

Annual List and Brief Review of Articles on Agrarian History, 1988*

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QUESTIONS concerning the productivity of agricultural land are discussed in a number of leading articles this year. Analysis has traditionally concentrated upon the spatial organization of land use, field patterns and cropping but Olsson (177) offers an alternative approach which focuses on the resource base and the flow of nutrients with the agro-ecosystem. In a case study Dodgshon and Olsson (63) reconstruct the nutrient 'budgets' of Scottish townships to show how productivity was raised through inputs of manure. The reason for comparatively low yields in medieval England is considered by Clark (48) who argues that the prohibitive impact of high interest rates upon land improvement was a root cause. As an antidote to the doom and gloom interpretation of the medieval economy Hogan (120) has analysed the cropping strategy, itemized furlong by furlong, in some exceptional manorial records. These reflect a remarkable sensitivity on the part of management and decision-making to crop needs, soil conditions and profits, while even in the open field environment there is clear evidence of flexibility in land use and respectable yields. The case for technological progress at this time gains further strength from Campbell's article (41) charting the advance of vetches as an integral part of cropping regimes during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. The innovation is linked to a rising urban demand and the intensification of mixed farming. The optimistic view is echoed in Stephenson's account (218) of fleece weights in which he shows that they compared well with the average of later centuries. And although fleece weights and flock size fell drastically at times, this was due to climatic change and disease rather than human failure. A central problem for historians concerned with the progress of post-medieval agriculture has been the lack of hard evidence on yields. A possible solution

(pace Overton) is the sophisticated statistical manipulation of data in probate inventories and Allen (8) offers a critical review of this approach, suggesting some changes in methodology. These are applied by Glennie (86) to evidence from Hertfordshire with significant results. They suggest that a sustained rise in yields began in the 1660s or 1670s and predated the widespread use of those fodder crops with which productivity increases are usually associated. In a comparative study Goldstone (91) questions the contrast between English and French productivity levels from medieval to modern times and argues that the explanation for England's achievements lies in her peculiar regional ecologies. Thus soil, rainfall and access to markets encouraged technological innovations to diffuse while weakness of common field regulations was also a factor. The greater productivity of the average English worker in the nineteenth century is also discussed by Nardinelli (169). He contrasts the shrinkage of the English labour force where land quality was above average with the likelihood of French workers to stay put on farms ecologically less well endowed.

On the earliest, prehistoric, cultures Mithen (159) highlights the intriguing discrepancy between the frequency of animal species represented in rock art of hunter-gatherers and those in faunal assemblages. After placing images in their ecological context he is persuaded that they functioned as a communications medium rather than decoration. A collection of reports presented by Hall (97) on the results of the intensive Fenland survey underscores the extraordinary value of wetland archaeology for reconstructing the past. Revolutionary new evidence obtained during the survey's work of pioneering iron age communities and their economy is reviewed by Lane, Evans and Serjeantson (136, 72) while the discovery of previously unsuspected Saxon settlement is reported by Hayes and Silvester (109, 203). Dramatic alteration to the environment is normally associated with machinery and agro-chemicals, but Simmons (204) reminds us that it can be traced back to ancient times. This is confirmed in a number of articles. Bush (38) for

*Publications are dated 1988 unless otherwise noted. References to articles or off-prints should be sent to the Bibliographical Unit, Institute of Agricultural History, University of Reading. The Master Index containing over 30,000 classified references on British rural history can be consulted by appointment.

example reports on the first palaeological record from a wetland site on the Yorkshire wolds which shows that mesolithic peoples were causing forest disturbances as early as 8900 BP and influencing the survival of species-rich grassland communities. Similarly, Butler (39) combines the results of litho-stratigraphic investigations with the microfossil record to deduce environmental change during the neolithic on Kenn Moor, Avon. He concludes that human impact may have been responsible for an alteration to the hydrological regime, leading to more frequent flooding, a rising water table and widespread silt deposition. An inspired use of unlikely material is a continuing feature of research. Heslop (113) argues that the systematic study of beehive querns can provide a mass of detailed information on the subsistence economy and external relations of later prehistoric communities, while Testart (224) uses the experience of present-day hunter-gatherer societies to provide insights into the past. Enckell and Rundgren (71) demonstrate how the presence of the anthropochorus earthworm can be used to trace former settlement. Densities are higher among house remains than in hayfields, and higher in shielings abandoned during the medieval period than in surrounding outfields. A number of prehistorians have addressed themselves to the problem of the transition to farming. Thomas (225) in a comparative study of Britain and northern Europe calls for a broader explanatory framework embracing social processes. In his view foraging populations and early farmers co-existed for a time. Redding's explanation (186) of the transition to food production centres on the resource base: where fluctuations were least predictable, more frequent and severe, he argues, farming was favoured. Milk and wool production in the late neolithic are reconsidered by Barker *et al.* (19) while Rogers and Rogers (191) question accepted evidence of horse domestication. The presence of notching and bevelling on incisor teeth recovered from palaeolithic sites may after all be due to causes other than human control.

There is a dearth of notable articles on Roman Britain but Jones and Casey (130) discuss the use of the Gallic Chronicle of 452 as a reliable chronological framework for its demise and the Anglo-Saxon invasions. For the slightly later period Foulds (78) provides a helpful detailed guide to cartularies as a documentary source, and the value of charters is again demonstrated. Griffiths (94) for example subjects the numerous twelfth- and thirteenth-century charters relating to the lands of Margam Abbey to detailed scrutiny. They give new insights into the structure of native society, in particular the strong attachment of kin to family land and the nature of property rights. The potential of other legal records is drawn to our attention. Coroners' rolls have been used to study crime but Hanawalt (102) shows that they can also

provide information on family life, the role of women and the material environment of the peasant. Walker (241) describes the manuscript pleadings protecting rights of wardship and marriage which, she notes, reveal layers of English feudal society largely invisible in other records. English wills survive in large numbers and Sheehan (200) gives an account of how they were drawn up and their practical consequences on peoples' lives. An early fourteenth-century poem and its relevance to food historians is described by Dhuibhne (60), and Claxton (50) finds fascinating glimpses into noble society at this time in some hunting tapestries. The Paston letters have been used to illustrate the degree of lawlessness during the late medieval period but as Britnell demonstrates (34) they can also tell us about agrarian conditions and the problems of estate management for smaller owners. Using manorial court records, Bonfield and Poos (29) demonstrate how customary tenants were able to fashion true strategies of inheritance once the deathbed transfer of property was developed and accepted by lords. The growth of interest in the peasant land market is reflected in Harvey's valuable methodological summary (108) of sources for its study, and in Raftis's analysis (182) of the manorial court rolls of Godmanchester. Debate over the Domesday Book regression analysis of McDonald and Snooks continues and Leaver (141) argues that it may after all be compatible with the Round theory of hidation which it sought to overthrow. On the question of continuity in the landscape Unwin (235) reconstructs the pattern of estates in Nottinghamshire before and after the conquest to show that only township boundaries survived the Norman rationalization. Field systems are being heavily researched. Nitz (173) challenges the view that the common field dates from the twelfth century and maintains that feudal authorities had been instrumental in its creation before 700 AD. The earliest documented open fields of the late Anglo-Saxon period are described by Hooke (124) who stresses our lack of certain knowledge about the chronology of developments. The distinctive long strip layout of open fields and subdivision is discussed by Matzat (156) who finds striking parallels with the German evidence, and Roberts (189) asks general questions about settlements and field systems in Cumbria. He has detected a particular type of village plan linked to long strip field cores of a possible twelfth-century origin. Fenoaltea (73) presses his case for the agricultural efficiency of common fields and denies that scattering sacrificed productivity, while Fox (79) looks into the transformation of the two- into three-field systems and the ecological consequences which inhibited change in some areas. On farming, Currie (55) documents the earliest recorded vetch crop, harvested in Wiltshire during the Romano British period and McDonnell (146) describes the history and

function of transhumance in the north. The impressive advance of commercial rabbiting after the Black Death on poor East Anglian soils is charted by Bailey (16). Landlords here were quick to direct funds into this high-growth project to off-set losses in arable farming and exploit new markets. In the past social historians have relied upon indirect evidence for consumption patterns but Dyer (67) has now exploited the records contained in manorial accounts of food and drink payments for harvest workers. These reveal that well before the Black Death there was a marked shift from lesser grains to fresh meat and wheat. In a separate article Dyer (68) highlights the tensions underlying the 1381 rising in Suffolk and shows that prosperity rather than impoverishment was causing strife.

In a wide ranging comparative study Goldstone (90) proposes that the English Revolution of 1640 was not a uniquely western crisis of capitalism or absolutism, but shared the same basic cause with Ming China and Ottoman Turkey. They, contemporaneously, suffered an imbalance in population and resources leading to breakdowns of state power. Although the early modern period is under-represented much attention has as usual been paid to questions of property and ownership. Vogel (238) explores eighteenth-century liberal conceptions of property rights and the conflict between a belief in the exclusive claims of the individual and the rights of each generation to the earth's resources. Spring (214) debates with Bonfield (28) the function of strict family settlement – whether it preserved estates or spread wealth amongst family members – and Langford's study (137) explores the relationship between landed property and parliamentary representation. The view that during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries land was bought for more than its economic worth is examined by Allen (9): using a model of real estate which incorporates motives for purchase, the effects of strict settlement and new data on rents he concludes that land prices were not after all artificially high. The financial affairs of a Tudor nobleman are analysed by Doran (64) to deny Stone's thesis of an aristocracy in decline. Allen (7) investigates the significant growth in the productivity of agricultural labour in England during the early modern period. He argues that it flowed from a shift to the large farm and a release of manpower, benefiting markedly the economy at large. On transport, Gerhold (84) is critical of earlier attempts to measure the metropolitan carrying trade and proposes new methods of approach. In an inventory-based analysis of changing farm structure near London between 1550 and 1700 Glennie (86) highlights a move to more grain-dominated farms, despite unfavourable prices for arable producers. On livestock Gibson (85) draws upon evidence in Scottish household accounts,

agricultural reports, bone remains and modern unimproved breeds to estimate the changing size and carcass composition. It has become a commonplace (*pace* Bowden) that lower wool prices from the mid-sixteenth century relative to wheat depressed sheep production. But Martin (152) uses evidence from unique flock surveys to show that grazing was extended. On enclosure Hanley (103) traces in detail the piecemeal extinction of common rights over large areas of the Chilterns and shows how commoners could delay but not prevent actions of a territorial magnate with the law on his side. In his Buckinghamshire case study of opposition to enclosure Turner (233) stresses the importance of local economic problems and argues that conflict was within rather than across social classes. The significance of the Black Act is reassessed by Broad (35) who argues that in practical terms it did not mark a major turning point in Government's or landowners' approach to dealing with organized rural crime. Bohstedt (24) confronts the view that women were prominent in food riots, demonstrating that they merely participated with other family members to defend the household economy. Bohstedt and Williams (25) also question why riots spread to certain towns and villages and not others. They maintain that in the late eighteenth-century crowd action became more sophisticated and that much depended on the degree of hardship, social and economic networks which carried information, and the social structure of localities. The ritual element in agrarian protest is explored by Seal (197) who explains how dance, drama and procession were used to convey in a non-violent way, deeply felt public hostility.

On the source material of the modern period Nicholson (172) describes the specialised large-scale maps produced by the Ordnance Survey for the military from the 1850s and Day (58) draws our attention to the new database established at the Institute of Irish Studies. This records the uniquely detailed parish accounts of Irish economy and society in the 1830s. The value of using a computer for dealing with large amounts of numerical evidence is demonstrated by Mills and Mills (158) in their census-based study of mobility, and Grigg (95) exploits the annual agricultural returns to chart regional trends in tillage. The reliability of another well used source is called into question: Allen and Ó Gráda (10) have scrutinized the quantity of evidence on grain yields collected by Arthur Young and point out that the conclusions he drew from them about enclosure and on related growth in productivity were false. The study of the size of different wealth groups has been hindered by lack of solid evidence. However, Rubinstein (192) highlights a document printed in 1861 which holds potential for research. On élites in rural society Eastwood (69) tests the view that voting

was determined by deference to landlords and contends that during the 1830s Tories were having to use a more efficient political organization to gain electoral success. In another study of mid-Victorian politics the ability of magnates to hold sway due to national influence and economic muscle is demonstrated by Heesom (111).

The relationship between repeal of the Corn Laws, agricultural conditions and the exodus of British farmers is considered by Van Vugt (237). Those who left were typically small grain producers who anticipated ruin at home from import-led price falls. The tariff reductions are also discussed by Irwin (127) who provides an assessment of their welfare impact. On settlement Banks (18) argues that the use of model 'open' or 'close' parishes by historians is misconceived and supports her claim with detailed statistical analysis of some social and demographic features of West Norfolk. Adonis (2) examines the career of the third Lord Carrington and assesses his role in the liberal land reforms and Leneman (142) reviews the little known breakup of Scottish lowland estates for smallholding earlier this century. The question of pre-Famine living standards in Ireland is addressed by Mokyr and Ó Gráda (162). To overcome a lack of direct evidence they have constructed a 'subjective index of improverishment' and together with other proxies calculate that although average income may have risen after 1790 poverty deepened. A similar approach to the discussion of living standards in Britain is adopted by Mokyr (161) in another article. Instead of the usual reliance on real wage data he presents evidence on the consumption on luxury goods and concludes that the pessimists' view of little or no improvement before the mid-nineteenth century still holds. There has been much attention devoted to internal movements of population recently and Withers (251) examines the extent of directed labour mobility which was part of the system of relief following the Highland potato famine. Also on labour Jordan (131) has scrutinized census evidence for England and Wales. It is found that they give a poor indication of the numbers in work and she argues that contrary to accepted belief female unemployment was rife between 1851 and the First World War. Tracing the growth of state aid for agricultural education Richards (188) explains how it had its origin in the 'whiskey-money' fortuitously made available to county councils in the 1890s. In celebration of the Royal Agricultural Society of England's 150th year Gower (92) reviews the historical relationship between statistics and research and points to World War Two as marking a real turning point in their application and development; while Henderson (112) too addresses himself to the remarkable achievements of science in agriculture and charts the progress of events from the

formal research activities of Lawes and Gilbert to present-day embryo transfer.

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