

Conference Report: Winter Conference 2000 'Livestock in the Farming Economy'

by Jean Morrin

The Winter Conference took place on Saturday, 2 December at the Institute for Historical Research in London. Despite the rail chaos, some forty people heard papers about the importance of animals in agrarian history. Bruce Campbell (Queen's Belfast) welcomed the Society putting the horse before the cart and hoped for a genuine research shift from corn to horn. In many respects in 1300 the pastoral economy was more dynamic than the arable: horses supplied draught power, sheep supplied wool for the domestic, Italian and Flemish textile industries. Sheep numbers in 1300 may have reached 20m in comparison with the 11m estimated in c. 1690 by Gregory King. Dairy produce was a staple foodstuff and manorial accounts suggest that the pastoral sector was far more commercialised than the arable. By 1400 animals and their products contributed 55 per cent of gross agricultural revenues in the London region. Furthermore, the importance of livestock increased more than corn from 1300–1850: grain yields per acre doubled in this period while fleece weights increased 2.5 times; carcass weights of cattle and sheep increased three-fold; milk yields four-fold. The share of livestock products in English agricultural output is estimated to have increased from about one quarter to one half, 1300–1850. Livestock were the key to food stocks. Prof. Campbell posed a number of questions about management of livestock. How was pastoral husbandry organised and how did it compare in size and value with the arable sector? How specialised was livestock trade?

The main body of Campbell's paper discussed the results of his research using Inquisitions Post Mortem into the extent and value of pasture and its value and size in relation to arable in the first half of the fourteenth century. This work has been partly covered in his recent book *English seigniorial agriculture* and will be further covered in *Lay lordship, land and wealth: a socio-economic atlas of England 1300–49*. Campbell mapped and measured agricultural land use throughout England using IPMs of which 9,300 relating to 1300–49 are preserved in the PRO for 5,500 demesne locations held

by tenants in chief of the crown. Campbell's analysis of the IPMs indicates that by 1300 England had crystallized into localities and regions with either a scarcity or abundance of pasturage. England was not as a whole deficient in pasture although particular regions were deficient in quantity, such as land along the chalk ridge extending from north Hampshire to Norfolk. When pasture was measured by value, the highest values were recorded in areas where pasture was scarce. The most developed pastoral regimes with the highest proportion of working horses, non-working animals and milk-producing cattle were concentrated within the areas of greatest grassland scarcity in East Anglia and south east England. Campbell concluded that pastoral components of medieval agricultural systems are still not well understood and much more analysis is needed.

Richard Hoyle (Reading) opened his paper on the cattle trade of north-west England by saying that the enormous trade in cattle in the seventeenth century was an unexplored subject which posed serious research problems. Large herds have been found in inventories, but inventories shed no light on the dynamics of the cattle trade. Animals, including Scottish and Irish cattle, were driven from the west and north of England to the south and east and might move two or three times in their lives before slaughter. Professor Hoyle had analysed several sets of Lancashire gentry accounts from the decades before and after 1600 seeking evidence of the working of the cattle trade but with limited results. In most cases the accounts did not offer information on the total herd size or its composition, nor did they make any allowance for beasts (or butter, or cheese) consumed in the household. The accounts revealed a considerable diversity of practice. Sir Richard Sherburn – with over 300 beasts in 1571 – was running three independent mixed rearing, dairying and beef herds with oxen for traction and was selling significant numbers of animals through the Lancashire autumn fairs. Hoyle thought it most likely that these were entering the droving market but evidence has not been found to confirm this. Other households

proved to be net consumers, selling only a few animals but buying heavily at Spring Fairs, one or two animals at a time from local individuals. This appeared to be a sale of stock from yeomen producers to gentry consumers. The accounts followed the life-cycle of the herds, beginning when the herds were newly established. As the accounts progressed fewer beasts were bought and more sold, normally three or four year olds into the late summer or autumn cycle of fairs. Hoyle thought it likely that these too were sales to drovers but the accounts did not include names of purchasers who bought from the local market or fair. Thus whilst the gentry accounts contributed considerably to understanding of the cattle trade, their insight was both partial and incomplete.

Louise Curth (Royal Holloway, London) presented a paper on the insights into seventeenth-century animal health care in English almanacs. Curth studied 1369 almanacs mainly in the British Library and Bodleian which had originally been published from the mid- to late-seventeenth century, describing them as a treasure chest of unexplored popular literature about animal health care from the pre-veterinary period. Almanacs were small, cheap and offered information and advice to the mainly rural society. Among the weather forecasts, astrological predictions, and lists of market towns and fairs was advice about animal health care often attributed to Gervase Markham or William Dade. Most of this advice was preventive medicine, advocating for example, a proper daily regime; convenient food, in sufficient quantity; reasonable tasks but not overwork. There were instructions to geld in cold weather and to shear sheep in June. If despite the care, animals fell ill remedies were

included for treating sick animals. Curth quoted recipes from the *Country-Man's Kalender* for curing a wound by mixing a salve from wax, honey, turpentine, swinesgrease and wheat flour (1688) and a cure for sore eyes in cattle (1699) which involved blowing a powder made from burnt and crushed egg-shells into the infected eyes. Almost one-third of the almanacs addressed animal health care.

John Gall (Beamish Museum) has built up a delightful collection of engravings, paintings and photographs of horses, ponies, oxen, bulls, cattle, sheep and pigs at Beamish Museum, a selection of which brought the subjects of this paper to life. Gall's display culminated with a life size illustration of the Durham Ox, which weighed 272 stone when displayed in first decade of nineteenth century. Gall addressed the importance of livestock breeding in north-east England 1770-1900 where livestock breeders such as George Culley and the Colling brothers used engravings and paintings to market their stock as well as touring agricultural shows with their prize oxen and bulls. Ceramics were used to advertise livestock: one meat dish design depicted the Durham Ox and its owner. Pubs were named after the Durham Ox. Shorthorn cattle, spotted pigs, Teeswater and Swaledale hill sheep and full size Clydesdales working in lead mines appeared in the slides. Shetland ponies, the demand for which was so great that the Londonderry's bought the island of Bressay to extend production, were also featured. Some of the paintings were the work of artists in America depicting horses exported from the north-east. This was a fascinating display to round off the day.

The conference concluded by conveying its thanks to John Broad for organising another successful and enjoyable meeting.