

# RURAL HISTORY TODAY

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## The people who made agricultural history

The new *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* and rural historians

**After the publicity campaign surrounding its launch on 23 September 2004, there can be few people in the UK who have not heard of the new *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*.**

For many reviewers it was the publishing event of the year, and the headline statistics are certainly impressive: 60,000 pages in 60 volumes, requiring twelve feet of shelf space in the printed version (costing £7,500) and also in a continuously updated online ([www.oxforddnb.com](http://www.oxforddnb.com)) version for about £200 a year. It has about 50,000 biographies, 20 per cent of them illustrated with a portrait (the publishers co-operated with the National Portrait Gallery), written by 10,000 contributors backed up by a large team of researchers and a careful editorial process, and the whole project was completed in 12 years. Impressive indeed – but is it of any use to rural historians?

As a research tool, the online version is probably the more useful of the two, simply because of the various ways in which the database can be searched. Just entering Agriculture and Food as a Field of Interest produces a list of 1587 names. But this broad category can be split into agriculture general, farming, veterinary medicine, land management, horticulture, forestry, fisheries, and food and drink. These in turn are further subdivided. Agriculture general, for example, includes agriculturists, innovators and improvers, engineers, scientists, educators, and writers and scholars, of whom there are 46. The earliest of these is Walter of Henley, and among the twentieth-century figures are A.W.Ashby and C.S.Orwin. Arthur Young is among those listed as an innovator and improver, whereas Leonard Elmhirst of Dartington is listed as a writer and scholar; would they, one wonders, have preferred it to be the other way round?



Above –  
Arthur Young (1741–1820)  
'Innovator and improver'

Left –  
Philip Pusey (1799–1855)  
'Agriculturalist'

Walter Blith's biography has been written, perhaps not surprisingly, by Joan Thirsk, and the search facility then allows the reader to look for other articles by the same writer – 11 in the case of Dr Thirsk, including Robert Loder, Vermuyden and W.G.Hoskins. Gordon Mingay and F.M.L.Thompson are among the other prominent rural historians in the list of contributors. (*Nearly every member of the BAHS committee wrote at least one entry – Ed.*) It is also possible to search the complete text for key words: pigs, for example, are mentioned in 115 biographies. Alternatively, categories can be combined: women/1600–1900/farming/breeders produces Annie Dorothy Betts, apiculturist, Anne Isabella Noel Blunt, traveler and breeder of Arab horses, and Beatrix Potter, artist, children's writer and breeder of Herdwick sheep.

For those who do not have easy access to a university library it may still be possible to consult the dictionary online. I read it on my home computer by going to my county library website and entering my library card number. And a good thing too – I would never have found 12 feet of shelf space.

Paul Brassley

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# AGRICULTURAL HISTORY IN THE NETHERLANDS - STATE OF THE ART

By Jan Bieleman – Part II

Jan Bieleman (born 1949) studied Rural Planning and Agricultural History at the (then) Agricultural University in Wageningen. He obtained his doctorate in 1987 with a thesis on the history of farming in the Dutch province of Drenthe during the period 1600–1910. Since 1985 he has been working at the Rural History Group of the Department of Social Sciences of the Wageningen University, teaching and doing research in the field of Dutch agricultural history. One of his main publications is a textbook on the agricultural history of the Netherlands, entitled: *Geschiedenis van de landbouw in Nederland 1500–1950. Veranderingen en verscheidenheid* (Amsterdam/Meppel, 1992). Recently he published a study on the technological changes in Dutch agriculture in the 20th century. E-mail: jan.bieleman@wur.nl

**In the second part of his overview Jan Bieleman describes the regional work that has been undertaken in the Netherlands but stresses the need for a systematic as well as a regional approach to agricultural research.**

Even for outsiders, the great variety of regional farming systems is one of the most striking characteristics of the country and much agricultural research has been concentrated in this area.

*Geschiedenis van den Zeeuwschen Landbouw in de negentiende en twintigste eeuw*, by Bouman was published in 1946 and broadly followed the general trend of periodizing used in traditional history. Four years later however, Adden's book, *De 'vraagpunten' der Groninger Maatschappij van Landbouw 1852–1941* was the first to study the agricultural history of a single province for a specific period. Two years later a two-volume study by Spahr van der Hoek on the history of agriculture in Friesland appeared, dealing with broad agricultural developments in this province up to the 1940s.

Though hardly recognized as such at the time, the publishing in 1957, of Slicher van Bath's *Samenleving onder spanning*, a study on the rural history of the province of Overijssel up to about 1850, was a watershed in the historiography of the Dutch countryside, both in its thematic and in its methodical approach. Seen in the light of our new understandings, Slicher's unquestioning belief in the unchangingness of traditional farming in this province appears quite surprising. In his eyes, traditional farming had done little to increase productivity.

In 1964, the book by Philips and others on the agricultural history of our most-southern province, Limburg was published. At that time, it was conspicuous by its new approach to its subject. Even more modern was the dissertation by Hille de Vries *Landbouw en bevolking tijdens de agrarische depressie in Friesland (1878–1895)* which gives a detailed analysis of the developments in arable farming in the northern parts of this province during what is known as the 'great depression'.

In the early 1970s three influential studies in Dutch rural history were published. Two, covering the period 1500–1800 were by

Van der Woude and by Faber on the North-Holland region, and Friesland, respectively. In these books agricultural developments played only a relatively limited part in a much wider approach. The third, by Jan de Vries covered the rural economy of the whole Republic from 1500 up to 1750. In Jan de Vries' study, more room was given to agriculture as an economic sector. In hindsight, however, the impact of De Vries' book lies to a great extent in the fact that he encouraged the discussion on the transformation and the role of Dutch agriculture in the whole of economic development during the crucial period 1500–1650, and during the Dutch Golden Age in particular.

Next, and typically regional in its approach, was Baars' book on the *Geschiedenis van de Landbouw in de Beijerland*, published in 1974. It is concerned with developments in arable farming on one of the islands in the southern part of the Province of South Holland from the 16th to the 19th century. A most important aspect of Baars' brilliant book is the way it demonstrates the flexibility of farming then and the attention it gives to ecological factors.

H.K. Roessingh's book published in 1976 and entitled *Inlandse Tabak*, on Dutch tobacco cultivation in the 17th and 18th centuries, is of wide significance, as it is regional in its approach. More than any book before, this book gave Dutch historians an insight into the way so called 'traditional' farmers thought and acted, managing their business in the countryside of the central and eastern parts of the Netherlands. Roessingh's chapter in Volume 8 of the new *Algemene Geschiedenis der Nederlanden*, (1979) on the period 1650–1815 demonstrated the way farming in different farming regions reacted to the worsening economic situation during the secular contraction after 1650.

Van Zanden's research, published in 1985 on the economic developments of Dutch farming in the 19th century was macro-economic in its approach. This strongly analytical study revealed for the first time the dynamics of the agro-economic climate during the period 1800–1914, in its regional diversity. Two years later, my own *Boeren op het Drentse zand 1600–1910* appeared. For the first time in a Dutch study of this kind, the social-political watershed of



the Napoleonic era was looked at from the 17th to the early 20th centuries. Until then, historiography had seen the rural economy of the sandy region as being closed off from the outside world. The prevailing farming system there was seen as hardly ever evolving. My study, however, showed how Drenthian farmers indeed had to cope with the whims of and trends in general economical developments.

In the same year, Crijns and Kriellaars, published the first volume of their study on the mixed farming system in the Brabant. Together with a second volume published in 1992, they gave a survey of the agricultural developments in the period 1800–1930. Though they were quite traditional in their approach, both volumes contain a lot of information and show how farming here took a completely new turn after 1890.

In 1991, an important study by Peter Priester on the agricultural history of the northern province of Groningen appeared. Using a wide approach, the author discusses the fundamental changes that took place in 19th century farming in this province. The adoption of new methods led to a sharp decline in the area left fallow, an increase in the area under crops and an expansion of livestock farming.

Quite different studies are those by the Groningen scholars Pilat and Knibbe. Pilat in his *Dutch Agriculture Export Performance* (1989) covers the period, 1846 to 1926. It was a period in which the Dutch agricultural sector more than ever before turned to export. Knibbe's book, *Agriculture in the Netherlands 1851–1950*, (1993), goes much further and is, in fact, a daring attempt to get a grip on the total agricultural production in the Netherlands, in terms of aggregated input, output and added value.

Finally I want to mention two books on the two southern provinces. First, the *Geschiedenis van de landbouw in Limburg* published in 1992 by the Jansen and Rutten as a supplement to the volume published in 1964, is concerned with 20th century developments. The second one is the craftsmanlike study of the origination of cooperative dairy industry in Brabant and Limburg by the sociologist Jeanine Dekker. This book was published in 1996.

All the studies I have mentioned have made clear that Dutch agriculture and rural economy was much more dynamic and flexible than former publicists believed and was one of the main themes of my own survey published in 1992 as the *Geschiedenis van de landbouw in Nederland 1500–1950*. In this book, I show not



only that 1850, 1890 and 1950 were important junctures in agricultural developments, but also that in an even more distant past, important transformations in agriculture took place. What emerges more and more clearly is the picture of an enormous variety in farming systems, each of them adapted to an economic and ecological niche. I believe, that one of the most effective way of studying agricultural history comprehensively is to do so in terms of a farming systems' approach. This method is based on the idea that agricultural production, can be taken as a hierarchical set of mutually related systems and sub-systems. Studies of the market gardening sector and the cooperative movement along these lines, for instance, is one of our most important desiderata.

### Blank spots

If we look at the agro-historic map of Netherlands there are many blank spots to be filled in, even, if we just look at the Early Modern and Modern Periods. As progress is being made in the field of 'macro' studies, the need for studies on a 'micro' level becomes apparent. And it is this special type of research that provides us with the knowledge of the individually operating and decision-making farmer.

Above – map to show the agricultural regions of the Netherlands

### Key to map

- I. Arable and mixed farming on marine clays
- II. Mixed farming (with fruit growing) on river clays and loess soils
- III. Livestock farming on peat and/or clay-covered peat soils
- IV. Mixed farming (dairying, pig fattening and poultry keeping) on sandy soils
- V. Former 'peat colonies'; arable farming on sandy soils (mainly industrial potatoes)
- VI. Market gardening districts

# CONFERENCE NOTICEBOARD

## Historic Farm Buildings Group

16th–18th September 2005, Herefordshire



The county is noted for high quality timber framing, but brick and stone buildings are also well represented. The programme will combine lectures and visits. Two tours are proposed: one to the north and west of Hereford city, where mixed farming predominates, becoming more pastoral towards the Welsh border; the second will focus on the east side of the county, noted for fruit and hops. The importance of livestock, particularly of pedigree Hereford cattle, will be evident on both tours. Specialist buildings such as hop kilns and cider mills are widespread as are barns and foldyards. Dovecots, horse engine houses and waterwheels also survive. Accommodation will be in a hotel on the outskirts of Hereford.

*Details and application form from Joan Grundy, Old School House, Ullingswick, Hereford, HR1 3JQ e-mail jgrundy@aol.com*

## Medieval Settlement Research Group 'The Medieval Village in Woodland and Champion Landscapes'

9th–10th April 2005, Cambridge



The first day of the conference includes lectures by Dr Stuart Wrathmell 'Regional Diversity in Medieval Rural Settlement', Christopher Taylor 'Landscape History, Observation and Explanation: The Missing Houses in Cambridgeshire Villages', Dr Tony Brown 'Does the landscape add up?', Dr Peter Warner 'Greens, Commons and Clayland colonisation 20 years on – and reflections on (in) moats', Glenn Foard 'The Historic landscape of Rockingham Forest: creating a Digital Atlas', Dr Tom Williamson 'Woodland and Champion: Farming, Environment and Landscape'.

The second day will consist of an excursion led by Christopher Taylor and Dr Peter Warner, to Hinxton, Pampisford and Eltisley.

*Further details from MSRG Spring Conference, 5, High Street, Great Eversden, Cambridge CB3 7HN*

## W.G. Hoskins and the making of the British Landscape

7–10th July 2005, University of Leicester

This conference, commemorates the 50th anniversary of the publication of the Making of the English Landscape.

It pursues 10 themes, some of them which figured in Hoskins' account of landscape history, such as 'rural settlement' and 'industry and communications', and others mark new developments in the subject, such as 'designed landscapes' and 'perceptions of landscape'.

The conference takes note of the work of W.G. Hoskins, but its focus is on recent developments and the future outlook.

Sixty papers will be given, on all periods from the Neolithic to the 20th century, and there will be receptions and an excursion.

*For more details and application forms, contact: Christopher Dyer, Centre for English Local History, University of Leicester, Marc Fitch House, 5 Salisbury Road, LEICESTER LE1 7QR e-mail address, cd50@le.ac.uk*

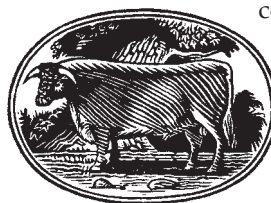
## British Agricultural History Society

11th–13th April, 2005, University of Leicester

Speakers will include Professor Alan Everitt on 'Leicestershire – portrait of a society', Professor Bas van Bavel on rural markets in the low

countries from the 13th to 16th centuries, and Professor Goddard on urban-rural environmental issues in the 19th century. Other speakers include Doctors Richard

Jones and Mark Page on medieval Whittlewood and Fernando Collantes on the European peasantry of the mountain regions and their response to industrialisation in the 19th and 20th centuries. There will be a 'New Researcher's Session' covering topics from the medieval to the nineteenth century and an excursion through the Leicestershire



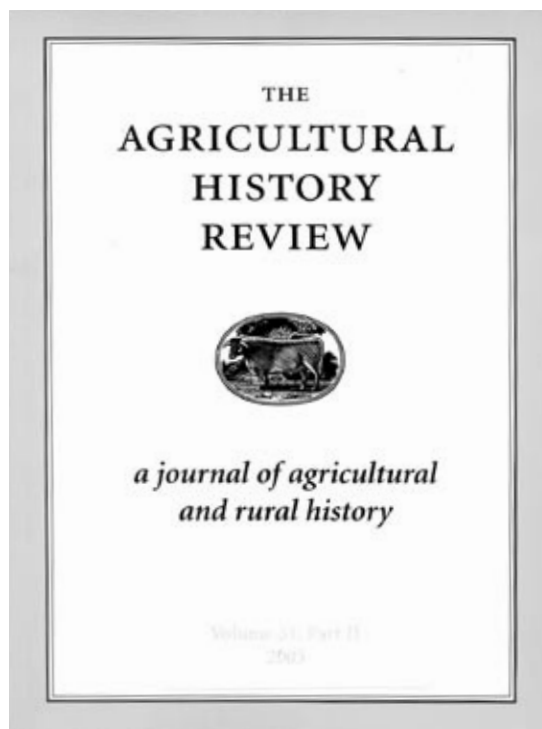
countryside to Lamport Hall and farm museum. Those who are attending the Economic History Society Conference in Leicester immediately beforehand may arrange to remain in their accommodation throughout. For further details, please contact the Secretary, Dr John Broad (j.broad@londonmet.ac.uk), Department of Humanities, Arts and Languages, London Metropolitan University, 166–220, Holloway Road, London N7 8DB. Full conference programme and registration forms will be available on the Society's website ([www.bahs.org.uk](http://www.bahs.org.uk)) from early in the new year and will be sent to members of the Society.

## Conference bursaries

**Are you studying for an M.Phil. or Ph.D. in rural or agricultural history?**

To encourage postgraduate students, the Society has agreed to award up to three bursaries annually for its spring conference. These will cover the registration fee and full conference charges, leaving successful applicants to find their travel costs. Applicants should send an application statement of no more than fifty words giving details of their course, subject of dissertation, and any other particular reasons why the conference would be valuable to them. They should include a letter of support from their supervisor and be sent, preferably by e-mail to John Broad (j.broad@londonmet.ac.uk), Department of Humanities, Arts and Languages, London Metropolitan University, 166–220, Holloway Road, London N7 8DB. The closing date for applications is mid-March.

## The Agricultural History Review online



**Last year the Society agreed to make back numbers of its journal generally available on line.**

You can now read and browse all issues of the Review that are more than five years old on the Society's website ([www.bahs.org.uk](http://www.bahs.org.uk)), and download articles for more leisurely reading. However the files are large and most suited to those with broadband connections to the internet. In addition all volumes of the Review, including those not on line, have been fully indexed. If you have the full version of Adobe Acrobat you can search all volumes of the Review once you have one volume on screen, using the 'Search' facility. This has been automated and is extremely fast. We are hoping to extend this to all users, and the new google search engine [scholar.google.com](http://scholar.google.com) may also enable you to make overall searches. If you have any queries or suggestions on this please contact the Society's secretary, Dr John Broad (j.broad@londonmet.ac.uk).

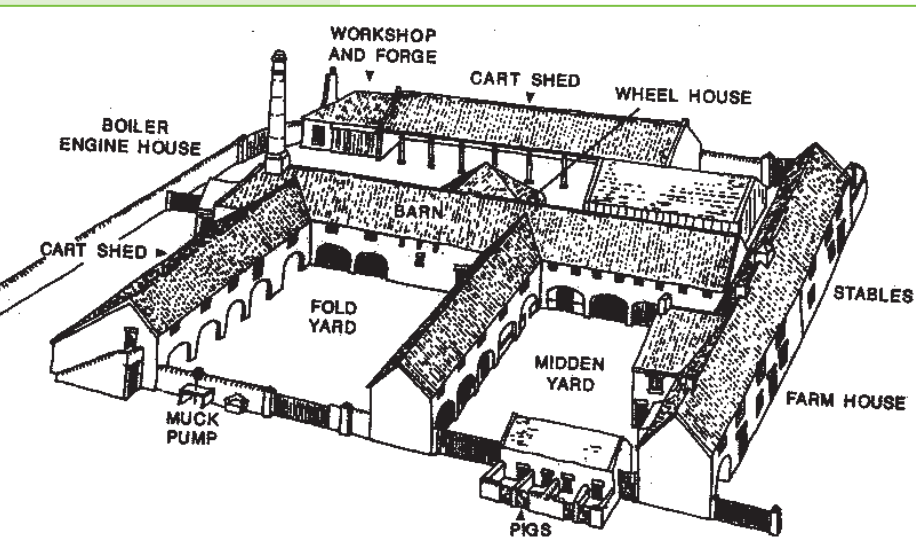
*You can now read and browse all issues of the Review that are more than five years old*



# Progress with the Beamish Project



Beamish houses the main farming and rural life collections for the North of England and these form the basis for the two farms operated by the Museum, Home Farm aims to demonstrate farming just before the first world war, and Pockerley Farm that of about 1825. Major progress has been made to both farms and the collections, which provide the intellectual background to the project.



*The Home Farm at Beamish has changed little since 1790. The wheel house with horse engine was added in 1799, providing power for mechanical threshing.*

## Home Farm

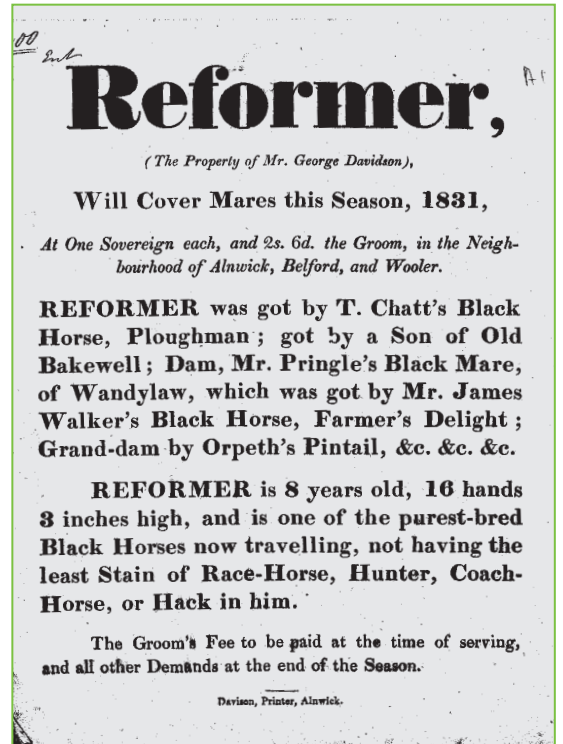
We are preparing for a major reworking of the steading which has had little attention for 10 years. The new exhibitions will be centred around the threshing steading which houses one of the earliest surviving barn Threshers from the 1790s. The 1903 Ivel Tractor from the Moffitt collection will be displayed at Home Farm for a 5-year period.

## Pockerley Farm

The 1820s landscape project is moving ahead with 30 acres of ridge and furrow settling down after installation (both straight and revised S types) and seeding. The 1820s steam railway is a major feature as it crosses the Georgian fields. A horse Gin Pit has been erected and a track for a wood rail horse railway or Newcastle waggonway is currently having its embankments and fencing completed.

## Collections

A major collection of printed posters from the Davison Print works at Alnwick has been acquired. The 300 items covering 1810-1840 periods cover all aspects of Town and Rural life. Of particular interest are a good run of stallion adverts which include much new material on Bakewell's horses (known locally as Vardys) in Northumberland.



*Advertisement for a stallion bred from Bakewell's stock, from the Davidson collection held at Beamish North of England Open Air Museum*

## Staffing & Stock

Farming operations are under Peter Brassett who has been joined by Jim Elliott – World Champion Horse Ploughman. They are developing the stock collections and new blood lines have been brought in on the Cleveland Bay, Shorthorn and Teeswater sheep holdings. As one of the larger open-air museum sites (we have 400 acres +). We also have woodland/coppice areas and are preparing projects to get our visitors to the 6 mill sites, which were working at Beamish in the 1820's.

Beamish is open all year. In summer, (April through October) every day from 10am to 5pm. An average summer visit lasts 4–5 hours. In winter Beamish is open from 10am to 4pm, closed on Mondays and Fridays. Home Farm and Pockerley Manor are open during the summer season only, a winter visit is centred on the 1913 Town and tramway and lasts around two hours.

*John Gall*  
Deputy Director and Head of Development

## The Museum of English Rural Life, Reading



### The Museum of English Rural Life

The Museum will be moving to its new site at the University of Reading over the course of December and January. As a result, the library and reading room will be closed during January. See the website ([www.ruralhistory.org](http://www.ruralhistory.org)) for details of re-opening.

Three major archive collections at the Museum have been catalogued recently. They are:

### Council for the Protection of Rural England Archive

The Council for the Preservation of Rural England (CPRE) was established in 1926. The Council saw itself as the guardian of the countryside, campaigning against threats to it. The CPRE had constituent and affiliated bodies, as well as county and local branches throughout England. In 1969 the name of the Council was changed to The Council for the Protection of Rural England to reflect a change in approach to its activities. The name of the Council was again changed to The Campaign to Protect Rural England, aiming to promote the beauty, tranquillity and diversity of rural England by encouraging the sustainable use of land and other natural resources in town and county. The archive consists of minute books 1926–1968; annual reports 1927–1982; monthly

reports 1932–1958; correspondence 1925–1990; publications 1926–1999; maps 1943–1969; posters and exhibition material 1928–1960s; watercolours 1857–1888; press cuttings 1910–1990; photographic material 1895–1980s. Eleven deposits of CPRE material have been made to the Museum since 1979 and these have all now been catalogued.

### Women's Farm and Garden Association (WFGA)

The Women's Agricultural and Horticultural Union was established in 1899 and from 1910 became known as the Women's Farm and Garden Association. Its objectives were to unite all professional land workers and those interested in outdoor work for women into a strong central association to help and advise land workers on all matters connected with their profession and to influence public opinion in everything concerning women workers on the land. The Collection contains: minutes 1899–1987; annual reports 1918–1920; correspondence files 1956–1991; account book of Lingfield smallholding 1922–1934; journals 1920–1940; other publications 1900–1940; press cuttings 1908–1949. The Collection was deposited in 2001.

### Messenger and Co Ltd

Thomas Goode Messenger is recorded as having a plumber's, glazier's and glassfitter's business in High Street, Loughborough as early as 1855. In 1858 he formed Messenger and Co. and

*Continued on page 8*

*The Museum will be moving to its new site over the course of December and January*

## A note from the editor

*Rural History Today* is published by the British Agricultural History Society. The editor will be pleased to receive short articles, press releases, notes and queries for publication. She would particularly like articles on European projects, kindred societies and news from museums, all of which she hopes will become regular features. Articles for the next issue should be sent by 30 May 2005 to Susanna Wade Martins, The Longhouse, Eastgate Street, North Elmham, Dereham, Norfolk NR20 5HD or preferably by email [scwmartins@hotmail.com](mailto:scwmartins@hotmail.com)

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, c/o Dept. of History, University of Exeter, Amory Building, Rennes Drive, Exeter EX4 4RJ. Enquiries about other aspects of the Society's work should be directed to the Secretary, Dr John Broad, Dept. Humanities, Arts and Languages, London Metropolitan University, 166-220 Holloway Road, London, N7 8DB, Tel: 020 7753 5020; Fax: 020 7753 3159, [j.broad@londonmet.ac.uk](mailto:j.broad@londonmet.ac.uk).

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by 1863 is listed as a plumber and hydraulic engineer. By 1877 the firm is described as "horticultural builders and hot water apparatus manufacturers". In 1874, Walter Chapman Burder purchased the company and in 1884 the business was moved from the High Street premises to Cumberland Road, off Ashby Road. A foundry was then built and further extensions in 1895 led to the complete closure of the High Street Branch. The firm was famous, particularly in the Victorian and Edwardian period, for making greenhouses, verandahs, summer houses, cucumber frames, melon pits, mushroom beds, orchid stages, vineries and peach houses. As demand declined from the 1930s, the company began to concentrate more on the manufacture of heating equipment and became an engineering firm. It was also known by the name of the Midland Horticultural Company. The archive consists of contracts files for glasshouses and heating apparatus erected by Messenger and Co., 1880s-1950s.



An Exmoor farmer. Photo by John Tarlton.

Recent notable acquisitions include several thousand images of agricultural and rural life from the 1930s to the 1980s by professional photographer John Tarlton whose work was used by *Country Life*, *Farmers Weekly* and other similar publications.

## UNIVERSITY NEWS

### School of History, University of East Anglia Norwich

#### Post-1870 farming landscapes

**A new three-year Leverhulme-funded project has just begun in the School of History, aiming to study the farming landscape of East Anglia between c.1870 and 1950.**

The development of the rural landscape in the years of agricultural depression and the influence of two world wars has received little attention. We know little, for instance, of the affects of the break-up of the great estates and the increase in owner-occupier farming, or of the small-holding movement, on the landscape. Did depression simply result in benign neglect or is that too much of a simplification? The project is being undertaken by Dr Tom Williamson and Dr Susanna Wade Martins. Watch this space!

#### The Landscape Group

**A dynamic group of post-graduate students under the leadership of Dr Tom Williamson has set up the Landscape Group within the School of History.**

Members are studying a wide range of topics of interest to Rural Historians and their bi-monthly newsletter *Prospect* can be downloaded from the web at [uealandscapegroup@yahoo.co.uk](mailto:uealandscapegroup@yahoo.co.uk), or from the group's website at [www.uea.ac.uk/his/research/landscape/](http://www.uea.ac.uk/his/research/landscape/)

