

Book Reviews

Britain and Ireland

ERIC JONES and PATRICK DILLON, *Middle Ridgeway and its environment* (Wessex Books, 2016). 144pp., 20 illus. £16.95

The introduction to *Middle Ridgeway and its environment* asks how the interaction between changing patterns of land use and ecology has shaped southern England. The authors elect to answer this question by using one small area – just a ‘short stretch of the Middle Ridgeway’ (p. 125) as an ‘open-air laboratory’ (p. 10) – to highlight important factors in the environmental evolution of the whole region. That they chose to minutely focus on a locality with which both authors – and the illustrator – have strong connections is an asset rather than a liability. That the Middle Ridgeway area is well-documented archaeologically and historically is also in its favour, although as well as using it as a microcosm of the wider region, the authors use sources from other parts of the whole, such as Gilbert White in Selborne, to shed light on some of the darker corners of their chosen locale. Sources closer to home include the various members of the Cornish family, Richard Jeffries, John Orr and J. B. Spearing, as well as antiquarians, farm accounts, trade directories, local newspapers, and oral testimony collected over the past 50 or 60 years, which can take us back to the last decades of the nineteenth century.

Readers of the *Review* have varied interests, and the eight chapters of this short book contain something for everyone. First the authors set the scene. It is not about the Ridgeway as a route, nor is it a ‘walking’ book, although it has already made one of this reviewer’s walks a great deal more interesting. It is, rather, a ‘descriptive study’ (p. 10) of the still somewhat remote ‘ecological island’ (p. 15) through which the Ridgeway passes, between Avebury and Streatley; even within this, the environs of Ashbury are more often than not in the foreground.

Chapter Two on ‘Prehistory and early history’ describes the rich archaeological landscape of this area with its many Neolithic long barrows along the chalk escarpment followed by the Ridgeway, the ‘path of

“least cost” travelling east-west along the downs’ (p. 30), although not necessarily a long-distance highway in this period. The authors also evoke the bio-landscape – ‘teeming and resonating with wildlife’ (p. 32) and the development of a mixed pastoral and agrarian economy through this period.

In Chapter Three, ‘The London market’, we embark upon the first of the ‘themed’ chapters. The pull of the capital (‘like tugging a great bag into a new shape’, p. 47) consolidated the Ridgeway as a trans-regional routeway, requiring energy to be spent on climbing up to it but remaining dry underfoot. Grain wagons appeared in the seventeenth century, only to be eclipsed by the Kennet and Avon Canal in the eighteenth, but sheep – thousands of them, followed, in a dry year, by a pall of dust – continued to be driven along it into the twentieth century, until the introduction of lorries. Strangely, there is only one pub on the Ridgeway itself: the Shepherd’s Rest near Wanborough, though apparently Welsh drovers who returned by sea left their dogs to return overland, where they were ‘fed at the pubs their owners had visited on the inward journey’ (p. 40).

The chapter on ‘Ploughland and grassland’ forms a beautiful case study of the interplay between geography (soil type and slope), price fluctuations, and technological developments. Rather than the traditional phases of agriculture (open-field, enclosure, intensive), Jones and Dillon identify an alternative chronology: eighteenth-century sheep ranching; buoyant mixed farming during periods such as the Napoleonic Wars and the ‘Golden Age of High Farming’, alternating with periods of ‘tumbledown’ during which the ploughed turf never properly recovered; and a long agricultural depression lasting until the ploughing campaigns of the Second World War signalled the beginning of a long period of predominantly arable farming. The fortunes of agriculture are mirrored in the fortunes of the rabbit population (medieval warrens, with pillow-mounds still to be seen; population stability when rabbits were in competition with sheep: near the end of the eighteenth century, 24,000 rabbits a year could still be killed at Aldborough; decline and then, due

to the availability of crops, a population explosion; myxomatosis and with it the complete collapse of a whole ecosystem).

The succeeding chapter looks at the area through the prism of land ownership rather than land use, though the two are inextricably linked. From the time of the Roman villa onwards, land holdings have included both vale and downland, giving each farm a share of clay and chalk. Here the authors argue that the received chronology (individually owned strips farmed in common, followed by enclosed fields restricting ownership to the few) is still 'revealing' (p. 81). They speculate that enclosure had 'profound' impact on wildlife habitats, using as a baseline Roque's map – which this reviewer knows, from looking at South Berkshire, is one of the better-quality eighteenth-century maps. The social consequences of enclosure are also explored. In contrast to the enclosed landscape there are also the country estates, particularly those of the Earl of Craven, Ashdown Park – 'for long a sea of grass only intermittently assailed by the plough' (p. 90); and Lord Wantage at Ardington.

This leads us into the fourth 'theme', that of Chapter Six, 'Countryside sports'. This catalogues the human-on-animal blood sports that have been pursued down the ages, and also human-on-human contests such as 'single stick or back-swording combat' and shin kicking. The authors also describe the Scouring of the White Horse, a festival reported in the *Reading Mercury* as attended by 30,000 in 1780. Preservation of game for sport often has the side effect of conserving habitats for wildlife, and 'The wildlife legacy', as Chapter Seven is titled, looks at the effect the changing patterns of land use have had on the flora and fauna, mostly of the avian variety. Again, the authors have chosen to explore a wider issue through a 'microcosm', on the grounds of 'personal familiarity and quality of historical record' (p. 107). From the 1840s onwards there are a surprising number of ornithological sources for the area, from which they draw the conclusion that though every change in land use and ownership has resulted in species losing their habitats, other species have been able to move in: 'nothing is static' (p. 123). Sadly though, increasing diversity in land use has not been reflected in wildlife species and, as the concluding chapter emphasizes, this remote little corner of southern England is still under pressure from recreational as well as farming activity.

An idiosyncratic aspect of this book is its illustrations. Paintings by the daughter of one of the authors have been used to illustrate the landscape. They are bold, modernist and colourful, showing perhaps the influence of Fauvism and definitely of Spencer

Gore (both having painted 'The Icknield Way'). The stylization almost literally throws the landscape into sharp relief, but – apart from the fields of oil-seed rape, the colours are too vibrant to evoke the subtlety of this landscape. One hankers for some contemporary photographs to illustrate the countryside of the past two centuries – apparently there are some very early photographs of the Ashbury estate from about 1850 (p. 45) – or perhaps one or two works by William Affleck or James Seymour, both of whom are mentioned in the text. Anna Dillon's paintings are attractive but do little to support the text and perhaps make the book look less serious than it is. Despite a useful list of further reading there are neither footnotes nor index and, irritatingly, the running headings do not indicate which chapter you are in – so the book is not as well-signposted as the Ridgeway itself. Nevertheless *Middle Ridgeway* makes a thought-provoking and engaging book for anyone interested in the history of landscape and particularly those – like this reviewer – who like to understand the countryside through which they go walking.

CATHERINE GLOVER
Spencers Wood

C. M. WOOLGAR, *The culture of food in England, 1200–1500* (Yale, 2016). xii + 341 pp., 32 illus. £30.

This is another enticing and inspirational book by Christopher Woolgar. The chapter titles alone are enough to draw us in: Food Cultures; Cooking in the Countryside; the Culture of Drink and Drinking; Bread, Meat and Dairy Foods; Sauces and Spices, Sugars and Preserves; Gardens, Wild Food, Fish and Hunting; Civic Food Culture and the Guilds; Foodways and Monastic Institutions; the Elite Table; Cooks and Kitchens, Dietetics and Food; Hunger and Famine; Food and Popular Mentalities.

Drawing upon a wide range of sources and focusing in turn upon various aspects of food and drink, we are led into a garden of delights – and one where we regularly encounter rich and poor, young and old, women and men. Each of the 12 studies is given greater depth by the different sources upon which Woolgar draws. The introductory section uses the widest range of sources together with references to the works of others. In sharp contrast, the single most significant source for 'Cooking in the Countryside' is the coroners' rolls. These are balanced by an appropriate (and more cheerful) leavening from other sources, which serve to give a vivid depiction of family life. By integrating his work into a series of wider views and detailed discussions, Woolgar holds our interest and leads us up hill and down dale.

The chapter on 'Bread, Meat and Dairy Foods' allows a discussion of the changes in butchery practices that emerged after the Black Death. These included the role of women in preparing offal for sale together with their involvement in providing street food. Here we read about a case found within the records of Durham Cathedral Priory, where a series of women (at least some of whom were linked to the men employed in the kitchens there) apparently ran a business based upon the conversion of offal and entrails from the Priory kitchen into food for sale. This scenario is intriguing and must lead to the possibility that such economic activity by women was widespread and suggests that we should be actively seeking the evidence. (Equally intriguing is the employment of men within religious establishments for women where – on the face of it – their presence also seems inappropriate.) The role of servants is explored further in the next chapter, which gives a broader discussion of kitchen equipment, cooking techniques and the changes in both techniques and styles of food preparation that developed during the fifteenth century in both religious and elite contexts. Of particular interest is the extended discussion of the household of George, Duke of Clarence (the younger brother of Edward IV) whose legendary end in a butt of Malmsey still resonates.

The penultimate chapter discusses the major subsistence crises of the wider fourteenth century and considers the background levels of hunger against which such events as the Great Famine of 1315–18 must be set. The varied responses to individual pleas for help and the decisions made by the authorities in considering how to address the wider problems are not necessarily different to those currently faced. It would seem that a willingness to demonize the poor and suggest that they are the authors of their own downfall is not a modern phenomenon – but who thought it was?

The final chapter, although short, covers some very important aspects and points towards areas of research which should repay the effort of further investigation. Not least in significance is Woolgar's comment that 'There is much more to be learned about cooks and cooking, and we cannot now do so without understanding the importance of women in this process' (p. 236) – cry hallelujah and amen.

JENNIFER S. HOLT
Rossendale

SIMON TOWNLEY (ed.), *The Victoria County History of the counties of England. A History of the County of Oxfordshire, XVIII, Benson, Ewelme and the Chilterns (Ewelme Hundred)* (Boydell and Brewer for the Institute of Historical Research, 2016). xv + 483 pp., 120 illus., 16 plates, 118 maps and plans, 3 tables. £95.

There is a reassuring solidity to volumes of the Victoria County History. These tall books with their distinctive red covers stand in contrast to online sources such as Wikipedia. I must quickly add that I have contributed to Wikipedia and acknowledge its virtues but it eschews original research and primary records, drawing instead on already-published material. This volume in contrast is firmly grounded on records from the past, as a perusal of the extensive footnotes to each page will verify. The volume covers the Oxfordshire Hundred of Ewelme. At first glance not a particularly exciting area: 14 rural parishes, the only population centre, Benson, an overgrown village. But the economic and social history of the area is fascinating.

Ewelme Hundred has both 'open' and 'closed' communities – determined in the main by historical land ownership – and this volume brings out the contrast between these social structures. A prime instance of how a long-standing pattern of land tenure can influence the social and economic structure of an area is provided in the chapter on Benson. It was a royal demesne in Anglo-Saxon times and, although Wallingford became dominant as a royal *burgh*, Benson's royal status is reflected in the number of free 'sokemen' holding land there. The relative freedom of many landholders was reflected in a lively land market. The Crown sold Benson manor in 1628 and Benson had an increasingly fragmented land ownership, absentee landlords and weak manorial structure so that by the 1840s the manor had over 100 landholders, mostly occupying smallholdings. Relative freedom helped Benson to develop as a service area on a main coaching route to London; inns were established, as well as coach building, shops, and other such services, staffed by a wage-earning class who in turn fuelled demand for shops from which to buy goods and public houses for recreation. By the nineteenth century the area had a reputation for independence and at times the inhabitants became unruly. A curate in 1832 complained that the population was 'principally of the lower class ... whose morals are not bettered by the existence of fourteen beer shops and public houses' (p. 54) and a weak magistracy. Benson men were participants in the Swing Riots in 1832 and later in the century there was some agricultural trade union activity. A friendly society, founded in 1830, held annual feasts, which were

sometimes rowdy events, leading to police intervention and enforced closure in 1892. Religious dissent, another feature of 'open' villages, was 'rife' in the nineteenth century and a Dissenting school was set up in opposition to the Anglican one. There were Quakers, Baptists, Calvinists, Congregationalists and Methodists active in the parish at various times. So, the general character of the village in the nineteenth century was largely determined by the way land had been controlled there since before the Norman Conquest.

The maps in this volume are very good: parishes are illustrated with maps and there are others showing particular areas, such as that of the brick and pottery workings at Nettlebed. The parish maps illustrate some of the complexities of rural life in the past. Take, for instance, Fig. 4, which shows Benson, Berrick Salome and Ewelme parishes in c.1800, with their common lands, open fields and early enclosures. The map helps to explain the landscape, which – prior to enclosure in 1863 – 'was dominated by vast open fields' (p. 42) shared by the three communities. Greatest in extent c.1300, the fields in 1863 totalled some 1950 acres and were subdivided into 16 fields of widely varying sizes. Farmers from all three communities often held arable strips in each of the fields, which were – in theory – worked in a three-year rotation. Two hundred and twenty acres of common were also shared between the settlements – some open to all three, some to specific villages, and additionally some farms had specific rights in certain commons. Inhabitants also had varying rights over woodland and meadowland (dry and wet). Luck has given us a particularly good map of pre-enclosure Oxfordshire (Richard Davies's *A New Map of Oxfordshire of 1797*) and the four sheets covering Ewelme Hundred have been reproduced (fig. 2). This map includes field boundaries and woods and clearly depicts the contrasting landscape of the vale areas with their significant areas of 'nothing' – open fields with no hedges in them – with that of small irregular fields assarted from the Chiltern woodlands.

The map of Nettlebed parish in 1840 (Fig. 75) depicts a Chiltern parish looking very different from that of Benson – here the irregularly shaped arable fields are all enclosed and there are tracts of woodland and common north of the village. A hilly, wooded parish, the agriculture was long a mixture of cereal production, sheep and other animals, and wood products. Favourable clay and sand, together with wood for fuel led to the development of an important brick, tile, and pottery industry, and the common became pockmarked with old pits. Nettlebed village was on a main road to London so, like Benson, it developed an economy of coaching inns, brewing and shops.

As is usual with recent volumes of the VCH, this volume is well illustrated. The coloured plates include two pictures of imposing coaching inns. Ewelme almshouses and the beautifully painted interior of the church there and at Chalgrove were obvious candidates for coloured photographs. Maybe a couple more coloured plates of vernacular buildings would have been appropriate although there are some in black-and-white throughout the book. One is struck by the number of black-and-white pictures of 'former' buildings – inns, rectories, turnpike houses, farmyards, barns and the like, indicating the changing nature of society and economic history in this part of Oxfordshire, an area at one time with a high proportion of poor people and now one where houses are not infrequently priced in millions.

As well as notes on sources – particularly useful in the case of material housed in various archives – there is a glossary of unusual words, mostly those concerning property rights, religious activity and obsolete forms of taxation. This volume is a significant addition to the history of Ewelme Hundred and a useful addition to the history of England.

MALCOLM THICK
Harwell

MARK NEWMAN, *The wonder of the North. Fountains Abbey and Studley Royal* (Boydell Press for the National Trust, 2015). 406 pp., 196 colour illus., 52 b&w illus., 15 line drawings. £35.

The wonder of the North offers a landscape history of the famous North Yorkshire property, today a World Heritage Site, owned and managed by the National Trust. Written by Mark Newman, archaeologist at the property since the 1980s, the book is far more than just an account of the making of the famous eighteenth-century gardens laid out by the Aislabie family. Instead, it offers a minutely researched landscape history of several distinct sites including the Studley Royal gardens, Fountains Abbey ruins, Fountains Hall, Swanley and Morker granges, and the minor medieval pilgrimage site at How Hill. Each has a distinct ownership and management history. That the book manages to weave together their diverse stories over more than 1000 years is a considerable achievement.

The first chapter offers brief summaries of the Neolithic, Bronze Age and Romano-British finds across the site, along with a discussion of pre-Conquest occupation of the area based primarily on place names evidence but little in the way of finds. Newman paints an evocative picture of a marginal landscape relatively under-settled, a situation which 'presented the opportunity – the space – for the remarkable and ultimately unique creations that would be forged here'

(p. 9), even whilst acknowledging that the abbey's early chroniclers may have exaggerated the extent to which the landscape was empty. Yet any attempt on his part to (re)people the pre-Conquest landscape is rather undone by the lack of archaeological evidence so far discovered at the site.

Where we are on surer ground is from 1132, with the foundation of Fountains Abbey by a group of dissident monks from the Benedictine abbeys at York and Whitby. There follows a history of the abbey which outlines key stages in the development of the buildings within the abbey precinct, as well as changes within the Skell valley where the arable fields and grazing lands of nearby Studley Magna, woodlands belonging to the archbishop of York and the abbey's granges all lay cheek-by-jowl. Chapter 3 discusses the end of the abbey community and changes to ownership in the post dissolution period along with the impact of Civil War, while Chapter 4 examines the early history of the Aislabie family who acquired the Studley Royal property through marriage in 1663.

Chapter 5 outlines the programme of land acquisitions and early work on the Studley gardens undertaken by John Aislabie (d. 1742) – the disgraced Chancellor of the Exchequer implicated in the South Sea Bubble, who spent his retirement beautifying Studley – while chapters 6 through 8 explore his son William's improvements. Together John and William Aislabie produced one of the most famous landscape gardens of the Georgian era which became a regular stopping point on picturesque tours of the North, including that by John Tracy Atkyns of 1732 who referred to Studley as the 'Wonder of the North' (p. xi) and gifted Newman his title. William Aislabie died in 1781, leaving his eldest daughter Elizabeth Allanson to inherit the property. She was succeeded by her niece Elizabeth Sophia Lawrence in 1808 and between them the two women held the property for more than six decades, though we know less about their management of the estate than their predecessors', in part due to a lack of documentation, but also because Allanson, at least, was mostly resident elsewhere.

The final three chapters of the book examine the later nineteenth and twentieth century history of the site, including the loss of Studley Royal House to a fire in 1946 and the National Trust's purchase of the estate in 1983. There follows a useful bibliography of archival and printed sources and archaeological reports used in the research project, the long list undoubtedly testament to the huge amount of work over many years that has gone into this impressive volume.

The book is beautifully illustrated with a combination of colour and black-and-white plates, which include

portraits, landscape sketches, prospects, woodcuts, plans and maps, and copies of original documents. Personal favourites are the stunning portraits of the abbey's first post-Dissolution owner, Sir Thomas Gresham, and his wife, Anne Fernely, by the Dutch painter Anthonis Mor (Figs 31 and 32). We also benefit from the inclusion of a series of excellent GIS maps, which help orientate the reader and precisely document the various phases of landscape change within the valley.

As for gripes, all of them minor: the book might have benefited from the advice of a geologist and geomorphologist on the sections on topography and hydrology in the opening chapter, and its strictly chronological treatment of its subject matter is occasionally confusing, moving rapidly between the two main properties now in the National Trust's care. But, overall, *The wonder of the North* is a beautifully produced and hugely absorbing read. Moreover, it ably demonstrates the potential of 'deep time', longue durée approaches – especially those so skilfully integrating archaeological evidence; standing buildings survey; place names; and documentary, visual and cartographic sources – to produce truly excellent landscape history. W. G. Hoskins would, I think, be impressed!

BRIONY MCDONAGH
University of Hull

RICHARD JONES and CHRISTOPHER DYER (eds),
Farmers, consumers, innovators. The world of Joan Thirsk (Explorations in Local and Regional History 8; University of Hertfordshire Press, 2016). 192 pp.
£16.99.

This attractive, well-produced volume came out of a conference to celebrate the life of Joan Thirsk (1922–2013). It features contributions by those who knew Professor Thirsk well, together with papers by newer students of some of the subjects she held most dear. The chapters are short but often of some interest, and the book will be read with enjoyment by agricultural and economic historians alike.

After a short piece by Christopher Dyer, arguing that the most crucial stage in Thirsk's development was her time at Leicester, the volume moves on to a short round-table discussion on sub-regions. The late David Hey argues for the importance and longevity of the 'country', a cultural region which he detects through the spread of surnames, especially in the 1881 census. He suggests, perhaps controversially, that people had little conception of the world outside their 'country', unless they had been to London. John Broad gently critiques Thirsk's work on agrarian *pays*, by pointing out that they underplay the role of towns, especially London. He

suggests that we should pay more attention to 'layering', with small farmers perhaps more ingrained in their *pays*, while larger, more market-oriented producers were more open to wider influences. John Chartres likewise emphasizes the role of trade and markets, facilitated by middlemen and towns, with the role of the *pays* declining as markets became more integrated.

Following from this, a section on 'Farmers and Fields' discusses an area perhaps most closely associated with Thirsk's work. Tom Williamson offers a really useful discussion of Thirsk's important work on the origin of the medieval open-field system. Though it has not been unchallenged, her theory that common fields originated out of population growth post-Conquest has aged very well. In some areas, open fields evidently date from earlier, but much recent archaeological research suggests that Thirsk's model and chronology is broadly correct. Where she appears to have been mistaken, though, is in the geographical spread of common fields, which does not seem to have correlated with population levels. James Bowen, considering his own detailed research on early modern Shropshire agriculture, goes back to the issue of the *pays*, although he rather sits on the fence as to the usefulness of the concept. On the one hand, he finds, each individual manor or parish was unique, while there were social distinctions in farming practice within each community. On the other, the larger region is a useful way of allowing historians to make sense of rural complexity. Finally Nicola White, in a thought-provoking paper which focuses on Norfolk, wonders whether historians have been too keen (explicitly or implicitly) to associate enclosure with modernity, when it could be just as customary as commoning. Indeed, both enclosed and non-enclosed land could be subject to common rights of some sort, most notably (in Norfolk), the 'foldcourse'. She ponders whether feminist scholarship on the growth of privacy might provide insights into the history of enclosure. This is a promising line of enquiry, not least because both boundaries and enclosure could be supported by a discourse of neighbourliness: good fences, of course, were supposed to make good neighbours.

A third section tackles innovation. Craig Muldrew delicately questions Thirsk's famous thesis that industry was located in pastoral areas because farmers' families there had more free time for wage labour, pointing out that industry generally needed to settle in areas where fulling mills were viable, and this meant hilly countryside with fast-flowing waterways. These, of course, were often also pastoral areas. He also suggests that the growth in textile production in the first half of the sixteenth century made a major contribution to

household incomes, and thus was an important spur to a growth in consumption. John Stobart, meanwhile, in a particularly fascinating contribution, offers insights from a study of rural shops in Cheshire. These became more common in the period 1660–1760, offering an 'Aladdin's cave' of consumer items. Their keepers, partly evidenced by whom they chose to execute their wills, had unusually strong links to local towns, suggesting that shops occupied a liminal space between town and country.

In a final section on 'Consumers', Susan North describes the bewildering variety of fashionable clothing and accessories in England from 1552 to 1665, Mark Dawson explores the oat-eating world of the Peak Country, while Richard Hoyle offers an analysis of the consumption behaviour of a Lancastrian farmer-minister, Peter Walkden. Each article shows different aspects of a developing consumer world, with North highlighting diversity and vibrancy in the clothing trade, Dawson pointing to important (and still relatively understudied) regional variation in diet, and Hoyle showing an early eighteenth-century farmer whose own participation in the new world of consumer goods was largely restricted to tobacco. In the latter case, though, a fascinating gender dimension is added, for, as Hoyle argues, it seems that Walkden's wife Catherine was the one who was making the key decisions between leisure and production on which Jan De Vries' industrious revolution hypothesis was based.

It is, of course, impossible to do justice to Joan Thirsk's work in one conference and in one volume. Nonetheless, the contributions here will be of great interest to those working in agrarian and economic history. Many of the most interesting papers describe fresh research, and even if they tend to be short and quite specific, these at least give fascinating pointers towards bigger projects.

JONATHAN HEALEY
University of Oxford

DAVID NEAVE, SUSAN NEAVE, CATHERINE FERGUSON and ELIZABETH PARKINSON (eds), *Yorkshire East Riding Hearth Tax, 1672–3* (British Record Society, Vol. 131, 2015). 600 pp., 28 illus., 14 maps. £30.

The book forms part of the Hearth Tax Series, which intends to produce county volumes of Hearth Tax records. Since Yorkshire is such an expansive county, this volume focuses only on the East Riding, with the West Riding already having been published and a further volume planned for the North Riding. This book not only provides a detailed analysis of Hearth Tax records for the East Riding of Yorkshire (dating

to 1662 and 1663), but also contributes towards a wider landscape and architectural history of the East Riding. As such, it will be useful for local historians, students and academics alike, who are interested in undertaking research on various aspects of the East Riding of Yorkshire's early modern history.

The volume offers an interesting and accessible introduction to the Hearth Tax, including for those with a limited knowledge on the subject. The structure, I found, was refreshing. It begins with a comprehensive preface written by Catherine Ferguson, General Editor of the British Record Society Hearth Tax Series, which introduces the series and provides adequate justification for the extensive study of such documents. Next, Elizabeth Parkinson's chapter on Hearth Tax administration offers detailed insights into how the collection of the returns were undertaken in the East Riding, examining different aspects of its administration including: the criteria for exemption from paying the Hearth Tax; how the tax was managed and collected at varying points between the tax's introduction and abolition; the economic revenue that tax contributed to the East Riding; and also includes a section informing the reader how to access and understand the related documents.

The second and third chapters, written by David and Susan Neave, will be particularly useful to those studying the local history of the East Riding of Yorkshire. The authors introduced the history, topography, population, economy and architecture of the area, while simultaneously delving into how these specifically relate to the returns of 1662. Additionally, this background history will be especially valuable for those studying the wider implications of the Hearth Tax, who may know little about the East Riding of Yorkshire itself.

The remaining sections of the provide a review and assessment of the East Riding returns, a transcription, and statistical analyses of the data collected from the documents. These three sections constitute the main bulk of the volume and may upon initial observation seem daunting. Yet the maps at the end of the second chapter provide an excellent visual resource, displaying not only topography, wapentake and township boundaries but also the distribution and concentration of households, hearths, exemptions and hearths per household in each of the townships. My only thought is that more of this material might have been desirable: pie charts, percentage data and other numerical or graphical representations might have allowed readers to digest what the data as a whole suggests about number of hearths per household before delving into the realms of individual wapentakes and townships. But this is a

minor quibble and, in general, the introduction to the data and the logical layout of the information from the returns resulted in a largely accessible presentation of a sizeable quantitative data set.

The summary maps show local variations within the East Riding. A particularly interesting finding represented in one of the maps is that only five of the townships – Howden town, Kingston upon Hull, Beverley town, Bridlington, and Hedon – had more than 144 hearths per 1000 acres. In David and Susan Neave's chapter relating to the East Riding houses and the Hearth Tax, a sub-section on fuel suggests that the reasons for the dominance of the single-hearth household in the East Riding may be explained by the lack of fuel available in the area. The townships which had more than 144 hearths per 1000 acres were among the most densely populated in the East Riding.

To conclude, this book can be considered a useful addition to the literature relating to the Hearth Tax. Not only does the volume make significant findings relating to the distribution of hearths across the East Riding, and in which circumstances households may be exempt from the tax, but it also provides a valuable resource for further research and use of the tables as a secondary data source.

HELEN MANNING
University of Hull

AMY M. FROIDE, *Silent partners. Women as public investors during Britain's financial revolution, 1690–1750* (OUP, 2017). 240pp., 13 illus. £60.00.

Froide's colourful opening description of the hustle and bustle of eighteenth-century London beautifully illustrates the activities of the numerous female investors and the public places that they (and their male contemporaries) visited to conduct their business. In painting this picture, Froide also makes the important point that the activities and voices of these women are not (and have never been) silent, rather they have just not been listened to.

The author situates her work squarely in the revisionist historiographical camp, alongside other historians such as Pamela Sharp and Amy Erickson. She states that 'this book will provide some of the evidence to strengthen Erickson's assertion that English financial markets were open to female capital, especially *femme soles*' (p. 2) but crucially Froide's work expands upon this to demonstrate that married women were also able to act as independent investors. Moreover, whilst the majority of investors (measured numerically as well as by the amount of capital they controlled) were men, women represented up to 20 per cent of investors and there is an important story to be

told. Froide further extends the existing historiography on female investment in the eighteenth century by looking beyond the individual incidents of the 1690s or the South Sea Bubble, and instead examining female investment over two generations. This allows long-term patterns of behaviour to be examined and the activities of women from a wide variety of socio-economic backgrounds to be considered.

In *Silent partners*, Froide makes the timely argument that female investors did not act as a homogenous group who followed the same patterns of investment and displayed the same financial behaviours. This is an important point as it highlights the fact that simply acknowledging the existence of these women is not enough, historians must also take care to allow the different motivations, levels of interest and education of women to be expressed through the sources. To achieve this, Froide has examined three main groups of sources. The first is the records of the British government and the financial corporations themselves: these have been examined many times in the past but rarely with the purpose of extracting data about women's economic activities. Secondly, she analysed periodical literature of the time including newspapers, pamphlets and other contemporary commentary. Finally, family papers and archives were cross-referenced to uncover the personal papers, account books and correspondence of individual women who made financial investments and/or managed financial portfolios.

Silent partners is broken into eight chapters including the Introduction and Conclusion. Chapter Two, 'Playing the Lottery for Marriage and Profit' examines the late seventeenth- and eighteenth-century fashion for lotteries and the extent to which women participated in and encouraged the development of the industry. Froide then goes on to explore the way that fictional representations of single women using these lotteries to generate a marriage portion were reflected by reality. Although her initial findings that some 20 per cent of investors in lotteries were female is interesting in its own right, it is Froide's analysis of fiction and contemporary commentary that adds another layer of rich detail to our understanding of unmarried women, their prospects and society's perception of them.

Chapter Three, 'Early Adopters, Women Investors in the Early Years of the Financial Revolution', scrutinizes the very earliest female investors in public investments, paying particular attention to those women who were active investors from the 1690s, some 30 years before the more commonly examined female investors in the South Sea Company. Froide comments that the term 'early adopter' has been borrowed from entrepreneurship literature, and her use of it to describe the investment

activities of women in 1690s London who 'quickly availed themselves of the new financial instruments made available by the Financial Revolution' (p. 61) seems apt given her later arguments that these investments were often just one of several financial strategies employed by women to secure the economic future of their family. Their ability to recognize the opportunity of the emerging financial markets points not just to an entrepreneurial acumen, but also a level of financial literacy that is difficult to quantify, or even pinpoint in archival material. Froide attempts to circumvent this through three case studies of Sarah Churchill the Duchess of Marlborough, Martha Hutchins and Elizabeth Freke. These case studies demonstrate how successful the careful combing of family papers and correspondence can be and although it is perhaps inevitable that these rich archives most often belong to elite women, the details within the Bank of England and public corporations presented elsewhere in this volume demonstrate that such activities were not solely their preserve.

Chapter Four, 'Women as Investors for their Families' and Chapter Five, 'Unmarried Women Investing for "Retirement"' focus on exploring the active role that women played in shaping and managing their finances to ensure the economic security of their immediate and extended family members as well as their own long term comfort. The case studies presented in these chapters of Cassandra Willoughby, Duchess of Chandos, single gentlewoman Mary Barwell, widow Barbara Savile, spinster Gertrude Savile and unmarried sisters Patty and Teresa Blount, all demonstrate the importance of lifecycle and circumstance to women when making investment decisions. Furthermore, these middling, genteel and elite women were all depended on by their male kin; it was not only elite women with their own fortune who were able to take control of the financial reins.

Chapter Six, 'Gender and Risk in the Early Stock Market', and Chapter Seven, 'The Financial and Political Agency of Female Investors', provide yet more evidence, this time from individual account ledgers, as well as contemporary publications such as newspapers and pamphlets, to argue that women were not passive observers, but active agents who manipulated and drove financial deals on both sides of the law – and were held accountable for their actions. Froide examines lesser-known financial scandals including the fraudulent London Orphan's Fund and the Charitable Corporation and the results suggest that contrary to the historiography of the nineteenth century, investing in financial markets actually represented a less risky option than private loans; this is markedly different

from the characterization of female investment behaviour in later centuries. Spreading financial risk is explored through the portfolio of businesswoman Hester Pinney, who used her capital and profits from her lace-making business to invest in the stock market on both her own account and on behalf of other male and female investors. Froide goes on to argue that the power associated with such investments gave women the opportunity to develop a political authority that would otherwise have been denied to them, indicating that the role of women in the financial workings of the British Empire has not yet been fully explored.

The footnotes of some of these sources, particularly the contemporary newspaper articles, shows that Froide accessed them over a decade before the publication of *Silent partners*; this, along with the substantial bibliography, reflects the thoroughness of the research and the extent to which this work has clearly been a labour of love for the author. As well as presenting important new data about women's role as public investors during Britain's Financial Revolution, *Silent partners* is charmingly written and entertaining to read and has relevance far beyond women's historians of eighteenth-century finance.

JENNIFER ASTON
University of Hull

DAVID JOHNSON, *An improving prospect? A history of agricultural change in Cumbria* (Amberley Publishing, 2016). 304 pp., 100 illus. £16.99.

Agricultural improvement tends to be associated with central, midland and southern England rather than the upland, pastoral north and west. Yet agricultural improvement in the uplands and moorlands was certainly important and I can think of no better guide to it than David Johnson, a man who has walked the rougher parts of the upland north in great detail over many years. He has mapped their limekilns. He has undertaken a series of excavations of sites on the limestones of Ingleborough and has shown that several of them belong to a previously unsuspected phase of settlement dating from the pre-Norman times. He is also familiar with a wide range of archives covering a large geographical area and temporal range from medieval monastic records to modern computer databases.

Beginning with the origins of improvement in the mid-sixteenth century, the book takes both thematic and chronological approaches to its subject matter: the agricultural development of the county up to the present day. The author also considers the construction of limekilns and the associated coal-mining industry which was linked to them. He then moves on to the use of lime in agriculture and to the issue of enclosure,

challenging the idea of northern agriculture as static. The role of larger estates is examined and the changing fortunes of agriculture between 1850 and 1937. The author might perhaps have said more about the impact of improvements in roads, canals and railways, but otherwise this is a comprehensive study.

Overall, *An improving prospect?* is a substantial book on a little-known subject. Its only flaw is the black-and-white illustrations which have been printed very dark. The author describes the book in modest terms as a very substantial 'work in progress', but his achievement is really far more impressive and this book should become a standard work for agricultural historians of the north of England.

IAN WHYTE
Lancaster University

ELIZABETH FOYSTER, *The trials of the king of Hampshire. Maness, secrecy and betrayal in Georgian England* (Oneworld Books, 2016). 330 pp., 19 colour illustrations. £20.

The trials of the king of Hampshire tells the story of John Charles Wallop, third earl of Portsmouth, who was declared insane in 1823 after a long, expensive and hugely controversial trial. Details about his mental state came from hundreds of witnesses, from lords to labourers, who variously provided evidence of Portsmouth's strange habits: from an obsession with funerals (which he called 'black jobs') and bloodletting, to viciously beating his horses and an enthusiasm for labouring in fields alongside his farm workers, the latter being a particularly ungentlemanly thing to do. Lunacy commissions were not uncommon in Georgian England, but the scandal here was that the case was brought against him by his family, specifically his younger brother Newton Fellowes (born Wallop), who was trying to gain the Wallop property and title for himself and his eldest son.

Portsmouth was noticeably different from a young age: born in 1767, he was a slow learner with a debilitating stammer. At boarding school he regularly fouled the bed, and his schoolmates later commented on his 'singularly foolish silly ways and antics' (p. 33). When he met the 11-year-old Lord Byron, Portsmouth violently pulled his ears, starting a fight which ended with a window being broken and Byron declaring Portsmouth a 'fool of an earl' (p. 174).

That not everyone agreed with Byron was thanks in part to the efforts of Portsmouth's family. Foyster sheds considerable light on the actions of the Wallops – especially its female members – in managing Portsmouth, his behaviour and his estates so as to project the best possible version of him for public

consumption. Portsmouth's mother Urania, countess of Portsmouth, was a fearsome figure who administered the family properties and provided her son with an allowance akin to the 'pin money' many elite Georgian wives received. As Portsmouth later complained bitterly, 'I am never consulted on any business ... I am not considered as Master in my own House' (p. 69). Crucially, in being so controlling, Urania largely succeeded in concealing Portsmouth's oddities from his peers in landowning society at least during her lifetime. In his early thirties, Portsmouth married Grace Norton, a middle-aged widow whom his family assumed would not produce heirs to interfere with plans for his younger brother to eventually inherit the title. Grace handled Portsmouth with kindness and even love, showing a real capacity for gently managing him and his interactions with the social world, these – of course – not being insubstantial given his responsibilities as a peer of the realm and a justice of the peace.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, Urania and Grace appear not to have got along, but things only really started to go wrong after both their deaths (in 1812 and 1813, respectively). Within four months of Grace's demise, the family's trusted solicitor John Hanson saw his opportunity and arranged a surprise marriage between Portsmouth and his 23-year-old daughter Mary Ann. The Wallop family knew nothing of it until afterwards, and even Portsmouth seemed to have been unaware of the situation until the morning of the wedding though he apparently then freely consented, in part because Hanson spun it as a way to escape his family's control. In a strange turn of fortune, his old adversary Lord Byron was the chief witness to the marriage, later testifying to Portsmouth's sanity in a preliminary case heard before the Lord Chancellor (though Byron had himself been publicly disgraced by the time of the commission proper and was not called as a witness). Unfortunately for Portsmouth, Mary Ann treated her new husband with great derision, keeping a lover in the house (and even in her bed with Portsmouth present!) and meeting out violence and abuse on a daily basis. Portsmouth's marriage to Mary Ann was eventually annulled and her children (almost certainly her lover's rather than Portsmouth's) declared illegitimate, though it was Portsmouth's precarious personal situation during the marriage – and the risks to dynastic inheritance posed by a young wife – which ultimately precipitated the family decision to subject him to a commission of lunacy.

It is the evidence from Portsmouth's trial that forms the meat of Foyster's account, along with her painstaking research in the family archives where she has identified the letters and other records which she

uses alongside legal papers held at Lambeth Palace Library and newspaper reports. Foyster deals deftly with these materials, assembling a hugely absorbing narrative and demonstrating a great eye for detail while never over-sensationalizing her story, however tempting that might have been. She also expertly weaves Portsmouth's story into wider histories of mental illness, the aristocracy, and marriage and the family, as well as carefully signalling that which we cannot know from the surviving documents, including Portsmouth's inner thoughts and true diagnosis. There is much in *The trials of the king of Hampshire* to interest agricultural, social and economic historians, not least in its detailed exploration of the relationships between one aristocratic family and the communities around them – whether the labourers and farmers on the Hurstbourne estate, or the newspaper-reading public in London – and in the dynamics of family, marriage and property amongst the Georgian elite. In this, it acts as a worthy companion to some of the recent biographies of women like Mary Eleanor Bowes, the countess of Strathmore and abused wife of Andrew Robinson Stoney (on which, see Wendy Moore's *Wedlock*).

Yet this is at its heart a tragedy of one man. Much to his family's surprise perhaps, Portsmouth went on to live for another three decades after the commission of lunacy concluded, maintained in the family mansion at Hurstbourne Park, where he imagined himself the king of Hampshire. This was a very different life to most lunatics in Georgian and Regency England (including some of Portsmouth's relatives who were shut up in no doubt squalid private madhouses) and Portsmouth seems to have continued to inspire the respect of the local community, even whilst his antics revealed in the courtroom slowly came to be forgotten – at least until now.

BRIONY MCDONAGH
University of Hull

JEAN MORRIN, *The Victoria History of Hampshire. Steventon* (University of London, 2016), 104 pp., 41 illus. £12.,

This is the second parish history published by the recently established Victoria History of Hampshire group as part of the Victoria County History Shorts series, the first having been Mapledurwell, published in 2012. The book addresses the economic, social and religious lives of both the lords of the manor and the ordinary people of Steventon, which is also famous as the birthplace of the author Jane Austen who lived there for 25 years. Her depictions of rural society and the influence of the village on her writings are covered within the social history chapter.

The structure of this book is unsurprising coming from the VCH stable as it does. After an introduction to the parish, landscape and settlement, the topics of manors, economic history, social history, local government and religious history are covered. Written in the usual VCH narrative style, it presents the facts in a continuous torrent, albeit chronologically arranged. The detailed description of farming has been enhanced by the availability of the records of the Knight family who were lords of the manor during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. These draw on a range of sources from the National Archives and the Hampshire Record Office.

Steventon lies on the chalklands of Hampshire and has a rich history, which provides examples of agricultural improvement and change. The importance of sheep in medieval times is demonstrated by an Inquisition Post Mortem of 1277 which recorded the lord of the manor possessing downland pastures for 300 sheep: further, in 1409, a member of the local gentry died leaving 417 sheep in Steventon. A survey of 1512 showed that some of the parish was already enclosed, but named the nine surviving open fields along with the sheep down.

The book records conflict in the parish in the 1590s and early 1600s arising from the estate management practices of the lord of the manor. Records of litigation from the Courts of Chancery and the Star Chamber have been used to illustrate how he was accused of stealing land, crops and animals from his tenants, until he was forcibly removed by his son, supported by the local tenants. A list of his possessions included £500-worth of grain, although it is not possible to determine how much had been misappropriated.

Later in the seventeenth century, butter, cheese and bacon were being produced and, whilst wheat and barley continued to be important, fodder crops of vetches, peas, oats and hay were also grown. In 1707, the manor became part of the Knight estate: the land was mainly enclosed, with only 236 acres found in three open fields: these were converted into part of a new leasehold farm in 1741. This was part of the restructuring of agricultural practices in the parish by the absentee Knight landlords: the purchase of other smaller estates, use of lease covenants and the management of the woods all added to change in the parish. Strict covenants in the farming leases specified that common land was to be ploughed up and spread with lime, that dung was to be used in good husbandry style and that all hay, straw and fodder were to be used on the land.

The records of the Knight estate provide much more detail about agricultural practices at the time.

A report from 1839 shows that there was very poor husbandry with crops 'poorish in quality, moderate in quantity': the land was described as 'susceptible of vast improvement'. In 1855, Edward Knight sold the estate he had inherited three years earlier to the second duke of Wellington but this had little impact on the parish. Property repairs were part-funded by Wellington and the woods were managed, but all was not well.

When Henry Harris bought the estate in 1877, he became the first resident landowner for 240 years. The estate underwent a programme of modernization: a new manor house and houses for estate workers were built, along with a new farmhouse and large brick barns for Bassetts Farm. Moving forward to the twentieth century, the estate changed hands several times: the main land uses were increasingly grazing and fodder crops as the cattle industry developed and cattle replaced sheep as the main livestock. By 1926, Bassetts Farm could house 70 cows and from 1939 specialized in Friesian cattle, which were later crossed with Holsteins.

The book is a high-quality production, marred only by three minor errors which this reader found: the use of 'principle' instead of 'principal' (p. 30), a double 'had' (p. 72) and an attempt to make 42, 2 and 6 add up to 51 (p. 48)! Overall, this is a very readable account of an agricultural parish in the south of England.

ALAN WADSWORTH
Chippenham

JON STOBART and MARK ROTHERY, *Consumption and the country house* (Oxford University Press, 2016). 304 pp., 44 illus, figs & tables. £65.

Stobart and Rothery's comprehensive book aims to re-orientate the study of the country house. It goes beyond useful but increasingly limited art historical and architectural analyses to discover the meaning of the house through the processes and relationships behind the highly visible objects on display, with a move to reveal more about social and cultural change. Through this focus on consumption, Stobart and Rothery have used the archives of three families in order to make connections between various perspectives and to place the country house in a broader context, thus paving the way for new interpretations of the splendour of the British country house. The book is a product of a two-and-a-half-year AHRC-funded project entitled 'Consumption and the Country House c.1730-1800', awarded 2010, which enabled Stobart and Rothery to look at the archives of the Leigh family of Stoneleigh Abbey (Warwickshire), the Newdigates of Arbury Hall (Warwickshire) and the Drydens of Canons Ashby (Northamptonshire).

The book is structured around five themes, roughly corresponding to the chapters but also overlapping to show the fluid nature of the study of material culture in the country house. The first considers the country house as a site of both conspicuous and everyday consumption, reflecting on its complexity and composition as a space. Secondly, corresponding to key concerns raised in their historiographical survey, Stobart and Rothery address the changing nature of eighteenth-century domestic material culture. The third theme analyses the relationship between consumption and identity, with a chapter dedicated to each masculinity and femininity. This works with Amanda Vickery's analysis in her 2009 book, *Behind closed doors*, and confidently combines current thinking on gender and consumption with work on gender and the country house. The fourth looks at the practicalities of supply and the conditional nature of consumption, which flows nicely into the fifth and final theme, that of the spatiality of consumption, within and extending beyond the country house.

The cases of the three different families are very well woven together throughout the book, representing different facets of what Stobart and Rothery aim to achieve in widening the story and context of the country house in terms of consumption. This works particularly well in Chapter 5, where four different women – Mary Leigh as heiress and custodian, Sophia and Hester Newdigate as wives, and Elizabeth Dryden as both widow and mother – are utilized to show how gender interacts with different identities and moments in the life cycle to determine consumption habits amongst women. Here Stobart and Rothery conclude that conventional female roles did not automatically mean a lack of agency on women's part or a lack of awareness of the opportunities for using gender strategically. Both this chapter and the preceding one on masculinity move beyond Vickery's analysis of the sexual division of consumer responsibilities between spouses to examine how different circumstances shaped the ways elite men and women experienced and harnessed consumerism across a longer period of time.

Construction of identity is key in country house literature, with the traditional view being of a house carefully and self-consciously constructed according to taste. Stobart and Rothery question this throughout the book, beginning in the first chapter with the observation that conspicuous consumption was rarely conspicuous just for the sake of it. Chapter 2 reveals how taste was tempered by a long list of other influences, such as conservatism, rank and lineage, as well as the influence of relationships with family and friends, as discussed in Chapter 6. Chapter 3 reminds us of the importance of the routines of everyday life in constructing the

space of the country house, remarking that everyday practices and the lived spaces underpinned the social and spatial consumption within the country house. They reinforced the practices more commonly seen as conspicuous consumption. This link is very important in fulfilling Stobart and Rothery's aim to invite a fuller understanding of the country house as a process, contrasting with previous analyses, which tend to focus on landmark pieces of material culture, rather than the implications of both the everyday and the special within country houses. As the British country house is perceived and presented as a place of luxury, and – as commented in Chapter 1 – the elite who resided in these spaces were distinguished by their ability to spend lavishly on the kind of goods that would indicate their status, we can easily forget this important aspect of consumption. Yet as Stobart and Rothery argue here, the country house represents a nexus of flows of goods, people and ideas, and all forms of consumption are integral to the building of spaces, social relationships and identities.

Overall, *Consumption and the country house* demonstrates how the country house during the eighteenth century was a product of modern forces and an ever-changing set of spaces. In successfully weaving together the stories of their three chosen country house families and their consumption, and insisting on seeing the material culture of the country house as a process rather than an end product, Stobart and Rothery offer a forward-thinking argument that opens up the country house for further study on each of the themes addressed in the book.

LIZZIE ROGERS
University of Hull

JONATHAN SPURRELL, *Bessingham. The story of a Norfolk estate, 1766–1970* (Bessingham History Project, 2016). xxxiv + 216 pp., 77 illustrations. £12.95. The bold-print, capitalized opening title of Jonathan Spurrell's first publication indicates a clear and proud acknowledgement that the focus of the book is on one small local area, Bessingham. This, the reader soon discovers, is a village in north Norfolk, boasting one of Britain's oldest round church belfries. It is also home to many of the author's ancestors, who form the basis of Spurrell's research and discovery. This may lead to accusations of insularity, yet Spurrell's work should not be dismissed outright as parochial. There is value in taking a microscope to a locale, where it may further our understanding of rural life, and highlight the connection between community and landscape. Spurrell has certainly done this. Through meticulous and painstaking study, leafing through his family tree,

the author opens up a view of the whole community, which is both invaluable to those who study Norfolk, and of interest to social and agricultural historians.

The book is divided in to five parts, in which Spurrell takes the reader through the lives of the inhabitants of Bessingham, from the birth of the settlement through to the twentieth century. The scene is set with descriptions of Bessingham's physical landscape and the early communities that settled there. Sequential lords of the manor are described, including a reference to the Paston family who held the manor there in the seventeenth century. The church of Bessingham also features heavily in Spurrell's book, and this reflects its obvious influence and importance to the community as a whole. The church gives a central charm to Bessingham and thus to Spurrell's work.

The book is at its best in its discussions of the nineteenth century. With access to labour account books, Spurrell has painted an in-depth picture of the day-to-day running of an estate. A description of men failing to turn up for work following a party to commemorate the marriage of the Prince of Wales in 1862 sits alongside accounts of the rise and fall of agricultural wages, the anecdote in this instance serving to augment the socio-historical narrative. The study also benefits from the recollections of locals whom Spurrell interviewed during his research. There seems to be a general feeling among those questioned that, following a period of contentment, when milk was delivered in churns carried on bicycle handlebars, Bessingham had by the mid-to-late twentieth century become a ghostly deserted village. The monograph finishes on a more hopeful note, describing the final renovations to the manor in a chapter entitled 'Recipe of rejuvenation'.

Focusing inwardly, as already indicated, offers real insight into rural life. Spurrell's text is peppered with fascinating examples of family life and struggles, such as when William Spurrell thriftily used the unfilled pages of his schoolbook because paper was an expensive commodity. Continually woven within the trials and tribulations of rural life are the specific lives of the Spurrell family. The Daniel Spurrell line of the family in particular appear to have led interesting lives. There are novel tales regaled of an escaped bear, the creation of a new species of Daffodils, and the shooting of 109 animals in one day. Yet, it also feels sometimes that there is an opportunity missed, namely to see how rural life in Bessingham compared to rural England more broadly. For example, it would be interesting for the general reader to be informed whether the population rise in Bessingham from the start to the middle of the nineteenth century was reflected elsewhere. The

intricate details of the lives of the Spurrell family also made the book occasionally difficult to read. Additionally, it is a shame that some of the images interspersed throughout the study are sometimes hard to make out, or feature on a page to which they do not relate. Even so, for those of us who have not had the opportunity to visit Bessingham, they offer an insight.

As the book draws to a close, Spurrell's use of the first person increases. This perhaps reflects his deep personal involvement in his writing, but it also makes his passion infectious. As Spurrell states, 'the strong pull of family, and of history, is difficult to resist' (p. 180), and it is this kind of personal joy and experience which adds richness to our understanding of rural life as a whole.

STORMM BUXTON-HILL
University of Hull

Europe and beyond

KARIS BAKER, RUTH CARDEN and RICHARD MADGWICK (eds), *Deer and people* (Windgather Press, 2014). 248 pp. £45.

Among the barriers to communicating good inter- and multi-disciplinary work is jargon. Technical language can help convey complicated messages succinctly, but its over-use can limit the accessibility of our written and spoken words. Why would we want that? For books such as *Deer and people*, which cross the disciplines, it is, I believe, important to write clearly and plainly because the intended audience is, presumably, wide and diverse in academic background. The book largely succeeds against those criteria, most chapters being easily accessible and limited in their use of jargon.

The editors sought to 'draw together research on deer from wide-ranging disciplines and in so doing substantially advance our broader understanding of human-deer relationships in the past and present' (p. vii), by compiling papers submitted by speakers at two international conferences. Those conferences both focused on zooarchaeology, so it should be no surprise that the majority of chapters (17 of 24) arise from that discipline. The remainder cover history, law, iconography, genetics and ecology: a wide range of disciplines indeed. Most chapters represent reviews of single or multiple papers and reports that have been published previously, with few presenting novel data. That is not a criticism; the breadth of subjects addressed should mean that there will be few readers who do not learn something new to them. I learnt a lot.

Chapters are organized into six sections, some of which group more logically than others. In the first section the opening chapter traces the origins of the

current distributions of several deer species by mapping the genetic relatedness of different populations. It confirms the important role that translocation by humans has played and demonstrates the utility of techniques in molecular ecology for answering questions in zooarchaeology and history. The second chapter beautifully combines traditional archaeological approaches, a biogeographical perspective and population genetics to briefly chart the spread of fallow deer across Eurasia in prehistory with a detailed focus on their introduction and expansion over Sardinia since the medieval period. Subsequent chapters become increasingly inter- and multi-disciplinary. The final two chapters of this section are somewhat more traditional, presenting single-discipline accounts of human-deer interactions at two locations: Sardinia and the Yukon river basin, albeit over different timescales (since the medieval and from the early Pleistocene to the present, respectively).

The following two sections provide 13 case studies of interactions between humans and deer: the first section looking at prehistory and the second examining the Roman and medieval periods. All choose to limit their accounts to certain species, specific archaeological sites or summaries across regions or countries. This simple approach results in a distinctive nature to each chapter, while also clearly demonstrating the many similarities in the ways in which deer have been viewed and exploited between discrete geographical locations, and also over time. A great advantage offered by many of the authors in these sections is the quantification of archaeological and historical evidence. Provision of such high-quality information allows other authors to make more use of a paper (e.g. by parameterizing models) than do purely descriptive accounts. On the downside, many of these chapters were less accessible than others due to the use of jargon words without explanation, and the apparent assumption that all readers will be equally familiar with all levels of periodization used by geologists and historians. A description of each period ('from' and 'to') would be very helpful.

Next, the peculiar situation we find in Great Britain is explored, where sizeable patches of the rural landscape were given legal protection in order to preserve populations of wild, feral and captive deer for hunting by royalty and nobility. The final two sections deal specifically with hunting and management. The first, somewhat more esoteric section examines changes in hunting iconography during the medieval period, and the last presents two chapters addressing aspects of modern-day deer management: population management for hunting and for conservation.

While acknowledging that the editors could only work with articles that were submitted for this volume, it seems surprising that so little is included on interactions between humans and deer in modern times since the quantity and quality of information available today is considerable. Perhaps this reflects my biases. I also have a preference for synthesis; I like to understand editors' opinions on what a collection of works tells us that each piece of work cannot convey on its own. For whatever reason, the editors chose not to provide a synthesis for this book.

Nevertheless, *Deer and people* represents a collection of chapters covering a range of disciplines and including multi- and inter-disciplinary studies. It provides every reader with an opportunity to learn something new about our interactions with a group of closely related species that seem to have profoundly affected the ways in which humans have lived since prehistory, and which continue to hold fascination for us today.

ALASTAIR I. WARD
University of Hull

PETER MITCHELL, *Horse nations. The worldwide impact of the horse on indigenous societies post-1492* (Oxford University Press, 2015). 464 pp., 97 b&w illus., 16 colour plates. £35.

As an attempt at producing a syncretic history of the role of horses in human history, Peter Mitchell's *Horse nations* is a credible and comprehensive effort. Attempts to produce syncretic histories rest upon the strength of their unifying themes and the depth of the secondary source material they employ. Mitchell's theme revolves around human societies where horses provided a paradigm-shift in capability, making those societies either better able to manage hunting and gathering, or indeed, to manage aggression over their neighbours. Taken at a meta-level, this thesis has much to recommend it. Just as 'automobility' has fundamentally shifted not only the ability of individuals to do more and fit more into their lives but also the ability of collectivities to do the same, so too, the impact of horses on human societies can be judged to be similar, if at different speeds and with different direct impacts.

Mitchell's book covers a wide range of societies in the 'Old' and 'New Worlds'. Yet, as Mitchell asserts, the book focuses upon those 'Horse nations' who embraced the horse in the several-hundred-year period between when horses came into their lives and the time when they were 'conquered' or assimilated into mainstream New World European society. This is a time of much interest in the histories of colonization and imperialism as it represents a period when the hegemonic application of European power was not

yet possible in these remote places, leading to what Richard White termed the 'middle ground' in his book of the same name (CUP, 1991). Here, the incoming European commercial explorers were forced to adopt local practices and understandings as they were unable to enforce European belief systems such as Christianity upon the local peoples. In the resulting mix of power and practice, horses no doubt had an empowering influence on native peoples, and, particularly in the discussion of South and North American horse nations, Mitchell explores this in some detail.

Mitchell employs the work and ideas of the newer environmental historians, including White and William Cronon, for the ideas he uses to organize his efforts. Thus, we see horses as part of the environment and, at the same time, as a technology for breaching environmental limits, such as the carrying capacity of land through expanded hunting grounds, or greater domestic mobility. The focus is on horses, which 'transform older ways of life, creating and building new modes of existence and new ways of understanding' (p. 3), as a disruptive technology. And, similarly, much of his focus is on the 'New World' after the re-introduction of horses to those continents in the period of the 'Columbian Exchange', which 'involved the transport and dispersal of hundreds of species of animals, plants and microbes' (p. 3).

When I teach 'Horses and History' I normally theme the various clusters of human-horse activity into technological phases, saying that the history of human-horse relations should be seen as a history of technology (in the most open sense of the word, as in technologies of organizing society, etc.) Whether figuring out how to ride what would then have been a domesticated food animal and the social consequences

this innovation raised, or the invention of the stirrup, which allowed a new type of hunting (spear-based) and military activity, the technological innovations which revolve around horses also revolutionized human activity. The impact on human societies varied, but they shared the consequences of horses as enablers of new activity which increased access to food and wealth. And, of course, no one human group held an exclusive grip on these technologies for long, making, in this case, human history a matter of ebb and flow across a number of facets of equine-enabled activities.

Reliant as it is on 'the combined resources of history, anthropology, and archaeology' (p. 3), this collection of *Horse nations* is understandably somewhat varied in terms of detail and the evocation of human life enabled by the possession and use of horses. After all, if there is little archaeological record, there is little that can be said about many of the peoples in this story and their lifestyles/inter-societal relations. Mitchell nevertheless demonstrates his key point – that peoples who welcomed horses into their lives, both personally and collectively, built societies in which horses became central not only to the organization of their societies, but also to what could be done and what could be aspired to, especially in terms of improving marginal limits on society, such as nutrition, the acquisition of wealth and the arrangement of hierarchy.

In summary, this is a very useful account of our best knowledge about the impact of horses on human societies. In my teaching, I will certainly include it as a core reference volume and would highly recommend that others do so as well.

RHYS EVANS

*Norwegian University College of Agriculture
and Rural Development*