

The Women's Land Army

The Women's Land Army has received a lot of attention this year encouraged by the final recognition for their efforts in the form of badges provided by Defra.



Cover picture (detail) from *The Women's Land Army: a portrait* by Gill Clarke. Sansom & Company Ltd, £24.95

Two new books and an exhibition have ensured that the WLA's role will not be forgotten. There has been an exhibition at the St. Barbe Art Gallery, Lymington, sadly closing on the 10th January, which drew on the original drawings and paintings created for the War Advisory Committee and mostly now held by the Imperial War Museum, many of which had not been exhibited since the war years. The fully illustrated catalogue seeks to redress the neglect of these artists by focusing overdue attention on

their contribution to twentieth century British art and cultural history.

Often been labelled 'the Forgotten Army': these women worked in difficult conditions and sometimes in virtual isolation to ensure that food production was maintained despite the drain of rural workers into the army.

However, if you missed the exhibition all is not lost. Gill Clarke, who helped put the exhibition together has also produced a book *The Women's Land Army: a Portrait*. Using both words and images, she tracks the genesis of the Women's Land Army in the first world war through its re-formation in the second and final disbandment in 1950. It makes extensive use of the paintings, photographs and recruitment posters of the time as well as drawing on published autobiographies and recent interviews by the author with land girls of the second world war. It will be of interest not only to rural historians, but also art and cultural historians of the world wars.

Also published in October was Stuart Antrobus' *'We Wouldn't have missed it for the World' The Women's Land Army in Bedfordshire, 1939-1950*. It tells the story of the hundreds of young women who worked on Bedfordshire farms and market gardens during the second world war. Again this book draws on personal memories collected through interviews and is illustrated by over 160 photographs. Importantly, it contains a definitive alphabetical list of almost 3,500 maiden names of land girls which will be of great value to family historians.

Let us hope that we see more local studies over the next few years while the oral evidence is still available.

Above – Cover picture from Stuart Antrobus 'We wouldn't have missed it for the World' *The Women's Land Army in Bedfordshire 1939-1945* The Book Castle, £16.99

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British Agricultural
History Society

Volunteer-run museums in market towns and villages

Bridget Yates, who for many years was the founding curator of Norfolk Museum Service's Gressenhall Rural Life Museum, is now undertaking research at the University of Gloucester on volunteer-run museums in the market towns and villages of England. She would be delighted to hear from any one with information on volunteer run museums started before 1950 or from other researchers in this area.

She can be contacted at s0411613@glos.ac.uk or at bridget.yates@tiscali.co.uk

The museum landscape in England today is a complex mix of institutions run by national and local government, universities, private and commercial bodies, charitable trusts and charitable companies. Approximately 10% of museums are run entirely by volunteers, mainly situated in rural areas, in small towns and villages.

Many of these date from the 1950s, which coincided with the rising interest in local history and the foundation of closely focused local history societies, and from the 1970s and 1980s, the years of the 'heritage' boom; but there are a number which date from an earlier period. These small museums are not evenly distributed across England; there is a far greater concentration in the South West, the South East and the East of England than in other regions. Although much of the research for my PhD will concentrate on the volunteer run museums of Dorset at the present day, and will seek to understand what motivates their volunteers, and the importance that they attach to the role of the museum in their communities, I have also been exploring the history of volunteer-run museums, and the relationship between their establishment and the broader changes in and attitudes towards the rural community, including when it became important to collect specifically *local* items that reflected the life and activities of ordinary people in the area.

The oldest museum that I have found (so far!) that has been run entirely by volunteers since its foundation is the Victoria Jubilee Museum at Cawthorne in Yorkshire, begun in 1884¹. In the nineteenth century Cawthorne was a semi-industrial community with collieries, iron furnaces and brickworks alongside the agricultural activity of the Cannon Hall estate. The two prime movers of the project were Roddam Spencer Stanhope, younger brother of the local landowner and a second generation Pre-Raphaelite artist, and Rev. Charles Tiplady Pratt, the Vicar. The museum was "to be managed, of course, by the people themselves." (*Cawthorne Parish Magazine*, January 1884). A Cawthorne Museum Society was set up, a committee elected, donations solicited, including a collection of minerals from John Ruskin, and the museum

established in some old cottages. A year or so later, a new museum was erected, which is still in use, using materials from demolished estate buildings, and opened to commemorate the Queen's Jubilee of 1887. The early history of the museum is chronicled in the *Cawthorne Parish Magazine*, written by Pratt until his retirement in 1915, and through surviving Minute Books and Visitors Books. In its early years, and particularly while Rev. Pratt remained as chairman/curator, the museum collected natural history, geology, antiquities and various items brought from abroad or from the field of battle by members of the Spencer Stanhope family; it did not collect items that reflected the history of the village or the life of its people. In this, the museum was following the lead of the larger, urban museums. However, where it differed was in its management – between 1884 and 1894 twenty nine individuals served on the committee and they included five employed in mining, four as gardeners, a mason and a mason's labourer, a teamster, the postmaster and grocer, and a blacksmith, in addition to those working for the estate. The group appears to have been representative of the Museum Society as a whole, the majority of whom came from the working and lower middle classes, with mining being the largest occupational group.

During 1891, 2,609 people signed the Visitors Book, 285 coming from Huddersfield, fourteen miles away, and 193 from Barnsley, which is four miles away. It has been possible to identify the occupations of a number of the visitors, particularly those who came in groups from churches or chapels, as neighbours or as friends; two typical examples are the group of young women from Clayton West, (a dressmaker, a worsted spinner, a worsted weaver, a cashmere weaver and a manufacturer, boots and shoes) and the group of eighteen young men, members of the Skelmanthorpe Naturalists Society, which included six coal miners, a banksman and a colliery trammer, five fancy weavers, a joiner's apprentice and a general labourer.

One of the questions that arose from my study of Cawthorne was when museums, and particularly these very small museums, began to collect local material, and to focus much more closely on the life of the people who lived in the village or small town served by the museum. At Cawthorne, this shift may not have occurred until the 1940s, but during the 1920s and 1930s a number of small village museums were

¹ The early history of the Victoria Jubilee Museum, Cawthorne, was the subject of a paper delivered at the Voluntary Action History Society Conference held in Liverpool in July 2008.



Victoria Jubilee Museum, Cawthorne, Yorkshire

started whose purpose was to collect local artefacts, then known as bygoners, rather than natural history or geology. Sometimes these museums were set up by individuals, such as Lavinia Smith's East Hendred

(Berkshire) collection, which contained items given to her by villagers, purchased locally or even found on the village dump. The museum closed at some time in the 1940s and much of the collection, and a

catalogue, is now in the Museum of English Rural Life at Reading. There is no evidence it was ever actually run by the villagers, but elsewhere village museums were appearing that were managed in this way, and this is the area that I am currently engaged in exploring. These museums include Filkins in Oxfordshire, founded and funded by Sir Stafford Cripps, Ashwell in Hertfordshire, where the collection was started by two schoolboys and the museum established under the chairmanship of E.O.Fordham, elder brother of Montague Fordham, secretary of the Rural Reconstruction Association, Westmill, also in Hertfordshire, Winchcombe in Gloucestershire, visited and publicised by H.J.Massingham (who had his own collection of rural bygoners, which he described in *Country Relics*, (C.U.P. 1939,) and Portland in Dorset, founded by Dr.Marie Stopes.

Bridget Yates

NEW PUBLICATIONS

The Husbandry of Devon and Cornwall

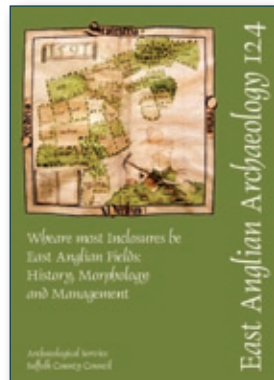
Robin Staines, Andrew Jewell & Richard Bass £8.50; available from Deep End, Deepdene Park, Exeter EX2 4PH

This publication is a collection of eight essays by these well known west country historians. While they all have or will appear in local academic journals such as *The Devon Historian* and *Exeter Papers in Economic History*, it is extremely useful to have them all gathered together under one cover. Titles include; 'Devon agriculture in the eighteenth century, the evidence of the Miles MS', 'Landlord and tenant husbandry covenants in eighteenth century Devon', 'Uffculme husbandry' and 'The Devonshire Hedgebank'.

'Where most Inclosures be' East Anglian Fields: History, Morphology and Management

Edward Martin & Mark Satchell East Anglian Archaeology monograph series £30 from www.eaareports.org.uk

The survey of which this book is the final report is the result of twelve detailed case



studies in Norfolk, Suffolk and Essex. In each place the landscape was mapped and quantified into basic land types using archive maps and other documentary material as well as the early OS maps and fieldwork. It was clear that there were areas where block holdings were more common in the south and common fields to the north. The study emphasized the importance of the 'Gipping divide', following the course of the River Gipping through Suffolk. This cultural boundary is obvious not only in field systems, but intriguingly also in vernacular architecture, terminology used to describe greens and woods and in inheritance patterns. The origin of co-axial field systems is examined and the conclusion drawn they are not necessarily pre-Saxon features. It also concludes that the adoption of common

fields may have arisen out of the social upheaval caused by the Viking interventions or in the reorganization following the English re-conquest. Conversely areas where there was minimum Viking influence seem to have developed block demesnes, possibly as a continuation of farming practices that could have their roots in the Roman period or even earlier.

From these few conclusions, picked out from a range of stimulating hypotheses put forward in the book, it is clear that it will be of great interest to those involved in the study of English field systems and their origins.

The Countryside of East Anglia Changing Landscapes 1870–1950

Susanna Wade Martins and Tom Williamson Boydell and Brewer £25

This book brings the East Anglian story up to the end of the second world war and looks at a variety of themes often forgotten by landscape historians such as the affect of the motor car. When, for instance were roads tarmaced? The village as well as the farming and tourist landscapes are considered as well as the major landscape change in the area of the interwar years – the planting of Thetford forest.

Jonas Webb and Henry Adeane: a famous sheepbreeder and his landlord

Dr Paul M. Wood is a Senior Teaching Fellow, Department of Biochemistry, University of Bristol and three times great grandson of Jonas Webb. His researches into family history, fuelled by the discovery in 2006 of two of Webb's notebooks, have thrown up some interesting questions about the relationship between landlord and tenant.

The relationship between landlord and tenant during the period of the 'Agricultural Revolution' is one that is of increasing interest to agricultural historians. The simple division between a landlord who provided the fixed and the tenant the working capital is now seen to be too simplistic as Liz Griffiths' work on share farming has revealed. Evidence from some recently discovered notebooks of Jonas Webb of Cambridgeshire, the nineteenth century breeder of Southdown sheep is of interest to this debate.

The initial improvement of the Southdown breed and its popularising amongst the great landlords and improving farmers of the day is usually credited to John Ellman (1753–1832) of Glynde on the edge of the Sussex Weald. By the 1780s he was selling to the aristocracy in Essex, Suffolk, Norfolk and Bedfordshire and by the early 1800s to Northumberland, Ireland, Scotland and Russia. His sheep fitted well into the arable regime of the 'Norfolk system' where they were fed on the turnip fields during the day and folded on bare fallow at night. His rams sold for extravagant prices and were the basis for improved breeding programmes on the great estates. Their merits were much discussed at the sheep shearings at Woburn and Holkham and compared with that other improved breed; Robert Bakewell's New Leicesters. It was the cross between the Southdown and the Norfolk which created the modern Suffolk.

By the 1830s it was Jonas Webb of Babraham in Cambridgeshire who was the most famous Southdown breeder and whose ram sales had become the focus of interest for the leading improvers. His imposing statue in the village is inscribed: 'To Jonas Webb of Babraham, 1796–1862. By farmers and friends in many lands.' It is apparently unique in the UK in being funded by fellow-farmers. Webb was described by Charles Darwin as 'the most celebrated of recent breeders'. The question of how he achieved this fame raises some questions about his early years:

First, who paid for his initial flock? In a memoir for *Farmer's Magazine* in 1845 Webb wrote, 'I commenced by purchasing the best bred [Southdown] sheep from the principal breeders in Sussex, regardless of expense.'

His father was tenant at Streetly Hall, near West Wickham, Cambridgeshire, which at 550 acres was an unusually large and no doubt profitable farm at that time. However, Webb had six brothers and was not the eldest son. How could he afford to buy sheep 'regardless of expense'? The notebooks shed a new light, by providing evidence that his breeding programme included sheep belonging to his landlord, Henry Adeane of Babraham Hall (1790–1847). This is not stated in any published source, but suggests an element of partnership. Henry Adeane is not a name associated with the magic circle of agricultural improvers. He is not mentioned amongst the eminent guests to the Holkham sheep shearings, nor is he listed amongst the purchasers of sheep from the home farm in subsequent years.

Secondly, who organised his first ram-letting? For many years Webb held an annual event at which others paid handsomely for a season's use of one of his rams. The 1840 ram-letting, timed to coincide with the Cambridge Royal Show, was described as the 'most distinguished assembly of agriculturists since the days of the Holkham and Woburn sheep-shearings'. My only description of the first ram-letting is in Webb's obituary in the *Illustrated London News*:

'It was in 1826 that he first came out as a letter of Southdowns in the little meadow near the old house at Babraham, with the Dukes of Portland, Bedford and Richmond, Earl Ducie, 'Dick Gurney' and the first men of the day to back him.'

Webb had only started his flock in 1822 (the year after the Holkham sheep shearings ended) and did not win prizes at shows until the 1830s. The allusion to 'old house' is accurate, since Babraham Hall was rebuilt for Adeane in 1833–37 on the site of the old Hall. It was an era of intense competition



Statue of Jonas Webb at Babraham, Cambridgeshire

between leading landowners, but why should three Dukes attend the ram-letting of an unknown tenant farmer?

Babraham Hall was sold to the Agricultural Research Council in 1948 and is now the Babraham Institute. The library is for animal physiology researchers but includes a compilation of letters written by Adeane's wife, Matilda, as transcribed by their daughter Alethea in 1897. There are not many allusions to farming, but those there are, are quite revealing:

'I am at times very sick of farming; it is so completely the rage of the country gentlemen in these parts.' (9 December 1837)

'The sheep day went off very well yesterday, more people than ever, 300 sat down to dinner. The gentlemen all came back to tea (not the 300), one ram let for 52 guineas, and a gentleman came from

- 1 Darwin, C.R. *The variation of animals and plants under domestication* 1868 John Murray
- 2 'Memoir of Mr Jonas Webb of Babraham' *Farmer's Magazine* 1845 195–197
- 3 'The dispersion of the Babraham Downs' *Farmer's Magazine* 1861 68–70
- 4 'The late Mr Jonas Webb' *Illustrated London News* 1862 552–554

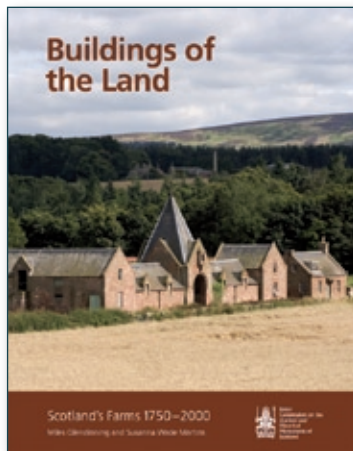
Centenary celebration

The Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historic Monuments of Scotland is alive and kicking 100 years on.

To commemorate this an exhibition 'Treasured places' ran at the City Art Centre, Edinburgh until the 18th January. It included over 200 photographs, drawings and paintings from the Commission's collections and covered both rural and urban buildings.

A book to accompany the exhibition, entitled *Treasured Places: a Centenary* by Head of Collections, Lesley Ferguson, price £7.50 acts as both a catalogue and souvenir of the exhibition as well as including a short history of the RCAHMS.

Amongst the other publications produced during the centenary year is *Buildings of the Land: Scotland's Farms 1750-2000* by Miles Glendinning and Susanna Wade Martins. Covering more than 300 farms it is the first book to look at the farm buildings of



Scotland as a whole within the context of its farming history. It draws heavily on the earlier recording work of the Commission as well as a more recent programme of research carried out over the last ten years.

New website for medieval settlements www.dmv.hull.ac.uk

Funded through a bequest by the late Maurice Beresford, the University of Hull is developing a web site dedicated to deserted and shrunken medieval settlements.

This interactive site will provide information on known settlements and allow images, maps and other material to be accessed in a number of ways; through a map-based search engine, county-wide searches and text-based searches.

► The site is still being constructed, but any information for inclusion will be more than welcome and should be sent to Dr H.Fenwick: h.fenwick@hull.ac.uk

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Liverpool and made great purchases for America, but the great glory is to have so many Sussex people come to be supplied.' (21 July 1838)

The ram-letting was a reversal of the normal landlord/tenant relationship, since buyers came to Babraham at Webb's behest. Only the gentry were invited back to tea! In the words 'great glory' we can sense the prestige that the Adeanes derived from Webb's success. Adeane's first wife died in 1824. In 1828 he married into the Stanley family of Alderley in Cheshire. In 1830 he became Tory MP for Cambridgeshire. These biographical details suggest personal reasons for him being keen to bring nobility and thus prestige to Babraham in 1826. If three dukes attended the first ram letting, it must have

been at Adeane's invitation.

In the *Farmer's Magazine* memoir and other written sources, Webb is portrayed as a self-made man. He was an exceptionally talented breeder, but it was only by starting with the best that he was able to dominate sheepbreeding for a generation. In the backing of his first ram-letting by leading agriculturists he must have had a sense of great expectations. He was regarded as the most straightforward of men. Are there other examples of well-known breeders, who were dependent on help from a sponsor to get started, but who never acknowledged this assistance in later life? As an amateur in this field I should be glad of feedback.

► Contact Dr Wood by email: pwood@bristol.ac.uk

OBITUARY

Dan Byford

Dan Byford died in July 2008 at the age of 81. He was a regular attender at the BAHS conference and for many years he served on the Society's executive committee. Dan was a very popular member of our society.



Photograph of Dan Byford (left) and Bill Chaloner taken in 1981 on the headland of the South Field at Laxton, Nottinghamshire.

He loved both the academic and social side of the conferences and got on well with everyone. For a big strong man – a former rugby union prop forward – he had a surprisingly high-pitched laugh, almost a giggle, which was infectious. At conferences we could rely on Dan to comment on every talk, no matter what the subject, by making a comparison with or a contrast to the experiences of the inhabitants of Hatfield Chase. Born and bred in the Yorkshire Dales, he moved to this lowland part of South Yorkshire when he became a history lecturer at what was then the High Melton Teacher Training College. He became a local historian with the enthusiasm of a convert and in 1972 registered for a PhD on the agricultural history of Hatfield Chase during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries under the supervision of Dr B.A. Holderness of Sheffield University. The pursuit of his PhD under old regulations that did not insist on a time limit, became legendary. The award of his doctorate in 2005 was the occasion of a special toast at the Society's Spring Conference.

Dan suffered from ill health caused by heart problems in his later years. His funeral service was attended by John Chartres (President of BAHS), Mike Turner and David Hey (who spoke of some of his memories of Dan over 40 years).

David Hey

CONFERENCES – PAST

2008 Agricultural History Annual Meeting University of Nevada, USA



Campus at the University of Nevada

Abigail Hunt of Peterborough Regional College reports on the Annual Conference of the Agricultural History Society (of America)

I first heard about the Agricultural History Society in late 2006 when the 2007 CFP was announced. I was immediately struck by two things; firstly the breadth of discussion taking place at this event and secondly its relevance to those of us researching British agricultural history. Unfortunately I was too late to submit a proposal, but decided to apply for the 2008 conference and seek funding from the University of Lincoln to participate.

So, in June 2008 I was lucky enough to attend the conference and present a paper based on my research with funding from the University of Lincoln and a travel bursary awarded by the Agricultural History Society.

My paper was titled “Women as Producers and Consumers in Lincolnshire: Changing Agricultural Practice and its Effects on Rural Culture during the mid to late twentieth century.” The aim of this paper was to examine the role of women as producers and consumers in rural Lincolnshire against a background of profound change in agricultural practice and life in the countryside from the 1950s to the 1970s. The paper was developed from my doctoral research material which examines how changes in agricultural practice have affected rural culture in

Lincolnshire between c.1930 and 2000. It drew on oral testimonies gathered as part of my doctoral research, and set findings against the growing historiography examining later twentieth-century rural English society and culture. I did not expect anyone in the audience to be familiar with the geographical area my research covers, and was surprised to meet an academic from Australia who came to listen to my paper as she visits her husband’s family in Alford, Lincolnshire, on a regular basis!

The conference was held in a brand new facility, on the University of Nevada Campus, which was an amazing location, overlooked by the Sierra Nevada Mountains. The theme for 2008 was agriculture, environment and Society in a global perspective, which encompassed sub themes from gender, to agricultural history and the media, and even a session on ways of teaching agricultural history.

I attended several lectures, by postgraduate students and professors from universities across the USA. The papers were wide ranging in scope and those I attended covered topics such as the option of concrete as a building material in 1930s rural America, organic agriculture in post war America, German views of the forest

during the Enlightenment, county fairs in Florida and the agrarian image of the state during the 1920s. There was also a highly interesting panel that focused on teaching agricultural history in a global context, and dealt with issues such as how to attract students towards agricultural history modules on offer at universities. Throughout the conference I was struck by the high quality of the papers by fellow post graduate students and the confidence with which they presented them, and I learned a huge amount about writing and presenting papers by attending this conference.

The highlight of the conference for me was an after dinner speech by Jim Harkness, President of the Institute for Agriculture and Trade Policy, Minneapolis, who spoke about the current world state and fate of agriculture. His lecture focused on the challenges the West currently faces in farming and the opportunities the Chinese Government is creating for its own economy through its agricultural policy.

There was also a fantastic field trip to Virginia City, Carson Valley and Lake Tahoe, which included a lecture by the state historian and a quick glimpse of the Bonanza ranch! This journey across the Comstock which took in attractions such as the historic Fourth Ward School gave participants a feel of what the West was like during the gold and silver rushes of the nineteenth century.



Old buildings in Virginia City Nevada

One of the most interesting aspects of the conference was the amount of research taking place on both sides of the Atlantic that is being undertaken in parallel, when perhaps a new approach might be to investigate the relationship and similarities between agricultural history in the USA and Britain. Hence my submission for the 2009 meeting in Little Rock Arkansas, of a paper about the shared experiences of women in agriculture in both countries during the 20th century.

CONFERENCES – FUTURE

Rural History 2010

An international conference dedicated to rural economies and societies.

The BAHS is planning to convene a conference in Brighton in September 2010. A conference committee under Dr Nicola Verdon (University of Sussex) has been set up, so watch this space.

Captain Swing Reconsidered: 40 years of rural history from below

Organized by the Southern History Society at the Agriculture Dept, University of Reading, RG6 6AR, 21 March 2009

The conference will take a fresh look at the Swing riots in the context of other disturbances of the first half of the 19th century. Speakers will include Adrain Randall (University of Birmingham) on Swing's historiographical legacy, The Luddism of the poor; Iain Robertson (University of Gloucestershire) on 'Two steps forward; six steps back': the dissipated legacy of Captain Swing; Jamie Przybysz & Daniel Myers (University of Notre Dame, Indiana, USA) on Space, spread and locality, the diffusion of contentious gatherings in the Captain Swing uprising, and Michael Holland (FACHRS academic advisor) Altogether, Swing! Some findings of the FACHRS Swing Project. Related riots will be discussed by Paul Newton Taylor (University of Essex) on Rural revolts in 1820s Kent; Harvey Osborne (University Campus Suffolk) on Suffolk workhouse riots and Alun Howkins (University of Sussex) on The Owlesbury Lads. The reaction of authority will be considered by Judy Hill on the immediate reaction to the Swing riots in Surrey 1832–34, Rose Wallis (UWE) on reaction in Norfolk and Somerset 1829–1832 and Maggie Escott, (History of Parliament and Swansea University) on Berkshire. Finally there will be papers on 'Identifying Swing'.

Fee (to cover buffet lunch and registration) £25.00, SHS and RHC members £15.00, unwaged/student £10.00. For full programme and registration form, contact Dr Jean Morrin, History Department, University of Winchester SO22 4NR
jean.morrin@winchester.ac.uk

Buildings and Farming Past, Present and Future

A weekend school at Rewley House, Oxford organized by the Department for Continuing Education, University of Oxford and the Historic Farm Buildings Group.

The main focus of this weekend is farm buildings, farm houses, and other buildings relating to the agrarian economies of the past, including the recent past. The evidence of landscapes and abandoned farmsteads will also be discussed and physical evidence will be complemented by that of written sources. The programme will include speakers on the medieval period covering both peasant (Chis Dyer) and monastic (James Bond) sites, regional studies from the south-east (David Martin), Exmoor (Mathew Bristow) Wales (Bob Silvester) and upland hill farming (Angus Winchester) The more recent past will be considered by Susanna Wade Martins (County Council Small holdings), Brian Short (the changing face of English farm landscapes 1850–1940), and Roy Brigden (Farm buildings and changing farm practice in the 19th and 20th centuries). Finally the future for historic farm buildings will be considered by Peter Gaskell. Further details from OUDCE, 1 Wellington Square, Oxford OX1 2JA or ppdayweek@conted.ox.ac.uk

BAHS Spring Conference

6–8 April 2009
Sunley Management Centre,
University of Northampton

Speakers will include Professor Richard Smith (University of Cambridge), Dr Ernst Langthaler (Institute of Rural History, St Polten, Austria), Dr Clare Griffiths, (University of Sheffield), and Dr Briony McDonagh (University of Hertfordshire).

Dr McDonagh and Professor Mathew Cragoe (University of Hertfordshire) will lead the field trip to examine landscape, enclosure and agriculture in Northamptonshire and the new researchers session will include topics ranging from the medieval to the second world war. Further details will be posted to members of the Society and also on the Society's web site (www.bahs.org.uk). Research degree students in the field of rural and agrarian history may apply for a bursary that will cover the cost of the conference (but not travel) and applications should be made to the secretary (j.broad@londonmet.ac.uk) giving reasons for the relevance of the conference, and providing a supporting letter from their supervisor. Closing date 10th March 2009.

2008 Tawney lecture

The 2008 Tawney lecture given by Bruce Campbell, entitled 'Nature as historical protagonist' can now be viewed at <http://wip.ehs.org.uk/downloads.asp>.

The lecture is wide-ranging and covers the role that natural environmental processes play in shaping the course of economic development over the last millennium and longer. That there was indeed a significant environmental component to the course of pre-industrial development is demonstrated via comparisons between chronologies

of prices, wages, grain prices, and populations reconstructed from the historical record with corresponding chronologies of growing conditions and climatic variations derived by natural scientists from dendrochronology and Greenland ice cores. An example of this co-evolution of human and environmental processes was a close, but probably indirect relationship between climatic perturbations and biological hazards, as exemplified by the Black Death.

TAILPIECE

Agriculture in the press

The *Eastern Daily Press*, one of England's longest-standing county newspapers is also unusual in that for most of the 20th century it has employed an agricultural correspondent. Micheal Pollitt, the current holder of the position since 1984, describes an incident during the tenure of one of his predecessors, Col. B.B. Sapwell. The paper was also the first regional morning newspaper to introduce feature pages; hence the 'Field and Farm' section in 1910 which included Sapwell's 'Farm Notes'.

Col. Sapwell wrote the paper's 'Farm notes' from 1904 without missing a week until shortly before his death in 1929 at the age of 83. A familiar figure at Norwich market, one of the largest for cattle in the land where thousands of animals were sold every Saturday, he would gauge the mood of farmers which would be reflected in his articles. He was also a farmer himself, having moved to Norfolk in 1904 at the age of 29, ending a successful business career in London. Because of poor health, he was advised to move to the countryside and bought 500 acres near Aylsham. This meant he had friends within the farming community. As a result his articles were written with such knowledge, force and humour that he was revered as an oracle. In 1920 he was advising tenants to buy their land as 'the only way to secure their future'. Like most farmers he objected to the 'interference' imposed by the Agriculture Act of 1920. 'If we were left alone we could get along'. Only later was its withdrawal seen as 'the great betrayal'. He understood how important diversification was in bad times, appreciating both the importance of sugar beet to the East Anglian farmer and also the shift to dairying. 'If I were a young man', he wrote in 1910, 'I would farm in the way I have just described' (long leys, more cows and less cereal). His 'Farm



Col. B.B. Sapwell, the Eastern Daily Press's agricultural correspondent 1904–1929

Notes' are therefore an important historical source for demonstrating the attitude of mostly Conservative East Anglian farmers at the time who normally blamed their troubles on the rising price of labour.

However, he was not only a farmer and a journalist; he was also Tory County Councilor and in that position almost literally crossed swords with the radical liberal and bellicose Earl of Kimberley, supporter of George Edwards, the first farm labourer MP, who represented South Norfolk. Like Sapwell he was a farmer, as well as respected landlord, livestock and horse breeder, sometime president of the Norfolk Chamber of Agriculture and friend of the Norfolk Agricultural Station when it was founded in 1908.

The cause of their most serious confrontation was in 1905 over a proposal to spend £10,000 extending the Shire Hall next to the cattle market, where the County Council met. The argument became heated and the peppery Lord Kimberley challenged Sapwell to a duel, suggesting that they both took the train to Paris to fight, as dueling was not illegal in France. After a showdown in a private room at Shire Hall, the two finally made their peace in the Royal Hotel. The event made the national papers and was described in *Punch* as 'the dual that wasn't'. The activities of the present agricultural reporter have not included such challenges-yet!

Rural History Today is published by the British Agricultural History Society. The editor will be pleased to receive short articles, press releases, notes and queries for publication.

Articles for the next issue should be sent by 30 May 2009 to Susanna Wade Martins, The Longhouse, Eastgate Street, North Elmham, Dereham, Norfolk NR20 5HD or preferably by email scwmartins@hotmail.com

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