

# Annual List and Brief Review of Articles on Agrarian History, 1984\*

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FOR prehistorians research into the Neolithic has once again produced the most exciting insights. The long accepted association between the earliest arable activity and elm decline is questioned by Edwards and Hiron (56). They have found five separate sites in Britain and Ireland where there is evidence of cereal cultivation occurring well before the elm decline levels of their pollen profiles, and the authors caution against ascribing all pre-elm decline vegetation change to Mesolithic disturbance. Smith (193) reconstructs the chalk landscape near Avebury and shows how early farmers adapted to the degeneration of land which followed cropping. As well as using pigs to destroy invasive bracken they resorted to a type of infield-outfield system so that production could be maintained upon difficult terrain. On the major linear earthworks of southern uplands Ford (67) uses field-walking, survey and excavation to distinguish those which divided valley-based territories from others which separated arable from pasture. The landscape archaeology of a self contained topographical unit on Dartmoor is summarized by Collis *et al* (39). Here the piecemeal layout of prehistoric fields contrasts with the systematic reave system on other parts of the moor which are helpfully described and interpreted by Fleming (64). The usefulness of soil-phosphate concentrations as a guide to early field remains is indicated by Edwards (57) who has used them successfully to locate areas of prehistoric settlement and agriculture in Scotland. More evidence has come to

light of neolithic woodland management and exploitation and Gilbertson (77) reports on the carved objects associated with wooden trackways and platforms from Skipsea in Yorkshire which resemble structures from the Somerset Levels. The sheer bulk and complexity of artefactual evidence that has accumulated on Roman and Anglo-Saxon England has rendered its mapping and interpretation highly problematic. However Faull (63) demonstrates how the computer can throw light on settlement patterns by the rapid sifting and analysis of information. It was thought that pre-Saxon settlement was restricted to favourable free-draining soils but recent research questions this view and Williamson (227) has used systematic field-work accurately to assess the high level of Roman clearance and colonization upon Essex clayland. It is his belief that the distribution of chance finds, aerial photography or place names can be highly misleading unless used in conjunction with careful ground work. The impressive range of techniques and expertise available for enquiry into historic habitats and human activity in upland Britain is described by Cowell (43). He stresses that once documentary sources become available they assume new significance when ecological processes are understood. An investigation into the origins of woodland by Jones (112) shows the usefulness, even necessity of adopting the multi-disciplinary approach, while a study of hedgerow evolution by Amer and Dalton (3) illustrates our continued lack of a reliable methodology for dating. They found no simple relationship between age and species content and the point is made that a number of factors, particularly variations in manage-

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ment technique, can influence the form of hedges. Reece however (168) affirms his confidence in hedge surveys as a most useful device for determining continuity in land organization since Roman times. There is little on early farm products but Chambers and Jones (29) reconsider the question of when rye was first cultivated, and on livestock Ryder (180) compares hair remains from an aurochs with those from domesticated cattle. He concludes that contrary to earlier beliefs the primitive coat type persisted until as late as medieval times.

On the medieval period itself computer manipulation of historical data is making progress and Kordecki (118) describes how in a current project improved technology is being usefully applied to information on property transfers in deeds. The value of the Cymer Abbey charter is highlighted by Gresham (82). This document is one of very few which reveal details of land division and settlement in Gwynedd at a time of significant change. There is continued strong interest in the medieval agrarian economy. Using data from the Winchester manors Dury (53) applies magnitude-frequency analysis and other statistical jugglings to identify the years between 1232 and 1349 when cereals cropped badly. Problems were largely weather-related but progressive soil exhaustion is also cited as an underlying cause. Hallam (86) charts East Anglian weather conditions, harvests and agrarian crises over roughly the same period from bailiffs' accounts and finds many discrepancies with chroniclers' reports. Rainfall and crop yields not only varied greatly between localities but their impact depended upon dietary habits as well as the particular grain that failed, and he also doubts whether the Great Famine was as severe as the chroniclers implied. Austin (4) focuses upon castles. He rejects the blinkered approach which sees them merely as romantic objects or 'sterile lumps of architectural history' and sets them firmly in the context of the estate and regional

economy. A number of articles challenge the assumption of general failure in medieval England. Langdon (120) for example argues that the rise of horse hauling in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries and economic expansion were not coincidental. Although population increase and advance in the money supply made important contributions to growth, horse hauling, he maintains, was a critical technical element which reduced bottlenecks and vitalized communications and marketing. Continuing her enquiry into the administration of Canterbury Cathedral Priory, Mate (131, 132) focuses on property investments and finds that although the statute of Mortmain may have caused a setback in land purchase after 1300, large scale accumulation resumed in the 1320s and continued to be profitable even after the Black Death. She also shows that the monks quickly restored revenues following the catastrophe despite harvest failure, livestock disease, floods and purveyance. This was due partly to astute management and price inflation, but it also supports the view that the Black Death was more purgative than toxic and by removing excess numbers allowed greater efficiency. The extraordinary regularity of layout and landholding in the open fields of eastern Yorkshire which argues a planned origin is again described by Harvey (90), demonstrating the value of detailed local investigation. Hayfield (93) compares archaeological finds with air photographs and cartographic evidence to reconstruct the medieval East Yorkshire village of Wayne. Part underwent a deliberate clearance and rebuilding in the fourteenth century and the question is raised of a possible chronological link with the village's own regular open-field layout which also may have resulted from a wholesale restructuring. Assarting was a high-cost, long-term investment and in her regional study of West Yorkshire Stinson (200) shows that although those with small holdings were able to participate, only those with large interests in land could

afford to assart extensively. Consequently assarting did more to perpetuate existing landholding structures than relieve poverty. Witney (231) tests R V Lennard's research methods and hypotheses on medieval prosperity and argues that in Kent unusually high affluence was related less to size of arable holdings than the nature of agrarian economies. He also cautions against over-reliance on Domesday Book for insights into the economic well-being of the English peasantry. It is assumed that the Statute of Labourers was a device of the magnates and gentry to secure a cheap and tractable supply of labour during the time of shortage following the Plague. However Poos (160) finds this interpretation is at odds with evidence in the peace session rolls. These show that villagers were themselves often heavily involved in the enforcement of labour laws in order to sustain their own economic positions during times of difficulty. Again farm products are neglected although Ryder (179) summarizes the results of his painstaking research into the origin of modern sheep breeds and the evolution of wool types since the neolithic.

The early modern period has yielded a heavier crop of articles. Zell (235) explores the coverage of probate records by measuring them against evidence in other sources from a sample parish, and warns users that they do not record a representative cross-section of population. Only about half of adult males and 10 per cent of women of the parish who died between 1566 and 1601 were noticed by the probate courts. In an important comparative study Post (161) questions the assumed link between bad weather, poor harvests and epidemic disease in Europe. He rejects the view that lowered resistance due to malnourishment explains the mortality peaks of the eighteenth century and points instead to the social upheavals which followed dearth and reduced employment. Thus increased vagrancy, unrest, crowding and personal neglect fostered disease, and he concludes that welfare

programmes which neutralized hardship influenced the demographic outcome more decisively than the actual level of food prices. Irish harvests of the seventeenth century have received only passing attention but Gillespie (78) has pieced together fragmentary literary evidence supplemented with some English and Scottish material to discover when, and with what effect, failures occurred. The interest in nutrition continues and Shammass (185) analyses the eighteenth-century diet of English rural poor using the Davies-Eden data and institutional menus. Northerners always fared best but even their calorific intake was barely adequate, while southerners were clearly underfed. Further, the shift from animal proteins to tea, sugar and bread caused deterioration. A number of articles challenge the Wrigley-Schofield thesis, in particular the idea that the modern increase in population arose from earlier marriage due to economic growth. Matossian (133) for example postulates that climatic change and advance in potato and wheat consumption at the expense of rye were responsible. This was because acute mould poisoning associated with rye had, she argues, previously caused death and infertility to a significant degree. Gutmann and Leboutte (85) also question the link between economic opportunity and fertility: their research reveals that high ages of marriage were sustained in some early industrial settings. Mobility has become a leading issue. Souden (196) describes his new technique using family reconstitution based on parish registers to chart changing migration patterns over long periods. The pitfalls of this approach are discussed by Schofield, Pain and Smith (153, 184) who note that a significant proportion of parish registered births, marriages and deaths actually related to outsiders. Whyte and Whyte (221, 222) explore the potential of Scottish sources in their study of a seventeenth-century rural community. The low level of movement here is related to farm structures and holding

size which worked against effects of the short-term lease. Landowners are enjoying a good press. Sixteenth-century bills of complaint against them have been used in the past to demonstrate oppression of a defenceless tenantry. Zell (234) however, explores the background to one such bill and offers a very different interpretation. Quite prosperous men were in fact using the bill to fix existing and beneficial customs in perpetuity and to obtain private pasture out of formerly unrestricted common. Hoyle (108) compares landlord-tenant relationships on four northern manors and concludes that although some lords did resort to oppression, most recognized the moral constraints, risks of failure and high cost of confrontation and therefore sought alternative means of raising income, such as by land sales or enclosure. In another study of a northern manor, however, Spence (197) shows that where claims were legitimate lords could successfully pursue them to the detriment of the farmers' finances and the local economy. Bonfield (17) scrutinizes the nature of marriage settlements between 1500 and the eighteenth century and argues that changes he detects in the transmission and distribution of property are consistent with the trends in family relationships hypothesized by E L Stone for the same period. The debate over trends in land ownership after 1660 is reviewed by Beckett (9) who stresses the importance of regional variations, the resilience of small owners in many areas and the gradual nature of change. After the demographic destruction of Glamorgan's élite in the first half of the eighteenth century a new gentry class emerged and Jenkins (111) investigates its own very different origins. He finds that heiresses were considerably more influential than industry in establishing the new élite. The experiences of successive generations of a seventeenth-century gentry family are documented by Larminie (122) to illustrate how crucial for success in property matters were personality and the level of inherited

debt. The importance of pre-parliamentary enclosure, particularly by agreement, is emphasized by Reed (169) in a detailed survey of north Buckinghamshire. Here so much took place quietly and without formal record that actual acreages involved defy enumeration. A lack of opposition to eighteenth-century enclosure has been variously interpreted in the past. However Neeson (143) argues that the rural poor were far more active in their defence than historians have allowed. As well as the more usual forms of protest, stubborn non-compliance and mischief were common among landless commoners, artisan-farmers and small occupiers. On a related theme Martin (130) probes the links between enclosure and landlessness. It was the petty traders and craft families with a small, unofficial stake in the land who were disadvantaged most by the reordering of fields, and it was their disappearance rather than the small landowner as such which was the most dramatic change wrought by enclosure according to Martin. The current interest in the role of women is apparent in several articles. Okin (149) challenges the claim that during the seventeenth century they obtained significant independence both in matters to do with their estates and within the family, and Thwaites (204) documents the declining role of women in the marketing of agricultural produce after 1700. Their position suffered by competition with aggressive businessmen as trade became more organized, less casual and more private.

For the modern period a variety of new data sources are discussed. English (60) draws our attention to the death duty registers which are virtually unexplored but will provide valuable insights into the family finances of the very rich. An Irish livestock census dating from 1803 is made available by Turner (209) who compares evidence for Down with data from north west Antrim and certain English counties. Evidence is also set against the published Irish figures for

the 1840s, to determine trends in the density and distribution of animals. The value of the Forestry Commission censuses of 1924 and the 1940s for the study of woodlands is assessed by Watkins (214) while Essex (61) compares the data on woodlands in the annual agricultural returns with information on the Ordnance Survey and finds serious discrepancies. He concludes that the agricultural statistics are too poor in quality to provide an accurate picture of change. For the period prior to the introduction of the agricultural returns there is serious lack of time-series data on land use. Cropping books could make up this deficiency however and Phillips (158) describes the insights provided by material relating to a Northamptonshire estate. There are a number of important articles on the Irish agrarian economy. In an econometric study Hoffman and Mokyr (102) show why the potato imposed severe constraints on development. Despite real gains in land productivity it also raised levels of risk, vulnerability and impoverishment in the long term largely because of problems in storing and marketing the crop. Ó Gráda (148) has compiled a new index of agricultural production for Ireland in the eve of the Famine and for 1854. This shows that output fell by 15 per cent while labour productivity rose by almost as much over this period. Mokyr and Ó Gráda (137) also consider research on population history and re-assess the influence of fertility, mortality and emigration on growth trends after 1700. In another valuable computer-assisted analysis of Irish census data Morgan and Macafee (140) conclude that early marriage was not a major factor in population growth in the half century before the Famine, at least not in north east Ulster. Instead patterns conformed with those in Britain and Europe where late marriage and differences between social groups were usual. Ulster farmers married later than either linen workers or labourers for example. On Britain Dewey (50) investigates agricultural profit levels

and considers why they were so high during the early part of the First World War. Static rents were helpful but Dewey also highlights forces which kept the real cost and uses of production factors at a low level. Raybould (167) looks into the economic role of great landowners and counters the claim that they merely squandered the nation's wealth. In the Black Country enclosure was closely linked to mineral extraction and many aristocrats took positive initiatives in the advancement of industry and of the transport network. Sill (188) explores the nature of landowner involvement in Durham coal. Although capital flowed in from landowners outside the county, local men preferred simply to rent out their property while maintaining a strict control over siting of mines and use of land. The finances of great Edwardian landowners are examined by Spring (198) who explains their rising political anger at the measures of the Liberal government. The unrecognized importance of firms of land agents from London or the provinces is highlighted in English's study (59) of estate management in East Yorkshire. Here there was no movement to greater professionalism in the nineteenth century. Instead the main change was the substitution of individuals by firms of agents whose greater efficiency owed more to corporate experience than formal qualification. The different meanings of the term 'peasantry' are considered by Beckett (10) who argues that it is incorrectly used when treated as a catch-all for rural society. In Reed's view (171) it is sufficient to define the group as producers relying mainly on family labour and he points out that these farmers were far more numerous in late nineteenth-century England than is generally realized since over half of holdings were under 20 acres, and he calls for research into their economic roles. It has become a commonplace that living-in farm servants declined with the advance of capitalist farming. However Short's detailed local investigation (187) shows that as late as the

1860s there were still large numbers, nor was there a simplistic change from farm servant to day labourer. Another view widely held is that the decline in numbers of women in agriculture during the second half of the nineteenth century was dramatic and substantial. This view has been based upon census data, yet Miller's scrutiny (135) of farm labour accounts and ancillary material raises serious doubts about the accuracy of these returns. In Gloucestershire day women were often omitted from the occupational record although they undertook a large proportion of day work on arable and mixed farms. The role of domestic service in strengthening bonds between the Big House and the local community is considered by Gerard (76) who also raises the question of the mansion's impact upon local employment and living standards. On innovation Sullivan (201) believes that the flow of patents and output of books on farming are useful measures of technological change and charts trends from the sixteenth century. The introduction and rapid spread of the horse-powered threshing machine to Ulster farms is discussed by Gailey (71) while Walton (211) uses information in Coates's Herd Book to trace the diffusion of the improved Shorthorn. This made slow but coherent progress from its point of origin under the influence of an élite of specialist breeders. In a separate article (212) he focuses upon the auctioneering trade and suggests that it contributed as much to the spread of information as agricultural societies or the printed word. The neglected demand-side of agriculture is the subject of an article by Weir (217) who explores the uneasy relationship between whisky distillers, barley growers and the Government from 1870 up to the Second World War. Discontent continues to attract scholarly interest. Knott (117) argues that agitation in Ireland was firmly grounded in notions of legitimacy and directed against threats to traditional rights, while Richter's study (173) of Welsh agitation in the 1880s stresses the deep sense of injustice and the

well organized, restrained and effective use of violence over tithes. Williams (225) takes issue with current views on revolting crowds in England and maintains it was the market economy and not the moral economy which lay behind eighteenth-century food protests. In a consideration of the socio-economic backgrounds of protesters in 1816, 1822 and 1830 Charlesworth (32) concludes that the 1830 revolt was not the culmination of increased proletarianization and pauperization. Rather it was the political tensions nationwide over Parliamentary reform which explain the scale of disturbances at this time.

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