Reviews

doi:10.1017/S0956793316000066

Paul Brassley, Yves Segers and Leen Van Molle, eds, *War, Agriculture, and Food: Rural Europe from the 1930s to the 1950s*. New York and Abingdon, Routledge, 2012. 268 pp. £85. 9780415522168 hb; 9780203121429 ebook.

The middle decades of the twentieth century witnessed, in the Western world, an agricultural revolution arguably greater than that of the eighteenth century, yet agricultural historians have so far seemed rather reluctant to give it the scrutiny it demands. The publication of *War, Agriculture, and Food* is therefore particularly welcome, both in itself and, one hopes, as a portent of further such studies to come. The editors describe the volume as 'a collective intellectual product' which owes much to discussions at conferences in Lisbon (2008) and Leuven (2009). Its contributors are distinguished academics from a wide range of countries, including Austria, France, Germany, the United States, Hungary, Italy, Spain, Sweden and Switzerland. The United Kingdom contributors are some of the most noted analysts of twentieth-century British agriculture: Paul Brassley, Clare Griffiths, John Martin and Brian Short. One therefore expects, and finds throughout, a high standard of scholarship, well supported by statistical data.

The Introduction identifies the book's chief purpose as investigating the extent to which the Second World War 'challenge[d] and change[d] the outlook and nature of European post-war farming and countryside', in order to discover whether the war produced distinct new developments or simply accelerated those already under way. The diversity of conditions in the countries studied makes this a very difficult task. Some remained neutral; some were occupied; some were democracies and others were under authoritarian rule. This variety of subject matter is organised through four main themes. Two opening chapters offer an international perspective on the state of European agriculture in the 1930s, and the world trade in agricultural products between 1935 and 1955. These are followed by case studies of the effects of state regulation on agricultural policy, in Austria, Britain, Hungary and Spain. The third section examines the relationship between the state and the farmer in Britain, Denmark, Ireland, Sweden and Switzerland. The fourth part of the book is likely to be the most interesting for historians of rural life, dealing as it does with rural identities in Britain, France and Germany. Chapters by Clare Griffiths and Edouard Lynch demonstrate the differing public attitudes to farmers in Britain and in France between the wars, and how these changed as a result of the Second World War. British farmers had been regarded as unadventurous and inefficient, but their contribution to the war effort, and the rapidity of mechanisation in the 1940s and 1950s, turned them into symbols of dynamic progress. In France, however, the inter-war respect for the peasantry disappeared during the Occupation, as agricultural productivity

proved inadequate and farmers were perceived to be profiteering at the expense of the urban population.

If there is one dominant trend amid the various sets of circumstances examined in these essays, it is surely the state's role in promoting or enabling agricultural efficiency and industrialisation, whether through collectivist planning or organised capitalism. War forced governments to be responsible for national food supplies, 'with resultant demands for protection, or the establishment of an international order in agricultural trade'. In other words, it helped pave the way for the Common Agricultural Policy.

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doi:10.1017/S0956793316000078

A. T. Brown, *Rural Society and Economic Change in County Durham: Recession and Recovery, c.1400–1640*. Woodbridge, Boydell Press, 2015. xv + 288 pp. 19 figures, 32 tables, 4 maps. £60. 9781783270750.

This book contributes new dimensions to our understanding of late medieval Durham by analysing the great church institutions and also lay society at all levels from earls to cottagers. The first two chapters on the estate management of Durham priory and the bishops might seem old-fashioned, but in this thoroughly modern book the estates are treated comparatively, and the emphasis is on the mentality of the institutional lords and of their tenants. Also in modern style, the book covers a period on both sides of the customary dividing lines around 1500, and a constant theme is the contrasting economic background of recessions and crises in the fifteenth century, and expansion and inflation after 1540. In the period before 1500, the priory converted the holdings of its customary tenants to leasehold, and although its income dipped severely and the tenants' arrears mounted in the middle of the fifteenth century, a recovery was achieved after about 1470. The bishops, however, retained copyhold tenure, and made no great effort to recover rent income after the recession. Instead they diversified by exploiting the pasture resources of their parks, and made good money from coal mines.

After the Reformation, the Dean and Chapter (the reconstructed priory) came into conflict with their leasehold tenants, but were able to keep ahead of inflation by charging large entry fines, while the bishops were afflicted by a long-term fall in their real income as their copyholders enjoyed fixed rents, while estate assets were leased for seventy years or more at rents set before the rise in prices. Brown shows how administrative choices made in the middle ages were still having strong effects on the two estates in 1640, and he explains their experiences in terms of path dependency.

The rise and fall of the lay estates, in the absence of detailed accounts, have to be examined by counting their manors. A consistent story emerges of the expansion of a handful of larger estates between 1350 and 1500, and a reduction in the number of lesser gentry dependent on a single manor, but in 1540 to 1640 their fortunes were reversed as the magnates made political errors and spent unwisely, while the gentry profited from rising prices. A new dimension in landholding in the north of the county came from