

The British Agricultural History Society and *The Agrarian History of England and Wales*: new projects in the 1950s*

by Joan Thirsk

Abstract

Joan Thirsk is the last surviving member of the founding Executive Committee of the British Agricultural History Society. In this paper, drawing on her own recollections as well as those of her contemporaries, she describes the circumstances of the foundation of the BAHS in 1953 at the suggestion of George Fussell. She then recalls the establishment of the *Agrarian History of England and Wales* in 1956 on the initiative of the first editor of this *Review*, H. P. R. Finberg, and its subsequent travails, concluding with the triumphant publication of volume VII in 2000.

It seems to be a general rule of life that when new organizations, institutions, or societies are established, no one picks up a pen and records how the idea was formed, who joined in the first discussions, and how it moved forward to become something permanent. I suppose that people are too busy in the initial stages, devising ways of making progress to find time to write down the single steps that led them on. After all, at that stage one does not know whether the initiative will lead anywhere; it could turn out to be a failure. It is only when another forty or fifty years have passed, and people begin to look back on their success, that they hanker for more detail, and by then some of the most influential participants at the beginning are dead.

Such is the case with the founding of the British Agricultural History Society. Its minutes do not begin until some time after the Society was launched, and those who participated in the first efforts did not keep diaries or other records. Beginning even earlier in the story, however, I can write from lively remembrance of the public mood in which a society that explored the history of agriculture was thought to be timely. I lived through the deep agricultural depression in the 1930s. I possess a copy of a short essay, dated 1931, by Sir William Beach Thomas, and published by Faber and Faber, entitled *Why the Land Dies*. I recall the accounts of my brother-in-law, coming from a non-farming family in Huddersfield, who decided that he wanted to farm for a living, took his NDA in agriculture at Leeds University, worked as a learner on four farms, and then searched for one to rent. In 1934, at the age of 22, he found a farm of 135 acres without difficulty. It was one of six on an estate in West Yorkshire of which four were untenanted. He took one from which the farmer was retiring, and saw the estate workers trying to 'farm' the other four, cutting the hay, but having to watch the stooks rotting on the ground

* I warmly thank Professor Ted Collins, Professor Alan Everitt, Mr Michael Havinden, and Professor Eric Kerridge for help and comments on this essay, though it remains my personal account for which I alone am responsible.

for lack of labour to do more. He married my husband's sister, and they lived frugally on a small income. His accounts were vetted by the economists at Leeds University, and Harwood Long was his particular scrutineer. Harwood became an active member of the Society, and I remember him well. But my sister-in-law always recalled having prepared for Harwood the traditional, sumptuous Yorkshire tea for his farm visit, only to read afterwards his dispiriting account of the year's financial outcome on their farm.

So the thirties passed until the war came, when farmers were suddenly needed to feed the nation against the threat of near starvation. They responded heroically, and the whole population became fully aware of what it owed to farmers for feeding them through six long years of war. A thoroughly neglected branch of the economy had been brought to the centre of the stage, and as a result interest in the history of farming was galvanized in an entirely fresh way.

Hence it is not difficult to see why the idea of setting up a formal society for the study of agricultural history should have been born at that time. A similar stimulus was at work in West Germany, and the Society for Agrarian History (Die Gesellschaft für Agrargeschichte) was set up in 1953, though a society for the history of literature and the rural economy had existed there between 1904 and 1942, so that effectively the society was being re-launched. It maintained contact for many years with the BAHS, and many books for review were exchanged. It is much to be regretted that that association has faded. Elsewhere in Europe similar trends of interest in agriculture and rural life resulted in other notable initiatives, for example, in Holland, Denmark and in Hungary, in the setting up of agricultural and open-air museums; for many years an ambitious bibliography of *European* agricultural history was published from Budapest. A much fuller European story than can be attempted here lies in the background to the founding of a British society of agricultural history, while at home too, other related developments clustered around it. The Welsh Folk Museum had been founded in 1948,¹ and the Museum of English Rural Life in 1951: the specialist journal on folklife, *Gwerin*, began in 1956, and the English Society for Folklife Studies was set up in 1961.

The initiative for setting up our society lay, most definitely, with George Fussell, who had been a relatively lonely scholar in the field all through the 1920s and 1930s. He had taken up a junior post at the Ministry of Agriculture in 1909, showed literary interests and what he called 'a writing itch', and was encouraged by his superior. He wrote articles for the Ministry of Agriculture's *Journal* through the 1920s, others in the 1920s and 1930s for *The Economic Journal*, *Economic History* and the American journal *Agricultural History*, and by 1933 he had become sufficiently recognized as an authority on agricultural history to be elected a Fellow of the Royal Historical Society. Fussell was unquestionably the leading agricultural historian on the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in the inter-war years, and he maintained his steady output of books and journal and newspaper articles until about 1953. They numbered over 500 in all.

Fussell had no formal academic training, but he had ready access to the library of the Ministry of Agriculture and became a regular reader in the Reading Room of the British Museum. He

¹ Some measure of the difference wrought by the passage of fifty years was brought home to me while I was writing this essay in July 2002, when a neighbour returned from a visit to the Welsh Folk Museum, finding herself there on a special day for school visits when three thousand children were present.

attended the medieval seminar of Hubert Hall at the London School of Economics, and the most cursory reading of Hall's works, especially his *Society in the Elizabethan Age* (1886), is enough to show the stimulating range and slant of his interests.

I daresay that someone still living knows more than I about Fussell's first ideas for setting up an agricultural history society, but it is unlikely that he thought seriously about taking action until after he had retired as librarian of the Ministry of Agriculture in 1949, and had time to ponder such a project. Eric Kerridge had known Fussell since 1947, when Fussell had helped him at the ministry's library with difficult words in Wessex dialect while Professor Kerridge undertook his doctoral research on Wiltshire agriculture. He recalls being invited by Fussell to dine one evening at the Café Royal (Fussell's known watering hole) along with Robert Trow-Smith, another crony who was editor of *The Farmer and Stockbreeder*. They met to discuss the setting up of such a society, and, writes Professor Kerridge, 'Fussell made the proposal, Trow-Smith seconded, and the motion was passed unanimously. I agreed to be temporary acting treasurer until such a time as a society was formed'. Eric Kerridge was working in an Economics Department at the time, and thus he explains why he was thought to be the right person to be the treasurer. It happened again, he says, when he joined the Chester branch of the Historical Association; he became its treasurer, but was never invited to give a lecture!

Thereafter, Fussell must have recognized that he had to find a university to give the project a secure anchorage, and so it happened that John Higgs, Keeper of the Museum of English Rural life at Reading University, took charge, and managed affairs as soon as the project took firmer shape. A meeting of interested people assembled at the Science Museum in London in the autumn of 1952 when Sir James Scott Watson, Chief Scientific Adviser to the Ministry of Agriculture, took the chair. (Scott Watson had historical interests, and had written a book on *Great Farmers* with May Elliot Hobbs in 1937, and a history of the Royal Agricultural Society in 1939.) Some 420 people attended: John Higgs was designated secretary. Prominent already in supporting the project was Alexander Hay, Secretary of the Association of Agriculture, which had for many years promoted the understanding of agriculture in an industrial world. Hay was a staunch supporter of the new society, giving valued financial assistance in the early days and drawing both organisations together as they promoted courses and a regular winter conference in London, which continues still.

A provisional committee was set up at the London meeting in 1952, and when it next met in Scott Watson's rooms at the Ministry on 12 November 1952, other participants, not already named above, included Professor Edgar Thomas, Professor of Agricultural Economics at Reading, author of *The Economics of Small Holdings* (1927), based on Carmarthenshire, Frank Atkinson, Keeper of the Halifax museums, later to become Keeper of the Bowes Museum in Barnard Castle, and finally the founder of the Beamish Museum in County Durham, F. G. Payne, Keeper of the Welsh Folk Museum at Cardiff, and W. E. Minchinton, Lecturer in Economic History at University College, Swansea. The numbers attending the meeting at the Science Museum had instilled confidence in the success of the enterprise, and so a formal foundation meeting was arranged for 13 April 1953 at Reading. The strong support that was to be given henceforward by Reading University was then made plain. That meeting was welcomed by J. F. Wolfenden, the Vice-Chancellor; Scott Watson spoke on 'The scope of Agricultural History', and Sir Frank Stenton on 'The manor in English History'. Both Sir Frank and his

wife, Doris Stenton, taught at Reading (Sir Frank had recently retired as vice-chancellor); both stood high in academic esteem as scholars in medieval history. Those attending also had the chance to look round the recently founded Museum of English Rural Life.

The setting up of an agricultural history society was thus agreed, its object being to study the history of agriculture and the rural economy; the subscription was fixed at one guinea. Scott Watson became the first president, Edgar Thomas the Treasurer, and the committee comprised all those already chosen in London, plus myself, Roger N. Dixey, Director of the Institute of Agrarian Affairs at Oxford, Captain E. N. Griffith, President of the Agricultural Engineers' Association, Stuart Maxwell of the National Museum of Antiquities at Edinburgh and George Ordish, an expert on pest control who worked for Plant Protection Limited. He showed his historical perspective when he wrote on vineyards, one of his books, *Vineyards in England and Wales* (1977) also describing his own vine-growing in Kent.² Alexander Hay became chairman of the Executive Committee. Although Herbert Finberg's name does not appear in this list, he had taken an active interest in the setting up of the Society and he was soon designated editor of its planned journal. He had succeeded W. G. Hoskins as head of the Department of English Local History at Leicester in 1951, and was then best known for his newly published study of the medieval estates of Tavistock abbey (1951) and his scrupulous, quizzical examination of Anglo-Saxon charters and their boundaries. But these subjects until now had been his leisure interests, for he was by profession a publisher of fine books, a typographer, and founder of the Alcuin Press. This press was first based in Chipping Campden, then moved to Welwyn Garden City in 1935, and thus brought Finberg onto the doorstep of the record office of the Dukes of Bedford, owners of the Tavistock estates. Part of his book on Tavistock was written while fire watching during the war.³

The Society had now enrolled a highly varied group with rural interests, for which John Higgs deserved most credit. Higgs proved to be an ideal choice for a secretary: he was less of a scholarly agricultural historian than a dynamic entrepreneur with wide contacts. He divided his life between academia and running his own farm at Enstone in Oxfordshire, and he would later buy an estate in Scotland. He moved on to be bursar at Exeter College, Oxford, then worked at FAO in Rome, and finally became Secretary to the Duchy of Cornwall and an influential adviser to Prince Charles until his untimely death in 1986. People say that Higgs (or rather Sir John, for he was knighted shortly before he died) was one of the influences in stimulating Prince Charles's interest in rural communities and organic farming.

John Higgs had an admirable style at meetings, bringing a certain ceremonial dignity to every occasion, which successfully enhanced the status of the young society. His plans for the agricultural museum at Reading brought him into an international circle of forward-looking professionals creating rural museums in a new image. He had visited the Danish National Museum in Copenhagen, where he met Axel Steensberg, and was much impressed by the Danish initiative in establishing an open air museum. Our Society benefited in due course, for at the annual conference of the BAHS in the Spring of 1956 in Nottingham, Axel Steensberg gave a

² His wife, Olive Ordish, was the translator of Wilhelm Abel's influential book, *Agricultural Fluctuations in Europe from the thirteenth to the twentieth centuries* (1980, first published in German in 1935).

³ Finberg's career is felicitously recounted by Maurice Beresford in the *Festschrift* for him, Joan Thirsk (ed.), *Land, Church and People*, Supplement to *Agricultural History Review* 18 (1970), pp. vii-xii.

paper on prehistoric husbandry experiments in Jutland; in my mind's eye, I have a clear picture of him as an enthusiastic member of our field expedition that year. The invitation to Nottingham, incidentally, came from Audrey Beecham, who was warden at one of the university's halls of residence. She was another colourful figure at all our gatherings, a deeply committed early member of the BAHS, who had served in the war as a FANY, had duly received a training in car maintenance, and always drove a large vintage car. (Alan Everitt remembers that she owned three Alvises.)

Recruitment to the society was encouraging. It counted 181 members by September 1953, 391 by February 1956, and was proud to number many farmers alongside its scholarly academics – a situation that continues to the present day. Agricultural history in those days figured routinely in the syllabus of students of agriculture, and Ted Collins recalls among the teachers of the subject at Reading, Edgar Thomas, John Higgs, Andrew Jewell, who succeeded John Higgs as Keeper of the museum, and himself. In the liberal traditions of the past, economists, scientists and trainee-farmers were expected to know something of Britain's agricultural history; the ending of that tradition has deprived them of vital information and the perspective which they plainly need today, as recent problems and policies testify.

The first issue of *Agricultural History Review* was produced by Finberg with remarkable speed, appearing in the early days of January 1954. Its publisher was the Broadwater Press in Welwyn Garden City, of which Finberg had been director from 1936 to 1944. I shall never forget our quite magnificent proof-reader at Broadwater; like Finberg, or better, she had an eagle eye for typing errors and inconsistencies, and her supreme efficiency commanded universal admiration. I doubt whether any reader found a single error in the issues of *The Review* in her day.

The Society's annual conferences in March or April each year became convivial, as well as academically rewarding, occasions, and always included an afternoon expedition of some sort. We once visited the archaeological site at Hound Tor on Dartmoor, led by W. G. Hoskins; we inspected a deserted medieval village on another occasion; often we were taken round working farms. Around Easter the weather is always a hazard, and it is not difficult to picture, then as now, members' fortitude on windswept moorlands, in pouring rain, or trudging through the deep mud of the farmyard. Herbert Finberg on these occasions will for ever live in our memories, for, although he had a deep sympathy with the country life of the past, he arrived at every conference in a black overcoat and black trilby hat, dressed as if for an engagement in the City; he never looked ready to poke his head into cowstalls. He was also famed among us as a gastronome, and we awaited his judgement on the food in the hall of residence with trepidation. George Fussell was another of our memorable characters and faithful attenders at conferences, almost to the end of his life. He usually sat in the front row of the lecture hall, loudly snorting 'Nonsense' at anything with which he disagreed.

As editor of the *Review*, Finberg was a meticulous scholar. He was also a bold projector of publications. In the third year of the society's existence, in January 1956, he proposed to inaugurate an *Agrarian History of England and Wales*, which would be a multi-volumed work that would take many years to complete. He put his plan before a meeting of eighteen scholars at University College London on 14 January 1956, at which R. H. Tawney took the chair. Those attending were mostly senior scholars in pre-history, historical geography (Professor H. C. Darby had arranged the place of meeting), economics and economic history and the

scheme received their warm support.⁴ It was hoped that the Scottish historians might be persuaded to initiate their own history at the same time, but they decided that the idea was premature.

Young Turks have been heard to say these days that the project for a grand survey of our agricultural history was a mistake, but they live in a world of scholarship that was actually created by *The Agrarian History* and *The Review*. They take for granted the level of interest and the scope of research in the subject since 1950; the contrast with the period before 1950 is just not readily understood by those who did not experience it for themselves. Writing to Maurice Beresford on 28 July 1953 (in a letter, which like all letters from Finberg sitting in a file, stands out prominently from the rest because he was such a fine calligrapher), Finberg remarked on the current state of agricultural history, saying that many people 'imagine that agricultural history begins with the introduction of the turnip'.⁵ It was fair comment. Finberg looked forward to Beresford's help in dispelling that illusion, and that support was instantly given when Beresford wrote an article that appeared in the first issue of *The Review* on 'The Poll Tax and Census of Sheep, 1549'. It is one illustration of the broadening scope of agricultural history that gave the subject a new image. Beresford's contribution, in fact, went well beyond that article, for along with John Hurst, and alongside Hoskins's work, he was opening out another aspect of agricultural history in the study of deserted medieval villages. He was not only identifying and listing them but actually digging them up, notably at Wharram Percy. And in making all this known to readers of books, none of us, I think, wrote and writes more beguilingly than Maurice.

Finberg's plan for *The Agrarian History* was built on the expectation that the first volume to be written would deal with the early modern period. I was then Senior Research Fellow in Agrarian History in the Department of English Local History at University College Leicester, having been appointed by Hoskins in 1951 to embark on a study of Lincolnshire agriculture. The Clapham committee had earlier examined the state of economic history in general, and as a result money had been allocated to promote research in the field. G. D. H. Cole had alerted Hoskins to the funds that were available, and so Hoskins applied, and was granted enough to pay for a research post for three years, 1951–54. By 1956 I had finished my study of Lincolnshire (it was published in 1957 as *English Peasant Farming. An agrarian history of Lincolnshire from Tudor to recent times*), and Finberg now asked me to take on the sixteenth-century volume of his *Agrarian History*, and, first, to draw up a plan for the contents.

I had been alerted by my Lincolnshire studies to the supreme importance of identifying distinct farming regions, rather than taking county boundaries as a framework, and that became a feature of my volume and others, though in planning them, separate editors were given a free hand to rank their themes as they wished, and notable differences resulted; not all volumes, for example, dealt with farmhouses and buildings, through which regional as well as class differences could be perceived. In strengthening my perception of regions, I acknowledge a deep debt to G. H. Tupling's splendid book on *The Economic History of Rossendale*, first written

⁴ The full list of what became an advisory committee is set out on p. viii of volume IV of *The Agrarian History*.

⁵ Contained in a file of correspondence and papers

concerning the *Agrarian History*, donated by Prof. Beresford to the Society's archives held at the Rural History Centre.

as a Ph.D thesis as long ago as 1924, and revised for publication in 1927.⁶ The notion of regions had run quietly through R. H. Tawney's *Agrarian Problem in the Sixteenth Century* (1912), but, following Tupling and some other inter-war historians, our *Agrarian History* gave them such prominence that it is not too much to claim for ourselves much of the credit for public concern these days to preserve the varied cultural traditions of our regions.

Another dimension was given to our researches in the 1950s by the setting up or expansion of record offices, making historians conscious of the great wealth of documents on agrarian affairs that awaited systematic study. New collections were steadily arriving for deposit in places where they could be publicly consulted for the first time. So while I was recruiting some ten authors for volume IV, I was intent on exploiting this treasury of manuscripts, and it was plainly necessary to think of a way in which all the county archives could be visited; it was impossible to envisage all authors visiting all counties for themselves. We needed research assistance, and were extremely fortunate to secure a grant from the Nuffield Foundation, which was renewed once subsequently, to pay for researchers to visit the county record offices. We were able to appoint Alan Everitt to examine the archives in the Public Record Office and in Kent (where he lived). He then became a contributor to the volume, writing chapters on marketing and the agricultural labourer. We were also supremely lucky in having the services of Margaret Midgley, who was a most experienced medievalist. She had edited a volume of Ministers' Accounts for the Earldom of Cornwall for the Camden Society in 1942, and later worked for the *Staffordshire Victoria County History*. I often find myself these days returning to her transcripts, with admiration for her skill and care. She had no desire to write any text for volume IV; I would have sympathized with her if she had so wished, and would have endeavoured to satisfy her. But she preferred to gather material for the rest of us. When she finished work for volume IV, she continued collecting material for the medieval volumes.

Scholars are assisted nowadays by so much technology, and so many labour-saving devices, that it is worth recalling our handicraft usages of the past. Alan Everitt and I were both at work on the London archives, but we had no office, no stationery, and no reference books at our elbow. We used to meet at intervals, in the forecourt of the British Museum, or if raining in the vestibule(!), to discuss progress; Alan recalls one occasion when we resorted to a quiet corner of George III's King's Library, a usually deserted place that functioned generally as a corridor to other parts of the museum. We each devised our own note-taking methods, and housed all our papers in shoeboxes. Miss Midgley had received guidance from all authors on the classes of material to look for in each county record office, so she chose her own itinerary, surveyed the scene in each record office, often working in the local history room of the public library as well. She transcribed the relevant documents, making one top copy and one carbon, and when I received her packages of transcripts, I took my own notes and sent the two sets on their rounds, so that in the end they were seen by all authors. The final work was based on a great variety of original documents from many record offices; we were not summarizing only knowledge that was already somewhere in print.

The work on volume IV had begun in 1956 and was completed in about eight years. I had selected as authors younger historians of my generation who were not already overcommitted

⁶ Chetham Society, new ser. 86 (1927).

to other tasks, and so the work proceeded relatively quickly. It took twice as long to finish volume V, 1640–1750, which started around 1967, and was ready by 1983, published in 1984–5.

The search for a publisher started with the hope that Leicester University would undertake the task. By then it had a university press of its own, spurred on by the enthusiasm of Finberg and Professor Jack Simmons, the railway historian. But the press was small and it lacked the courage and the resources. We counted it our great good fortune that the Cambridge University Press became our publisher. It had published H. C. Darby's two volumes on the fenland and its drainage history in 1940, and proceeded in the 1950s with the volumes of Darby's Domesday geography. The *Agrarian History* had found a congenial home. Subsequently the Cambridge University Press became a distinguished publisher of many more works pertaining to agriculture and historical geography, and in 1989 it proudly issued a catalogue entitled *New and Recent Books on Agricultural History*, which ran to twenty pages, and noticed thirty-eight books besides the volumes of *The Agrarian History*.

I vividly remember the meetings which Finberg and I had with editors at the Cambridge University Press, and I dare say that some of them remember Finberg equally vividly! He was, after all, a uniquely experienced editor and publisher, and so expected to impose his style where other editors bow to the prescriptions of their publisher. Cambridge agreed to abide by Finberg's editorial usage, so long as all contributors adhered to it consistently, and Finberg saw to it that they did. When the manuscript of volume IV was handed in at Cambridge, its recipients were told that every full stop and comma were in place; they should make no alteration whatsoever. On one issue, however, I saw Finberg obliged to capitulate. As my volume was passing through the press, Finberg wanted to make a slight change to the lettering on the spine. Cambridge's editors were accustomed to a long chain of command, and told Finberg that the alteration he wanted would delay publication for at least three months. His rueful comment to me later was that it would have taken five minutes at the Broadwater Press, where editor and typesetters worked under the same roof.

Finberg's editorial style was made known to all authors at an early stage, and the spirit that suffused it deserves its memorial here. It is contained in his advisory document to authors from which I quote verbatim. First, *The Agrarian History* is intended to be a history 'not of processes, trends, or problems, but of human beings, namely English countrymen of all ranks; second, that consequently the English countryman should never be far from the centre of the stage; third, that any sentence of which the subject is an abstract noun, and the verb some form of the verb 'to be' can be re-written with advantage'.⁷ These precepts will always remain deeply embedded in my head and in my own aspirations. They may explain some of my editorial corrections to the work of authors which have mystified, or even offended, them. As precepts, written over forty years ago, they deserve to be remembered alongside the judgements of some present-day journalists and reviewers of current television programmes, believing mistakenly that history writing for the public is nowadays guided by new and original notions to win their interest, in contrast with the work of past scholars, depicted as living in ivory towers remote from the everyday world.

The planning of all eight volumes of *The Agrarian History* was accompanied by the usual

⁷ A copy of Finberg's 'Notes for contributors' is also held in Prof. Beresford's file (n. 5).

unforeseen accidents and unexpected withdrawals that delayed completion. But it *has* now reached its conclusion, though the last volume to appear, number VII, covering 64 years up to 1914 runs to 2,277 pages, whereas volume IV managed with less than half that length (919 pages) to survey 140 years. Finberg originally envisaged a work of seven volumes, which would end in 1914. But Edith Whetham became the editor of an eighth volume, carrying the history from 1914 to 1939. She was a most knowledgeable historian on the inter-war history of agriculture, and always a shrewd, brisk contributor to our discussions at conferences. She had been immersed in the world of farming and policy-making throughout her childhood, for she was the daughter of Sir William Dampier, who, among other things, had been a member of the Agricultural Wages Board through the 1920s and 1930s. Edith later worked on the official history of wartime food production, 1939–45. She had intended to share her volume of *The Agrarian History* with another author but in the end she was the single-handed writer, in contrast with the others.

Every volume has its own story of hopes deferred, fulfilled or disappointed. Finberg expected that volume I would follow the publication of volume IV, and part (ii), covering the period 43–1042, did, indeed, do so in 1972. This contained Finberg's own chapter on Anglo-Saxon England. But part (i) on prehistory, edited by Stuart Piggott, waited until 1981. As the years wore on, the teaching and administrative duties of academics squeezed their time for research; often it could only be retrieved during their evenings or leisure hours at weekends. I am the best informed of all of these trials and tribulations for I took over as editor in 1975.

Now twenty-five years later the series has been completed, and we have a survey of English and Welsh agriculture that is likely to serve another fifty years. Such large synoptic histories are invaluable, but they are needed only at long intervals. Lord Ernle's heroic study had been published in 1912, and it was not until 1956 that scholars grew restive and wanted a fresh one; even so, the continuing value of Ernle's book was recognised in its re-issue in 1961. Now we must wait for the emergence of fresh viewpoints on the broader scene, before another large survey is thought necessary. We know that a certain lapse of time is needed before a new perspective is recognised. But that reappraisal has to be illuminated by a host of other intervening changes involving matters well removed from agriculture, before a fresh pattern appears. The future of agriculture is much debated, but its context is undergoing a fundamental transformation, and that must stabilize before another satisfactory farming regime establishes itself on new foundations. None of us can confidently predict in which new direction agriculture will find that confident future, and no one will want to conduct another survey while our view over that wide landscape remains clouded in a mist.⁸

⁸ *The Editor of the Review adds: Agricultural History Review* welcomes further recollections of the early years of the Society. The Society is also eager to expand its rather meagre archive. Donations, loans, or documents which might be photocopied and returned should be sent to the editor of the *Review* at the Rural History Centre, University of Reading, where the Society's archive is now held.