

Annual List and Brief Review of Articles on Agrarian History, 1979¹

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A feature of recent years has been the attempt to reconstruct complex man-environment relationships by sophisticated interpretation of evidence gleaned from the landscape. Prehistorians in particular have used techniques of pollen analysis and radio-carbon dating to determine the nature of resource-exploitation and its impact. Much effort has been spent on the uplands of northern England and a number of articles report on recent findings. It was once thought that changes in the ecosystem here occurred only with the advent of farming, but Simmons (201) postulates deliberate firing of forest edges by Mesolithic societies to increase browse and attract game, leading in some areas to waterlogging of soils and irreversible formation of blanket peat. He also constructs a tentative model of Mesolithic settlement and economy in a year-round cycle. There is further discussion of the tools and debris found at Star Carr, Pitts (171) stating that this was not a temporary winter site as previously believed but a 'specialized industrial complex' where individuals stayed on during the summer months to carry out the treatment of animal hides and processing of antlers in the earliest known case of vegetable preparation and tanning. The North York Moors have also yielded information on subsequent human activity. Atherden and R L Jones *et al* (6, 122) describe findings which point to the wholesale clearance of trees during the late Iron Age and Romano-British period, while Judith Turner (214) contrasts the forested landscape and shifting agriculture of the north-east at the earlier period with the cleared woodland, maintained pasture and the cultivation of cereals and hemp on a quite different scale during the Roman occupation. Investigations are also progressing in the south-west. Palaeobotanical analysis is the main tool employed by Beckett and Hodder (13) to determine the phasing of prehistoric clearance and farming in the Somerset Levels, while Hamond (101) uses a different method in his study of Dartmoor during the Neolithic and Iron Age. Here the inter-relationship between settlement, economy and the environment is explored through the locational and morphological analysis of hut circles. Fleming's investi-

gation (84) of boundary patterns and settlement in the same area further illustrates the complexity of early subsistence systems and also our continuing lack of certain knowledge about them.

The role of sociological rather than biological or environmental factors is emphasized in another model of the transition from hunting and gathering to agriculture, proposed by Vincent (218), in which an improvement in the status and economic productivity of women is crucial. It is argued that this improvement may have been triggered by a drying climate which increased the yield of nuts and seeds, and through the raised status this gave to women in their role as gatherers reduced female infanticide, raised population numbers and made agriculture necessary. In their survey of prehistoric development in Britain, Bradley and Hodder (24) collate cultural and economic evidence to identify three phases between the Neolithic and Iron Age on the basis of settlement, land-use and cultural patterns. Both articles are concerned with population growth and agricultural progress, echoing Ester Boserup's theory (*The conditions of agricultural growth*, 1965). This is critically examined by Grigg (94) who concludes that while population pressure is unlikely to be the only cause of technical change, as she maintains, and intensified cropping not the sole response, the thesis 'is still a remarkably fruitful interpretation of agrarian change'.

The concern with landscape and man-environment relationships referred to earlier, is not confined to prehistorians. Everitt (71, 72), for example, believes different types of economy and society are essentially a product of the physical environment and urges closer attention to contrasting *pays* or regions. A broad classification is offered, together with the results of preliminary investigations throwing light upon settlement history and upon the nature and development of county towns. Methods of reconstructing landscape change over long periods are outlined by Smith (204) in a retrogressive analysis of three Staffordshire parishes. As well as fieldwork an impressive array of documentary sources is used to chart developments over three millennia. Place-names are a standard tool of landscape archaeologists, and Faull (78), with reference to Anglo-Saxon Yorkshire, discusses some of the more significant elements which may be of value in tracing settlement patterns. Place-name evidence is employed by Hooke (107) in a reconstruction of the west

¹Publications are dated 1979 unless otherwise noted. References to articles or off-prints should be sent to the Bibliographical Unit, Institute of Agricultural History, University of Reading.

midlands landscape at the same period. She finds a countryside dominated by woods and undrained marshes with little in common either with primeval forest or the tamed landscape of today.

There is continuing debate about field systems. Butlin (34) notes that recent investigations have added little to our understanding of the Irish experience and believes that current thinking over-stresses both the element of continuity and the contrasts between 'alien' and 'native' types. In his view a variety of physical, social and economic forces led systems to adapt both spatially and temporally, and he predicts that future research will show a greater degree of complexity than ever imagined. Of course, variation and adaptability in English field systems is now accepted, but in Scotland infield-outfield farming has often been dismissed as a uniformly extensive and low-yielding adjunct to an essentially pastoral economy, incapable of evolution or improvement. White (228) contends, however, that in areas well supplied with lime and near urban markets it could and did evolve into an intensive system where grain was the primary concern and stock played a minor role. The question of origins is still unresolved, and Fox (86) proposes new avenues of enquiry to confirm the Thirsk thesis that two- and three-field systems developed from the early twelfth century due to pressure on grazing. Preliminary study shows that in the west with its irregular fields pasture values were low, whereas in the two- and three-field midlands they were high, and the author suggests a search for documentary evidence in the intermediate stretch of country where reorganization may have been undertaken sufficiently late in time to have been recorded. Archaeological methods of enquiry in an intensive field survey of Anglo-Saxon villages is also recommended to help establish the nature and timing of field development. Dodgshon (60) has employed a different approach in attempting his own interpretation of origins, based on Domesday Book and other sources. These reveal considerable splitting of townships between the eleventh and fourteenth centuries following upon population growth and reclamation which created the need to rationalize haphazard cropping and reduce problems of scale and complexity in farming. He concludes that early splitting and township reorganization may have provided a nursery for the development of what became the two- and three-field system. The theory put forward by McCloskey in 1975-76 that the scattering of holdings in open fields was entirely due to the desire to spread risk comes under attack. Wilson (233) questions his assumption that risks encountered in medieval farming would be much reduced by dispersal, and he also emphasizes the lack of evidence that English peasants consciously and deliberately retained scattering, or indeed were able to reorganize holdings without reference to the village framework. Still on English medieval farming, Harwood Long (131)

questions the view that the critically low yields were due to soil exhaustion and puts forward an alternative explanation. The basic problem was weed control, it being impossible to cross-plough the heavy ill-drained strips, while puny draught animals and inefficient tools could not eradicate perennial weeds. Thus corn yields were lower than on the better drained and well-tilled Broadbalk field at Rothamstead, despite continuous cropping without aid of manure. The very great variation in English land measurement at this time is described by Andrew Jones (119), while Nash in a separate article (155) stresses that even within a county measures varied according to local methods of land-division.

On the broader topic of medieval society in general, Wrightson and Razi (234, 184) evaluate the Toronto School's work on court rolls and highlight certain methodological problems in their analysis of village social structures. Criticism centres upon questionable identification of individuals and upon certain fundamental assumptions about the nature of rural peasant society. A large body of numerical data from two other sources has also been analysed by Darby *et al* (45). Their mapping of information from Domesday and the lay subsidies of 1334 and 1524-25 depicts changes in the geographical distribution of wealth. The evidence of land surveys and rentals has underpinned many studies of pre-industrial society, but it is now becoming clear that these sources can be a very misleading guide to landholding structure because of the prevalence of sub-tenancing. From an examination of unusually detailed manorial extents Andrew Jones (118) concludes that the neat patterns of virgates and semi-virgates shown on early documents may have been the exception rather than the rule. This is confirmed by Dewindt's study (52) of an active land market in medieval King's Ripton, where complicated leasing arrangements and sub-tenancies created multi-layered claims on a piece of land subsequently recorded in the name of a single individual. Similarly, a study by Harrison (102) of Elizabethan Cannock suggested that whereas sub-tenancing accounted for no more than 15 per cent in the official records, the fortuitous survival of a field book revealed that the true figure was over sixty, one-third of them absentee. Also on landholding, Jefferies' study of the Berkshire gentry (114) considers how a legal device, the medieval 'use', was employed to manipulate estates, while in another article Searle (198) shows that merchet functioned above all as a means to control villein tenure but also permitted the lord to tax female inheritance.

Among articles dealing with the early modern period two describe documentary sources and their potential use to historians. Chancery records have been little used in the past because they lacked a comprehensive index, but Beresford (17) draws attention to the recent analytical listing which has made them more accessible

to historians of landed property and tenure. Yields are a prime indicator of progress implicit in any 'agricultural revolution' yet reliable data are lacking. Overton (161) argues, however, that this deficiency can be overcome by statistical manipulations of evidence from the already heavily exploited probate inventories, and analyses material from East Anglia. Results suggest a 75 per cent increase in wheat between the 1590s and 1660s, which would seem to vindicate Kerridge's view of major achievement at this time. Estate history is the most prominent theme in current articles on the period. Habbakuk (97) discusses in a general way how ownership could change in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, and suggests that landed families could more easily carry debt and avoid sales after 1650 than before. It is his thesis that strict settlement was a significant factor in the 'rise of great estates', but Bonfield (20) takes issue with this view. From a model of intergenerational succession and demographic evidence he concludes that some two-thirds of owners were prevented by early death or lack of male heirs from taking advantage of the device, nor was any correlation found between the possibility for resettlement and estate building among 'great magnates' in Northamptonshire. Taking a different approach, Broad (28) examines the impact of the Civil War on a single estate, and shows that neither political neutrality nor distance from the battleground could shield owners from the catastrophic effects of falling rents, high taxes and shortage of credit. Rapid recovery of the Verneys evidenced the flexibility of some landed families but further underlined the importance of chance factors such as marriage, family size and interest rates. The economic difficulties in the early 1600s of an Ulster estate are described by Roebuck (188), who finds the letting to middlemen on long lease at an uneconomic rent the main problem. Disposal of Somerset Crown land in the earlier mid-Tudor period is examined by Wyndham (235), who shows that those closest to the centre of power fared considerably better than those in the provinces. Taking an overall view of conditions in France and England between 1590 and 1640, Appleby (4) compares corn prices and harvests in an attempt to discover why England solved her food problem after 1650 and France did not, and concludes that a major factor was the balanced mix of grains cultivated, in particular the greater emphasis on oats and barley which were a cheap substitute for wheat. But in France the already small acreage of spring-sown cereals diminished further in the seventeenth century, so that in bad years prices of all grains soared and denied the poor a cheap alternative to wheat for bread-making. In an assessment of the impact of written leases on Scottish agriculture Whyte (230) dates their introduction to the century before rather than after 1700, and relates their nature and incidence to farming structure and rising farm incomes. Dairying in the

midlands is examined by Edwards (67), who describes the technical innovations employed to expand production there in the seventeenth century when demand locally and in London was rising. Migration is now attracting more attention, and Clark (39) reviews recent research before presenting new data on English population movements to explain, *inter alia*, the shift from long-distance toward local and seasonal migration after the Civil War. Regional variation is stressed by Salerno (193) in his study of emigrants from the wood-pasture and chalk areas of Wiltshire in the seventeenth century.

For the modern period Kain examines the value of tithe records (123, 124) and describes the eagerly awaited atlas he is compiling from data on England and Wales. The Poor Law Inspectors' returns of 1854 are another useful but comparatively neglected source of evidence on English land use, and Dodd has analysed returns from four counties (54-7) to show their value in depicting regional variation. For Ireland Solar (206) draws our attention to the 1835 agricultural trade statistics in the Railway Commissioners' reports, and warns that they are flawed by errors which exaggerate both the volume and value of exports. This seriously distorts the picture of, for example, remittances to absentee landlords and the 'product mix' of Irish agriculture. Johnson's estimate of cross-border cattle smuggling a century later (115) provides further proof of gross inaccuracy in some official records.

Enclosure is a continuing focus of attention. Baack (7) develops a theory of property rights as a framework for analysing its course from Tudor times. In it he views stinting and the extinction of common rights as the means whereby landowners and farmers could realize increased land values, and benefit from gains in output and income flowing from a greater 'exclusivity' of land use and land rights. Returning to the debate over the impact of parliamentary enclosure on the freeholder class, Martin (146) distinguishes between types of community on the one hand and between absentee owners and owner occupiers on the other. Both distinctions are found to be significant in a study of east Warwickshire, where small owners, mostly absentees, declined by a quarter within a decade of enclosure but where the severest impact was in 'open' townships with numerous freeholders. It was W E Tate's contention that Parliament dealt with enclosure bills not to secure the interests of the landowning class but rather to further the interests of the 'community at large'. However evidence produced by Martin in another article (145) casts serious doubt on this claim. Not only did individual legislators manipulate the passage of bills affecting their land but procedures to protect small owners and dissenters were abused or ignored. Nor was opposition to enclosure as uncommon as Tate has maintained. The landed elite is subject to further criticism in Richards's anatomy of

the Sutherland fortune (186). Much investment was haphazard and led to grave social dislocation for little if any profit; and the author notes that the cost of the aristocracy to the nation has yet to be calculated. Mismanagement of estates is the theme of two further articles. Colyer (40) charts the decline of the Pryse family of Gogerddan after 1800, and Farrant (77) partly blames owners' failure to recognize and adapt to changed circumstances in the late nineteenth century for the break-up of their properties on southern downland. It was traditionally believed that landlords were main agents of change, but Macdonald (140) concludes from a survey of Northumberland records that personal communication between practical farmers had greater effect, while apprentices and labourers also influenced the spread of new ideas. Studies of equipment have often focused on machinery, but Marshall (143) traces the origin and development of the Rotherham plough after 1730: although difficult to use it afforded savings in man and horse power on suitable soils. In another article, Macdonald (141) looks at the early progress of the threshing machine and argues that large farms, high wages and security of tenure explain its popularity in the north. Also on farm machinery, Vamplew (217) inquires into the changing price and quality of award-winning models during the third quarter of the nineteenth century and concludes that over this period the real cost of machinery fell while the price of labour steadily increased. The value of seasonal workers to British agriculture is further demonstrated by Devine (50), who shows that even the larger influx of Irish after 1840 was insufficient to meet the expanding labour requirement on farms in Scotland and northern England. Consequently Highlanders continued to provide vital effort during work peaks and through their own earnings helped sustain a fragile economy at home. That old chestnut, poor relief during the Napoleonic Wars, is revisited by Dunkley (62), who analyses the role of gentry-justices and shows how they extended their authority to alleviate distress after 1795, and prevented ratepayers from cutting relief as conditions worsened. Such behaviour he argues was founded on a definable 'morality' where the privilege of property was believed to confer obligations to protect the poor, and since the poor readily subscribed to this view justices had little choice but to conform to it, particularly under threats of violence. The large increase in poor relief at this time is viewed differently by Wells (223), who maintains it was made conditional upon deference and generated class conflict in the countryside. Driven underground by administrative repression, protest, he argues, had to remain essentially covert until after the 1850s. Horn (108) suggests why agricultural trade unionism among agricultural labourers was so weak in a case study of Berkshire, while Dewey (51) argues that this same weakness allowed large numbers of government-

controlled workers to be used during the First World War, thereby preventing a sharper rise in agricultural wage rates. Livestock is the subject of two articles. Whetham (224) identifies the boom in overseas demand for pedigree animals after 1850 and describes changes in the home trade which followed, while Carlyle (37) synthesizes information from published accounts and field studies to give a picture of the changing distribution of the main sheep breeds in Scotland since the 1790s. There has been comparatively little of note written on modern Irish agrarian history, but Almquist (2) taps the 1841 census to determine how far the expansion of rural industry was associated with other changes, such as population density, land fragmentation and more intensive methods of farming. In a study of retailing in rural Ireland between 1880 and 1914, Kennedy (126) suggests that its growth was a natural concomitant of depression. Frequently farmers were also shopkeepers, and as the labour-using tillage and dairying sectors declined so the sons and daughters tended more to cross the short distance from the farmyard to the other side of the shop counter.

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