

Book Reviews

Britain and Ireland

SUSAN ROSE, *The wealth of England. The medieval wool trade and its political importance, 1100–1600* (Oxbow, 2018). 238 pp., 55 illus. £40.

Rose begins her new volume with a quote from Eileen Power: for England in the Middle Ages, ‘her commerce and her politics alike were built upon wool’ (Power, *The wool trade*, p. 17). Quite rightly Power remains the guiding spirit for all students of the wool trade. Rose’s book is divided into four sections – ‘Production’, ‘Trade’, ‘The Crown and the Wool Trade’, and ‘Decline’. While agricultural historians may find the opening section of most interest, it is impossible to divorce production, trade and politics. Rose explains how each influenced the others. Graziers often engaged in trade above and beyond the sale of their own wool, although most – like John Heritage of Moreton-in-Marsh – did so on a relatively modest scale and never achieved riches. The greatest among them, such as Cardinal Bishop Henry Beaufort, were powerful figures at court.

Chapter 1 summarizes contemporary writing on pastoral husbandry. Treatises first appeared in the thirteenth century and influential writers included Walter of Henley in England and Jean de Brie in France. They were primarily concerned with the role of the good shepherd and what he needed to do to protect his flocks. Selective breeding probably began earlier than Rose suggests, but its advantages were well known by the sixteenth century. In a case from the 1560s the claimant alleged that the defendant had allowed his rams ‘of a very coarse kind of wool’ to wander into his fields, obliging him ‘to cover the hinder parts of the ewes’ with canvas bags (p. 10). She relies on the work of Ryder to state that, in the Middle Ages, horned sheep were uncommon. Anyone who has admired the magnificent stone beasts that gaze down from the churches of Windrush in the Cotswolds and Kilpeck in Herefordshire might beg to differ.

Several case studies examine wool growing on estates held by both the church and laymen. For a while the Cistercians were dominant, but ultimately many of their houses were brought low by misjudging the

wool market. ‘The system of advance payment for wool provided monasteries with the ready cash needed to support ambitious building plans but could easily lead to disaster if bad weather or attacks of disease badly affected the productivity of flocks’ (p. 182). The most poignant remark must be credited to the abbot of Pipewell who, when deposed in 1323, lamented that, ‘it is easier to borrow than to pay back debts’ (p. 182). Successive bishops of Winchester managed their enterprise much more wisely and extant records trace their fortunes from as early as 1208/9. Among gentry estates, those of Adam de Stratton of Sevenhampton in Wiltshire are particularly well documented. Between 1270 and 1279 he increased annual revenue from livestock farming from just over £6 to more than £55, by which time he owned 1,001 sheep. Sheep farming was not, however, the preserve of the great and the good. Peasants kept small flocks and, in this way, acquired an ‘early acquaintance with “commercial” agriculture’ (p. 202). Enterprising attitudes developed and flourished in all ranks of society.

In her overall assessment of medieval wool growing, Rose arguably underestimates the changes that occurred between the thirteenth and the fifteenth centuries. Her view that there were ‘few if any marked differences in farming practice’ (p. 36) between the two centuries is contentious. Although she gives a nod to the work of Slavin and Stone, she does not really get to grips with the consequences of climate change, panzootic, pandemic, demographic collapse and all that ensued for ovine husbandry. She is much more persuasive in analysing the popular reaction against sheep farming in the early sixteenth century, when total animal numbers were almost certainly less than they had been two hundred years earlier and the wool trade was in sharp decline. For her the debate that ‘focused on the size of sheep flocks, [was] little more than a convenient symbol for the far-reaching changes in land-holding and land-use in the countryside and their social effects’ (p. 179).

Rose relies almost entirely on published material, in which she has read widely. Her volume includes an extensive bibliography that serves as a useful point of reference for other scholars. Nevertheless, there

are some surprising omissions, in particular Bruce Campbell, whose studies of seigneurial agriculture are well known and highly regarded. Those looking for cutting-edge research will be disappointed by this volume. Those who want a well-structured survey of previous work written in a clear, concise and engaging style will be well satisfied. The book is a good read and nicely illustrated. Hopefully it will reach an audience well beyond the halls of academia.

NICHOLAS R. AMOR
University of East Anglia

NIGEL SAUL, *Lordship and faith. The English gentry and the parish church in middle ages* (Oxford University Press, 2017). 384 pp., 50 illus. £75.

This is an ambitious and informative piece of scholarship. Nigel Saul's latest monograph is sure to become a touchstone for scholars of medieval lay piety. To achieve his full-length study of the relationship between the gentry and the parish church, Saul has scoured the English countryside and collated archival research with antiquarian reports to produce an analytical and dynamic account of gentry faith between the late Anglo-Saxon period and the early sixteenth century. The result is a comprehensive monograph, which makes a valuable and important contribution to the flourishing field of parish church studies.

The book's overarching argument is that throughout the middle ages, the English gentry were an active and visible presence in the physical and social space of the parish church. Since the emergence of scholarly interest in the medieval gentry during the 1980s, the question of how far they were involved in parochial life has been prominent in the field. In a seminal article, Colin Richmond argued for the individualistic and self-centred nature of gentry piety, made tangible through the proliferation of books of hours, oratories and household chapels. In some respects, *Lordship and faith* might be read as a response to Richmond's argument. This is most clearly seen in 'Chapel and Household' (chapter six), where Saul presents domestic chapels and parish churches as complementary entities. Saul argues that while the domestic chapel provided a forum for the lord's daily devotions, the parish church nevertheless remained a centrepiece for events associated with key stages of the lifecycle, including baptisms, marriages and funerals. The observations in this chapter are representative of the book's broader conclusion that relations between the gentry and wider parish community were, on the whole, harmonious rather than antagonistic.

To present *Lordship and faith* as a mere refutation of Richmond's thesis, however, would be to understate

grossly the book's wider significance and contribution to the field. Impressive for both its breadth and level of detail, the monograph contextualizes the parish church as part of broader corpus of religious institutions, from monasteries and mendicant houses, to household chapels and collegiate foundations. The volume's structure is at once thematic and chronological, enabling Saul to chart the gentry's growing involvement in the parish church over time, whilst also avoiding the trap of becoming overly descriptive. Gentry interest in the parish church is traced back to the late Anglo-Saxon period when thegns – referred to as 'proto-gentry' – began to take an interest in building the modest chapels that prefigured the later parish churches. The book's main focus, however, is the period after the Black Death, when what Saul refers to as the 'gentry church' really came into its own. Saul presents the fourteenth century as a watershed moment when the gentry shifted their resources from the monasteries to parish churches, a transition compounded (and no doubt also facilitated) by diocesan legislation, which saw the laity – and the gentry in particular – increasingly encouraged to shoulder the responsibility for the upkeep of parish churches. It is at this point that we begin to see the gentry really staking a claim to the fabric of parish churches, evidenced by their commission of funerary monuments, chantry chapels and heraldic decoration.

This rosy picture of increased gentry involvement in parish life is, of course, partly determined by the greater amount of surviving source material for the later part of the period. Saul acknowledges that the rebuilding of many parish churches in the fifteenth century, coupled with the systematic preservation of wills from the later fourteenth century onwards, throw a spanner in the works when trying to access the activities of the earlier medieval gentry. Saul is skilful in his navigation of the holes and pitfalls of his sources, although his chapter conclusions occasionally go beyond what we can say on the basis of the evidence available. In chapter eleven, 'Lordship and Patronage', he states that 'sometimes the presence of gentry lordship could become overbearing and oppressive, as when the church was turned into a family mausoleum; rarely, however, did it become wholly intolerable' (p. 274). While the evidence presented in the book suggests that internal disputes between members of the gentry were more common than those between the gentry and other social groups, the more sceptical reader might still wonder how we can know the thoughts of so many parishioners whose voices are either lost to us or mediated through those of their social superiors.

Saul asks 'How far, if at all, did the "gentry" church have a distinct look?' (p. 201). Given that only two dozen end-to-end gentry churches survive from the middle ages, Saul poses a question which is difficult to answer. We learn that the gentry church was a cocktail of variables, impacted by factors such as geography, the master mason's skills and the patron's preferences and wealth. Where they did not embark upon the wholesale rebuilding of the church, gentry patrons usually took an interest in features such as towers, porches and clerestories, and – most characteristically – the chantry chapels where they chose to be buried. Saul concludes that while gentry churches came in all shapes and sizes, they were characteristically grander and more ornate than their humbler neighbours.

Women feature prominently in the book as commissioners of architecture, commemorators of the dead and as advocates for the interests of their fellow parishioners. The monograph notably opens with the example of Isabel de Pembridge, a Shropshire widow whose foundation of a chantry college at Tong was designed to commemorate her three former husbands. An active and innovative patron, Isabel is one of many gentlewomen who repeatedly surface in the book's pages as leading lights of parish life. Of domestic piety in particular, he suggests that gentlewomen may have similarly set the pace when it came to household devotions, providing exemplary models for their peers to follow (p. 120). Although he frequently highlights women's importance, however, Saul's conclusions as to the nature and significance of their roles remain underdeveloped. Did women make a distinctive contribution to the physical and social fabric of the gentry church? Perhaps this is a question for another monograph.

The book's argument is helpfully supplemented by fifty black and white illustrations, which are generously distributed throughout the text. These are essential to the monograph's argument, although colour images would have been a more fitting tribute to the lively and vibrant picture of gentry life painted by Saul's prose. In chapter two, 'Churching the Landscape', a subsection is also confusingly given the same title as the chapter. These, however, are minor issues, which should not detract from the overall achievement of this impressive monograph. A well-researched and clearly written volume, the work is sure to appeal not only to scholars of medieval religion, but also to those wanting a broader understanding of the everyday workings of life in the medieval parish.

RACHEL M. DELMAN
University of Oxford

HADRIAN COOK, *New Forest. The forging of a landscape* (Windgather Press, 2018). 232 pp., 41 illus. £34.99.

Hadrian Cook, author, academic and landscape historian, will perhaps be more familiar to people with an interest in the history, ecology and conservation of water meadows and catchment management. In his latest book, *New Forest*, he turns his attention away from the aquatic to another evocative but altogether more terrestrial landscape as he attempts to 'defragment' interest in the New Forest and tries to produce a fresh and integrated look at its history, conservation policy, changing economy and governance. The writing of the book was, it seems, prompted by two events: the creation of the New Forest National Park in 2005 and the Coalition Government policy of 2011 which many interpreted as an attempt to privatize the Forestry Commission and sell off the New Forest (among other state-owned forests). Both of these events revealed the contested nature of the New Forest landscape. In the case of the former, through the argument that effective forms of governance and legislative provision had already been established over its 900-year history, and in the case of the latter, through protests in favour of the New Forest remaining a state-owned and state-maintained public resource. As the author shrewdly observes, even the late Mrs Thatcher never presumed to privatize the assets of Mrs Windsor. These themes and, indeed, the thrust of the book therefore emanate from questions concerning the values that we place on the landscape; asking why we perhaps value some areas more than others, and what do we value them for? For the New Forest, once a medieval royal hunting forest and now a modern conservation-cum-recreation landscape these are valid enquiries that demand a multi-disciplined approach. This book is, therefore, Cook's attempt to see the subject through the lens of environmental history or 'green history', to use his words, in an approach that mixes discussion of the political and economic dimensions with description of the New Forest landscape.

While the New Forest landscape has changed less than the agricultural landscapes and urban areas that surround it, Cook points out that the Forest has entered the twenty-first century as the core of an array of planning and conservation designations. He therefore seeks to provoke a wider understanding and discussion of how the New Forest has arrived at its current arrangement and where it is going. He does this by examining what he identifies as four critical themes: first, the shaping of the natural environment

into human prehistory; second, human intervention through natural resource management; third, the governance and management of the Forest over time, stressing the pressures on resources and attempts at exclusion of certain groups; and, fourth, policies and designations to conserve the New Forest. The themes are dealt with in order of chronological interest.

After an introduction and a section explaining the landscape's ecology, function and value, the remaining chapters deal (respectively) with the prehistoric and pre-Norman Conquest landscape, revealing through archaeology the impact of early humans on the New Forest; the medieval period, which saw the establishment of the royal forest and elite hunting; the Tudor period through to the reign of William III and Mary, which saw the rise of silvicultural production; the early modern period into the twentieth century, which is described as the decline of the 'old ways'; the twentieth century, including the Second World War era up until the mid-1980s, which saw the conflict between forestry exploitation and public amenity; and, finally, from the mid-1980s into the present day, which has seen the New Forest increasingly under the influence of partnership arrangements between statutory, voluntary and private sector organizations. This book also attempts to outline the twists and turns of the New Forest's journey through history, not just in terms of changing governance and political priorities but also some of the various stakeholders who have altered and influenced its cultural and physical landscape. These stakeholders include the prehistoric hunter-gatherer societies, the aristocracy, politicians, farmers, economists, agricultural labourers, gypsies and commoners to which list has been added in recent years, environmentalists, recreation-seekers, tourists and those living on its margins in the urban hinterland.

New Forest endeavours to blend history, politics, geology and ecology, together with a touch of literature and even folk culture, in order to examine the values placed on its landscape, the process of its governance and the possibilities for its future. Historians who regularly study the New Forest will be familiar with the primary sources (and indeed some of the illustrations) that have been used throughout this book but will surely find originality in the ideas that are presented and the questions raised by Cook's book. Indeed, many of the questions considered by the author, particularly about the prospects for the New Forest in the coming years, are still being discussed amongst the many organizations that share an interest in the Forest's purpose, value, governance and future. Fortunately, the author is fairly upbeat about the outlook for the

New Forest, which he believes is all the better for being regarded and managed as a 'nationalised' property. But, as he says, time will tell.

GALE GOULD
University of Southampton

PATRICIA CROOT, *The world of the small farmer. Tenure, profit and politics in the early modern Somerset Levels* (University of Hertfordshire Press, 2017). 240pp. £18.99.

Studies of particular communities, places or landscapes run the risk of being inward-looking, 'parochial', and of little interest to people outside that locality, but Patricia Croot's study of farming communities on the Somerset wetlands is an excellent example of how that problem can be avoided. Croot's Introduction (Chapter 1) sets the scene extremely well, outlining how this is a case study of an important, but neglected, phenomenon: an early modern rural society which demonstrates the importance and dynamic nature of small-scale farming in the development of a capitalist economy. There is an account of the historiography that places this study in its wider context – including the 'Brenner debate' over the transition from feudalism to capitalism – and the issues associated with which are returned to in the conclusions (Chapter 7).

This is not, however, just a study of agricultural economics. In Chapter 2 Croot explores the landscape itself including its natural wetland resources, the important common meadows and pastures, access to local markets, and the wide range of craft activities that were also undertaken. The Somerset Levels are an extensive reclaimed wetland next to the Severn Estuary in south-west England, and represent a hand-crafted landscape that – were it not for a complex system of drainage channels and embankments – would be regularly flooded by both inland rivers and the sea. During the early modern period a strongly market-oriented economy developed and, rather than these small-scale farmers being at a subsistence level, they were successful business people who exploited their landscape's natural potential and good access to nearby towns such as Bristol, Bridgwater, and Taunton.

Patterns of landholding and inheritance are then explored in Chapter 3, with the switch from customary tenure to leasehold for a certain number (usually three) lives being particularly important. Chapter 4 explores the different ways that farmers made a living from the land. Dairying was the dominant land use, but this was complemented by a wide range of other farming strategies including the growing of beans and keeping of pigs, alongside some arable including the cultivation of teasels which can tolerate poor

wet soils. The rich wetland pastures attracted more distant landowners who bought up some of the land in order to fatten livestock. Farm sizes and incomes are also explored. Chapter 5 looks at family structures and inheritance practices, showing, for example, that, while testators could not share out the land belonging to one tenement, where they owned more than one landholding these were distributed amongst their children (something that was a factor in the multiplicity of small holdings that characterized this landscape). Chapter 6 discusses wealth, society, and national politics, showing how the weak manorial structure contributed to local communities' sense of independence and self-determination.

This study is extremely well written, well structured and engaging, but it has one weakness: there are just three illustrations that together do nothing more than show the location of the study area, its parishes and major settlements within it. Apart from the cover image there are no photos to help the reader understand the character of this landscape – such is its water-filled drainage ditches lined with pollarded willows – or more detailed maps showing the intimate relationships between the diverse settlement patterns, field systems and common pastures. A relatively small number of photographs and maps would have brought this landscape to life, and help readers who have never been there to appreciate its visual and historical qualities.

Overall, however, this is an excellent study of a landscape and society dominated by small-scale farmers. It presents a fascinating counterbalance of the world of the great estates that dominated Midland England, and the author shows convincingly that major landlords played a relatively small part in shaping the landscape and economy of this area.

STEPHEN RIPPON
University of Exeter

ELIZABETH GRIFFITHS (ed.), *Her price is above pearls. Family and farming records of Alice Le Strange, 1617–1656* (Norfolk Record Society, 79, 2015). viii + 376 pp., 6 figs. 1 map. 8 tabs. £18.

Alice Le Strange, a seventeenth-century Norfolk woman with an extraordinary talent for accounting and estate management, is responsible for the archive that forms the basis for this exemplary edition. Hidden within a flap of one of her account books Alice's husband Hamon wrote that 'her price is above pearls', highlighting the trust and admiration that he had for her in her role. Griffiths has already demonstrated Alice's role as a manager of domestic affairs in *Consumption and gender in the early seventeenth century household. The world of Alice Le Strange* (published by her in 2012 in collabo-

ration with Jane Whittle). This present volume looks to her role beyond the limits of the household. Thus, it provides a compelling piece of evidence for the crucial role that one remarkable woman had as overseer, improver and accountant of her family's lands and suggests that historians need to look to women, as well as men, who fulfilled these duties.

The book begins with an extensive opening chapter that introduces the reader to the Le Strange family and to the contents of their impressive family archive. In this section, we learn of Alice Le Strange's place within her family and broader Norfolk society, and the significance of her contribution to the management of her family's estate and finances beyond the household. It also introduces the reader to the accounts that follow and provides historical context and detail to aid the reader's navigation of them. We learn, for example, that when Alice came into the possession of her father's estate at Sedgeford she commissioned extensive surveys and reconstructed the infield-outfield farming system for greater profitability. She also kept detailed records of the sheep that she and her five children owned. Furthermore, Griffiths explains how Alice and her family attempted to recover from the terrible losses they suffered as a result of the Civil Wars. The family lost most of their sheep to plunder by soldiers and were forced to pay fines to the Parliamentary forces. Alice used one of her books to account for her family's finances, documenting the losses that came about from the 'unjust and tyrannicall oppression' (p. 83) that the family had suffered as a result of supporting the Royalists during the wars.

The accounts themselves are clearly presented and editorial decisions are explained throughout in footnotes. Griffiths explains that she tried to retain the 'experimental nature' (p. 59) of the original documents when presenting them. As a result, it is possible to observe Alice's corrections and insertions even within the limitations of a printed transcript. This means that the reader can note Alice's errors and occasional confusion (for example in the arithmetic within the sheep accounts) as well as her skill and overall success. All of this serves to present the accounts as documents with a real historical figure at their core and invites the reader to comprehend the incredible contribution that Alice made to the management of her estates.

The edition also contains several tools for the reader to use when navigating the accounts. There is a rather lovely pull out map to be found within the final cover of the book that reproduces the maps of Sedgeford that Alice commissioned from John Fisher in 1631. Additionally, as several of the printed accounts pertain to the family's sheep holdings, there is also a very

useful 'Sheep Glossary' – invaluable to any reader not familiar with the difference between a hogg and a shearling.

Above all, *Her Price is Above Pearls* is an incredibly valuable contribution to the history of women's involvement in estate management, as well as for wider histories of estate management and accounting more broadly. It offers glimpses into the familial relationships that existed within a wealthy seventeenth-century family, from the accounts of the sheep belonging to the children to the wills of Alice and her husband at the end. It provides an in-depth insight into the running of a Norfolk estate and demonstrates the ways in which farming methods changed and improved over the period, as well as how such an estate recovered from the material losses of the 1640s. Most importantly, perhaps, this edition showcases the ways in which one particular woman wrote accounts, improved her estate and noted down perceived unjust losses within the accounts themselves for future generations to read.

By presenting the accounts of Alice Le Strange and holding her up as an extraordinary figure, this edition does not answer the question of whether women were active more generally as estate managers, accountants and improvers in the seventeenth century. This edition ought to prompt further exploration of the role of women as estate managers in the seventeenth century. In this way, the true nature and the potential uniqueness of Alice Le Strange's achievements could be illuminated.

HANNAH WORTHEN
University of Hull

BRIONY MCDONAGH, *Elite women and the agricultural landscape, 1700–1830* (Routledge, 2017). 189 pp., 17 illus. 3 tabs. £105

Briony McDonagh was awarded the Joan Thirsk Memorial Prize for this book. There was stiff competition but McDonagh and her elite women prevailed. Those already acquainted with the activities of these remarkable women will not be surprised, while newcomers will be re-assured that McDonagh is not seduced by luxury, wealth and privilege. She celebrates their achievements and has clearly enjoyed her association with the seventy women cited in the text, but reminds us that their function was to reproduce the social and political power of the ruling elite.

As she says in her concluding chapter, there is no escaping the fact that through their astute estate management, these gifted and determined women bolstered the existing patriarchal order. Improvements, which cemented the property rights of their families,

extinguished the rights of commoners and hit lower-class women particularly hard. Even though these elite women were often very religious and also keen philanthropists, some of their activities were potentially disastrous for those further down the social scale.

Nevertheless, McDonagh identifies a real issue. While the contribution made by women in business, the arts and philanthropy during this formative period has been acknowledged, the role of women in shaping the British landscape has largely been ignored, not only by contemporaries, but by modern historians and archivists too. As a historical geographer and feminist, McDonagh sets out to correct this omission and challenge the view, expressed by John Beckett, that 'eighteenth-century landowning was a man's world'.

The idea for the book was part of a wider project to uncover alternative histories of the British landscape and to recognize the contribution of those – including women and the poor – so often written out of existing accounts. We might not visualize elite women as victims of discrimination, but we soon learn in terms of their gender, they were seriously disadvantaged and had much to contend with. In relation to their fathers, husbands and sons they were truly underprivileged. McDonagh fully appreciates the dark corners of their lives and skilfully plots their story.

The book is composed of seven tightly written chapters with an appendix providing the key information on the female landowners, estate managers, builders and improvers featured in the text. This is a most useful reference with details of their route to landownership, marital status when managing the property, approximate years managing the estate, the names of husbands and children, and finally their own maiden name. In this way, seventy lively women and their appendages become quite manageable. The estates are located principally in the Midlands, but with significant additions in the West Country, South East and in the North. The lady landowners of East Anglia, including Lady Suffield and Constance, Marchioness of Lothian who presided at Blickling for over a century, are notable exceptions.

After setting the scene, McDonagh explains the full range of legal constraints which operated against heiresses and female landowners. Primogeniture meant that elder daughters were bypassed in favour of younger sons, while coverture ensured that if they were lucky enough to inherit, estates passed to their husband on marriage. Some managed to secure separate status for their estate, but most had to wait for widowhood to assume complete control of their property. No wonder a quarter of aristocratic women never married. Apparently, a woman's chance of inheriting an estate

diminished during this period as nephews were favoured over daughters: this kept the property within the family. Despite these constraints, McDonagh calculates that, from enclosure awards drawn mainly from the Midlands counties, just over ten per cent of 250,000 acres was owned by women. With 700 examples of female landowners scattered through 150 parishes in ten counties, they were relatively commonplace. Significantly, half the land identified was owned by 50 elite women.

In the next two chapters, McDonagh describes how these women managed and improved their estates. Not all of them showed particular aptitude, but several, notably those women brought up with the prospect of inheritance, showed a special affinity and talent for the various tasks involved. One of first examples, Elizabeth Hood, was trained in the art of estate accounting by her elderly father and inherited the family estate at Butleigh Wootton, Somerset aged just eighteen. She married a captain in the Royal Navy, who was killed six years later, leaving her to manage the estate – which she tripled in size – for a total of 67 years: the longest tenure cited in the appendix.

Similarly, childless widows devoted themselves energetically to their new roles. Elizabeth Prowse is the prime example, benefiting from the experience of her mother-in-law and the manufacturing and radical background of her own family. While her brother, Granville Sharp, campaigned for the abolition of the Slave Trade, brother James made agricultural implements at his iron foundry in London and performed trials on her estate at Wicken. Prowse brought an entirely modern approach to the business, keeping an estate journal, reforming her accounts and experimenting with new ideas and technology. Clearly, these two women were exceptional but not unique, as the other 68 examples testify.

In the next two chapters, McDonagh explores the traditional role of elite women and how their contribution has been represented in obituaries, family memorials, literature and by historians. With the single exception of Elizabeth Manners, Duchess of Rutland, their efforts as estate managers, builders and farmers were disregarded. Praise was firmly focused on their philanthropy and good works, reinforcing the idea of the moral economy of the landed estate. This is understandable in the context of the time. The question is why modern historians, male and female, have accepted this interpretation for so long and adhered to the model of 'separate spheres'. For challenging this assumption McDonagh certainly deserves her award.

LIZ GRIFFITHS
University of Exeter

RUTH TITTENSOR, *Shades of green. An environmental and cultural history of Sitka spruce* (Windgather Press, 2016). 375 pp. £29.95.

The author is an ecologist known for her pioneering studies on the historical management and exploitation of Loch Lomond oaks, and more recently for a remarkable oral history of the Sitka spruce forest at Whitelee in Ayrshire. She returns here with a book that aims to do two things: to tell the story of Sitka spruce in its widest context in North America and Great Britain and Ireland, and implicitly to cast doubt on the usefulness of categories like 'naturalness' for setting conservation priorities.

This explains the structure of the book. It begins with five chapters telling the ecological history of Sitka spruce in Washington, Oregon, British Columbia and Alaska, and its cultural history in relation to the uses that the First Peoples made (and still make) of it. There is much fascinating detail. For instance the discovery of a 6000-year old basket, made of Sitka roots, which is virtually identical in preparation and weaving techniques to those still used by indigenous Alaskans. Sitka in western North America grows into mighty trees, an essential component of the temperate rain forest that clothes the islands and the coastal plain. All parts of it, roots, shoots, bark, the great trunks and branches themselves, have their traditional uses for the First Peoples, ranging from totem poles and boats to fish traps and food.

The next three chapters have nothing at all to do with Sitka, but provide a hasty tour of British woodland history from Mesolithic tinkering with the wilderness, to Tudor ship-building and Georgian planting and wood management, but not saying much about some topics, like the charcoal iron industry. The purpose of this seems to be to demonstrate that human exploitation has left its mark on woodland at every stage, so what we take to be natural wilderness is nothing of the sort. It is also to show how all-enveloping and critical has been the need for timber products, and how ultimately inadequate was the supply of native trees to meet these needs.

The rest of the book returns to its main theme, firstly with the discovery of Sitka spruce by British sailors and explorers on the Pacific coast of North America who used the foliage to make beer as a remedy for scurvy and came to appreciate the tall straight trunks for replacement masts.

Alerted to its potential, the estate gardener David Douglas was sent from Scotland to explore the area's botanical riches, and returned with the first Sitka seeds to Britain in the 1830s. Wealthy sponsors planted the seeds on their estates; some of

the first are now magnificent specimens in Scottish arboreta. Nevertheless, it took the best part of a century for foresters to appreciate fully the remarkable combination of lightness and strength in the timber, and rather longer for them to work out how best to grow it on wet and cold British uplands. Meanwhile when the Forestry Commission came into being in 1919, 'the new commissioners and other significant landowners fell over themselves to get their own property sold and afforested', finding a welcome chance to make money from their worst land at a time when estates were under pressure – an interesting observation from Tittensor. These included the duke of Northumberland, who sold off his least profitable moors at Kielder to enable the Commission to make the biggest forest in England, now the haunt of merlin, goshawk, osprey and red squirrel.

The first to appreciate Sitka as the tree of the future in Britain was W. D. Crozier in an article of 1910. The first time it caught the public imagination was as the timber for early aircraft in the First World War (not for nothing is Boeing located in Seattle). The first person to find seed of the best provenance to grow in Scotland, and the right method for planting it on a large scale on bad land, was Sir John Stirling Maxwell on his estate at Corrour, amid the utter bleakness of Rannoch Moor. After the Second World War, with the invention of powerful moorland ploughs, Sitka came to dominate new planting in Britain and Ireland, covering hillsides with dark blankets of close-planted, short-rotation trees and bringing about the biggest change in land use in Scotland since the Clearances. Protests followed. Meanwhile in North America logging companies made havoc in the old growth forests, coming into conflict with both the First Peoples and with nature conservationists before some kind of compromise was worked out.

Ruth Tittensor dwells on the richness of lichen, bryophyte and fungal diversity in the British plantations, and stresses the ecological interest of these new habitats. She herself is very indignant about the indignation that many felt over afforestation: what right had people like Marion Shoard to protest about Sitka when even the paper her protests were published upon were made from Sitka? What was all this about beauty and nature conservation when beauty is in the eye of the beholder and there is no such thing as naturalness? Her arguments here begin to come off the rails a little. No ecologist or historian argues that Britain has 'natural' habitat: the term used is 'semi-natural', which recognizes the cultural history embedded in, for instance, the Loch Lomond oak-woods. Scientists perforce concentrated their research on semi-natural

habitats not because they did not recognize Sitka spruce plantations as habitat but because the Nature Conservancy and its successors who employed them were charged with mitigating threats to less common species, and most of those that were endangered lived in semi-natural habitats threatened by drainage, chemical agriculture or mono-cultural afforestation. In any case, there was substantially more scientific effort put into understanding the new forests than Tittensor suggests: she makes no mention, for example, of Morton Boyd's move from heading the Nature Conservancy Council in Scotland to advising the Forestry Commission, or of the work of Mark Avery and Roderick Leslie, with its very balanced conclusions.

This is a book of striking perspectives and feisty opinions, but perhaps not, to this reviewer, of entirely convincing conclusions.

CHRISTOPHER SMOUT
University of St Andrews

DAN MCKANAN, *Eco-alchemy. Anthroposophy and the history and future of environmentalism* (University of California Press, 2018). 289 pp. £24.95.

Dan McKanan's book is a welcome surprise for those interested in the sub-genre of agricultural history that concerns itself with organic farming. Welcome because it deals with a problem that has until now received little detailed attention from scholars: how significant were the ideas and practice of biodynamic cultivation for the organic movement's progress between the 1930s and the 1980s? More specifically, was the influence of Rudolf Steiner's disciples in the English-speaking world greater than that of Sir Albert Howard and those who adopted his Indore Process of composting? And *Eco-alchemy* is a surprise, because one might have expected such questions to be addressed by agricultural historians rather than a Senior Lecturer at Harvard Divinity School.

That this book's author holds such a post does in fact make sense, as Rudolf Steiner's teachings – known as anthroposophy – are a form of esoteric Christianity. They have spread to many countries since their formulation during the first quarter of the twentieth century, influencing agricultural and educational practices, and have played a significant role, directly and indirectly, in the growth of environmentalism.

McKanan describes his stance as 'neutral with regard to the spiritual practices and worldview that are unique to anthroposophy' (p. xv): a stance which is a thoroughly sound position from which to write about a controversial set of ideas. 'My judgment,' says McKanan, 'that environmentalism has been enriched by anthroposophy is pragmatic, focused on

the effects of anthroposophically inspired initiatives' (p. xv). He is not an evangelist for Steiner's ideas; equally importantly, he is not a secularist enemy of them, eager to carry out a demolition job. Instead, McKanan has visited many anthroposophical projects, spent three summers in a Steinerian community, and is fully aware of the various criticisms that can be levelled at anthroposophy, particularly with regard to its historical links to Nazism, of which he gives an illuminating account.

As an important strand of his argument that anthroposophy has enriched environmental activism, McKanan examines the influence of Steiner's biodynamic methods of cultivation on the organic movement's growth in Britain and North America. He maintains that they were much more significant than has hitherto been recognized. McKanan therefore lays emphasis on the roles played by Steiner's follower Ehrenfried Pfeiffer and by Lord Northbourne, author of *Look to the land* (1940), who experimented with biodynamic methods on his East Kent estate, and held a conference there in 1939 at which Pfeiffer was one of the main speakers. Regrettably, McKanan perpetuates the myth that Northbourne coined the term 'organic agriculture', which Northbourne explicitly denied (see p. 71 of my book, *The development of the organic network*, for details). McKanan interprets the term as a translation of the biodynamic ideals that Northbourne learned from Pfeiffer, but the phrase 'organic husbandry' was in use more than two years before *Look to the land* appeared.

In order to play up the importance of the biodynamic movement in organic history – and the chapter entitled 'Roots' provides much valuable evidence of its quickening influence – McKanan has to play down the role of Sir Albert Howard. He even speculates that without biodynamics there might have been no organic movement at all, since 'Howard was no movement builder' (p. 41). It so happens that February this year has seen the publication of Gregory Barton's *The global history of organic farming*, a book drawing on hitherto undiscovered papers of Howard and his wives Gabrielle and Louise, and describing what Barton sees as the central role of these three figures in the rise of organic agriculture. At the time of writing this review, I have not yet been able to study Barton's book; it will be fascinating to contrast his ideas with those of McKanan.

The evidence which McKanan marshals to demonstrate the influence of biodynamic activists on the wider organic movement should certainly cause those who, like myself, see Howard as the key figure in the British and North American organic movements,

to stop and re-consider. In Britain, Pfeiffer impressed not only Lord Northbourne, but leading organicists Viscount Lymington (later the Earl of Portsmouth) and Eve Balfour; while in America he contributed for many years to Jerome Rodale's journal *Organic farming and gardening*. Rodale also promoted Howard's ideas, but Howard was thoroughly sceptical about Steiner's cosmic theories. McKanan describes Howard as having a 'secularizing' approach (p. 53) and being without ties to any spiritual movement. In fact, he was closely associated with the 'Christian sociologists' who ran the *New English Weekly* and with the Council for the Church and Countryside. Certainly, he was more than ready to meet other agricultural scientists and farmers on their own ground, and the pages of the agricultural press in the 1930s and 1940s demonstrate that he rallied many farmers behind him in the cause of observing the 'rule of return' of wastes to the soil.

McKanan provides useful detail on late twentieth-century developments in environmentally minded forms of cultivation. He notes the part played by the soil scientist Herbert Koepf, who succeeded Pfeiffer as the leading promulgator of biodynamics. The anthroposophist establishment Emerson College in Sussex provided tuition for Sue Coppard, who founded WWOOF (Working Weekends on Organic Farms – now Worldwide Opportunities on Organic Farms), and for Patrick Holden, who became Director of the Soil Association.

The organic movement has always been closely associated with initiatives promoting economic reform, and McKanan believes that Community Supported Agriculture is one aspect of the new economy which anthroposophy can claim as its intellectual property, since it was the anthroposophical banks and the biodynamic movement that introduced the idea during the 1980s. He examines how this came about in Germany and in the USA. More broadly, McKanan shows how anthroposophy has changed from a 'self-reinforcing' movement to one that is 'self-dispersing': increasingly open to those sympathetic to its environmentalist ideas without subscribing to its esoteric philosophy.

For the agricultural historian, *Eco-alchemy* offers a thought-provoking perspective on the organic movement's origins and development. For environmental historians, it provides a fair-minded, wide-ranging account of the ways in which anthroposophy has percolated into the mainstream of a worldwide campaign.

PHILIP CONFORD
University of Leicester

Europe and Elsewhere

MARIA ÅGREN (ed.), *Making a living, making a difference. Gender and work in early modern European society* (Oxford University Press, 2017). 272 pp., 14 illus. £22.99.

Making a living, making a difference comes out of the Gender and Work in Early Modern Sweden (GaW) project at Uppsala University. In collaboration with the team who created the Demographic Database at Umeå, Ågren and her collaborators created a database that would collect a large dataset to analyse work in Sweden between 1550 and 1799. Chapters covering 'working together', singleness, marriage and age, have been written by different participants in GaW. The volume achieves a high level of overall intellectual coherence.

The book reaches the important conclusion that *no* area of work was gender-specific. It also demonstrates that marriage was an enabler for *both* sexes, conferring social status. New ways of encapsulating work have emerged from the research findings. The first is 'the two-supporter model', the book revealing that singleness meant relatively low social authority and high levels of mobility and poverty. The book also uses the concept of 'ever-married' to capture the way in which women attained an authority after marriage that endured into widowhood. Widows in Sweden were money-lenders – as has been found in other parts of Europe – and they carried out the early modern equivalent of middle management, including investment in and rental of property.

GaW has turned completely on its head the way in which historians research work. Instead of starting with occupational categories, Ågren chose the anthropologists' approach of standing 'on the street corner' observing human activity. The source was court testimonies. Using a 'verb-oriented method' GaW captured 16,182 records of what people said they were actually *doing*. From this recorded data, GaW created 16 broad work categories: military, teaching, trade, credit, care, administration and justice, and so on. They included theft, which was almost balanced between men and women. The research confirms that prostitution was just an extra work activity for some women.

Like other studies of work, GaW has found the market to be employer-driven (Jane Humphries and Carmen Sarasúa, 'Off the record', 2012). Both men and women *needed* to work and instead of the gendered spatial divisions of public and private, at the centre of employment was a marital household. Young people 'travelled frequently and far to make a living' (p. 21),

and patriarchy was less important than 'parentarchy'. In the marital household – which was 90 per cent of the total – work provision meant the elevated authority of *anyone* taking the surrogate roles of mother/father. The north-western European pattern of late marriage led to many couples experiencing a 'life-cycle squeeze' as they struggled to care for the aged while inducting the young into the world of 'making a living'.

Some of the more nuanced patterns of social status and labour divisions are revealed by GaW's division of the 16 work categories into sub-categories of *doing*. For example, managerial work was sub-divided into 'governing', 'ordering', 'assigning', and 'asking' and it was found that the figure of roughly a third representing female involvement in managerial work was skewed upwards by women 'asking'. Similarly, the much smaller percentage of single people found in managerial work tended to be 'asking'. GaW also found that servants were not regarded as occupying a lowly status and that people readily substituted for one another's work activity up or down social hierarchies. Elite women can be found caring for servants, for example, in a society that had 'intersections' of work practice.

A vast and diverse range of work activities was undertaken, then, by both sexes and all ages in 'open houses'. There was *no* gender-idleness. GaW's new categorizations have helped to value upwards work traditionally associated with women, such as childcare. Furthermore, children can be found substituting at times for adults, carrying post, hauling things and caring for babies. GaW's findings prompt new ways of theorising the connections between work and social status across gender, age and class: 'making a living ... allowed people to construct sameness in ways that transcended social groups ... [and early modern Sweden] was a complex society predicated on both difference and sameness' (pp. 218–9). The reconceptualization begs cultural comparison with other regions in Europe and a debate about whether or not Europe's current cultures of work have emerged from past patterns that are regionally specific. Use of the same ethnographic methodology would provide answers.

Importantly for agricultural history, GaW found that both men and women in early modern Sweden were occupied by the widest range of work activities in urban communities. The urban/rural divide is best revealed in a chapter on 'the fiscal military state'. In some ways, this chapter engages with the historiographies of state power structures (Anderson's *War and society in Europe*, 1988; Linda Colley's *Britons*, 1993; John Brewer's *Sinews of power*, 1989; Peter Dickson's *The fiscal revolution*, 1993) more than the volume does with the historiography of work. Sweden's military

development created a quite unique fiscal citizenry which had access to work opportunities, both in town and country, while paying the price of heavy taxation.

AMANDA L. CAPERN
University of Hull

TINE DE MOOR, *The dilemma of the commoners. Understanding the use of common-pool resources in long-term perspective* (Cambridge University Press, 2015). 226 pp., 10 illus. £67 (hardback), £25.99 (paperback).

In recent years, Tine De Moor has been a significant figure amongst historians of the commons and commons governance, not least through her recent presidency of the International Association for the Study of the Commons. Her many publications on the commons are listed in the book's bibliography (though – slightly confusingly – they appear under two different initials) and together constitute a considerable body of scholarly work. In line with much of this earlier work, *The dilemma of the commoners* offers a bottom-up analysis – ‘an intensive and detailed micro-study’ (p. 15) – of the functioning of the commons in one particular region (Flanders) in the period up to and including the nineteenth century. Yet it is also clearly envisaged by De Moor as a model for work on commons in other times and places and a call for action in developing new institutions for collective action in the twenty-first century present. It is thus a hugely ambitious book.

The introduction and chapter one set up the book and its aims, before moving on to examine institutionalized forms of collective action in historical perspective, arguing that the second half of the medieval period witnessed a ‘silent revolution’ in north-western Europe, whereby both agrarian commons and urban guilds emerged. In De Moor's view, common rights and commons institutions were neither ‘vestiges of earlier primitive agrarian communism’ (p. 76) nor one step on a progression from common to private property, but a reflection of specific circumstances and changes in medieval Europe. Here De Moor differs in her analysis from those who rely on evolutionary explanations to explain the emergence of commons, but also offers a different chronology of this ‘revolution’ from other recent scholars (for example, Susan Oosthuizen's *The Anglo-Saxon Fenland* (2017), where she argues that common rights emerged several centuries earlier than 1000 AD).

The second, third and fourth chapters focus on institutions for managing common land and common rights in Flanders, with a particular focus on non-arable commons: that is, the common-pool resources of the

‘waste’ (pasture, turf, meadow, wood, etc), rather than grazing on open-field stubbles or seasonal commoning on land otherwise held in severalty. Chapter 2 examines these resources, the evolution of the legal rights to the land and differences in management between eastern Flanders (where the commons were extensive and physically open) and western Flanders (where they were generally smaller and demarcated by hedges or fences). The next two chapters offer a careful analysis of the functioning of one particular common – that of Gemene and Loweiden close to the city of Bruges in western Flanders – in the two centuries after about 1700. Drawing on a combination quantitative and qualitative analysis, De Moor focuses not on ‘a momentary description of features’ but on ‘changes within the system’ (p. 119). She points out that the commoners of Assebrook and Oedelem were a heterogeneous rather than a homogeneous group, and explores variations in participation in the use and management of the common over time. In Chapter 4, she identifies a growing number of passive members who neither turned animals onto the common nor involved themselves in its management, the dwindling number of farmers involved in the common (itself part of the more general proletarianization of rural Flanders) and a clear and growing polarization between users and managers. She also highlights the associated problem of the under-exploitation of the common (too few users), which might be as significant as over-exploitation and similarly lead to ‘tragedy’.

In the final section of the book, De Moor lays out her conclusions, while the epilogue considers the contemporary ‘new commons movement’, arguing that government should take a role in building institutions for collective action in the twenty-first century. As De Moor argues early in the book, ‘historical commons can provide us with inspiration on future governance models for natural and other resources’ (p. 3), perhaps especially in the wake of the 2008 financial crisis.

The significance of the book lies not just in De Moor's determination to take on and dismantle Hardin's ‘tragedy of the commons’ thesis: indeed, others – including Lin Ostrom – have already done this. Rather, it lies in her careful and systematic analysis of the Gemene and Loweiden case study and her insistence that those studying the commons embrace both interdisciplinary approaches and historical analysis. As readers of this journal will undoubtedly be aware, the common wastelands of Flanders were different from both English commons and those elsewhere in Continental Europe. Most significantly, in Flanders – unlike in much of England – rights to the common waste were not linked to the tenure of

land in the arable fields or to specific properties, but commoners essentially paid a subscription in order to register their right, though they did not always exercise it (by the nineteenth century, falling participation rates may have contributed to the temporary dissolution of the common). Yet despite regional differences, there is much for rural and agricultural historians of both Britain and Europe to value in the book. Commons were – as De Moor argues – inherently local institutions, whose management was always reflective of specific circumstances, hence the importance of studying them ‘from within’. Moreover, as De Moor persuasively argues, ‘common land did not escape existing power relations’ (p. 178), but was rather caught up in both local and national politics, a theme that might usefully be further explored by others. There are other important reminders too in the book, not least that we need to study not only the rules of commons (as recorded in by-laws, for example), but also the varying application of those rules over time, individual and collective decision making, and problem resolution (as recorded in registration documents, records of sanctions and legal cases).

As for minor gripes: the book occasionally seems to be attempting to tackle rather more than will fit in its 170 pages. I would like to have heard rather more about the Gemene and Loweiden case study – the discussion of which really only occupies two relatively short chapters – and especially the unusual circumstances that led to its reestablishment and survival. As a historical geographer, I note that better (and larger) maps would have been a welcome addition. Finally, De Moor seems to assume that all commoners were male. As she points out in Chapter 3, in the case of her chosen Flanders case study they mainly were: the early sixteenth-century rules of the common show that women could initially claim membership, but from the middle of the seventeenth century women no longer registered as commoners (pp. 103–4). This is a fascinating insight and others scholars might fruitfully investigate the question of gender in other times and places, though the persistent use of male pronouns to describe commoners elsewhere in the book may overstate the case.

Overall, this is a thought-provoking book and a useful addition to a growing body of literature on the functioning of historical commons in north-western Europe and beyond. It is to be recommended as essential reading to both historians and historical geographers of the rural landscape and scholars of the commons in the here-and-now.

BRIONY MCDONAGH
University of Hull

DOUGLAS SOUTHGATE and LOIS ROBERTS, *Globalized fruit, local entrepreneurs. How one banana-exporting country achieved worldwide reach* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016). 232 pp., 3 illus. £50.

Ecuador's banana export industry is the largest in the world, accounting for approximately four million tons of shipments per year. Yet it has received relatively little attention within a large body of scholarship centring on the machinations of United Fruit (UFCO, now known as Chiquita) and other US-based multinationals that are synonymous with the global fruit trade. The main thesis of *Globalized fruit, local entrepreneurs* is that the prevailing ‘banana republic’ narrative developed elsewhere does not apply to Ecuador, whose industry dates from the mid-1930s, long after the US companies had consolidated control over Central America and the Caribbean. Southgate and Roberts attempt to show how Ecuadorian entrepreneurs from the Guayaquil region, most of them of humble origins, established a banana sector that often out-competed the US-based behemoths, not only in dominating new markets but ultimately in exporting bananas to the US itself.

The authors centre their study on a handful of small-scale capitalists whose business and political acumen allowed them to chart a course independent of UFCO while contending with an often intrusive state, nationalist politicians, and labour movements. The most notable of these investors was Luís Noboa, who rose from penniless street vendor to command a personal fortune of \$650 million upon his death, almost all of it derived from banana exports. Their promotion from small-scale traders to powerful agricultural bourgeoisie rested on unique geographic advantages associated with Guayaquil itself, especially the ready availability of easily cleared land, an existing agricultural infrastructure, port and labour force, and, most importantly, immunity from the hurricanes that frequently devastated banana production in the Caribbean basin. Despite these advantages, an export-oriented industry in Ecuador remained impractical until the completion of the Panama Canal and resumption of Caribbean shipping after World War I. By that time, United and Standard Fruit had already perfected a system of vertically integrated production, transportation, ripening and wholesaling of fruit on an industrial scale for the US market.

Analysing the rise of the US companies within the ‘taxonomy of entrepreneurial innovations’ advanced by economist Joseph Schumpeter, the authors suggest that Ecuadorian investors were able to draw upon innovations already developed (at considerable cost)

by the US multinationals. When UFCO belatedly entered Ecuador itself as an exporter in the 1930s, local entrepreneurs established strategic alliances with the company to gain access to the organizational and agronomic knowledge (not to mention chemical inputs) required for banana production on a large scale. Much of the Noboa's success lay in wedding Ecuador's fledgling banana sector to new markets in the Middle East, Japan, and even Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union, where he bartered bananas for machinery and raw materials. He thus avoided direct competition with the American firms until he had amassed enough resources and shipping to challenge them in the US market itself, particularly in California and much of the western US.

This is a story well worth telling, as it highlights the role that historical contingency and individual agency play in the creation of global markets, and the capacity of local elites to outmanoeuvre formidable representatives of foreign capital. Southgate and Roberts adopt an unapologetically 'top-down' approach throughout, situating the entrepreneurial savvy of home-grown capitalists within an ever-shifting national political context that at one moment encouraged their activities and at others impeded them. Yet their analysis is permeated by a rigid neoliberal bias that blinds them to those who provided the most important 'factor of production' for Noboa and his counterparts, that of labour. Ecuadorian farms are known for returning to their workers the lowest share of earnings of any banana industry in the hemisphere (presently about four cents for every dollar of fruit sold in the US). Yet the demands of banana workers and tenant farmers for a greater return to their labour are treated parenthetically, if at all. Land occupations and strikes are simply attributed to the political ambitions of misguided or manipulative politicians and 'union bosses' who stand to personally profit from the movements they lead (pp. 119–20). (This criticism is developed in an extended, if not particularly relevant, polemic about the country's recent nationalist president, Rafael Correa, derided as a 'troublesome populist'). The authors are openly hostile to the primary existing scholarship on Ecuador's banana industry, that of anthropologist Steve Striffler, for his putatively 'anti-corporate cant' and 'ideological perspective at least a quarter century past its expiration date' (p. 36), i.e. the labour theory of value. Striffler's research on the occupation of UFCO's Tenguel estate drew upon material from Ecuadorian archives and Chiquita's own extensive internal memoranda, as well as interviews with dozens of workers and peasants whose families participated in the occupation. *Globalized fruit, local*

entrepreneurs is lightly sourced in comparison, relying on already published material (mostly in English) and interviews exclusively with industry representatives, large growers, and government officials, but almost no archival evidence and evidently no conversations with workers themselves. Ironically, its authors repeatedly draw upon Striffler's material when it serves to advance their argument, even while otherwise ignoring or belittling the experiences of his primary informants.

Joseph Schumpeter, whose ideas frame much of the thinking in this book, referred to the effects of entrepreneurial innovation and competition as 'creative destruction'. Some 350,000 Ecuadorians presently work on farms owned by the entrepreneurs that are the protagonists of this work. Much of the latter's business success stems directly from the fact that their workers are the lowest paid in the Americas, earning around 40 per cent of the average wage of their unionized Central American counterparts. Ecuadorian farms, including those of the Noboa family, have been repeatedly cited by human rights organizations for the widespread employment of child labour in production, where they are regularly exposed to chemical pesticides. Contrary to the claims of this book, the entrepreneurial acumen it celebrates largely rests on such 'creatively destructive' arrangements. To understand them, however, readers will have to look elsewhere.

MARK MOBERG
University of South Alabama

DEBRA A. REID, *Interpreting agriculture at museums and historic sites* (Rowman and Littlefield, 2017). 284 pp. £24.95.

Deborah Reid invites those of us tasked with working with and researching museums and historic sites to urgently become proficient at interpreting agriculture, 'as the future of humanity on the planet depends on it' (p. xiii). In this volume Reid – who is Curator of Agriculture and Environment at the Henry Ford Museum and Professor Emerita at Eastern Illinois University – has gathered together contributions from a range of curators, museum educators and academics working across America to develop a handbook for agricultural interpretation which aims to be as provocative as Freeman Tilden's 1957 landmark text, *Interpreting our heritage*.

Anyone who has ever worked in a museum or curated an exhibition will know that developing interpretation is a time-consuming and complex process, and in the first four chapters, Reid therefore focuses on simple ways to incorporate agriculture into heritage displays and programmes. She stresses that the interpretation of agriculture doesn't have to be limited to rural sites

and historic farms; most museums have objects that can be traced back to agriculture through the materials they are made of or the scenes they depict, and any site can be used to grow plants and start a conversation about where food comes from. Reid advocates a 'humanist' approach to strategies for incorporating diverse human perspectives into agricultural interpretation and developing interpretation that is engaging and at the same time encourages critical historical thinking about agriculture. This first section also provides a comprehensive overview of attitudes toward collecting agricultural objects in the USA and the development of agricultural and living history museums as specialist institutions.

The second section of the book contains examples of research-led approaches taken by museum professionals as well as chapters covering practical guidance on identifying, documenting and caring for agricultural collections. In the chapter, 'You can't eat gold: Agriculture in early Colorado City, 1858–1867', museum professional and historian Carol Kennis Lopez skilfully demonstrates how contemporary concerns about food security informed her research in preparation for the Pike Peaks sesquicentennial (1858–1861 to 2008–2011). Lopez found herself asking who provided the food for the swathes of settlers who descended on the peaks in search of gold and charts her research into the agricultural practices of settlers in early Colorado City. Her chapter demonstrates that national and local centennials can be timely opportunities for new research into how agriculture impacted people in a certain time and place, and the importance of agriculture and food histories to wider narratives about resettlement and migration. Another highlight of this section is the tribute written by William S. Pretzer (currently Senior Curator for History at the Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture) to his former colleague at the Henry Ford, Peter Cousins. In his chapter, 'A curator's legacy', Pretzer recounts the unswerving dedication with which Cousins worked towards acquiring a Ben Pearson Rust Cotton Picker known affectionately as 'Grandma', a task which took twenty years. Pretzer's moving dedication to his late colleague provides illuminating insights into humanities-centric collecting agendas and how effective museum collecting needs to be underpinned by rigorous research and sensitivity to the personal wishes of individuals who choose to donate the tools of their trade to a museum.

The third section of the book comprises of a series of case studies on localized approaches to interpreting agriculture. Deborah Reid and Cameron L. Saffell (Curator at the Museum of Texas Tech University)

illustrate the significance of roads and transportation in interpreting agriculture and provide a case study of the relocation of the Pecos River Bridge to the New Mexico Farm Ranch and Heritage Museum. Barbara Carson (veterinary doctor and farmer at Colonial Pennsylvania Plantation) provides a rich chapter on horse-drawn vehicles and harness function, which includes indispensable information for researchers and museum workers tasked with the often baffling job of identifying and interpreting archaic (and often unprovenanced!) bits of equipment.

Living history museums became extremely popular in the USA in the late twentieth century, leading to a proliferation of sites containing full-scale farms and herds of stock animals to care for. In chapter twelve, Debra Reid and Jonathan D. Kuester (Farm Manager at Volkening Heritage Farm in Illinois) provides a balanced evaluation of the benefits and potential risks of collecting livestock. The authors describe the problems that can blight living history farms, such as demands on staff time, animal welfare concerns and difficulties in maintaining historically appropriate equipment. Reid and Kuester are both advocates of living history and the benefit that can be gained from interpreting agriculture through livestock, but they stress that animals should never become 'lawn ornaments' and, to make the interpretation of livestock meaningful, animals must be well cared for on a scale appropriate to a museum's resources.

After considering individual examples of different research-led approaches across the USA, the final section of the book returns to the nuts and bolts of developing good museum interpretation. Reid's final chapter provides a 'multi-step process' to guide museum staff in developing new interpretation plans for agriculture which focuses on skills in reading material culture and developing historical thinking. The book then concludes with two further case studies: of how agriculture has been incorporated into the Magoffin Home in El Paso and how students at Tusculum College in Tennessee explored the agricultural legacy which built their college.

Interpreting Agriculture is a stimulating and enjoyable read, which is not only packed with practical information about the art of museum interpretation but also a wealth of information about the development of agriculture and farming heritage in the USA. At times, the sheer wealth of information can disrupt the pace of the book, as the focus shifts away from building the case for the social benefit that can be achieved by interpreting agriculture in a museum setting toward detailed examples of scholarship on the history of farming in the USA. The text would also have benefited

from more references to relevant contemporary scholarship in Museum and Heritage Studies – for example, Elizabeth Merritt’s work on museum futures and Nina Simon’s work on the participatory museum – which could have been used to support Reid’s case for the power of ‘humanist’ interpretation. Nevertheless, Reid and her collaborators achieve their goal in providing

an excellent handbook for museums and historic sites to utilize when approaching the topic of agriculture. It is also an insightful read for researchers studying the production of agricultural heritage sites and how museums communicate agricultural knowledge.

RUTH L. QUINN
University of Hull