consciousness of Norfolk rural society.

The interviews he conducted with the men and women who had worked on the land transformed his historical understanding and, in his own words, "altered my approach to the subject from being a 'labour historian' to being, I hope, a historian of the Norfolk labourer" (*Poor Labouring Men*, p. xii).

Although his academic career was characterised by diverse interests and he published on a wide range of subjects connected to popular culture, left-wing politics and music, his central commitment always remained the life and work of the rural labouring poor.

On his retirement from the University of Sussex in 2010, Alun and his wife Linda moved to the Norfolk countryside (or 'God's heartland' as he called it) realizing a long-held ambition to reconnect with the people and landscape of his early research. The Burston strike story had its origins in many of the themes that distinguish *Poor Labouring Men*, in particular the efforts of the poorly paid rural working-class to find a voice through unionization and education, and the role of the local elite, notably the clergy, school managers and farmers, to stymie those aspirations and hold on to their positions of power.

The Higdon

Tom and Annie Higdon arrived in Norfolk in 1902, six years into their marriage, appointed Headmistress and Assistant Master of Wood Dalling Council School.

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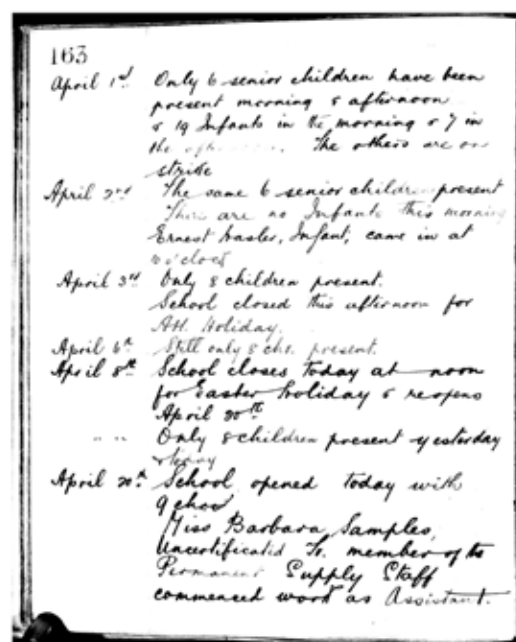
Tom and Annie Higdon. Image supplied by Burston Strike School.



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Above: Strike Day at Burston, 1914. Right: Page of the school logbook from 1st April 1914 recording that only six children were present in the morning and afternoon... 'The others are on strike.' Images supplied by Burston Strike School.



These positions reflected their contrasting social origins and educational backgrounds. Tom was the son of a farm labourer from Somerset and received his training as a former pupil-teacher, essentially a four-year apprenticeship scheme that allowed bright children from poor backgrounds to receive secondary education. He did not go on to training college unlike his wife Annie, the daughter of a foreman-shipwright from Cheshire, who was able to train as an elementary school teacher and become a certified head teacher.

At Wood Dalling they set about a campaign to improve the dilapidated school buildings, pupil attendance and academic attainment. This led to conflict with local farmers, who were taken to task by the Higdon's for illegal employing children during term time, and with school managers for their intransigence. Tom's increasing involvement on the parish council and with the newly formed Eastern Counties Agricultural Labourers' and Smallholders' Union, exacerbated deteriorating relations. In 1910, following charges that Annie had called the chair of the school managers and his colleagues liars, the pair were transferred from Wood Dalling to Burston, where they arrived in January 1911.

At Burston, the Higdon's continued their endeavours to provide a decent education for the local children and a voice for their parents on the local platforms of power. At the March 1913 parish elections, Tom's encouragement led to the election of a number of local labourers, usurping the established order of village 'government',

much to the consternation of the incumbent Reverend Charles Eland, who already distrusted the Higdon's for their non-attendance at his church. Eland was later appointed Chair of the school managers, which set in motion a train of events that led to the strike.

In February 1914 Annie Higdon was brought before a Norfolk Education Committee enquiry for allegedly beating two children in her school and being discourteous to the school managers. Although the former accusation did not stand up to scrutiny, the Higdon's were given notice to quit in March 1914. Support from the Burston community was immediate. It was led by the pupils who, with parental support, went out on strike on 1st April.

The Burston Strike and School

The strike was well organized. Led by Violet Potter on her concertina, 66 of the 72 pupils walked behind the banner 'Justice', following a 'Candlestick' (circular) route around the village. They carried red flags, Union Jacks and other banners demanding 'We Want Our Teachers Back'. Despite strikers and parents being summoned before the Education Committee and fined, momentum gained. The strike garnered local and national publicity, public backing from the agricultural trade union, Norwich Independent Labour Party and other trade unions.

The children's education continued with Annie at the helm, firstly under a marquee on

the village green, then in a former carpenter's shop. As donations poured in, the dream of buying land and opening a new, permanent school became reality. The site was a small parcel of land between the village green and the church, and the new school was opened in May 1917. Annie continued to lead education provision. Tom's attention was increasingly on union activity. He continued to serve on the executive committee and organized an annual rally at Burston, in celebration of local democracy, up to 1937. At the time of his death in 1939, the last 11 pupils were transferred to the council school and Burston Strike School was closed. Used for storage in the Second World War, it was left without a legal owner on Annie's death in 1946. In 1949 the National Union of Agricultural Workers (NUAW) set up the Burston Strike School foundation; it became an education charity administered by four trustees.

In 1982 the school became a museum and the following year the trustees re-established the Burston rally, which still takes place annually on the first Sunday in September. In recent years one of these trustees was Alun Howkins, proud to be associated with a building that he argued, told 'a remarkable story in stone'.

► This extraordinary story has now been brought to life by another trustee, Shaun Jeffery, in his meticulously researched and engagingly written book *The Village in Revolt: The Story of the Longest Strike in History* (Higdon Press, 2018). The foreword is by Alun Howkins.

Rural electrification

A post-publication reflection by Paul Brassley, Jeremy Burchardt and Karen Sayer

As we hoped, since the publication of our book on rural electrification (*Transforming the Countryside: the electrification of Rural Britain* (Brassley *et al* eds, Routledge, 2017) a debate about rural energy has begun to emerge, most recently at the European Social Science History Conference in Belfast in April 2018, where a session on the role of women in making energy choices included two specifically rural papers (O'Brien, 2018; Sandwell, 2018).

Two of the contributors there, as well as one of the editors of the collection in question here, have also published journal articles on various aspects of rural electrification and uses of electricity across the social scale, in the UK and beyond. These appeared in a special issue of *History of Retailing and Consumption* (Harrison Moore *et al*, 2018).

New generation

Nevertheless, looking at the book again, we cannot help wondering if, given the changes that have happened over the last decade, we should have included a chapter on farm electricity generation by wind and photo-voltaic panels, to go with the chapter on rural broadband. Although we

had a couple of chapters examining the adoption of electricity in rural households, we said virtually nothing about its impact on the non-farm rural economy. Given the competitive success of other energies (paraffin, coal, anthracite, bottled gas) on farms and rural households, what was demand for electricity like in small rural manufacturing and service businesses? Equally, has electricity been the only infrastructural or service change that has recently affected the rural economy and society?

Energetic discussions

Thinking of other services takes us back to the origins of our book. It emerged from a BAHS-sponsored conference on rural electrification, and an AHRC discussion group on interwar landscapes. It was in those meetings that we realised how much rural infrastructural change occurred in the first half of the twentieth century. Classifying such things, as in the format below, clearly takes us outside the interwar period, but also reminds us of the range of historical questions which, we argue, still remain to be investigated:



Electricity supplied by the National Grid reaches Llanuwchllyn after 54 years of local production. National Library of Wales photograph by Geoff Charles.

1. **Utilities** – gas, electricity, water and sewerage
2. **Communications or information flows**
 - (a) narrowcasting – postal services, telegraph, telephone, email
 - (b) broadcasting – newspapers, radio, TV, internet
3. **Transport**
 - (a) infrastructure – footpaths and bridleways, canals, railways, roads
 - (b) users – walkers, riders, trains, bikes, buses, motorbikes, lorries, cars
4. **Social services**

Education (primary, secondary, adult/extramural)

Health (GPs, nursing, midwifery, cottage hospitals)

Leisure (village halls, rural organisations)

Income support (pensions, benefits, including unemployment benefit)
5. **Commercial services** – shops, pubs, banks, post offices, garages, B&Bs, etc.

Even this list remains incomplete. With one or two exceptions, there has been little work on the impact of the 1926 *Housing (Rural Workers) Act*, despite the fact that it led to the reconditioning of more than 10,000 houses over the following ten years (Shears, 1936).

Our hope, perhaps insufficiently stated in the book, that our work might provoke others into investigating a wider range of rural services, has yet to be realised. Rural service provision remains a live political issue and some historical perspective on the arguments would be useful. Is this a challenge that rural historians can meet?

References

- Sorcha O'Brien, *Electrical demonstrators and Irish countrywomen: official and voluntary promotion of Irish rural electrification*.
- Ruth Sandwell, *Women as energy agents: the case of rural Canada, 1880–1950*.
- R.T. Shears, 'Housing the Agricultural Worker', *Journal of the Royal Agricultural Society of England*, 97 (1936) pp. 1–12.



Image: Eamon Curry

Soup of the day

Rural soup kitchens in the long nineteenth century

The provision of soup and other food by the landed elite to the poor has been largely ignored by historians, probably in part because the evidence is so fragmentary. However, as *Philip Carstairs* explains, in some areas it formed an important part of the makeshift economy of the poor.

Famine relief

Soup kitchens are commonly perceived as urban institutions, but they were also present in the countryside and small towns. During the half-dozen, eighteenth-century crises that verged on famine, the rural gentry and aristocracy began to introduce soup to the standard relief package of bread, meat and coals. For example, in 1757 the *Derby Mercury* reported that the Earl of Dartmouth was distributing beef, broth and bread twice weekly to nearly 200 people from a farm on his Sandwell Hall Estate, near West Bromwich. This was nearly four decades before institutional soup kitchens started opening during the last two major “scarcities” of the century in 1794–96 and 1799–1801.

The scale of these rural soup distributions could be enormous. During the famine of 1799–1801, the vicar of Stowe mentioned in a letter of 23 January 1800 that Earl Temple (Richard Temple Grenville, later the first Duke of Buckingham) was distributing soup to over 800 of “his poor neighbours”. The population of Stowe parish was only 311 in 1801. The surrounding seven parishes could only muster 1,200 more. This largesse was not a one-off: the *Windsor and Eton Express* commented 24 years later that it was “the practice at Stowe to provide soup during the winter to the poor.” The Grenville family distributed soup regularly from their other houses at Avington, Hampshire and Wotton in Buckinghamshire.



George Elgar Hicks: *The Parish Soup Kitchen* (1851)

Country house provision

Soup was usually made at, and distributed from, country houses on a take-away basis. For the poor, this potentially meant a long, cold walk. In 1846, an inquest recorded how 74-year old Martha Foddy made the 5 mile round trip from her home to Stowe to get soup, expiring as she returned to her front door. Urban soup kitchens provided quart servings, which contained around 600–700 calories. In some cases at least, the broth available in rural areas was even more nourishing. In 1800, William Hervey, diarist and traveller, documented Lord Grimston of Gorhambury’s recipe for soup for the poor which appeared to contain nearly 2,000 calories per serving.

Using the country house as the venue for soup distribution, enabled the owner to make a grand display of his or her wealth and patronage – an important part of aristocratic performance. However, the Victorian era saw a growing desire for domestic privacy, although many country house owners still felt a responsibility to provide at least basic sustenance. The solution was to establish facilities closer to the homes of the poor. Some engaged a proxy in the village – like Miss Buckmaster in Ivinghoe, Buckinghamshire, who employed the local butcher to provide soup; or Ferdinand de Rothschild who had soup served from three different locations at his extensive estate in Buckinghamshire.

Dedicated premises

Rather than find suitable premises in Berkhamsted, the Countess of Bridgewater (Catherine Egerton) had a soup house built in the ruins of Berkhamsted Castle, which lay on the edge of her estate. The single-storey building (below) was constructed in 1841 with two 60-gallon coppers (large stoves) at the rear, a small kitchen and a place for the supervisors to sit while they checked the recipients’ names against their list and took payment of one penny per quart. The poor had to contribute to the cost, in the belief that this encouraged thrift and prevented the soup being fed to pigs.

An annual subscription paid for operating costs (the Countess was a regular subscriber until her death in 1849) and Balshaw’s Charity, a testamentary charity, provided bread to go with the soup. This soup house



The Berkhamsted Soup House (author, 2015). The building is attached to a cottage which is a private residence.

In urban soup kitchens, winter was normally late December to early March, but country house soup distribution started earlier and finished later. 1799–1801 was an exceptional crisis and soup was distributed for much of the year – except in the summer months when rice pudding and treacle were more common.



The two stoves in Bloxham Court House, Oxfordshire (author, March 2018).
The building is now the village museum.

provided sustenance for up to 350 families, three days a week, nearly every winter until at least 1897 (the population of the parish grew from about 4,000 to 5,000 during this period). Newspaper reports from the later nineteenth century speak glowingly of waifs eagerly queuing for soup, but there was a firm moral undertone: the names of recipients were publicised on the church noticeboard, so that parishioners could inform the committee if they felt someone (perhaps an idle drinker or unmarried mother) did not deserve soup.

Not all rural soup kitchens were as severe. Alfred de Rothschild established a soup kitchen in 1884/85 in Wendover, Buckinghamshire, shortly after completing his newly-built mansion at nearby Halton. It operated until at least 1914. Soup and bread were free and served from November to April, longer than anywhere else except Trentham, Staffordshire. A list of recipients was kept, but the soup kitchen manager had wide discretion. The estate agent's particulars describe the building, long gone, as "exceptionally well-built and commodious" – in contrast to neighbouring cottages belonging to another landlord. The poor travelled nearly 4 miles to reach it every winter.

Philanthropy was not restricted to the great landowning families, the middle class provided charity too, particularly women. Edwin Grey, reminiscing about Hertfordshire village life in the 1860s, reported:

"During the wintertime when times were as a rule the hardest for the labouring class, many of the ladies of the parish distributed soup, warm clothing etc ..."

Grey, E. 1977. *Cottage life in a Hertfordshire Village*. Harpenden: Harpenden & District Local History Society

Larger villages might even establish their own soup kitchen. Bloxham, Oxfordshire, ran several through the nineteenth century. By 1879, the Feoffees (trustees of the parish charities) had established a soup kitchen in the old Court House, a building that also provided a courthouse, fire station, reading room and clothing club. The two stoves still sit in the corner of the building next to the fireplace (above).

Despite their ability to feed hundreds, soup kitchens were unloved, unsurprisingly perhaps given the social and economic environment in which they operated. This may have contributed to their disappearance, yet those that survive can provide glimpses into a past that we should surely remember and understand.

Lord Grimston of Gorhambury's soup for the poor

Take a 70 gallon cauldron, put in 12 stone of beef (shoulder, neck, leg) and half fill with water. Bring to the boil and simmer for several hours, add some garden stuff (carrots, onions celery and herbs), 20 stone of rice, 7 lb of flour and salt and pepper to taste, continue simmering for several more hours, keep stirring and adding more water as it thickens.

Hervey, S. (ed.) 1906. *Journals of the Hon. William Hervey, in North America and Europe, from 1755 to 1814; with order books at Montreal, 1760–1763*. Bury St Edmunds: Suffolk Green Books.

► Phil Carstairs is studying for a PhD at the University of Leicester School of Archaeology and Ancient History and would be pleased to hear of any evidence of rural soup distribution. Email: pjc51@le.ac.uk

Laxton looks to the future

John Beckett on developments in the Nottinghamshire village of Laxton, England's last open-field village

In the past, manor courts consisted of courts leet and baron, with the latter handling civil offences. Nationally manor courts largely disappeared as a result of enclosure, and the decline of copyhold tenure (for which transactions had to be registered by the court). However, the legal powers of the manorial court at Laxton were expressly preserved by Section 23 of the Administration of Justice Act (1977).



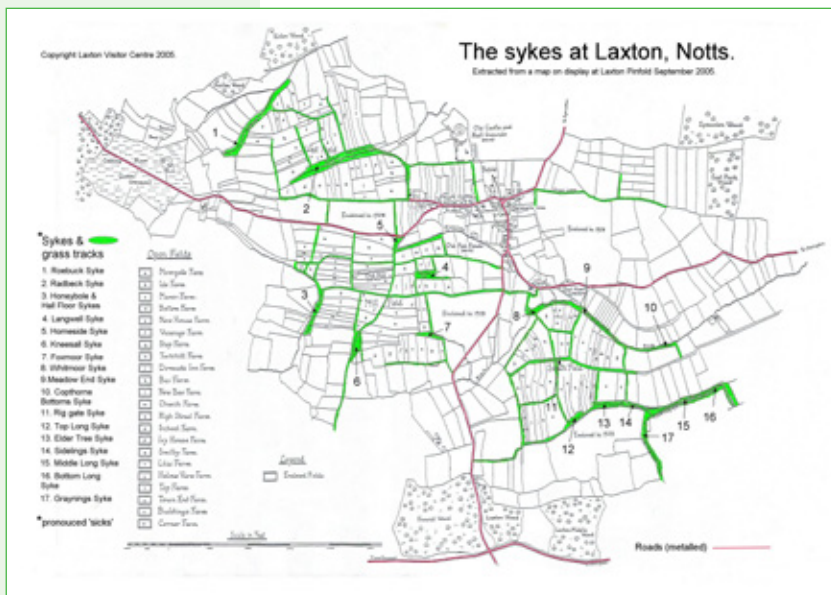
The manor court leet

One of the roles of the manor court, at its annual meeting, has been and continues to be to appoint a field jury responsible for inspecting the field that has been in fallow and is about to become the wheat field. The jury consists of a foreman who serves until he retires, and twelve jurymen who are summoned by turn. The men summoned by the bailiff to be on the jury are sworn in, and serve for a year.

I have deliberately referred to men, but in the past women also served on the jury, and were sometimes summoned to the court and fined for misdemeanours. Usually they were widows, often holding a tenure which had been granted to their late husband and which they would pass to their eldest son when he came of age.

There are plenty of examples of women appearing before the court. Becky Pye, widow, was fined 2s in 1653 for failing to lock the gates into the corn field. In 1658 she was fined a further 4d 'for not ringing her swine'. Margaret Nicholas was fined 3s 4d in 1661 'for scolding a disturbance to the neighbours', and the following year Elizabeth Challand was fined 1s 'for not suffering the water to have passage out of the Hall Lane through the Hall wood accordingly as hath been formerly'.

Appearing before the court when summoned was one thing, election to the jury quite another, but women were occasionally involved. 'For not answering to the court', in other words for not turning up when summoned Jane Woolfit, widow, and Elizabeth Boswell, were both fined 6d in 1692, and Rebecca Hinde 1s in 1695. Maria Cartwright seems to have sat on the jury in 1726, Anne Pinder in 1727, and Anna Salman in 1728. Widow Johnson was on the 1730 jury and Sara Birkett in 1731.



Above: Mark Pierce's map of Laxton in 1635.
Below: The 'sykes' (uncultivated grass areas) at Laxton.
Images supplied by Laxton Visitor Centre.

Historic occasion

Women continued to serve on the jury through the eighteenth century, but in the nineteenth century they appeared less frequently, and by the twentieth they had disappeared altogether. It was, then, a historic moment at the Court Leet on 6th December 2018 when Liz Moore of Ivy House Farm was sworn in to serve for 2018–19.

Liz is a native of Laxton and her father, Robert Haigh, is the bailiff of the manor, so she certainly knows what she is letting herself in for. In my thirty years of attending the court women have often attended, and Carter Jonas (the Crown's agents) have often had a female representative at the court. One of them, Hannah Skingley, was even allowed to hammer in one of the wooden stakes during a jury visit to the fallow field. But it is a long time since a woman was summoned to be on the jury in her own right, and this is a welcome development.

As usual, this year's court also fined farmers for trespasses in the open fields, and had a long discussion about farming conditions. Being fined is not too onerous since the minimum fine is just £10 and farmers are usually fined more than that only for repeat offending. The potential 'shame' is strong enough to ensure that most come into line. The key offences are 'ploughed too far', in other words ploughing beyond the end of a strip into the adjoining roadway and therefore reducing the width of the roadway and potentially making access to the strips difficult, and 'not shovelling in', which means, in effect, not clearing up behind them when they have been ploughing.

Laxton's future

The underlying debate this year was about the future of the village. The estate was owned until 1951 by the Pierrepont Family,



Earls Manvers, whose chief seat was at Thoresby Hall. The sixth earl, aware that with his death the estate would be at risk due to tax demands, gave it to the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food in 1952 to hold in perpetuity as a national asset. The court met in December 1952 under the control of the Ministry. Following the 1979 General Election, the Prime Minister, Margaret Thatcher, ordered the sale of many state assets, including Laxton. The buyer was The Crown Estate, which paid £2m for the privilege.

The estate today consists of 1,845 acres which includes 525 acres of unenclosed open fields. There are 17 tenanted farms subject to Agricultural Holdings Act (AHA) tenancy agreements and Farm Business Tenancies (FBT). In addition, there are ten let residential properties and a substantial range of traditional buildings within each farm tenancy. The Crown Estate also owns the village pub, the Dovecote Inn.

In 2017 The Crown Estate, through their agents Carter Jonas, announced that they no longer felt it was in the interests of Laxton for them to be the landowner/landlord. There are various reasons for this, including the recent Agriculture Bill. Its main purpose is to authorise new expenditure for certain agricultural and other purposes, and to make provision about direct payments during Brexit. A further reason was the replacement of the Civil List by the Sovereign Grant, and the impact of this on the operation of The Crown Estate. Finally, access to charitable gifts and grants is not possible for a government body such as The Crown Estate.



Above: Liz Moore kissing the historic copy of the New Testament, which all members of the jury are required to do in order to demonstrate their allegiance to the Crown and as evidence that they will undertake the business to the best of their ability. On her right is jurymen Michael Jackson of Crosshill Farm, and sitting behind her is Vaughan Godson of Post Office farm. Picture: Dik Allison. Left: image supplied by Laxton Visitor Centre.

The Crown Estate has made it clear that this was not to be considered a 'fire sale'. In other words they would not sell it simply to the highest bidder. Potential purchasers will need to show they have experience of dealing with a heritage asset, have the funding available (not simply to buy the estate but also to invest in future development), and are committed to the future of the open field system. The Crown Estate will want to see evidence of how potential purchasers intend to maintain the field system and the court. If no potential buyers come forward who meet these terms and conditions, the estate will not be sold, and The Crown Estate will continue to manage the property. Consequently the court leet should continue to meet, and to appoint a jury – hopefully with more women in the future – as it has done for centuries.

At the time of writing, several landowners are known to be interested. The Crown Estate will interview prospective buyers and assess their suitability. This may take up to six months. A covenant will be attached to the sale stating that the purchaser will be expected to continue with the open field system 'in perpetuity'. It is not entirely clear what mechanism will be available to ensure that this is enforceable. The guide price is £7m.

The outcome of the Laxton sale may not be known for some months. However, at least we can be confident that the next owner will understand the need to look after a piece of our national heritage which is also a working farming community.

John Beckett is Professor of History at the University of Nottingham



Image: Robert Goulden

Coming to terms with **Europe**

Image: Elliott Brown

The political turmoil sparked by Brexit and its likely effects on British agriculture, has caused *Julian Anderson*, a former civil servant, to recall his involvement in the negotiations that took us into the European Community in the first place.

Negotiations took place in 1970 under a Conservative government and were carried out by a Cabinet Minister and a small team of officials split between London and Brussels. I was part of the latter group, on secondment from the Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food (MAFF) – where I worked for a total of 30 years. We were the ears and eyes of London, gathering intelligence and lobbying.

Negotiations were difficult. The Community's starting position was that we had to accept all their existing rules and regulations. Any departures from these had to be fought for tooth-and-nail. Unsurprisingly, agriculture and fisheries were key elements of the negotiation. Finance was also crucial, as the Community – particularly Germany, by far the main net contributor – saw us as a valuable future provider of funds.

Agricultural support

One of the most difficult issues was that of agricultural support. While the UK system was largely based on grants for structural works and subsidies for commodities, the Community's was very different. It mainly involved protection at the frontier by means of tariffs and levies, and intervention buying of surplus produce – all designed to protect producers from import competition and sustain market prices. Hours of difficult discussions were only resolved by private talks.

Another major issue was our desire for the continuation of the UK's traditional system of support for hill farmers, which was viewed initially with great suspicion by the six member nations. In the end, we had to agree to a higher financial contribution in order to retain it.



Image: Walter Baxter

Hill farming by the Arkland Burn, Scotland.

Commonwealth produce

There was also the hugely vexed question of the UK's demand for continued access to Commonwealth agricultural produce. Many Commonwealth countries were deeply upset at the potential loss of valuable export markets. Australia and New Zealand were particularly vocal and it was essential to placate them. Back in 1970, many members of the UK Parliament had served in the war, often beside their Commonwealth colleagues, and there was a strong pro-Commonwealth sentiment in Parliament. This meant that we had to agree to a far higher financial contribution than we had wished, in order to get quotas for imports of sugar, lamb, butter, cheese, beef etc that were acceptable to the Commonwealth. The best deal we could negotiate was a Declaration in the Minutes that, if the proportion of the budget going to agriculture failed to diminish, as we had been promised it would, then the Community would 'have at its heart' the need to take corrective measures on our contribution. When agricultural support did not diminish and we tried to 'cash in' that Declaration, the Community told us that it was only an entry in the minutes, had no legal force and therefore need not lead to any corrective action. It took Mrs Thatcher's famous 'handbag' exercise before we were able to obtain a rebate.

In February 1974, Labour was returned to power. Although the original application to join had been made under a Labour Government there was, by then, a much stronger Eurosceptic sentiment in the Cabinet. The first manifestation of this was to go back to the Commonwealth in an effort to obtain cheap food, as prices within the community were high. In spring 1974, a mission was sent to various Commonwealth countries. I was part of this and went to New Zealand and Australia. We were met – politely in New Zealand, less so in Australia – by a flat refusal: they were getting far better prices from the new markets they had developed, and it was time UK ministers faced up to reality. A point to be considered, perhaps, by those who believe negotiating new trade agreements with the Commonwealth will be easy.

Rural History Today

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Articles for the next issue should be sent by

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Dr Rebecca Ford:

rebecca.ford@btinternet.com

*Front masthead image:
The two stoves in Bloxham Court
House, Oxfordshire – see page 4.
Image: Philip Carstairs.*

Membership of the BAHS is open to all who support its aim of promoting the study of agricultural history and the history of rural economy and society. Details of membership are available on the website: www.bahs.org.uk/membership.html

Enquiries about other aspects of the Society's work should be directed to the Secretary, Dr Sarah Holland: sarah.holland@nottingham.ac.uk