

Recent Developments in Studies of the Terminology of Agrarian Landscapes

By R. A. BUTLIN

IN 1961, H. P. R. Finberg, in an editorial introduction to a glossary published in this journal, wrote that "Agrarian history, like other branches of learning, not infrequently finds itself bedevilled in discussion and exposition by ambiguity in the terms employed."¹ The glossary itself was intended to reduce such ambiguity, stimulate further discussion of this problem, and continue the work begun at the international colloquium in Nancy in 1957. At a time when the quantity of published work on the evolution and development of rural societies and landscapes was rapidly increasing, it appeared obvious to some geographers, historians, economists, and others that a more carefully defined terminology was an essential prerequisite for profitable discussion and comparison of features of agrarian landscapes. Comparisons and contrasts could not be made unless the connotation of many ambiguous terms could be more exactly expressed. While many scholars agreed that the value of such a project was potentially high (though there remained, and still remain, those who, in the words of one eminent agrarian historian "appear to prefer *not* to know what they are talking about"), the problem remained of determining the most profitable and expedient way of arriving at such a goal. The most obvious solution was to adopt the decimal system of classification of terms drawn up by Professor Harald Uhlig, of the University of Giessen, and to effect discussion, debate, and ultimately definition, by means of the circulation of carefully designed working papers, each relating to a specific term.

The problems of making comparative studies of agrarian structures within a European context, because of confused terminology, became

increasingly obvious as a result of further international colloquia at Vadstena in 1960 and Leicester in 1964, and determined efforts were made within the British Isles to enlist the help of scholars working in a wide variety of disciplines. The co-ordination of this work was attempted by a small *ad hoc* group of geographers, operating within the Institute of British Geographers. The results of their work, however, were meagre, as there appeared to be few people who were willing to complete the working papers which formed the basis of the whole system. At a meeting in Würzburg in July 1966, further deliberations on this problem took place between geographers from European countries. The French geographers reported the establishment of a *Commission du Lexique Agraire*, which was actively involved in the production of a lexicon of agreed definitions of terms which would be used in France. The German geographers were working on an outline draft of binding definitions of German terms which could be used as a basis for comparison for discussion on an international basis. In order to redress the obvious imbalance between terminological definition in France and Germany on the one hand and the British Isles on the other, it was decided to constitute a formal Study Group for the Terminology of the Agrarian Landscape (subsequently designated The Agrarian Landscape Research Group) within the Institute of British Geographers, whose constitution makes provision for such groups. This group was established in January 1968 with Professor J. T. Coppock (University of Edinburgh) as chairman. The basic aims of this study group are: to compile lists of definitive terms used to describe agrarian landscapes; to initiate and stimulate re-

¹ H. P. R. Finberg, Editorial Introduction to 'Some Terms Used in Agrarian History', by R. A. Butlin, A.H.R. ix, 1961, p. 98.

search into the characteristics, origins, and development of the features so described; to further co-operation in this field with cognate disciplines and organizations, particularly in the British Isles and in Europe; and to publish papers, discussions, and definitions.

One method of generating discussion of agrarian features and terms which has been adopted by the group is the sponsoring of conferences dealing with specific themes and features. To this end, a one-day conference was held in the Geography Department, University College, London, on Saturday, 26 October 1968, its theme being 'The Terminology of Commons, Common Fields, and Field Systems'. This conference was attended by thirty-five participants, of whom the greater proportion were geographers.

The first paper of the first session (chaired by Professor J. T. Coppock) was read by Dr A. R. H. Baker (University of Cambridge), and dealt with 'Some Terminological Problems in Studies of British Field Systems'. The text of this paper is published in this number of the REVIEW, and need not, therefore, be presented in précis. The discussion which followed this paper related to two main points: the apparent need to have formal and functional sets of definitions, which should not be confused; and the possible alternative terms for 'open' or 'common-field'. On the latter point, several suggestions were made, including 'subdivided field', 'parcellated field', 'quilletted field', and 'divided field', though there was no general agreement to the use of any one of these as a suitable alternative.

In a second paper, entitled 'Terminology of the Open Fields of Devon and Cornwall', Mr H. S. A. Fox (University of Cambridge) paid particular attention to the terms 'stitch' and 'stitchmeal', and 'landscore'. The term 'stitch' may be of Anglo-Saxon derivation, meaning 'anything small', and suggests to some that these dispersed and fragmented holdings were of Anglo-Saxon introduction. This latter argument was not very convincing, for early field names in Cornwall were, in fact, in Cornish, and throughout the Middle Ages Celtic-Cornish names remained in the vernacular while Latin was dominant. With the change to

English, however, 'stitch' and 'stitchmeal' became common terms, and thus constitute an interesting example of the relatively late introduction of terms which became dialect terms. In Devon, the term 'landscore' only became deeply rooted in local terminology after the sixteenth century, and was used in three different ways: to denote a boundary of an open-field strip, a strip itself, and to describe open-field land in general. Mr Fox concluded by stressing the importance of dialect terminology, and this theme was continued in the ensuing discussion. It was agreed that the study of dialect terminology was significant both in relation to the genesis of field systems in an area, and also in relation to non-indigenous description of these systems whereby 'alien' terms might be applied by extra-regional commentators to features which they did not fully understand.

In the final paper of the morning session Mr J. C. Harvey (University of Sheffield) discussed the 'Terminology of the field-systems of Yorkshire', with particular reference to the West Riding terminology of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, a period when the old system was in decay and enclosure made rapid progress. Features such as strips and furlongs were described by a great variety of terms. The Parliamentary enclosure awards describe a variety of situations showing degrees of prior enclosure, but the terms 'open' and 'common' (fields) were used synonymously, while the term 'town-field' was frequently applied to the sole open field of a settlement of the hamlet type. Interpretation of the terminology of field systems used in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries was difficult because the described features were changing in form and function, but because the evidence for this period is most profuse, more attention should be paid to it. Problems and suggestions raised in discussion included: the possibility of a study of the terminology used by various enclosure commissioners, the cumbersome terminology currently used to describe various types of enclosure, and the difficulty of arriving at an exact functional connotation of field-names.

The second (afternoon) session, chaired by R. A. Butlin (University College, Dublin),

comprised one paper and a discussion of an outline terminology proposed by German geographers.

Dr I. H. Adams (University of Edinburgh), in a paper on 'The Terminology of Commons in Scotland', spoke initially of the paucity of documentary evidence for Scotland, and also of the need to distinguish between various levels of terminological usage, i.e. between the spoken but largely unwritten language of the peasant cultivator, the written language of the period studied (which normally had heavy legal bias), and a working terminology for general use. Estate plans and documents should be studied with particular reference to the notional agrarian concepts of the surveyor: inexplicable anomalies and features of agrarian systems often reflect the inability of the surveyor fully to perceive and describe what he saw. A classification of Scottish commons was proposed, including the following categories: run-rig, commonry, borough commons, commons in which the Crown had interest, common greens, common moss, and common grazing (the last-named comprising the bulk of the common lands of Scotland). This paper stimulated a lengthy discussion, with a notable contribution from Mr R. A. Dodgshon (Museum of English Rural Life) on the subject of some apparently fallacious notions of the run-rig system.

Dr C. Lienau (University of Giessen) introduced, in the final working session, a new publication, *Flur und Flurformen*,¹ recently published in Giessen. The object of this work was to establish a basic terminological framework into which various types of field patterns

and their elements could be placed, which would thus constitute a comparable basis for international discussion. A set of standard German terms is offered in the book along with suggestions for French and English equivalents, to be debated in the respective countries. The members of the conference discussed the English terms suggested, and agreed to adopt the recommended definitions and terms, including, *inter alia*, the term *parcel* ('the smallest unit in a parish or township'), *strip* ('an elongated parcel, the longer sides of which are more or less parallel. The width-length ratio of 1:2.5 is taken as the dividing line between regular blocks and strips'), *block* ('a more rectangular shape' as defined above), and *fur-long* (a 'bundle of parcels').

This conference generated considerable interest and discussion and similar conferences will be held in future. Indeed, a week-end conference on the 'run-rig' system has since been held in Edinburgh. It has been agreed that the necessary extension of the debate on terminology is more likely to profit from discussion of specific themes and related terms rather than from protracted discussion, *in vacuo* and in a solely lexicographical context, of separate and unrelated terms. This work has been largely initiated by academic geographers, but there can be no doubt that progress can only be continued on an inter-disciplinary front. Support of, and interest in this venture from historians, economists, agriculturists, archaeologists, and others is vital, if this attempt to refine definitions and descriptions of agrarian landscapes is to succeed.²

¹ H. Uhlig (ed.), *Flur und Flurformen* (Types of Field Patterns), Giessen, 1968, being vol. 1 of 'Basic Material for the Terminology of the Agricultural Landscape', compiled under the auspices of the International Working Group for the Geographical Terminology of the Agricultural Landscape. Each section of this work is reproduced in German, English, and French. Copies can be ordered from Frau Völpel, Geographisches Institut der Justus Liebig-Universität, Landgraf Philipp-Platz 2, 63 Giessen, W. Germany, price DM 15.

² Provision for membership of the Agrarian Landscape Research Group by non-members of the Institute of British Geographers is being made in the constitution of the group. Those requiring further information about the group and its activities should write to the author at University College, Dublin.