

Annual List and Brief Review of Articles on Agrarian History, 1985*

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OUTSTANDING among this year's articles are contributions by leading scholars on the grand theme of population and economic growth. Many were inspired by Wrigley and Schofield who provide an account (197) of the philosophy and intellectual origins which underpin their own attempt to reconstruct modern population history. Anderson (1) offers a critical appraisal of the assumptions, the data and the research designs employed by Wrigley and Schofield. A main concern is that aggregative analysis masks important differences at the regional and community level, and he argues that research should now be focused less upon quantitative national data and more upon the family, marriage and human response to economic change. This latter approach is adopted by Levine (135) who argues that the changing nature of the family economy during industrialization affected quite radically the marriage market, household formation and fertility trends. Thus, for more than a century after 1700, the dominant family work unit was composed of all its members, and the prospect of earning removed the prudential check on marriage; but thereafter reliance upon the male breadwinner encouraged postponement of marriage and a curb on family size. Jackson (116) offers a detailed study of a group of contrasting communities in south-west England to assess the degree of association here between economic development and growth of population. Although employment opportunity was indeed linked to high fertility through early marriage,

migration was also found to be an important variable. The central role which historians have assigned to agriculture in explaining England's industrial rise is challenged in a number of articles. Jackson (115) provides a new index of agricultural production between the Restoration and the French Wars based upon a study of population, real wages and price trends. The index locates a period of marked growth up to 1740, but thereafter agriculture clearly failed to respond to pressures of population increase as production slowed and even stagnated. Two new sectoral price indices for the period 1660 to 1820 have been constructed by O'Brien (160) in order to calculate how far productivity increases in farming boosted home demand for industrial goods. He finds that neither the faltering advance in productivity nor the limited reallocation of labour to urban employment had much impact, while the rise in agricultural prices actually dampened demand. The achievements of the classical agricultural revolution are also questioned by Thomas (218) who considers how England attained industrial supremacy despite the fact that from 1760 farm production failed to keep pace with growth of population. The explanation he suggests lies in her food imports, mainly from Ireland, which by the 1840s accounted for one sixth of food supplies. In a comparative study of urbanization in England and continental Europe Wrigley (244) shows how trends can be used to measure growth in agricultural productivity. He calculates that output per head in England roughly doubled between 1600 and 1800 and he explores the distinctive features of England's preindustrial economy

* Publications are dated 1985 unless otherwise noted. References to articles or off-prints should be sent to the Bibliographical Unit, Institute of Agricultural History, University of Reading.

which lay behind her achievement. Lindert (136) applies statistical analysis to Wrigley and Schofield's population data to test the classical Malthusian belief that population growth depressed the real wage. Results argue that increased numbers had a direct impact on prices and only indirectly affected real wage levels. In his own statistical analysis of the wage and population data Lee (134) makes an important distinction between short, medium and long term trends since 1540 and considers factors which may have shaped them.

There are thin pickings for prehistorians. Ward (227) warns that the attractions of some marginal areas to past agriculturalists should not be underestimated. A study of low grade common land in Wales reveals that even in recent history it had sufficient potential to justify sustained use and improvement. The debate over how far man was responsible for environmental change continues. Sturludottir and Turner (214) discuss evidence in pollen profiles from a site in the northern Pennines which suggests that mesolithic populations were managing woodland vegetation throughout the four centuries or so represented. And although climate may have contributed, man's impact appears to have been chiefly responsible for the elm decline here. The Scottish evidence for vegetational change during the mesolithic is examined by Edwards and Ralston (70) who stress that relative to other causal factors the degree of human influence still remains uncertain, while Maguire (145) provides new data on the vegetation of Dartmoor which suggests that it was almost entirely forested up to 5000 bp. Cairns have been associated with funereal practices but Yates (245) has surveyed groups of the smaller monuments in Scotland and argues that they resulted from field clearance. This sometimes became necessary when continuous tillage caused soil deflation and impoverishment which brought stones to the surface; or clearance could be undertaken for sporadic upland cultivation at times of

land pressure. A theory on the origin of the plough is put forward by Pryor (182). He reasons that it was invented where large domestic animals were found, where population had reached a certain density and where 'plow-positive' staples such as wheat or rye were native.

For the medieval period Tuck (224) examines the effects of the Anglo-Scottish wars on the northern rural economy and suggests that the area showed more resilience than has been supposed and in certain respects even benefited. The level of war damage in the Midlands during Stephen's reign is reconsidered by White (235). He concludes that while the high levels of tax-exemption here resulted more from administrative problems than devastation, the picture of a 'wasted Midlands' cannot be entirely dismissed. Historians have been hindered by a lack of direct evidence on medieval demographic change, but Poos (177) brings to our notice a large body of information deriving from the frankpledge system which can reveal movements over the long term. Analysis of the Essex data sets for example not only confirms severe mortality during the 1315-17 period and the Black Death but also shows a prolonged decline during the later Middle Ages, so that by the sixteenth century local population was below half the level of two centuries earlier. Langridge (130) uses a variety of documentary sources to trace the demographic trends of a small east Kent community over five centuries. Distinctive features were an early expansion from the late twelfth century in conjunction with urbanization and intensified land use. The evidence and approaches to rural settlements in early and middle Anglo-Saxon England are surveyed by Welch (233). He urges better field work combined with environmental research programmes. The multiple estate model developed by G R J Jones is critically evaluated by Gregson (88) who raises problems of definition, method and application. Jones however (121) re-emphasizes the

values of his model for interpreting early settlement organization, even though the multiple estate took variant regional forms. The manorial settlement pattern of Anglo-Norman Ireland is examined by Graham (86) who stresses its spatial and temporal diversities. Fleming (78) has studied old English wills, charters, writs and memoranda in conjunction with Domesday Book to determine what became of those monastic estates destroyed by the Danes in the eighth and ninth centuries. In what amounted to a virtual revolution in landholding many were strategically used by west Saxon kings to endow officials and gain loyalty for defence purposes. The value of Domesday Book for reconstructing the economy of Norman England is demonstrated by McDonald and Snooks (141). They have applied regression analysis to Essex data on lay estates to show that the tax assessments were not an artificial impost levied from above, but rather were based upon the actual capacity of manors to pay. Results from another significant study of the data by these authors (140) show a strongly positive relationship between the values and resources of lay holdings, pointing to a high degree of consistency in the way estates were managed. Holt (105) explains the system of female inheritance after the conquest showing how while it hindered a woman from enjoying estate in her own right, it fully exploited her as a means of perpetuating the bond between tenure and lineage. The central importance of the arranged marriage for controlling descent of property through the female line is also underscored by Waugh (230) who describes how abuse of royal lordship by Henry III threatened the marriage strategies and therefore group interests of the aristocracy, leading to revolt and curtailment of the King's feudal power. The introduction of non-alienation clauses in charters is described by Waugh (231) in a separate article. This was a device used by lords to re-assert their control over free tenants and their properties when their own

feudal power was threatened. The complex interplay of forces underlying grain price movements during the thirteenth century and their influences on estate management are discussed by Bridbury (30). Although manorial revenues rose with inflation after 1270, they represented neither farming prosperity nor improvements, but rather successful efforts to raise the fixed charges paid by tenants. Continuing her own investigation into the management of Canterbury Cathedral Priory during the fourteenth century Mate (148) emphasizes the strong regional differences in wages and labour services and the dramatic impact of the Black Death. In another article (149) she compares farming methods on the scattered estates of individual lords and finds that for those practices discussed in treatises, such as manuring or stock care, there was a large degree of uniformity. But where treatises were silent, the practices were often the local ones. Nash (156) has used estate maps to investigate the origin of strip size in Sussex open fields. Here measures did not conform to traditional notions of the strip, nor can variation be explained by land quality, settlement chronology, regional farming practices or Roman influence. Rather, local acre size would appear to have been the controlling factor and Nash tentatively links variations in local acre measures with the distribution of lordships. In an important article on medieval crop productivity Osmaston (167) claims that grain yields are largely independent of sowing rates and he questions both G H Dury's handling of the Winchester Manor's crop data and his inferences about contemporary weather patterns, criticisms which Dury (68) strongly repudiates. In a quantitative study Biddick (21) uses a taxation assessment to explore the relationship between taxable peasant wealth and market involvement. Results of regression analysis indicate that the position of the vill in the regional marketing grid determined over two-thirds of the variation in wealth, while soil type,

access to route ways and the number of lords explained only a further 4 per cent. The value of lay subsidies is stressed in Slater's article (202). He maintains that despite weaknesses they can provide a convincing picture of the urban hierarchy if used sensitively and in combination with other evidence.

On source material of the early modern period Woolgar (243) describes some seventeenth-century documents thought to be copies of estate maps which on closer inspection were found to be working papers and drafts. They provide a valuable insight into the advanced surveying and map-making techniques of the time. The study of probate inventories has traditionally focused upon goods and chattels as evidence of life styles and living standards. However Cox and Cox (53) have analysed their valuations and find that they are not only consistent with market prices but are subject to the usual factors such as the seasons, wartime scarcity, new sources of supply and technical innovation. Climate is still the subject of debate. Prior (181) disputes the hypothesis of E L Jones that climatic fluctuations and other natural disasters may explain the slower economic development of Asia compared with Europe before 1800, and Jones replies (120). Parry and Carter (173) use the Manley temperature record covering three centuries from the 1650s to evaluate the influence of climatic variation on levels of risk of crop failure. They conclude that some recent and quite minor climatic variations have in fact had a substantial impact. The statistical relationship between prices, mortality and weather since 1670 is explored by Galloway (80) who finds a strong association between endemic disease, low winter and high summer temperatures, while reductions in mortality after 1700 are linked to a better climate, less variable harvests and improved sanitation. Based on the argument that the seasonality of marriage reflected rural work patterns Cressy and Kussmaul (55, 127, 128) use evidence from parish registers to plot changes over the long term.

Kussmaul's findings portray the emergence of strong regional differences in the mid-seventeenth century which are linked to the achievements of market integration and regional specialization of production. The political affiliations of landed men involved in ruthless depopulating enclosure are examined by Stone (210) to test the claim that the English Civil War represented a clean conflict between the feudal and entrepreneurial elements in society. Findings contradict the theory that bourgeois attitudes led to support for Parliament. Beckett (13) reviews the history of the land tax. This did not represent a new move into permanent high-yield direct taxation but rather was an extension of earlier levies which survived so long because the government would not or could not assess wealth realistically. Of greater long-term consequence was the extension of excise duties which ultimately was profitable enough to relieve the land tax of its major role in fund raising. On farming practices Bell (18) examines ridge-making techniques in Ireland and maintains that they were not necessarily 'backward' but carried important advantages for cultivation. Technological change in agriculture continues to attract interest. Sullivan (215) uses patent data to trace the chronology of invention between the early seventeenth century and 1850, and Colyer (49) lists cultural isolation, limited capital and extensive farming systems as major constraints on the spread of new methods in Wales. Using evidence in probate inventories Overton (169) traces the spread of turnips and clover in Norfolk and Suffolk and discusses the mechanics of the diffusion process. Boud (25) considers the early development of agricultural societies in Scotland and concludes that they were a significant agent of change in areas of agricultural conservatism, while the impressive achievements of the little known Scottish improver, John Walker, are drawn to our attention by Withers (241). Two other

notables are discussed: Spier and Anderson (203) find that Shakespeare's references to farming have much in common with Thomas Tusser's writings and Moffat (152) has examined observations made by William Cobbett on the soils of districts he visited to discover that they conform well with present day assessments. On migration Houston (109) uses evidence from movement certificates issued by the Scottish church to illustrate how mobility was associated with particular occupations and stages in the life-cycle, and Withers (240) traces patterns of movement from the Scottish Highlands to the central lowlands from census and other sources. On Ireland O'Flanagan (163) plots the incidence of fairs between 1600 and 1800 and considers how the pattern that emerges can be related to developments in agriculture and commerce, while Bell (19) examines hiring practices in Ulster. Here both servants and employers often came from the same small-farm sector, were of a similar social status and simply used service as a stage in the quest for their own holdings. The overwhelming poverty of Tudor and early Stuart England has become axiomatic. But Tronrud (223) argues that the tax assessments which underpinned earlier studies are misleading and he uses alternative sources to show that the levels of destitution may have been exaggerated. In her study of rural crime Herrup (101) denies the claim that the discretion exercised over the execution of capital offenders served as a tool to sustain the power of the elite. Her evidence suggests that each decision resulted from careful assessment by people from differing social backgrounds, and reflected contemporary views on morality and justice. Through a close scrutiny of local and judicial records Walter (226) has provided fresh insights into the abortive Oxfordshire rising over depopulating enclosure in 1596. Because the gentry and 'middling sort' were prospering from the very changes which had spawned revolt they remained aloof, denying leadership and stifling collective action by the

poor. The pattern of plague fatalities in medieval and early modern England is considered by Ell (71). He maintains that it can be partly explained by dietary habits which caused iron deficiency in women and the young. Curiously, this gave them a level of protection against the disease, while adult males with a high iron status were more likely to die.

The history of British woodlands deserves more scholarly attention than it is apparently receiving and Watkins (228) describes how spatial changes of the present century can be assessed by the use of sources including satellite remote sensing and aerial photographs. In their own local study Jones and Jones (125) also emphasize the variety of source material that is available for the study of woodland management on particular estates; for surveys of individual woods; and for the historical analysis of wood and timber using crafts. Browne (33) and Day (62) draw our attention to the Ordnance Survey maps and memoirs. These have been little used but can provide valuable insights into Irish society during the pre-Famine era. The value of computers for managing historical data is explained by Jackson and Schurer (117, 198), and Beckett and Foulds (15, 16) report on the early stages of an important computer-based investigation into the open-field village of Laxton. Flora Thompson's *Lark Rise* has gained in popularity recently as a primary source for the study of late nineteenth-century rural life and society. However, English (74) has scrutinized documentary records of the time and found that the work was more fictional than factual. Thompson's aim apparently was to glorify the old way of life and so she constructed a past that never really existed. The vexed question of living standards is again the focus of concern, and Schwarz (199) argues that real wage rates may not have settled comfortably at the level of the mid 1700s until a whole century later. Crafts (54) takes issue with the claim that real wages doubled between 1820 and 1850, and offers revised lower estimates. These

Lindert and Williamson (137) refute. Welfare is another leading issue, Boyer (29) offers an economic explanation for the granting of outdoor relief to the able bodied between 1780 and 1835. Using a simple profit maximization model he demonstrates that the system represented to farmers the lowest cost method of securing an adequate peak season labour force. Lately it has become accepted that the New Poor Law had little impact on welfare provision locally. However, Apfel and Dunkley (2) question the new orthodoxy and their close study of a southern arable county highlights the marked reduction in aid to the poor after 1835 and the general harshness of the new relief system. The role of friendly societies is explored by Jones (119) in her study of Glamorgan evidence. Most families from a wide social spectrum contributed but benefit provision was secondary to 'good fellowship'; risks of mismanagement were high; and while regular contributors might gain, it was at the expense of those who fell behind and lost all. Irish rural societies seem to be all the rage at present and Bartlett (10) focuses on protests of the Defenders during the 1790s. Although they shared the conservative concerns of their predecessors over agrarian injustice, their deeply held anti-state feelings and extreme violence marked a new departure in protest. The Society of United Irishmen was active at the same time and Curtin (58) describes how it built up a revolutionary mass-based organization which struck terror into the heart of the administration. Archer (3) demonstrates that the little understood crime of animal maiming in East Anglia was not always an expression of class hatred as generally believed. Instead outrages resulted from deeply held grievances of a personal nature which found relief in a form of symbolic murder. There has been a neglect of protest in western parts of England and Porter (179) helps redress the balance in his search for reasons why attempts to unionize labourers in Devon failed. Isolation on small farms,

low wages, a lack of alternative employment and employer hostility all contributed to an apparent lack of interest. There is renewed controversy over England's landowning elite. Using quantitative methods Stone (209, 212, 213) refutes the hypothesis that for centuries this class was uniquely open to infiltration by new families from banking, trade and industry. The Springs however (205, 206) challenge this interpretation and there is a protracted exchange of views. Michie (150) describes how one of England's richest men, Lord Overstone, spent his money and Richards (187) in a study of the Sutherlands and their fortune asks whether the 'landed leviathans became prehistoric left-overs, rendered obsolete by elements of industry and Empire'. He concludes that by the 1880s, like other families, they were 'stranded like dinosaurs, an expensive élite with few and diminishing functions, a gaudy decoration of the uppermost levels of British society'. Britton (31) has constructed a table of the occupations and fortunes of the top ten wealth holders in Scotland between 1876 and 1913. Comparisons with the United Kingdom as a whole show that finance and the professions generated few fortunes compared with heavy industry, drink manufacture and trade. In the recent flood of literature on land reform the role of Ulster politicians has been largely ignored. Thompson's study (220) however, shows that northern opinion had a critical influence both upon the content of the 1881 Land Bill and upon its fate at Westminster. The belief that farmers rarely defied the traditional leadership in county politics is contested by Jaggard (118) who argues that in Cornwall farmers maintained a pivotal position and consistently overshadowed their social superiors in political affairs. On marketing Thwaites (222) examines the impact of late eighteenth-century food shortages on trading practices both short and long term, and Shaw (201) concentrates on the food supply of British cities in the nineteenth century. Although the number of retail outlets was

growing up to the 1840s to serve increased numbers of consumers, the major transformations occurred after 1870, when rises in real incomes and population went hand in hand with innovations in food technology and widening areas of supply. This latter development created its own problems and Offer (162) considers how they impinged on naval planning during the years leading up to the Great War. Rooth (191) makes use of government papers of the 1930s to show that formidable obstacles prevented the full-scale protection of British agriculture from being implemented. A major constraint was the priority given to industry which led government to allow imports in return for foreign purchases of British manufacturers, while fears of damaging imperial interests were a further hindrance. The course of British agricultural policy since the Second World War is traced by Bowers (26) who stresses the pernicious effects on the environment and the destruction of deserted sites, ridge and furrow, water-meadow systems and hedgerows that it has indirectly caused. But in his own historical overview of the same issue, Collins (48) argues that what we are seeing today is merely part of a long term trend that originated with the Agricultural Revolution and was only briefly halted during the depression years of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

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Book Reviews

RICHARD M SMITH (ed), *Land, Kinship and Life Cycle*. CUP, 1984. xiii + 347 pp. £40.

A book of fifteen essays by different authors and over 500 pages on the theme of land, kinship and life cycle is likely to attract the interest of more than a small group of specialist readers already working in the field. In that case, the reader needs to be prepared in some way for the current angles of approach and the documentary sources used in the subsequent essays. Richard Smith attempts this in a long first chapter but it makes tough reading, partly because it ranges too widely, partly because it seeks to generalize over much. It leads the reader into many byways and leaves him at the end without any clear framework in which to fit the more detailed studies that follow. It is best read last of all.

Easier to comprehend and positively stimulating are the next six essays on the Middle Ages that examine different places under different tenurial conditions before and after the Black Death, and show some clear trends and changes in the workings of kinship and the occupation of land. The abrupt alteration in the ratio of people to land in the mid-fourteenth century could not fail to leave clear traces, and these are effectively demonstrated in rural places in East Anglia by Bruce Campbell, Richard Smith, and Jack Ravensdale; by Ian Blanchard in some Derbyshire and Somerset villages where industry temporarily supplemented agriculture; and by Christopher Dyer and Zvi Razi in the West Midlands. The weight of the evidence falls on different aspects of the story, but between them all they underline the partitioning of land, multiple tenancies, and family disputes before the Black Death, in contrast with the larger holdings and more strongly differentiated peasantry that gradually emerged thereafter. Jack Ravensdale emphasizes the changing content of manorial custom, and in particular the changing status of women, especially widows, when customary land ceased to be a scarce commodity and became, instead, a drug on the market. The subtlety of changes within a formally stable structure is the essential message here. Similarly Ian Blanchard's evidence of rural industries

surging and fading, or moving to other places, reminds us of the transitory nature of many strategies for survival – an important lesson this, for all periods and not just for the fifteenth century. But Ian Blanchard's wider perspective at this point on the question of strategies narrows unaccountably at others. For example, he is puzzled by the seeming sale of pieces of land at one date and their return to the same family at another; he can only explain it by some ancient group memory of rights that permit the resumption of once-owned land. He does not contemplate the possibility of an unwritten custom (that is found in some villages in Spain to this day) obliging sellers of land first to offer their property to kin and/or neighbours; again, when reconstructing family relationships, he never sees mutual aid, and support gladly given, between fathers and sons, but only 'tyrannical paternalism'. This is only half a view of reality. Zvi Razi uses Halesowen families to emphasize the need for family pedigrees to be fully explored, if the historian is to gauge correctly the influence of kinship on changing land patterns. This is a salutary reminder, especially as it draws attention to the women involved in some way in almost every land transaction. Yet his own analysis is not free from criticism. He reckons a transfer of land from parents to son-in-law as a transfer between kin, while that between husband and wife is not. This procedure draws objections from Christopher Dyer in a second contribution that has the welcome flavour of constructive debate between the essayists. Medieval historians already stand on firmer ground when studying land, kinship, and life cycle than the early modernists.

Writers on the period after 1500 present a less coherent picture, reflecting the unsatisfactory state of present knowledge, and a desire to generalize prematurely. But individually some of the essays are rewarding reading. The economic resources of widows, many of whom were considerable money-lenders, are demonstrated and discussed by Jim