RURAL HISTORY TODAY

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Above: Wenlock Olympian Games bicycle races winner 1877 and 1878 – see page 2. (Image by kind permission, Wenlock Olympian Society)

Eggs – an underesearched topic

As suggested by an advert for Bird's custard powder painted for and published in the Diamond Jubilee number of the Illustrated London News *(1897), the nineteenth-century cook did not believe in 'fresh' eggs.*

And, it was only after the Second World War (according to the British Egg Marketing Board at least) that the consumer was finally able to trust their fresh eggs enough to crack them all into a single bowl. Trust was at the heart of the BEMB's campaigns, a trust that asked the consumer to differentiate between products that were 'British' and those that were not, and those that were 'safe' (conformed to its standards) and those that were not. In order to build that trust the BEMB had to provide a materially reliable product – something which relied on an emergent technology of specialist egg production and distribution.

By the time of Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee considerable concern was already being expressed within government and among agriculturalists that the country was not self-sufficient in eggs. Not only were eggs often held back by farmers until higglers came to collect them, the higglers themselves would keep them until they had enough to ship to the wholesaler. 'Fresh' eggs in Scotland might be between ten days to six weeks old, and were rarely tested for freshness before they were dispatched. Eggs were also a seasonal item; in the winter British eggs were normally sold preserved – in water-glass or lime-water, later also through refrigeration – as were those eggs imported from the continent and Empire. In part this was seen as an opportunity: if the British farmer could be persuaded to produce more eggs, then 'he' might capitalise on growing consumer demand and find a way out of late-nineteenth century depression. However, as Joan Thirsk has observed, though specialised forms of poultry farming had advanced on the continent, especially in France and Denmark, during the period 1750 to 1880 it was perceived in Britain as something that only small-scale and mixed farms could benefit from. Though this began to change towards the end of the nineteenth century, there was considerable scepticism among farmers about the possible benefits of specialising in a particular branch of poultry production. Even Edward Brown, one of poultry farming's great advocates, observed

as late as 1929 of what he called 'Special Egg Farms':

On these there is usually a greater or lesser amount of intensification, in many instances much more than is justified. There is abundant experience that many failures have arisen from disregard of natural factors…

In the period up to the late nineteenth century poultry were seen as merely bringing in 'pin money': poultry keeping was traditionally women's work. This was viewed by government agencies as one cause of its 'backwardness'. The Departmental Committee on Poultry Breeding in Scotland, reporting in 1909, was especially critical of women's methods of handling poultry. 'The management of poultry' it observed, 'is generally relegated to the women members of the family, and the methods adopted are, in the majority of cases, very antiquated'. Though the Committee suggested that 'the servant girl class' ought to be educated in the new methods in order that 'poultry-keeping on the larger farms … be extended and

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Karen Sayer is professor of Social and Cultural history at Leeds Trinity University College. She is currently working on projects on the history of women farmer and farmers' wives, and also on the history of the farmed animal,in both of which eggs and chickens are an important part.

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British Agricultural History Society

The Olympic movement; its rural origins

Baron Pierre Coubertin (1863–1937), is widely credited as the founding father of the modern Olympic Games, which were first held in Athens in 1896. While the Baron has been extensively praised for his pioneering initiatives, rather surprisingly, the rural origins of this revival have merited scant attention.

***Dr John Martin** attempts to put this right in this timely piece on Dr William Penny Brookes (1809–1896) and the establishing the Much Wenlock Olympian Games in Shropshire, which had an important influence on the development of the international Olympic movement.*

William Penny Brookes was born in Much Wenlock, Shropshire, in 1809, where his father was the local doctor. Pursuing a medical career, he became a student at Guys and St Thomas's Hospital in London before moving to France and Italy to continue his studies. Aged 22, he returned to Much Wenlock to succeed his father as the town's local doctor.

William Penny Brookes 1875. (Image by kind permission, Wenlock Olympian Society)

He rapidly became involved in civic activities and, at the age of 32, was appointed a Justice of the Peace and the Commissioner for Roads and Taxes. Brookes played a key role in the renovation of the Council Chamber and the construction of the Corn Exchange. He was also instrumental in the establishment of the town's library, museum and gas works, as well as the development of the railway station.

As a JP, Brookes was frequently confronted with cases of petty crime, drunkenness, theft, licentiousness and vice, an experience which reinforced his belief in the importance of the virtues of self improvement. In 1841 he helped to establish the Wenlock Agricultural Reading Room.

In October 1850 he organised the first Wenlock Olympian Games. The opening ceremony and subsequent events were accompanied by extensive pageantry and banners with Greek inscriptions. Garlands of laurel leaves were awarded to the winners.

As an exponent of the 'healthy body for a healthy mind' concept, he revered the Greek ideal, but tempered the Ancient Greek Games ethos of 'winner takes all' with medieval English chivalry, fair play and pageantry.

The games were intended to provide the opportunity for structured physical exercise and education for the working class. They were a mixture of athletics, traditional country sports such as quoits, football and cricket, and were designed to promote the moral, physical and intellectual improvement of the inhabitants of the town and surrounding areas.

Organised physical activities undertaken on a competitive basis were intended to provide a means of popularising the benefits of 'rational recreation', stressing the importance of discipline, to prepare for work and to enhance morality. These principles were very much in keeping with the developing Victorians virtues of 'self help' and 'thrift', which Samuel Smilies was espousing.

By 1860 the growing popularity of the games led to the formalising of the Wenlock Olympian Society. In the following year the Shropshire Olympian's Games were organised, encompassing a much wider range of athletic and country events including cricket, jumping, a three mile Penny-farthing bicycle race, and a wheelbarrow race. Locally based competitions such as 'Putting the stone', a contest between the two local quarries, was introduced, and continues to this day. Brookes ardently supported the idea of including physical education in the school curriculum and used the Wenlock Olympian Society as a means to petition parliament in furthering this objective.In 1877, as part of the local celebrations to commemorate Queen Victoria's Golden jubilee, Brookes asked Greece to provide an Olympian prize, an action which led to him becoming acquainted with His Excellency J. Gennadius the Greek Chargé d'Affaire in London.

In 1899 Baron Pierre de Coubertin,a leading French educationalist and organiser of an International Congress on Physical Education, had a letter published in an English newspaper, appealing for information about initiatives in physical education and the administration of athletics. Brookes' response to the appeal was accompanied by an invitation for the Baron to attend a meeting of the Wenlock Olympian Games, which he gracefully accepted. The two men discussed

Wenlock Olympian Games Procession 1887. (Image by kind permission, Wenlock Olympian Society)

their similar ambitions and further, Penny Brookes, then aged eighty one, shared with the young twenty seven year old 'Coubertin his dream of an Olympic revival, an international Games to be staged in Athens. On his return to France de Coubertin gave a glowing account of his stay in Much Wenlock and referred to his host's efforts to revive the Olympics.He wrote in his article for the December issue of 'La Revue Athletique' – **"If the Olympic Games that Modern Greece has not yet been able to revive still survives today, it is due, not to a Greek, but to Dr W P Brookes…"** He subsequently referred to Brookes as "my oldest friend". Although Penny Brookes was listed as an honorary member of the 1894 Congress, he was unable to attend because of ill health. It was shortly before Brookes' death in 1895 that the Board of Education finally agreed to include physical education as a compulsory subject in British schools.

Unfortunately Brookes died a mere four months before the launch of the first International Olympic Games in Athens in 1896 and so did not live to see his dream reach fruition. His untimely death resulted in scant regard being paid to his role in establishing the modern Olympics. However his legacy in the form of the Wenlock Olympian Society continues to thrive. It organises a plethora of activities which attracts international visitors. See **www.wenlock-olympian-society.org.uk**. The importance of Brooks and the Wenlock Olympian Society was commemorated late May 2012 when the Olympic torch passed through Much Wenlock.

▶ *You can find out much more about the connections between rural and agricultural life and sport in the current temporary exhibition at the Museum of English Rural Life, University of Reading –* ***Playing fields: our sporting life in the countryside*** *(until 16 September 2012) which forms part of a project co-ordinated by the Heritage Sports Network to showcase the wealth of British sporting history. With items drawn from the museum's diverse collections, the exhibition takes a look at major sports such as football and cricket as well as less familiar but equally fascinating activities such as the thorny challenges of competative hedgeing to the little-known ball game, knur and spell.*
www.reading.ac.uk/merl/whatson/exhibitions/merl-oursportinglife.aspx

Agricultural History Review's sixtieth anniversary competition *was won by Dr Johann P.Custodis and was presented at the Society's Spring Conference in Hampshire by the Society's president, Professor Alun Howkins.*

…and a sporting event with an even longer (almost) continuous history has been identified by the medieval historian, Professor Christopher Dyer at Chipping Camden in Wiltshire

The annual celebration of Robert Dover's games on a hill above Chipping Campden in Gloucestershire, celebrated its 400th anniversary when it took place this year on 1 June.

The first known games were organized by Dover in 1612, but cannot claim a continuous history, as they were abandoned in the period of Commonwealth, and again in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Neither were most of the events of Dover's day in evidence in 2012 : fencing, fighting with cudgels, hare coursing and wrestling have ceased, though maidens danced now as they did in the past, and shin kicking is still a popular event. Sadly, this year beer drinking on the hill was forbidden, but had figured prominently in earlier days. Moralists who put an end to the games in 1852 claimed that they were attracting large crowds from industrial towns who committed acts of debauchery and no doubt this was a feature alongside prize fighting and gambling which would have enlivened the early games as well.

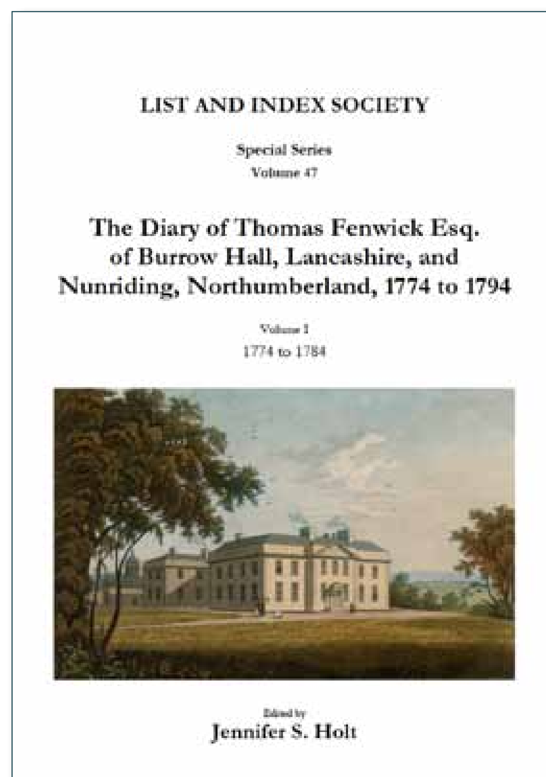
The Diary of Thomas Fenwick: a new source for agricultural history

Jennifer Holt's *main research interests lie in the social and economic conditions of 'ordinary people' before about 1750 so editing the diaries of an 18th century esquire lies outside her usual range. However, so extensive were the interests and activities of Thomas Fenwick that his diary serves as a source for aspects as diverse as the finances of married women, parish apprentices and (not least) the cattle trade all of which she hopes to write about in the near future. (The subject index has about 2,000 headings.) As a side effect of editing a million words written by a man who was gloriously inconsistent in his spelling, Jennifer now finds she has problems recalling the accepted forms.*

Thomas Wilson was the younger son of a prominent Kendal attorney who followed his father and maternal relatives into the law, being entered at Lincoln's Inn in 1751. In 1757 his elder brother died without children so Wilson took his mother's maiden name of Fenwick as the price of receiving that family's estates. If the typical gentry estate to be found in Northern England had ever been a coherent unit, by 1700 it had ceased to be so. Those who sought to expand their family landholdings were rarely in a position to do other than buy piecemeal as fields or farms became available. The lands held by Thomas Fenwick esq. of Burrow Hall, Lancashire and Nunriding, Northumberland (1729–1794) are an extreme example of this phenomenon.

In brief, the lands he acquired from his parents' families stretched from the Fenwick's native Northumberland (Mitford and Shilbottle parishes) across County Durham (West Auckland) West Yorkshire (Dent and Thornton in Lonsdale) Westmorland (Kendal, Kentmere, Hutton Roof, Burton in Kendal, Kirkby Lonsdale & Stainton) to Lancashire (from its northern boundary and down the Lune valley to Claughton in Lonsdale). In all the acreage was not enormous and the land units ranged from fields which might only touch at the corners to reasonably coherent units such as the Nunriding farms. Of necessity, some leases related to individual fields whilst the whole of the demesne for Claughton (which included the manor house) was let as one unit. The single landholding at Masongill (Thornton in Lonsdale) was freehold; Fenwick's tenant held by tenantright so the annual rent there was tiny. His diverse holdings required close oversight for Fenwick spent most of his adult life desperate for cash. Fortunately for posterity, Fenwick maintained a diary, the extant portions of which run from the mid-1770s until his death. This paper takes a glance at aspects of his estate management strategy as shown in the diary and suggests that these were the usual resort of those faced by similar problems.

In all the rent roll probably came to about £2,500 and his financial situation together with his interest in agrarian improvement meant Fenwick wished to maximise productivity. He attempted to meet his targets in two ways. He used local men to act as his bailiffs or agents and he discussed prices and farming practice to landlords of the inns he visited. Although not all his agents were as effective as he would have liked, Fenwick built long-term relationships with many of the innkeepers along the Great North Road and on his routes from north Lancashire to County Durham and Northumberland. He used them not just as sources of information and company during his overnight stops, but also as suppliers for a whole range of goods from grain to new socks. Marmaduke Bowes of the Halfpenny House was one such supplier until his retirement in 1782 when he was replaced by William Miller.



Other information gathering could be more casual as he questioned chance-met strangers. Visiting new territory always offered opportunities for noting local conditions as when, in March 1776, he travelled to the Scottish border:

... Berwick is as dear to travellers as most places. Mr Tomlin & I had for dinner a small plate of veal cutlets, perhaps a pound, & 2 or 3 small broken off claws of crabs, & we were charged 3s. for our dinners. The road from Belford to Berwick is bad. It is a great corn country, & from the vast quantity of unthrashed stacks, one may infer that grain is cheap & the stock of horned cattle is very inconsiderable, or else they would want straw, & consequently must thrash for it.

In July of the same year, Fenwick was exploring Lincolnshire and observed:

The road to Boston is a kind of sandy earth. There is a

very extensive common inclosed and produces excellent crops. There is one close of woad. On a common near Boston, I was astonished to see an immense number of geese. I dined at the Peacock, Boston; the landlord intelligent.

However, he was not always favourably impressed and noted 'The White Hart at Spalding good, but the master is a coxcomb.' The next day he '... went to see some cattle here belonging to a Mr Wallet; he seems to be no breeder, but has a dozen good long horned cattle. Carrick & Moorhouse supplies him.'

Fenwick had a modest personal interest in both cattle and sheep for the fatstock trade and bred horses from the mares which he and his grooms rode on their journeys. The sheep were also of his own breeding and he preferred to have a combination of black and white lambs. The cattle were mainly bought in with no clear pattern for either purchases or sales; it appears to be the kind of opportunistic buying and selling that his neighbours probably indulged in too. What does change with time is a tendency for the sales of sheep to become focused upon Liverpool, although the costs of taking them there instead of one of the local markets must have been significant.

Fenwick's diary is an amazing source for all kinds of eighteenth century activities for we see his practical sympathy with the victims of the Poor Law (including parish apprentices) and the way in which he freely gave his neighbours the benefit of his legal knowledge. His lifelong interest in politics influenced the lengthy list of his correspondents. Although he was an active member of the Yorkshire Association, Fenwick's attempts to undermine the Lowther hegemony in Cumbrian politics did not lead him to return to Parliament where he had held the seat for Westmorland between 1768 and 1774.

The foregoing briefly draws upon the contents of Fenwick's diary which has been edited by the author and is to be published in three volumes by the List & Index Society. Volumes I and II were published in January 2012. Volume III is due out in January 2013 and will be accompanied by Volume IV which will include introductory essays, supporting documents and full indices.

CONFERENCES

Call for papers: folklore and archaeology

13–14 October 2012, UCL Institute of Archaeology

▶ *A joint conference with the Folklore Society. Contributions invited on such subjects as antiquarians and antiquarianism, the folklore of archaeological sites and objects, folk revivalism, folklore and heritage. Further information on the Folklore Society's website.*

Historic Farm Buildings Group

14–16 September, Loe, East Cornwall.

▶ *The theme of the weekend wil be the variety of farmsteads in East Cornwall. The full programme can be seen on the HFBG website.* **www.hfbg.org.uk**

BAHS Winter Conference

▶ *This will take place at the Institute of Historical Research on 1 December. Further details will be available on the Society's website.*

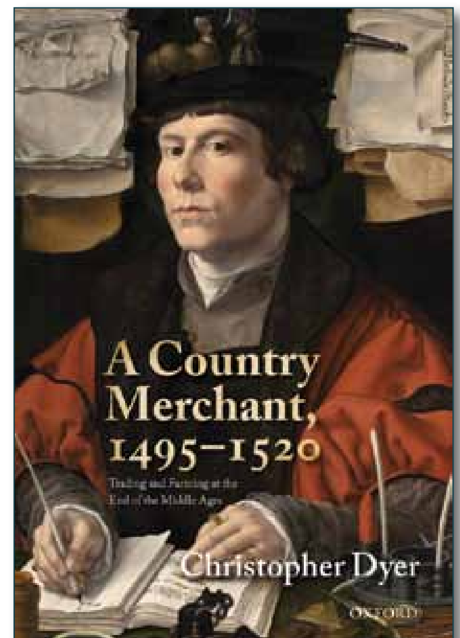
NEW PUBLICATION

Everyone knows about the 'wool trade', but how was it conducted, and what were its consequences for those living in the country in its heyday?

A Country Merchant is a new book by Christopher Dyer which uses as its central theme the trading and farming activities of John Heritage, who began his career at Burton Dassett in Warwickshire and conducted his business most actively at Moreton in Marsh in Gloucestershire. Heritage was born around 1470 and the account book that provides most information about him covers the years 1500–1520. Dyer has not attempted to write a biography but rather to explore the society and landscape of the district in which Heritage operated. For more than twenty years the woolmonger or woolman Heritage rode constantly from village to village, negotiating to buy wool from the producers. The account book gives us the names of hundreds of Heritage's suppliers who were scattered over the countryside around Moreton, including inhabitants of such villages as Adlestrop, Little Rollright, Great Wolford, Blockley, Longborough, Temple Guiting and Cutsdean. Close examination of the account book when linked with other documents for the area tells us about networks of information and credit, and the role of the market in the peasant economy. The work of the woolman emerges as a vital link between the rural sheep farmers and the London-based merchants who exported the fleeces to Calais for the clothmakers of Flanders.

The book also looks at the production of wool, some of which took place in large pastures, including the former fields of deserted villages. More sheep in total were kept by small producers who combined corn growing with flocks of 60 or 100 sheep feeding on the common pastures and the fallow fields. Rural society was in a constant state of tension as those wishing to pursue mixed farming felt threatened by acquisitive graziers who coveted their land. The open fields were not entirely rooted in conservative practices, and innovations such as setting aside part of the cornfield for grass helped to adapt the old methods to the new age.

All of this took place in a varied landscape, as Moreton lay on the frontier (still called the 'edge' in place-names)



between the lowlands of the Feldon of Warwickshire and the vale of Evesham, and the high ground of the Cotswold Hills. Though so different in many ways, these two landscapes were bound together by many links and contacts, not least by the traders represented by John Heritage.

An historic case of foot and mouth?

Attempts to control the spread of animal disease in the sixteenth century

James P.Bowen is a doctoral student at Lancaster University whose work reveals the striking parallels between the methods of controlling the spread of cattle deseases in the sixteenth and twentieth centuries.

In 2001 the United Kingdom saw the first outbreak of foot and mouth disease or hoof and mouth disease (*Aphtae epizooticae*), since October 1967-8. The epidemic in 2001, caused by the Type O pan Asia strain of the disease, resulted in a total of 2,030 confirmed cases of foot and mouth disease between February and September 2001 across farms throughout the British countryside. Millions of sheep and cattle were culled in an eventually successful attempt to halt the disease. The images of hundreds of burning carcasses with plumes of smoke filling the air were broadcast throughout the media, becoming a defining image of the outbreak as Defra officials sought to control the spread of the disease.

In a previous article in *Rural History Today*, (Issue 1, 2001) entitled 'Foot and Mouth Disease in the Past' which coincided with the 2001 outbreak, Paul Brassley provided a modern historical perspective which extended beyond the 1967 outbreak back into the nineteenth century. In particular, he highlighted the introduction of the compulsory slaughter policy in 1892, which resulted in 15,000 animals being slaughtered annually between 1929 and 1953. Issues that have in the past been the focus of much public debate, include the sources of infection and attempts at control. This article focuses on the manor of Prees in north Shropshire and the attempts of the manor court to regulate the spread of animal disease locally.

In the thirteenth century, there was in excess of 1,000 acres (1,180 acres) of common land in the manor of Prees, north Shropshire. Common land provided a rich grazing resource for pastoral farmers who turned out their sheep, cattle, cows and goats onto areas of common pasture. In areas where livestock were allowed to graze freely on the open common, disease was a constant predicament, the spread of which could have devastating effects for the emerging body of grazier farmers whose livelihood was reliant on the availability of access to extensive pasture resources. John Broad ('Cattle Plague in Eighteenth-Century England', *Agricultural History Review*, Vol. 31, No. 2 (1983), pp. 104–115) has highlighted, that it was not until the eighteenth century that the government sought to take legislative precautions against cattle disease and plague. Yet documentary research has revealed that even in the sixteenth century rural communities took preventative action to stop the spread of animal disease within the locality. Frequent harvest failure meant that undernourished livestock were more likely to fall victim to disease. (D.G. Hey, *An English Rural Community: Myddle under the Tudors and Stuarts* Leicester, Leicester University Press, 1974, pp. 48–51).

The manor court of Prees, the institution responsible for the governance and management of common land, sought to regulate the pasturing of diseased livestock. Given the large numbers of livestock grazing on areas of open common land, a function of 'good neighbourhood' was to regulate the prevalence of disease locally. By-laws sought to regulate aspects of communal pastoral management. Previous studies such as that of upland Northern England have highlighted that communities formulated by-laws to prevent the pasturing of diseased horses, with communities playing 'a role in policing the commons'.It appears that in such instances those livestock found to be diseased or scabbed were removed off the common and pastured in private enclosures until they recovered (A.J.L. Winchester, *The Harvest of the Hills: Rural Life in Northern England and the Scottish Borders 1400–1700* (Edinburgh, 2000), p. 103).

In the case of the manor of Prees, the manorial court took stringent precautions to prevent disease spreading. For example, in 1578 a by-law or pain stipulated that 'none shall pasture any manner of their cattle that are infected with the reef', (a form of disease) 'upon the commons belonging to this manor, pain every default 10s.' (Shropshire Archives, Shrewsbury (hereafter SA) 3607/II/A/15 (15 October 1578). The laying of this pain by the manorial court, highlights, the considerable fear of the outbreak of cattle plague in the locality and nationally, the spread of which could have catastrophic effects on rural communities engaged primarily in pastoral farming. Consequently, the court not only sought to amerce those who pastured diseased livestock but moreover, put in place a practice which was to be followed in order to prevent the spread of disease.

Furthermore, underneath the order in 'John Worswick's book' of pains or orders, laid by Prees manor court between 1567 and 1609, and held at Shropshire Archives, Shrewsbury, more specific instructions were given as to what was to be done with any diseased cattle (SA 3607/II/A/15). 'It was also ordered that the bailiff of the manor shall for the time aforesaid monthly drive the common of this manor and if he find any cattle infected with that disease and that being viewed and seen by the tenants of the manor that he should tie the same to a tree, and there burn the same to death.'(SA 3607/II/A/15 (15 October 1578). The by-law or pain refers to the monthly driving or drifts of the common undertaken by the bailiff who would have counted the livestock pasturing on the common, impounding those who had no common right

of pasture. Clearly, the bailiff and those involved with driving the common needed to be vigilant and good stockmanship was required in order to prevent the spread of disease locally.

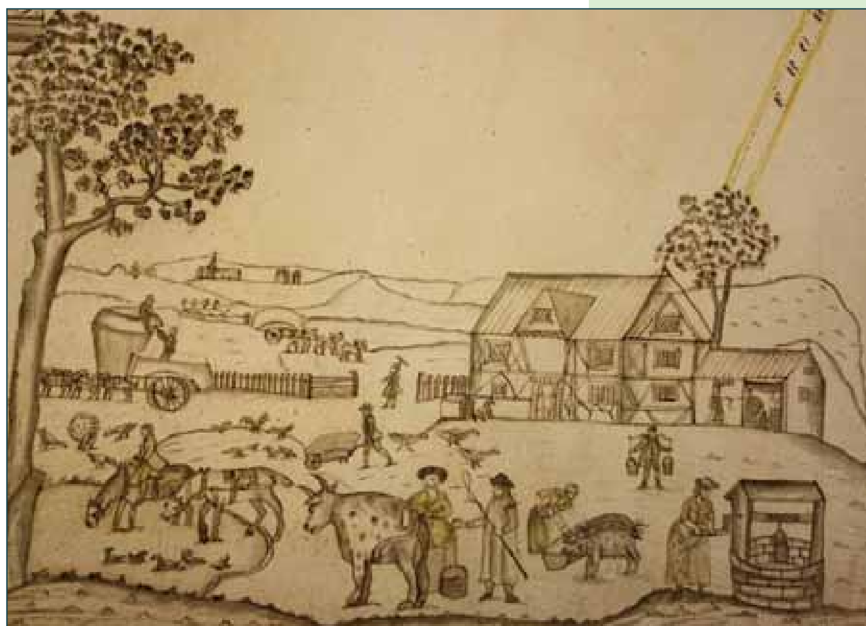
This brutal case demonstrates the importance attached to the maintenance of healthy livestock on common land and the degree of fear with regard to the potential consequences of cattle disease in the pre-modern period. Today, such a measure would be termed a biosecurity measure. Moreover, the burning of diseased cattle also suggests that contemporaries had an understanding, albeit limited, of the way that disease was transmitted and how it could be eradicated. By burning any infected animals, it implies that they believed that it would prevent the spread of the disease, rather than for any ritualistic purpose.

It is not clear from records whether these rather brutal instructions were ever acted upon. It is, nevertheless, a sobering reminder of the extent to which rural communities were prepared to go in order to maintain their survival. A by-law similarly sought to prevent the pasturing of 'diseased horses or mares as such as have the reef, glanders or such like diseases into any common, common ways or lands' within the manor of Whitchurch, a market town five miles north of Prees 'upon pain of every default 11s 3d.' (SA 212/Box59a (28 April 1636); E. Hopkins, 'The Bye-laws of Whitchurch in 1636', *Transactions of the Shropshire Archaeological and Historical Society*, Vol. 56 (1957–60), p. 183). With the intensification and specialisation of local farming systems in the seventeenth century linked with a commercially orientated economy, it is possible that farmers began to rely more on enclosed pasture closes than areas of common wasteland for the pasturing of livestock (P.R. Edwards, 'The Development of Dairy Farming of the North Shropshire Plain in the Seventeenth Century', *Midland History*, Vol. 4 (1977), p. 182). One consideration may have been the possible loss of livestock to disease. Whilst, the keeping of livestock in enclosed pastures did not prevent the spread of disease within a locality, it nevertheless would have reduced its spread when compared to the use of common land where animal movement was typically unrestricted.

The occurrence of cattle disease and plague is widely mentioned in the chronicles of Shrewsbury (1372–1603) and in the eighteenth and nineteenth century Quarter Sessions records (W.A. Leighton, 'Early Chronicles of Shrewsbury, 1372–1603', *Transactions of the Shropshire Archaeological and Historical Society* , Vol. 3, No. 2 (1880), pp. 221–352). Even in the nineteenth century, farmers in Shropshire were fearful of the effects of cattle disease and its potential to have a devastating impact on their livelihood. Consequently a cow club – essentially a mutual self-help scheme which provided a degree of protection for cottagers who were dependent upon employment and grazed their cow on a small area of land – was established at Whixall two miles from Prees, as well as the market towns of Wem and Whitchurch and more widely throughout the neighbouring county of Cheshire (SA XLS15404; S. Matthews, 'Cattle clubs, insurance and plague in the mid-nineteenth century', *Agricultural History Review*, Vol. 53, No. 2 (2005), pp. 192–211). Animal disease, whether in the sixteenth, seventeenth, eighteenth or nineteenth centuries could have significant implications for communities and the wider economy of localities.

As I hope this short article has highlighted, farmers in the sixteenth century were all too aware of the effects of the spread of animal disease. I would be really interested to hear of other instances where such strategies for the control of animal disease were imposed. The action of local inhabitants of the manor court of Prees to put in place measures to prevent the spread of animal disease through the culling and burning of diseased livestock provides an illuminating historical parallel, and highlights a striking continuity in responses to such events which even today threaten the rural economy of the countryside.

The current Defra 'Foot and Mouth Disease Control Strategy for Great Britain' specifies that in the event of any future outbreak carcases will be disposed 'by commercial incineration, rendering or licensed commercial landfill. Every effort will be made to ensure that on-farm pyres or mass burial are not used in the future but this cannot be completely ruled out if demand exceeds the capacity of the preferred disposal options.' Clearly the slaughtering and burning of diseased livestock in order to prevent the spread of disease is a controversial strategy which is still favoured by the UK government rather than vaccination. Remarkably, Prees Heath, also known as Whitchurch Heath, is 126.27 hectares of common land registered under the Commons Registration Act 1965 (CL 21) and is characteristic dwarf shrub heath lowland accredited as a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). Its survival as common land to the present, although in a much diminished extent, is an interesting historical continuity which provides the backdrop to this episode.



Farm work at Fords Farm, Twyford, Northwest Shropshire, 1797 SA 800/95

By kind permission, Shropshire Archives

▶ *James Bowen's work focuses on Shropshire, but he would like to hear of any similar evidence from other areas.*

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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. Membership enquiries should be directed to the Treasurer, BAHS,
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Continued from front, page 1

improved', it associated good business practice, something that it wanted to encourage, with the (male) 'farmers and crofters themselves' who were apparently indifferent to its potential. In other words, until the men could be persuaded that it could pay, it was believed that the industry would not evolve. 'Rearing poultry,' as Joanna Bourke has observed 'was one of the most important occupations of the farm woman. Indeed, despite the impassioned debates and controversial decisions concerning the poultry industry from the 1890s, one thing was agreed: for better or (more commonly) for worse, the poultry industry was dominated by women.'

Nevertheless, from the 1890s, some farmers did begin to move towards specialist egg production and, as Michael Winstanley suggests, this was frequently because smaller farmers – so often maligned as disinterested in agricultural 'improvement' – began taking on board many of the new methods later associated with large-scale poultry farming. The new techniques were disseminated through the local press, courses run by county councils (which were, strikingly given the official view, often widely attended by farmers' daughters) and agricultural colleges, trade journals such as *The Feathered World* and *Poultry Science*, advice literature published by specialists and trades bodies, and the meetings of poultry societies: sources that reveal the ways in which the technology/science surrounding poultry and egg production was adopted and adapted in practice.

After the First World War, as this specialised production began to spread, so did disease among fowl. As disease peaked in the 1930s, so the voluntary registration of breeders was introduced in the UK to improve the quality of the stock. Standardisation of the size of eggs marketed and the voluntary marking of eggs to improve freshness was introduced. During the Second World War the rationing of poultry feed limited the possibility of substantive, large-scale change. Nevertheless, government action continued – alongside that of commercial interests – to encourage large-scale and intensive production with the aim of increasing yield in line with the international 'nutritional policy' agreed at the Hot Springs Conference, 1943. Post-war, the government, building on its wartime controls, then continued to work on improving the distribution and marketing of eggs, something that led in the end to the creation of the British Egg Marketing Board in 1957 and introduction of the lion brand as guarantor of quality; a brand which lasted until the demise of the Board in 1971, and then reappeared with the Lion Code of Practice after the salmonella scare of 1988.

Yet, as flock sizes increased (only 11% of birds were in flocks greater than 500 in 1948, as compared to 70% of layers being in flocks of over 20,000 by 1988), and despite their initial engagement with the new practices of poultry farming, many smaller holdings went out of business. It was this that was at the forefront farmers' minds when 'factory farming' began to emerge as a structural issue in the agricultural press in the 1960s – just at the point when Ruth Harrison's critique of intensification, *Animal Machines* (1964), launched widespread public debate about animal welfare. Yet, none of this was at any point a given. The broader change came about through a massive shift in farming practice, rural infrastructure and marketing. Though they were debated in practice, these shifts were and encouraged by government, local authorities, colleges, and the trade. They were underpinned materially by the manufacture of specialist breeds, the development of feeds and new veterinary practices. Meanwhile, demand was stimulated by new forms of marketing that stressed the naturalness of eggs; Again, campaigns were grounded in trust but this time derived from and dependent upon the new technologies being put in place.

New website

The new-look BAHS web site was unveiled at the annual Spring Conference. The URL remains the same: **www.bahs.org.uk**. The site focuses on publicising events and other news of interest to agricultural historians and historians of rural economy and society. All members are encouraged to submit news items and we also welcome photos of past conferences – particularly of the outdoor visits – and other images relating to rural history and the countryside (provided you are able to grant us permission to use the images on the site). The site currently has slideshows from the last four BAHS Spring Conferences held at Northampton, Durham, Easton and Sparsholt. We are also very happy to include links to other sites that are likely to be of interest to members.

The site continues to provide access to all back numbers of the *Agricultural History Review* and *Rural History Today*. You can download either a whole volume of the *Review* or an individual article, both in PDF format. A new feature is the **Find…** page, which allows you to find, filter and sort the names of authors and titles of all articles from all issues of the *Review*. We hope to add more new interactive features when we move the site to a commercial Internet host in the near future. The new Webweaver, Catherine Glover, looks forward to receiving your suggestions and requirements for new features. You'll find a contact link on the website.