

Annual List and Brief Review of Articles on Agrarian History, 1991¹

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THE analysis of pollen spectra to reconstruct human activity in prehistory continues to provide valuable insights. Research at a site in the West of Ireland by Malloy and O'Connell (131), for example, has resulted in a detailed record of woodland and land use history from 9500 to 1500 BP, including the timing of clearance and types of early farming. Similarly Hall (86) combines historical, topographical, and palynological evidence from an inhospitable area of Armagh to create a picture of agricultural activity from prehistoric to modern times. The question of the elm decline is addressed in a number of studies. Day (59) has analysed pollen, sediment, and charcoal particles from two Oxfordshire sites. An interesting finding is that elm decline was associated with disease and leaf gathering for fodder rather than clearance, while the discovery of a single triticum type grain dating from c 6700 BP adds to the growing body of evidence for the occurrence of cereals in Britain prior to the elm decline. Investigations in the Pennines by Tallis and Switsur (203, 204) suggest that the replacement of upland forest and scrub with blanket peat was linked to a complex of environmental changes including forest clearance, climate, and soil deterioration that varied from region to region. Mesolithic bands contributed in a major way through controlled burning and grazing which damaged the land. Studies by Whittington *et al* (226-8) at an eastern Scottish site also demonstrate the value of palynology as a tool for evaluating landscape change; their analyses provide evidence of multiple elm declines and recent woodland planting on estates.

The transition to farming is widely discussed. McCorriston and Hole (126) postulate that agriculture was first adopted 10,000 years ago in the Jordan Valley. This resulted from climatic change which made it necessary to store food and encouraged sedentism. Layton *et al* (119) also reject the theoretical framework in which the transition is conceived as an evolutionary progression and

where population growth is a critical prime mover. Instead foraging or farming are viewed merely as alternative strategies which are appropriate in different natural or social environments. In the opinion of Zvelebil and Dolukhanov (236) the transition was a slow one during which the two systems overlapped. Blumler and Byrne (24) review models of plant domestication and a number of articles demonstrate the contribution that molecular biology is now making to our understanding of the origin and evolution of crop plants: studies of legumes and the potato (23, 81) are among these. On livestock Anthony and Brown (12) have identified microscopic bit wear on equid teeth which date the beginning of horseback riding to 4000 BC. This event, they argue, became the first major innovation in transport, pre-dating the wheel and transforming Eurasian societies. On early agricultural systems Cooney (50) reviews the evidence on neolithic fields in Ireland in an attempt to discover their contemporary functions and extent, and on food. Evershed *et al* (66) show how gas chromatography and mass spectrometry can be used to detect the vegetable components of ancient diets.

On early historical source material Higham (96) draws our attention to passages in Gildas's sixth-century work on Britain. In it there are references to intensive agriculture and transhumance which are at odds with current views which associate this period with population collapse and economic dislocation. Hanawalt (89) discusses the difficulties of interpreting medieval texts which arose out of contemporary narrative, and shows from the records of coroners' inquests the importance of their cultural context. The value of records which resulted from disputes over the ownership of lands is described by Smith (189, 190). Quite apart from information on property they can provide rare insights into early life styles, customs, attitudes, and behaviour. The meaning of 'waste' in the early pipe rolls is considered by Amt (10) who defends the traditional interpretation as devastated land unable to sustain normal output because of economic disruption. Kosminsky's classic analysis of social structure in the hundred rolls is reassessed by Barg (16) who by careful linkage techniques

¹ Publications are dated 1991 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 40,000 classified references on British agrarian history and rural society can be consulted by appointment.

reveals the complex socio-economic identity of manorial freeholders.

On socio-political structures Crouch *et al* (55) debate the content and chronology of bastard feudalism, and Alfonso (5) provides a wide ranging study of Cistercian estates at home and abroad. Focusing upon the social relations that developed within the Cistercian economy she rejects views which have stressed its capitalistic non-manorial structure. The development of the economy in general is considered by Britnell (34) who questions why England relatively had a low level of urbanization in the fourteenth century and argues that the reason lay in the political, cultural, and economic characteristics of the cities themselves and not simply in the low rural demand for urban goods and services. Postan's thesis that there was a Malthusian crisis during the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries is challenged by Desai (60). He suggests an alternative model of the English economy in which livestock disease and harvest failures were the prime movers, rather than over-population. McCloskey (125) asks why peasants persisted tilling open fields when scattering imposed such severe problems of inefficiency, and concludes that the problems were outweighed by the buffer against risk that scattering offered. In a call for less economic theory and more history Komlos and Landers (116) dispute the thesis of McCloskey and Nash that the low level of grain storage was linked to high interest rates. Livestock as usual receives little attention, but Currie (56) in his study of fish-keeping traces the history of the carp from its introduction in the late medieval period when there was a change both in the economic climate and the attitudes to fishponds. The approach of the Toronto School to the study of society is reflected in the work of Dewindt and Olson (62, 153) who have scrutinized the manorial rolls of a fenland community to throw new light upon the social underpinnings of local government. They reveal how local people interacted with their leaders and responded to long term crises arising out of the plague.

Issues surrounding kinship, marriage patterns and the development of early rural family forms are a dominant theme in this year's periodical literature. The size and structure of the medieval family has been a matter of controversy and Moore (139) contributes to the growth of knowledge by an analysis of widely differing sources. Alderson and Sanderson's study of household patterns in early modern Europe (3) proposes that different forms were linked to the mode of labour control; complex households predominated where feudalism was the norm, simple nuclear households where capitalist labour markets were eroding

feudal bonds. The nature and role of kinship in early modern society is re-evaluated by O'Hara (151) who uses evidence of depositions in Canterbury's consistory court to show its influence on marriage decisions. The influence of the church on marriage choices is considered by Mitterauer and Sheehan (137, 184), and Bonfield (26) challenges the view that the church determined inheritance strategies through marriage law for its own financial benefit. In a detailed analysis of property transfer in Earls Colne, Sreenivasan (196) takes issue with the Macfarlane thesis on English individualism and the weakness of the land-family bond, while Collins (49) looks at the inheritance implications of parents remarrying. The belief that in early modern England the norm was for children to leave home to work as live-in servants is challenged by Mayhew and Sharpe (134, 180) whose findings show that most children stayed to learn traditional skills, while orphans were bound to craftsmen or went to large families. It has become a commonplace that economic opportunity encouraged earlier marriage but Sharpe's demographic investigation of Colyton (179) shows that although the relationship is confirmed for men, for women it is not. The theory is also challenged by Guinnane (82, 83) who analyses the census and tax records of post-famine Ireland to obtain a more complete appreciation of the role of household behaviour in historical economic development. The complex relationship between urban centres and the rural hinterland is considered by Wrigley (234) who raises questions about the validity of making exclusive divisions between town and countryside and between different classes of urban settlement. The knock-on effect of emergent urban systems during the long eighteenth century is examined by Chartres (44), who highlights the impact of provisioning needs on resource allocation in the countryside. Property law is discussed by Ward (219) who shows how developments during the seventeenth century had a considerable impact upon the ability of the peerage to survive economic problems which followed the Civil War, and Hoyle (102) demonstrates the strong support that tenants could obtain in the courts when their customary rights were threatened by an improving landlord. In an important article Clark (47) addresses the difficult question of the long term trend in national yields. Using an ingenious new approach he charts the inputs of harvest labour as a surrogate and concludes that wheat yields increased most significantly between 1600 and 1770, with little progress in either cereals or hay during the 'classic' period of the agricultural revolution.

On the source material of the modern period

Turner and Wray (213) underline the usefulness of the *House of Commons Journals* for the study of Parliamentary enclosure and provide an index of available Commissioners' working papers. The copies of Irish estate surveys and other manuscript maps held by the National Library of Ireland are described by Andrews (11) and Oliver (152) provides a guide to the Ordnance Survey. There is a growing volume of literature on information technology demonstrating its relevance to historians. Middleton and Wardley (135) now provide an invaluable annual review of developments, and articles published in *History and Computing* demonstrate the potential of information technology (76, 104, 169). Among them Kain (109) explains how computer procedures used for the tithe records have extended the questions that can be asked about the data.

An explanation for the large differences in productivity achievements between Britain and north west Europe during the period 1870 to 1914 is advanced by van Zanden (215). He argues that farm structure and institutional developments meant that French farmers were better placed than their British counterparts to exploit family labour and land saving technologies. Clark (46) questions the argument (*pace* Allen) that the economies of scale flowing from the rise in farm size in England increased labour productivity in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. On Ireland O'Rourke (154) constructs a computational equilibrium model of the agricultural economy to support his contention that the Great Famine hastened conversion to pasture and played a crucial role in reducing agricultural employment, and Turner (212) investigates output and productivity in Irish agriculture from the Famine to the Great War. Ignorance of Ireland's dairy industry is highlighted by Solar (193) who fills in some gaps in our knowledge with new estimates of the butter trade in the nineteenth century. The motives behind urban improvements on the Irish estates of the Duke of Devonshire are explored by Proudfoot (163) who stresses that power rather than profit was the main objective. In her regional study Hallas (88) examines the supply responsiveness of Yorkshire dairy farmers and demonstrates how market behaviour could vary greatly within a relatively small geographical area. Also on Yorkshire, Harris (90) investigates the management of gorse for fuel and fodder and with Spratt (91) uses archaeological and documentary evidence to chart the commercial exploitation of rabbits. The importance of the horse in the Welsh economy is reviewed by Moore-Colyer (141) who explores reasons behind the failure to improve breeds, and on innovation Brigden (33) documents early experimental use of

electricity in the working of farming equipment. On society in the countryside Wasson (221) charts the incidence of landed families amongst MP's from the mid-seventeenth century and detects an abrupt check to their stranglehold on the House after 1832. Thompson (207) examines the links between successful business enterprise and estate purchase, and in a separate article (208) enquires how the landed have fared this century. The pattern of land tenure since 1750 is discussed by Offer (149) who argues that social advantages of ownership underpinned the persistence of fixed rent tenancy and the low level of occupation before the wars, after which improvements in security of tenure and income caused a shift to owner occupation. Allen (6) looks critically at the revolution in enclosing and farm amalgamation, maintaining that it benefited only the large landlords and that most people would have been better off without it. The neglect by historians of enclosures carried out under the 1845 Act is noted by Chapman (40) who examines how it affected south Wales. The role of farm inheritance in modern Ireland is assessed by Kennedy (111) and Mutch (145) questions how easily farm-labourers became farmers in the north of England. The laws of settlement are discussed by Landau (117) who argues that their function, was to control inter-parochial migration. However, Snell (191) postulates an intimate and pervasive link between settlement and the Poor Law, and doubts that mobility was hindered. The growth of interest in the experience of women is reflected in the literature. King (113) dismisses the view that gleaning was a marginal activity and in a wide ranging survey shows that it was a vital component in the 'make-shift economy' of the rural poor. Reasons for the retreat of women out of agriculture and into household employment in Ireland between 1890 and 1914 are sought by Bourke (28), and Valenze (214) focuses on the withdrawal of women from dairying in England. In a study of labourers Nicholas and Steckel (146) use height data as an indication of living standards and find evidence of decline amongst English workers relative to their Irish equivalents. Ó'Gráda's study of heights (150) confirms the comparatively high nutritional status of the rural poor in Ireland. His data further reveal a striking correlation between the ability to read and write and nutrition, indicating that in poor societies literacy is a powerful proxy for income. Sharp (178) gives an account of the foul living conditions in the villages of England while Shpayer-Makov (185) reminds us that the rural idyl was largely in the minds of urban dwellers who found in the countryside eager recruits to city life. Studies of popular protest and crime are

prominent in the literature. Charlesworth and Wells (43, 222) consider the state of research, Jones (106) investigates the level of crime in nineteenth-century Wales and the evidence of criminal gangs in the rural south of England is analysed by Wells (223). The view that there was little interest in Highland emigration during the late nineteenth century as an alternative to land reform is contested by Norton (147) who describes the failed scheme of the Scottish Office to settle crofters abroad. Also on social reform Wells (224) explores the extent of support for chartism in English villages and finds that labourers were the largest category subscribing to the Land Plan.

There is a growth of interest among historians of the modern period in questions of policy and government. The work of the Agricultural Executive Committees during the First World War is considered by Chapman and Seeliger (41) using surviving papers. Cox *et al* (52) describe the process whereby the National Farmers Union acquired the organizational structure and political acumen that turned it into a powerful pressure group, and the influence of the NFU and other agrarian bodies which shaped opinion in Government and Party during the 1920s are explored by Moore (140). Sheail (181) uses Ministry of Agriculture records to follow the changing perception of the rabbit as a pest from the 1920s to the arrival of myxomatosis, and in a separate article (183) shows how the Ministry tackled the undesirable side effects of technological progress when road dressings threatened inland fisheries.

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