

Book Reviews

NILS HYBEL, *Crisis or Change. The Concept of Crisis in the Light of Agrarian Structural Reorganization in Late Medieval England*, trans. James Manley, Aarhus UP, 1989, xxiv + 333pp. 220 DKK.

It is always more interesting to write about the eventful than the uneventful. 'Crises' and 'revolutions' have thus become the stock-in-trade of historians, especially of those endeavouring to animate accounts of socio-economic trends during the pre-industrial centuries, with their pronounced continuities and generally slow tempi of change. Few 'revolutions' have been claimed of the period from the thirteenth to the fifteenth centuries, at least as far as the agrarian relations of production are concerned, but the 'crisis' literature is substantial and growing. It is with the latter that *Crisis or change* is concerned. No new research findings are presented; instead this is an exercise in historiography.

The medieval crisis debate began in the 1860s with an exchange between Frederic Seebohm and Thorold Rogers as to the demographic impact and social and economic consequences of the Black Death (on and off, these have remained central concerns ever since). Hybel rehearses their arguments and then traces the issue as it was taken up and developed by subsequent scholars, demonstrating the emergence of different concepts of crisis. Five main definitions/theories of crisis are identified, each stressing contrasting elements within the mix of endogenous and exogenous factors, whose conjunction lends this period its enduring intellectual fascination. Hence, we see a 'neo-classical' theory of crisis, stressing monetary factors and the crisis of income experienced by landlords during the late middle ages; a 'political and constitutional' theory of crisis, with its emphasis on the role of government, war, and taxation; an 'epidemiological' theory of crisis, attributing central importance to a mortality-induced demographic collapse with plague as its main agent; a neo-Marxist 'crisis of feudalism' and the socio-property relations embodied by lordship and serfdom; and a 'neo-Malthusian' crisis, which interprets the demographic, economic, and ecological problems of the fourteenth century as the price paid for over-expansion during the previous two centuries.

These theories are discussed within a chronological framework – 1865–66, 1888–90, 1884–1915, 1900–30, 1930–50, 1950–60, and post-1960 – determined by the stages by which historical debate and enquiry progressed. Unfortunately, while this may elucidate the history of the debate it makes for a very disjointed exposition of the issues being debated. Nor is the discussion up to date, since it stops short of the crucial Brenner debate of the late 1970s and the major restatement of a variety of viewpoints to which this

gave rise. These are serious defects. Nevertheless, those who teach and research the period will be grateful for Hybel's extensive survey of a partially forgotten literature and for the many unresolved issues which this exposes. The book is handsomely produced, although indifferently translated, and its final plea for more systematic research into the crucial half-century before the Black Death is timely.

BRUCE M S CAMPBELL

R A LOMAS and A J PIPER, eds, *Durham Cathedral Priory Rentals, volume 1, Bursar's Rentals*, Surtees Society, CXCVIII, Durham, 1989, 286 pp. 1 map. £14 (incl p & p).

The latest volume of Surtees Society publications of texts from Durham Cathedral is an edition of five fiscal documents compiled between the thirteenth and fifteenth centuries: valuation (c 1230); rent-roll (1270); bursar's rental (1340–1); bursar's rental (1396–7); and bursar's rent book (1495–6). The volume includes a gazetteer, an extensive index, and a small map.

The editing is of very high quality. The text is expanded and doubtful expansions of the vernacular indicated. Erasures, deletions and subsequent interpolations are clearly marked. Each document has a detailed introduction on location, format, hand, and dating where appropriate. The quality of editing and the variety of documents makes it especially useful to students wishing to get the 'feel' of a medieval account before proceeding to tackle the real thing.

The somewhat unusual selection principle appears to be that these documents are the earliest instances of their type in the Priory records. Nevertheless it has the considerable advantage of collecting in one volume an overview of estate administration over a much broader period than is usual. This presents great opportunities to the editors, but for these to be exploited to the full, with maximum benefit to the reader, the quality of the historical introduction to the documents has to match the quality of their textual presentation.

Regrettably, historical comments on the texts are disappointingly brief, especially with respect to the first and last. The 1230 valuation is connected with papal taxation, which is mentioned, but since its nature is not explained the reader's comprehension of both the document itself and its difference from later estate records is unnecessarily restricted. The late fifteenth-century bursar's rent book is fascinating, showing rents being paid piecemeal in both cash and kind. A longer commentary on this would have been most welcome, particularly if the editors had been able to explain why this developed and whether it was a purely local phenomenon.

The book will doubtless be of great interest to local historians, including non-specialists. Bearing the latter in mind it is excellent that the text is expanded, making the work much more accessible, but a pity that explanations of customary terms (like *wodeladpennies*) is confusingly found partially in the index and mainly in the middle of the gazetteer. A note to this effect at the front would have been useful to this far from negligible category of readers.

MARIE STINSON

operated in Lancashire and along the Welsh border during the 1670s. Horses, like cars, were status symbols which depreciated quickly. Once past work the horse was worth no more than the knacker would offer, since the English had no stomach for horse-meat. Why this should have been the case – especially when their continental cousins regularly feasted on the product – is not clear.

DONALD WOODWARD

PETER EDWARDS, *The Horse Trade of Tudor and Stuart England*. CUP, 1988. xii + 205 pp. £22.50.

Under Mary and Elizabeth I increasing concern with horse stealing led to legislation which decreed that all transactions involving horses should be recorded: the resultant toll books reveal the buyers and sellers, the types of horses sold, their prices and characteristics such as their sex, colour, age and size, thus providing 'a range of information unrivalled among sources for inland trade'. Unfortunately, the survival of the toll books is patchy – both geographically and chronologically – but, by using them and other sources, Peter Edwards has been able to present a fascinating picture of the equine world of Tudor and Stuart England. As in other branches of agriculture there was substantial regional specialization: breeding was more concentrated in the north and west, and also in pasture regions of lowland England such as the Fens, and rearing was more prevalent in the East Midlands and southern counties, although it is difficult to generalize since both activities were practised in all districts on a small scale and there was a bewilderingly complex movement of horses and their offspring about the country. Under the triple stimulus of rising population, growing commerce and the increasing switch from oxen to horses within agriculture, both the quality and quantity of output improved substantially. With this excellent study of the horse trade Peter Edwards has opened up a little-frequented section of early modern English agriculture.

Perhaps the chief delight for the reader of this book is to discover the similarity between the early horse trade and the trade in second-hand motor cars. Peter Edwards does something to rescue the low opinion in which contemporaries held horse dealers but he admits that they drove a hard bargain, and just as many today 'can be taken in by the outward appearance of a second-hand car', so were gullible customers for horses frequently duped. Stolen horses could have their colour and markings changed – in the manner of a modern respray – and fraud ranged from the casual opportunity open to the dodgy salesman or youthful joy-rider to the organized crime practised by groups such as the Harrison gang, which

G C BAUGH, ed, *The Victoria History of the Counties of England: a History of Shropshire*, IV, OUP for the Institute of Historical Research, 1990. xix + 293 pp. Maps; illus. £60.

PAUL STAMPER, *'The Farmer Feeds us All': a Short History of Shropshire Agriculture*, Shropshire Books, Shrewsbury, 1989, vii + 78 pp. Illus. £4.75.

The early volumes of the *VCH*, published in the first two decades of this century, commonly included an overview of agriculture. These are now so out of date – some were even written before Lord Ernle's book appeared – as to be almost useless. Happily, the projected Shropshire histories failed to materialize until the modern revival of the scheme, so that, uniquely, we have a volume which is entirely devoted to agriculture and which is as authoritative as we could wish. The seven contributors – including the present Secretary of the *BAHS* – have done an enormous amount of new research and have presented it within a framework of ideas that will be immediately recognizable to readers of this *Review*. They succeed admirably in providing both an overview of this rather remote part of England and a quarry of rich pickings for those in search of comparative details.

But that is not all there is to applaud. Paul Stamper, the assistant editor responsible for the early chapters, has also written a short, well-illustrated, popular account of the county's agriculture, the third in a series of *VCH* booklets that present the latest research to a wider audience. The committee of the *BAHS* has long been concerned by the general ignorance, even in schools, of the work that during the last four decades has transformed our understanding of agricultural history. In Shropshire, at least, the laymen can now obtain readable, concise information, attractively packaged at a modest price.

Shropshire is still one of England's least-populated, most obviously agricultural counties. It is probably fair to say that its history is not of major interest to the outsider until the early-modern period. It was then that a series of connected changes shifted the emphasis from sheep to cattle. Shropshire had always been a pastoral county, now it became overwhelmingly so. The relatively small acreages

devoted to open-field husbandry were already being reduced by enclosure during the late middle ages; few systems remained intact as late as the era of parliamentary enclosure. During the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries thousands of acres of commons and wastes were enclosed, woods were converted into pastures and marshes and meres were drained. At the same time, copyhold tenures were commonly converted to leaseholds for three lives. The small farmer continued to keep sheep and pigs, but he put most of his resources into cattle. In many parts of the county the raising of stores was the main activity, but in the north the emphasis was on dairying and particularly on the rapidly-developing Cheshire cheese trade. Dr Peter Edwards's chapter on this formative period is central to the whole volume. It was during the early-modern period that Shropshire's agriculture acquired a distinctive character and became integrated into the national economy.

The subsequent history of the county's agriculture is broadly that of the country at large. Shropshire farmers, whether freeholders or tenants, profited from the general agricultural prosperity of the Georgian period and the era of Victorian High Farming. Although leases were almost universally replaced by rack rents, on many large estates farms continued to be held by one family for generations. The labourers fared far less well; wages were low and housing often bad. In the poorest areas, eg. Clun, the poor left the countryside in droves. Between 1870 and 1914 the county's agricultural workforce fell by 36 per cent. The twentieth century has seen inter-war slump, post-war recovery and revolutionary change. The new economic realities of the 1980s have led to projects that the most fertile minds of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries never dreamt of: places to see butterflies or old livestock and poultry breeds and even a snail farm. The future promises more diversity and ingenious enterprises, including a conscious rejection of some of the less savoury aspects of the agro-chemical industry of recent years.

DAVID HEY

A BAGOT and J MUNBY, eds, *'All Things is Well Here', Letters from Hugh James of Levens to James Grahme 1692-5*, Cumberland and Westmorland Antiquarian and Archaeological Society, Record Series, X, Carlisle 1988. xvii + 205 pp. No price given.

Annette Bagot and Julian Munby, who have cared for the archives at Levens Hall for more than forty years, have in this volume edited the 117 letters which Hugh James, the Levens steward, wrote almost weekly to his master, Colonel James Grahme, in London between 1692 and 1695. They provide an agreeable, unexceptional account from a loyal servant to a remote and demanding squire of impeccable

Jacobite connections. Their chief interest is that they record the building of the South Wing at Levens and, in less detail, the commencement of William Beaumont's famous work on its gardens. James's account of the difficulties encountered in building even a modest extension – the wing principally built to provide additional service accommodation cost no more than £500 in all – is a revealing one. With no architect's overall supervision and with Grahme making only migratory summer visits, a great deal of the responsibility of seeing that the largely estate-produced supplies of stone, timber and lime matched the irregular appearances of masons, joiners, and painters alike, of accommodating Grahme's demands, of re-utilizing old materials fell upon the steward. Engaged similarly with Beaumont in the garden, perhaps not surprisingly he succumbed to a fatal pleurisy from supervising work in a chill Cumbrian spring.

Interspersed with these preoccupations are James's reports on the home farm (especially its draught animals) and the requests made by and the exactions wrung from the Grahme tenantry. But both these subjects are dealt with only partially, because James was not Colonel Grahme's sole informant of events at Levens. The letters of his agent, Tim Banks, also survive, and for a complete picture one needs both these and the letters written in reply, however vile the hand and erratic the spelling, of Grahme himself. But this volume provides an attractive edition about the work and position of a steward on a smallish estate of a largely absentee owner. It is well collated and in addition provides plans, photographs, and a glossary besides reproducing contracts, inventories, and some specimen accounts.

R G WILSON

D R HAINSWORTH and CHERRY WALKER, eds, *The Correspondence of Lord Fitzwilliam of Milton and Francis Guybon, his Steward 1697-1709*, Northamptonshire Record Society, Northampton, 1990. xxiii + 312 pp. £18.

Eighteenth-century agricultural experts were unanimous in asserting that efficient estate management required frequent appearances by the owner on his property. Leaving everything to the steward was commonly considered a recipe for disaster. Yet for the historian a corresponding absentee is nothing but good news since the surviving letters often provide a vast store of evidence about how an estate operated. William, third Baron, later first Earl Fitzwilliam of Milton House, near Peterborough, was deeply interested in his estate even though he never managed to visit it in the years covered by this correspondence, 1697-1709. Despite his oft-repeated claims to be 'coming down', and despite frequent requests to do

so from his steward, somehow London had attractions which always managed to outweigh any appeal the Soke of Peterborough might have offered. Even his son's funeral was supervised from London. Fitzwilliam at least kept in touch, and by publishing the letters Hainsworth and Cherry have provided a wealth of information about management and farming on this estate, and incidentally about Fitzwilliam's personal and political background.

The letters cover a range of subjects including the 1696 recoinage, the Land Tax, the problems of returning money to London, the game (and particularly supplies of venison to be sent to Fitzwilliam), the health of the tenants, his own illnesses, London life, and agricultural and rent policies to be followed on the estate. The most persistent topic, however, is money; letter after letter implores, cajoles, and generally demands, money. Contemporaries were well aware that, in the absence of the landlord, stewards found it hard to collect rents and taxes. As these letters illustrate with almost monotonous regularity, Francis Guybon was no exception; the letters are excellent material for the historian, but Guybon would doubtless have forsworn them all for an occasional visit from Fitzwilliam. Overall a worthy volume to set beside Hainsworth's earlier edition of Lowther correspondence, and to go towards his promised book on stewardship.

J V BECKETT

D HUW OWEN, ed, *Settlement and Society in Wales*, University of Wales Press, Cardiff, 1989, xx + 315 pp, 62 figures, 12 plates, £35.

This handsomely-produced volume fills an important gap in British agrarian and landscape history for hitherto no such comprehensive, multi-disciplined approach to the complex, difficult subject of the evolution of settlement and agricultural organization has been available for the distinctive region of Wales. The many knotty problems that beset this subject are tackled head-on by a well-chosen team of experts whose joint enterprise has yielded up the best overview we have of the making of the Welsh landscape.

After pertinent observations are made in both the editor's valuable introduction and in Glanmor Williams's essay on 'Local and National History in Wales' – which he himself has done so much to foster and shape – as to the crucial role of local studies in landscape history, there follows a number of scholarly essays on 'The Welsh Landform' (D Q Bowen), 'Vegetation' (William Linnard), 'The Landscape' (Frank Emery), 'Place-names' (Gwynedd Pierce), 'Houses and Building Styles' (Peter Smith), and

'Archaeology' (H N Savory). This reviewer found the essay by the much-lamented Frank Emery especially stimulating in its scope and authority. All these aforementioned chapters, drawing on a wide range of disciplines, provide a vital explanatory framework for the more conventionally 'historical' essays that follow, chapters which deal with 'The Dark Ages' (Glanville R J Jones), 'The Middle Ages' (D Huw Owen), 'The Emergence of the Modern Settlement Pattern 1450–1700' (Matthew Griffiths), 'Rural Settlements in the Modern Period' (Colin Thomas), and 'Urban and Industrial Settlement in the Modern Period, 1750–1914' (Harold Carter).

In these latter authoritative chapters, collectively containing much new research, we are, in particular, presented with a picture of the evolution of settlement in so far as upland Wales was concerned (comprising the area of *pura Wallia* to the north and west of the Anglicized, manorialized lowlands of the south and borders) from the old tribal order and its 'gwely' communal ownership pattern, which dominated before around 1350, into consolidated, scattered farms which emerged in the late Middle Ages and the century or so after 1500. The pressures forcing through this change both internal ones as escheat, and the operation of 'cyfran' or gavelkind and of the *prid* mortgage under Welsh land law, and external ones as population decline in the later Middle Ages and the damaging impact of Glyndwr's rebellion, are carefully assessed as, too, are the factors catalysing this changing pattern of settlement after 1500, notably population growth. The transformation of the landscape after 1700, too, was largely owing to population pressure and the part played by enclosure in remodelling the landscape after 1700 is underlined. While Colin Thomas's chapter on post-1700 rural settlements is valuable and demonstrates the marvellous contribution to agrarian history which can be made by historical geographers adept at measurement techniques, the discussion would have been even better had he pointed to the intermixture of property in the eighteenth century which rendered improvements impracticable, to the end of the 'great estates' from around 1900 and to the increasing tendency in the later nineteenth century for married farm labourers to live in villages. Appropriately, the final chapter considers the 'new' type of settlement of mining towns and villages and of coastal ports growing up with the industrial revolution from the late eighteenth century.

Students of agricultural and settlement history will benefit from reading this volume, not least from the discussion devoted to the value and application of different categories of source material. All the essays make a substantial contribution; those of Matthew Griffiths and D Huw Owen are outstanding.

D W HOWELL

DENNIS MILLS and CAROL PEARCE, *People and Places in the Victorian Census: a review and bibliography of publications based substantially on the manuscript Census Enumerators' Books, 1841-1911*, Historical Geography Research Group, Historical Geography Research series, 23, Cheltenham, 1989. ii + 144 pp. £3.50.

Since the 1960s, historians, geographers and a few sociologists and anthropologists have made considerable use of the census enumerators' books of the nineteenth century, to penetrate behind the aggregated tables which feature in the published census reports. In a brief introduction, Dennis Mills discusses some of the census-takers' foibles yet concludes, rightly, that the enumerators' books are 'a mine of largely reliable economic, demographic and social information' on the Victorian population. Approximately four hundred studies are listed including Ireland (42), Scotland (19) and Wales (43). The English studies are therefore much more numerous, but as Mills shows, far from evenly distributed. Lancashire and Yorkshire, together with Lincolnshire among the more rural counties have received most attention (61, 42 and 26 studies respectively). By contrast there are two each for Norfolk and Hertfordshire, one for Wiltshire, and apparently none which focus on communities in Cumberland, Huntingdonshire, or Gloucestershire. This shows that the source is far from having been mined to the point of exhaustion, especially when the ever-increasing scope for longitudinal studies is borne in mind, with the accession of successive data sets under the hundred-year rule.

The four hundred studies range from the highly professional works of scholars such as Anderson, Foster, Lawton, and Dennis through to loving compilations prepared by enthusiastic amateurs or WEA groups and published more obscurely. In each case, the content of the work and the use made of census data is sketched out. Many, of course, focus on towns or industrial communities, but some deal with issues of direct interest to readers of this journal, eg, farm labour in Warwickshire (R Peek); population and enclosure on Exmoor (R Scott); East Yorkshire's agricultural labour force (J Sheppard); tenancy turnover on the Ashburnham estate (B Short); Irish farming families before the First World War (D Fitzpatrick); the social position of commoners in Herefordshire (G Charnock); landownership in Leicestershire (J Allsopp); family farming in Hartland, Devon (M Bouquet); the structure of farming in Rutland (A Chinnerrey) etc. Many more offer snapshots and sometimes moving pictures of individual villages, among them Cardington, Laxton, and North and South Rauceby; or of small market towns such as Ashbourne, Lewes and Thirsk. The entries are listed in alphabetical order (by author) but they are

also arranged by county and by subject in a useful matrix. From this one can see at a glance, say, that there are eleven studies of Kent, for example, and which places and topics they examine.

This publication yields a rich harvest of useful references for general research and teaching purposes, and will be indispensable to anyone contemplating a similar study. It is excellent value for money.

W A ARMSTRONG

A D M PHILLIPS, *The Underdrainage of Farmland in England during the Nineteenth Century*, CUP, 1989. xv + 315 pp. 52 maps and diagrams. £32.50.

It was estimated in the mid-nineteenth century that about half the farmland of England suffered from the deleterious effects of excess surface water. Historians have since contested this figure but it goes a long way to explain the importance of this subject in contemporary thinking. This major aspect of Victorian agricultural improvement has long awaited its historian.

In this monograph Tony Phillips has produced an impressively authoritative summary of the many debates in this area of research, to which he has himself already contributed significantly, and has incorporated new research and brought the whole together in ways that will quickly make this the standard work. Focusing on historical controversies that emerged most noticeably in the 1960s, he has combed through myriad archival evidence to create a picture of contemporary views of the need for underdraining, of the spatial location and temporal patterns of post-1845 draining schemes and of the sources, scale and management of financial resources.

His chief finding is that underdraining was a major component in the rise of agricultural productivity, outside the South and the East, in the three decades after 1845 (the Golden Age of underdraining) and that its recuperative effect on the arable was so great that many farmers were persuaded to stay in corn even though relative price movements suggest that their best interests would have been served by switching to grass and stock. Nonetheless, by returning good heart to many of the nation's arable fields, this improvement prepared soils well for conversion to grass when corn prices fell from the mid-1870s. A question mark is raised over the association, often found in historical literature, between clay soils and underdraining, by pointing out that drainage was introduced on other soils than clays and that in any case not all claylands were drained.

Analysis of the loans administered under the Public Money Drainage Acts (clearly a gold-mine of information) corroborates the conclusions derived from study of a sample of estates in Devon, Northampton and Northumberland and the outcome

is used to cast light on old controversies. A salutary reminder is given of the extent to which regional and local variations serve to qualify generalizations about national developments. As compensation for the frustrating scarcity of evidence of investment by tenants and owners of small estates we are offered a magisterial appraisal of other available evidence. Even though a quibble, it should however be said that readers (like this reviewer) might find the frequency with which data is presented in map and diagrammatic form to be an excess of riches. And the use of gross rather than received rents in chapter four can convey a misleading impression of the burdens of drainage outlay on true estate income. But these are minor points.

Perhaps at some later date Dr Phillips will set underdraining into the broad context of general farming improvements. Here, whilst acknowledging the inter-related nature of farming progress – draining of wet soils and the replacement of obsolete farm buildings were often undertaken as part of an integrated plan – he forbears to take up these more speculative issues. This is a pity, for his comments would have been extremely valuable. But, in any case, agricultural historians are already heavily in Dr Phillips's debt for this major contribution to knowledge of progress in Victorian farming.

ROY STURGESS

PETER BENES, ed, *The Farm*, Boston University, Mass, 1988. 192 pp; 4 maps; 11 figs; 34 plates. \$9.00.

The Farm is a collection of nine articles selected from the papers given at the 1986 Dublin (New Hampshire) Seminar for New England Folklife. Three of the articles, based on journals kept by farmers in the nineteenth century (from Nova Scotia, Massachusetts, and Maine), form the first section of the book, and are preceded by a discussion of cooperation between farmers in Maine, for the purpose of assisting one another in farm operations, road maintenance, building work, and care of the sick and needy. Taken together, the four articles throw much light on the day-to-day working of the farms and its highly seasonal nature. Also revealing are the extent to which goods and services were paid for in kind rather than cash, the use made of borrowing and credit, the families' political and religious views, and their use of leisure.

A second group of three papers deals with farm improvement, beginning with an account of a family of gentleman farmers, whose members included a doctor and a storekeeper and tavern keeper. A further discussion considers the role of the New England agricultural press in fostering technical advances in the first half of the nineteenth century. The journals provided a forum for the exchange of readers' advice

and information, and even attempted to promote good taste in the architecture of farm buildings and ornamentation of grounds. The third paper is concerned with the various ways in which Massachusetts farmers adapted to changing market trends in the early nineteenth century, notably in meeting the demand from the expanding non-farm population, in satisfying the rising industrial market for raw materials such as wool, hides, and timber, and in reducing wheat production in response to increased western competition.

The paper which is perhaps of greatest direct interest to British readers, however, concerns the introduction from Europe, especially England, of cattle, sheep, and swine into coastal New England in the first century of settlement beginning in 1620. Devon cattle, for example, were popular among the settlers, while the original sheep brought to eastern Massachusetts were Wiltshire Horns, though there were also Old Leicesters and Romney Marsh sheep, the last especially well suited for survival in harsh New England winters.

Lastly, a commentary on seventeen most interesting contemporary illustrations of farmhouses and farming scenes of the period 1790–1865 provides an attractive conclusion. The volume is rounded off both by an informative editor's introduction, and by valuable bibliographies of primary and printed sources relating to the American north-east.

With its numerous illustrations, which help greatly to bring the text to life, the volume provides the kind of detailed local history which is the essential underpinning of regional studies, and succeeds admirably in putting flesh on the bare bones of textbook generalizations. It should be read by all English scholars who want to gain a deeper understanding of American rural history, and the book makes a worthy addition to the publications of the Dublin Seminar. And, at nine dollars, it is extraordinarily good value for money.

G E MINGAY

Z A MEDVEDEV, *Soviet Agriculture*, Norton, 1987. xiv + 464 pp; 3 maps. £17.95.

Agriculture has been the Achilles' heel of the Soviet economy since the revolution in 1917. At that time, the vast majority of people in Russia were peasants, engaged in traditional forms of farming. Although Imperial Russia was a major grain exporter and some improvements had been introduced onto a minority of farms by the turn of the century, average yields were low and rural poverty remained a problem. The period since the Revolution has seen an expansion of agricultural output (today the Soviet Union is included among the world's leading producers of cereals, some livestock products, and technical crops), but this

achievement has to be seen against a background of the growth of the nation's population, three major famines, increasing inefficiency, and, at times, grave human suffering. Today, many foodstuffs are rationed in Soviet cities and the prospects for an immediate improvement are slight. *Soviet Agriculture* is an analysis of why the world's first experiment in socialist farming has had such a chequered history. Its author, Zhores Medvedev, is well qualified to have undertaken the analysis; born just before the collectivization drive swept peasant farms from rural Russia, he trained as a biologist and geneticist. He witnessed, and later took part in, the post-war debates about how to reverse the cumulative affects on agriculture of Stalin's neglect, World War II's destruction, and Lysenko's domination of agrobiology. After a spell in a Soviet mental hospital for his dissident activities, Medvedev was exiled from the Soviet Union in 1973 just at the time when the signs of a terminal stagnation in agriculture were becoming apparent. Medvedev has had to observe the latest chapter in Soviet agriculture's fortunes from afar but his observations have remained perceptive.

One advantage that Medvedev has over political economists writing on Soviet agriculture is that his scientific background means that he understands the biology of agricultural systems. In the text he makes good use of this knowledge to explain why decisions on farm practice taken by the political leadership have had variable success. As a result he is able to go much further than others in untangling the influence of organization, politics and agronomy on Soviet agriculture's failures. For example, he is the first author I have read who satisfactorily explains why the much expanded use of mineral fertilizers since the 1960s has made no appreciable difference to yields; the answer lies in the chemical composition of the fertilizers manufactured in the Soviet Union which are not suited to many of its soils. Medvedev's scientific knowledge is combined with an understanding of the workings of the Soviet bureaucracy that only someone who has lived most of his life in the country can possess. Medvedev understands how the agro-industrial complex's various parts fit together, and how they articulate with the rest of the Soviet economic and political system. Fortunately for non-specialist readers, he does not assume too much prior knowledge so it is easy to follow his account of the organizational changes that have taken place since collectivization. The text is also enriched by personal reminiscences about people he met when working in biology and references to his own research interests.

The book falls into two main parts; the first is an historical account of agricultural policy from the Revolution to Khrushchev's fall in 1964 and the second is a systematic discussion of the sources of weakness in post-war agriculture. The account of the

collectivization drive provides a useful reminder of the lasting effects that upheaval had on rural society and farm production. The loss of five million households in the 1930s as a result of deportation, famine, and flight undermined the rural labour force and peasant morale. This, plus the slaughter of livestock in protest against collectivization, the constant interference by Party members in intermediate production decisions, and the economic discrimination practised against the collective farms and their members, ensured that Stalin bequeathed to his successors an economic, social, and ecological disaster of mammoth proportions. Medvedev explains the subsequent failure to overcome this bequest by the reluctance of any of the post-Stalin leaders to question the legitimacy of collectivization and of the social ownership of agricultural resources; attempts to increase productivity through 'chemicalization', mechanization, and administrative changes were ultimately limited by a continuing faith in the collective and state farm system. Medvedev argues that the solution to Soviet agriculture's problem lies in a more flexible approach to farm organization (including the legalization of private farm ownership) a precondition for which is a critical reappraisal of the decision to collectivize in the 1930s. Some of Medvedev's recommendations have been voiced by other specialists in the Soviet Union in recent years and Gorbachev himself has expressed sympathy for the idea of greater organizational flexibility. However, there also are powerful oppositional forces to any de-collectivization. In the preface to his book Medvedev writes: 'I wanted to present it (Soviet agriculture) as a political, economic, social, or scientific experiment in which the final results differed from those originally expected.' He has succeeded in doing this, but he has also shown that the experiment continues, the outcome remaining just as unpredictable as in the past.

JUDITH PALLOT

ELINOR M C ROPER, *Seedtime: the History of Essex Seeds*, Phillimore, Chichester, 1989. xvi + 294 pp. Illus. £14.95.

Seed growing in Essex has a history stretching from at least the seventeenth century to the present. Its longevity demonstrates the tenacity of an agricultural innovation where favourable climate, soil, and social conditions are augmented by longstanding local expertise. Unfortunately, this book does not do justice to an important subject, a disappointment given the wealth of material the author has collected.

Two introductory chapters trace English seed growing from 'the pre-glacial era' to 1750. In the first chapter supposition usually replaces historical evidence: we are told that Roman London *must* have

had a seed trade, although the author has found 'no mention of any such trade until centuries later'. The rest of the book describes the Essex seed industry in the eighteenth to twentieth centuries, with most space devoted to the last hundred years. Much information has been amassed on local growers, merchants, and labourers. The reminiscences of those involved with seeds are interesting; these passages demonstrate the considerable knowledge held by Essex seed farmers of growing, breeding, harvesting, and storing seeds, and the formidable hazards faced by them from pests, disease, cross-pollination, and weather. One reads of the complexity of relationships between seed merchants and large- and small-scale producers, and the ease with which smallholders could begin seed growing. Also covered are the major seed merchants and local industries which served growers and merchants such as agricultural engineering and sieve making.

This book is not well organized. Material is arranged in sections of varying quality, loosely held together in chapters. Some of the eleven appendices are useful, most are superfluous. The author seems loath to discard any information collected and, as a result, the text has a 'curate's egg' quality. No knowledge of modern agricultural historiography is displayed; Townshend and Tull are given prominence in a discussion of turnips and a recommendation of turnips as cattle fodder in 1723 is described as 'early' (cf Blithe, 1653; Speed, 1659). Some factual errors mar the text: Sir Richard Weston is renamed 'Hugh' and Sir Hugh Plat is said to have been writing in the 1640s – he died in 1608. Many of the illustrations are line drawings which do little but fill space although photographs of work in progress on seed farms do complement the text. The book, despite the imperfections, is useful as a source of information on the most important seed-growing area of England.

MALCOLM THICK

NAGATSUKA TAKASHI, translated with an introduction by ANN WASWO, *The Soil: a Portrait of Rural Life in Meiji Japan*, Routledge, 1989. xviii + 204 pp. £25. *The Soil* is a novel written in 1910 by the literarily-inclined son of a landowning family living in a village to the north-west of Tokyo. It was published in serial form in a Tokyo newspaper the same year and has

continued to arouse both controversy and admiration as an example of naturalistic writing, finally achieving, in recent years, the respectability of a set text in university entrance exams. Nagatsuka based the novel on his own village and many of his characters on its real inhabitants, so that, for the agricultural historian, its chief interest lies in its detailed and faithful depiction of life and work in a rural community in turn-of-the-century Japan.

Through the lives of the characters over a number of years, readers can follow the agricultural cycle, observe the festivals and ceremonies which mark the passage of time, and trace the social relations within and between households, all against the background of the sometimes devastating forces of nature. What emerges is not altogether a pretty picture: Nagatsuka gives an unsentimental account of the village as a world of gossip, petty meannesses, and few uplifting virtues. The main character, a tenant farmer struggling to survive on the fringes of village society, is dishonest, morose, and at times cruel, although he battles through to better times by means of grim hard work, on the part of himself and his relentlessly oppressed daughter, and some protection from his patron/landlord. Conditions within the village reflect the improving standards of life in Japanese rural areas at the time and the strife we observe is not born so much of economic and class inequalities as of the niggling quarrels and resentments of inter-connected households, smoothed over by social pressures to preserve harmony.

Ann Waswo provides an excellent introduction to the ethnographic background of the novel and to interpretations of it, and her translation reads smoothly, although difficulties in conveying the local dialect which Nagatsuka used leave the dialogue sounding more formal and stilted than perhaps seems appropriate. Waswo notes that the real-life model for the novel's chief female character lived until 1978 and for those seeking to appreciate the real dimensions of the economic transformation which has taken place in Japan over one life-time, as well as those interested in a wealth of unromanticized detail and insight into Japanese rural life, *The Soil* can be thoroughly recommended.

PENELOPE FRANCKS

Shorter Notices

GAVIN KITCHING, *Development and Underdevelopment in Historical Perspective*, 2nd, revised edition, Routledge, 1989. xii + 209 pp. £30 (hbk); £6.95 (pbk).

This is a re-issue of Gavin Kitching's 1982 text tracing the line of 'populist' and nationalist reactions to the social and economic costs of industrialization, from nineteenth-century agrarian socialist thinkers through to the various influential contemporary writers whose thoughts went to constitute the anti-industrial 'radical orthodoxy' of development studies in the 1970s. This edition includes a new postscript which discusses the issues raised in the original in the light of the shift, during the 1980s, to a more free-market approach to industrialization strategy within major development agencies, and, very briefly, brings the case-studies of Tanzania and China up to date. It also attempts to answer, or at least justify the author against, the criticism that the original hovered uncertainly between the history of ideas and the sociology of knowledge. The text remains a stimulating and clear critique of ideas still widely current and should continue to provide undergraduates in development fields, or history students interested in the recurrence of agrarianist responses to industrialization, with a challenging introduction, though those with access to the original edition need not, I think, rush out to buy this one.

PENELOPE FRANCKS

HAROLD B CLINGERMAN, *Field Man. The Chronicle of a Bank Farm Manager in the 1940s*, Iowa State University Press, Ames, Iowa, 1989. xii + 183pp, \$19.95.

During the Great Depression the United States National Bank in Omaha acquired some 400 farms through foreclosure. To manage and eventually sell these farms when they could realize the full value of their listed price the bank hired 'Field Men' or supervisors. Harold Clingerman was such a Field Man between 1941 and 1948 and his autobiographical account describes the 'nitty-gritty' of small-scale farming in Nebraska in those years. For readers interested in agricultural, rural, social and economic history this memoir is useful in showing how leasing arrangements worked, which crops were grown and

why, what happened to tenants when farms were sold, how and when repairs were made, how government agencies operated and what war-time shortages meant. Clingerman, a 'local boy' with wide knowledge of farming and some experience in real-estate, conveys the positive role in which his Omaha bank sought to help rebuild a shattered agricultural economy. His story is interesting and is clearly written and though limited in its implications, gives a contrasting and refreshing picture to the macro-analysis found in a standard chapter of a United States Economic History textbook.

MARGARET WALSH

STEPHEN DUCK, *The Thresher's Labour*; MARY COLLIER, *The Woman's Labour; Two Eighteenth Century Poems*, with an introduction by E P Thompson, The Merlin Press, 1989. xvi + 30 pp. Illus. £4.95.

Duck's poem is a graphic illustration of the hard physical lot of the agricultural labourer in the eighteenth century. His description of the monotony, sheer hard physical work and long hours will surprise no agricultural historian. As Thompson points out, Duck's analysis of threshing belies any notion that mechanical and repetitive labour was the product of industrialization and the production line. The arduous male working day is underlined by Duck's dismissal of female workers as marginal contributors to agricultural labour, who gossip, waste time, and perform only light work. In Duck's opinion, it is a pity women's hands are not as active as their tongues.

His onslaught was challenged by Mary Collier who had worked as a washerwoman, household brewer, and housekeeper. Her response is a highly informative catalogue of the hard physical work performed by women in agriculture, domestic industry, and household production. Her poem is an evocative portrayal of both the gender and class oppression of women in the eighteenth century.

The two poems, together with Thompson's informative short bibliographical introduction, are not only entertaining but also highly informative on a whole range of subjects of interest to economic and social historians. In twenty-six pages there is evidence of the nature of agricultural labour, social class

relations between farmer and labourer, male attitudes to women as wives and workers, the contribution women made to agriculture, and household production and the gender class system in the eighteenth century. Both poems are witty, spirited and well worth reading.

SUE BOWDEN

E J T COLLINS, A K GILES AND J G K MALLESON, (eds), *Innovation and Conservation: Ernest Edward Cook and his country estates*, Reading: Department of Agricultural Economics/Institute of Agricultural History, Reading University, 1989. 155 pp. + statistical appendix. 1 map; 21 plates. £7.50 (incl p&p)

The story told in this book is a little-known and fascinating one. Ernest Edward Cook sold his interest in the family travel firm in 1928. A rich bachelor, his interest turned to purchasing country estates, with a view to preserving the endangered landlord/tenant system, which he valued for its economic and social effects. By the time of his death in 1955, he had purchased seventeen estates, covering 37,000 acres. Some of these were sold or went to the National Trust; six (14,000 acres) were retained in the Ernest Cook Trust, whose story is told here. Essentially, it may be said that the ECT has achieved its primary aim of preventing sale and fragmentation of these estates, but this volume also shows how the Trust has reacted (up to 1985) to the pressures on large estates. The greatest challenge has been to find the capital to invest in farms which were already by the 1930s severely run-down. This task has been exacerbated by the post-Second World War shift from grass to arable in lowland England (where the estates were all situated) which required even more capital. But the challenge was met, and a heavy investment programme brought its rewards, in the form of higher rental income, thus permitting the ECT to continue its investment programme (including building estate houses), and to engage in the educational work which was also part of its aims.

The editors and authors have written a very useful volume, which gives a clear idea of the forces recently affecting large estates, and devotes some space, and

some good photographs, to the present condition of the estates and their buildings. Altogether a useful contribution to agricultural and environmental history.

P E DEWEY

Agricultura y Sociedad, 53, October – December 1989, Ministerio de Agricultura, Pesca y Alimentación, Madrid, 1200 ptas; *Revista de Estudios Agro-Sociales*, 149, July – September 1989, Ministerio de agricultura, Pesca y Alimentación, Madrid, 1200 ptas.

The Spanish Ministry of Agriculture has for many years published a variety of works on the wider aspects of agrarian change, including its economic, social and political implications. Not least, it has strongly encouraged research into Spain's agricultural history. The Ministry's publications are generally well-priced and greatly in demand by economic historians, agricultural economists and others. Since 1958 the Ministry of Agriculture has published the journal, *Revista de Estudios Agro-Sociales*, joined in 1976 by another periodical – possibly of more use to agricultural historians – *Agricultura y Sociedad*. Both journals follow a standard format of about six to a dozen articles, including review articles, detailed book reviews and a synopsis of the periodical literature. Often, a fair amount of material included is translated, and all articles contain brief summaries in French and English.

The Winter 1989 edition of *Agricultura y Sociedad* comprises a special issue on technical change in the agriculture and foodstuffs sector, edited by Alfredo Cadenas Marín. The Autumn 1989 issue of the *Revista de Estudios Agro-Sociales* contains articles on such topics as the demand for Galician shellfish, artificial intelligence in agriculture, reafforestation and the impact of Spain's EC membership on the agriculture of the Canary Islands. Its book review section is excellent and informative, especially so for a country where objective criticism in the social sciences is an underdeveloped art.

JOSEPH HARRISON