

Annual List and Brief Review of Articles on Agrarian History, 1980¹

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ARTICLES on climate dominate this year's collection mainly due to an issue of the *Journal of Interdisciplinary History* having been devoted to the subject. This offers 17 contributions by climatologists, demographers, biologists, and historians, demonstrating not only the need for collaboration between disciplines but also the very real potential of a joint approach. Among them, Fischer (79) notes the mass of data that has accumulated and calls for a synthesis of information and its publication in a form which would make it readily accessible to scholars in the different fields. In an historiographical survey, De Vries (62) is critical of traditional concern with the short-term impact of extremes and crises of subsistence, and questions the accepted causal link between climate, harvest size and economic cycles. His preferred approach is to consider human adaptation to long-term weather changes. This is echoed in Appleby's own study (5) of the 'little ice age' between 1500 and 1700. He believes that although weather was crucial for harvests, the impact depended largely on human factors, including welfare programmes and technical change in agriculture; and he concludes that human responses to climate were more important than climate itself, whether causing famine or avoiding it. Post (173), however, argues that climatic fluctuations of the period impinged seriously upon economic activity and mortality, and identifies instances when major health problems in England were traceable to weather conditions and high grain prices. He also points out that the impact on economies less developed than the Dutch and English would have been even more severe. Post further questions the validity of those studies based upon fluctuations spanning only a year or two and suggests that the minimum period for understanding the impact of weather may be a decade. The importance of the time scale is also underlined by Rabb (178), who believes the most useful analysis of data is that which lies in a range between the short-term catastrophe and the 500-year worldwide shift, detectable only by climatologists. He urges a search for an acceptable index of weather data for the fourteenth to nineteenth centuries, with the aim of uncovering

demonstrable links between climate and political, economic, social, and cultural history.

The question of the origin of agriculture is still exercising minds: Rindos (185) denies that the event was either revolutionary or even intended, and instead views agriculture as 'the outgrowth of evolutionary potentials which may develop whenever an animal consistently feeds upon any set of food plants'. Thus domestication was the result of slow man-plant interactions which pre-dated agricultural systems. A number of articles on prehistory emphasize the lack of hard evidence and demonstrate again the value of the cross-disciplinary approach. To detect the process of evolution in prehistoric cropping, Hubbard (106) subjects archaeobotanical data collected in Europe and the near East over the past three decades to a new quantitative method — 'selective analysis'. Findings indicate a continuous but very gradual process of change and suggest a variety of possible relationships between cropping patterns, ecology and culture. Pickering (172) highlights the potential and some limitations of aerial reconnaissance which has revealed a highly organized and developed landscape in England but leaves unanswered many questions of agricultural, social or cultural origins. The limitations of this device are also underlined in Haselgrove's study of crop marks in Co Durham (96). From the air these could be interpreted as field systems but were in fact generated by natural fissures. Similarly, Martin and Hall (136) show that careful field-walking can unearth important evidence of settlement and land use which is not revealed in aerial photographs. Absence of cereal seeds recorded on Grooved Ware sherds has been taken to imply that the culture was based on pastoralism rather than arable farming. But Martin Jones (114) has employed the new water flotation technique and detected carbonized grains which may call for a major re-thinking of the Grooved Ware economy. Where grains are indeed absent, storage methods rather than lack of arable farming may be the cause, and the author believes we should be seeking behavioural rather than land-use explanations of missing grain impressions. Problems of interpretation are also discussed by Mercer and Dimbleby (140) in relation to a Cornish hut circle settlement at Stannon Down, where pollen of arable weeds is absent despite a field system and querns. There are two articles by Whittle: one (228) postulates a two-fold economic division of the British Neolithic which

¹ Publications are dated 1980 unless otherwise noted. References to articles or off-prints should be sent to the Bibliographical Unit, Institute of Agricultural History, University of Reading.

ended with a greater intensification in the use and organization of land, rather than the introduction of metallurgy or beakers; the other (227) reports on prehistoric lynchets and boundaries in the Shetland Islands. These he believes indicate early infield-outfield systems and provide a remarkably accurate gauge of the intensity of land use to compare with southern Neolithic sites. In an examination of tool remains and subsoil traces of ards in Orkney and Shetland, Rees (183) concludes that the latter were consistently tilted when in use — presumably to help turn the soil. Ryder (189) has analysed the hair on a recently discovered Neolithic ox skull from Orkney, and found it has the degree of fineness previously associated with the wild *Bos primigenius*. This raises the possibility that earlier samples thought to be of wild cattle in fact originated from domesticated stock.

Landscape and landholding patterns have pre-occupied agrarian historians of the medieval period. Toponomic studies have traditionally focused on lowland regions subject to invasion, tracing settlement patterns from nucleated village and hamlet names. But Thomas (213, 214) demonstrates that in uplands characterized by continuity, a dispersed habitat, and environmental constraints this type of research is inappropriate. Instead he has analysed over 10,000 Welsh field and farm names and plotted their components spatially, sharpening our perspective of the nature and pattern of internal colonization. The wide range of topographical information available in manorial documents for reconstructing historic landscapes is illustrated by Bond (25) and Moorhouse (146); while Faull (73) emphasizes the value of place-names, but also notes the importance of fieldwork and the checking of documentary sources such as early maps to locate and interpret local features. Hedge-dating has become a common-place tool of landscape historians, but Johnson (112) notes the statistical limitations of the Hooper method, while Cameron and Pannett (37) in a study of some Shropshire examples also warn that diversity in hedges is sometimes only weakly related to age. The genesis of common fields is the subject of a leading article by Campbell (38). He provides further support for the Thirsk thesis that population growth where the supply of land was finite could lead to parcellation of land and the gradual emergence of sub-divided fields. Population growth alone however, is considered insufficient explanation in a case study of Martham in Norfolk. Here weak manorial control was crucial in permitting partible inheritance and alienation, which in turn fostered the development of a fragmented and complex landholding structure. The remarkably fluid nature and complexity of medieval landholding is again emphasized in McIntosh's study (133) of the royal manor of Havering in Essex. Here the level of sub-tenancing advanced from 11 per cent of those renting land to 69 per cent between the mid-thirteenth and

mid-fourteenth centuries. Evidence is derived from two manorial extents, a type of documentary source described in a separate article by Lomas (128). In a study of Holderness, Harvey (94) examines seventeenth-century field morphology to determine much earlier developments. Regularity of landholding and simplicity of field layout argue a planned origin, and the suggestion is made that a major eleventh-century estate re-organization accompanied wholesale restructuring of arable fields, based upon the Viking 'solskyfte' method of division and assessment. There is alarm in some quarters at the treatment of medieval history by economists, and McCloskey (130) coins the term 'megaloeiticism' to describe the 'enlargement to excess of the study of origins'. Criticism is focused on Mazur's theory that the ploughing process created the scattering of open field strips, and in reply Mazur (139) counters with a critical view of McCloskey's own theory of risk aversion. On tenure Betley (22) describes evidence suggesting that the manorial custom of rights of 'free bench' was less rare than once thought. This was a device based on arranged marriage to delay the return of a tenement to the manorial lord.

Management of estates is another prominent theme in articles on medieval agrarian history. Mate (137) estimates that under 10 per cent of Isabella de Forz's revenues were devoted to maintenance and improvement, but argues that a small financial outlay was not inconsistent with high profits. Partly, high returns reflected helpful economic circumstances, but flexible and astute management of resources was also a factor. The royal estate has come under scrutiny. Stafford (204) details information from Domesday Book which describes arrangements for provisioning the Court and provides evidence of dynamic management on royal manors before the Conquest. Medieval Cheshire has been viewed as a backward, pastoral county, but Booth (27) questions this assumption and shows that the Black Prince was prepared to barter power and direct management for the more profitable system of leasing his lands. Also on administration, Britnell (31) confronts Kosminsky's claim that the structure of small estates made them more alert to market opportunities and more likely to be exploited to their full potential. The decisive influence of market forces on the local development of village structure and economy is shown by Moss (150) in a study of late medieval Tottenham. Closeness to London and good communications led to transformation from an arable to a pastoral economy and rise in prosperity, while less well-placed centres nearby stagnated. The academic neglect of livestock husbandry reflects the unhelpful nature of documentary sources but recent examination of organic remains promises to throw fresh light on the subject. Bourdillon (28) has patiently sifted and measured bone fragments at Hamwih to determine

changes in animal size and husbandry. Curious trends to emerge include the decline in sheep size during the medieval period, while cattle became larger. Similarly, the archaeozoological analysis of horn cores has provided Armitage (7) with new evidence on the origin of long-horned cattle. These appeared in England in the fourteenth century and represented not imported stock but were, he argues, the result of selective breeding on a few of the larger estates in the south-east.

Maps dating from the early modern period are described in a number of articles and their value as source material assessed. A D M Phillips (169, 170) draws our attention to the detailed seventeenth-century estate maps of William Fowler, for example, and Shercliff (195) describes those of Martinscrofte, which also portray field systems, landholding and tenure. The land tax returns are discussed by Wilson (238), who concludes that while they provide much insight into factors which could influence a tax, they present too many problems to be used by historians as a worthwhile source in themselves. The other major documentary source described is the probate inventory: Overton (159) shows how they can be exploited to measure agricultural change, and Garrard (85) demonstrates their value for studying the domestic interior.

On the important question of the relationship between agriculture and economic growth, Crafts (53) blames preoccupation with the labour-intensive nature of mixed farming (*pace* Chambers) for the mistaken view that industry obtained its labour from population growth alone. He prefers an alternative interpretation which emphasizes agriculture's achievements, specifically the rise in output per man which allowed it to feed increased numbers with a declining proportion of the nation's labour force. Again the landed estate has received most attention. Aylmer (12) traces developments in the definition of 'property' from the early seventeenth century neo-feudal view to one which emphasized the absolute power of owners to dispose of estates and seek redress in law against those who violated it. Debate continues over the contribution of marriage settlements to the rise of great estates. English and Saville (70) offer further evidence that the contribution was a significant one, but Bonfield (26) re-emphasizes those demographic realities of the time which prevented most families from implementing settlements and ensuring estates remained intact through generations. On a related theme Habakkuk (90) uses evidence of Parliamentary Acts, obtained for discharging debt through property sales, to determine which periods were the most difficult for landed families. Findings suggest that they were under less pressure to sell after 1720 than they had been during the half-century before, owing to lower interest rates, less serious wars, and protective devices favourable to borrowers. Much attention has been focused on insti-

tutional owners. Factors underlying the disposal by Tudor monarchs of Crown property during the middle decades of the sixteenth century are discussed by Wyndham (242). Gentles (86) examines the 'never to be repeated bargain in the history of the English land market' — the sale of bishops' lands during the Revolution of 1646–60, while Clay (50) exposes the lamentably weak position of the Church as landlords during the century thereafter. Denying E P Thompson's claim that ecclesiastical owners were greedy and exploitative he shows how bishops were forced to continue letting land to aristocrats and gentry at a fraction of its value because any change in the beneficial lease system would have involved unacceptable financial sacrifices in their own lifetimes. The view that institutional landlords were invariably less effective as managers finds little support in Trueman's study of Guy's Hospital estate (216). The author claims that overall similarities were more striking than differences, noting that both institutional and private owners were often more concerned with bare maintenance of property and avoidance of waste or damage than improvement. Accumulation of land by Sir Thomas Audley in the last quarter of the eighteenth century is described by Williams (235). The pattern conforms with the general one of wealthy individuals buying out small owners and copyholders, and emphasizes the importance of private as opposed to Parliamentary methods of consolidation and purchase. Traditional conceptions of Parliamentary enclosure are derived largely from the midland experience but Chapman (44) examines Sussex evidence to illustrate why conditions could differ so markedly outside. Not unconnected, Dymond's investigation of a Suffolk village (66) reminds us of the bitter but ineffective opposition that enclosure could arouse. Farm practice is of growing interest. Lane (121) draws upon agricultural science and history to document important changes in pasture management and livestock feeding between 1500 and the end of the seventeenth century. Scrutiny of contemporary records of farming in the midland plain leads Broad (32) to re-evaluate the role of alternate husbandry. Dr Kerridge argued that this was the vital ingredient of an agricultural revolution completed in the eighteenth century. But after 1650 a new and important practice of permanent pasture farming emerged on the heavier clays, with manuring, rotational grazing and drainage giving encouragement to specialist livestock production. On rural society generally Lindert (123), having collected large samples of parish data on occupations from burial registers and lists of inhabitants, casts renewed doubt on Gregory King's classic social table. Findings suggest that King seriously understated the size of the commercial and industrial sectors. In an attempt to reconstruct the socio-economic organization of rural Cumbria after 1660, Marshall (134) uses information from probate

inventories to detect advancing wealth and a slow rise in consumption following expansion of agriculturally based trades and minor local industries. Chaytor's article on Ryton (47) demonstrates the great variety of documentary records that can be exploited to reconstruct in detail the social structure of an early modern rural community.

For the modern period Vamplew (220) assesses whether or not the nineteenth century corn averages were statistically sound and offers an index of production and revised price series for cereals. In another study (221) he focuses upon the working of the Corn Laws and attempts to determine their protective value. Over the short run, time-lags and the bonded warehouse system allowed dealers to anticipate duty changes and hoard or sell accordingly. But over the long term protection may have been significant and the author argues that Repeal encouraged a cut-back in cereal production after 1842. It is commonplace that farmers in England reacted to higher prices during the Napoleonic Wars by radical land use change, specifically converting pasture to arable. However, Macdonald's study of crop returns (131) suggests a very different interpretation for Northumberland, where farmers undertook little reclamation for permanent cropping and instead relied more on convertible husbandry on existing arable land. This system raised yields and allowed cropping adjustments in response to short-term price changes. The dynamic nature of lightland-farming after the wars is well documented, but Wilkes (232) notes that most of the increased grain production up to 1835 derived from expanded wheat acreages on the clays, and he emphasizes the price-sensitivity of clayland farmers despite their technical disabilities. It is the view of Nicholas and Dziegielewski (153) that until 1860 most of Ireland remained within the framework of a peasant subsistence economy. But Ó Gráda denies this (158), and offers further analysis of supply responsiveness to show that Irish farmers were influenced by market forces, even before the Famine. The extent of landed indebtedness thereafter is explored by Curtis (57). He finds that as in England small- and medium-sized estates carried heaviest debt burdens, while those least affected by depression of the late nineteenth century were magnates, Ulster landlords, and those with urban and industrial interests. The impact of this depression is also discussed by Robinson (187), who traces regional adjustments in the farming economy of Herefordshire. In a graphic illustration of the impact of towns on nineteenth-century agriculture A D M Phillips (167, 168) describes the reclamation of Carrington and Chat Moss. In order to solve the sanitary problems of Manchester a network of railways was laid out to deliver night soil and refuse, enabling the creation of valuable agricultural land for market gardening. There has been more than usual attention paid to livestock. The national cattle

herd declined in Britain between 1870 and 1885, despite favourable prices, and Fisher (80) argues that disease was a major factor inhibiting agricultural adaptation at this time. In his separate article on disease control (81) ignorance and concern to safeguard personal interests are quoted as the main reasons for rejection of sound veterinary advice. Only the crises of the 1860's and growth of the dead meat trade persuaded government to adopt measures advocated earlier. The contributions of the railway and steamships towards narrowing regional meat-price differentials are assessed by Edwards and Perren (69). Also on the subject of meat, Capie and Perren (40) study the nature of supply and relative importance of home and foreign sources, while problems surrounding the question of demand are also highlighted. Very little of note was written on the period after 1900. Atkins (10) describes the London retail milk trade up to 1914, and in a separate article Dewey (63) focuses upon government policy during the Great War. It has become almost a truism that the 'ploughing' policy lay behind England's success in maintaining war-time supplies. But the author denies this and argues that food control was the real factor which allowed nutritional levels to be maintained.

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