

Book Reviews

MARTIN S. BRIGGS, *The English Farmhouse*. Batsford, 1953. 242 pp. 21s.

Farmhouses and cottages have attracted a vast sentimental literature in this country, and innumerable beautiful photographs, mostly taken in the height of summer. Few rural subjects have been so much written about, or so copiously illustrated, with so little profit to the serious student. Mr Briggs's book is no exception to this statement. It is attractively written and superbly illustrated with all those clouds and reflections in still water that the house of Batsford does so well; and if this were not a specialist journal and one were an urban-minded reviewer, one might commend it as the ideal Christmas present for some other townsman. But for anyone who is interested in the historical development of the farmhouse the book fails repeatedly to answer the important questions.

It will be sufficient warning, to begin with, to say that the book contains 132 illustrations and not a single plan, except one or two reproduced from early nineteenth-century books on farmhouse design. Moreover, the illustrations themselves warn us that Mr Briggs's notions of a "farmhouse" are remarkably wide. We find the Roman villa at Chedworth (surely a country house if ever there was one), the well-worn photograph of the manor-house at Boothby Pagnell (here wrongly spelt), Ashleworth Court in Gloucestershire, Little Moreton Hall in Cheshire, various 'halls' from Lancashire, and manor houses from several other counties. The author justifies their inclusion on the ground that farming was carried on at all of them, but this is surely to make nonsense of the word "farmhouse".

Where the author indulges in economic history, as he must if he is to explain the origins of certain types of house, the results are lamentable. Thus on page 26 we are told that the manor was "a self-contained estate, an economic unit, in which the various tenants were subject to the lord of the manor in his demesne farm. These tenants were of two

ranks or grades: the freemen or yeomen who paid him rent for their land and helped him at busy seasons, and the unfree tenants or serfs who worked for him at a weekly wage." Such a wonderful conflation of history reminds one irresistibly of the landlord of a certain inn who shows one a cupboard in his attic and says: "This is where the old monks used to hide when they were being chased by the highwaymen." It may be objected that one cannot expect an architect to know any economic history (though why not?), but no economic historian (one hopes) would venture to write with a similar ignorance of architecture.

Even an ignorance of economic and social history would not matter much if the author had a serious contribution to make on the architectural side, where he bears a well-known name. One does not ask for original research in a book of this kind, but one is surely entitled to expect a knowledge of what is already accessible in print. The opening chapter on Farmhouses Before c. 1500 is weakest of all in this respect. Apart from the Iron Age farmsteads (e.g. those at Chysauster in Cornwall), the chapter is entirely concerned with Roman villas and medieval manor-houses. The recent work of Sir Cyril Fox and Lord Raglan on medieval farmhouses in Monmouthshire is nowhere mentioned; nor is the briefer work of the late Mr Hansford Worth on the medieval farmsteads of Dartmoor. Much other incidental information about medieval farmsteads is scattered through the Proceedings and Transactions of local historical and antiquarian societies, but the author has made no search in these sources.

Chapter II is devoted to Medieval Granges, Tithe-Barns, and Dovecotes. It is particularly beautifully illustrated but is well removed from the subject of farmhouses. Chapters III to VIII are concerned with farmhouses of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries in six broad regions of England, "the regions being selected to correspond with the types of build-

ing material that lay nearest to hand." Here the author is more at home, and if one accepts the fact that he is not concerned with the development of internal plans, one finds much to enjoy, above all perhaps where he writes about his ancestral Yorkshire. One hopes, however, that the facts of his native countryside are more accurately given than those for south-western England, where there are a number of mistakes. It is not true to say (p. 136) that coal did not reach Devon and Cornwall until the eighteenth century. Richard Carew was writing his *Survey of Cornwall* in the 1580's, not in 1602 (p. 137). The Aclands are not known to have a Saxon ancestry (p. 139) and Acland Barton qualifies much more readily as a farmhouse than many of the author's other houses, though he seems to have doubts about it. Both Rashleigh and Colleton Bartons were rebuilt in the early seventeenth century, not the late sixteenth (p. 138).

The book concludes with a chapter on Eighteenth and Early Nineteenth-Century Farmhouses and another on the Victorian Farmhouse, in both of which the author draws much upon contemporary architectural books. There is much original social history in these chapters, which in this respect are the best in the book. But the real history of the English farmhouse still remains to be written.

W. G. HOSKINS

A. R. B. HALDANE, *The Drove Roads of Scotland*. Thomas Nelson and Sons Ltd, 1952. 266 pp. 25s.

This is a pioneer work of outstanding merit. It is not the first time that attention has been drawn to the drove roads of Britain. There have been articles, and at least one short book in recent years on the subject. But Mr Haldane is the first to have undertaken an enquiry on a national basis into the documentary and field evidence as well as the living oral tradition of cattle-droving. His book adds to everyone's enjoyment of the Scottish countryside by disentangling a whole series of road net-

works and explaining their origin, and it serves the historian too by brightening one of the dimly-lit corners of marketing history.

The fullest part of Mr Haldane's story relates to cattle-droving in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and tells of the fortunes of the drovers and cattle dealers from the time when their business became well established until its decay in the 1880's. For this narrative, Mr Haldane draws particularly on the *Statistical Account* of 1791-9, the *General Views of Agriculture* published at much the same time, and the *New Statistical Account* of 1845. He also makes excellent use of contemporary memoirs, and for the nineteenth century, of stories that linger in the memory of living people. His anecdotes are entertaining and skilfully woven into the narrative, and the inherent dramatic qualities of his subject are underlined in graphic passages, which turn this scholarly history into an adventure story as well. A colourful description of Broadford Tryst, where cattle from Dunvegan and the Outer Isles paused on their journey southward, illustrates the vivid quality of his writing. "Here too," he writes, "were the noise of cattle and the shouting of the drovers, the quarrelling, bargaining, and courting of the crowd, the tents in the hollow where food was cooking for weary drovers, and in the background the steep stony sides of Ben-na-Cailich looking down on the bay and the river. . ."

Mr Haldane recognizes the remote beginnings of the cattle-droving business in Scotland in the raids and cattle-rustling between glen and glen, which are as old as history itself. But his story proper begins with the evidence of peaceful droving at the end of the fifteenth century. Although the documents are sparse and the information fragmentary, they are enough to show livestock on the road to England by the sixteenth century in sufficient numbers to warrant interference by the Scots Parliament and Privy Council to safeguard the food supply at home. Restrictions imposed and dis-

carded in turn during the sixteenth century reflected the same uncertainty of purpose as that shown by the English government towards the question of corn export. Undeterred by food crises, and panic decrees alternately obstructing and facilitating their passage, the Scots cattle threaded their way in slow, dignified procession to London. Their path was made smoother by the union of the crowns in 1603, and the cost of their journey cheapened after the Restoration when a new policy of free trade was inaugurated. The order of 1663 permitting the transport of cattle by sea without toll, and the later order of 1672 granting free passage to cattle by land are better understood when considered in conjunction with other measures taken towards freeing the export of corn at the same time. Finally in 1707 by the union of the two Parliaments the last obstacles to the free movement of cattle were removed, and the marketing systems of the two countries merged into one. Scotland's independent trade connections with the Continent were broken, and she became wholly reliant on the English market. The Scots producer was not dissatisfied, however, for the demand for meat in England's growing industrial towns and in the centres of industry in southern Scotland was insatiable. The English government's bulk purchases of meat for the armed forces kept prices high, and gave an added stimulus to production for nearly a century, from 1727 until the peace of 1815—"a sorrowful peace for me," as one Aberdeenshire breeder described it, "for it cost me £4,000."

The two main cattle trysts in Scotland, where the herds were gathered together for their longer journey south, took place at Crieff in the second week in October, and after the middle of the eighteenth century at Falkirk, three times a year in August, September, and October. These markets were a memorable experience, "when thirty thousand black cattle in different droves overspread the whole adjacent country for several miles round the town." Con-

temporary descriptions of the drovers were couched in less glowing terms. "Shaggy, and uncultured, and wild" was one summary judgement, based upon appearances only. Mr Haldane corrects this one-sided view by emphasizing the responsibilities and dangers of their calling. To take sole charge of some fifty to sixty animals in a herd of between one and three hundred beasts (or a thousand beasts and more in the nineteenth century), leading them from the highlands of Scotland to the grazing lands of the Norfolk fen, across dangerous rivers and wild country, protecting the cattle from theft, judging the right routes for the right weather, eating frugally, and sleeping roughly, required uncommon skill and patience, and exceptional powers of physical endurance. It is not surprising that the drovers had no time for the elegant manners of the town, and shocked the squeamish urban dweller with their rough language and coarse behaviour.

Then, too, their trade was precarious. They were rarely wealthy men, yet a drover in the mid-eighteenth century thought nothing of buying cattle to the value of £10-12,000, paying for them partly in cash, but mostly in promissory bills. If sickness overtook the herd, or political changes upset the balance of his financial calculations, he and the farmers who had entrusted their cattle to him faced ruin. According to one report in the *Statistical Account* the farmers of the parish of Assynt in the 1790's reckoned on meeting severe losses on their cattle sales once every ten years, and in Galloway in 1813 it was estimated that nine out of every ten drovers had been at least once insolvent. Yet the hazards of the business did not prevent some drovers from winning a high reputation for trustworthiness, even though they did not, so far as Mr Haldane can discover, become carriers of money and bankers like their Welsh colleagues.

Five out of Mr Haldane's twelve chapters are devoted to an examination of the drove routes themselves, in so far as they can be established from old eighteenth- and nine-

teenth-century maps, and by inspection on the ground. He traces the course of the main routes, and provides a map, but he emphasizes that many of the subsidiary tracks have long since fallen into disuse and become unrecognizable, that some roads had not one but several courses according to weather conditions, while others did not originate as cattle tracks at all, but were only later adapted to that use. A typical drove road was a series of roughly parallel paths, altogether twenty to thirty yards or more in width, and occasionally bounded by stone walls. Some good photographs are included with the text showing them as they appear on the ground today. The presence of drovers' inns helps to identify some of the roads, while the stances, where the cattle rested overnight, continue to this day appreciably greener than the surrounding countryside.

Until the nineteenth century there was no difficulty in keeping open routes on which cattle could be driven from the north of Scotland to southern England. The end of droving was brought about not so much by its cost—seven shillings and sixpence per beast for a twenty-eight day journey from Caithness to Carlisle was not apparently considered uneconomic at the beginning of the nineteenth century—but by agricultural changes and the development of coach traffic on the road. Some cattle routes became turnpike roads on which tolls had to be paid. The transport of cattle by sea became more popular, and by taking some livestock off the roads, hastened the day when the old ways fell into disuse and were closed. Travelling by the back ways became more difficult as land shortage led to enclosure, and greater economy in the use of land. The free use of stances was discontinued, and in 1848 a legal decision declared the drovers' rights of stance to be without foundation in law. Finally, more fattening began to be done in Scotland than hitherto, making transport by sea, and later by railway, essential. By 1900 the Falkirk tryst was nothing but a fast-fading memory.

It is to be hoped that Mr Haldane's book, while completing the history of cattle droving in Scotland, will also stimulate interest in the drove roads of England. Mr Haldane takes us over the Cheviots, and along the two main roads west and east of the Pennines to the fat pastures of East Anglia, thence to the cattle market at St Faith's outside Norwich or to Barnet, and finally to Smithfield. But his account of the drove roads beyond the border is an outline only, and leaves much detail waiting to be filled in. The task may be a large one, for the documentary material is dispersed, but the map of England will yield plentiful evidence in its *green roads*, *Welsh roads*, and *Drovers' Arms*.

That one of the main goals of the Scots cattle was Norfolk is evident from many eighteenth-century records. Defoe wrote of "the prodigious number of black cattle" fed in the Norwich-Yarmouth area. But if Norfolk was the principal feeding ground, it was not the only one. We know that "northern cattle" were being taken into the fens of Lincolnshire in the sixteenth century, and although it is possible that these hailed from no further north than Yorkshire, the suspicion of early links with Scotland does not rest on this one item alone. The earl of Argyll's purchase of saltmarsh in the Holland division of Lincolnshire from James I may have been prompted by the desire to use it as a grazing ground for his cattle. For the eighteenth century, we have the word of Thomas Lowe, steward to the Drake family of Croft in Lincolnshire, writing in or about 1726, that "the Woulds people have of late yeares gott a Custome of buying up and bringing hither Scots Cattle, which having been bread up in so cold and poor a country as Scotland is, even the Would country of Lyncolnshire is so much better than what they come out of, that it is sufficiently rich and good enough to feed them."

Clearly, there is much to be learned of England's part in cattle fattening, and of the influence of that business on English

husbandry. Detective work on the ground and a thorough search of the archives will bring it to light. Mr Haldane's book suggests how rewarding it will be to both writer and reader.

JOAN THIRSK

L. E. HARRIS, *Vermuyden and the Fens, A Study of Sir Cornelius Vermuyden and the Great Level*. Cleaver-Hume Press Ltd. 21s.

The cardinal error of this book is exemplified by its title, which puts Vermuyden and the Fens in the wrong order. Like all land drainage history the history of the Great Level is exceedingly complicated and to set it out in a way that is both clear and readable is a task of great difficulty. It is necessary to consider the state of the Fens up to the end of the sixteenth century and the measures that were taken, as for instance by the monasteries and by Cardinal Morton, to effect improvements. It is also necessary to set the statutes affecting the issue, particularly Henry VIII's Statute of Sewers, and the Commissioners of Sewers set up thereunder. In sequence there should follow an account of the negotiations that led up to the commencement of operations by the earl of Bedford and the Adventurers, which involves the terms and conditions under which the work had to be done. At this point something should be said of the general principles of land drainage, their application to the drainage of the Great Level, and the criticisms that may be made of that application. Finally, something should be said of the history of the Corporation of the Bedford Level and its successor bodies such as the Commissioners of the Middle and South Levels.

No such history has yet been written. It is true that Wells, the Register of the Corporation of the Bedford Level, wrote his history of the drainage of the Great Level of the Fens in 1830, but this work is almost unreadable, and the criticisms which Mr Harris has made of it are well justified. Nevertheless, Wells for all his lack of literary talent had the right conception. The present author has not, for he has attempted to work in the

history of the Level as an inset in the life of Vermuyden. This is to make a task, which was in all conscience sufficiently complicated, quite impossible. Nor does there seem to be anything in the character of Vermuyden which justifies the attempt. No very clear picture of Vermuyden emerges from this book, but in so far as any idea can be formed it would appear that Vermuyden was an early example of a type with which we are not unfamiliar now—the arrogant technical expert. There is nothing attractive about this type of person, and the only thing that distinguishes Vermuyden from his modern counterparts was that since he had fewer rivals his position was more powerful.

The result of this approach to the subject is that much of the matter contained in the book is irrelevant to its real subject, for apart from his draining of the Fens Vermuyden is just not worth writing about. Certainly the discussion of his ancestors and his relations has no significance, nor is it really worth considering his activities in Malvern Chase or Sedgemoor.

The final impression left by this book is that it suggests, perhaps by way of contrast, how a book on the subject could be written. It is certainly not an account from which the reader will derive a clear impression of what happened. The maps do not serve the purpose of making the context clear. No doubt seventeenth-century maps have some antiquarian interest, but they should not be used to illustrate points which they only succeed in obscuring. Diagrams are a much better method of illustration, as is shown by the diagrams comparing Vermuyden's scheme of 1642 with the Great Ouse Flood Prevention scheme of 1949.

M. E. J.

JAMES E. HANDLEY, *Scottish Farming in the Eighteenth Century*. Faber & Faber. 314 pp. 25s.

The telling extracts which illustrate Mr Handley's narrative show that the large bibliography at the end of the book is no mere appendix. These extracts are particularly in-

teresting in the first chapters of the work, which deal with Scots agriculture before the reforms of the eighteenth century. One sees from them how great was the variation within the old system of 'Infield' and 'Outfield' land. Speaking generally, Infield or croft land was manured and was under constant crops, of which oats and bere (inferior barley) and mixed grain were the most usual. Outfield land was mainly used for pasture, but portions were temporarily taken into cultivation and cropped until the ground was exhausted. The farms were cultivated under the 'runrig' system, i.e. in intermixed strips allocated to joint cultivators; sometimes the strips were redistributed every year, sometimes the holding was more permanent. The size and arrangement of the holdings also varied, from the farms cultivated by the laird or by some considerable tenant or by a 'wadsetter' (wadset = a Scots form of mortgage) to groups of joint tenants. Although the divisions of each joint holding were traditionally conditioned by the plough team—eight oxen in the Lowlands, four horses in the Highlands—all the surviving old rentals I have seen show that the size of the individual shares varied considerably. Below the joint tenants was a variety of cottars and other lesser fry.

The picture of the old Scots agriculture founded on copious quotations from eighteenth-century sources is uniformly and monotonously sombre. It is indeed difficult to imagine how the country people survived at all. (In the descriptions the word peasant, so often used, strikes an alien note. The country people were, as a matter of fact, largely of kin to the gentry, and the term "peasantry" is misleading when applied to a society where class barriers were far lower than in most European countries. It was not habitually used by native writers.)

As a matter of fact, so early a writer as Froissart, although he described the country people as being very poor, was evidently disconcerted by their high spirit, and descriptions by travellers of the sixteenth and seventeenth century are on the whole not so scornful of Scots agriculture as those of the eighteenth century.

Perhaps there was deterioration during the seventeenth century, due to cumulative maltreatment of the soil, and the dietary of the people must have suffered when, after the Union of the Crowns (in 1603), the great export of hides was superseded by the practice of sending the beasts south on the hoof. But surely something must be allowed for the attitude of most of the eighteenth-century writers, such as the authors of the reports on the various counties to the Board of Agriculture, who were contrasting the new methods with the old. History has shown that many of the new methods were not so triumphantly successful (would Sinclair himself be quite so enthusiastic about sheep if he saw the present state of many Highland hillsides?), and it may be that their shadows as well as their highlights were rather accentuated.

In the same careful detail, Mr Handley proceeds to describe the great changes that not only brought much farming practice into line with the improvements in England but in some districts surpassed them and transformed the face of the countryside and the lives of those who lived on it. Unlike the Industrial Revolution, the great innovations of the Agricultural Revolution were worked out in the first half of the eighteenth century, a period in Scotland of economic frustration, but, as in the Industrial Revolution, the great advances were made by the interrelation of several groups of inventions or innovations. The enquiring and scientific spirit of the seventeenth century had led to practical improvements in English agriculture, especially the use of the fallow, and this was followed by more purely scientific improvements arising from the study of botany and of plant nourishment; and the rotation of crops was worked out and adjusted to the particular needs of different districts. The all-important cultivation of the turnip in these rotations overcame the cardinal weaknesses in the old system of Scots agriculture, the plague of weeds on the uncleared land and the lack of winter feeding. When it is remembered that Scotland, which was and is largely devoted to stock raising and feeding, was very deficient in natural hay and

is exposed to prolonged and severe winters, the benefits of the introduction of the turnip and of sown hay do not need stressing. But these great improvements could only have been used on a limited scale had not the practical administrative reform of the consolidation of the intermixed strips and enclosure of the fields been introduced alongside of them. Mr Handley points out that about 1733 this was being advocated, but it would have been an improvement to the book if he had dealt rather more fully with the differences in land-tenure in England and Scotland and the absence in the latter of copyholding and customary rights. This greatly simplified the process of enclosure (in Scotland we use the word in its primary sense of building a fence or dyke round a piece of land), and was merely a matter between the proprietor and the tenant (the valuable extracts from the Monymusk Papers published by the Spalding Club and the Scottish History Society admirably illustrate the process).

The movement for agricultural reform spread among enterprising proprietors all over Scotland, and the section of the book about these pioneers is particularly interesting and summarizes information not supplied in other books dealing with Scots agriculture. Among professional farmers the movement spread more gradually from the extreme south-west and south-east up the eastern coastal plain, with the lesser folk struggling behind, so that in the Highlands the great change from cattle to sheep overtook the agrarian changes.

The disastrous social changes largely brought about by the coming of the black-faced sheep are dealt with with great moderation, but although it is but a side issue in the book I venture to think that such contemporary sources as the Wardlaw MSS., the Black Book of Taymouth, the Book of Dunvegan, and Boswell's account of his visits to Raasay and Cull show that the relation between a chief and his clansmen was not quite as one-sided as Mr Handley's quotation from the Englishman Burt suggests.

I. F. GRANT

M. E. SEEBOHM, *The Evolution of the English Farm*. Allen & Unwin. Revised second edition, 1952. 356 pp. 30s.

This is a welcome second edition of a book first published in 1927, comprising a history of the farm and farming routine from neolithic times to the present day. Information about husbandry, ordinarily dispersed in many different places—in works of contemporary literature, in treatises on husbandry, and among printed editions of documents—is here brought together in a single narrative. On this account, the book is extremely useful. Its serious shortcoming in 1954, however, is that the interwoven commentary, based on secondary works, is badly out-of-date. This would not matter so much, were the new edition not described as a *revised edition*. It is revised, but in the most niggardly fashion, and the reader is given no indication of the principles on which the revision was carried out. The first three chapters on prehistoric agriculture have been considerably altered and the bibliography enlarged to take account of new archaeological evidence. But in the later chapters, one would think that historians had been asleep since 1927 for all the notice that is taken of their work. No alterations appear to have been made to the sections on medieval, sixteenth-, seventeenth-, and eighteenth-century husbandry, and only the slightest additions to and subtractions from the last chapter, which brings the history of farming through the nineteenth century up to the present day. The statement that "the great underlying cause of the breakdown of the manorial system was the increasing exhaustion of the soil," which was criticized when the book was first published, reappears again without any warning to the reader that it is still a much-disputed opinion, not an established fact.

The chief disappointment of the revised edition, however, lies in its omissions. The uninformed reader will go away starved of information which in the last twenty-five years has immensely deepened our understanding of field systems, and infused new life into the old discussions about open-field

husbandry. There are none but the slightest hints in this book of the differences of farming practice between regions, and none of the variety and flexibility of cropping arrangements, devised within the framework of the old system, to keep it working as economic circumstances changed. Here the fields are

represented as either open or enclosed—a view which credits our ancestors with none of the resourcefulness and ingenuity in getting a living which they displayed in building their churches, protecting their homes, and evading their taxes.

JOAN THIRSK

THE AGRICULTURAL HISTORY REVIEW

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