

Book Reviews

A STEENBERG, *Man the Manipulator*, The National Museum of Denmark, Copenhagen, 1986, 199 pp; 62 illus. DKr 250.

Professor Axel Steensberg got to know Papua New Guinea only after he retired as first holder of the Chair of European Ethnology in the University of Copenhagen. The way of life he saw there fused with his previous upbringing as a farmer, and his training as a geographer, archaeologist and museum man (he had also been head of the Danish Folk Museum). It sparked off a flood of mental activity which, in spite of other sustained work in writing up the results of archaeological investigations, led to a stimulating work on *New Guinea Gardens: A Study of Husbandry with Parallels in Prehistoric Europe* (1980) and then to the present more generalized study, which is subtitled 'an ethno-archaeological basis for reconstructing the past'. It is a distillation of the writer's eighty-year long experience and thinking, full of lively points of view and pointers to further areas of research. Painstaking and accurate observation of tools and working-processes have in many instances led to fresh interpretations that throw light not only on the history and development of harvesting implements and of the plough in its inter-relationships with the traction spade, but also deeper thinking on the possible origins of civilization.

In nine short chapters, he outlines his belief that archaeology is an extension of history and demonstrates how it may be made so. The examples chosen are indicated by the chapter headings: arrow, fire and digging stick; early exploitation of plants; the axe and the forest; land occupation and fire husbandry; paddle spades; intensive cultivation with hand tools; the origins of the ard and the plough. There is in this sequence an implicit comment on the growth of organized human cultural systems with a basis on the produce of the soil and the development of forms of control of man's natural aggressiveness.

For Steensberg, the growing and storing of hard grains and their use as a medium of exchange is a major step in high civilization, leading to the need for accounting systems and for writing. He observes that root crops that cannot readily be stored or used in similar ways, or that were, as in New Guinea, in a cycle of planting and ripening all the year round, did not lead to the forms of central administration that wheat brought in its train. The viewpoint may be queried, but it provokes thought.

A second throughrunning thought is that comparable cultural phenomena occurring in different places should not be simply explained away as resulting

from diffusion. He considers it better and safer to focus on working-processes in relation to environments, and not so much on typology. Double-headed paddle spades from Danish bogs are surely not the source of these found in Papua New Guinea, nor vice versa.

The final chapter, on reconstructing the past by experiments and demonstrations, is the third major theme. He has inspired and carried out numerous experiments with sickles, stone axes, traction spades and ards, in attempts to get at the 'mental template' of the past. His range of skills and knowledge, including knowledge of ethnographic parallels, allow him to go deeper than most.

Man the Manipulator is a book to be read slowly, and to savour. It can stimulate, and inspire.

ALEXANDER FENTON

CHARLES PHYTHIAN-ADAMS, *Re-thinking English Local History*, Leicester UP, Department of English Local History, Occasional Papers, 4th series, 1, 1987, vi + 58 pp. £5.95.

Historically the Department of English Local History at the University of Leicester has functioned as the great think-tank of the subject since its foundation in 1948. There are times in the history of any academic discipline when it is desirable to consider a 'fresh theoretical framework' (p 17). This happened in 1952 when Professor H P R Finberg recommended the local historian 'to re-enact in his own mind, and to portray for his readers, the Origins, Growth, Decline, and Fall of a local community'. Into being came a distinctly Leicester approach to the subject, studying local history in its own right and for its own sake, or local history *per se*. This was quite distinct from 'national history localized' or a traditional exploration of 'national' themes at local levels (pp 1-2), and represented in effect 'a resounding theoretical declaration of unilateral independence for a wholly fresh historical approach' (p 3).

One of the declared purposes of this publication is 'to pause and take stock of the subject from within' (p v). Highlighted over thirty-five years is an extraordinary fertility of ideas and research. Offered here is a useful reminder of how local history has developed and widened in scope since the 1950s.

Of more significance than mere stock-taking is the need to re-think local history's present and future, while remembering that most of England still remains unexplored in terms of recording the development of rural and urban communities, *pays*, regions, or historic landscapes (pp 25-6). The author

identifies several matters of concern respecting local history today, including tacit tensions and uneasy relationships between 'national' history and 'local' history, an academic need for a wider definition of the subject and how to overcome constraints of purpose and horizon. For the future the reader is invited to think of local history as 'societal history' (p 17), before being introduced to new possibilities in approaching the subject in Chapters 3 and 4 (pp 19-42).

This, the Department's thirty-third Occasional Paper, is both timely and scholarly. Achievements from the past are used as pointers to the future, so that local history may continue to be regarded both as an academic discipline and 'a form of local history *per se* after all' (p 49). If in addition this paper opens up a wider debate on the academic scope of English local history it will have served a dual purpose.

JOHN WHYMAN

DAVID HEY, *A Regional History of England: Yorkshire from AD 1000*, Longman, 1986. xv + 343 pp. 27 figures, 26 plates, 13 tables. £10.95 (pbk); £19.95 (hbk).

Longman's new Regional History of England series, edited by Barry Cunliffe and David Hey, is scheduled to appear in 21 parts – two volumes dividing at the year 1000 for each of nine regions, and three volumes for the combined West Midlands and Welsh Border region. In any such enterprise the chief problem lies in the identification of regions. No scheme will please all readers, but where the intention is to cover the whole country it makes a lot of sense to regard groups of counties as regions, rather than create regions based on topographical characteristics. For other volumes at least two counties will be covered, but David Hey has had the good fortune of being able to take the history of a single county. This makes a lot of sense: Yorkshire was the largest of the ancient counties occupying about an eighth of the whole country, and 'the West Riding alone was bigger than any other English county, and the North Riding came fourth in size'. But Yorkshire's chief claim to being regarded as a region in its own right lies in its people:

Yorkshire people have acquired a belief in themselves as a breed set apart from the rest, and this sentiment has proved more powerful than . . . differences in ways of life. Those living beyond the county boundary have long acknowledged this separate Yorkshire identity, though they have usually done so in phrases far removed from the eulogies that Yorkshiremen have bestowed upon themselves.

A world bereft of the characteristic charm, humour and forthright honesty of Yorkshire folk would be

a poorer place, and David Hey has written an excellent history of his fellow Tykes. Much of the material incorporated in the volume has been used in courses he has taught for many years for the University of Sheffield's Division of Continuing Education and he pays due tribute to the stimulus and challenge provided by his students.

David Hey's text is extremely well balanced: nearly as much attention – over a third of the space – is devoted to the Middle Ages as to the period from the accession of Henry Tudor to that of Victoria. In five major chapters, each of more than fifty pages, he skilfully charts developments in town and country, in agriculture and industry, in architecture, in religious beliefs, and in a host of other subjects, often seen against the background of the changing national pattern. Inevitably given David Hey's *locus* and interests his account occasionally reflects its 'made in Sheffield' origin, but it suffers little on this score and I particularly enjoyed being reminded of the disastrous flood of 1864 'when the Dale Dyke reservoir burst its banks, drowning 258 people and causing £500,000 worth of damage'. Hull people often say 'once a Sheffield flood' rather than 'once in a blue moon'. With very few exceptions David Hey's account is well written and it should be read by anyone interested in the history of England's premier county. Undergraduates will find many valuable local examples to flesh out their over-generalized statements and all Yorkshiremen with a feel for history will derive many hours of enjoyment from these pages.

DONALD WOODWARD

J H BETTEY, *A Regional History of England. Wessex from AD 1000*, Longman, 1986, xiv + 320 pp, 30 plates, 9 figures, 31 tables. £10.95 (pbk); £19.95 (hbk).

Regional history must be one of the most difficult modes of historical writing. First, there is the region itself and its changing meaning and relevance through time. There is a compelling logic to the Wessex of this book (almost the whole of southern England with the precise boundary drawn to respect the integrity of county boundaries) in the eleventh century at which point this book opens, but the coherence in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries of a region which includes both Exmoor and the South Downs is much more difficult to sustain. Fortunately, the author has long experience of both the methods and practice of resolving history at this scale of enquiry and also a deep familiarity with the localities about which he writes. A second difficulty is that of identifying and discussing genuinely *regional* issues rather than reviewing either collections of local circumstances, or, of providing some place

specificity to what are really national issues. Some essentially regional matters, particularly concerning industry and society, are explicitly identified and discussed in this book for the earlier centuries but in times closer to the present more recourse is made to statements such as 'above all the years 1914-1939 were marked by the development of new industries and new commercial ventures and developments' (p 290) followed by a list of these activities and some locations where they were to be found. In part this is a consequence of the uneven treatment of time periods. Only ten pages are devoted to the twentieth century compared to more than eighty for the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. It is unlikely that the readers of this review would come easily to a consensus of a date at which matters historical interdigitate with the present but the pace and radical nature of much change in the twentieth century warrants at least equal if not arguably greater treatment of the recent compared with the distant past. Notwithstanding these comments addressed mainly to the *genre*, there is quite a lot in this book for agricultural historians. Not least are a discussion of that most distinctive and really regional practice: the creation and management of water meadows, and also the regional experience of Swing Riots which gave birth to some of the region's most celebrated folk heroes: the Tolpuddle Martyrs.

R J P KAIN

PHILIP RIDEN, *Record Sources for Local History*, Batsford, 1987, 253 pp, £9.95.

The recent decline in the popularity of history in schools and universities has been matched by a remarkable and continuing expansion in the number of local historians, genealogists and family historians, and by the increasing sophistication of the local studies which are being produced by such groups and individuals. It is to such local historians and to anyone who is pursuing a systematic search for material on a particular place or local community that Philip Riden's book is addressed, following in the footsteps of his previous introductory handbook on the study of local history. The task he has now undertaken is formidable, since his purpose is to guide such researchers through the complexities of the major sources for local history in the Public Record Office, and to provide 'a guide to classes of the public records which can be searched reasonably expeditiously and profitably for local studies'.

Most researchers have felt overwhelmed by their initial attempts to use the material in the Public Record Office, and many beginners will find that this book provides a valuable introduction. It is written in a clear, lively style, and shows an impressive familiarity with a great range of documentary

sources for both England and Wales from the Middle Ages to the twentieth century. There is no disguising the complexity of the subject, however, and the reader may still be left reeling beneath the weight of information, but this is a helpful attempt to provide practical guidance and advice on which classes are worth searching for local references. As well as suggesting the major sources among the central records which will yield local information, Riden also usefully draws attention to numerous classes of records which are under-appreciated and little used by local historians, and the records in the custody of bodies as diverse as the Duchy of Cornwall, the archdiocese of York, the College of Arms or the various water authorities for England and Wales.

The inevitably brief account of each class of records does not allow space for many examples of what may be found, and occasionally over-simplifies the difficulties inherent in some sources and the fact that useful local material often lies buried within vast quantities of repetitive legal argument, 'money matters', or uninformative disputes and depositions, although attention is drawn to the limitations and deficiencies as well as to the potential of each class of records. There is a good Index and a very full bibliography, as well as a helpful section of notes listing numerous published works. A brief glossary of some of the main technical terms might have been a useful addition for those attempting for the first time to use the records of central government, but in each section the reader is given an extensive list of references, suggestions and examples of published editions, as well as useful recommendations on the sort of local material which may be found, the purposes for which it was originally collected and the institutions which produced it. Most useful of all, the book provides valuable hints for using the unpublished search-room handlists, topographical indexes, finding-aids and guides to locate material on particular places or individuals. It is a commendable achievement to have provided such good brief introductions to so many classes of records, and the book will undoubtedly prove of the greatest use to serious local historians as the essential starting point for any attempt to find their way through the material for local studies in the PRO.

J H BETTEY

DAVID HEY, *Family History and Local History in England*, Longman, 1987, xvi + 276 pp, 5 tables and 4 pedigrees; 5 maps; 40 plates. £7.95.

In recent years record offices which hold bishops' transcripts of parish registers have filled with people working their way through them box by box. Many university historians will have been asked to lecture

to family history societies, and in so doing may have tried to take the genealogists beyond their pedigrees and into wider issues in the history of the family. David Hey's aim in this book is to introduce the family historian, whose interest is but his own pedigree, to wider issues of family history, such as the structure of the family, as well as to an understanding of the local history of the community in which the family lived.

In the brief introduction there are interesting reminders (besides the author's work on Myddle) that in the past it was not only the gentry that concerned themselves with genealogy. Then come three chronological chapters. That on the middle ages suggests this period has the most problems for the amateur, but goes on briefly to look at how some case studies, of Wigston, or (more controversially) of Halesowen, have broadened our understanding of the medieval family in the community. The chapter on the early modern period begins with a discussion of the main sources (parish registers, probate records and the Hearth Tax) for both genealogists and local historians, with reference to expert comment on pitfalls and difficulties. The complicated example given of a parish register is slightly spoilt by a printing error (p 49). Probate records and the Hearth Tax returns are shown to provide insights into the occupation of the deceased, or the geographical distribution of a family through a county, as well as basic genealogical information. Then follows an historiographical section introducing recent work on demography, village studies, industrial communities and towns. Amongst other places, we learn about Willingham via Margaret Spufford or, with Mary Prior, about Fisher Row in Oxford. The same basic format: sources; historiographical guide; and a (wider) range of case studies, follows for the late Georgian and Victorian period, with Hey's own relatives woven in as examples. Chapter four concentrates on two of the families involved in the Hey pedigree. There is a guide to further reading for each chapter.

This is a lively book, one is there with the writer in St Catherine's House as he struggles to find a nineteenth-century ancestor. If it leads genealogists to ask questions about the community evolving before their eyes as they search a parish register, then it will have succeeded.

C B PHILLIPS

TOM WILLIAMSON and LIZ BELLAMY, *Property and Landscape: a Social History of Land Ownership and the English Countryside*, George Philip, 1987. 240 pp. Illus. £17.95.

Just who is responsible for our landscape? All too often we take what we see for granted, accepting

that with the passage of time and the passing of the generations the landscape has acquired the characteristic features with which we are so familiar. As Williamson and Bellamy remind us, however, this is a complacent view since it is man who makes the landscape, and what we see today is the product of centuries of manipulation by generations of men with more or less interest in what they saw around them. In this interestingly written and illustrated book they argue that the fabric of the landscape offers a particular insight into the communities that have lived and worked within it, and that it embodies a history of power in the land. Starting from this premise they proceed to argue that in Medieval society the landscape was the product of decision making at the local level, but with the growth through time of large, privately-owned estates it has increasingly been shaped according to the interests of a smaller, more powerful élite. In Medieval England it was the monastic foundations which 'used their power to intervene directly in the established patterns of land use . . . trying to alter the basic fabric of the landscape, and to impose innovations and specializations over the heads of the local communities' (p 53). By the sixteenth century the gradual privatization of the landscape, and then from the seventeenth century the growth of great estates and widespread enclosure opened the way for a small élite to transform the landscape. Whether for parks or model villages, this élite deliberately and extensively reshaped the landscape for social and aesthetic purposes, while they themselves retreated behind park walls into houses designed to protect their privacy. These same owners manipulated the landscape to protect their interests, either to maintain their shooting and foxhunting, or to ensure that railway lines were sited out of sight and earshot. In the twentieth century the great estate system has slowly crumbled, but this has not been beneficial to the landscape since many of the new owners tend to look upon their acquisition as merely an economic resource for the production of food. As a result, 'the farming of the present is almost exclusively destructive . . . both ecologically and aesthetically its consequences have been almost exclusively negative' (p 215).

This is a profoundly disturbing picture if it is correct, but Williamson and Bellamy present one side of an ongoing debate about the role of private property in modern society, in mustering past evidence to support their case there is at least the suspicion that they have cut some of the more difficult corners. Enclosure is found to have 'represented the concentration of ownership in the hands of the few' (p 115), a view which does scant justice to the labours of Michael Turner and others in trying to explain the motives behind, and results of,

enclosure. Landowners apparently fought tooth and nail to keep the railway out of sight of their parks, but this reactionary attitude to perceivable commercial advantages seems potentially at odds with Williamson and Bellamy's assertion that in many instances landowners persuaded railway companies to build a station within a short distance of their house. The book ends with two pictures, one of a busy haymaking scene set against the backdrop of a tree-lined Oxfordshire landscape in 1905, and the other of a modern agricultural prairie in Cambridgeshire, bereft of hedges and trees, a picture, in their view, of the shape of things to come while land remains in private hands. It is a sombre contrast, but the rights and wrongs of private landownership have been debated for more than a century, and while this book is likely to give a further twist to the argument through its concentration on the landscape, it is unlikely to disturb the equilibrium of Britain's remaining landed interest, at least in a decade during which private property ownership is so clearly lauded.

J V BECKETT

REX C RUSSELL, *Cottagers & Cows 1800-1892: The Cow Clubs in Lincolnshire, Charity, Self-help, Self-interest*, Barton on Humber WEA, 1987. 52 pp. Illus. £2 (incl. p & p).

The virtues of cow-keeping by cottagers in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries have received much attention from both contemporaries and recent historians. However, one element, the formation and growth of cow clubs, has attracted no more than an occasional passing reference. Rex Russell in this booklet partly redresses the imbalance. As the title suggests, the contents of the book provide some information on several aspects of cow-keeping in Lincolnshire.

The first section of the book offers little new insight for the agricultural historian. It covers the well-trodden ground of the advantages of cow-keeping and uses extensive quotations from Arthur Young, the Enclosure Awards, the Report of the Society for Bettering the Condition of the Poor and the *Stamford Mercury*. The later sections, however, provide interesting examples of the establishment and growth of cow clubs in many parts of Lincolnshire. The main source used here is the *Stamford Mercury*. The earliest known cow club in the area was established in 1834 and the idea spread rapidly with many clubs being formed throughout the country. The movement reached a peak in both number of clubs and number of members in the second part of the nineteenth century. The cow clubs embodied the Victorian ideal of self-help and provided cow-keeping cottagers with a useful insurance against the

death of their cows. Russell identifies over twenty cow clubs in Lincolnshire and the extant records of several are reproduced in the text. In addition, there is mention of the existence of pig clubs though little further detail is given. The author uses oral evidence to attest to the continuance of some of the cow clubs into the twentieth century – a few survived as late as the 1970s.

Most of the booklet is devoted to primary source extracts with little commentary. The main use of the publication, therefore, is to provide an indication of the type of evidence available on cow clubs. Where there is analysis of the material, it is primarily in the form of helpful tabulations of club records covering the latter years of the nineteenth century. Unfortunately some of the primary material used is not fully referenced and there is no bibliography to aid the potential researcher.

Overall, the booklet provides a useful glimpse into an interesting subject which merits further research.

C S HALLAS

PETER KRIEDTE, *Peasants, Landlords and Merchant Capitalists: Europe and the World Economy, 1500-1800*. Berg Publishers, Leamington Spa, 1983, 191 pp. £14.

Any author who attempts to discuss the economic development of Europe in relation to the rest of the world in the three centuries of the early modern period in 161 pages cannot be said to be lacking in ambition. The approach adopted is set out not in the text but in a section (pp 165-6) of the wide-ranging bibliography, which includes books not only in English but also in a number of other European languages. Peter Kriedte holds that the controversy of the 1950s between Maurice Dobb and Paul Sweezy – the one emphasizing the increasing exploitation of the peasantry, the other commerce as the main force which brought about the dissolution of the feudal system – continues to define discussion to this day. Kriedte rejects the more recent arguments of S R Brenner, set out in a series of articles in *Past and Present*, vols 70, 78-80, 85, and I A Wallerstein, in *The Modern World System* (2 vols, 1974 and 1980), which he believes have led discussion in the wrong direction. This study, he states, 'tries to restructure the problem of transition in a way which is inspired by the concept of proto-industrialization [on which by now there is a considerable literature], on the one hand, and by G Bois's attempt [in *Crise du féodalisme: économie rurale et démographie en Normandie orientale du début du 14e siècle au milieu du 16e siècle* (Paris, 1976)] to incorporate the theory of agrarian crisis into a theory of the feudal mode of production on the other' (pp 165-

6). Flanked by an Introduction and Conclusion, the main body of the text is divided, like Gaul, into three parts, by century: the age of the price revolution, the crisis of the seventeenth century and the upswing of the eighteenth century. Each chapter is then divided into four sections, the second of which in every case is devoted to agriculture: expansion in the sixteenth century, crisis and resurgence in the seventeenth and expansion or revolution in the eighteenth. Here there are no surprises. Peter Kriedte presents a straightforward account contrasting the development of west European agriculture with the refeudalization of east European agriculture. To support his case, he selects readily available statistics, sometimes for quite small areas such as seven seigniorial areas in the French Hurepoix region, the Korczyn district of Poland or the estates of the Lordship of Boitzenburg whose location, without maps, is not easily identified. Originally published in German, the translation is not always felicitous – one table is headed 'Volume of oxen drift over land

to Frisia and the Netherlands, 1491–1700 (ten-year averages of animals registered by Gottorf customs post)' (p 31). German terms, like Hufe, Schwarzbrache, Kaufsystem, Vorwerk, etc, not always adequately explained, pepper the text. Another table headed 'Imports into Europe' (p 41) has three lines, one of which is labelled 'Grain from the Baltic'. The annual average import (weight in tons) is given with remarkable precision as 'ca 126 109.4'. Kriedte, too, could have been better served by his publishers: there are no maps and no list of tables or charts and the index is poor. This book provides an attempt to present an overall explanation of the European economy in the early modern period inspired by notions of proto-industrialization which will appeal to those who support that thesis. Others will find the overall thesis less compelling while the available detailed information to support the general argument remains so fragmentary and unsatisfactory.

WALTER MINCHINTON

Shorter Notice

JOHN WELLER, *Medieval Investment: Demesne Buildings within Christ Church Priory, Canterbury, 1285–1322: Fixed Equipment and Agricultural Productivity Based on Prior Henry of Eastry's Memorandum*, Bildeston Booklets, 1986. 38 pp, illus. £4.50 (+ £0.50 p & p).

The improving medieval landlord: fact or fiction? The question stands or falls by our view of Henry of Eastry, Prior of Christ Church, Canterbury, from 1285 to 1331. R A L Smith's classic exposition, nearly fifty years ago, made a strong case for him, a case that won the rather more cautious support of David Knowles. Now John Weller presents the case anew, drawing also on several important unpublished studies (with their authors' permission? – if so it is not acknowledged). He presents it well:

maps, graphs, tables and a succinct and lucid text show clearly the extent and form of investment in the Priory estates in Henry of Eastry's time. He is aware of the risks of applying to the thirteenth century the economic criteria of the twentieth and there is little to question in the factual evidence – though there is a startling throwaway comment that the *Seneschauy* 'appeared in print' in Henry of Eastry's time, and some or all of the vineyards listed may well have been fishponds (*vivaria*). It is useful to have the evidence put before us so forcefully; anyone who, like this reviewer, finds that his faith in the improving medieval landlord is failing, must at least reconsider his doubts.

P D A HARVEY