

# RURAL HISTORY TODAY

Rural History Today is published by the British Agricultural History Society

SHEEP MUST BE  
DRIVEN CLEAR OF  
TARGET AREA  
BEFORE  
FIRING COMMENCES

## VCH and agricultural history

As readers of RHT will probably know, the VCH is a veritable store of information concerning the history of English agriculture, although it can sometimes be hard to locate! The original intention of the VCH was to have a set of volumes for each county (including Wales, dropped in the 1920s) which would include general volumes on the history of the county, and topographical studies of each parish within the county. Where a county has been finished, this has indeed taken place.



The original scheme with its emphasis on general material is no longer followed, and most of the work currently undertaken is topographical. Even so, the VCH should not be underestimated as a source for agricultural historians. At least one general volume was published for every English county with the exception of Northumberland, Westmorland and the West Riding of Yorkshire. It is always worth consulting the first two volumes in the series, where you are likely to come across some relevant material. Thus volume 2 in the VCH Cambridgeshire series, published in 1948, includes several short sections on agriculture by H.C. Darby, while volume 2 in the Leicestershire series (1954) includes 120 pages of agricultural history by Rodney Hilton and Joan Thirsk.

For some counties rather more extended treatment was published, especially when the general volumes extended beyond the first two in the series. Particularly informative, and still very useful, are Wiltshire volume 4 (1959), with extended contributions by Eric Kerridge and F.M.L. Thompson among others, and Shropshire volume 4 (1989) which is devoted entirely to agriculture. The authors included Peter Edwards

and Richard Perren.

In the topographical volumes, each parish has a section on economic history, which is likely to include agriculture, market gardening and nurseries. These will be most useful the more up to date the volume. In preparing these sections, county staff are encouraged to research any general comments in directories, and to look in family and estate records in the county record office or The National Archives. Wills and probate inventories are used for the early modern period, the enclosure map for the eighteenth century, or a nineteenth century tithe award. The agricultural returns are used to provide information about crops and farms in the later 19th and 20th centuries.

Depending on the interest and knowledge of the county staff member writing the entry, it may range widely in terms of length and breadth, but as a starting point for any parish, particularly as it will be accompanied by the legendary VCH footnote (one note for each statement), it should provide a good grounding for coming to terms with the agricultural history of any particular parish. Nowadays you can also read the VCH on the web. For researchers without access to a major library, it is always worth searching for a particular parish on the British History Online website which now has a full text search facility at [www.british-history.ac.uk/search](http://www.british-history.ac.uk/search). More than 100 volumes are already available on this site and more are added regularly. It is now policy to add new volumes two years after they are published by Boydell & Brewer. Parishes which have been researched but not yet published can also be read in draft on the web. See, for example, Mark Page's work on the Oxfordshire village of Rotherfield Peppard at [www.victoriacountyhistory.ac.uk/Oxfordshire](http://www.victoriacountyhistory.ac.uk/Oxfordshire).

Finally, the VCH has a new project currently ongoing with funding from the Heritage Lottery Fund, which involves engaging with volunteers on projects that are likely to be published in paperbacks and on the web rather than in the better known red books. On Exmoor the work of volunteers will be published in 2009 in a book about the settlement and development of Exmoor.

John Beckett

Issue 14 • January 2008

Above – Sheep warning on the SENTA Training Area on the Mynyddu Epynt plateau, Mid-Wales. See page 2.

John Beckett is currently Director of the VCH and Professor of English Regional History at the University of Nottingham as well as a member of the Executive Committee of BAHS

### ALSO IN this issue

- Work in progress – page 2
- New publications – page 4
- Museum news – page 5
- Kindred bodies – page 6
- Future conferences – page 7



*Eleven AHRC-funded projects under the Landscape and Environment Initiative are now under way, several of which are of interest to readers of the Newsletter. The preliminary findings of three of them are described here.*

## Militarized Landscapes in twentieth-century Britain, France and the United States

*Peter Coates is professor of American and environmental history at the University of Bristol. His most recent books are Salmon (2006) and American Perceptions of Immigrant and Invasive Species (2007).*

**Tanks and soldiers in the countryside? Even before the first bomb is dropped on enemy territory, preparation for warfare reshapes landscapes and environments at home. Yet this form of military mobilization remains under-researched, not least as an aspect of rural history.**

The Ministry of Defence is one of the UK's largest landowners, overseeing approximately one percent of national territory, over half of which can be characterized as 'rural.' This three-year project, at the University of Bristol, seeks to rectify this neglect through a comparative analysis of the emergence, meaning and management of militarized landscapes. We are particularly interested in military lands as reservoirs of biodiversity often superior in 'green' value to surrounding non-militarized landscapes subject to intensive agriculture and other customary forms of encroachment (including mass recreation). The status of Defence Estate lands as places emptied of human residents and civilian activities is another central ingredient. The focus on British, French and American histories brings out both the common ground and national divergences, providing a vital historical perspective on highly topical questions of military power (defending nation) and environmental responsibility (defending nature).

Peter Coates, the project leader, is looking specifically at the conversion of military sites into wildlife refuges in Colorado. Tim Cole, the co-investigator, is focusing on the relationship between the social history of human displacement from British militarized lands and the environmental history of these sites (is human loss non-human nature's gain?). Chris Pearson, the project researcher, is responsible for covering France, and Marianna Dudley, the project student, is working on a doctoral thesis entitled "'Greening" the Ministry of Defence: An Environmental History of the Defence Estates in Post-War Britain.' Two external partners are assisting the project: the Defence Estates' Environmental Support Team (based at Westdown Camp at Tilshead, Wiltshire) and Icon Films, a Bristol-based documentary film making company.

Dudley's research is most directly relevant to British rural history. That no environmental history of the UK's Defence Estates has been written to date is an important gap in the

scholarship on landscape and environment in view of these lands' ecological significance and the MoD's development of conservation policies, publicized through its magazine, *Sanctuary*, since 1976.

This investigation of 'khaki conservation' is grounded in case studies of five sites in southwestern England and Wales. The first is the Castlemartin gunnery range within the Pembrokeshire Coast National Park (first used by the army in 1939). The second Welsh site is the Sennybridge Training Area (SENTA), situated on the Mynydd Epynt, a moorland plateau north of Brecon Beacons National Park, whose dispersed community was displaced during the Second World War. The third site is Lulworth Range in Dorset, where the renowned 'ghost' village of Tyneham, subject of Patrick Wright's acclaimed book, *The Village that Died for England*, was requisitioned in 1943. Dartmoor, our fourth site, was selected as Britain's first artillery training ground in 1875. Our final British site is the Salisbury Plain Training Area, covering a ninth of Wiltshire, where the War Office first purchased land in 1897. This militarized landscape encompasses the largest remaining area of chalk grassland in northwest Europe and all five sites contain a wealth of natural assets, including various designated sites of special scientific interest (SSSI).

So far we have launched most aspects of the project. We visited SENTA (on a non-firing weekend!) in the early summer and followed this with an autumn visit to Salisbury Plain's 'deserted' village of Imber (requisitioned in 1943). In addition, Pearson has already completed two research trips to France.

Planning for a project conference in September 2008 is underway and there has been an enthusiastic response from California to China to our call for papers. We have also submitted a proposal for a documentary to our film company project partner. The subject is the recent re-introduction of the great bustard - on Salisbury Plain. Extinct since the 1830s, it was a victim of enclosure, agricultural mechanization, global cooling and over-hunting.

For further information about the project, visit [www.bristol.ac.uk/history/militarylandscapes](http://www.bristol.ac.uk/history/militarylandscapes)

*Peter Coates*



## Contested Common Land: environmental governance, law and sustainable land management c.1600–2006

The project focuses on the local management of common land since the 16th century, tracing governance mechanisms in the light of the changing legal context and changing perceptions of the value placed on common land.

Historically, commons yielded an array of vital resources, not only grazing but also peat and turf, a range of species of vegetation (heather, rushes, bracken, for example), game and minerals. Despite the enclosure of thousands of hectares of common land in the 18th and 19th centuries, surviving commons remain important as an agricultural resource (especially in the uplands) but they are also now valued as a recreational resource and as the location of some of the nation's most ecologically sensitive environments and landscapes.

Large areas of common land fall within national parks or designated Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty and considerable sections are subject to more specific protective instruments, as SSSIs, areas of ESA (Environmentally Sensitive Area) status, or scheduled ancient monuments. Contemporary policy debates focus on sustainable management: stocking levels (both over-grazing and under-grazing) pose threats to ecological and landscape character, while recreational use can cause problems such as footpath erosion. The diversity of 'stakeholders' in common land – and the potential for tension between their aims – makes common land an excellent laboratory in which to study the interplay between cultural perceptions of landscape and environmental change.

The legal context of the management of common land at local level has undergone profound change since 1600. From the later medieval period, the exercise of common rights was governed by the byelaws and orders made by manor courts, so that most commons were subject to a body of local customary law regulating grazing, peat-digging and other forms of exploitation. The collapse of effective governance by manor courts in the 18th or 19th centuries (the timing varied from place to place) led to a period of drift, sometimes bordering on anarchy. One of the main aims of the project is to explore local attempts to manage common land in the 19th and 20th centuries, after the failure of manorial control. A third distinct phase was ushered in by the Commons Registration Act of 1965, which required those with rights in common land to register their interests but did not tackle questions of governance. It is generally agreed that the 1965 Act confused an already creaking system, not least by assuming that grazing rights would be registered numerically, even where rights had been 'without number', that is governed by the traditional rule of levancy and couchancy. The



Commons Act 2006 has introduced a new legal framework for the governance of common land, aimed at improving environmental governance and the protection of both biodiversity and landscape value. The interplay between this complex legal history and the attempts to manage common land at the local level forms the central theme of the project.

That theme is being explored by focusing on four case studies to illustrate the changing patterns of land use, differing management principles and regulatory mechanisms applied to common land from c.1600 to the modern day. The case studies have been chosen to embrace a diversity of types of common land with contrasting histories. They are: Eskdale common, Cumbria, a large unstinted common in the heart of the Lake District fells; a group of commons surrounding Ingleborough in North Yorkshire, where there is a long history of stinting on Pennine moorland; Cwmdeuddwr common lands surrounding the Elan Valley in Powys, in the uplands of central Wales; and a group of lowland commons in the Brancaster area of north Norfolk, including both coastal salt marsh and inland commons.

The research will marry archival evidence gained through historical enquiry with qualitative data generated by semi-structured interviews with stakeholders in the four case study areas. Commoners, land managers, voluntary groups and the public agencies responsible for the governance of common land will also be involved in the project through participation in seminars for stakeholders to be held in each case study area in the concluding phase of the research project.

Synopses of the historical data gathered during the project will be posted on the project website (currently under construction) at <http://commons.ncl.ac.uk/>

Angus Winchester

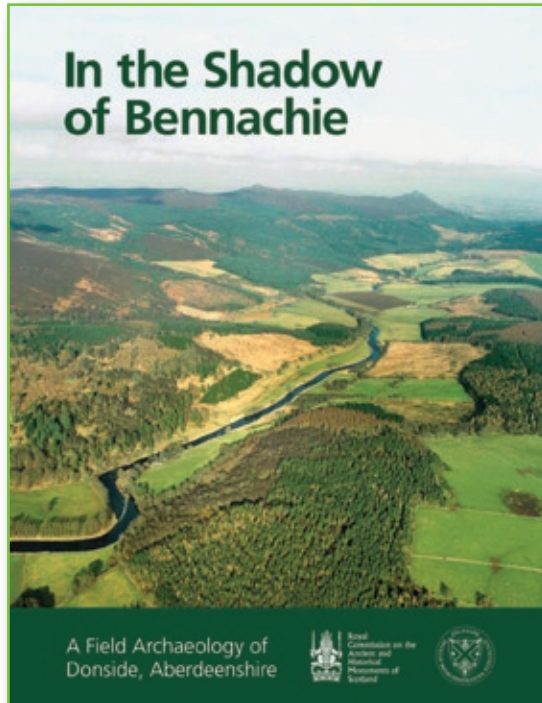
*Above: Common land in the Pennines: the commons of Blea Moor, Littledale and Winterscales Pasture (on the slopes of Whernside) from the summit of Ingleborough common.*

*This three-year project, funded as part of the Landscape and Environment Programme of the Arts and Humanities Research Council, began in February 2007. It takes an interdisciplinary approach, seeking to provide an historical perspective to contemporary debates surrounding the management of common land in England and Wales. The Principal Investigator is an environmental lawyer, Professor Chris Rodgers of Newcastle Law School; the historical research is being undertaken at Lancaster University by Dr Angus Winchester, with Dr Eleanor Straughton as Research Associate.*

**MORE ...**  
*The third AHRC report is on the back page*

## NEW PUBLICATIONS

### In the shadow of Bennachie: a field archaeology of Donside, Aberdeenshire



**Aberdeenshire lies beyond the Mounth, the mountain rim that bars the route northwards from the eastern lowlands of Angus. Riven with paths and passes, this mountain barrier is by no means impenetrable, but access is seldom easy. In effect, to cross the Mounth into the North-east is to enter into another land, a land with its own deeply etched sense of identity which not only permeates its people today, but also its past.**

Donside lies at the core of this land, sandwiched between the rugged highlands of Deeside and the windswept Buchan plain. And Bennachie, is a distinctive landmark that dominates the landscape for miles around. The land appears rich and lush today, but this is testimony to the generations who have laboured to clear the stones that are its most reliable perennial crop. Indeed it is from these very stones that the ancient identity of the North-east is built, manifesting an individuality within the wider trends in Scottish history.

In the Shadow of Bennachie explores this theme through the field archaeology, tracing it through a remarkable range of ancient sites,

from the unique Early Bronze Age recumbent stone circles, to spectacular Iron Age forts and Pictish carvings. But the field archaeology is much more than these overt and striking monuments, and this study embraces the lesser structures from prehistoric hut-circles to the huge post-medieval expansion of settlement. It uses over forty-five maps and numerous plans and photographs to present and explore the history of human settlement and what is known of the exploitation of its environment. Almost half of the text focuses on the evolution of the landscape from the medieval period to the present day, concentrating on the transformation that took place in the 18th and 19th centuries. For example, the ruins of crofts and small farms that litter the upper reaches of so many glens are set in context, a strand of north-eastern individuality in a process of change that was visited upon every district of Scotland. Here was the solution of north-eastern landowners to secure the labour force at the very end of the 18th century into the beginning of the 19th century. These holdings created a new class of crofter who held their land directly from the landowner, not only tying them to the estates, but also allowing the landowners to invest in the improvement of former common pasture at little direct outlay.

The volume does not seek to synthesise all the potential information bound up in archives and museum collections, and it is not conceived as a printed gazetteer, the traditional fare of county inventories. It sets out to provide a commentary on the field archaeology and the landscape, and references the reader back into the records held in the archive of the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland *via* CANMORE at [www.rcahms.gov.uk](http://www.rcahms.gov.uk). The preparation of the volume has been long in gestation, but its publication ushers in the centenary of the RCAHMS, which was established to record the ancient monuments of Scotland on 7th February 1908.

*Published by the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Scotland and the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland, price £30 + p&p*

*This handsome fully illustrated volume is a model of how a total field archaeological survey should be carried out and published, covering as it does all periods from the Palaeolithic to the Second World War.*



## MUSEUM NEWS

### New buildings and a gallery

The Weald and Downland Open Air Museum is as busy in the winter as in the summer.

The construction of a new gallery for displaying some of the Museum's large collection of vehicles and implements is under way and should be open by next season. Buildings to house a cattle and gipsy wagon as well as a van are also being built.

The recently restored Marshalls of Gainsborough threshing drum built in 1862 along with the living van and elevator which together with a traction engine made up the threshing train will also be displayed in the eighteenth century hay barn currently being re-erected.

### 1820s landscape recreation

A new attraction at **Beamish** (County Durham) is the recreated 1820s landscape, thank to funding from County Durham Environmental Trust (CDENT).



### A Small World exhibition

A temporary exhibition at **MERL (The Museum of English Rural Life, University of Reading)** which will appeal to young and old alike is entitled **A Small World: scale models and miniatures from the MERL collections** and runs from 6th November to 2nd March 2008.

Small scale models are always appealing and the exhibition includes a model gypsy caravan, a steam engine and threshing machine, a 1950s Tri-ang toy tractor (*pictured above*) and a Garrard plaster model of a short-horn bull of about 1800. A browse through the exhibition is more than a nostalgic trip down memory lane. It is also an education as the models illustrate the evolution of styles and technologies and some are historically significant in their own right.

The editor welcomes news from museums of interest to rural historians.

Details to:  
scwmartins@  
hotmail.com

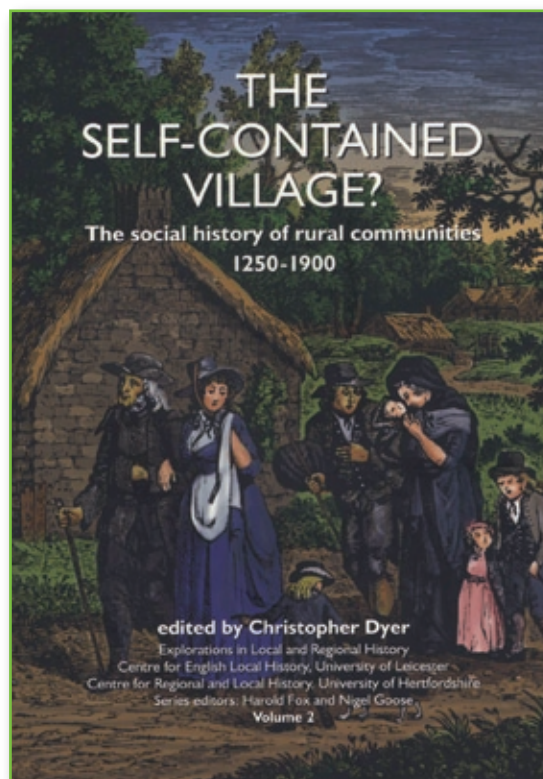
## The self-contained village: The social history of rural communities

*Christopher Dyer (ed).*  
*University of Hertfordshire Press 2007.*

This is the second volume in a new series of mid-length monographs of fresh and unusual subjects within local and regional history published under the auspices of the Centre of English Local History, University of Leicester and the Centre of Regional and Local, University of Hertfordshire.

It considers the question of whether there ever was such a thing as a self-contained village and essays cover subjects such as demography, migration, agriculture, inheritance, welfare, politics, employment, industry and markets with contributions by David Brown, Henry French, Steve Hindle, Jane Whittle, Ian Whyte and Christopher Dyer.

Available at the very reasonable £15.99 (including p&p) from University of Hertfordshire Press, Learning and Information services, University of Hertfordshire, College Lane, Hatfield, AL10 9AB.



### NEW PUBLICATIONS

The editor always welcomes details of relevant publications to be included in this section.

Details to:  
scwmartins@  
hotmail.com

## KINDRED BODIES

### Local History Societies

**The article in Issue 13 of RHT about Crackenthorpe's farming notebooks which, until the work of Paul Brassley and Richard Hoyle had been thought to be those of Joseph Ellis of Thriplow, prompted Shirley Wittering of the Thriplow Society to write to the editor about the work of the Society and its foundation.**

Running a local history society, particularly in a rural location can be a lonely business, yet it is from groups such as these that the raw material of much rural research is built.

Following our short article on the Newton History Society (Issue 13), the editor would like to receive short articles (preferably with a web address for further information) on other local history groups.

On the night of 15th and morning of 16th October 1987 a severe gale blew through a swathe of south eastern England and East Anglia, wreaking havoc to property and uprooting over 15 million trees. As it passed over the small village of Thriplow (pop. 480), eight miles south of Cambridge, it lifted the roof of a barn and let it down six inches from where it had been. This barn belonging to Bacon's Manor had been used as a museum housing rural bygones and was open to the public every Daffodil Weekend, a festival to which thousands of visitors come from far and wide. The gale had however done more damage than was at first apparent, for the top of the walls which were made of clay-bat or clay lump, a sort of brick made of puddled chalk and straw, were now open to the rain and the walls began to cave outwards. The owner felt that it was no longer safe to open the barn to the public. A notice was placed on the door of the Post Office inviting people who had loaned objects to the museum to reclaim them; the rest were sold.

The Parish Council were worried by the sudden loss of the museum and a committee was formed which led, in 1992 to the foundation of the Thriplow Society. Its remit was to promote interest in local history, the

environment and the conservation of the Thriplow region. The Parish Council asked the Society to take over the care of the village Smithy which stood on the village Green and the beginnings of a collection of agricultural tools relevant to the area was formed.

A programme of talks, outings, and socials was put together and editors found to produce three Journals a year free to members. One of the first speakers was Mike Petty who had founded the Cambridgeshire Collection at the Central Library, a wonderful repository of local information. He spoke of the village chronicles that had been written by various villages using the card indexes he had made from the *Cambridge Chronicle* and other old newspapers. Soon a Thriplow Chronicle was under way; this led to other documents being perused in the Record Office in Cambridge. The Society has flourished, we have 80 family members out of 150 households. They pay £6 a year for six talks, outings and socials as well as the three Journals a year. We open the Smithy at Daffodil Weekend and a blacksmith hammers horseshoes and wrought iron items; the Society has also put on exhibitions to celebrate VE day, the Millennium and the Archaeology of the village.

Work by individual members has established much about the history of the area from prehistoric times, through the medieval period of open-field husbandry to the twentieth century. The papers of the Ellis family together with the extensive archives held by the Cambridge colleges and the University Library who hold the Ely diocesan records – both bodies who never throw anything away – form a treasure trove of history just waiting to be mined for their riches.

*Shirley Wittering*

*Bacons Manor with the derelict barn after the gale of 1987.*





# CONFERENCE NOTICEBOARD

## BAHS Spring Conference

**Monday 31 March – Wednesday 2 April 2008**  
**University of Nottingham.**

Papers will cover topics from nineteenth century oxen to medieval zoo-archaeology, from early pioneers in organic farming to the rural history of modern Spain. There will be a New Researchers' session and a field trip to Sherwood Forest to look at the ancient and modern management of woodland. Speakers will include Professor Ted Collins, Professor Juan Pan-Montojo, Professor John Beckett, Dr Elizabeth Griffiths and Dr Umberto Albarella.

Full details of the programme and registration forms will be available on the Society's web site ([www.bahs.org.uk/agevent.htm](http://www.bahs.org.uk/agevent.htm)) from early 2008.

Registered post-graduate students in any aspect of rural history who would like to attend are eligible for bursaries to cover the costs of the stay, and should apply to Dr John Broad by email ([j.broad@londonmet.ac.uk](mailto:j.broad@londonmet.ac.uk)) with details of their research areas and a supporting letter from their supervisor.

## Deserted Villages Revisited

**Saturday 21 June and Sunday 22 June 2008**  
**Centre for English Local History, University of Leicester, in collaboration with the Medieval Settlement Research Group.**

A weekend conference will be held to mark the 60th anniversary of the gathering in Leicestershire of Hoskins, Beresford, Postan, Steensberg to look at DMV sites, in June 1948.

The purpose is to recall to everyone that the study of DMVs is an interesting subject, as a way of learning about, not just social and economic changes in the 15th century, which attracted the original group of scholars, but also the variety of rural settlements (including farmsteads and hamlets) which experienced shrinkage and desertion. The speakers will be concerned with the whole process of rural depopulation, which continued from the later middle ages into the 19th century.

We hope that this gathering will signal that DMV studies have quietly been yielding many novelties in recent years, and that new research agendas are unfolding as a result of this work.

The speakers (in order of their place in the programme) are Chris Taylor, Stuart Wrathmell, Chris Dyer, Richard Jones, David Hinton, Sally Smith, John Broad, Tom Williamson, Bob Silvester. An excursion will be guided by Paul Everson and Graham Brown.

For more details and an application form contact C. Dyer, Centre for English Local History, University of Leicester, 5, Salisbury Road, Leicester LE1 7QR. E-mail [cd50@le.ac.uk](mailto:cd50@le.ac.uk)

## CALL FOR PAPERS

### Land, Landscape and Environment, 1500–1750

**Monday 14 July to Wednesday 16 July**  
**Early Modern Research Centre, University of Reading**

Current debates over the environment – and in particular over the exploitation or management of natural resources – find their origin in early modern discourses of mastery and stewardship. Whilst a pervasive argument saw it as man's responsibility to exploit the Earth, to what extent were those who made their living from the countryside, and those who wrote about it, ambivalent about landscape change in the name of progress and improvement? How far was land, landscape and environment the subject of struggles between those who were the subjects of rural capitalism and those who lived off its profits at first or second-hand? How did representations of land and environment develop in this period? And what does the recent turn towards 'green politics' suggest about the

usefulness of twenty-first century political imperatives for an interpretation of the early modern past?

Papers are invited in the following areas: plantation and colonisation as civilising progress; agrarian capitalism and sustainable agriculture in theory and in practice and consequences; law, property, rights and tenure; husbandry and husbandry manuals; the country house and its landscapes; horticulture and gardens; rivers; writing the land; artistic representations of the landscape; cartography, maps and signs; the country and city; parks; urban pastoral; travel, travel writing, walking tours and sight-seeing.

Proposals (max. 300 words) for 30 minute papers and a brief CV should be sent via e-mail attachment by **1st February 2008** to Dr Adam Smyth, School of English and American Literature, University of Reading, [a.smyth@reading.ac.uk](mailto:a.smyth@reading.ac.uk)

*Dr Briony McDonagh describes the work based at the University of Hertfordshire which was awarded a Research Grant under the AHRC's Landscape and Environment Research Programme.*

### A note from the editor

*Rural History Today* is published by the British Agricultural History Society. The editor will be pleased to receive short articles, press releases, notes and queries for publication.

Articles for the next issue should be sent by 30 November 2007 to Susanna Wade Martins, The Longhouse, Eastgate Street, North Elmham, Dereham, Norfolk NR20 5HD or preferably by email [scwmartins@hotmail.com](mailto:scwmartins@hotmail.com)

Membership of the BAHS is open to all who support its aim of promoting the study of agricultural history and the history of rural economy and society. Membership enquiries should be directed to the Treasurer, BAHS, c/o Dept. of History, University of Exeter, Amory Building, Rennes Drive, Exeter EX4 4RJ.

Enquiries about other aspects of the Society's work should be directed to the Secretary, Dr John Broad, Dept. Humanities, Arts and Languages, London Metropolitan University, 166-220 Holloway Road, London, N7 8DB  
Tel: 020 7753 5020  
Fax: 020 7753 3159  
[j.broad@londonmet.ac.uk](mailto:j.broad@londonmet.ac.uk)

## Changing Landscapes, Changing Environments: enclosure and culture in Northamptonshire, 1700-1900

**This interdisciplinary project draws together historians, historical geographers and art historians from the Universities of Hertfordshire and Lincoln in order to examine the role played by parliamentary enclosure in the long-term evolution of the English landscape.**

Between 1750 and 1836, over 5000 Acts of Parliament were passed, transferring the ownership of previously open fields, commons and wastes into private hands. A great deal of scholarly ink has been spilt debating the consequences of enclosure's severe rationalisation of the landscape for contemporaries, as well as its impact on agricultural productivity, land-holding structures and the economic well-being of the poor. Yet one aspect of the problem – crucial to any historical assessment of enclosure – remains untouched: its long-term impact. At present, parliamentary enclosure is frequently assessed in isolation, and its consequences sought within a time-frame encompassing perhaps ten years. However if the effects were as severe as some have stated – one scholar recently calculated that an average of 49% of those with access to common rights in Northamptonshire were dispossessed at enclosure – the history of these communities must have been affected for several generations.

Focusing on the county of Northamptonshire – where levels of parliamentary enclosure were particular high – the project seeks to understand how communities traumatised by the experience of enclosure healed themselves in the decades and centuries that followed. To this end, the project approaches the Northamptonshire landscape from four distinct but overlapping thematic perspectives: historical, literary, architectural and aesthetic. The project investigates both aristocratic and popular reactions to agricultural change, as well as examines artistic and literary representations of the landscape during and after enclosure, drawing attention to the work of

regional artists such as George Clarke of Scaldwell (Northamptonshire) as well as to more well-known commentators on enclosure like the poet John Clare of Helpstone (Northamptonshire, now Cambridgeshire).

The three-year project got underway in the summer of 2007 and research to date has centred on the impact of parliamentary enclosure on aristocratic and estate landscapes, as well as on the place of the church in these newly enclosed and rationalised landscapes. In early October, the project team put on their walking boots and fleeces for an informative (if also rather wet) field trip to Northamptonshire. The day began in West Haddon, where in 1765 opposition to enclosure manifested itself in a riot organised under the guise of a football match. The team then ventured onto the Althorp estate to see the model cottages and estate church built in the late 1840s and 1850s by the Spencer family, before driving south towards Stoke Bruerne and Shutlanger. These two hamlets were the last in the south of the county to be enclosed under Parliamentary Act, and the site of one of the final enclosure riots in England in 1841. In Deanshanger parish on the Northamptonshire-Buckinghamshire border the team compared the field patterns around the hamlet of Passenham, enclosed by the lord of the manor in the 1620s, with those around Deanshanger, an open village without a resident landlord which was enclosed under a Parliamentary Act of 1772. The day ended in neighbouring Wicken, where the local landowner and amateur architect Thomas Prowse enclosed the open fields in 1757 without the need for an Act of Parliament, at the same time as rebuilding the church and extending his country house.

Forthcoming events include a day conference on landscape and enclosure to be held at Rewley House in Oxford on Saturday 17th May 2008 and a major conference planned for winter 2008. For more information about these events or any aspect of the research, check out the project website at [www.landscapeandenclosure.com](http://www.landscapeandenclosure.com) or email the team at [info@landscapeandenclosure.com](mailto:info@landscapeandenclosure.com)  
*Briony McDonagh*



*Estate cottages at Great Brington, built by E. Blore for the Spencer family in c.1848.  
Photograph B. McDonagh*