

scholars have tended to view it as in terminal decline long before then. But more up-to-date entertainments featured alongside the traditional ones. On one occasion ‘the Kinges Players’, apparently visiting Glamorgan under the patronage of the Earl of Pembroke, had twenty shillings from Sir Thomas.

Dr Bowen has edited a bizarrely spelt text with care and every consideration for the reader. He provides a serviceable glossary of many (but not quite all) of the obscure terms that occur. Perhaps ‘vellice’ > fellies, the outer rim of a wheel, and ‘cutting’, castrating animals, should have been listed. I feel sure that ‘ordinary’ was a public dinner, not as explained on p. 222. More interesting are the words ‘beat’ and ‘beater’ which appear several times in the accounts. When understood in conjunction with ‘coapsinge’ and ‘trenchinge’, it is clear that some serious land reclamation, or at least land improvement, was under way in the winter of 1636 on Mynydd Cobb (part of the demesne, the modern Maesiward farm) in the manor of Tal-y-fan, adjoining Llantrithyd.

Family and Society in Early Stuart Glamorgan casts welcome light on the life of one of the substantial landed gentry. As a source, Sir Thomas Aubrey’s accounts are detailed, and not without problems of interpretation; their overriding quality is their uniqueness in the Welsh context. Lloyd Bowen has done a service to scholarship by publishing them in this fine edition.

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Paul Brassley, Jeremy Burchardt and Lynne Thompson (eds), *The English Countryside Between the Wars: Regeneration or Decline?* Woodbridge, Boydell Press, 2006. 280pp. £55 hb. 184383264X

It is only relatively recently that historians have begun to turn their attention to the social and cultural history of rural England in the inter-war period, and much of this pioneering work, including that of Moore-Colyer, Morgan, Miller, Burchardt and Grieves, has appeared in the pages of this journal. This very welcome book takes these enquiries further. As the editors emphasise in their introduction, the essays it contains present a revisionist account in more ways than one. They challenge the idea that this was a period of unrelieved gloom and decline, of depression and depopulation, in the life of the countryside. But they also consider rural life as a whole, so that while farming and agricultural economics are by no means neglected, they take a subsidiary place. The chapters include broad overviews of such matters as agricultural politics, rural and agricultural education, and the fate of rural industries. There are also more focussed discussions of the role of village halls and the activities of women rural writers and detailed case studies of particular writers (Henry Williamson) and places (Dartington and Leckford).

The contributions are thus diverse, but they are united both in their quality (all of the chapters are excellent) and in their agreement that this was, indeed, a period of regeneration rather than decline. Even the fate of farming between the wars was less straightforward than is sometimes suggested, as the chapter by Brassley, in particular,

demonstrates, with many sectors of the agricultural economy experiencing considerable growth. In terms of recreation, culture, education, and even rural industries, the period was characterised as much by development and change as by stagnation and decline. The case is forcibly and convincingly made. Yet, as Sheail intimates in his characteristically thoughtful piece, there can be dangers in imposing too unified a picture on an untidy past, and a consideration of some of those aspects of the inter-war countryside which are omitted from the volume would, perhaps, have presented a more nuanced case. In particular, it is striking that there is no real consideration of what many people would mean today by 'the countryside', fields, woods, hedges, and the various semi-natural environments, including wetlands and heaths. By looking at these, a less positive picture of the inter-war years might have emerged, one involving the wholesale collapse of traditional forms of management and the increasing dereliction of important habitats. The 'depends where you look' objection can be raised in another way. One theme which runs strongly through many of the contributions is that of 'counter-urbanisation', the gradual spread of suburbs and commuters into rural areas, and the decline of a clear distinction between the rural and the urban. As the penultimate paragraph of Howkin's excellent overview of the period ('Death or Rebirth?') puts it:

Perhaps somewhere around 1930 rural history, in the way we have hitherto understood it – as cows and ploughs, as landlord, farmer and labourer, or as cottage and castle – comes to an end. Or, at least (to paraphrase Churchill) comes to the beginning of the end.

Yet such a view, while certainly true everywhere to some extent, was unquestionably far truer of the home counties than, say, of Lincolnshire, Norfolk, or other more resolutely agricultural areas. Here the impact of suburban expansion and 'counter-urbanisation' was, it can be argued, much more muted until after the Second World War. Only then did the massive decline in the number of people actually working on the land, coupled with significant increases in mobility resulting from the proliferation of car ownership, really bring about a major change in the character of rural life.

But these are minor quibbles. This is an excellent volume, which opens up a vital new area of historical enquiry, and yet at the same time manages to provide (despite the disclaimers of the editors) a general overview of the period, one which is unlikely to be superseded for many years to come. It should be essential reading for all those interested in the history of the countryside in the twentieth century.

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Stephen Cresswell, *Rednecks, Redeemers, and Race: Mississippi After Reconstruction, 1877–1917*, Jackson, University Press of Mississippi, 2006. x + 283 pp. \$45.00 cloth. 1578068479.

This is the third volume in the Heritage of Mississippi series, a multi-volume project sponsored by the Mississippi Historical Society and intended to supersede the