

Annual List and Brief Review of Articles on Agrarian History, 1976¹

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THIS year's collection of articles reflects a more balanced geographical coverage, largely due to a welcome increase in the attention paid to Irish agrarian history. The English experience, none the less, continues to predominate, with much interest centred upon the nature and causes of rural protest. The traditional view that deprivation, and in particular food shortages, were to blame, is critically re-examined and found to be inadequate. In his study of Kentish evidence for the Elizabethan and early Stuart period, for example, Clark (34) finds no close correlation between the incidence of riots and scarcity. Rather price discrepancies between different markets were often the key factor in sparking off disturbances, which were typically small-scale and localized. The view that protest confirmed rather than challenged the established order of parish society is echoed in Walter and Wrightson's study of early modern England (241), and further supported by Thomas (225). The latter depicts eighteenth-century Derbyshire rioters as a group protesting mainly against farmers and middlemen who profited by hoarding and by-passing the market rate in times of dearth. Jones (123) explores the extent of violent protest in East Anglia towards the middle of the nineteenth century, and finds the root cause in the lack of employment opportunities and insecurity resulting from capitalist agriculture, the New Poor Law, and collapse of cottage industries.

For the prehistoric period, Jarman (116) emphasizes the need for a more economic approach to the study of domestication to show intermediate stages and underline the gradual nature of change. The usefulness of the approach is confirmed by Mellors' article (156) on the implications of controlled forest burning by mesolithic communities, the author suggesting that this may well have been the technique crucial to effecting the change from hunting to herding. Conscious manipulation of the environment by removal of undergrowth, it is argued, at once gave a measure of control over the movement of deer, facilitated hunting, allowed selective killing, and gave rise to the idea of ownership over live as opposed to dead animals. The role of man in the

decline of woodland is highlighted again, this time by archaeological evidence, mainly in the form of soil profiles. Findings from the Pennines leads Tinsley (228) to conclude, for example, that although climate was acting in the same direction, "the evidence for man as the prime factor in deforestation now appears to be overwhelming," while Atherden (5) claims that the Iron Age was most significant in this respect due to the introduction of clear-felling of woodland and permanent settlement. Returning to the subject of cereal cultivation in southern England, Dennell (51) uses the evidence from Windmill Hill to challenge Helbaek's thesis that wheat was the main crop during the Neolithic and Iron Ages, but barley in the Bronze.

Again, comparatively few articles relate to the medieval period. Fenoaltea (65) speculates about fluctuations in the scale of demesne farming in the late Middle Ages, while Reed (185) denies that the greater fall in prices than costs at this time necessarily meant falling profits. In a discussion of the significance of the scattering of arable land in the open field, Fenoaltea (66), in another article, maintains that this was not a means of spreading risk at the cost of productivity, but was rather a means of raising productivity by optimizing the distribution of labour. The medieval land market receives some attention. Smith (213) explores the background to the development of the "prie" and shows that although it was conceived as a means of stopping alienation it became a convenient and adaptable device which significantly aided the consolidation of property in Wales. Court Rolls of three Middlesex Manors are examined by Moss and Murray (163) who detect a flourishing market in land occupied by unfree tenants, although alienation was supposedly denied them. In his study of a deserted medieval village, Cameron (26) concludes that, contrary to popular belief, the site was not depopulated by the landlord to make way for a park, but was deserted as a consequence of its peculiar history and tenurial structure. The author also warns of the dangers of adopting a standardized procedure based on tax returns for determining the date of disappearance.

More has been written on the early modern period. In an important article on the growth of English agricultural output during the eighteenth century, Crafts (44) questions the assumptions behind Deane and Cole's estimates. He argues not

¹ Date of publication is 1976 unless otherwise noted. References to articles or off-prints should be sent to the Bibliographical Unit, Institute of Agricultural History, University of Reading.

only that output expanded faster between 1710 and 1740 than Deane and Cole allow, but faster even than between 1740 and 1780. In relation to Ulster, and perhaps with wider relevance, Crawford's study of landlord-tenant relations (45) shows how they reacted to significant changes in economy and society there. For Scotland, Dodgshon (56) examines income and expenditure at the farm level to show changes in profitability after 1750 in the upland sheep-farming economy. Findings show that the years between the 1780's and the end of the French wars were particularly advantageous to leanstock producers.

Rural credit is a much neglected subject, but Holderness (99, 100) has demonstrated that lending was more widely diffused than is generally realized. In an analysis of probate inventories as many as 40 per cent were found to contain reference to debts owed, showing that little money was allowed to stand idle, but was transferred from unproductive to productive uses. On the mechanics of innovation, Emery (59) describes the successful efforts of Welshmen at the top of the social hierarchy to introduce clover to Wales before 1750, and shows that Welsh producers were more responsive to new ideas than is generally assumed, demanding only that these were appropriate to their own situation and needs. Macdonald (141) asks whether the long lease was as necessary for farm improvement as many believed, maintaining that although it may have been of some importance where tenants provided finance and initiative, "it is doubtful whether lease covenants were generally regarded either by tenant or landlord as being worth a great deal more than the paper they were written on." England's article (60) on John Howard stresses again the human element, by describing one man's contribution to the introduction of the cluster potato, while Macdonald's description of an eighteenth-century implement maker (140) indicates the importance at the time of "engineers" in furthering the adoption of new machines.

On the social side there has been some discussion of the significance of poor relief and the settlement laws. Taylor (223) suggests that the more complex regulation of settlement after 1691 was a necessary consequence of a fuller acceptance of the right to relief from the parish, and while providing a framework within which improvements in welfare provision could develop, also served to regulate the mobility of labour constructively, thereby furthering industrial growth. This positive view is echoed in Coats' article (36) on the relief of poverty, in which he speculates that in so far as aid prevented living standards from falling in times of distress, it may have succeeded in sustaining the morale and energy of the work force, and after a long period of relatively cheap food, in "preserving these rising

expectations on which the incentive to increased productivity so often depended." Collins (38) examines the role of migrant labour flows in the nineteenth century, in both source and host economy, and argues that their contribution was often vital where the supply of local labour was inelastic at work peaks.

For the period of the Napoleonic Wars Hueckel (113) examines relative price movements and concludes that beef rather than corn was "king" at this time, while data from the accounts of three farms are used to illustrate the sensitivity of producers to price trends. Colyer's analysis of the home-farm accounts of a Carmarthenshire estate (39) further underlines the advance in livestock production around the turn of the century. Hueckel (112) in another article, estimates that the long-run equilibrium return to capital earned by farmers was equal to or slightly below the 9 to 14 per cent range earned outside agriculture, and that while much depended upon whether a farmer's rental obligation remained fixed during an inflationary period, "it was the landlord who stood to gain most from the wartime shift in relative prices."

The severity of depression during the post-war decades is called into question by Perkins (174), who implies that on the Lincolnshire Wolds a 20 per cent return on capital, and 45 per cent return on turnover were commonplace in the 1830's. Donnelly (57) looks at the difficulties of Irish agriculture between 1859 and 1864, and claims that these were more severe than either the Famine or the depression of the later 1870's. In a more familiar vein, Taylor's article (222) on the continued progress of the English dairy industry emphasizes the selective impact of the Great Depression. On the subject of enclosure, Chapman (32) describes how specific clauses written into awards to reduce the burdens of costs in areas of low-value moorland were an important influence on the timing of subsequent "improvement." Where fencing was made compulsory, for example, reclamation was carried out soon after the award was made, although subsequently the land often reverted to waste. Land enclosed under permissive clauses, by contrast, might be reclaimed over very long periods, but then reversion was unlikely. The background to the poor performance of the British agricultural machinery industry in the later nineteenth century is also examined, Jewell (119) noting its failure to respond to competition from abroad, persisting instead in the production of "one-off" heavier and more costly machines. An explanation is found in the traditional emphasis on quality rather than cheapness. McLean (147) is unconvinced that the cost-price factor was important in overseas markets, and contrasts the vigorous American sales policy and product adaptation in Australia with the passivity

of British makers there. Thompson (226) attempts a horse census and hints at the wide implications of his findings for the pre-motor economy. The impact of state intervention on land use and management between 1915 and 1919 is examined by Sheail (206).

Social themes of the modern period have received some attention. Ward (242) explains the varying tempo of pressure for land reform in England to 1940, pointing out that little was achieved partly because in an industrializing economy land reform schemes appealed neither to agricultural nor urban workers. Post (182) looks at European mortality levels of the early nineteenth century but finds no significant correlation with food shortages. He suggests this was due to improved social and environmental conditions, and in the case of plague, to climatic change which affected the chief vector, the rat flea. The working conditions and health of children in the English pillow lace industry are examined by Spenceley (216), who finds production a far cry from the picture of rustic bliss imagined by contemporaries.

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NOTES AND COMMENTS

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WINTER CONFERENCE 1977

The winter conference was again held jointly with the Historical Geography Research Group of the Institute of British Geographers on 3 December 1977. The theme of the conference was 'The agricultural consequences of population change'. In the morning session there were papers on 'Intensive farming in open-field Norfolk during the high Middle Ages' by Dr Bruce Campbell, and 'Some demographic characteristics of the agricultural

labour force in nineteenth-century England and Wales, and their implications' by Dr Alan Armstrong. In the afternoon Dr Brian Short spoke on 'Population mobility and agricultural change in the Victorian weald' and this was followed by a panel discussion with all the speakers. Over sixty people attended the conference which showed once again the fruitfulness of co-operation between agricultural historians and historical geographers. Thanks are due to Dr Dennis Baker for organizing the conference and to the Polytechnic of Central London for providing such a convenient and well-appointed venue.

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Dr Stuart Macdonald is now a Lecturer in Economics at the University of Queensland. His current interests centre on the flow of information and he has worked on the subject in the fields of engineering and electronics, though innovation in agriculture remains a primary interest.