

Editorial

Dear Reader: You have not heard from the Editor of this journal overly frequently. The last substantial editorial to appear in its pages was published in Volume 1 in 1953, its author H. P. R. Finberg setting out the mission of this publication. This, and the scope of articles, was reiterated by my predecessor, R. W. Hoyle, as the journal reached its half-century in 2003 (he also provided very perceptive valedictory reflections in 2019). The journal is now three score and ten, but looks forward to a long life yet. Nevertheless, we can also ponder the value, as Finberg did, of ‘a review competing for attention with the spate of contemporary letterpress, and a society demanding, in these days of cruelly straitened incomes, yet another guinea?’ The coinage has changed, and the competition is digital, but a journal and Society must still be justified.

The original mission of the *Agricultural History Review* was to deliver ‘a number of articles embodying original research in agricultural history, together with shorter notes and comments, a bibliography, and book reviews.’ It has remained remarkably true to that plan, while much has changed in other forms of publishing. In the post-war decades, for example, *Farmer’s Weekly*, still the best-known read for the agricultural community, generally indulged its editor across three pages alongside extensive Letters pages. Much of the small editorial notes, having something of the tone of a diary, gave pointers to the further content of the magazine, but also provide for the historian a fascinating window on the farming year, on the matters driving comment, concern and gossip. A partial view, to be sure, but who was better placed to know the diverse opinion and concerns of the nation’s farmers? Now the editorial has shrunk to a single column. The twenty-first century content too is more forensically focused on the economics of farming, having had a much more diverse range of content (including articles on farming history) in the past. Previously, *Farmer’s Weekly* sought to speak to a farming world. Now, that world has changed, and the magazine delivers on the business of farming.

In 1953, the British Agricultural History Society sought to provide a secure institutional home for the history of agriculture, at a time of what seemed to be, ‘the farming revolution of the mid-twentieth century’. An old world was slipping away and out of mind, and there was also felt to be a necessity to bring academics more in touch with the practical experience of farmers. The journal has proudly delivered a vast amount of historical agricultural knowledge over the decades. Yet it is also notable how the content of the articles published has radically diversified over time, becoming more international, and encompassing a much wider-ranging set of perspectives on rural society as new topics of historical study have proliferated. If previous generations carried the torch for women’s and gender history, to take perhaps the most important example, today much work on agriculture and rural life is found among those

who are writing histories of science, or environmental history, or histories of race, of empire, or sexualities. And nor have any of the more venerably established themes disappeared.

The core of the journal will remain its academic articles. Yet we operate in a world of an increasingly diverse media (including the society's own *Rural History Today* and website), and most importantly, we want to reflect the diversity of work and embrace and enable a diversity of authors, who themselves have diverse lives and working opportunities.

This means in future we will be offering more formats. So herewith, we invite authors to consider submitting roundtables, on all aspects of the field; review and survey essays; notes on sources and methodologies; photo essays; comments that deliver a historical perspective on current issues; and contributions highlighting the work of the museum and heritage sector. And readers will see more editorials – at least more often than once every few decades – not necessarily from the editor. We will maintain our standards of peer review, always. Guidelines are provided on the Society's website.

Precisely how the journal develops will be down to our contributors. Indeed, our mission arguably remains unchanged, but we want to take more seriously those 'short notes and comments' that are not ephemera but gateways into new voices and exciting avenues of research. Whatever you think of submitting, in H. P. R. Finberg's words, 'The Editor will be glad to consider', and equally glad to discuss in advance. Dear reader, tell us also what you want to read. Even more so, we hope the journal's second ever editorial will be a stepping stone towards conversations and publications from those who have never yet been authors and readers but will find a home for their ideas and findings in these pages.

Paul Warde