

# RURAL HISTORY

Rural History Today is published jointly by the British Agricultural History Society  
and the Rural History Centre, University of Reading

# TODAY



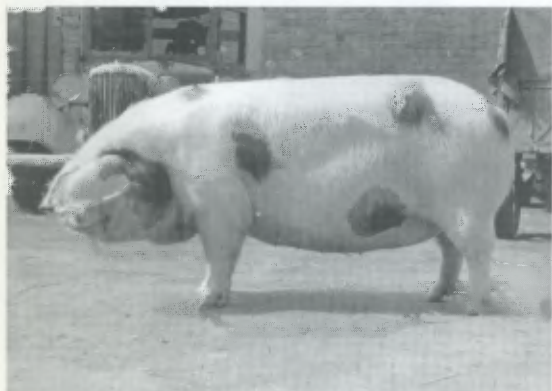
Issue 4 • January 2003

## CRISIS IN GLOUCESTERSHIRE

By Roy Brigden

**Two recent announcements from Gloucestershire in consecutive issues of the *Museums Journal* raise important issues for the future of the rural heritage.**

In November, it was reported that Gloucester City Council in a cost-cutting exercise was considering amalgamating its two museums. The implication was that the Folk Museum, which has operated from its splendid Tudor buildings in Westgate Street since 1935, would be moving in with the City Museum and Art Gallery. This was followed in December's issue by news of the permanent closure of the Cotswold Heritage Centre at Northleach after twenty years of operation. The story sounded familiar: £2m a year had to be sliced from the Council's budget and keeping the Museum open was costing £10 per visitor. This may be another fallout of the Lottery era in which the glitzy HLF-funded project overshadows everything else, to the detriment of the community's cultural bedrock. Gloucester has tried and so far failed to convince HLF of its grand vision for a new City Museum and so now it seems the Folk Museum is to pay the price. At Cirencester,



the Corinium Museum is currently benefiting from a major injection of lottery funding but it cannot be coincidence that Northleach is being sacrificed at the same time.

So what of the collections? Whatever might be the rationale, relocating the Gloucester Folk Museum is not being considered for the health of the material it holds. Yet this is a treasure of a collection, the roots of which stretch back to the formative years of social history museums between the Wars when a few far-sighted individuals - among them in this case Dr Oliver Wild - sought to record and preserve evidence of change in the locality. The Northleach Museum is also built around the work of an individual collector, Miss Olive Lloyd Baker, who for fifty years until her death in 1975 combined the running of her Hardwicke Court estate with good works around the county. Subsequently the collection, the finest in the region and amounting to 684 items of local rural and agricultural interest from the horse era, was taken into public ownership when the Treasury accepted it in lieu of capital transfer tax. This was something of a high water mark for no agricultural material before or since has been the subject of such official recognition. Ironically, the collection was originally destined for Gloucester's Folk Museum but the City had a change of heart, largely on financial grounds, and left the way clear for Cotswold District Council to propose a new museum to house the collection in the eighteenth-century House of Correction at Northleach. The fate of that collection now looks bleak. The Council has announced that it will remain in place for the time being but would clearly like someone to take it off its hands.

Both collections are the physical representation of the indigenous rural culture of the area. They could only have come from that place in that time and each has a story to tell. They are unique and they are part of the patchwork that makes up the distributed national

*Left: Gloucester Old Spot pig. Are Gloucestershire's social history museums set on the road to becoming another rare breed?*

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*Top right: Walter and Mary Spreadbury pictured on the family onion patch.*

*Photograph from the Spreadbury Archive featured on page 6.*



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collection of rural and agricultural material. Why then is it that we seem less convinced today? What possible reason could there be for thinking that these collections are any less important now than when they were first put together? In what other aspect of the national heritage would such a view gain credence? We are encountering a crisis of faith because economic reality appears to show that museums and collections of this kind now draw too few visitors for them to be sustainable. But that is a misinterpretation based on only half of the story. The truth is that this genre of museum has been starved of resources for many years and

gradually drained of the energy to adapt and retain its relevance to today's audience. It need not be a downward spiral. Reinvigoration is in the air as was demonstrated recently by the makeover at Norfolk's Rural Life Museum, by the launch of the Museum of Scottish Country Life, and hopefully by the impending developments at Reading. Will the second coming of the rural life museum be too late for these two distinguished Gloucestershire collections? I hope not.

**Dr Roy Brigden is Deputy Director of the Rural History Centre and Keeper of MERL**

## Hunting for History

The most recent focus of collecting at Leicestershire County Council's Heritage Service has been photographic material and documents surrounding the public demonstrations supporting and opposing the Hunting Bill, which culminated in the 'Liberty and Livelihood' march in London last September.

This material adds to Leicester County Council's small but rapidly expanding collection associated with the history of and debate on fox-hunting upon which the recent refurbishment of Melton Carnegie Museum heavily relied.

While collecting contemporary material has and

always will challenge general visitor perceptions of museums, it has been possible to build up a resource of recent material - comprising photographic records, documents and ephemera - to be stored for future interpretative projects.

A systematic approach to recording many of the trades associated with hunting is scheduled to start in the spring. This is taking place against the background of Leicester County Council's review of policy issues relating to its museum and archives collections, which has reached its final stages. Highlighting particular strengths in the Leicestershire Life Collection - including hunting material - the revised policy brings together into a single document for the first time its rationale for collecting, conserving, using and disposing of the objects and archives in its care. The policy is aimed at service users, and consultation with partners and other interested groups will begin shortly.

*Jenny Dancey, who supplied the text and photographs for this article, is Curator of the Melton Carnegie Museum, Melton Mowbray*

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*Left: The 'Livelihood' strand of the 'Liberty and Livelihood' march starting out near London Bridge, 22nd September 2002. Below: Poster on road sign, South Croxton, Leicestershire*





# The Agricultural Historian and Environmental History

By John Sheail

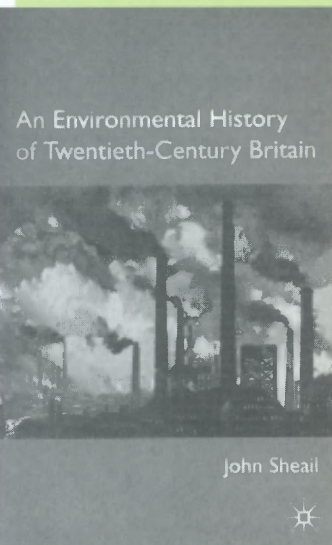
**Agricultural historians should need no lessons in environmental history. After all, W.G. Hoskins took economic historians to task, in an early volume of *Agricultural History Review*, for failing to appreciate the tyranny of the annual fluctuations in harvest yields, and the bearing of such uncertainty upon human demography, social well-being and perhaps even the fundamental processes of economic growth. Others have endeavoured to distinguish the respective roles of weather and climate, topography and soils, the choice of crops and livestock, and the aspirations and resources vested in such husbandry. Archives have been closely scrutinised for evidence of how the land was kept in good heart, in the sense of preserving and enhancing, and therefore conserving, its productivity.**

Agricultural historians have taken increasing account of the other inhabitants and artefacts of the farm and estate. A paper by Eric Jones pointed to the significance of wild birds, which might be persecuted as pests, welcomed as a further source of food, or their presence simply tolerated. The complexities of relationships between the natural environment and human endeavour were explored in such studies as that of Mary Dobson on the disappearance of the ague, and the respective roles of the biology of the mosquito, ecology of its habitat, hydrological change, and personal living-standards, in bringing about its demise.

Malcolm Chase, writing in *Rural History* in 1992, was nevertheless critical of the imperviousness of historical scholarship to what he called 'green issues'. At a time when many perceived 'an environmental revolution' to be taking place, neglect further encouraged the popular assumption that 'environmental limits' had only

recently been ruptured by human activity. Such passivity could be exaggerated. Where historical ecologists had begun to take increasing interest in the character and significance of past ecosystems, their studies almost invariably encompassed such human impacts as agriculture. An informal Historical Ecology Discussion Group brought together ecologists, geographers, and documentary and field historians. A conference, in November 1969, focused on the common interests of ecologists and archaeologists in 'old grasslands', and how mutual support might be given both through closer research links and the exchange of expertise in managing such grasslands as Ancient Monuments and Sites of Special Scientific Interest. The initiative came largely from the Nature Conservancy. As the Conservancy and county naturalists' trusts became owners of 'ancient woodland', so there was urgent reason to discover more as to its natural and cultural significance. Hedgerow dating and the significance of species composition were the subject of a conference held in 1971, under the auspices of the Standing Conference for Local History. Much more was at issue than diligence. Where British scholars were, for the most part, content to work away at the incremental filling out of the historical picture and, in doing so, be of use to environmentalists, there were considerably more pretentious moves in North America to create whole canvases. Environmental history was self-consciously promoted as an integral part of the clamour of the 1970s to do something about 'the global predicament'. As Donald Worster famously observed, environmental history in America was born out of 'a strong moral concern'. That more emotive, overtly political goal was more easily achieved by projecting the writing of such history as novel, and its findings as shocking. Whether the recent past was perceived as a massive discontinuity, or whether precedents could be found for such divorce of culture from nature, the value-laden words of 'abuse' and 'degradation' figured large in such writing. As Christopher Smout has remarked, their use went to the heart of the environmental historian's business. For proponents of some kind of environmental rectitude, 'useful history' might well be to scour the past for detail to support the pre-determined case. For Smout, himself the founder-director of the Centre for Environmental History at St Andrews/Stirling, the aim was rather to make history available, in the sense of describing as comprehensively as possible what had happened where and when, how and why, and to adjudge (again from all the evidence to hand) how far such

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*An Environmental History of Twentieth-Century Britain was published by Palgrave in March 2002 and is available at £16.99 (paperback) and £49.50 (hardback)*



'Many of the threads are in place that should tie the interests of historians in the farmed countryside to those of the ecologist'.

human aspiration had been met without prejudice to future generations.

Whatever the other stratagems, the emerging field of environmental history strove for academic esteem through workshops and journals that drew attention to its potential and tentative findings. An international workshop of European environmental history was convened at Bad Homburg, Germany, in 1988, its published proceedings providing a comparative discussion of the impacts of urban-industrial pollution in England, Germany and the Netherlands. The American Society for Environmental History published an increasingly substantial journal, *Environmental History*. Through the initiative of Andrew Johnson of the White Horse Press, a British-based journal, *Environment and History*, now approaches its tenth year. Its editors, John M. MacKenzie and Fiona Watson, continue to attract an impressively international range of papers. As for book-writing, Chris Smout has further explored what he characterised as the contest between conservation and development - use versus delight - in an environmental history of Scotland and Northern England since the sixteenth century. Ian Simmons' 10,000-year environmental history of Great Britain has rightly been called by Robert Dodgshon 'a benchmark text' for its fusion of cultural and natural history.

In a first attempt at writing a self-conscious 'environmental history' of Britain since the Industrial Revolution, B.W. Clapp remarked on how the subject matter of such histories would only be decided by long practice and example. A new millennium seemed an obvious time to attempt *An Environmental History of Twentieth-Century Britain*, with the emphasis on the indefinite article. The object was not so much a comprehensive review of all that was significant, but rather of illustrating the use of both printed and archival sources to identify the more pressing environmental concerns of that century, and how they were tackled. In his environmental history of the USA, Hal Rothman characterised the twentieth century as 'the regulatory century', with environmental regulation among the most pervasive in everyday American life. Production agriculture bulks large in a British account, whether such farming is characterised as a force for military victory in two world wars, or as an increasingly despised 'engine of destruction'. Occupying some three-quarters of the UK land surface, it provided both the site and context to the 'new beginnings in forestry' and the third force in the countryside, alongside farming and forestry, that of outdoor recreation and the protection of

amenity and wildlife. Where pollution was once regarded as largely an urban phenomenon, residues of the pesticides introduced to farming in the 1950s became as ubiquitous as the fallout from atmospheric nuclear tests.

These reflections, as invited by the Editor, might perhaps most appropriately conclude with some illustration of the opportunities which continue to arise as the more senior scholarly activity, agricultural history, celebrates the half-century of the BAHS. Many of the threads are in place that should tie the interests of historians in the farmed countryside to those of the ecologist. As Tom Williamson expressed it, 'landscape history has come of age'. Historical ecologists have continued to reconstruct the former distribution of such plants and, by implication, changes to their respective habitats.

Turning to current policy-making, increasing weight is being given to protecting not only wild species, but the genetic individuality of local populations. It is heritage value, so the argument goes, that must not be compromised by gene flow from an external source. The term 'genetic pollution' has been coined to describe the loss of such 'purity'. Yet alongside the need for fuller understanding of what this might constitute and the factors affecting its significance, the agricultural historian might also provide salutary insights. Far from crop and weed species developing in some kind of isolation ward, they must have been exposed, over many centuries, to a wide array of imported genotypes. As Joan Thirsk remarked, in a foreword to Mauro Ambrosoli's volume, *The Wild and the Sown*, it comes as a shock to realise the clover revolution depended heavily, throughout the nineteenth century, on the supply of seed from southern Europe.

And turning to the current controversy in production agriculture over GM crops, the Royal Society President, Lord May, has pressed for the debate to centre on the appropriate applications rather than on the visceral rejection of the technology itself. There is a choice between a further intensification, with 'fewer wild plants, fewer insects and an ever more silent spring', or a 'Doubly Green Revolution', in which 'we grow our food efficiently in ways which work with the grain of nature'. In contemplating what historical perspectives might be brought to this debate as to 'the appropriate uses of a new technology', agricultural historians are likely to discover how imperfect is their own knowledge and understanding of debates as to 'appropriateness' in the past. For history to become available, it must first be within the grasp of the historian.

## News from the Rural History Centre and Museum of English Rural Life

### New Reading Room for Researchers

Over the summer, the RHC undertook an office reorganisation to create a new Reading Room for the Centre's archive, photographic and library collections.

The Room was officially opened by Professor Fulford, Pro-Vice-Chancellor of the University of Reading, on 14 August 2002. A member of staff is always on duty in the new facility, which includes eight reader spaces, a computer terminal to search the RHC's database (available at [www.ruralhistory.org](http://www.ruralhistory.org)), a microfiche reader and card indexes. The Room is open Monday to Friday 10am-4.30pm by appointment.

### Preservation of Agricultural Glass Negatives Project

The Rural History Centre has recently been awarded £50,000 from the Heritage Lottery Your Heritage Fund to preserve the Centre's glass negatives collection.

The project will package 130,000 glass plate negatives of the *Farmers Weekly* and *Farmer and Stockbreeder* magazines' photographic collections. All the glass plate negatives will be enclosed in four flap archival enclosures and placed in acid free boxes.

The collections are of historical, social and agricultural significance and include images of farm labour, wartime farming, agricultural shows, events and personalities.

We are currently seeking volunteers to take part in the project, which will begin in March. Please contact Caroline Gould (0118 931 8660, [c.l.gould@reading.ac.uk](mailto:c.l.gould@reading.ac.uk)) for further information.

### Access to Archives Project

The catalogues of the Historical Farm Records Collection are now available on the Public Record Office's Access to Archives (A2A) web site at [www.a2a.pro.gov.uk](http://www.a2a.pro.gov.uk).

A2A is the English strand of the UK archives network, bringing together millions of catalogue entries from different archive institutions and making the information available from one web site.

The RHC has recently received money from the

Designation Fund to contribute a further 2089 pages of our trade catalogues to Access to Archives. They should be available in June 2003.

### Retirement of John Creasey

Rural historians worldwide will be saddened at the news of the retirement last September of John S. Creasey, Information Officer and Librarian at the Rural History Centre since 1971.

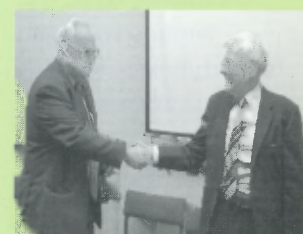
The Library is his own unique achievement. With minimal professional and clerical help, he built a small reference collection into what is widely acknowledged as the largest and best facility of its kind in the field of nineteenth and twentieth-century English rural and agricultural history, specialising in practical farming, rural crafts and industries and contemporary 'rural life' literature. John will be remembered, with gratitude, for his unstinting assistance to enquirers, based on a remarkably detailed knowledge of the collections and their subject matter. A bibliophile and polymath whose interests ranged from folk museums and medieval churches to Kentish history, his retirement marks the end of a crucial first stage in the development of the RHC as a national centre for research and information.

Ted Collins

### The DEFRA Deposit and AHRB Gift

Through the good services of the Librarian of the new Department of Environment, Food and Rural Affairs, the RHC has received a large portion of the library of the Ministry of Agriculture.

From the basements of Whitehall Place have come printed materials dating from the late eighteenth century through to the 1970s and beyond, including many local farming journals. The gift also includes the Fussell collection of antiquarian farming books, long runs of trade periodicals, several hundred nineteenth-century Royal Commissions and such exotica as the Ministry library's own paste-up volumes of parliamentary questions asked of the Ministry. There are also several thousand books - in all somewhere over 300 shelf metres of books and periodicals. The deposit forms a most valuable extension of our holdings. Mercifully, the AHRB has also come to our aid by making us an award of £160,000 to catalogue the gift. We hope soon to have a new cataloguing team in post and to be able to make some of the collections available to readers in the Autumn of this year.



John Creasey pictured with Professor Ted Collins, RHC Director 1979 - 2000, at his retirement party in October, which was attended by many colleagues and friends.

John was appointed Information Officer in 1971 and Information Officer and Librarian in 1974. He retired in September 2002, but will be working part-time for a further year.



## The Spreadbury Archive

In Autumn 2002, the Rural History Centre received an extensive gift of photographs, documents, taped oral reminiscences and transcriptions relating to a Wiltshire community.

The donor, Mr Benjamin Spreadbury, worked on the land during the 1930s at East Everleigh near Marlborough. The material relates to identified individuals, families and locations, giving a detailed and wide-ranging picture of Downland life.

Please contact the RHC for further information.

Walter Spreadbury, seated front right, on a haymaking break with other members of the Spreadbury family in 1928.



### The Milking Machine

'When old Cave came there first after taking over the farm from old Joey Nicholls ... he brought along with him a Hosier milking machine. Now this machine was the first one that anybody had ever seen or heard of round this way. Now this meant that those old cows didn't have to be taken twice a day to the yard for to be milked, because this was going to be done out on them downs with this machine, and on top of that, it only needed one cowman and one boy for to milk the whole lot of them instead of about four of them.

'The cows were put in a pen close to the machine. There were three bays to this machine and two cows could go into each bay. Once they were in, they were tied up round the backside with a chain. At the front of them there was a tin door fixed on a wooden frame, and attached to the door at the bottom was a strong steel wire. This wire went up to the top of the frame and then to the back. There was also a wooden shoot at the front where they were giving a small portion of cake. This cake was put in from the top of the machine and had to be topped up at intervals by the cowman. The cake was regulated by a shutter, you pulled a lever back which let the cake down into a box where the old cow could get at it. There was no trouble for to get the cows in to be milked, because they knew that there was a bit of cake on the end of it.

There were three sets of cups, one set in each bay, and when the first one was finished, the cups were taken off and put on the other cow. 'Twas my job for to start stripping out the cow where the cups had just been taken off. I had to sit on a three legged wooden stool, with a little tin bucket in between my legs holding on to them with my knees and what a job that was. When I'd finished, I then pulled on this steel wire which had a handle on it for to put your hand through which lifted up the door at the front. Then you gave the old cow a kick up the backside and out he went ready for the next one to come in.

'The milk went along pipes and into a little hut where there was a little engine which started all things again. The milk then went through a cooler and then into milk churns which held eight gallons. This

was one of the cowman's jobs to see how they were filling up. After all the milking had been finished, we had to steam out everything which had been used, or else it would soon be sour.'

### Foot and Mouth

'In the early 1930s there was an outbreak of Foot and Mouth disease in many parts of the country. At that time, my father was looking after some 'dry cattle' as they were called then, which meant that their milk producing days were over and they were being fatted up for sale. He came home one night from work and mother remarked he did not seem to be his usual self. His reply was that some of these cows seemed to be off colour and that he had a very strong feeling that it was



1930s threshing gang - Lower House Farm, East Everleigh

Foot and Mouth disease, and that he had notified the farmer, who was going to inform the veterinary surgeon.

'The vet soon came out and confirmed what father had first thought. This came as a great shock to the village people because there had been no outbreaks of this disease in the vicinity. A ban was immediately imposed on all movements of cattle for up to a 25 mile radius which even meant that no cattle could be moved from one field to another. All cloven-footed animals on the farm had to be destroyed, which also included nannygoats if anyone had one to help out with the milk situation.

'Now Mr Hazell had a pedigree registered flock of about 400 Hampshire Down breeding ewes, and he vowed and declared that he would not let one of those sheep be killed. He said that he would go up to the field where these sheep were being penned off with a double barrelled shot gun and shoot any Ministry Officials who came anywhere near them.

'Now whether this was sufficient warning to those men or not I do not know, but not one of those sheep were killed. This caused some speculation amongst the village people about how he got away with it.'



# Rethinking Agricultural Depression: British Agriculture between the Wars

By Jeremy Burchardt

The Interwar Rural History Research Group held its second conference at the National Agricultural Centre, Stoneleigh, on 16 October 2002.

Paul Brassley gave the morning's first paper, presenting new data on agricultural output, costs and incomes between the wars. He concluded that physical output was maintained (and may even have increased somewhat) but its value fell. Costs were relatively stable although labour inputs fell. Incomes rose from an index of 100 in 1904-10 to 229.0 in 1920-22 but then slumped to 79.5 in 1930-34 before rising again to 139.8. The sharp rise in incomes to 1920-22 emerges as a significant factor in explaining the subjective intensity of the experience of agricultural depression in the 1930s.

Ted Collins provided striking figures on rates of output and productivity growth in British agriculture during the interwar years, demonstrating that far from being a 'continuation' of the late nineteenth-century depression, the period from the mid-20s to mid-30s saw the onset of quite different trends. Gross output grew at +1.2% p.a. (compared to -0.3% for the 1870s-1910/13) whilst labour productivity grew at +2.2% (compared to +0.5% for the earlier period). Total factor productivity grew at an impressive +2.0% (compared to +0.5%). Key factors in this were rising consumer demand and steep falls in the cost of feed and fertilisers. Agricultural science and government intervention probably played only a marginal role.

After lunch Phillip Sheppy, librarian of the RASE, gave a guided tour of the Society's impressive library and archives, including rare books from as early as the seventeenth century. The next paper, by John Martin, emphasized the need to understand the marked differences of outlook and situation between British farmers if we are to understand the response of agriculture to the experience of depression. Drawing on recent work by rural sociologists and agricultural economists, Dr Martin put forward a provisional typology of interwar farmers and then provided a more detailed analysis of two groups of

entrepreneurial farmers, cereal growers who adopted combine harvesters, and outdoor milk producers. The dynamic, innovative approach of these two groups to the need to cut costs demonstrated both the variety of responses of interwar farmers and the significance of this period for the development of practices that were to make a major impact in the post-war years.

Philip Conford's paper on the organic movement argued that it was an alternative to mainstream farming during the interwar years, one which emphasised food quality and agricultural sustainability rather than cheapness and labour productivity. The interwar years were a formative period for the organic movement.

Although concerns had been raised about issues such as the use of artificial fertilisers prior to the First World War, it was only in the 1920s and 1930s that a coherent organic approach to agriculture came into existence, pioneered above all by Sir Albert Howard whose Indore Process provided a viable practical model for would-be organic farmers and market gardeners. The organic movement had several other strands between the wars, however. Followers of Rudolf Steiner promoted his Biodynamic system of cultivation (much to the dismay of Howard, who distrusted the mystical cosmology underpinning Biodynamicism), whilst doctors such as Robert McCarrison and right-wing landowners like Rolf Gardiner and Viscount Lymington provided a further dimension to interwar organicism. Indeed, it was only towards the very end of this period, in 1938 and 1939, that these different strands came together.

A wide-ranging discussion followed, which it would be impossible to summarize briefly, with questions ranging from the influence of imperial/foreign experience on farming methods to whether the expansion of agricultural education created 'a new kind of farmer' in this period, whether the causes of output and productivity growth in these years were the same or different from those which led to such impressive results after the war, and whether the benefits of falling fertiliser prices were limited by the failure of crop scientists to develop appropriate varieties.

The next IRHRG seminar meeting will be on 21 May 2003 at the Centre for Ecology and Hydrology, Monk's Wood, Huntingdon, hosted by John Sheail (jdbs@ceh.ac.uk)

Jeremy Burchardt is lecturer at the Rural History Centre. His most recent publication is *The Allotment Movement in England, 1793-1873* (Boydell and Brewer, Woodbridge, 2002). Copies are available from the publishers

*'The dynamic, innovative approach .. to the need to cut costs demonstrated both the variety of responses of interwar farmers and the significance of this period for the development of practices that were to make a major impact in the post-war years'.*



Above: Interwar depression? Tithe barn, Naseby, 1930



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*Rural History Today* would be pleased to receive short articles, press releases, notes and queries for publication. Articles for submission should be sent to Richard Statham at the RHC (r.i.statham@reading.ac.uk).

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www.ruralhistory.org

Membership of the BAHS is open to all who support its aim of promoting the study of agricultural history and the history of rural economy and society. Membership enquiries should be directed to the Treasurer, BAHS, c/o Dept. of History, University of Exeter, Amory Building, Rennes Drive, Exeter EX4 4RJ. Enquiries about other aspects of the Society's work should be directed to the Secretary, Dr John Broad, Dept. Humanities, Arts and Languages, London Metropolitan Univ., 166 - 220 Holloway Road, London N7 8DB. Tel: 020 7753 5020, Fax: 020 7753 3159, j.broad@londonmet.ac.uk Articles for submission to *Agricultural History Review* should be sent to Prof. R. W. Hoyle at the Rural History Centre.

## Rodney Hilton's Middle Ages (400 - 1600)

A conference at the University of Birmingham  
13 - 14 September 2003

Rodney Hilton (1916 - 2000) is remembered and celebrated in this conference, which takes as its theme ideas and approaches which he devised. The conference will be held at the University of Birmingham where he taught for 36 years, and is sponsored by *Past and Present*, which he served as a member of the editorial board and for fourteen years as its chairman.

The purpose of the sessions, detailed below, is to recognise the directions in which he pointed, to define current developments in key historical issues, and to look forward to future thinking.

### Lordship, rent and social structure. What was the impact of lordship on society and economy?

Contributors: Grenville Astill, Peter Coss, Wendy Davies, Phillipp Schofield, Erik Thoen, Chris Wickham

### The peasantry as class and communities. Can we talk of a 'peasant society'?

Contributors: Isabel Alfonso, Monique Bourin, Ros Faith, Miriam Muller, Zvi Razi

### 'Non-feudal islands in the feudal seas'. How did towns relate to feudal society?

Contributors: Richard Goddard, Richard Holt, Steve Rigby, Penny Roberts, Heather Swanson

### 'Bond men made free'. Rebellion and liberation

Contributors: Sam Cohn, Steven Justice, Pablo Sanchez, Jane Whittle

### The transition from feudalism to capitalism.

### Changes in medieval society and the origins of the modern world

Contributors: Bas van Bavel, Spencer Dimmock, Christopher Dyer, Larry Epstein

For information and registration forms, please contact: Dr. Heather Swanson, Dept. of History, Univ. of Birmingham, Edgbaston, Birmingham, B15 2TT, 0121 459 4038, hcs4@tutor.open.ac.uk

## The Allotment: Its Past, Present and Future

A one-day conference organised by the RHC at the University of Reading. Saturday, 31 May 2003

Speakers include: Dr Jeremy Burchardt, *The Nineteenth-Century Allotment Movement*; Dr Phillada Ballard, *Guinea Gardens*; Geoff Stokes, *The NSALG*; Professor David Crouch, *The Art of Allotments*; Michael Wale, *Inner-City Allotments*; Dr Richard Wiltshire, *Thinking the undiggable: a future without allotments?*

Fee: £25, including lunch. Contact Dr Rachel Stewart on 0118 378 8306 for details and to receive a booking form. There will be a conference on post-1945 British farming at the RHC on 22 Sept. Full details in next issue.

## BAHS Jubilee Spring Conference 2003

7 - 9 April, King Alfred's College, Winchester

### The Programme will include:

Jubilee Prize Essay - Dr David Stone (Univ. of Cambridge), *The productivity and management of sheep in late medieval England*

Prof. Chris Dyer (Univ. of Leicester), *50 years behind the plough - how has our understanding of the medieval countryside changed?*

Prof. Doug Hurt (Univ. of Iowa), *Reflections on American Agricultural History*

Dr John Hare (Peter Symond's Coll., Winchester), *Demesne agriculture in the chalklands of medieval Hampshire*

Prof. Richard Hoyle (RHC), *Tenurial change and litigation in England 1550 - 1640*

Dr Peter Dewey, *The British Farm Tractor 1932 - 2002: Saviour of the agricultural machinery industry or cuckoo in the nest?*

*BAHS after 50 years* - a reminiscence session led by Prof. John Chartres

*Excursion to Waitrose model farm on the Leckford estate* introduced by Dr Roy Brigden

*New Researcher's Session*

A full programme can be obtained from the BAHS website, BAHS.org.uk

## A Friends Organisation for MERL and the RHC?

MERL and the RHC owe a great debt of gratitude to their many friends - volunteers, sponsors and donors - for all their help with the day to day running of the Centre, and by making the future expansion of the RHC at St Andrew's a living reality through financial support.

Mindful of the enormous and much-valued contribution which our informal 'friends' have provided over the years, the RHC, as part of Reading University, is now considering the establishment of a formal 'Friends' organisation which would play a much-needed role in nurturing the RHC as it moves into an exciting new phase.

The RHC therefore invites all readers of *Rural History Today* to express their general views on the proposal, or to indicate interest in taking an active role in the new organisation. Please contact us at rhc@reading.ac.uk or call 0118 378 8660.