

Annual List and Brief Review of Articles on Agrarian History, 1983*

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THERE was a disproportionately large number of important articles in 1983 on the role of food in history. This arose out of the publication of papers given by the historians, demographers, economists, food scientists and nutritionists attending the Bellagio conference the previous year. Many had used evidence on the effects of hunger on fertility and mortality in present-day poor societies to supplement historical data and Scrimshaw (206) evaluates this approach. Among those contributors critical of Malthusian theory Boserup (28) underscores the positive effects of population growth and food shortages, arguing that high and increasing densities allow heavy investment in the infrastructure necessary for technological change and greater agricultural output. Simon (211) also focuses on the benefits of dense settlement for development, maintaining that an increased demand for food leads to more plentiful supplies in the long term. Several other contributors questioned the Malthusian assumption that malnutrition kept pre-industrial populations within the bounds of their resources through positive checks. Watkins and Van de Walle (233) for example argue that nutrition and mortality are linked but only where there is a *chronic* food shortage. In England crises of subsistence were too localized and infrequent to have a large impact and high death rates were more commonly the result of infections unrelated to the food supply. Even subsistence crises were not necessarily caused by food shortages *per se* according to Tilly (222). The rise of national markets, the ripple effect of high prices on employment or wars all affected access to food, leading to serious deprivation and conflict. Her study of food protest in England and France suggests that crises were less about the dearth of grain than its inequitable allocation. Franklin's study (85) of medieval Gloucestershire connects high death rates not with harvest failure but with climatic changes which allowed the malarial mosquito to flourish. Carmichael and Livi-Bacci (41, 146) also deny that infection was mainly due to malnourishment and cite killer epidemics that were independent of harvest failures. McKeown (149) however takes a contrary

view, and argues that 'slow growth of human population before the eighteenth century was due mainly to lack of food, and the increase from that time resulted largely from improved nutrition'. Central to his argument is the belief that poor food intake lowered resistance to disease, and that until better hygiene of modern times, increases in density of populations encouraged infections, keeping mortality at a high level. European death rates are studied by Kunitz (138) who offers a variety of explanations for their decline from the seventeenth century. Among the most significant, after the waning of epidemics, was the alteration of diseases into relatively benign childhood forms where nutritional status and level of child care were all-important for survival. Wrigley and Schofield's recent seminal work — *England's Population History 1541-1871* — offers a fresh interpretation of past events, and a number of articles by these authors (203, 244, 245) summarize their impressive investigative efforts based on family reconstitution. Their most exciting proposal is that the astonishing growth of England's population was due not to changing mortality but to changes in nuptiality, specifically earlier and more universal marriage, linked to improvements in the real wage. This is already proving controversial and Olney (172) for example questions the postulated fifty-year lag between changes in fertility and living standards. An underlying cause of disagreement may be the nature of a major data source — the Phelps Brown and Hopkins cost of living index — and Thirsk (221) offers a salutary reminder to historians of its fundamental weaknesses. Chief among them is the omission of fruit, vegetables, dairy produce and pork for long periods. Flaws in the index are also highlighted by Shammass (207) who investigates the impact of new commodities and the evidence of wage assessments to gain a clearer understanding of diet and expenditure patterns. Findings suggest that the proportion of income devoted to food purchase in early modern England was closer to 50 than the 80 per cent assumed by Phelps Brown and Hopkins, and that substitution and adjustments could counteract hardship. By using retail instead of wholesale prices Rappaport (188) further suggests that the cost of living index may overstate the fall in real income during the sixteenth century by some 40 per cent. An

* Publications are dated 1983 unless otherwise noted. References to articles or off-prints should be sent to the Bibliographical Unit, Institute of Agricultural History, University of Reading.

alternative to the cost of living index for measuring nutrition is data on height and Floud and Fogel *et al* (83, 84) report on a major collaborative project to test the value of this source in historical studies. Located in military records, censuses and household surveys, the information is not only abundant (after 1700) but also offers good geographical and occupational coverage. A number of articles examine how workers fared during modern times. Oddy (168) proposes a new conceptual framework for the study of famines which differentiates between psycho-social famine, nutritional famine and actual starvation. In a test case study of the 1860s subsistence crisis in Lancashire he shows the impact of reduced incomes on consumption and health patterns. Cage (38) also highlights the serious deterioration in income and conditions of Glasgow workers in the first half of the nineteenth century. Two studies reach more optimistic conclusions. The analysis of height data in Floud (83) suggests a very marked improvement in the nutritional status of urban poor after 1800, outweighing the effects of squalor and pollution, while Lindert and Williamson (144) also argue that living standards rose. They use more traditional pay and expenditure data to show that farm workers actually gained ground on the higher paid during the latter half of the eighteenth century and from the 1820s were better off than during any earlier decade.

There is a dearth of information on diet in ancient times but Greig, Knights *et al* and Osborne's studies (97, 98, 137, 177) of sewers, cesspits and latrines promise to remedy this deficiency. On the pre-historic period generally Pryor (187) offers a critical survey of the major theories proposed by anthropologists and archaeologists to explain the origins of agriculture. A guide to the remarkable growth in research on the Mesolithic is provided in Price's lengthy bibliography (185) and review of recent work. The general trend of thinking supports a rapid intensification of subsistence patterns and settlement within the context of seasonal foraging activity. Modern farming has destroyed much archaeological evidence but Bell (18) demonstrates that valley sediments can reveal valuable data on climatic and land use changes that would otherwise be unobtainable. The sophistication of early societies is becoming increasingly apparent. Fleming (79) scrutinizes the extensive network of boundaries on Dartmoor and links them with complex territorial structures and agriculture. Their positioning suggests that the boundaries, or reaves, originated in a major re-organization of land which followed a single political decision in the second millennium BC. A study of centralized food storage facilities in Britain by Gent (90) also casts new light on the nature of prehistoric economies. He argues that they evolved in areas

where cereal growing was hazardous and at a time when climatic change and population growth increased the risks of dearth. Until recently it has been assumed that the introduction of the hardy spelt wheat in the first millennium BC was confined to the south of England, in association with pressure of numbers and migration onto marginal soils. But Van der Veen and Haselgrove (230) describe a sample from County Durham which suggests that spelt was probably not only present but also of considerable importance in the north. Coles and Orme (48, 174, 175) bring us up to date with work on the ancient wooden trackways on the Somerset Levels and the fascinating glimpses they provide of woodworking techniques and life generally 6,000 years ago.

A number of data sources for the medieval period are described. The lay subsidy rolls contain the most comprehensive evidence on wealth between 1334 and the early sixteenth century. Despite the well known problems of under-assessment and local variation Hadwin's critical survey (100) confirms that they can still be of value in comparative studies. Clues to the antiquity of many boundaries can be found in Ordnance Survey records and Faull (73) draws attention to their importance for the historian and field archaeologist. Very little has been written on medieval Irish agriculture and Jäger (122) describes a variety of primary sources which could provide the detailed information we lack. The interest in field systems continues: Baker (7) reviews recent contributions to the debate over origins and calls for a closer co-operation among scholars in order to synthesize ideas. Close examination of open fields in Yorkshire by Harvey (109, 110) has revealed a remarkable regularity in layout and tcnurial units. These support deliberate re-organization and the author speculates about a ninth- or early tenth-century origin when strong or unified lordship, population growth and a new landholding structure may have promoted the massive replanning of the landscape. Also in the north-east, Unwin (229) compares an extensive system of fields of probable Roman date with medieval township boundaries but finds no evidence of the continuity of occupation stressed in some recent findings. Work on Irish fields is also progressing and Currie (56) provides a regional study with a classification of the various field types. It has been thought that strip size in open fields was linked to the quality of land or the statute acre. A detailed analysis of Sussex data by Nash (163), however, suggests that these are unlikely explanations and that local customary acres may have had a strong influence. The low state of English agriculture during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries has become axiomatic. But in an important article Campbell (39) shows that land pressures and poor stocking rates did not necessarily imply pro-

ductivity failures. On the contrary, in eastern Norfolk and some localities outside, high corn yields comparable with the late eighteenth century were achieved by reduction of fallow, heavy manuring and the intensive cultivation of nitrogen fixing crops. A very different picture emerges from Farmer's account (70) of Westminster Abbey Manors. Here grain harvests remained wretchedly low despite increased stocking, abandonment of marginal lands and the growing of legumes. Using a theoretical approach Silver (210) proposes a general equilibrium model to explain the decline in grain yields on Winchester manors before the Black Death. It is argued that the rise in wool-export taxes rather than over-population caused a switch into more intensive cereal cultivation leading to reduced output per unit of land. In a separate article Campbell (40) again focuses on the problem of yields and demonstrates a new method of measuring output. By analysing data from a variety of estates on different soils he shows that productivity varied according to farming regions rather than the size or ownership of estates. Current investigations are shedding light upon the obscure origin of English sheep breeds. Bischoff (22) has uncovered evidence of two distinct fleece types in manorial records. This, in conjunction with a calculated use of rams, suggests selective breeding and the creation of the genetic predecessors of the seventeenth-century Longwool. Armitage's research into this breed (5) uses osteological, iconographic and wool fibre evidence to reconstruct its changing appearance between medieval and modern times. Contradicting the usual assumption of economic rationality Mate's investigation (153) of the affairs of Canterbury Cathedral Priory indicates that the question of monastic discipline influenced decisions on estate policy in a way which could reduce revenue. The traditional reliance on records of the largest estates for evidence on the development of leasehold tenure is avoided by Rees (189) in her comparative study of a small and remote abbey property. Methodological controversies have surrounded the use of court rolls for social studies due to their idiosyncratic and localized nature. To allow more meaningful interpretations Bennett (19) proposes a new approach based on rigorous surname analysis and selective family reconstitution. The importance of local management decisions in causing peasant discontent is stressed in Watts's study (234) of Titchfield Abbey manors, while Stone (218) destroys the romantic idea of the ancient village as conflict-free and peace-loving; our ancestors were even more prone to casual violence in the past than at the present time.

For the early modern period Robinson (196) describes the *Valor Ecclesiasticus*. Compiled in the sixteenth century to provide information on benefice

incomes in England and Wales, this source has been hardly used by historians, and yet could provide valuable data on agrarian output. It has been a usual practice for students researching into the British economy to rely on Deane and Cole's estimates of production. However, recent investigations by Crafts (53) have highlighted the need for revisions, and new estimates give prominence to the period before 1760 as one of significant achievement in agriculture, while years thereafter have a slower growth than generally believed. Lindert (143) combines earlier revisions of the social tables of Gregory King with comparable estimates of income structure up to 1913 to give an over-view of growth and inequality trends. Findings again emphasize the importance of the century before 1780 for agricultural production. Similarly, in another important article, Wordie (243) rewrites the chronology of English enclosure history, arguing that the seventeenth century rather than the eighteenth was pre-eminent in terms of acreage, and he calculates that the productivity gains to agriculture were substantial. The stimulus of enclosure to production and wealth is also highlighted in Johnstone's analysis (124) of probate records from eastern Lincolnshire. However, an econometric study by Allen (2) of data collected by Arthur Young in the 1760s comes to a very different conclusion. Results argue that enclosure did not increase efficiency. Rather rent increases reflected a redistribution of existing agricultural income from the tenant farmer to his landlord. Irish landownership structures have been heavily researched: O'Dowd (169) examines inheritance customs and finds that the law of family or kin ownership was not always adhered to, even before the influence of English colonizers encouraged primogeniture. Smyth's scrutiny (213) of landholding in a single Tipperary parish over two centuries portrays the highly cohesive kinship system as the essential instrument which allowed the farm families, particularly the middle tenantry, to survive in times of uncertainty. Duffy too (64) stresses continuity in the family farm system which survived well into the nineteenth century where in-depth colonization did not take place. The Plantation has been viewed as the process of driving the native Irish off their lands for the benefit of colonists, but Sheehan (209) rejects this stereotype, maintaining that the English government lacked the means to achieve it. Instead almost all the undertakers lost their lands to native claimants by judicial proceedings or simple reoccupation. The process of Irish village development is also discussed. Robinson (195) argues that the urban network in Ulster was influenced more by pre-Plantation precedent and the physical and economic environment than by any deliberate planning by the Commissioners, and Wheelan (235) describes how

new villages developed around the reinvigorated parish and chapel networks following the religious upheavals. The study of English village plans is considered by Roberts (191) who offers a classification system, and Taylor (219) illustrates the effect that grants of markets had on morphology. The manoeuvrings of Government, its agents and the local community over the issue of fenland drainage are explored by Kennedy (133, 134) who shows how Charles I aroused hatred and distrust by his unscrupulous use of power, whereas Elizabeth and James had been remarkably fair-minded. A massive plough used to drain a Yorkshire clayland parish in the seventeenth century is described by Newman (164). Twelve feet in length and requiring twenty-eight oxen to draw it, the machine provides an extraordinary example of township co-operation in the construction, use and maintenance of equipment. A number of articles return to the question of information flows and technological change. Macdonald (148) asks what was the role of the real user — the agricultural labourer — and argues it was a vital one. Not only did he adapt new ideas but he transferred innovations from one area to another and sometimes even initiated change. Goddard (95) tries to estimate how influential were agricultural newspapers in hastening progress in farming. Although the majority of agriculturists never read an agricultural newspaper, one half of substantial tenants did and the author concludes that the press provided an important medium for the exchange of ideas. Absenteeism has been viewed unfavourably but Beckett (12) shows that it did not always lead to neglect and deterioration of estates; indeed it may have encouraged efficiency through the employment of able stewards. Marshall's lengthy article (151) on Cumbrian market towns is intended to put right the 'lamentable deficiencies and tendencies in the study of urban history'. His aim is to widen the scope of study from a narrow concern with mere numbers of people and their economic function to a consideration of local society, marketing and manufacturing activities over time. On market development in Scotland Gibb and Paddison (91) describe the inhibiting effect that burghal monopolies of trade had on village development and rural services. Scottish rural communities have not received the same attention as their English counterparts due to the belief that sources are lacking, but Whyte and Whyte (236) identify a quantity of archival material that could be exploited. Proto-industrialization has been much debated in recent years and Coleman (47) explains why the concept has little value in an English context. Problems include the very gradual development of rural industries here, their differing origins and the contrasting character of the localities concerned. Mills (155) seeks an explanation for

framework knitting taking root in certain Leicestershire villages, drawing comparisons with evidence for Nottinghamshire. He rules out environment and enclosure history but believes landownership patterns and social structure may have been crucial. Gulvin (99) notes that little has been written on framework knitting in Scotland and draws together fragmentary data for the century after 1650.

Many fewer notable articles were published on the modern compared with earlier periods. The Sun Fire Insurance policy registers have been known about for some time but they are now being made more accessible by the use of computer storage systems. One of the potential uses of this data is to throw fresh light upon the agricultural processing trades and their fixed capital, although Schwarz and Jones (204) alert future researchers to some inherent weaknesses. Three other primary sources are brought to our notice. Kain and Holt (130) map the data on crops and their yields from the Cheshire tithe files; the 1854 statistics for north-east Scotland are analysed by Dodd (61), and the accuracy of the agricultural census from 1866 is assessed by Clarke *et al* (45). On Ireland, Kennedy (132) offers a critical appraisal of writings adopting an econometric approach and stresses their outstanding contribution to our understanding of agricultural and population history. A rigorous statistical analysis of the 1841 census data is employed by Almquist (3) to reconstruct regional occupational profiles of the Irish economy. Results contrast with Lee's findings for Britain. Also on Ireland, Cuddy and Curtin (55) establish that by the end of the nineteenth century farming was highly commercialized, even on the smallest holdings in western areas, while Hazelkorn (111) looks at the writings of Marx and Engels and concludes that many of their insights were obscured by 'flamboyant but inconsequential paradigm'. Fukudome (86) too finds gross inaccuracies and misinterpretation in Marx's view of English mechanization. The activities of farmers is the main theme in a number of articles. Mutch (162) counters Fletcher's claim that the late nineteenth-century depression was confined to the arable counties of the south-east. Even in Lancashire low prices and uncertainty were felt keenly by growers of vegetables, fodder crops and corn. Fisher (77) explains why no statutory measure for enforcing the acclaimed Lincolnshire custom of tenant right was achieved in the mid nineteenth century, despite an active campaign. Apart from the defence of landlord privilege there were real practical difficulties in assessing residual improvements in the soil and he notes that the high returns on investments in Lincolnshire made that county exceptional. Also, local custom had already evolved and Jones (125) describes the sophisticated and flexible system used by the Glamorgan tenantry.

The activities of an enterprising businessman in creating a prize farm in Yorkshire in the 1880s are detailed by Harris (108). Production of liquid milk and butter for urban markets was the main expression of confidence at the time. In a separate article Harris (107) focuses upon a single estate in the East Riding during the inter-war period and shows how disastrous this time was for agriculture locally. Livestock is now receiving more attention and Broad (36) gives an account of the outstandingly successful government action which eventually eradicated cattle plague in the eighteenth century. In contrast, Britain failed to cope with the outbreak of disease in the 1840s and Fisher (76) cites the belief in *laissez-faire* and confusion over the nature of animal disease which prevented effective control measures being taken at this time. The diffusion of improved sheep breeds is traced through farm sales notices by Walton (232) who argues that the rapid adoption rate owed much to Robert Bakewell's peculiar marketing techniques. On farm labourers Devine (60) examines Highland migration, seasonal and permanent, to the Scottish lowlands after 1760, and Peck (179) surveys the changing composition of the male workforce in Warwickshire during the third quarter of the nineteenth century. From this time allotments and smallholdings became common and Perkins (181) describes the circumstances that led to their provision. It was hoped that they would halt depopulation and Haresign (105) explains why the schemes of the Lincolnshire fens were a failure. Basically allotments provided only a small addition to income and labourers remained badly paid, ill-fed, poorly housed and barely educated. Not surprisingly many laid down their hoes and left the land.

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