

Book Reviews

UK and Ireland

DAVID HINTON, D. P. S. PEACOCK, and CHRISTOPHER DYER, *Impinging on the past: A rescue excavation at Fladbury, Worcestershire, 1967* (The Highfield Press, 2020). 96 pp. £20.

British archaeology is riddled with tantalizing discoveries which lie unpublished for decades, despite their national importance. Such was the case with David Peacock's 1967 rescue excavations at Fladbury, whose publication has until now been restricted to two brief reports printed in *Current Archaeology* and *Medieval Archaeology* shortly after the excavations. The late Professor Peacock's friend and colleague David Hinton has now brought the Fladbury findings to full publication in this compact but thorough monograph, arranged in four parts.

Part 1 presents the original draft excavation report which Peacock prepared (but, for unclear reasons, never published), augmented by new observations from Professor Hinton. It is a classic and well-illustrated descriptive report, placing the site in its topographical context in the Vale of Evesham then detailing the archaeological sequence including a prehistoric ditch and pits, 11 burials (not closely dated but thought to be most probably late Roman), and – the site's dominant feature, though incompletely excavated – a sunken timber-and-daub oven, with three phases of use or construction. It is this oven, believed on the basis of its cereal contents to have been used for parching grain prior to milling, which makes the site so significant for scholars of early medieval farming.

Part 2 contains the specialist reports on human, environmental and artefactual remains, some produced as part of the original post-excavation programme in 1967–68, others presenting wholly new research using methods unavailable in the 1960s. Among the latter, the osteological and isotopic study of the (challenging) skeletal archive by Ellie Brown stands out, suggesting a degree of migration and the possibility of a post-Roman date for the burials. With regards to the oven, the

newly precise radiocarbon dating report by Alex Bayliss places the last firing of the oven most likely somewhere between the late eighth and late ninth centuries: a result which fits remarkably well with that of the pioneering original analysis by F. W. Shotton. This date is critical to the interpretation of both the oven and the charred plant remains discovered therein, which are analysed in a new report by Rob Scaife. Although these plant remains are not especially rich, and are typical of the period (dominated by grains of hulled barley and free-threshing wheat), they provide a valuable addition in a region which is relatively poor in Anglo-Saxon archaeobotanical data. The authors seem unaware, however, that another archaeobotanical analysis of material from the oven was undertaken by Mick Monk for his (unpublished) 1977 Masters' dissertation. This was a much richer assemblage, with some different species identified, so it is a shame that Monk's work is absent here; presumably his data never found their way into Professor Peacock's archive.

Christopher Dyer's vital historical review (part 3) – updated from his 1960s original – situates pre-Conquest Fladbury within the ecclesiastical estates of Worcester. Between the seventh and ninth centuries it was at least 'nominally the site of a monastery', and certainly at the heart of a substantial and productive minster estate. The documentary record is thus found to be entirely consistent with the discovery of both small finds suggestive of an establishment 'with some social pretensions', and a large grain dryer suitable for providing for the periodic needs of a large royal or episcopal household. Whether or not the presence of this single oven warrants the designation 'drying complex' is more debatable, especially given that there are other sites of this period with more than one such oven (such as the recently discovered brewing complex at Sedgford, Norfolk, with three or four ovens). Nonetheless, Hinton's concluding discussion (part 4) highlights how this grain dryer – an unprecedented discovery in 1967 – now fits well within a small corpus of large ovens excavated at high-status settlements of this period. The estimated dimensions of the oven chamber (2

metres by 2 metres) are very similar to those of a malting kiln excavated at Higham Ferrers (Northamptonshire), for example, which has been associated with a royal tribute collection centre. Hinton's extended discussion, incorporating comparisons such as this, not only provides an excellent context for the Fladbury oven, but also makes an important, original contribution to the wider study of grain ovens in Anglo-Saxon archaeology.

As such, this modest volume bears witness to the great significance of both Peacock's original project and Hinton's admirable 'impingement' to bring this important site finally into the spotlight. It is essential reading for anyone interested in the agricultural activities of this corner of Anglo-Saxon England, and a perfect example of how decades-old excavations can be revisited with valuable results.

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ANDREW MARGETTS, *The wandering herd. The medieval cattle economy of south-east England c.450–1450* (Windgather, 2021). 272 pp. 122 illus. £34.99.

Compared with the farming of sheep (along with the wool and cloth trades), and to a lesser extent that of pigs (principally swine pannage), relatively little has been written about cattle management in medieval England. Margett's contention – surely correctly – is that this was important and has left a narrative which can be explored not just through the documentary record (of which more anon) but also through the visible landscape and below-ground archaeology. Based on a thesis and arguably less concise than it might have been, the book is nicely produced, with a large number of relevant figures including a gathering in colour and a lengthy bibliography. But the lack of an index greatly diminishes its usefulness.

Margetts opens strikingly, asking us to travel back 1,200 years ago to follow herds of cattle passing along the wide unmetalled droveways of south-east England leading from the coast and downland to well-watered summer pastures in the Weald. 'Local woods would have echoed to the lowing of herds feeding on browse as contentedly as they had done on the grass of Romney Marsh or the chalkland hill' (p. 1). That said, Margetts believes direct documentary evidence for the use of wood-pasture in this part of the country for cattle is slight, other than in parks and forests. Even here, the references gathered by Margetts are little more than glimpses. One of the few substantive references is one from the late thirteenth century when 2,000–3,000 beasts were agisted in Ashdown Forest (Kent), apparently at a time when sheep were excluded from it,

and specialized vaccaries were being developed on its fringes. And from this stems one substantive criticism of the study, which is the generally limited use made of historical sources, and especially manorial and other accounts, which are detailed and quantifiable from across south-east England. It is refreshing that this is a multi-disciplinary study, but one which foregrounded the written evidence would surely have been on surer ground and less speculative.

Self-evidently, cattle were important components of the agrarian economy, with plough oxen essential for both lords and peasants wherever there was arable cultivation, here notably on the Sussex coastal Plain. Based on limited evidence it is suggested that in Sussex dairying based on cattle was not widely found on the eastern downs, whereas on the western downs the Clay-with-Flints gave a wetter and more wooded environment, more akin to the North Downs of Kent which are associated with medieval cattle dairying. The evidence presented for beef consumption, whether from clapped-out oxen or from bullocks, is also scattered, and no clear conclusions emerge. While little evidence for how and where beasts were housed is presented, one good example is cited – although Margetts gives no date – from Milton Regis (Kent), where part of the 'Cowhouse' called the 'Somerhouse' where cheese, butter and dairy products were made was 18 feet wide and 48 feet long (p. 43). Chapter 8 presents the evidence of bones from excavations, but despite the precise percentages given in tabulations the general picture only reflects what we already know (as is often the case with archaeological bone reports).

Less speculative are the chapters where Margetts presents the results of two excavations on the Weald, both suggested to be the product of tenth-/eleventh-century colonization of land previously exploited as seasonal pasture. One was at Wickhurst Green, west of Horsham, West Sussex, where, by the late Saxon period, there were enclosures associated with droveways. The other was at Hayworth, in Cuckfield, West Sussex, where a park-scale oval enclosure thought to have late-Saxon origins was found, one of the many in the region suggested to be associated with cattle herding and seasonal transhumance. Here, within ditched enclosures, stood a long (34m), apparently open-fronted shelter. On the balance of probabilities, it is suggested that cattle ranching and dairying were carried on here, in other words it was probably a vaccary. This is a site which (like Chris Dyer's complementary work on sheepcotes on the Cotswolds) will be cited in future studies of the medieval agrarian economy, and it is worth flagging that Margetts published a slightly fuller account of the site, with

excellent colour illustrations, in *Medieval Archaeology* 61 (2017), pp. 117–48.

PAUL STAMPER
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NIGEL SMITH, *The medieval park of Erringden* Occasional Paper No. 10 (Hebden Bridge: Hebden Bridge Local History Society), x + 140 pp. 49 illus. £11.99.

This volume is a rewriting and re-analysis of three previous articles by the author on the subject of Erringden, in the light of further research he carried out for his PhD examining upland environments. It is a detailed study focusing on one particular medieval park, collating documentary and cartographic sources along with landscape analysis to paint a clear and thorough picture of the rise and fall of Erringden Park through time. It does this against a backdrop of comparative examples from other English parks.

First setting the scene with a review of the geography of the area, Smith then discusses the reasons behind the creation of the park and the steps taken to develop, structure, and manage it. He also examines the deer themselves, including the various species, the potential carrying capacity of the land, and the likelihood of additional fodder being supplied in the winter. Smith notes that there is little evidence for actual hunting taking place at Erringden, but that it is large enough both for the usual parkland bow-and-stable hunting as well as the more vigorous *par-force* hunting normally enjoyed in an unenclosed landscape.

Smith then introduces a wider range of potential uses for Erringden. Given its upland location, isolated from the main manors of the de Warennes, he argues that it may have been used primarily as a place in which to increase and maintain deer stocks by breeding, and by driving wild deer in from the surrounding, unenclosed lands. These animals could then have been used to resupply lowland parks, which were more conveniently placed to be used for elite hunting. Smith also notes that the park incorporated two pre-existing vaccaries, or cattle farms, with a possible horse stud-farm located immediately outside its bounds. These are discussed along with the potential for agistment (leasing out of land for pasture), timber extraction and ironworking, all of which would have provided a supplementary income for the manor. Such a range of uses are also known from other parks, and the large size and relatively isolated location of Erringden made them very suitable adjuncts to the primary aim of rearing and keeping deer.

In the closing sections of the book Smith turns his attention to the demise of the park, examining the reasons for disparkment, as well as the division of

the land between a number of tenants, and then the subsequent sub-division of these tenancies. He carefully constructs a detailed analysis of the landholdings based on topographical features, before finishing the study with a review of the ownership structure.

This is an attractively presented book, with full-colour images throughout. The text is straightforward and clear, explaining technical and obscure terms for the reader, and incorporating a useful glossary of these. One slightly strange layout issue was that the sources of images and graphed data were not given in the captions, or as footnotes, but only in an appendix at the end of the volume. As a result, it was sometimes unclear whether these were the work of the author. The documentary evidence was treated very thoroughly, with extensive footnotes and a substantial bibliography of primary and secondary sources. Another aspect that could have been improved was the linkage between the supplied maps and the text. The author displayed a detailed knowledge of the locality and assumed that readers were also familiar with the various landscape features. This would not be an issue for the local audience, but for readers based further afield, more comprehensive maps would have been useful, showing the location of the minor place names mentioned in the text. In particular, an overview based on an early edition of the Ordnance Survey map would have been very useful to locate the described features in the modern landscape. Similarly, a national map showing the locations of other parks mentioned in the text would have been helpful. Nevertheless, these are minor quibbles in an excellent study.

The volume was published by the Hebden Bridge Local History Society, and it will certainly appeal to readers from the region, who will be treated to a detailed local perspective. More widely, for those interested in medieval hunting, or in landscape development and use, this in-depth work adds a useful case study to the corpus of knowledge. At a wallet-friendly price, prospective purchasers can be confident that they will more than get their money's worth, and so this volume can most definitely be recommended as a useful addition to the bookshelves of readers of the *Review*.

FIONA BEGLANE
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MARGARET WILLES, *The domestic herbal: Plants for the home in the seventeenth century* (Bodleian Library, 2020). 256 pp. 60 illus. £25.

Margaret Willes' *The domestic herbal: Plants for the home in the seventeenth century* is beautiful to behold. The book charts the use of plants in domestic contexts in the early modern period, elegantly illustrated by

rich and varied botanical drawings, portraits, woodcuts from conduct manuals and photographs of vases and other artefacts. The book is intended to be structured as a 'tour' of the seventeenth-century home (p. 55), but chapters take activities of household management rather than spaces as their focus. Willes tells us about feeding, brewing, making oneself beautiful and healthy, clothing family members, and furnishing bedrooms.

The domestic herbal is primarily interested in England although island colonies in the Americas and West Indies and some parts of Europe are included too. Willes' main evidence is printed herbals (alphabetical lists of plants and their culinary and medicinal properties) and household management manuals, both of which boomed in this period. *The domestic herbal* has its own 'domestic herbal' spliced between the chapters on brewing beer and health and beauty, listing 50 herbs that were used by 'seventeenth-century housewives' (p. 112). Despite the slightly jarring placement in the middle of the book rather than as an appendix at the end, it is this herbal which one imagines readers will most enjoy. By guiding one through one's own reading of contemporary texts of the period, Willes helps to defamiliarize herbs that are now commonplace like rosemary, marjoram and thyme, and familiarize those that are not, like tormentil, used to cure colic in calves and children.

Willes convincingly makes the case for the garden and gardening being at the centre of life in the seventeenth century in England and elsewhere, perhaps best encapsulated by John Worlidge's description of the pleasure, culinary, medicinal and ornamental gardens of England's nobility, shopkeepers and cottagers (p. 1). Plants decorated, flavoured food; brewed and distilled; scented rooms; made and washed linen; dyed cloth; warded off pests; were used to celebrate births, deaths and marriages; and cured major illnesses and discomforts. Gardening for the purpose of food and medicine was an activity that the loftiest aristocrats and the poorest villagers both engaged in. Perhaps the biggest innovation of the book is in its treatment of the use of plants to furnish and environ the home. Clean air was central to early modern understandings of getting and staying healthy. As a result, we learn that the floor of homes was often strewn with fragrant herbs, rushes and sedge. A delightful quote from the popular conduct writer Hannah Woolley's *The queene-like closet or rich cabinet* (1675) about how to decorate fireplaces during summer with live moss, festooned with snails, wild mushrooms and flowers is truly transfixing. 'The flowers you must renew each week, the moss will last all summer till it will be time to make a fire' (p. 200).

The theme of labour runs right through the book implicitly. Willes tells us that St Thomas' Hospital

in London hired herb women to tend to medicinal gardens. Whilst an apothecary was paid £60 per year in 1629, a surgeon received £35, a doctor £30 and the herb women that provided all of the raw materials for medicines and ointments only received £4 (p. 51). The book points to the stratification of knowledge systems along traditional gendered lines with housewives doing much of the work to transform plants into materials to feed, clothe and care for family members. And yet, I felt that yet more could have been done to explore the frictions between gendered ways of knowing about and doing things with plants. Herb women were valuable enough to be employed right across the City of London in the seventeenth century, and yet few make it into the works of John Gerard or Gervase Markham, the latter of whom positioned themselves as practical and intellectual experts. For many women lower down the social scale, the seventeenth century fashions in interior decorating and new luxurious drinks like julep, coffee, tea and chocolate, all from plants and colonial expansion, had little practical impact on their herbal knowledge and the way they employed it in their work.

Willes has constructed an engaging and aesthetically beautiful account of homes and plants in early modern England, and parts of Europe, that will be enjoyed by many readers. Given the emphasis on art and material culture, it would have been beneficial to engage more critically with these aspects. The scanty referencing, obviously advantageous in ease of reading for a non-expert, trade audience, also made it difficult to contextualize and understand the beautiful woodcuts from herbals. Given that the book is a 'tour', I wondered whether including the plans landowners created of their domains might have helped to tie space to practice more firmly. Given Willes' expertise in the history of botany and gardening, I wondered what the overarching argument was, not as essential in trade publications as in purely academic, but nonetheless welcome. The book concludes by noting that much of the evidence about plants and botany comes from 'the more affluent members of society', and yet Willes has done considerable work to point out that herbal knowledge was central to all levels of society (p. 205). Perhaps more of a critical engagement with the material culture gestured to in the book and embodied practices of gardening, picking and processing plants would have gone some way to remedy this overreliance on elite accounts. Nevertheless, this book is an enjoyable and welcome introduction to the history of botany and domestic cultures in early modern England.

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FRANCES E. DOLAN, *Digging the past: How and why to imagine seventeenth-century agriculture* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2020). 238 pp. 11 illus. \$59.95

Frances Dolan's *Digging the past* explores agricultural literature and agriculture in literature in the seventeenth century, placing both in dialogue with contemporary discussions of farming that hark back to a supposed pre-industrial golden age. The book is then an attempt to both understand ideas and images in seventeenth-century literature, and to see how they measure up against the way the period is presented by non-historian agricultural practitioners and writers today. In drawing together the practical manuals of Hugh Plat, Thomas Tusser *et al.*, and reading them alongside Shakespeare and the marketing spiel of Californian winemakers, Dolan is doing something unusual and interesting. In the opening pages, it is arresting to see the intellectual agenda being set by the claims made on vineyards' websites, but this provides a new way of thinking not only about the seventeenth century, but also about its legacies, resonances and imaginaries today. Drawing on this broad conception of what constitutes writing about agriculture Dolan explores four themes in contemporary organic, environmentally-conscious and artisanal agriculture that also preoccupied writers in the seventeenth century: composting, eating local, natural wine and hedges. Within these themes, Dolan pursues 'persistent metaphors, their inherent contradictions, and the unpredictable cultural work they continue to do' (p. 11).

The associations, resonances and connections Dolan makes between texts and contexts daisy chain together in four creative and thought-provoking chapters. Chapter 1 uses the compost heap as an extended metaphor for and justification of Dolan's eclectic and chronologically wide-ranging source material. Here composting is portrayed as a creative process in which the past feeds the present, demonstrating the value of digging around in the muckheap of history to understand where values espoused in contemporary progressive agriculture emanate from. In chapter 2, Dolan explores a variety of forms of local and dislocated eating, in part spurred by contemporary calls to incorporate cover crops into our diet, and a desire to analyse what eating locally meant in English colonies in the early seventeenth century. Chapter 3 focuses on wine and its various adulterations, historical and contemporary, arguing that contemporary calls to make wine in simple or traditional ways belie the ways wine was a product of mixture and migration long before our present. Chapter 4 contrasts contemporary celebrations of the mature hedgerow as a biodiverse habitat with

the classic image of the hedge as early modern 'organic barbed wire' (in Nicholas Blomley's phrase) and failed attempts to 'rebrand' the hedge as a kind of forageable commons. Rather than offering a set of conclusions, Dolan leaves us with an epilogue that explores how the history of agriculture is presented and forgotten at the 'Historic Jamestowne' settlement, an archaeological site and museum complex covering the first English colony in Virginia.

Digging the past draws on some key surveys of early modern agriculture by Joan Thirsk and Mark Overton, but beyond this there is no systematic engagement with agricultural or environmental history. This can be frustrating. Neither the *Review* nor its American counterpart make an appearance in the references, and we read of 'Arnold' Crosby's Columbian Exchange thesis, for example. But perhaps an environmental historian would always want a book with 'digging' in its title to be a little more 'grounded' in the history of agriculture, and to be fair to Dolan the book makes no claim to be a work of agricultural history. This is predominantly a work of ecocriticism, written with the wit, incisiveness and élan that characterizes the best of that genre. For a historian, there are places where some more context would have been helpful. Several key authors are drawn on throughout: Walter Blith, Gervase Markham, Gabriel Plattes, and Hugh Plat. But while we are told that reading and doing were two parts of the same agricultural endeavour in the seventeenth century, we learn much more about what was read than who was writing it or what was being done with it. Given the focus on key writers, G. E. Fussell's *Old English Farming Books* is a surprising omission, and would have provided some detail, in particular on Markham, who looms large in *Digging the past* but is never adequately introduced, despite his colourful and varied life as a playwright, tenant farmer, and liberal recycler of others' agricultural writing.

Due to its interpretive approach and literary source material, *Digging the past* will be of greatest interest to literature scholars, but there remains interest for historians here too. Historians of the periods either side of the early modern period are keenly aware of how their areas of specialism are presented and manipulated in a variety of contemporary settings: medievalists have the study of 'medievalisms' and nineteenth-century historians the study of 'Neo-Victorianism'. Early modern historians have been less inclined to reflect on what our subjects look like in contemporary discourse (though there are notable exceptions, such as Stefan Hanss' work on the memory of the 1571 Battle of Lepanto). As Dolan's book shows us, environmental and agricultural history offer fertile ground for early modern historians to

engage with contemporary images of our period. Early modernity looms large in the background of contemporary environmental and agricultural debates – think of the misuse of the Little Ice Age by climate change deniers, the unspecific pasts invoked in ‘re-wilding’, or the effective census year of 1500 used by the UK’s Joint Nature Conservation Committee to determine the nativity or otherwise of species. Dolan’s book points the way to future critical engagement with these ‘persistent metaphors’, tropes and baselines.

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ERIN DREW, *The usufructuary ethos: Power, politics, and environment in the long eighteenth century* (University of Virginia Press, 2021). 234 pp. \$39.50.

In the 1990s and early 2000s the environmental humanities were mostly either indifferent or actively hostile to the pre-Romantic eighteenth century. The period was characterized by the supposedly pernicious, anthropocentric, and instrumentalizing discourse of ‘improvement’ associated with the Agricultural Revolution. In the last decade, however, historians and ecocritics have sought to recover a greater diversity of eighteenth-century thought about the relationship between humans and nonhuman nature. One early call for re-evaluation was the 2011 *Literature Compass* article ‘Ecocriticism and Eighteenth-Century Studies’ by Erin Drew and John Sitter. Now Drew, in her first book, identifies an alternative, parallel discourse to that of improvement, which she argues was culturally influential and pervasive: the usufructuary ethos.

Usufruct is a concept in ancient Roman law, referring to the temporary right to hold and use someone else’s property, with the condition that the property must not be damaged or altered. The term entered English law in the seventeenth century and theologians used it to theorize the relationship between God, humans, and the nonhuman world: God owned his creation in perpetuity, and humans held only temporary rights over the earth, with a responsibility to steward the land, plants, and animals in their usufructuary possession. While humans were superior to and empowered to use the natural world, due to their higher position in the hierarchy of being, the usufructuary principle meant that that power was ethically limited. The wider ‘usufructuary ethos’ that Drew argues developed in England from this theory included various ‘moral conclusions’ (p. 16). Drew claims that thinkers and writers (if not actual landowners or farmers) used usufruct to conceptualize moral obligations towards both nonhuman creatures and the future generations of humans who would inherit that usufruct.

The first chapter outlines how seventeenth-century jurists, theologians, and philosophers, including Matthew Hale, Richard Allestree, and John Locke, developed theories of humans’ usufruct of the earth. Drew seeks to show that the ethic of care which grew from the usufructuary ethos was both interspecies and intergenerational, involving all creatures, past, present, and future, in a network of reciprocal obligation. This reading might at first appear too optimistic. A responsibility *for* the world does not automatically equate to a responsibility *towards* the world, and for some writers on usufruct, care of the earth was the fulfilment of an obligation to God alone, not to the other humans or nonhumans who might incidentally benefit from that care. However, as Drew brings in more examples of the usufructuary ethos shaping different areas of thought, a picture does emerge of writers using usufruct to think about the rights of both humans and nonhumans, present and future. The ‘Trust and Stewardship’ of creatures that God has invested in humans, Hale wrote in 1676, creates a ‘Justice that is due from Men to them’ (p. 40).

The ‘moral conclusions’ of the usufructuary ethos shape the eighteenth-century literary texts that Drew examines in the following chapters. Chapter 2 focuses on literature about trees by John Evelyn, Anne Finch, and John Philips. These authors (all royalist Tories) portray the ideal usufructuary landlord as a gentleman-farmer whose paternalistic care of his human dependents and descendants is practically and ethically continuous with his care for the trees on his estate. In their capacity to provide food and shelter for multiple beings beyond the lifespan of a human, trees are significant in these texts as ‘organisms whose unique biological traits create both symbolic and ecologically literal connections among other beings and across generations – *if* landlords protect and steward them properly’ (p. 65). The combination of the symbolic and the literal here is an important corrective to the twentieth-century tendency to read eighteenth-century representations of nature as always and only symbols of culture (e.g., an oak tree as a symbol of the Stuart line). Drew demonstrates that nonhumans could be simultaneously figurative and material in eighteenth-century thought.

Chapter 3 addresses Alexander Pope and the critiques in his poetry of the improper pursuit and use of riches for purposes other than ‘benefit to public and posterity’ (p. 103). When Drew reads Pope’s poetry about land use in the context of the usufructuary ethos, seemingly simple condemnations of greed, luxury, and vanity become part of a larger, georgic-inflected argument that ‘value is [not] human beings’ to *bestow*

on nature through their use', but rather 'an inherent quality that they honor *through* proper use' (p. 118). Any use the landlord makes of his riches (either money or natural resources) must be an investment in and for a multispecies and multigenerational community.

Drew makes clear throughout that part of the reason writers were so eager to promote the usufructuary ethos was their recognition that landowners and farmers were increasingly 'understand[ing] the environment as wealth generating, rather than sustaining' (p. 139). Chapter 4 examines what Drew calls the 'midcentury mercantile monoculture georgics' (p. 18), John Dyer's poem on the wool trade, *The Fleece* (1757), and James Grainger's colonial plantation georgic *The sugar-cane* (1764). Chapter 1's analysis of Philips' *Cyder* (1708), the first English formal georgic, revealed this Virgilian genre to be particularly adaptable to the usufructuary ethos, and Drew thereby contributes to the ongoing critical construction of what David Fairer has called 'eco-georgic'. But Drew shows in Chapter 4 how Dyer and Grainger were able to manipulate a classical genre and traditional usufructuary rhetoric to endorse new and often catastrophic social, economic, and environmental practices, including slavery.

The usufructuary ethos is an important contribution to eighteenth-century studies, revealing a significant strand of social and environmental thought in the period. It reminds us that a varied range of attitudes to the nonhuman world, some destructive and some proto-conservationist, were held and articulated in the eighteenth century (and that different attitudes could be held by one person or expressed in one text). In her conclusion, Drew makes some tentative suggestions for how the cultural history of the usufructuary ethos might be relevant to environmental concerns in the twenty-first century. She suggests that the most pertinent, and most disturbing, lesson from this history might be that the cultural prominence of conservationist arguments was, and is, no protection against the onrush of the Anthropocene.

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THOMAS ALMEROOTH-WILLIAMS, *City of beasts: How animals shaped Georgian London* (Manchester University Press, 2019). 328 pp. £14.

From the brewery draught horse, to flocks of sheep driven down London's streets, Thomas Almeroth-Williams provides an account of the central role animals played in the Georgian capital. *City of beasts* asserts the primary role of animals in daily and industrial life in the Georgian capital. Cattle, sheep, pigs, dogs, and most prominently horses, are all shown

to be highly visible and valued presences in London. The agency and power of these beasts is convincingly demonstrated, manifest in their underpinning of 'physical, social, economic and cultural development in diverse and fundamental ways' (p. 5). In asserting that, 'despite obvious inequalities in power relations, horses, livestock and dogs were capable of influencing human behaviour', (p. 9) Almeroth-Williams also challenges an assumption that industrializing cities isolated its dwellers from livestock and animals.

A rich use of original 'bottom-up' sources provides individual accounts and micro-histories to illustrate how Londoners engaged with, thought about, and used animals. Engravings, letters, court and criminal records, diaries, and trade cards evidence Londoners' day-to-day and working engagement with their non-human counterparts. The utilization of digitized archives – namely newspapers, *London lives*, and *The Old Bailey proceedings online* – combine the more traditional histories with the burgeoning field of digital humanities. In a further step, a nuanced interdisciplinary approach draws upon sociology, animal psychology and science. The archives used take precedence over theoretical sources such as philosophical, religious, and romantic works. Almeroth-Williams's engagement with existing scholarship on human and animal relations is woven throughout the book, demonstrating the dominant presence of theoretical perspectives, which tell of a detachment from lived engagement with animals. Sixty pages of references sit the book well in the academic scholarship, an animal-centric contribution alongside Keith Thomas and Samuel Hays. The work successfully disproves the assumption found in Thomas and subsequent works, that urban populations were removed from the agricultural process, and that only a narrow section of urban society was directly involved in working with animals (p. 86). With insights across a number of subjects including the history of urbanization, industrial and consumer cultures, and the relationship between the country and the city, and 34 plates of illustrations, the text is aimed at the specialist and lay reader alike. From Lewis Mumford to William Cronon, the book is well situated in scholarship which spans decades and discipline, the omission of this secondary literature from the bibliography however, is an unfortunate choice by the publishers.

The book's original perspectives provide colour, presenting animals at the front and centre of Georgian London life. The implication and discussion of these wider historical themes, though fascinating, is somewhat difficult to trace across chapters and the book's animal-centric structure. The blurring of the

'traditional boundaries of "town" versus "country", and 'urban versus "rural"' (p. 4) is demonstrated through Londoners and animals engaging with activities usually regarded as divided from urban life. Similarly, whether in relation to the horses they rode or cared for, the dogs they kept, the animals they reared, or the streets which served as highways for cattle on their way to slaughter, animals influenced and were influenced by the complex human class structures in the Georgian metropolis.

England's dark satanic steam-driven mills were not the sole, nor even first drivers of industrial change in the UK. Water and wind power are now recognized as significant in the development of industrial Britain (p. 16). Almeroth-Williams places equine labour as an equally important source of motive power in London's early industrial revolution: mill horses outnumbered steam engines in 1805, and at least 50 horse-powered mills operated across 12 trades between 1740 and 1815 (pp. 39, 20). The more visible presence of draught horses is observed through their role delivering beer from London's booming brewing trade – breweries in London being then 'in size and capital... Britain's biggest industrial operations' (p. 35). Bred in Leicestershire, draught horses began a six-year journey to London, sold first to the south Midlands or West Country for agricultural labour, before reaching maturity and an adult life of work in London (p. 42).

That Londoners came face-to-face and lived alongside the livestock they consumed, in many cases as literal back-yard industries shows the sometimes literal 'intimacy' (p. 69) between the lives of humans and animals in the Capital. The third and fourth chapters, examining animal husbandry and meat consumption, offer a glimpse of this reality and some of its varied examples. Returning again to horses, chapters 5 and 6 affording them a leading role in the 'consumer revolution', as owners sought ever more elaborate care, tack, stabling and staff. Almeroth-Williams identifies London as a city of walkers – including the wealthy, to an extent which astonished visitors from the continent (p. 41) – despite this, a 'distinctive equestrian culture' emerged (p. 158). It becomes evident that this culture was centred around leisure: either promenading on horseback in Hyde Park, or riding out to the country for sport and exercise, again blurring the traditional urban-rural divide. The final chapter considers the role of watchdogs, enquiring into the relationship between not only dog and master, but also between dogs, criminals, and the developing systems of securing private property against theft.

The London Almeroth-Williams reveals is a Georgian 'agropolis' (p. 128): a rapidly industrializing city, which

retained distinctly 'rural' characteristics through its animal-centric life, open spaces, pastures, and droving paths. What *City of Beasts* reveals is that what could be considered hallmarks of the Medieval City endured in Georgian London, which became adapted and co-opted to fit the demands of the industrial era.

OLIVER MUMFORD

London

CATHERINE RICE, *Cottage gardens and gardeners in the east of Scotland, 1750–1914* (The Boydell Press, 2021). 286 pp. 32 illus. 3 tables. £75.

This book, 'a first attempt at a history of cottage gardens in Scotland' investigates the lives of the rural poor and their endeavours to survive via their cottage gardens. Cottagers and their struggles to feed themselves, their diet and how this changed over time, their abodes, their hard lives and attempts at moral improvement of their lives by landowners and writers are all examined. If the book is a sketch, as the author claims, then it is a detailed one rather than a mere outline. Rice's stated intention to answer four questions is admirably fulfilled: what did having a garden mean for the standard of living of rural workers? Did their gardens have other meanings for them apart from the supply of food? What were the expectations of landowners and employers with regard to the gardens/gardeners? What conditions had to be met to produce a well-tended plot? This is done with very few manuscript sources – not surprisingly, 'barely any evidence remains' – and Rice relies heavily on printed and official records to uncover the story she tells. She puts to good use worker-writers such as Alexander Somerville's *Autobiography of a working man* (1848) and the anonymous verse *Clodpole* (1858), perhaps bringing such writers to a wider audience.

While cultivated cottage gardens provided sustenance for a family living a knife-edge existence, lack of work, crop failure, insecurity of tenure and the common practice of flitting (especially for farm servants) all meant real hunger was a constant companion to their lives. The cottage garden was a buffer. However, farm servants rarely had the inclination to tend a garden. After a day of 12–16 hours that only changed with the 10-hour legislation in the mid-nineteenth century (though even that did not take into account grooming and supper time), who would have had the energy to have tended a garden plot large enough to feed a family, and especially if the plot was on unproductive, thin soil? Interestingly, the gardens of weavers and miners were tended, partly as a way of relief from being cooped up for hours in their respective employments. Nevertheless, whatever the occupation of the cottage dweller, their generally conservative outlook, lack of

skill and equipment, all conspired to unproductive gardens. Encouragement to garden, not least as a way to moral improvement (it kept the labourer away from the public house), came from writers (though the first handbook for Scottish gardeners did not appear until 1851 when Robert Adamson's *The cottage gardener* was published), and landowners. The latter were keen to staunch the rural exodus of labour and established competitions and shows as a paternalistic encouragement to stay. From the middle of the nineteenth century onwards, competitions with prizes for the best kept cottage and garden, often supervised and judged by the landowner's gardener, became increasingly popular: Rice mentions the Fife show in 1880 which was attended by 12,000. However, for those still neglectful of their gardens there was always the threat of eviction: it would be interesting to find any cases of actual eviction.

The variety of vegetables grown expanded as cottage gardens became places of competition, as did the growing of flowers, which were only rarely seen in the early part of the period covered by the book, at which time cottagers usually only cultivated a few of the same vegetables, particularly kale and the hugely important potato, which certainly helped to feed the family. From the beginning of the nineteenth century, particularly in rich soil areas, crops such as carrots, onions, savoy, and turnips were grown, as in Forgandenny, in Perthshire, where this was done from the 1790s. Gardeners producing such crops ensured a good diet for their family, giving Scottish labourers a reputation for being well fed, when compared with their English equivalent. Flowers adorning the front of the cottage, rather than the useful but noisome midden of the period up to c.1850, were also encouraged after the mid-nineteenth century, following the Victorian mania for floral display.

There is only slight mention of poaching. This could have been given more space, since it was a widespread activity which provided a precarious source of meat for many of the rural poor, and rather than the landowner turning a blind eye as stated in the book, his gamekeeper was a constant potential threat. Rice also does not discuss outright how close labourers were to starvation, especially if they had no time or aptitude for gardening, or their gardens were too small to produce enough to feed the family adequately.

Rice points out that garden size was critical: too small and cultivation was not worth the output, too large and landowners feared gardeners would become independent by selling surplus produce. Thus, ideally 'The garden needed to be a safety net, no more'. Gardens become smaller towards the end of nineteenth century,

a half-acre in c.1800 became an eighth of an acre in the 1890s. This reduction reflected changing food supply as well as a drop in the cost of living: food was becoming more available via grocery wagons (though not necessarily better quality, for instance cheap sugar, white bread and treacle were available in this manner).

The history of cottage gardens in Scotland, a 'largely undiscovered territory', has been given impetus by this book. Rice points out that there is no example of a reconstructed worker's cottage garden in Scotland which would, 'open a gate into the world of the kailyard and the cottager's garden'. Probably the most important aspect to the book is to lift the latch on that gate. It is a seminal work, and hopefully, it will stimulate many years of fruitful research.

JOHN DAVIES
Independent scholar

SHAUN EVANS, TONY MCCARTHY and ANNIE TINDLEY (eds), *Land reform in the British and Irish isles since 1800* (Edinburgh University Press, 2022). xiii + 347 pp. £90.

This book is a useful collection of essays on land reform in England, Scotland, Wales and Ireland since 1800. It emphasizes the key differences between the four nations, arguing that there has been 'an imbalance of intensity between Scotland, Ireland and Wales, where land reform centred on the nature and conditions of tenure, protections and land distribution, and England, where it has been more diffuse, feeding into a multitude of debates, including enclosure, commons, game, housing and conservation'. The book is made up of 14 'original case studies', written by a range of contributors, mainly historians but also including lawyers and estate managers, offering expertise and life experiences outside the traditional domain of academic historians.

The book is organized into four areas of interest: (1) tenants, landowners and estate management, (2) agitation and agendas for reform, (3) legislation and its impact and (4) landowner responses, illustrating a multiplicity of relationships and connections between high politics and local experiences. As is the case for many essay collections, the book had its origins in a conference, here organized by the Centre for the Study of Historic Irish Houses and Estates (Maynooth University), the Centre for Scotland's Land Futures (University of Dundee), and the Institute for the Study of Welsh Estates (Bangor University). The conference held in 2018 identified 'that there were gaps in our knowledge of landed histories and that such voids impeded a better understanding of our respective historical narratives'. Like many studies of the Land

Question, it focuses on the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, 'but with considerations of earlier contexts and later legacies, sometimes extending into the present day', noting that in Scotland, and to a lesser extent in England and Wales, it is still very much a live political issue.

An essay by Professor Terence Dooley from Maynooth University, shows how the dramatic transfer of land ownership in Ireland from landlord to tenant between 1870 and 1909 (the creation of a 'peasant proprietorship') was quite different from the rest of the UK, highlighting the influence of nationalism and anti-English landlord sentiments on the nature of the Land Question in one of the four nations. This clearly differentiated Ireland from England for example, where such influences were largely absent. Another case study by Tony McCarthy, a graduate of Maynooth University and an accountant and stockbroker, on the wealth management practices of Irish Landlords, 1903–1930, describes the way 70 per cent of agricultural land of Ireland had been sold to their former tenants by the 1930s. In contrast to the situation in the Free State, another essay on the Northern Ireland Land Act of 1925 by Olwen Purdie, Professor of History at Queen's University Belfast, shows how Westminster protected the interests of the landed class ensuring that they remained in possession of their untenanted land.

The book identifies a range of different traditions of land reform in Scotland and Wales. In Scotland, where the long-term historical influence of the highland clearances played a key role, legislation placed the concept of community at its core in for example the Crofter's Holding Act 1886, the Land Reform Acts of 2003 and 2016, and the Community Empowerment Act of 2015. This in turn influenced legislation in Ireland, India and non-imperial territories such as Tsarist Russia. An essay by Micky Gibbard, who has worked on heritage projects and completed a thesis on the planned village movement in eighteenth-century Scotland, argues that the collective memory and history of the Highlands and Islands 'was a vital inducement for forcing through land legislation between 1886 and 1931 and again from 1955 to the present day.' In Wales other local influences were at play not directly linked to the politics of the Land Question. Shaun Evans, the Director of the Institute for the Study of Welsh Estates, argues in an essay on the North Wales Property Defence Association (1886–1896), that it was changes in local government, heavy taxation and loss of income, that led to the sale and break up of Welsh Estates on a massive scale, 'allowing thousands of former tenants to become freehold farmers in their own right across the early decades of the twentieth century.' A similar

process of took place in England after 1918, although many farmers were bought out by larger landowners later on.

In the introduction, the editors note the lack of studies tackling legislative land reform programmes from an English perspective, citing Cragoe and Readman's, *The Land Question in Britain, 1750–1950* (Basingstoke, 2010) as the only main source. My own studies of the Land Question in England after 1914 – *The failure of land reform in England in the twentieth century: The triumph of private property* (Abingdon, 2019: see the Review, 67.1) and *The history of opposition to blood sports in twentieth century England* (Abingdon, 2017) – trace the way concerns over land control and ownership were reflected in a wide range of political debates throughout the twentieth century suggesting that the Land Question in England was far from moribund or no longer relevant in an industrial and urban country divorced from the countryside, unlike Ireland, Scotland and to a lesser extent Wales. These debates covered the controversial issues of town and country planning and development control, taxation (the policy of betterment replacing Henry George's Single Tax, eventually developing into Section 106 agreements seeking to claw back the profits of land speculation), 'the unearned increment' for the community, agricultural reform and the role of smallholdings, public access to the countryside, moorlands and mountains (still highly controversial), opposition to hunting based partly on the misuse of land for sport rather than for more useful productive purposes, the role of charitable landowners such as the National Trust (which many Labour politicians after 1945 saw as an alternative to land nationalization), and not least the on-going housing crisis, based as it is primarily on remarkable and inflationary increases in land values.

MICHAEL TICHELAR
University of the West of England

SÉBASTIEN RIOUX, *The social cost of cheap food: Labour and the political economy of food distribution in Britain, 1830–1914* (McGill-Queen's University Press, 2020). 256 pp. 11 tables. \$34.95 CAD.

Anyone attempting to understand the dynamics of social change under capitalism could do worse than to start their studies with analyses of the British food distribution system. If we have E. P. Thompson's famous study of the 'moral economy' to thank for exposing the complex interplay between capital and consumers, regraters and retailers, and magistrates and markets, the study of the mechanics of food distribution are far older. Indeed, N. S. B. Gras' *The evolution of the English corn market* and other pivotal studies

such as F. J. Fisher's analysis of the development of the London food market arguably acted to figure the very emergence of economic history as a distinctive field of study. Collectively, such works teach us that beyond the fields and the farms, the making of food as a commodity exposes consumers to the effects of all the contradictory logics of capitalism: competition acting to lower prices and seek efficient routes to meet consumer demand yet profit-maximization leading to manipulation (of foodstuffs and markets alike) and other forms of market-based malfeasance. Sébastien Rioux's study, then, is the latest expression of a set of well-established positions. In one sense the reader might be forgiven for thinking that Rioux's study is too careful, too mannered, and too respectful of the vast historiography on which it stands. The four thematic chapters at the heart of the book – focusing on public markets, street sellers, small-scale shopkeeping, and the emergence of multi-retailers – are based in equal part on existing studies and Rioux's careful reading of Parliamentary Papers. All tell well-rehearsed tales: the refiguring of medieval markets as modern wholesale centres geared to mass distribution; the role of the costermonger as vital in meeting the needs of the urban poor for cheap food; the phenomenal rise of the small shop a response to the changing socio-spatial basis of the population; and the emergence of cooperative retail and multi-retailers central to standardization, mass consumption, and forcing prices lower. This is all artfully done; each chapter a blend of synthesis and original observation, Rioux having an admirable ability to combine broad-brush analysis with pithy exemplifying vignettes.

The novelty of Rioux's approach lays in his emphasis on the, as he puts it, 'social costs' of these shifts. In this, Rioux is concerned not with the 'costs' on consumers – the argument here is these shifts in distribution helped to force food prices down – or on producers – the book entirely silent as to the effects of the mass importation of foodstuffs that fed distributive change on those who laboured in the fields and gardens – but on those employed in distribution. And here a further point of qualification. Whilst Rioux offers a definition of distribution in the introduction, there is no explicit statement as to precisely this sprawling system fully entailed. As such, the account we have here does not consider rural retailing, this arguably a major gap considering that until the 1870s the balance of the population of England and Wales remained rooted in the rural. Nor does it consider the various individuals and occupations that made distribution possible: dealers, importers, warehouse operators, merchants, shipping companies and so on. Rather, it is those who

worked in direct retail, either as employees or the self-employed small shopkeepers and street sellers. The lived reality for this huge occupational growth was that cheap food acted to cheapen their labour, the cost of an integrated and efficient distribution system the living and working standards of those so engaged. Of course, as Rioux carefully shows, costermongers were invariably already poor, often turning temporarily to the trade in response to un- and under-employment. Yet the returns were small and the effort high, the result not being a route out of poverty but rather a stay from absolute destitution, the last step before entering the workhouse. Shopworkers too were, in many cases, forced to endure horrendous working hours, miserable conditions, wages paid partly in truck and in-kind through squalid accommodation and the most meagre of meals. Rioux notes that some improvements were made in the early years of the twentieth century, not least as regards the diminished exploitation of child labour, but he steadfastly refuses to be drawn into offering a Whiggish account of progress.

One of the most striking themes that emerges from the study is that retail remained stubbornly resistant to the efforts of parliamentary investigations and legislative interventions to improve the lot of shopworkers. It is surprising that Rioux does not make more of this, but, to his credit, this is a book that not only wears its considerable scholarship lightly but also remains generous to others and is refreshingly cautious in drawing conclusions. Likewise, Rioux's approach is unusually modest in not making stronger claims to novelty regarding the reading offered of migrant labour in retail, and especially more organized forms of street vending. The recruiting of children from the Calabrian countryside to sell ice-creams on the streets of London represented a defacto form of modern slavery, the parallels with the reliance on forced labour in parts of the UK's food system today painfully apparent. Another aspect of Rioux's study that deserves praise is his unfussy and direct prose. This is written with great clarity and certainty, something deeply impressive for a first monograph. What are the flaws? As detailed above, there are some significant gaps, but these are flaws only by virtue of the fact that the exclusive focus on retail as opposed to other aspects of distribution (the role of the railway a notable exception) is asserted rather justified. I would have liked, and this perhaps betraying my own intellectual biases, more in the way of the voices and individual experience of actual workers, the account often detailed but curiously devoid of actual human lives. None of this is taken away from what is a fine achievement. This is a timely, thoughtful, and powerful account that acts both as a welcome synthesis

of existing work and as a genuinely novel take on the hitherto hidden costs borne by those who brought cheap food to market.

CARL J. GRIFFIN
University of Sussex

JONATHAN SPAIN, *Fruit farming in the Cam Valley: an horticultural, social and economic history set in the regional and national context* (Shepreth, RiverRhee Publishing, 2021). 482 pp. 16 plates. £25.00

The primary focus of this book is the impact on agricultural practices of fruit growing in the Cam Valley, located in the south of the county of Cambridgeshire. Having briefly set out the intended themes and perspectives as well as the historical sources used, Spain opens with a description of the development and demise of the Cambridge Gage – a variety of greengage. From its origins in France, he charts its progression from the private gardens of the gentry and aristocracy into full commercial production up until the 1970s. Thereafter, the demand for the Cambridge Gage (along with other greengages) declined rapidly, returning it once more to private gardens, yet with a rejuvenated low-level demand as a heritage fruit.

Chapter 2 looks at plum cultivation in the Cam Valley. For each variety of plum grown at Wimpole and Madingley, he relates the comments made on these varieties by a number of authors from the eighteenth, nineteenth, and twentieth centuries. He concludes that the nurserymen of the district displayed ingenuity in using a range of varieties to reduce the risk of crop failure through either weather or disease.

A similar approach is adopted to his analysis of the varieties of apples in the next chapter, noting that apples were of much older origin than plums or gages. Attention is given to both culinary and dessert varieties of apple before concluding that modern apples are 'standardised snack food for the mass market' (p. 84). The last chapter of part 1 examines the cultivation of cherries, pears and soft fruit, in particular, gooseberries.

Part 2 opens with a survey of the main fruit growing villages in the Cam Valley, eleven in all, with a useful hand-drawn map provided: however, a key explaining the shaded areas would have been helpful. Spain then examines the history of each village in terms of orchards attached to private dwellings and the development of larger commercial orchards: further hand-drawn maps are supplied for each village to enable an understanding of the placement of the orchards. From the mid-nineteenth century, fruit growing developed apace, being fully established in the area by the 1920s and 1930s and the next chapter goes on to present the impact of fruit farming on village life in the area.

The third and final part of the book comprises six chapters which provide a chronological development of fruit growing from c.1740 to the present day, along with its impact on the economic history of the Cam Valley, set within a regional and national context. This part of the book confirms the intent to focus on the East of England with its primary markets in London, supplied by East Anglian counties and Kent. Jonathan Spain describes the development of the railway and its effect on commercial fruit production: the inclusion of a map would have aided the reader's understanding of the major rail routes in and out of the area.

In chapter 8, he notes the existence of strong local individualism amongst the Cambridgeshire fruit growers which conspired against the success of co-operative fruit grading and packing, despite such schemes running successfully elsewhere in the country. The following chapter continues to examine fruit farming between 1918 and 1939, building on the scientific and technical developments described in the previous chapter, to consider their impact on economic trends in this period. In addition to local newspaper reports, the author relies heavily on one trade journal source, *The Fruit Grower*: on pages 278–9, there are 15 consecutive footnotes, all drawn from this single source. It would have been interesting to see how original archive material supported his analysis.

Fruit growing in the district during the Second World War is examined in chapter 10, again with heavy reliance on *The Fruit Grower*, leading the reader to reflect on whether such a source presents an unbiased view of the situation: in particular, the emphasis given in the text to the alleged greater governmental support for agriculture, as opposed to horticulture at this time. One aspect which Spain attempts to address is the complexity of fruit price controls which he notes historians of food policy have neglected: whilst presenting the evidence for price control, he does not reach any overall conclusions. The final two chapters examine the post-war development of fruit growing in the district and the start of its decline by 1960, leading to the end of much commercial fruit growing in the area today.

In terms of presentation, the text occupies 454 pages of closely typed text on A4-sized pages, followed by a 'select bibliography' making up the remaining 28 pages. There are 16 quarter-page plates of fruit, excellently presented on glossy paper in chapter 4: these and the 12 hand-drawn maps provide the only breaks in the textual presentation. The book would be much improved in a number of ways: the use of the search function to eliminate obvious commonly occurring errors such as 'desert' rather than 'dessert' apples, and 'spaying' rather

than 'spraying'; the use of tables and graphs to present many of the statistics, in particular, the informative data extracted from the 1910 Land Valuation survey; and the inclusion of related photographs (historic and present-day) to illustrate points being made and to break up the text. Further, there are too many minor errors to enumerate, all of which could have been removed during a thorough proof-reading: the 'Isle of White' (p. 63) is but one example.

Overall, the reader gains the impression that fruit-growing was a gamble, with good and bad years, being the outcome of variable weather conditions and the prevalence of disease – no different to any other fruit-growing area of England. The regional and national contexts are primarily confined to the east of England and Kent, with little reference to other fruit-growing counties, such as Herefordshire and Worcestershire. This is a text densely-packed with information on a specialist subject, yet at times, the reader is left to wade through the content when they should have been assisted to digest the 'fruits' of the author's labours.

ALAN M. WADSWORTH
Evesham, Worcestershire

WILL ABBERLEY, CHRISTINA ALT, DAVID HIGGINS, GRAHAM HUGGAN and PIPPA MARLAND, *Modern British nature writing, 1789–2020: Land Lines* (Cambridge University Press, 2022). 300 pp. £75.

By a strange coincidence this book arrived for review at the same time as George Monbiot's new book *Regenesi: Feeding the World without devouring the planet* (Allen Lane, 2022). Monbiot's case is that, 'Farming is the world's greatest cause of habitat destruction, the greatest cause of the global loss of wildlife, and the greatest cause of the global extinction crisis' (*Regenesi*, p. 90). British farming is the elephant in the room in the book under review. On the one hand there are references to 'the deracinated agricultural landscapes that now compose much of Britain' (p. 75), whilst on the other hand there is this early statement: 'British nature writing has sometimes unhelpfully framed farming and farmers as the enemy, although there are signs that this is changing with the emergence of authors such as James Rebanks and Isabella Tree' (p. 22). Some writers would argue that it was not DEFRA, in its earlier incarnations, that actually grubbed up all those miles of ancient hedgerows and the later uses of the term 'enclosure' here seems to include the post-1947 'hollow victory of mega-farms' (p. 184). It is strange that there is no reference to the prolific nature writer Mark Cocker's 2018 book *Our place: can*

we save Britain's wildlife before it is too late? in which he explores the paradox of a nation of wildlife lovers having 'allowed' the post-war agricultural policies that decimated habitats and wildlife. This is odd because the theme of this book is very much about the paradoxes, tensions and uncertainties of British nature writing which it explores with often neglected examples and intellectual rigour that unsettles common assumptions, 'debunks lazy clichés' (p. 24) and challenges established commentators.

Modern British nature writing, a book wholly written by all five authors, declares that it is not a survey of (mostly) non-fiction prose nature writing. It takes a historical approach, but uses selected examples that 'perform both an aesthetic and a political function' (p. 24). As one might expect, the book starts with Gilbert White, but it ends with 'Shades of White' in which the book's discussions of cultural diversity are extended to contemporary questions of inclusion and access. The Romantic period focuses on Dorothy Wordsworth, Charlotte Smith and John Clare, with new work on Thomas Bewick and James Hogg as representing both traditional observations with 'emerging new understandings of the changeability of landscapes and species' (p. 25). The Victorian chapter proposes 'conservative idealism' as a key to understanding the tensions between pastoral and georgic, aristocratic and bourgeois values, the empirical and the spiritual, 'inchoate ecological consciousness' (p. 26) and anthropocentrism. From John Ruskin to Richard Jefferies, and from stonemason Hugh Miller to mountaineer Leslie Stephen, nature writing is discussed as having an uneasy self-consciousness about its being a literary construct of a moral, or even mystical imagination, 'valuing the natural world as a moral-spiritual aid' (p. 26).

It is in the chapter on the Short Twentieth Century (1914–91) that a crucial transformation in place-based nature writing is seen to give it a 'sense of a genre beginning to coalesce' (p. 167). 'The changes were particularly marked in attitudes towards farming, which in the early part of the century was almost synonymous with nature, but which, in the wake of the intensification of agriculture after the Second World War and the deployment of pesticides such as DDT, came to be regarded as one of the greatest threats to it' (p. 167). The popularity of rural writing that followed the First World War has largely been discussed in its fictional form. Here notions of a fragile national consciousness invested in landscapes, under threat from modernity and its mechanizations, are explored first in the writings of Edward Thomas, then in the Modernist georgics of John Stewart Collis's *The*

worm forgives the plough (1973, but combining two books originally published in 1946/7) before turning to 'two innovative female nature writers' (p. 185), Nan Shepherd and Margiad Evans. Both wrote in the 1940s and fell out of print in their lifetimes, but Evans has yet to achieve the rediscovery from which Shepherd's work has benefited. Evans' *Autobiography* (1943) appears to be one of the resurrections of reputation achieved, here under the heading of 'Earth Writing', by *Modern British nature writing*. This chapter is concluded by a 'Coda: Richard Mabey's post-pastoral' which discusses *The unofficial countryside* (1973), a reversal of Thomas's fleeing the suburbs in search of nature. Mabey, always searching for positive engagements with an ever-adaptable nature, nevertheless fears for its future: 'It will always fight back, but it cannot survive outright eradication', he writes (p. 196).

So we come to 'Nature writing after Nature' in the contemporary period and the book's most theoretically original contribution to current debates about the renewals and failures of so-called 'new nature writing'. The focus here is on Robert Macfarlane's *The wild places* (2007), Jay Griffiths' *Wild* (2006), George Monbiot's *Feral* (2013), Paul Farley and Michael Symmons Roberts' *Edgelands* (2012) before comparing contemporary with earlier books about hawks and then about otters. Taking Edward Said's notion of 'late style', the claim is made for the writers of new nature writing as being 'late Modern, expressing deep-seated anxieties about themselves, their writing and their positions in a rapidly diminishing natural world' (p. 29). Indeed, it appears that nature writing flourishes most during periods of such anxieties, not the least of which is represented by Tim Ingold's notion of 'weather-worlds' in which human and non-human forces act upon each other, as discussed here in work by Richard Mabey and Melissa Harrison. But if 'even the most self-reflexive forms of nature writing are likely to have limited environmental impact' (p. 223), this book brilliantly and provocatively makes the case for nature writing and its discussion as exploring both what 'environment' is and the nature of human 'impact' and interaction. All further discussions of nature writing will need to engage with this book.

TERRY GIFFORD
Bath Spa University

RICHARD A. GAUNT (ed.), *Church, land and people. Essays presented to John Beckett* (Thoroton Society Record Series 50, 2020). 274 pp. £32.

The appearance of a festschrift for one of the leading practitioners of our discipline and a prominent member of our Society is a noteworthy occasion. John Beckett's

contribution to Nottinghamshire history is celebrated in a volume published by the Thoroton Society, whose chairman he was from 1992 to 2020, in itself perhaps a record.

The book is a collection of essays on the county's history, all decent and contributing something fresh to its history. Every reader will have their favourites and there is not room here to discuss them all or even list all thirteen. To mention a few, David Crook shows how Nottingham traded on its reputation as the home town of Robin Hood in the mid-seventeenth century. Stanley Chapman discusses 'Newark as a coaching centre, c.1600–1850' although much of the essay is actually concerned with roads, and Dorothy Johnston the development of Welbeck Park by the third Duke of Portland. Ken Brand discusses the way in which enclosure allowed the development of a new suburb in Nottingham and discusses the architectural forms it took.

For the two of much greater than county interest, I nominate Adrian Henstock who discusses Ashbourne and Bingham and shows how these small towns were reformed and polished, particularly in the second quarter of the nineteenth century – I suspect a common enough experience but curiously under researched. And in what may be the most important essay in the book, Philip Riden uses correspondence at Chatsworth to rescue postal history from the postal historians, and show how the developing postal network in the late seventeenth century allowed for the freer and faster circulation of information – and, one might say, instructions. There is a bibliography of Beckett's publications.

The volume calls for some reflections on the contribution that universities make (or ought to make) to the local community through their sponsorship of local history. The appearance is that Nottingham never set out to have a figure so active in the history of the county but by appointing a man brought up in Nottingham they planted the seed. I suspect – no, I know – that no History department would do it today. Of course, given university special funding or a bequest, they would do so: but a straight choice between a local historian (or a historian with local interests) and someone who could teach what would today be regarded as core syllabus – Polish history say, or Catholic missionaries in the early modern Philippines and Japan – there is no contest. The MA Beckett ran in Local and Regional History died in 2005 on his secondment to London, and yet the book offers testimony to its success in drawing people into the discipline and offering them training. It will be interesting to see what Beckett's legacy in the university turns out to be.

There is much on Beckett the man, and yet curiously little. In a long biographical essay, we learn that he made a sledge in the winter of 1962–63 (with ‘metal runners and countersunk screws’ – important details) and that he married: and that is all it says about his family life. Given the energy he displayed, perhaps he was never at home. A section headed ‘private life’ is about his enthusiasm for cricket and football and it appears here that he is, or was, a church organist and one time choirmaster. There are vignettes of the old university – snooker with Michael Jones in the staff club after lunch on a Thursday. The book ends with a gallery of pictures of Beckett at public events which proves he is both photogenic and much photographed. This surely sets a record for the number of pictures of the honorand in a book of this sort.

And yet whilst the book gives thanks for Beckett and his contribution to Nottinghamshire history, it also serves to diminish the man. The younger Beckett in particular had ambitions to work on a much wider field, as is seen in his early books and the mid-career work with Michael Turner and Bethanie Afton. And see too his contribution to the *Agrarian History of England and Wales*. More recently he has looked at the processes by which towns achieved city status. All is detailed in the bibliography the book provides and yet, except for a contribution by Michael Turner, it has no resonance in the volume.

Neither were his ambitions limited to Nottingham: he was interviewed alongside me for the Directorship of the Rural History Centre at Reading in 2000. He had a secondment to run the Victoria County History in 2005 to 2010 and I always supposed that he wished it to turn into something permanent. Of course, with its Nottinghamshire focus, the book says nothing about how he presided over VCH in what was surely its Indian summer.

So whilst the book is a worthy and affectionate gift from his Nottinghamshire friends to their colleague, there could have been a different one which would have said much more about his contribution to economic history and agricultural and rural history: even to local history as a discipline. Perhaps we await it?

R. W. HOYLE
University of Reading

GERRY BARNES and TOM WILLIAMSON, *The orchards of Eastern England: History, ecology and place* (University of Hertfordshire Press, 2021). xiii + 258 pp. £16.99.

This book presents research from the ‘Orchards East’ project (2017–20), funded by the National Lottery Heritage Fund, which explores the history and ecology

of orchards in Bedfordshire, Cambridgeshire, Essex, Hertfordshire, Huntingdonshire, Norfolk and Suffolk. The authors, Tom Williamson and Gerry Barnes, examine the historical, ecological and commercial background, the impact of industrialization and the subsequent destruction of orchards and their potential future in an unsentimental, constructive way, evidencing extensive archival research and practical exercises.

Orchards have a rich and diverse history and a regional and national significance which has rarely been the subject of academic study. More readily associated with the western and south-western counties, an enduring image of the quintessential English orchard is one of ancient trees, with delightful blossom in spring and later in the season heavy with fruit, bathed in the golden light of an autumn afternoon, a symbol of enduring abundance. While orchards do reflect the changing seasons and cycle of life in the natural world, the popular, nostalgic image belongs to a Merrie England which never existed, a mythical paradise lost. And rather than being ancient trees, the maximum lifespan of an apple tree is approximately 120 years, a cherry tree 80 years and a plum tree only 60 years, and ‘old’ fruit varieties do not date back to time immemorial. These and other myths are gently but steadily debunked throughout the book, the authors acknowledging that this may be unwelcome to some.

Once common features of the English landscape, orchards have not been studied as distinctive and significant wooded areas. The point is made that ‘orchards, while sometimes described as “semi-natural habitats”, inhabit the world of culture more than that of nature’. Farmhouse and country-house orchards, commercial enterprises, orchards attached to institutions such as colleges and hospitals, the recent heritage and community orchards, all owe their existence to human agency, in planting and maintaining them in order to flourish and produce high yields and removing and replacing trees when diseased or too old to be usefully productive. The human factor is also instrumental in the destruction of orchards, both in the physical act of destruction and in the identification of orchards as no longer being useful or necessary features of a particular area.

Nine chapters take us through the results of the multifarious investigations undertaken by the project. They explore the history, surveying, and mapping of orchards in the eastern counties, the demise of the once-ubiquitous farmhouse orchard, changing methods of farming and patterns of land ownership and use, and the development of the nursery trade. Orchards as features of designed landscapes are considered, from

country house estates to those planted in the grounds of institutions such as those of hospitals and colleges. The development of fruit-related industries such as canning, jam, and cider production is discussed as are the cultural and commercial factors that influenced the pre- and post-industrial centuries.

The commercial orchard, such an important feature of the region, was in its infancy prior to the 'orchard century', c.1850–1960, the subject of chapter 3, in which we journey through the heyday and subsequent decline and fall of the orchard industry. There was significant growth in the period up to the First World War and, in the interwar years, expansion of the commercial orchard was bolstered by large-scale industrialization and urban development, the products being more easily transported thanks to improved rail and road communications. It is shown that expansion continued after the end of the Second World War, peaking in the 1950s and '60s, and outlines the reasons for the loss of vast numbers of commercial orchards over the course of the past half century, in some measure due to EEC membership and the rise of foreign imports but also to changes in shopping habits and food consumption and the demise of many small farms. The range of varieties being grown today nationwide is minimal compared to the range of known native varieties, many of which are now known by name only.

The penultimate chapter makes a strong case made for the importance and significance of orchards as landscape features, areas of fruit production, wildlife and wildflower habitats, and as public amenities. If orchards are a part of our heritage to be valued and to form part of future landscapes, how should this be brought about? Although historically part of the landscape they are not in themselves timeless and, going forward, should contribute productively to future landscapes in terms of biodiversity of ecology and habitat, edible produce, and uplifting places of peace and beauty. 'Biodiversity' and 'rewilding' are hot topics today but how appropriate are they when applied to orchards, given their 'semi-natural' character and the level of human input?

The book features a good number of maps, plans, photographs and other illustrations: could more have been included? But this is only a minor niggle. It must have been a Herculean task to select from the vast amount of data generated by the project and even more so to assign material to the various chapters. There is so much information here for local and landscape historians, social and economic historians, horticulturists, ecologists and anyone with any degree of interest in orchards. The curious can plunder the bibliography in search of further reading, for whether

read straight through from start to finish or dipped into to peruse selected chapters, this book is a wellspring of information to bolster the current resurgence of interest in orchards and fruit varieties. It sets the bar dauntingly high for future regional orchard studies.

SUSAN WILKIN
Oxford

PATRICK GRATTON, *Oasts and hop kilns: A history* (Historic England / Liverpool University Press, 2021). x + 182 pp. £40.

This book on the buildings of the hop-growing industry is based on a study which the author carried out in 1960. By the beginning of the twenty-first century, Patrick Gratton realized that much of what he had recorded then had largely disappeared as a result of a steady decline in the growing of hops in England, resulting in the related traditional buildings becoming disused across the country. In writing the book, Gratton has given due recognition to the differences in terminology between the hop-growing regions of England, with oasts (or oast houses) and hop gardens in Kent and Sussex, and hop kilns and hop yards in Hampshire and Surrey, and in Herefordshire and Worcestershire. Whilst the latter two counties were not included in his original research, he has drawn on the work of well-respected experts on vernacular farm buildings in these areas, to present a fully rounded account of his subject.

In his introduction, he outlines the development of hop cultivation in England and the use of hops in the brewing of beer, as opposed to the customary ale consumed in medieval times, with peak production occurring in the 1870s. The picking of hops is briefly examined in chapter 2 before the associated processes of drying (chapter 3) and bagging ready for despatch (chapter 4) are described, these being the activities which take place in the hop kilns and oasts. Regarding the use of sulphur in the drying process, the author notes that its use was more widespread in Kent than Hampshire, but he is silent about Herefordshire or Worcestershire in this regard. The topics of hop picking, and hops and brewing are summarized in brief appendices.

Having presented a typology of oasts and hop kilns in chapter 5, enabling their placement within one of five types, the next five chapters examine the existence of each type and the development from one to the next, albeit that multiple types could, and can still, be found adjacent to each other on the same site. With the buildings classified by type, the characteristic features of oasts and hop kilns as vernacular buildings in each of the three main hop-growing areas are then presented.

In chapter 13, the zenith of English hop production is considered, taking account of the impact of the development of the railway network in the 1800s, as well as the improvements made in ventilation and heating systems for the drying of hops. The development of hop buildings on a grand scale on various landed estates are also described. The implications of taxes including tithes, markets, the profits to be made (or not depending on the weather) and the politics behind hop production are all assessed in chapter 14, before a wider view is briefly taken of hop drying and the associated built environment in Europe and the United States.

In the final chapter, Grattan presents the current position as influenced by the impact of both changing demands for hops and international competition, along with the introduction of mechanized picking, fan-assisted blown-air heating and drying and the integration of the hop-drying and -processing operations within industrial units of modern construction. The outcome of the latter has meant that many of the traditional buildings have been subject to either decay or adaptive re-use as domestic or other accommodation. His final image is of the building which won the 2018 RIBA House of the Year award, its design inspired by the tall hop kilns of the Kent countryside where it is located, with a view of traditional oasts in the background.

This book is superbly illustrated with a plethora of colour photographs, sketches of the author's research in 1960 and a number of drawings and cross-sections to illustrate both production processes and building. There are very few typographical errors, and the only omission occurs at the end of chapter 1, where the weights and measures used in the hop industry are described, in which there is no mention of hop acres as used in the western counties. One hop acre is the ground covered by 1,000 hop plants, and in the 1890s there were 1,500 to 1,600 plants to the statute acre. Many growers kept records using hop acres, necessitating the Ministry of Agriculture to instruct growers to use statute acres, not hop acres, in their annual agricultural returns.

Overall, this book presents an excellent historical analysis of the traditional buildings associated with the hop industry, set within the background of the cultivation, processing and marketing of English hops.

ALAN M. WADSWORTH
Evesham, Worcestershire

DAVID JOHNSON, *Brickmaking: History and heritage* (Amberley Publishing, 2021). 96 pp. 100 illus. £15.99. In the introduction to his book, David Johnson considers questions such as: What is a brick? Where in Britain were bricks made? At what rate did brickworks

decline? Indeed, the whole book is written against the background of the demise of brickworks in Britain from a peak of 1,739 works in 1873 to only 50 by the year 2010. Johnson then examines the geology of the areas where brickworks have been constructed, along with the different sources of clay used for brickmaking. In chapter 3, an overview of the history of the brick in Britain is presented: starting with the use of brick by the Romans, there was limited brick usage after 410 A.D. except in high-status buildings, but then a rapid increase in their use was observed from the late eighteenth century onwards, the latter arising from improving kiln technology and the increased demand for housing as the population of the country expanded. Likewise, there was a demand for brick for the construction of farm and other industrial buildings at this time, especially in areas where stone was not available. Brickmaking also provided by-employment for those involved in agriculture as illustrated in this book with the example of the Scots farmer, John Ainslie, who patented various designs for brick technology (p. 55). Johnson also explains the construction and use of early clamp kilns which were temporary and/or movable structures.

Chapter 4 looks at the various stages in the preparation of the raw materials needed to make 'green bricks' ready for drying to be followed by firing. Subsequent chapters then present the chronological development of fixed permanent brick kilns. From the updraught and downdraught technologies, chapter 6 moves on to examine the progressive development of continuous kilns, culminating in the Hoffman kiln and its derivatives which are considered in chapter 7. In the following chapter, tunnel and shuttle kilns are examined where either cartloads of brick are slowly drawn through the kiln, or where the bricks are placed in the kiln (*set*), fired and then removed from the kiln (*drawn*). Finally, chapter 9 identifies where preserved (and not so well preserved) brickworks can be found, in their role as heritage assets, demonstrating the differing types of kilns.

It would have been helpful to have had further diagrams, similar to that on p. 73, explaining the operation of the various kiln designs in order to assist the reader's understanding of their functionality and their differences. A short glossary for the lay reader would also have been useful. In the early pages of the book, there are cases of numerical slips: for example, on p. 7, Johnson states, 'By 1858, across Britain over 1,400 brickworks were in existence, a number that had shrunk to 1,739 by 1873'; two further examples occur on p. 10. Apart from two minor typographical errors and the misspelling of Ashby de la Zouch ('Ashby de

la Zouche' on p. 9), this book is produced to a high standard and is well illustrated with both historic images and modern-day scenes of operational and non-operational brickworks. Whilst there is not a single reference in the whole book – indeed, the book has no pretensions to be an academic volume – a three-page bibliography is provided, along with an index of sites.

The author clearly knows his subject and, on the whole, he puts over the history of the development of brick kilns in a clear and concise manner, although more operational detail would have helped the understanding of the overall process of brickmaking, as suggested by the book's main title.

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Europe and Elsewhere

BEN MARSH, *Unravelled dreams: silk and the Atlantic World, 1500–1840* (Cambridge University Press, 2020). 500 pp. £29.99.

In *Unravelled dreams* Ben Marsh explores the history of the encounter with silk production and consumption in the Atlantic world in the period 1500 to 1840. He points out that silkworms were 'at the cutting edge of Atlantic imperialism' in this period not because of any commercial success in silk production but precisely for the reverse. He shows that silk production enjoyed wide ranging encouragement from colonial powers, yet did not succeed. In this way the book differs from other commodity histories in that it portrays the history of commodity that failed. Marsh argues that 'the history of failure is a something of an in-built blind spot for historians' and as such stands in the way of deeper understanding of the contributions that 'failures' or rather 'commercial failures' had on the wider social and economic development. In the case of silk, he cites the numerous contributions that silk made and argues that despite the failure of this commercial venture, silk paid 'testament to the experimental spirit, profound adaptability, and indomitable conviction of early American communities'. Moreover, as he shows Atlantic silk's history has always been bound with the more global history of the silk industry and consumption on the world market. In this way the history of failed projects can assist in studying the global and the global history needs to be taken into account when explaining the local failure. Since the book compares silk production in the French, English, Spanish and early American contexts the comparative element further aids to reveal the global and regional paths silk production took in the Americas.

The book is divided into three parts – Part I, Emergence, Part II, Persistence, and Part III, Convergence – and each part is then divided into chapters according to the region that they explore. Part I, Emergence, sets the progress of silk culture into the context of the spread of silk production and consumption around the globe and into the framework of early colonization efforts. Chapter 2 focuses on sericulture (the process of mulberry cultivation and silkworm rearing) and the ensuing silk production in Spain and the process of the transfer to New Spain. This process, as Marsh shows, started with the first voyages across the Atlantic. Marsh shows that this project was successful in the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries thanks to three factors that occurred simultaneously – something that did not happen in Atlantic regions. These were availability of Old-World silk experts, committed colonial authorities, and a labour force with experience in textile production and insect harvesting. Chapter 3 explores a significantly less successful project and that is the transfer of silk from England to Virginia. The chapter shows the great interest that the colonial centre, particularly King James I, put on silk production. Yet, the English did not have a great experience in silk production themselves and had to rely on importation of silkworms and mulberries from Continental Europe as well as on French silk experts for the knowledge transmission. Moreover, in the early seventeenth century the silk industry was affected by the plight of colonists in Virginia and their lack of expertise. Once tobacco dominated the economy, silk lost out to the already-present commercial success of tobacco planting, despite the continued interest it commanded in the political circles. Chapter 4 explores the French tradition of silk production and the experimental transfers of silk to New France in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Marsh argues that the French never achieved such success as the Spanish with silk production in the Atlantic because they were not so pressured to get supplies for their domestic silk industry from their colonies and because the lack of settler population in the French America did not allow for a large-scale silk production.

Part II, Persistence, sets the efforts of the colonial powers at expanding silk production in the Atlantic in the context of colonial competition and the quest for new supplies of raw silk for the growing silk weaving industries in Europe. In chapter 5 Marsh maps out the attempts at expanding sericulture in Europe itself. Chapter 6 focuses on the attempts to transplant sericulture to South Carolina and Georgia in the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries. Chapter 7

studies the efforts to establish silk cultivation in New England in the eighteenth century. Both chapters show the challenges that a lack of expertise, the need to get silk specialists from Europe, the configuration of labour, and competition with other ventures posed to silk production in the British Atlantic colonies. These challenges were not easy to overcome despite a political economy encouraging silk production.

Part III, *Convergence*, explores how silk production in the British Atlantic colonies fared in the eighteenth century at the backdrop of the revolution and independence. Chapter 8 studies the eighteenth-century silk consumption and taste in the framework of colonial boycotts and perceptions of British goods. Chapter 9 studies the pursuit of silk production in Pennsylvania, which aimed at solving the dichotomy between the perception of silks as 'symptom of Old World decadence' and the perceived virtues of the fibre itself. Chapter 10 looks at the renewed efforts at silk production in the newly independent United States. Both chapters show that although interest in silk production was not missing the pre-existing challenges did not disappear and US remained far from becoming one of the main world silk producing regions.

The monograph presents a unique study of commercial failure in a very long timeframe and in this way breaks ground as commodity histories almost exclusively focus on successes. Moreover, the book views the history of silk in the Atlantic through the lens of global connections and encounters and in this way presents a much more holistic portrayal of the transfer of silk production and its successes (and predominately failures) in this new environment and market. The story of silk in the Atlantic is very well weaved into the framework of political and cultural history of the area and thus forms an intricate history of a commodity in a specific geographical setting but also pays minute attention to the global events that shaped this regional history. The monograph relied on a very wide range of both primary and secondary literature and makes a great contribution to the history of silk as a global commodity. *Unravelling dreams* presents a wealth of information on silk in the context of culture, society, and economy and would be of great interest to cultural and global historians, scholars focusing on material culture as well as historians focusing on the Americas. Having more contributions to the history of failures such as Marsh presents in his *Unravelling dreams* would undoubtedly help to expand our understanding of the factors that facilitate commercial successes and failures.

KAROLINA HUTKOVÁ
LSE

VIJAYA RAMADAS MANDALA, *Shooting a tiger: Big-game hunting and conservation in colonial India* (Oxford University Press, 2018). 452 pp. 21 illus. £55. *Shooting a tiger* is a compelling account of the intrinsic links between big-game hunting, conservation, and the colonial governance of India. Building on his previous publications on the Raj, and his PhD thesis, Mandala draws on extensive sources compiled in India and the UK, over a seven-year period. His materials stretch from memoirs, published documents and images. He charts critical course through the ever-changing role of shikar (hunting) in India. *Shooting a tiger* offers new perspectives on the essential roles of big-game hunting and conservation, how hunting moulds political power, colonial administration, and assertions of masculine oppression in an imperial world.

Shooting a tiger is illuminating and accessible with exhaustive examples. It has a comprehensive introduction grounding the book in wider literature. Mandala is meticulous at critiquing and building on work in this field. Reading as a geographer, I found this useful in providing context to Mandala's research. The foreword, written by John MacKenzie, is likewise useful for this purpose.

In chapter 1, Mandala plots the multiple roles of big-game hunting in empire building, providing historical context before exploring the specific allegory of shikar in India. His first detailed discussion focuses on the Mughal Empire where he outlines the practical and symbolic uses of shikar as extravagant shows of political, military, and masculine dominance by the Mughal elite. These were complex discourses encoded in the Indian imagination that were later shared and manipulated during British colonization. Diverging from previous literature, Mandala argues that shikar straddles a dichotomy; being both a flamboyant showcase, with rulers riding bejewelled elephants, and the much smaller mundane acts of soldiers and imperial men. The more mundane but vital acts of administration and societal interaction were indispensable cogs in the Empire's machine. The traditional, hierarchical hunting culture developed comradeship, forged alliances, and allowed intelligence surveillance to aid territorial expansion.

Chapter 2 analyses the impacts of physical geography on big-game hunting, and how exploring new topographical frontiers influenced hunting practicalities and inspired the British colonial imaginations. Comparing the Nilgiri Hills and the Himalayan hill stations to the Indian plains, Mandala interprets the adaption of hunting to the mountains as part of a new aesthetic adopted by the upper classes. Mandala proposes that masculine and racial codes dictated new

metaphors connecting Indian hill hunts with health, authenticity, and European superiority. Identifying the mountain as a befitting environment for Europeans where increased challenges taxed the imperial man's elevated skills. This led to the establishment of clubs like the Ootacamund Hunt, building of military sanatoria, and the coveting of racially exclusive property in the hills. Mandala offers fresh perspectives on the complexities of masculinities and moralities that were constructed in the hills of India.

Chapter 3 argues that emerging codes of sportsmanship in shikar, use of hero sportsman narratives and developing gun-technology had resonances with authority, masculinities, and sought to exclude the 'other'. Mandala interprets sporting memoirs to provide examples of how imperial hunters gained privilege and masculine superiority through hunting man-eaters and saving native villages. Mandala infers that forest legislation and arms licensing exposes colonial perceptions of indigenous hunters. The poor hunted for food, and this was considered a barbaric and a lower-class attitude to the sport of hunting. Mandala argues that ideologies of scientific racism, social Darwinism and fears of rebellion fuelled by gun-ownership redefined shikar throughout the nineteenth century. He concludes that codes of sportsmanship reaffirmed the controlling societal structures in imperial India.

Chapter 4 discusses the collusive roles of Indians, specifically Indian princes, in constructing the powerful image of the Raj and reaffirming hierarchies. By examining paintings and media articles, Mandala observes how the extravagant shikars, such as tiger hunts hosted by Indian royalty, gave credence to colonial rule. Mandala argues that Indian princes were neither pliant nor idle, and that shared hunting opened opportunities for the Indian elite to negotiate beneficial relationships and assert their own political dominance. This chapter makes a convincing case that without the collaboration of Indian royalty, and the act of hunting on their reserves, the Raj's image of authority would have been limited and Indian princely powers diminished.

In the final two chapters, Mandala intertwines the paradoxical ideologies of big-game hunting and conservation. Mandala gives examples of acts of conservation that were not philanthropic but selective, safeguarding hunting stocks, reinforcing imperial narratives, and consolidating British ownership. He provides a convincing case of how imperial imaginations determined animal hierarchies. The anthropomorphic tendencies of the British painted the elephant as noble and the tiger as villainous vermin.

This influenced conservation policy throughout India until the early twentieth century. Mandala argues that the British supported an inherently contradictory in policy, eradicating tigers on the premise of protecting indigenous people while protecting elephants who were far more destructive. Further convincing connections are made through a critical analysis of the lives of Jim Corbett and Colonel Richard Burton. Both men spent most of their lives hunting 'man-eaters' while also promoting conservation and study of Indian wildlife. Accounts of these men show how they inhabited paradoxical spaces aligning their hunting practices with acts of preservation, using altruism to justify their behaviour while also reinforcing discrimination and imperial codes. This section explores how their experiences show unique relationships and contradictory colonial attitudes to wildlife, hunting and indigenous peoples.

Mandala, in writing *Shooting a tiger*, has succeeded in creating a well-illustrated and thoroughly researched set of accounts of big-game hunting and conservation in colonial India. Within each section, sophisticated interpretations and substantiated connections are crafted with appropriate links made to wider literature. Mandala's focus on the mundane experiences and administrative accounts add to engaging literature of imperial hunting and environmental studies.

JESSICA HOWELL-DAVIS
University of Edinburgh

TOMASZ OPALIŃSKI, *Stan chłopski w Księstwie Warszawskim w świetle akt sądowych* (DiG, 2021). 196 pp. 42.00 zł.

The history of the peasantry has never been a first-priority topic for Polish historians. This is true despite the fact that rural communities made up the vast majority of the inhabitants of the Polish lands. While there are many factors contributing to what amounts to an astonishing hole in our knowledge (some would point to the relative scarcity of sources, while others would blame the post-war narrow-minded socialist ideology imposed on Polish historians, which made the history of the peasants seem uninteresting for some) it is without doubt that any mature attempt to improve such a problematic state of affairs should be greeted with attention. Tomasz Opaliński's book *Stan chłopski w Księstwie Warszawskim w świetle akt sądowych* (*The peasantry in the Duchy of Warsaw in light of juridical documents*) is surely one of them.

The publication's scope may seem narrow at first glance. Opaliński has chosen juridical sources to explore the situation of villagers in the period of the Duchy of Warsaw (1807–15). However, they prove to be

such an information-rich source that it would be worth devoting a separate book-sized study to them.

The first chapter provides a broad background for the functioning of the judiciary system and legal reforms in the Napoleonic era. Opaliński vividly sketches the problems faced by Polish society, and especially its peasants, on the eve of the Duchy's existence. The literature review is broad, addressing scholarship from the nineteenth to the twenty-first century. He also succinctly defines the key terms for the book, such as *chłop* (peasant) or *stan* (estate). Thanks to this, the chapter not only offers a comprehensive introduction to the following parts of the study, but has an introductory value on its own – not only for those interested in the history of peasants or the law, but generally for all those interested in early nineteenth-century Polish society and statehood.

The second chapter addresses the primary sources the book is based on. They are described diligently, depicting the scale of the sources preserved. Many of the courts' documents have gone missing, with relatively few surviving until today. However, the material consulted by Opaliński enables interesting, yet geographically limited (mostly to the Wielkopolska region, around the towns of Śrem and Konin), conclusions. On several occasions, Opaliński proves to be capable of practically applying source criticism to his work, e.g., when he maturely refrains from putting forward far-reaching conclusions on social phenomena which may have been distorted in the available primary sources (p. 102).

The third chapter offers an analysis of the sources. Here, the material is organized around various social phenomena, such as crime, honour, family bonds and (il)literacy. One of the most interesting parts of this chapter is a suggestion that despite the high level of illiteracy amongst the peasantry, their numerical skills were very good, as shown in a few occasions described in the courts' documents.

The fourth chapter continues the analysis of the sources, now concentrating on the relationships between the members of different estates and between the peasants themselves. While some of the conclusions provided in this part are rather unsurprising, such as the suggestion that many of the acts of violence between the noblemen and the peasants stemmed from tense relations between landowners and serfs, others are more innovative. Opaliński suggests that the peasants and the noblemen were the most violent members of society, with their levels of aggressive behaviour being noticeably higher than among other groups, such as Jews and townsmen. However, this hypothesis seems to require further argumentation.

The concluding chapter offers a brief summary of the previous parts and puts forward proposals for further research on other estates and historical periods. The main conclusion of the book, which appears clear from the sources consulted here, is that reforms introduced in the Polish lands during the Napoleonic period, especially those abolishing the judiciary system in which the peasants were by definition in a position of severe subordination to the noblemen, were by and large a success.

Nevertheless, the book has a few downsides. For instance, some of the conclusions could have been improved by comparing the primary sources with the secondary ones (such as reflections on the national identity on p. 115, which could be further developed in the light of Elwira Wilczyńska's research on the relations between the peasants and Germans in the nineteenth century). But these remarks should not detract from the fact that this is a highly informative history of the Polish peasantry in the early nineteenth century.

Stan chłopski w Księstwie Warszawskim w świetle akt sądowych is a book worth reading, with its informative review of literature, careful source analysis and interesting conclusions. It also gives a good example of how historians can address the methodologically tricky topic of Polish peasants' history. One may only hope that the author will continue his research and others will follow his pattern.

ŁUKASZ KOZUCHOWSKI
University of Warsaw

GIACOMO BONAN, *The State in the Forest. Contested commons in the nineteenth century Venetian Alps* (White Horse Press, 2019). xi + 229 pp. £60.

This relatively slim, well-written volume contains a rich and compelling case study of contestation over the forest commons of the Cadore region of Italy, part of the Venetian Republic from late medieval times before its absorption into the Napoleonic empire and subsequently Austrian rule. Situated on the upper reaches of the Piave, an extensive trade was conducted downriver into the lowlands – indeed one that brought larger returns and commanded more capital than the more renowned woollen industry of the early modern Venetian state. The book amply demonstrates, along with many other cases now documented, the lack of empirical foundation for the persistent view that struggles over the enclosure of commons generally pitted a traditional subsistence-orientated economy against a commercializing capitalist world underpinned by the central state. Rather, it shows how legal and administrative reforms

between 1806 and 1848 helped demarcate new lines of tension and conflict in a long-commercialized world over questions of equity, authority and opportunity. One can doubt that this rich history would have been captured by an approach of hypothesis-testing of any particular institutional or economic theory. It is exemplary agrarian history.

Chapter 1 provides scene-setting of the institutional and economic history of regions to 1811, and the second chapter addresses political, demographic and economic changes in the first half of the nineteenth century. The next two chapters provide a narrative and analysis of the consequences of an institutional revolution. Prior to 1806–07, commons (*vicini*) were largely governed by assemblies (*regoles*) of heads of long-standing families, whether in the form of direct (and taxable) ownership as *beni comuni*; or alternatively as *beni comunali* which were effectively state property but largely with the usufruct granted to local communities and notables. From this decade, two major transformations occurred. State property was increasingly managed under the auspices of a modern forestry to generate revenue for the state, although local residents continued to provide the labour force. Secondly, enduring French reforms swept away the old assemblies of ancient households to replace them with municipalities, increasingly run by less inclusive councils, whilst a long process of mapping and valuation of the entire land began. By this time Cadore was a highly commercialized region with extensive seasonal labour migration, increasingly dependent on the potato, with local specialization in manufactures and rapid population growth. Around a third of the region was wooded. The timber trade remained very large, with numerous sawmills and one seventeenth of the wider province of Belluno's population employed directly in the trade.

New forestry supervision brought conflict over cutting practices (between clear-cutting and more traditional selection felling) and a lessening of the powers of allocation once enjoyed by municipalities, which had also largely used timber sales to cover their own liabilities and feather the nest of leading officers. Conflict also arose, as was seen across Europe, with attempts to create a clear delineation and separation of areas for grazing – a notable contribution to these debates being the Lombard official Giuseppe Gautieri's 300-page work on the pasture of goats! Bonan notes perceptively that despite the expression of generic fears about wood shortage and flood risk, foresters were largely concerned not with deforestation but with the sustainable delivery of forest resources to the market and the state.

More serious violence came however with a law enabling privatization of the commons in 1839, leading to unrest which also found an echo in the revolution of 1848. Bonan deftly shows that these struggles were not a question of being for or against such enclosure, but over who would benefit from the change. The 'customary' idea, swept away in the creation of municipalities, that forest resources belonged ancient families, saw a resurgence against fears that rights over the commons would be auctioned off to the highest bidder by municipalities, or that sales would largely benefit municipal officers themselves. This could lead to demands for privatization, but on a principle of division favouring ancient households: simultaneously a reversion to ancient practice and a demand for a radically new system of land ownership over the old commons, a circumstance created unintentionally by the legislation of the central state. Subsequently, widespread unrest in 1848 was not the result of customary resistance to privatization or commerce but was born of the consequences of the unequitable result of those sales of municipal lands, and against the new distribution of power that came with rise of the municipality and in the context of the longstanding high commercial value of timber. This is a moral economy of a kind, clearly influenced by the subtleties of E. P. Thompson's thinking rather than some of those who have latterly employed the phrase. The book ends noting a continued history of transgression, that ironically came to be interpreted more as a general right of the rural population to access the woods against the strictures of property holders and foresters.

This is a very welcome addition to the history of forests, commons and the rural world, not least as an Italian case study available to an anglophone readership.

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SAMIPARNA SAMANTA, *Meat, mercy, and morality: Animals and humanitarianism in colonial Bengal, 1850–1920* (Oxford University Press, 2021). 288 pp. £56.

In the summer of 1822, an Act of Parliament came into force in the United Kingdom to prevent the 'cruel and improper Treatment of Cattle'. It made it an offence to beat, abuse or ill-treat 'any Horse, Mare, Gelding, Mule, Ass, Ox, Cow, Heifer, Steer, Sheep, or other Cattle'. Martin's Act – named after Richard Martin, the Irish MP who drafted it – was the world's first national animal welfare law.

A couple of years later, in 1824, at a meeting held in the unlikely location of Slaughters' Coffee House, London, Martin and others formed the Society for the

Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (later given 'Royal' status and known today as the RSPCA) to ensure implementation of the Act. They blazed a nineteenth-century institutional and legislative trail that was to be followed, at least to some degree, in several parts of Europe, as well as in Canada, the US and Russia. Colonial Bengal was no exception. In 1861, a British artist named Colesworthy Grant, who had long been resident in India, founded the Calcutta Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals (CSPCA); Lord Elgin, Viceroy of India, became its patron and laws were introduced to punish the ill-treatment of animals.

However, this book says that there were added dimensions to the movement in Bengal that went beyond a simple desire to prevent suffering – and that the wielding of sanctions there was frequently motivated as much by politics as protection. It makes the case, in short, that in India: 'Animal cruelty and protection was... more about legitimizing colonialism than about addressing the suffering of non-humans in the colony' (p. 5) and uses contemporary debates on humanitarianism as a lens to understand the nature of British colonialism in Bengal.

Samiparna Samanta begins by outlining the tensions that have been provoked in today's India by the Hindu nationalist government's clampdown on beef eating and cattle slaughter, and reminding us that, paradoxically, 'the country where almost 80 per cent of the population revere cows and refrain from eating beef, is also the world's second-largest beef exporter' (p. 3). The origins of this paradox and these often-violent clashes can, she suggests, be traced back to the colonial era – a time when British concerns about animal welfare, as well as notions of health and hygiene, coincided with rapid urbanization and an increase in the number of Calcutta's slaughterhouses, as well as religious and class-based Bengali deliberations about vegetarianism. Sitting, as Samanta says, at the 'intersection of three sets of scholarships: history of science/medicine, environmental history, and urban history' (p. 11) it is less a book about the animal welfare movement, and more one about the animal as an agent for the complexities and legacies of Empire.

Samanta structures the book around three main stories, looking at animals as diseased, eaten and over-worked. Chapter 1, which provides an historical context to the humanitarian movement in colonial India, outlines the complexities of attitudes to animals in pre-colonial times and into the nineteenth century, and then discusses the formation of the CSPCA, which was 'a conglomeration of several influential Hindu landlords, well-to-do Muslims and Christians' (p. 44) divided in their attitudes to animals: some were 'more

concerned with disciplining the lower orders' whilst others 'were vocal about *caring* for the animals' (p.47). Although the Society might have seemed to be an extension of the RSPCA, Samanta argues that closer scrutiny reveals colonial humanitarianism with an 'Orientalist tinge'.

Chapter 2 is likely to be of most interest to agricultural historians as it discusses colonial responses to outbreaks of rinderpest (often known as cattle plaque) in Bengal. The disease, which caused much consternation to the colonial government, did not only devastate cattle populations but also created (or exacerbated) complex fractures in society; there were differences of veterinary opinion for instance, not only amongst British vets but also between British and Bengali vets. Although local knowledge of cattle diseases was sought, it was also often downplayed and native remedies treated with suspicion in favour of a modern, 'scientific' understanding. The chapter also examines further dimensions to the politics of care, discussing growing unease amongst Bengali elites about the ways local *go-dagas* or cow doctors treated animals. The politics of diagnosis, Samanta argues, was 'often more about controlling human populations than animals' (p. 131).

The rinderpest epidemic had consequences that were far-reaching, not least in the way it created new anxieties about diseased animals entering the human food chain and about meat-eating itself. Chapter 3 looks at this issue in detail, revealing how slaughterhouses became foci of attention and tensions for competing groups in debates encompassing issues ranging from cruelty to public health and vegetarianism.

The last story, that of the burdened or over-worked animal, is the subject of chapter four. It discusses the introduction of legislation to protect draft animals from practices such as twisting exhausted bullocks' tails to urge them on, or yoking animals to heavy loads even if their necks were sore and wounded, and examines the ways that prosecutions tended to focus on the economically disadvantaged carters, rather than the middlemen or merchants who encouraged overloading.

The editing of this book has been careless, and there are frequent typographical slips ('This feat is prompted not much by profit motive than his love for animal' (p.58) for instance, as well as at least two factual errors: it refers (p. 34) to a British Cruelty Act of 1867 (it was 1876) and states that it 'categorically forbade experiments on dogs and cats' (it didn't). However, by focusing on discourses around animals in imperial India, this book exposes some of the complex and multi-layered tensions that existed within the societies of both the colonizer and the colonized. It also adds

to our understanding of the intricate politics that can surround outbreaks of disease in livestock.

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BEN BRADLEY and JODEY NURSE (eds), *Agriculture, food, and fuel markets in Canada, 1860s–1990s* (Special Issue of *Histoire sociale / Social History* vol. 54, no. 111, September 2021). 210 pp.

In their introduction to a special rural history edition of the Canadian periodical *Histoire sociale / Social History*, guest editors Jodey Nurse and Ben Bradley relate how food supply issues have become a major topic of public discussion during the Covid-19 pandemic. Empty or understocked grocery shelves, long line ups of transport trucks at borders, and even closed borders have created food access anxieties unfamiliar to most Canadians. This unease will likely increase in the months ahead as the Russian invasion of Ukraine has effectively cut off two major grain producing countries from western markets. Most Canadians produce little of what they consume and are reliant upon the agribusiness system to provide them with fresh and affordable food. Nurse and Bradley argue that we should question this system, and call attention to the harm it causes to the environment, its treatment of agricultural workers, the consolation of food distribution into the hands of multinational conglomerates, and the growing divide between rural producers and urban consumers. To bolster their case, they have marshalled an impressive collection of essays to examine the historical roots of Canadian agribusiness. The essays presented examine Canada's post-Confederation rural industries, including farming, logging, and fishing, from economic perspectives, but also from social angles, illustrating the varied influence of rural life in Canada's past, and how it was in turn affected by broader trends. This collection is a welcome contribution to scholarship that will be of interest to rural historians around the world.

Much of post-1945 rural scholarship in Canada has focused on agricultural markets and rural modernization. Several essays here build on this foundation, and further our understanding of rural modernity and its links to industrialization. James Murton provides a long overdue re-examination of Nova Scotia's thriving early twentieth century apple export market to Great Britain. Often hailed as an early success of industrialized farming, Murton details how the sector was still rooted in family subsistence, with orchard cultivation being only one strategy farm families pursued to remain solvent. Joshua MacFadyen similarly traces the persistence of an older forms of the rural economy, fire

wood harvesting, into the modern age. While the rise of industrialization is usually linked to burning coal, MacFadyen meticulously details how wood remained a vital fuel source for homes, and even locomotives, in Ontario's burgeoning cities. Considerable infrastructure, including railways, was designed for the shipment of wood from rural hinterlands, and its urban storage. Hayley Goodchild's contribution looks at the rise of cheese manufacturing in the Ontarian cities. While the processing a farm product, cheesemaking was essentially industrial labour, and was affected by the same class conflicts, but here it was between cheese factory managers, their workers and dairy farmers, with the former perpetually squabbling with the latter two over wages and prices.

While several essays examine rural modernization, others highlight how rural modernity often failed to live up to its promises and was met with resistance from producers. The centralized marketing of agricultural produce through state mandated marketing boards was hailed as a great triumph of the post-war agricultural order. Where once produce scarcity and variability were common for consumers, and unreliable returns standard for producers, the new order yielded a steady supply of quality produce for shoppers, and steady and reasonable returns for farmers. But many farmers nonetheless chafed against the marketing restriction imposed upon them, and the system often fell short of its promise of delivering quality produce to market. Bradley and Jan Hadlaw's co-authored contribution examines the practice of 'fruit legging' in post-war British Columbia. Many fruit producers revolted against the authority of the BC Fruit Board to dictate where and for how much they could sell their produce by selling directly to consumers via illicit roadside fruit stands at prices they determined themselves.

Their actions are indicative of wider shifts in that accompanied growing discontent with the post-war Keynesian consensus and the rise of neo-liberalism. Nurse explores a similar phenomenon in her article detailing the 'rotten egg scandal' that rocked the federal Canadian Egg Marketing Agency (CEMA) in 1974 when their egg storage system was so botched that many eggs went bad before reaching market. This triggered a fierce political row that eroded public faith in organized marketing during an era of recession and inflation. A research note by Caroline Durand expands on this growing divide between producers and consumers over the course of the twentieth century. This culminated in the 1970s when the Food Prices Review Board (FPRB), a federal consumer advocacy agency, became increasingly critical of

producers whom they believed were disadvantaging consumers with high costs. By century's end many farmers were opposed to state-controlled marketing, as Laura Larsen details in her exploration of the final years of the Canadian Wheat Board (CWB). Formed in the early 1940s, at the behest of western grain producers, the CWB was the crown jewel of organized marketing in Canada, but by the 1990s it found itself at the mercy of changing ideologies. Whereas many mid-century grain farmers were populist progressives, by century's end many were now ardent free market neo-liberals, who viewed the CWB as an obstacle to their economic freedom. This sparked a fierce debate between the CWB's defenders and detractors, with the latter framing the argument as a moral one between freedom and tyranny. Such positions eventually won out, and lead the government of Stephen Harper to dissolve the CWB in 2011.

Rural gender relations loom large in several essays. Nurse's examination of the 'rotten egg scandal' shows that it was bound up with the contemporary 'battle of the sexes', as CEMA's chief opponent was a woman, Beryl Plumtree, the head of the FPRB. Plumtree believed CEMA's policies penalized consumers, primarily suburban housewives, with high prices and dodgy quality. This gave a gendered slant to the issue, as did the fact that CEMA's chief defender, federal Agricultural Minister Eustace Whelan, was a man, and framed his pro-CEMA stance as standing up for the livelihood of the primarily male egg farmers. Rural gender tensions were not limited to the late twentieth century. Goodchild's essay discusses how cheese-making went from domestic production undertaken by farm wives to an industrial activity conducted by men. In the process it became viewed as scientific and professional, making it more appealing to the masculine mind. William Knight's essay further discusses how production was viewed as masculine, but consumption as a feminine. These attitudes affected federal efforts to entice women to purchase more fish for their families. Using government produced fish cookbooks and exhibition displays on fish cooking, the state sought to make women 'rational consumers' that could both strengthen Canada's economy and improve the health of their families by purchasing and preparing quality fish products. Racism and classism also affected this campaign, as the state wanted white, middle-class housewives to avoid serving the old staple of salted fish, now associated with the poor and marginalized racial groups, and even popular dishes like fish and chips, which they linked to the working classes.

This review only scratches the surface of this issues raised in this collection. The authors of these essays

remind us that no picture of Canada's past is complete unless rural history is given proper attention. Rural history is not peripheral to the Canadian story, it is at the heart of it. The thoroughly urban country that exists today grew out of the development of rural industries and exploitation of rural resources. Modern Canadians are still reliant upon rural producers, and how the agribusiness system that emerged over the last century affects rural producers should be at the forefront of public discussion. These essays represent a fine contribution to such a discussion, and will give scholars, students, and the general public much to contemplate.

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JONATHAN E. ROBINS, *Oil palm: A global history* (UNC Press, 2021). 432 pp. 20 illus. 3 maps. \$32.95.

Indonesia and Malaysia are currently the first and second-largest producers of palm oil in the world, respectively. Hence, you may be forgiven for assuming that much of the history of oil palm, or at least its meaningful commercial history, lies in the south-east Asian region. My own writings reflect this: in my book on palm oil and transboundary haze (*The haze problem in southeast Asia: Palm oil and patronage* [Routledge, 2015]), I only make brief mention of the how the four oil palms that gave birth to the Southeast Asian palm oil industry were brought over to Buitenzorg (now Bogor) Botanical Gardens in the Dutch East Indies (now Indonesia) from West Africa in 1848.

Oil palm: A global history begins in West Africa as well, but dedicates six entire chapters to the oil palm's journey across Africa and across the globe (through Europe and the Americas), before even beginning its south-east Asian story. It is divided into three sections, Part I, Africa and the Atlantic World, Part II, Oil Palms and Empire, and Part III, Expanding the Oil Palm Frontier.

Through Jonathan E. Robins's excellent storytelling and supplementary materials, we learn about oil palm's role in almost all major events in modern world history, including colonial mercantilism and decolonization, anti-slavery and women's rights movements, the deterioration of the whaling and tallow sectors, the modernization of the food processing and packaging industries, and the world wars. Seen through the author's eyes, palm oil is not a 'mere' commodity subject to the whims of the international market; it shaped the world as we know it today.

However, Robins refrains from overly romanticizing palm oil, and instead consciously takes the time to walk the reader through the logic of some of his most interesting conclusions. A particularly fascinating piece

of academic detective work involved debunking the rumour that palm oil was found buried in Egyptian pyramids. He explains how, with the term 'palm' being used as an identifier of such a broad array of plants, this has often resulted in the conflation of any mention of palm oil throughout time and space to mean oil from *Elaeis guineensis*. In ancient Egypt, what was used was more likely oil from date palms.

There is plenty in this book to discover, even for someone who may consider themselves a scholar of the commodity. For example, did you know there was such a thing as palm wine? Well, neither did I. I learned that one of the big hurdles to the commercialization of oil palm in the early days was the locals' taste for the sweetly intoxicating palm wine, which was obtained by cutting the entire palm down and 'milking' it. This was, of course, counter-productive in supporting a consistent supply of palm oil – an oil palm needs to mature for several years before regularly bearing fruit.

Nowadays, the world is seemingly divided into clearly drawn camps either for or against palm oil. Intentionally or not, Robins echoes this current reality in his historical analysis, painting a picture of a complicated commodity, one that is often loved and hated at the same time. For example, as an ingredient in food, he picks up excerpts from cookbooks and colonial records to show how one person may sing praises to an oil that 'smells of violets' while another expresses disgust at the reddish sheen that it leaves on fried foods. Robins also gives his take on how oil palm went from being marketed as an exotic cure-all to being labeled as a serious health hazard. However, as a good historical book should, the author refrains from adopting a judgmental voice, one way or another.

One striking observation I took away from this book was that a lot of the challenges related to the commodification of palm oil in the past are similar to those experienced today. In chapter 7, a sentence describing the situation in pre-independence Malaya jumped out: '[P]lanters could solve or abate nearly any problem with more land, more labour, more chemicals, and machines'. I would say that, today, we are still trying to do the same thing, rightly or not. Planters past and present are still trying to figure out the best ways to effectively mechanize the farming and processing of palm oil. Commercial plantations worldwide are still tweaking community- and labour-relations systems in attempts to find the perfect arrangement to decrease conflict and increase productivity. Palm oil also continues to fight a battle of perception: in the past, its African origins made people turn their noses up at palm oil, while today, environmental concerns give it a bad reputation.

Part III of this book brings us back to present times and alludes to future directions. Here, Southeast Asia unsurprisingly takes centre stage and the author flexes his ability not only to talk history, but also to handle contemporary matters. Several chapters are dedicated to the complicated and continuously developing land use processes that have shaped the sector in Indonesia and Malaysia. Robins also takes us full circle as he explores how current market trends point towards a revival of sorts of palm oil commercialization in places visited earlier in this book: West Africa and Latin America.

This book will appeal equally to scholars of palm oil and to those with a casual interest in the crop. It is an eye-opener for anyone who thinks south-east Asia 'made' palm oil into the world's most important vegetable oil. It also soberingly highlights the struggle, still ongoing today, of 'taming' the mighty oil palm to benefit humans. Robins shows us why it should really be no surprise that palm oil is such a divisive commodity today: even after centuries of trying, it has always been difficult to do palm oil 'right'.

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ANNELIESE ABBOTT, *Malabar Farm: Louis Bromfield, Friends of the Land, and the rise of sustainable agriculture* (Kent State University Press, 2021). xi + 251 pp. \$29.95.

The American novelist and farmer, Louis Bromfield (1896–1956), is currently proving a subject of interest to historians, on account of his agricultural endeavours rather than his literary successes. Close on the heels of Stephen Heyman's *The planter of modern life: Louis Bromfield and the seeds of a food revolution* (2020: see the *Review*, 68.2) comes Anneliese Abbott's *Malabar Farm*, which carries an endorsement from Heyman on its back cover. As the book's title and sub-title indicate, Abbott concentrates on the history of Bromfield's farm and the environmentalist projects with which it has been associated. Bromfield and his legacy dominate the story, but *Malabar Farm* is not primarily a biography of him. Unlike Heyman's book it describes in detail the estate's history since Bromfield's death.

Anneliese Abbott deals succinctly with Bromfield's life up to 1939, the year he purchased the land in Ohio which he named Malabar Farm. He was brought up on a farm in Ohio, served with the Red Cross during the First World War; became a successful novelist, lived in northern France and created a much-admired garden, and returned to America as the threat of another war increased. His memories of his family's farm inspired in him the thought that agriculture could provide an island of security in a world of turmoil. It was

winter when Bromfield first saw the land he decided to buy; only when the snow cleared did he realize the scale of the challenge he was taking on. Ohio in the late 1930s was suffering from serious soil erosion: in Richland County, where Malabar was located, most of the land had lost 25 to 75 per cent of its topsoil. Abbott describes the destructiveness of the North American pioneers' farming methods, pointing out that this had been a cause for concern since the time of Jefferson. George Perkins Marsh had warned in 1864 of the impoverished productiveness which must follow if farmers continued to exploit the soil; scientists such as Franklin King (1848–1911) and L. H. Bailey (1858–1954) emphasized that the soil was the greatest of all natural resources.

Abbott shows, however, that officialdom, in the person of the Bureau of Soils chief, Milton Whitney (1860–1927), considered soil fertility inexhaustible; this despite the warnings of one of his surveyors, H. H. Bennett (1881–1960). Bennett's fears were amply justified by the disaster of the Dust Bowl, and he became a leading figure in Friends of the Land (FoL), founded in 1940. FoL held its annual meeting the following year in Ohio, and Bromfield, who had already enjoyed success in restoring the denuded soil at Malabar, spoke at the gathering and invited the Friends to inspect his methods and their results. Bromfield also entered into an agreement for Malabar to become an official demonstration farm for the Soil Conservation Service.

Abbott traces, with a wealth of archival photographs, how Bromfield and his managers had by 1944 turned Malabar into a national showpiece and a centre for a variety of environmental projects. The pace of regeneration was remarkable, and in his autobiographical best-seller, *Pleasant Valley* (1945), Bromfield presented himself as a new kind of pioneer, dedicated to restoring the nation's farmland. This was the golden age of FoL, of Soil Conservation Special trains and 'farm facelift' days, as the possibility of post-war food shortages lent urgency to the drive for fertile soil.

But it was short-lived. By 1953 FoL membership had declined substantially and most of its earlier, charismatic leaders had retired. Bromfield had subsidized his projects from his personal wealth, but his later novels were less successful than his earlier ones and Malabar Farm struggled financially. The second half of Abbott's book tells the story of Malabar's history since Bromfield's death: how in 1957 the oil-based Noble Foundation enabled FoL to preserve the farm; how FoL's ambitious plans for dairy farming brought further financial problems, and how FoL itself was swallowed up by a conservation group called the Izaak Walton League.

Even the growth of the environmental movement, in response to Rachel Carson's *Silent Spring* (1962), had little effect on the Louis Bromfield Malabar Farm Foundation, which struggled on as a tourist museum and dairy farm during the 1960s. In 1972, Malabar's deeds were transferred to the State of Ohio for use as 'a site for ecological research and the development of sound conservation practices in agriculture' (p. 156).

Malabar's fortunes rose again following the 1970s energy crisis, which highlighted the vulnerability of an agriculture dependent on fossil fuels. Under the management of Jim Berry, the farm attracted increasing numbers of visitors as a State Park which demonstrated the success of Bromfield's conservation tillage methods. By 1990, the number of annual visitors was ten times what it had been during Bromfield's lifetime, and his 'ideas about working with nature to develop a permanent agricultural system were being seriously considered once again – under the new name of "sustainable agriculture"' (p. 173). 'Sustainable', not 'organic'. Although strongly influenced by Sir Albert Howard's ideas, and sharing the organic movement's mistrust of chemical sprays, and its interest in the connection between the state of the soil and human health, Bromfield was not averse to the tactical use of chemical fertilizers, regarding Jerome Rodale and his acolytes as 'organic absolutis[ts]' (p. 105). Balance, above all, was what mattered.

Anneliese Abbott's book is a tribute to the importance of historical studies. She describes how, as a student in Sustainable Plant Systems at Ohio State University, she discovered that the institution offered no classes on agricultural history. She also came to realize that agricultural history books published during the Cold War ignored the soil conservation movement. Thanks to a helpful librarian she discovered the Louis Bromfield Collection, which made her realize that methods she thought new had been practised and (for a while) influential, 70 years earlier. Bromfield's work has been rediscovered, and recognized as being of practical value to a world seriously in need of food production methods which increase soil fertility and encourage the abundance of nature's ecology.

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JACQUELINE A. IGNATOVA, *Contesting Africa's New Green Revolution: Biotechnology and philanthrocapitalist development in Ghana* (Bloomsbury, 2021). 216 pp. £85.

In 2006, two major American philanthropic institutions, the Rockefeller Foundation and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, launched a multi-mil-

lion-dollar investment project to improve agriculture in Africa. The project, named Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa, attracted various other donors over the years and is ongoing today. The initiative has received much criticism, for not reaching its set goals and for promoting forms of production that expose African farmers to volatile markets and stringent credit suppliers.

The book by Jacqueline Ignatova provides a well-argued explanation of how foreign donor investments for a Green Revolution in African agriculture can lead to such effects. The book is not restricted to the initiative of the Rockefeller and Gates foundations. Ignatova's analysis covers a variety of projects supported by foreign donors and national governments. The chosen focus and the way Ignatova elaborates this in the various chapters works well overall. The book's central aim is to contest the notion that recent donor initiatives are 'new, green, a revolution or pro-poor, the latter implied by its designation that it is for Africa'.

In the introduction Ignatova explains that Green Revolution initiatives operate through a set of three mechanisms. By reducing complex agricultural problems to a restricted set of technical and managerial issues, the knowledge of external experts who perceive 'farming as a business' is given prominence over local forms of knowledge that approach 'farming as a way of life'. Secondly, a combination of 'philanthrocapital and biocapital' investments result in a preference for commercialized seed distribution. A third mechanism, implied by the former two, is that agricultural improvements overly rely on foreign, primarily US- and Europe-based, actors and disregard African people's expertise and autonomy in deciding their agricultural futures. These arguments will sound familiar to readers conversant with the literature on the Green Revolution in Asia. In the six chapters that follow, Ignatova elaborates what makes the recent initiatives in Africa distinctive.

Although the Green Revolution in Asia in the 1960s and '70s also focused on commercial inputs (mostly seeds and mineral fertilizers) much of the implementation and additional support to farmers was arranged by governments. Structural economic reforms in the 1980s and 1990s stripped the protective layer of government support to farmers and turned governments into initiators of more market-based arrangements. This, Ignatova explains in chapter 1, created an 'enabling environment' for private-sector initiatives that, as she argues in chapter 2, opened the door for 'philanthrocapitalism, a defining feature of the new Green Revolution'. Philanthropic agencies not only

provide the money to cover the costs of agricultural inputs but also set the terms of how agriculture must change towards more market-oriented production.

The commercialization of African agriculture, Ignatova explains in chapters 3 and 4, is particularly focused on the development of genetically modified (GM) seeds. For Ghana the examples are GM varieties of cowpea and rice. The reader is well informed about the new research cooperation and changes in the legislation of plant breeding that were set up in Ghana to develop these GM varieties, both still waiting for official release. Ignatova uses these examples to show how the patenting system turns GM seeds into 'biocapital' and that the organizations involved create a 'hype' around future benefits of GM seeds.

In chapters 5 and 6 the effects on the research system are elaborated. A substantial part of the donor money is spent on scholarships to train African scientists, mostly at US universities, who then become employed in the various Green Revolution initiatives. Ignatova provides an example of a training workshop in which Ghanaian experts prepare farmers for commercial Mango production, showing how such workshops typically attract young male farmers, unrepresentative for the larger, often female, farming population. These skewed effects and other shortcomings of the new Green Revolution are not unnoticed in Ghana and Ignatova provides a very interesting account, in chapter 6, of the criticism on these initiatives among Ghanaian researchers, policymakers and activists.

As mentioned, the overall argument of the book is developed effectively and for that reason the book is recommendable for a broad audience of students and scholars. The choice of examples and cases is not always convincing and sometimes confusing. The philanthrocapitalism argument in chapter 2, for example, is illustrated with the promotion of soybean production, a crop hardly grown in Ghana before the 1960s. The promotion was mainly supported, Ignatova explains, by USAID and UNICEF, organizations one would not immediately think of as philanthropic.

Moreover, the material collected in Ghana is interesting and adequately used but sparse. Most of the text is devoted to the overall argument, occasionally repetitive and using a wide variety of sources. Again, it is well done but readers interested in recent changes in agriculture in Ghana will have a hard time developing a picture. Ghanaian farmers appear in the book very sporadically. There is an interesting interlude, between chapters 5 and 6, where Ignatova presents an argument about 'mixing' the benefits of donor-supported innovations and traditional practices. In the conclusion she refers to mixing as 'critical for those activists and

development planners alike that, for different reasons, tend to downplay the independence and pragmatism of African farmers'. Unfortunately, this important point is not sustained by empirical accounts of Ghanaian farmers' practices. That in itself does not reduce the

strength of the book, convincingly arguing that recent Green Revolution initiatives for Africa serve purposes outside of Africa.

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