

A Fair Field once Full of Folk: Agrarian Change in an Era of Population Decline, 1348–1500*

By BRUCE M S CAMPBELL

IT WAS William Langland, reared during the crowded and hungry years before the Black Death, who employed the image of a 'fair field full of folk' to evoke the medieval rural world peopled 'of all manner of men, the meaner and the richer, working and wandering, as the world asks of them'.¹ Yet at the time that he was writing *The Vision of Piers Plowman*, in the aftermath of successive outbreaks of plague, that world was rapidly changing as excess mortality transformed population surfeit into population deficit, shaking the traditional fabric of rural society to the core. It is this age – from the outbreak of plague in 1348 to the close of the fifteenth century – and this changing social world which are the subjects of Volume III of the *Agrarian History of England and Wales*. A further 2½ inches and 1000 pages of rich and varied scholarship are thereby added to a series now running to approximately 6500 pages, occupying almost two feet of shelf-space, and wanting only Volume VII to provide a continuous agrarian history of England and Wales from prehistoric times to 1939.² Perhaps the time has now come for Joan Thirsk, the *Agrarian History's* indefatigable General Editor, to commission a ninth and final volume to complete the story down to the present.

Publication of a new volume in the *Agrarian History* is always an event, and this volume, so long awaited, is no exception. It is warmly to be welcomed. Of course, no major collaborative volume conceived in the 1950s, planned in the 1960s, researched and written in the 1970s and 1980s, and published in the 1990s, could be flawless, and there are the inevitable regrets, disappointments, and reservations. But Professor Miller and his fourteen distinguished contributors have laboured hard and wrought well and to such telling effect that they have rescued from obscurity one of the most formative but least researched periods in English agrarian history. Not only is a framework thereby established for a period whose agrarian history formerly lacked one, but along the way a great store of fresh data and learning is provided on a wide range of topics for which historians will be grateful for many years to come. Scholarly books on this scale come expensive, but at a little less than nine pence a page this is better value than many: those prepared to invest in its £85 will acquire an indispensable work of reference.

Justification for treating 1348–1500 as a separate and self-contained period derives from the fact that it corresponds to 'the longest period of declining and stagnant population in recorded English history'.³ Whether national demographic decline began with, or some time before, the Black Death of 1348–9 is a moot point. For Edward Miller, in his lucid but cautious introductory chapter on 'People and land', 'the balance between success and failure during the early fourteenth century in meeting the challenge of multiplying people has still to be exactly determined'.⁴ This issue has recently been explored in some detail by Richard Smith, whose careful review of such demographic evidence as is currently available suggests that the balance is more likely to have been tipped in favour of failure than of success.⁵ Nevertheless, there is no doubting the massive mortality of the 'Great Pestilence' itself. J F D Shrewsbury was sceptical of estimates which placed plague mortality above twenty per cent, but such scepticism appears entirely unwarranted in the light of the

oured hard and wrought well and to such telling effect that they have rescued from obscurity one of the most formative but least researched periods in English agrarian history. Not only is a framework thereby established for a period whose agrarian history formerly lacked one, but along the way a great store of fresh data and learning is provided on a wide range of topics for which historians will be grateful for many years to come. Scholarly books on this scale come expensive, but at a little less than nine pence a page this is better value than many: those prepared to invest in its £85 will acquire an indispensable work of reference.

* A review article of Edward Miller, ed, *The Agrarian History of England and Wales*, III, 1348–1500, CUP, 1991. xxv + 982, illus, £85 (hereafter AHIII).

¹ *Visions from Piers Plowman taken from the Poem of William Langland*, trans N Coghill, 1949, p 15.

² H P R Finberg, 'An Agrarian History of England', *Ag Hist Rev*, IV, 1956, pp 2–3.

³ J Hatcher, *Plague, Population and the English Economy, 1348–1500*, 1977, p 11.

⁴ AHIII, p 2.

⁵ R M Smith, 'Demographic Developments in Rural England, 1300–48: a Survey', pp 25–78 in B M S Campbell, ed, *Before the Black Death: Studies in the 'Crisis' of the Early Fourteenth Century*, Manchester, 1991.

evidence assembled in this volume.⁶ Subsequent plague outbreaks, together with a continuing high background mortality, reduced the population still further, so that between 1347 and 1377 – when the Poll Tax indicates a national population of 2.2–3.0 million – the total may have been reduced by at least half.⁷ Thereafter the pace of decline was slow but the trend remained ineluctably downwards, so that by the third quarter of the fifteenth century the population may have shrunk to barely two millions.⁸ Only in the final decades of the century are there indications that decline had been halted and from the 1480s and 1490s signs of modest recovery become apparent in such widely separate locations as Yorkshire and Lancashire, the West Midlands, Kent and Sussex, and Devon and Cornwall.⁹ Recent work points to an improvement in aristocratic replacement rates at about the same time.¹⁰ Nevertheless, in Miller's view 'recovery ... had not gone far by the 1520s'.¹¹

Such long waves of demographic depression were a recurrent feature of pre-industrial populations.¹² The late Romano-British and early Anglo-Saxon period dealt with in Volume I part ii certainly experienced a major demographic hiatus.¹³ The years 1640–1750, spanned by Volume V, also stand out as a demographic lull between two sustained surges of growth.¹⁴ More recently still, Ireland between 1845 and 1960 suffered a reduction in population which in its scale and duration closely paralleled English experience 1348–1500.¹⁵ In each case changes were effected in agrarian institutions which were to exercise an enduring influence long after the circumstances which brought them into being had passed. Herein lies the wider significance of these periods of demographic depression. Yet it is the agrarian consequence of population growth that have hith-

erto attracted the greater attention.¹⁶ Volume III thus ought to interest theorist and empiricist alike, early modernists as much as late medievalists, and all those concerned with long-term processes of agrarian change.

Above all, the years 1348–1500 occupied a pivotal position in the transition from feudalism to capitalism.¹⁷ The decline of serfdom, which formed one important aspect of this transition, is rightly a major theme of the volume. In addition to a series of regional essays on tenant farmers which chart the demise of customary tenures, E B and Natalie Fryde contribute an account of the role of peasant rebellions and peasant discontent in this process (Chapter 8). The latter, if in part already superseded by the flurry of publications on this subject which celebrated the six-hundredth anniversary of the Revolt, may be recommended to students as a lucid review of the main issues involved.¹⁸ Beyond this, more explicit discussion of the decay of feudal socio-property relations is lacking and there is little to suggest the uniqueness of the English path of development or the intense ideological debate which has been generated by attempts to provide an explanation of it.¹⁹

Unfortunately, the decay of feudal institutions is a major reason for the documentary discontinuity that renders investigation of this period's agrarian history so peculiarly difficult. Much more can be said of the second half of the fourteenth century, when most demesnes were still in hand and before the jurisdiction and authority of manorial courts had become seriously eroded, than can be said of the second half of the fifteenth, which, notwithstanding the efforts of all concerned, remains one of the murkiest eras in English agrarian history. Discussion of farming practice and techniques in Chapter 3 is thus disproportionately biased towards the first half of the period, and the account of tenant farming and farmers in Chapter 7 fares only marginally better. This deterioration in manorial documentation poses particular problems for D L Farmer's painstaking reconstruction of continuous agricultural price and wage series, an

⁶ J F D Shrewsbury, *A History of Bubonic Plague in the British Isles*, Cambridge, 1970, pp 122–3, and the review by C Morris in *Hist Jnl*, XIV, 1971, pp 209–10; *AHIII*, pp 4–5, 36–7, 70–1, 119, 139, 609, 611, 625–6, 636, 722.

⁷ *AHIII*, p 6.

⁸ *Loc cit*.

⁹ *AHIII*, pp 45, 636, 119, 731.

¹⁰ S J Payling, 'Social Mobility, Demographic Change, and Landed Society in Late Medieval England', *Econ Hist Rev*, 2nd ser, XLV, 1992, pp 54–6.

¹¹ *AHIII*, p 6.

¹² J D Chambers, *Population, Economy and Society in Pre-Industrial England*, Oxford, 1972; R D Lee, 'Population Homeostasis and English Demographic History', pp 75–100 in R I Rotberg and T K Rabb, eds, *Population and Economy: Population History from the Traditional to the Modern World*, Cambridge, 1986.

¹³ H P R Finberg, ed, *The Agrarian History of England and Wales, I, ii, A.D. 43–1042*, Cambridge, 1972.

¹⁴ J Thirsk, ed, *The Agrarian History of England and Wales, V, 1640–1750*, 2 vols, Cambridge, 1984–5.

¹⁵ R E Kennedy, *The Irish: Emigration, Marriage, and Fertility*, 1973.

¹⁶ E Boserup, *The Conditions of Agricultural Growth: the Economics of Agrarian Change under Population Pressure*, 1965; D B Grigg, *Population Growth and Agrarian Change: an Historical Perspective*, Cambridge, 1980.

¹⁷ M Dobb, *Studies in the Development of Capitalism*, 1946; J E Martin, *Feudalism to Capitalism: Peasant and Landlord in English Agrarian Development*, Atlantic Highlands, NJ, 1983; T H Aston and C H E Philpin, eds, *The Brenner Debate: Agrarian Class Structure and Economic Development in Pre-Industrial Europe*, Cambridge, 1985.

¹⁸ For example, R H Hilton and T H Aston, eds, *The English Rising of 1381*, Cambridge, 1984; R Hilton, *Class Conflict and the Crisis of Feudalism: Essays in Medieval Social History*, 2nd edn, 1990.

¹⁹ Aston and Philpin, *op cit*; Martin, *op cit*; M Dunford and D Perrons, *The Arena of Capital*, 1983, pp 90–123.

historical resource of the first order surprisingly neglected by other contributors to the volume. As he observes, 'for the fourteenth century, evidence is available from most parts of England south of a line between the Severn and the Wash; by the 1440s, however, almost all the manorial sources are from Hampshire and Sussex alone'.²⁰ In most cases he is able to make good the deficiency by recourse to alternative classes of record, although completion of certain specific wage series to the close of the fifteenth century defeats even his patience and ingenuity.²¹ Where statistical precision is less imperative there is an obvious temptation to extrapolate back to the late fifteenth century from sixteenth-century evidence, but most contributors wisely resist this temptation. Documentary inadequacies therefore blur the chronology of these years and render some of the consequences of demographic depression elusive of direct investigation.

Among the most immediate and conspicuous of adjustments were a major shift in land-use from arable to grass (as the demand for bread-grain contracted and, at least initially, that for livestock products expanded), together with a general contraction in the size and number of rural settlements, as the rural population shrank. It is to the documentation and description of these related developments that Chapter 2, 'The occupation of the land', is largely devoted. This is the first of three chapters to be organized regionally. The plethora of examples produced from all parts of the country bears witness to the universality of the trends in question, but more attempt could have been made to quantify the scale of settlement shrinkage and desertion, and only Miller for Yorkshire and Lancashire, C C Dyer for the West Midlands, and H S A Fox for Devon and Cornwall exploit the potential of Inquisitions *Post Mortem* and Feet of Fines to measure the extent of the swing from arable to grass.²² What is at issue here are differential rates of regional change and the degree to which, as Fox rightly ponders, the removal of demographic pressures 'strengthened regional contrasts as farmers adjusted land use according to the best capabilities of the land and the survival or otherwise of local markets'.²³ Yet this issue is left implicit rather than explicit since the individual regional analyses, although finely crafted, are far too self-contained. There is virtually no cross-referencing between them, no direct comparison

between regions, and absolutely no attempt to draw the separate regional threads together and provide an overview.²⁴ Nor is there any exploration of the links to related themes – on farming systems, marketing, prices and wages, and rural buildings – dealt with elsewhere in the volume.

That important spatial changes occurred during this period, as populations became more mobile and rural industry offered expanding employment opportunities, is not in doubt.²⁵ But how these mapped themselves out into changing patterns of land-use and agricultural activity remains an only partially answered question. Individual regional farming systems are successively described – by J A Tuck on the Northern Borders, Miller on Yorkshire and Lancashire, R H Britnell on Eastern England, Edmund King on the East Midlands, Dyer on the West Midlands, D Huw Owen on Wales and the Marches, P D A Harvey on the Home Counties, Mavis Mate on the Southern Counties, and Fox on Devon and Cornwall – each drawing upon an impressive range of primary and secondary sources; but the broader picture remains stubbornly out of focus. In part this derives from a greater reliance upon description than upon measurement, even when the variables concerned are eminently quantifiable (as in the case of the crops and livestock recorded in manorial accounts). Statistics are tabulated for individual demesnes and some groups of demesnes, but the number of demesnes involved is small and the level of aggregation low, thus thwarting attempts at regional aggregation and inter-regional comparison. Nor is there any attempt at mapping. But the problem goes deeper than this and is inherent within the actual regional scheme adopted.

Volume III, like Volumes II and IV, carves up the country into ten basic 'regions'. In Volume IV the individual regional descriptions and the broader overview which sets them in context are the product of a single author, Joan Thirsk.²⁶ This makes for considerable consistency of treatment and facilitated construction of her celebrated map

²⁰ AHIII, p 431.

²¹ AHIII, pp 516–20.

²² AHIII, pp 50, 78–80, 152–5. See, L R Poos, *A Rural Society after the Black Death: Essex 1350–1525*, Cambridge, 1991, pp 47–8, for comparable figures for Essex.

²³ AHIII, p 163.

²⁴ The lack of cross-referencing is a consistent weakness of the book. There is, for instance, no cross-referencing between the separate discussions of the Statutes of Labourers legislation on pp 483–90 and pp 753–60.

²⁵ AHIII, pp 17–18, 27–9, 599–600, 612, 621, 678–9, 703, 705, 740–3, 785; R S Schofield, 'The Geographical Distribution of Wealth in England, 1334–1649', *Econ Hist Rev*, 2nd ser, XVIII, 1965, pp 483–510; H C Darby, R E Glasscock, J Sheail, and G R Versey, 'The Changing Geographical Distribution of Wealth in England, 1086–1334–1525', *Jnl Hist Geog*, 5, 1979, pp 247–62.

²⁶ J Thirsk, ed, *The Agrarian History of England and Wales, IV, 1500–1640*, Cambridge, 1967, pp 1–112.

of the farming regions of England 1500–1640.²⁷ In Volumes II and III the individual regions are assigned to separate authors and in Volume III there is neither any discussion of the rationale upon which this regional scheme is based nor any evaluation of the overall picture thereby revealed.²⁸ In this instance, there is no attempt to reconstruct a map of farming regions. Nor is a picture pieced together from regions apparently so arbitrarily defined likely to provide an accurate definition of reality. On what grounds, for instance, is Lincolnshire lumped with East Anglia rather than the East Midlands, or the counties west of the Pennines with those to the east? It is not as if the boundaries of these regions correspond with those employed in Volumes II and IV, for they do not.

Tracing the evolving agricultural geography of England from 1042–1348, to 1348–1500, to 1500–1640 thus becomes an unnecessarily subjective exercise. Apart from the fact that certain counties have got missed out along the way (Surrey from both Volumes III and IV, and Huntingdonshire, Cambridgeshire, and Middlesex from Volume IV), others are classified very differently within the three volumes, and whether this is justified by the changing configuration of agrarian activity is not easily established. Oxfordshire, for instance, is grouped with the West Midlands in Volume II, with the Home Counties in Volume III, and with the Southern Counties in Volume IV. Excellent as are the individual regional accounts contained within Volume III, each will consequently be read more profitably by those interested in the particular localities and regions concerned than by those curious about the similarities and contrasts between regions. Collectively they do not provide a systematic overall picture and their coherence as regional case-studies has been broken by splitting their three component sections between Chapters 2, 3, and 7. These chapters are therefore no substitute for a systematic classification and analysis of farming systems across the country as a whole, for which the data certainly exist and the methodology is now available to hand.²⁹

Nevertheless, enough is already known for it to be clear that significant changes were afoot as individual localities and regions adapted in often quite different ways to the changing opportunities of the age. As land became cheaper and labour dearer there was a crying down in the intensity of the most intensive systems, a development clearly documented by Britnell in East Anglia and Mate in Kent and Sussex.³⁰ Elsewhere, in the East Midlands in particular but also in parts of the West Midlands, King and Dyer describe how brewing grains expanded at the expense of bread grains, and more land was given over to leguminous fodder crops as the pastoral component of common-field mixed-farming systems expanded in importance.³¹ The varying fortunes of legumes, in fact, bear witness to the often quite divergent strategies adopted by farmers according to their circumstances: legumes tended to lose rather than gain ground in the intensive husbandry regimes of Norfolk, Kent, and Sussex, where formerly they had been most important; made striking gains in the common-field country of parts of the east and west midlands and north-east where permanent pasture had always been in short supply; but remained of relatively minor importance in southern England and particularly so in the south-west where husbandry had always been more extensive than intensive and a natural abundance of pasture rendered the cultivation of fodder crops unnecessary.³²

Whether by dint of increased fodder cropping, the conversion of arable to grass, or the development of convertible husbandry, pastoral farming almost everywhere was on the increase.³³ One method of measuring this is in terms of a weighted total of livestock per 100 cropped acres as recorded by manorial accounts.³⁴ Fox calculates this for Devon and Cornwall and thereby reveals little increase in demesne stocking densities during the fourteenth century but a virtual doubling during the fifteenth.³⁵ It is a pity that similar measures are not available for other parts of the country for it is doubtful whether all regions participated in this

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 4. This map is, however, essentially qualitative in derivation: for a critique see M. Overton 'Agricultural Regions in Early Modern England: an Example from East Anglia', University of Newcastle upon Tyne, Department of Geography seminar paper, XLII, 1983.

²⁸ Cf H. E. Hallam, ed., *The Agrarian History of England and Wales*, II, 1042–1350, Cambridge, 1988, pp. 137–8.

²⁹ J. L. Langdon, *Horses, Oxen and Technological Innovation: the Use of Draught Animals in English Farming from 1066–1500*, Cambridge, 1986; B. M. S. Campbell and J. P. Power, 'Mapping the Agricultural Geography of Medieval England', *J. Hist. Geog.*, XV, 1989, pp. 24–39; J. P. Power and B. M. S. Campbell, 'Cluster Analysis and the Classification of Medieval Demesne-Farming Systems', *Trans. Inst. Brit. Geog.*, new ser., 17, 1992, pp. 227–45.

³⁰ *AHIII*, pp. 57, 209, 268–71.

³¹ *AHIII*, pp. 214–15, 230.

³² *AHIII*, pp. 60, 63, 121, 178, 187, 213–14, 215, 229–30, 260, 269, 271, 289, 304; B. M. S. Campbell, 'The Diffusion of Vetches in Medieval England', *Econ. Hist. Rev.*, 2nd ser., XLI, 1988, pp. 193–208.

³³ *AHIII*, pp. 10, 233–4, 264, 314.

³⁴ B. M. S. Campbell, 'Land, Labour, Livestock, and Productivity Trends in English Seigneurial Agriculture, 1208–1450', pp. 144–82 in *idem* and M. Overton, eds., *Land, Labour and Livestock: Historical Studies in European Agricultural Productivity*, Manchester, 1991, pp. 156–7.

³⁵ *AHIII*, p. 314. For corresponding trends within the country as a whole 1250–1450 see, Campbell, *op. cit.*, 1991, pp. 153–9.

process to the same extent.³⁶ *A priori*, it seems plausible to conjecture that livestock made their greatest gains where arable resources were most readily given over to the cultivation of fodder crops or converted outright to grass, as in certain of the central and southern counties.³⁷ Regions with a stronger comparative advantage in grain and whose pastoral regimes tended to be more exclusively arable based are likely to have met with less success.³⁸ Likewise, regions with a well-developed pastoral sector will have possessed only a limited capacity for developing it further. Thus, as Tuck and Miller show, permanent grassland had always been a conspicuous feature of land use in much of northern England and specialist livestock farms had long been well established.³⁹ In fact, livestock rearing in these areas tended to suffer from some drying up of demand during the later Middle Ages as lowland regions to the south and east became more self-sufficient in livestock.⁴⁰ Near the Scottish border and in those parts of the Welsh Marches exposed to the Glyn Dwr rebellion, attacks by the Scots and the Welsh acted as a further discouragement to the build up of flocks and herds.⁴¹ There were therefore many local and regional variations upon the prevailing national trend which more systematic measurement might help to map out in more detail. Since similar measures can be generated for later centuries from information contained in probate inventories there is potential, too, for some instructive comparisons across time.⁴² In this context, evidence already to hand suggests that the pastoral sector may have been the most dynamic sector within English agriculture in the period from the fifteenth to the eighteenth centuries.⁴³

Between 1348 and 1500 it was the more extensive forms of pastoralism that tended to gain most: rearing and fattening rather than dairying, and sheep rather than cattle. Sheep farming was, how-

ever, no panacea to the problems of the age and the enthusiasm with which it was conducted depended a great deal upon wool quality, wool prices, and changing regional demand for meat and wool.⁴⁴ The fifteenth century was certainly no unqualified golden age for pastoral producers, for, as T H Lloyd long ago pointed out and Farmer's price series makes clear, it was lower production costs rather than higher product prices that underpinned the shift from crops to livestock.⁴⁵ Given the continued decline in population, the low marginal elasticity of demand for food, and industry's finite capacity to absorb raw materials, the point was eventually reached in the mid-fifteenth century when the supply of pastoral as well as arable products was considerably in excess of demand.⁴⁶ The ensuing agricultural depression probably forced many producers – by this date mostly tenants rather than lords – back upon self-sufficiency except where access to urban and industrial markets provided a relatively sustained demand for their produce.⁴⁷ If the dimensions of this depression are now more clearly defined, there is much about its impact that warrants closer examination, especially in terms of the interaction between prices, production costs, production mix, profits, and rents.

These changes in both the composition and techniques of production were accompanied by equally important changes in the units of production. Direct demesne management ended almost everywhere and demesnes were either leased whole or broken up.⁴⁸ Labour services were commuted and customary tenures converted into leaseholds held for terms of lives or years and copyholds held at the will of the lord. As the rural population shrank there was a natural tendency for tenant land to become concentrated into fewer hands. Mean holding size rose and some tenants built up very substantial holdings. The mechanisms involved were quite complex and varied considerably from manor to manor and locality to locality according to the nature of prevailing inheritance practices, the ease with which land could be transferred *inter vivos*, and the strength of manorial jurisdiction. Recent years have produced a number of instructive case-studies of individual villages which point to the loosening of strong ties between families and their land and the rapid build-up and

³⁶ B M S Campbell, 'People and Land in the Middle Ages, 1066–1500', pp 69–121 in R A Dodgshon and R A Butlin, eds, *An Historical Geography of England and Wales*, 2nd edn, 1990, pp 106–7.

³⁷ Cf A Kussmaul, 'Agrarian Change in Seventeenth-Century England: the Economic Historian as Paleontologist', *Jnl Econ Hist*, XLV, 1985, pp 1–30.

³⁸ For a case study of Norfolk see, B M S Campbell and M Overton, 'A New Perspective on Medieval and Early Modern Agriculture: Six Centuries of Norfolk Farming c.1250–c.1850', *Past & Pres*, forthcoming.

³⁹ *AHIII*, pp 41, 50, 179–81, 189–90.

⁴⁰ *AHIII*, p 381.

⁴¹ *AHIII*, pp 37–8, 99–100, 181–2.

⁴² M Overton and B M S Campbell, 'Norfolk Livestock Farming 1250–1740: a Comparative Study of Manorial Accounts and Probate Inventories', *Jnl Hist Geog*, 18, 1992, pp 377–96.

⁴³ G Clark, 'Labour Productivity in English Agriculture, 1300–1860', pp 211–35 in Campbell and Overton, *op cit*, 1991, pp 214–19; Campbell and Overton, *op cit*, forthcoming.

⁴⁴ *AHIII*, pp 281–2, 400–1, 462–3, 574–6; J H Munro, 'Wool-Price Schedules and the Qualities of English Wools in the Later Middle Ages, c.1270–1499', *Textile History*, IX, 1978, pp 118–69.

⁴⁵ T H Lloyd, 'The Movement of Wool Prices in Medieval England', *Econ Hist Rev*, Supplement, VI, 1973, pp 24–30.

⁴⁶ *AHIII*, pp 13, 462–3, 464.

⁴⁷ *AHIII*, pp 14, 103, 265, 677, 705, 740–3.

⁴⁸ *AHIII*, pp 573–6, 580–2, 587–9, 614, 641, 662–3, 704–5, 728.

break-up of holdings.⁴⁹ But the number of such studies is not yet so great nor so representative that firm generalizations can be made with confidence. Why some villages and locations proved consistently more attractive than others, and what led some tenants to acquire land and others to dispose of it, are as yet far from clear.

Concomitant changes occurred in the physical layout of fields, as parcel was laid on parcel and selion on selion, and there was much rationalization and reorganization of field systems to accommodate modifications to rotations. The creation and development of common-field systems have often been equated with a process of population growth.⁵⁰ Indeed, the belief that the twelfth and thirteenth centuries witnessed a widespread conversion of two-field to three-field systems in response to the pressure to raise output used to be a truism of medieval agricultural history until recently subjected to systematic scrutiny by Fox.⁵¹ Yet if there are few documented cases of the replanning of field systems during the era of demographic expansion before 1300, the same cannot be said of the situation thereafter. Those who would equate changes in field systems with periods of reduced or declining population will find much supporting evidence in this volume.⁵² Here are documented cases of the evolution of two-field into three-field systems, of two-field into four-field systems, of three-field into four-field systems, and other more complex arrangements.⁵³ In many regular field systems furlongs rather than fields increasingly became the units of cropping, and it was at this time, as Mark Bailey has shown, that the shift system of cropping became more fully elaborated in East Anglia as the foldcourse system entered a new phase of development.⁵⁴

Some communities found it difficult to sustain traditional communal arrangements, and piecemeal and wholesale enclosure began to transform the landscape in many parts of the country, both in the core areas of common-field husbandry and more particularly around their periphery.⁵⁵

Such far-reaching changes in so many aspects of both the forces and the relations of production raise obvious questions about their consequences for agricultural productivity. The volume of total agricultural output cannot of course be measured, but by implication it fell as land was withdrawn from agricultural use, that which remained in use was exploited less intensively, and arable products accounted for a smaller share of total production. But within that context did the ratio of outputs to inputs improve, as production concentrated upon the most profitable products, on the better land, in the most advantageous locations? If, as some have suggested, a deficiency of livestock depressed yields in the late thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries, did improved stocking densities and larger sowings of legumes in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries provide the precondition for a more effective cycling of soil nitrogen and thus higher crop yields?⁵⁶ Or were the gains obtained in this way offset by the general reduction in labour inputs, as manuring, marling, ploughing, weeding, and harvesting were all undertaken less thoroughly?⁵⁷ Moreover, crop yields are only one measure of physical productivity: what of carcass weights, fleece weights, milk yields, and fertility/mortality rates?⁵⁸ And how were these affected by changing management strategies and ratios of livestock to labour?

There has been a tendency among continental historians to see a direct correlation between the level of physical productivity and the supply of labour, with the result that yields and other measures of physical productivity are believed to have declined with population from a medieval peak in

⁴⁹ For example, R M Smith, ed, *Land, Kinship and Life-Cycle*, Cambridge, 1984; P D A Harvey, ed, *The Peasant Land Market in England*, Oxford, 1984.

⁵⁰ Most notably, J Thirsk, 'The Origin of the Common Fields', *Past & Present*, 29, 1964, pp 3-25; and more recently, S Fenoaltea, 'Transaction Costs, Whig History, and the Common Fields', *Politics and Society*, 16, 1988, pp 171-240.

⁵¹ H S A Fox, 'The Alleged Transformation from Two-Field to Three-Field Systems in Medieval England', *Econ Hist Rev*, 2nd ser, XXXIX, 1986, pp 526-48.

⁵² B M S Campbell, 'Commonfield Origins - The Regional Dimension', pp 112-29 in T Rowley, ed, *The Origins of Open-Field Agriculture*, 1981; *idem* and R A Godoy, 'Commonfield Agriculture: the Andes and Medieval England Compared', pp 323-58 in *Proceedings of the Conference on Common Property Resource Management*, Washington, DC, 1986; R A Godoy, 'The Evolution of Common-Field Agriculture in the Andes: a Hypothesis', *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, 33, 1991, pp 395-414.

⁵³ *AHIII*, pp 254-5, 223-4, 198.

⁵⁴ *AHIII*, pp 200-3; M Bailey, 'Sand into Gold: the Evolution of the Foldcourse System in West Suffolk, 1200-1600', *Ag Hist Rev*, 38, 1990, pp 40-57.

⁵⁵ *AHIII*, pp 177, 185-6, 223, 225-7, 257-8, 613-14, 732.

⁵⁶ J Z Titow, *Winchester Yields: a Study in Medieval Agricultural Productivity*, Cambridge, 1972; D L Farmer, 'Grain Yields on the Winchester Manors in the Later Middle Ages', *Econ Hist Rev*, 2nd ser, XXX, 1977, pp 555-66; *idem*, 'Grain Yields on Westminster Abbey Manors, 1271-1410', *Can Jnl Hist*, XVIII, 1983, pp 331-49; R S Shiel, 'Improving Soil Fertility in the Pre-Fertiliser Era', pp 51-77 in Campbell and Overton, *op cit*, 1991.

⁵⁷ C Thornton, 'The Determinants of Land Productivity on the Bishop of Winchester's Demesne of Rimpton, 1208 to 1403', pp 183-210 in Campbell and Overton, *op cit*, 1991.

⁵⁸ For a discussion of the different components and methods of measuring land productivity see, M Overton and B M S Campbell, 'Productivity Change in European Agricultural Development', pp 1-50 in Campbell and Overton, *op cit*, 1991, pp 7-28.

the late thirteenth and early fourteenth centuries.⁵⁹ Did a similar relationship hold in England? And even if on balance land productivity was falling, which it is by no means clear that it was, could labour productivity not have been rising? There is certainly a strong implication that it was, to judge from the marked improvement in agricultural wage rates and the increased proportion of the population engaging in non-agricultural activities.⁶⁰ If so, what was the source of that productivity rise? Did it derive from a better fed, less servile, and more motivated labour force, from lower levels of rural under-employment, a shift to more labour-productive types of enterprise, or changes in technology?⁶¹

Readers who seek answers to these and other questions concerning productivity levels and trends during this intriguing period will be disappointed. Discussion of productivity is largely confined to a consideration of crop yields, mostly measured as yield ratios rather than yields per acre and dispersed through the separate regional sections.⁶² Nor are such yield statistics as are cited presented in a way which facilitates comparison. Some measures of livestock productivity are given – principally milk yields and fleece weights – but, again, not in sufficient quantity to cast significant light upon trends.⁶³ Yet manorial accounts, which survive in quantity for the second half of the fourteenth century and continue to provide information for a dwindling number of demesnes down to the middle of the following century, provide all the information necessary for the calculation of several useful productivity measures. In this way trends in the yields of individual crops and in the productivity of the cereal sector in general have been calculated for individual demesnes, particular estates, and entire counties.⁶⁴ Where detailed works accounts are available, as in the Winchester Pipe Rolls, Christopher Thornton has recently demonstrated that it is also possible to infer levels of

labour productivity in cereal husbandry.⁶⁵ Moreover, he has developed a method of estimating fertility and mortality rates for the principal categories of demesne livestock from the detailed information contained in stock accounts.⁶⁶ This complements Martin Stephenson's work on fleece weights and Annie Grant's use of animal bones to infer trends in carcass weights.⁶⁷

These are all approaches which are capable of much wider application. Most are, of course, contingent upon the availability of manorial accounts and they leave unanswered questions about the relative productivities of the demesne and peasant sectors and trends within the latter. The productivity of peasant agriculture is always likely to remain a serious lacuna due to the absence of suitable sources. Britnell, King, and Fox conclude that patterns of cropping on peasant holdings are unlikely to have been significantly different from those on seigneurial demesnes in the same locality.⁶⁸ Nevertheless, different factor endowments of labour and capital may well have resulted in very different levels of land and labour productivity.⁶⁹ One possible way forward has recently been pioneered by P T Hoffman with reference to the Paris Basin between 1450 and 1789.⁷⁰ He has combined evidence from leases with price series to infer trends in total factor productivity. In principle, such an approach ought to be directly applicable to late fourteenth- and fifteenth-century England. Gregory Clark has also made ingenious use of piece-rate payments to agricultural workers to infer trends in crop yields between 1250 and 1860.⁷¹ These are new approaches for a new generation of historians and their application will be greatly facilitated by more mechanized methods of data collection and analysis.⁷²

Medieval historians, like their medieval forebears, have traditionally worked with hand tools and this has rendered the build up of data bases to the scale at which valid generalizations are possible

⁵⁹ H Van der Wee and E Van Cauwenberghe, eds, *Productivity of Land and Agricultural Innovation in the Low Countries (1250–1800)*, Leuven, 1978; E Le Roy Ladurie and J Goy, *Tithe and Agrarian History from the Fourteenth to the Nineteenth Centuries: an Essay in Comparative History*, Cambridge, 1982; Campbell, 'Land, Labour, Livestock, and Productivity Trends', pp 144–9.

⁶⁰ Clark, *op cit*, 1991; G Persson, *Pre-Industrial Economic Growth, Social Organization and Technological Progress in Europe*, Oxford, 1988.

⁶¹ G Clark, 'Productivity Growth without Technical Change in European Agriculture before 1850', *Jnl Econ Hist*, XLVII, 1987, pp 419–32; Overton and Campbell, *op cit*, 1991, pp 36–7; Clark, *op cit*, 1991, pp 231–5.

⁶² AHIII, pp 179, 216–17, 230–1, 261–2, 277–80, 287–9, 308, 315.

⁶³ AHIII, pp 192, 207, 220, 235, 300, 321 (milk yields); pp 192, 209, 220, 235, 281, 296–7, 320 (fleece weights).

⁶⁴ For example: Thornton, *op cit*, 1991; Titow, *op cit*, 1972; Campbell, 'Land, Labour, Livestock, and Productivity Trends'.

⁶⁵ Thornton, *op cit*, 1991, pp 201–7.

⁶⁶ C Thornton, 'Efficiency in Thirteenth-Century Livestock Farming: the Fertility and Mortality of Herds and Flocks at Rimpton, Somerset, 1208–1349', in P R Coss and S D Lloyd, eds, *Thirteenth-Century England*, IV, Woodbridge, forthcoming.

⁶⁷ M J Stephenson, 'Wool Yields in the Medieval Economy', *Econ Hist Rev*, 2nd ser, XLI, 1988, pp 368–91; A Grant, 'Animal Resources', pp 149–87 in G Astill and A Grant, eds, *The Countryside of Medieval England*, Oxford, 1988, pp 176–8.

⁶⁸ AHIII, pp 64–5, 217–18, 306. But see also pp 228–9.

⁶⁹ AHIII, p 262.

⁷⁰ P T Hoffman, 'Land Rents and Agricultural Productivity: the Paris Basin, 1450–1789', *Jnl Econ Hist*, LI, 1991, pp 771–805.

⁷¹ G Clark, 'Yields per Acre in English Agriculture, 1250–1860: Evidence from Labour Inputs', *Econ Hist Rev*, 2nd ser, XLIV, 1991, pp 445–60.

⁷² M Overton, 'Computer Analysis of Probate Inventories: From Portable Micro to Mainframe' pp 96–104 in D Hopkin and P Denley, eds, *History and Computing*, Manchester, 1987.

across a range of manors and estates a slow and arduous task.⁷³ Farmer's feat in drawing upon data from several different estates to reconstruct marketing patterns within the country as a whole for a comprehensive range of agricultural products across a 300-year period is therefore all the more remarkable. His consecutive and complementary chapters, 'Marketing the produce of the countryside, 1200-1500' and 'Prices and wages, 1350-1500', lie at the very core of this volume, the former in its chronological range partially compensating for the absence of a corresponding chapter in Volume II.⁷⁴ Together they will provide the essential starting point for all future work on this subject. Much of this work will be concerned with testing and amplifying the findings so cautiously advanced by Farmer and sharpening their chronological focus, for, as he freely acknowledges, his is but a provisional view qualified by the time and sources at his disposal.⁷⁵ Since the latter are predominantly demesne accounts drawn in the main from major ecclesiastical estates – the Bishopric of Winchester, Glastonbury Abbey and Westminster Abbey, plus Merton College Oxford – there is an immediate need to broaden the perspective so as to incorporate evidence from other types of estate and categories of landlord.⁷⁶ In particular, more needs to be known about the market involvement of manors belonging to minor lay landlords for, although less well served by surviving records, numerically they were of far greater importance than their great ecclesiastical counterparts.⁷⁷ In those rare instances where accounts are extant for the very smallest of lay manors we are also brought closest to the kinds of marketing strategy likely to have been encountered

among the uppermost echelons of tenant society.⁷⁸ Investigating the market involvement of the rest of the peasantry requires other sources and methodologies, and here progress will inevitably be slower, although, as M K McIntosh has demonstrated, there is much that detailed case-studies of well-documented manors can reveal.⁷⁹

An earlier generation of historians identified self-sufficiency as the paramount objective of most medieval rural producers, and of the peasantry in particular.⁸⁰ Yet such a view is hardly reconcilable with the abundant evidence of marketing assembled here. By the end of the thirteenth century England was covered by a close network of trading institutions – markets, fairs, and boroughs – and market prices were established for almost every conceivable type of agricultural commodity. As Farmer documents, agricultural products were traded locally, regionally, nationally, and internationally, the quantities and distance traded depending upon the type of good, the nature of demand, and the costs of transport. Wool, for instance, the most commercialized of agricultural commodities, produced by lord and peasant alike, non-perishable and high in value relative to its bulk, was traded in large quantities over long distances. Such a large and well-established trade would not have been possible without the necessary commercial infrastructure.⁸¹ Likewise, the provisioning of London, by 1300 a major city of perhaps 80-100,000 inhabitants, impinged upon rural producers over a wide area of south-eastern England and involved increasingly complex trading relationships.⁸² Much of the trade in grain was handled by specialist bladers based in the capital, many of whom combined dealing in corn with dealing in fish, wine, and other food-

⁷³ The *Feeding the City Projects I and II* at the Centre for Metropolitan History, Institute of Historical Research, London, have employed computerized methods to collect, analyse, and map data from manorial accounts and *Inquisitiones Post Mortem*: see, J A Galloway and M Murphy, 'Feeding the City: Medieval London and its Agrarian Hinterland', *London Jnl*, 16, 1991, pp 4-5. A parallel project at The Queen's University of Belfast, *The Geography of Seigneurial Land Ownership and Use, 1270-1349*, is using portable laptop computers to collect information in the archives from *inquisitiones post mortem* which will then be analysed using standard software packages.

⁷⁴ B M S Campbell, 'Laying Foundations: the Agrarian History of England and Wales, 1042-1348', *Ag Hist Rev*, 37, 1989, p 191.

⁷⁵ *AHIII*, p 324, n 1.

⁷⁶ R H Britnell, 'Minor Landlords in England and Medieval Agrarian Capitalism', *Past & Pres*, 89, 1980, pp 3-22; B M S Campbell, J A Galloway, and M Murphy, 'How Commercialised was the Demesne Sector of English Agriculture c.1300? Some Evidence from the Hinterland of London', in R H Britnell and B M S Campbell, eds, *A Commercialising Economy: England 1086-1300*, Manchester, forthcoming.

⁷⁷ E A Kosminsky, *Studies in the Agrarian History of England in the Thirteenth Century*, Oxford, 1956, pp 95-142.

⁷⁸ For example, B M S Campbell, 'The Complexity of Manorial Structure in Medieval Norfolk: a Case Study', *Norfolk Arch*, XXXIX, 1986, pp 225-61.

⁷⁹ K Biddick, 'Medieval English Peasants and Market Involvement', *Jnl Econ Hist*, XLV, 1985, pp 823-31; E Clark, 'Debt Litigation in a Late Medieval English Vill', pp 247-79 in J A Raftis, ed, *Pathways to Medieval Peasants*, Toronto, 1981; M K McIntosh, *Autonomy and Community: the Royal Manor of Havering, 1200-1500*, Cambridge, 1986.

⁸⁰ M M Postan, 'Note', *Econ Hist Rev*, 2nd ser, XII, 1959, p 79; R H Hilton, 'Medieval Agrarian History', pp 145-98 in W G Hoskins and R A McKinley, eds, *Victoria County History of Leicestershire*, II, 1954, p 145 (for a revision to this view see, *idem*, 'Towns in Societies - Medieval England', *Urban Hist Yearbook* 1982, p 7).

⁸¹ E E Power, *The Wool Trade in English Medieval History*, Oxford, 1941; T H Lloyd, *The English Wool Trade in the Middle Ages*, Cambridge, 1977.

⁸² B M S Campbell, J A Galloway, D J Keene and M Murphy, *A Medieval Capital and its Grain Supply: Agrarian Production and Distribution in the London Region, c.1300*, Historical Geography Research Series, forthcoming.

stuffs.⁸³ Henley was the most prominent of several towns which served as collecting centres for grain destined for London and the Thames was the vital artery down which much of that grain was sent.⁸⁴ For its meat London seems to have drawn upon an even wider area, for as Farmer demonstrates 'urban dealers seeking meat travelled longer distances than those seeking grain'.⁸⁵ Together, the grain and meat trades provided employment for carters, hauliers, boatmen, drovers and a host of other intermediaries. Nevertheless, London's importance and that of other major centres of demand should not be overstressed; the bulk of England's population and therefore the bulk of demand remained rural rather than urban and hence local markets remained the most important outlets for agricultural produce.⁸⁶

How commercialized, therefore, was English agriculture at the beginning of the fourteenth century? Were producers merely using the market, on the one hand, to dispose of surpluses after their own consumption needs had been met and, on the other, to compensate for inadequacies in the range and quantity of the goods they themselves produced?⁸⁷ Or had they moved beyond petty commodity production: were producers specializing and gearing their production to the market? Kathleen Biddick has shown how clear answers to these kinds of question can be obtained for the demesne sector from manorial accounts, since these detail the quantities of grain, animals, and animal products produced, the quantities sold, and the quantities purchased.⁸⁸ Such information now needs to be collected and analysed for a wide range of different estates, controlling as far as possible for soil and environment; in this way it should be possible to form a clearer idea of the degree of commercial involvement of different categories of landlord.⁸⁹ In theory, farm enterprise reflected the interaction of Ricardian and von Thünen economic rent (the former embracing such factors as climate, soils, and population density

and the latter distance from the market).⁹⁰ Fuller exploration of the links between Farmer's analysis of markets and prices and the separate regional accounts of land-use and farming systems might therefore have been particularly fruitful. Certainly, it is hard, given the evidence now to hand, not to attribute considerable influence to the role of market-determined economic rent in the articulation of regional farming systems.⁹¹ Nevertheless, R A Dodgshon has doubted whether at this date the commercial impulse was powerful enough to have 'taken space to market'.⁹²

In this context, the question of whether English agriculture became more or less commercialized during the long years of demographic decline which followed the Black Death becomes particularly intriguing.⁹³ Did producers become more or less reliant upon the market for their inputs: iron, salt, seed, replacement animals, and labour? Did the proportion of total agricultural production destined for the market increase or decrease? Did market demand thereby exert a greater or lesser influence upon patterns of production as manifest in the nature and intensity of farm enterprise? And did farmers become more or less commercial in their attitudes to the land and its management?

In certain respects the period was clearly retrogressive. Aggregate demand shrank. Transaction costs, especially in international trade, almost certainly rose.⁹⁴ A combination of disease and crown interference disrupted the wool trade.⁹⁵ London declined in population, if not in relative importance, and the radius of its provisioning zone contracted.⁹⁶ From the second quarter of the fifteenth century urban demand in general tended to wither.⁹⁷ An increasing proportion of production emanated from the small and middling-sized farms of tenants rather than the substantial demesnes of

⁸³ *AHIII*, pp 334, 370-1; Campbell, Galloway, Keene, and Murphy, *op cit*, forthcoming.

⁸⁴ *AHIII*, pp. 371-2; Galloway and Murphy, *op cit*, 1991, pp 6-7.

⁸⁵ *AHIII*, p 335; Campbell and Power, *op cit*, 1989, pp 30-7.

⁸⁶ *AHIII*, p 329; G Grantham, 'Agricultural Productivity and Urban Provisioning Zones before the Industrial Revolution', forthcoming.

⁸⁷ R H Hilton, 'A Crisis of Feudalism', pp 119-37 in Aston and Philpin, *op cit*, 1985, p 129.

⁸⁸ K Biddick, *The Other Economy: Pastoral Husbandry on a Medieval Estate*, Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1989.

⁸⁹ The research project *Feeding the City I* has analysed the relative importance of grain sales on a range of estates in a ten-county area around London. This has revealed significant differences in the degree of commercial involvement between, first, episcopal demesnes (the most commercialized), second, royal demesnes, demesnes in the king's hands, and lay demesnes, and third, monastic demesnes (the least commercialized).

⁹⁰ M Chisholm, *Rural Settlement and Land-Use: an Essay on Location*, 1962, pp 20-32; D Grigg, *The Dynamics of Agricultural Change*, 1982, pp 50-9; B M S Campbell, J A Galloway, and M Murphy, 'Rural Land-Use in the Metropolitan Hinterland, 1270-1339: the Evidence of *Inquisitiones Post Mortem*', *Ag Hist Rev*, 40, 1992, pp 2-3.

⁹¹ For example, B M S Campbell, 'Ecology versus Economics in Late Thirteenth- and Early Fourteenth-Century English Agriculture', in D Sweeney, ed, *Reality and Image in Medieval Agriculture*, State College, Pa, forthcoming.

⁹² R A Dodgshon, *The European Past: Social Evolution and Spatial Order*, 1987, pp 287-351.

⁹³ R H Britnell, *The Commercialisation of English Society 1000-1500*, Cambridge, 1992.

⁹⁴ J H Munro, 'Industrial Transformations in the North-West European Textile Trades, c.1290-c.1340: Economic Progress or Economic Crisis?', pp 110-48 in Campbell, *Before the Black Death*, 1991.

⁹⁵ *AHIII*, pp 400-1.

⁹⁶ D J Keene, 'Medieval London and its Region', *London Jnl*, 14, 1989, pp 99-111; *AHIII*, pp 372-3, 375-6.

⁹⁷ A. Dyer, *Decline and Growth in English Towns 1400-1640*, Basingstoke, 1991, pp 20-36.

lords. More farmers commanded the resources necessary to ensure self-sufficiency, especially in livestock. Finally, rising wage rates encouraged greater use of family labour and living-in-servants rather than waged labour.⁹⁸ On the other hand, per capita incomes rose, encouraging the exchange of agricultural produce for non-agricultural goods and services. In town and country more of the more commercialized products – ale, meat, and dairy produce – were consumed.⁹⁹ The leather and textile industries grew apace, providing a domestic market for hides and wool and stimulating the demand of the non-agricultural sector for food-stuffs.¹⁰⁰ Great lords and ecclesiastical households relied less on their estates and more on the market for their provisions.¹⁰¹ Customary labour declined as a source of agricultural labour. Many of the institutional constraints to changes in land use and rotations were loosened. And as farm size rose more farmers found themselves with a disposable surplus.¹⁰²

These conflicting traits take us to the core of this period's enigmatic character. At one level it was a time of decay and contraction: at another, of transition to a more innovative, market-sensitive, and productive agriculture. Among producers there were inevitably losers but there were also gainers. Pastoral farmers tended to fare better than arable, and there was a shift in the economic and political balance of power from landlords to tenants. It is usually taken as axiomatic that the losses to lords were absolute as well as relative, since, according to Robert Brenner, 'lords could extract only much lower, now basically economic, contractual rents'.¹⁰³ This is one of the issues considered by J M W Bean in his chapter on 'landlords', in many respects the most technical and difficult in the entire book.¹⁰⁴ He postulates a four-part chronology to the development of landed revenues – 1350–1380, 1380–1420, 1420–1470, and 1470–1500 – and argues that it was only the third of these that witnessed 'a marked fall in landed revenues on many estates'.¹⁰⁵

At work here were the abandonment of sheep farming by many landlords as wool prices collapsed, especially between 1440 and 1460, a general decline in rents and farms, and a formidable increase in arrears. The Paston letters bear witness to the difficulties experienced at this time by a gentry family in one of the foremost arable-farming districts of England, and it is surprising that Bean does not draw upon this correspondence to enliven his account.¹⁰⁶ There was scope here also for cross-referencing to corresponding discussion of seigneurial sheep-farming, wool prices, and rent movements elsewhere in the volume.¹⁰⁷ In regretting that 'no direct evidence exists to throw light on the condition of peasant farming' Bean appears to be unaware that the bulk of Chapter 7 is devoted to that subject.¹⁰⁸

This failure to weld the separate contributions to the volume into an integrated whole is most conspicuous in the case of the final chapter, an account by H E J Le Patourel and L A S Butler of 'Rural building in England and Wales'. Such chapters are a feature of all the *Agrarian History* volumes and are intended, presumably, to explore the material context of agrarian life. Housing people, animals, crops, and implements required considerable resources and the buildings thereby erected bore directly upon the quality and organization of material life. The end result can thus reveal much about rural living standards and the physical infrastructure of agriculture, as well as casting interesting light on the social and economic trends of a period. It was, after all, in terms of the purchasing power of a building-worker's wages that H Phelps Brown and S V Hopkins measured living standards in England.¹⁰⁹ In the case of the years 1348–1500 the heritage of surviving rural buildings is surprisingly substantial – within the Rape of Hastings, for instance, no fewer than 110 small medieval houses are still in occupation – so there is much here for Butler and especially Le Patourel to discuss.¹¹⁰ But their preoccupation is with the buildings *per se* and there is little attempt to relate the various categories of building described to their socio-economic context. Some interesting trends do emerge, such as improved construction methods for peasant houses, a desire for greater comfort and privacy among lords and their followers, and the tendency of lords to build

⁹⁸ Poos, *op cit*, 1991, pp 181–206; A Kusmaul, *Servants in Husbandry in Early Modern England*, Cambridge, 1981.

⁹⁹ C Dyer, *Standards of Living in the Later Middle Ages: Social Change in England c.1200–1520*, Cambridge, 1989, pp 158–60, 197–202.

¹⁰⁰ M Kowaleski, 'Town and Country in Late Medieval England: the Hide and Leather Trade', pp 57–73 in P J Corfield and D Keene, eds, *Work in Towns 850–1850*, Leicester, 1990; A R Bridbury, *Medieval English Clothmaking: an Economic Survey*, 1982, pp 47–105.

¹⁰¹ Dyer, *op cit*, 1989, pp 67–9.

¹⁰² *AHIII*, p 617.

¹⁰³ R Brenner, 'The Agrarian Roots of European Capitalism', pp 213–327 in Aston and Philpin, *op cit*, 1985, p 272.

¹⁰⁴ A more readable discussion of many of the same issues is provided by Dyer, *op cit*, 1989, pp 27–108. See also Payling, *op cit*, 1991.

¹⁰⁵ *AHIII*, p 579.

¹⁰⁶ R H Britnell, 'The Pastons and their Norfolk', *Ag Hist Rev*, 36, 1988, pp 132–44.

¹⁰⁷ *AHIII*, pp 234–5, 243–4, 264–5, 281–2, 292–7, 461–4, 512–16, 720–1.

¹⁰⁸ *AHIII*, p 583.

¹⁰⁹ H Phelps Brown and S V Hopkins, 'Seven Centuries of the Prices of Consumables Compared with Builders' Wage-Rates', *Economica*, XXIII, 1956, pp 296–314.

¹¹⁰ *AHIII*, p 854.

smaller barns, but these are left to speak for themselves.¹¹¹

There is a good case to be made for incorporating material culture within any consideration of agrarian history but that case is not made here.¹¹² Moreover, why stop at buildings? If the concern is to research and reconstruct the physical worlds of work and home why exclude discussion of tools, implements, utensils, and furnishings?¹¹³ Some of the greatest recent advances in our understanding of medieval agrarian life have come from systematic study of its material technology: ploughs, carts, and mills.¹¹⁴ Le Patourel and Butler's survey of building materials, building methods, manor houses, peasant and other small houses, farm buildings, and industrial buildings is therefore no more than a starting point. Future research needs to equip, furnish, cost, and occupy

those buildings, all of which will require much fuller use of available documentary evidence than is made here.¹¹⁵

Volume III of the *Agrarian History*, therefore, more than most other volumes in the same series, represents a beginning and not an end. Reviewers alone will read the volume from cover to cover, spotting the cracks and blemishes which this inevitably reveals. Others – local and regional historians, undergraduates, postgraduates and professional historians – will use it more selectively. All will appreciate the richness and variety of the information it contains and may trust the soundness of its scholarship. During its long gestation, advances in the technology and methodology of historical research have helped transform ways of investigating the period. Joan Thirsk's hope is that publication of this volume will further stimulate this process of enquiry, and she is unlikely to be disappointed.¹¹⁶ It may not provide a definitive view of Langland's field, once so full of folk, but it does open up many inviting new vistas and help point the way forward.

¹¹¹ *AHIII*, pp 821, 825, 867.

¹¹² For example, C Platt, *Medieval England: a Social History and Archaeology from the Conquest to 1600 AD*, 1978.

¹¹³ Cf L Weatherill, *Consumer Behavior and Material Culture in Britain 1660–1760*, 1988.

¹¹⁴ Langdon, *op cit*, 1986; *idem*, 'Agricultural Equipment', pp 86–107 in Astill and Grant, *op cit*, 1988; *idem*, 'Water-Mills and Windmills in the West Midlands, 1086–1500', *Econ Hist Rev*, 2nd ser, XLIV, 1991 pp 424–44; R Holt, *The Mills of Medieval England*, Oxford, 1988.

¹¹⁵ For example, D Yaxley, *The Prior's Manor Houses: Inventories of Eleven of the Manor-Houses of the Prior of Norwich made in the Year 1352 AD*, Dereham, 1988; Poos, *op cit*, 1991, pp 73–88.

¹¹⁶ *AHIII*, p xix.

Notes and Comments

(continued from page 43)

add a sentence to the end of the paragraph 'The retiring ordinary members shall not be eligible after eight successive years of office for immediate re-election'. (6) Paragraph 9: replace 'the consent of the nominee' with 'the signed consent of the nominee'; replace 'seven days' with 'ten days'; add to the end of the paragraph 'Those nominating candidates for the Executive Committee should provide a statement of about twenty words about each candidate at the Annual General Meeting where the election takes place'. It was agreed that the level of subscription for the category of members covered in (3) above be set at £5 per annum for 1993/94.

SPRING CONFERENCE 1993

The 1993 Spring Conference will be at Gregynog Hall, near Welshpool, from Monday 5 to Wednesday 7 April. Speakers will be include: Professor Michael Thompson; Professor P K O'Brien; Dr

David Jones, Dr E J T Collins; and Dr Charles Withers. A booking form and full details of the programme are included in this issue of the journal.

AUTUMN CONFERENCE 1993

The 1993 Autumn Conference will be held in York and will, like the previous two autumn conferences, be centred upon the region where it is held. These Conferences are intended to introduce a range of local themes and speakers to audiences that want to find out more about their local area. If you are a member of the BAHS who lives in and wants to learn more about the agricultural history of northern England, or if you know of any non-members who may be interested in this, then this conference should not be missed. Previous conferences have been held on the third Saturday in September, and full details of this one are available from Dr Richard Hoyle, 13 Parker Street, Oxford OX4 1TD.