

of edited volumes most will focus on one or two chapters, the way in which overall themes can be traced through a reading of the full text is certainly worthwhile.

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Richard Jones, ed., *Manure Matters: Historical, Archaeological and Ethnographic Perspectives*, Farnham, Ashgate Publishing Limited, 2012. 249pp. £63.00 via website [regular price £70.00]. 9780754669883

In Walter de la Mare's short story 'The Wharf', a farmer reflects on the paradox of the muck-heap in his yard: 'A curious thing that what to some seems just filth and waste and nastiness should be the very secret of all that is most precious in the living things of the world . . . "We farmers couldn't do without it".' De la Mare's son Richard, as Faber and Faber's long-term agricultural editor, shared the farmer's belief in the necessity of obeying the Rule of Return of wastes to the soil, and promoted many classics of the organic movement's literary canon. Richard Jones's introduction to this collection of essays reinforces the message that:

Manure is one of only a handful of truly essential and universal substances . . . so important that it transcends national, political, ethnic, cultural and religious divides. And it articulates history too [providing] a constant thread which directly connects the present with the prehistoric past.

Jones's aim is to demonstrate the vitality of various lines of enquiry into manure's social and agricultural significance. Robert Shiel offers a wide-ranging account of 'the ecology of manure', stressing, like de la Mare's farmer, that manures must not be regarded as 'waste'. He reminds us that the art of manuring was a literally vital element of agriculture from Columella until the invention of chemical fertilisers in the nineteenth century.

Several chapters focus on archaeology, with Amy Bogaard looking at Neolithic Europe and Kate Waddington at southern Britain in the late Bronze Age, although Waddington's persistent use of 'may', 'suggests', 'appears', 'possibly' and 'perhaps' makes the reader wonder whether this indicates judicious academic caution or ambitious speculation. Bogaard and Waddington are concerned with the social conclusions which may be drawn from an archaeological study of manure, whereas Ian Bull and Richard Evershed are strongly technical and scientific, dealing with the application of the 'biomarker concept' to soil history. Ben Pears's chapter studies the impact of human cultivation on marginal landscapes, describing how the application of micromorphological techniques throws light on methods of enriching fertility. Other chapters are more broadly cultural. Daniel Varisco and Vanaja Ramprasad look respectively at Arab and Indian agriculture. We see the sophistication of Arab manuring techniques and are reminded of the religious dimension to Indian agriculture and of the success of its approach. Richard Jones, in an essay on medieval manure, similarly emphasises the spiritual/alchemical significance of turning apparently dead, base materials into new life. Hamish Forbes's study of the

'scatter' of shards in Mediterranean Greece further drives home the point that manuring is not a natural, but a cultural, practice.

Jones is aware that much is missing: there is nothing on Africa or the Americas, for instance. But he has brought together ample evidence to demonstrate that the apparent 'filth and waste and nastiness' of manure is in fact full of value for an understanding of landscape and social history. The book includes an admirably thorough bibliography, is solidly bound, and features an attractive cover photograph by the editor.

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Mike Williams, *Textile Mills of South West England*, Swindon, English Heritage, 2013. 247 pp. £50. 9781848020832.

For many centuries before the age of machinery the five counties which make up the south west corner of England, apart from Cornwall, were home to textile industries of national and international importance. The contributions to the national economy of both the Devon serge industry and the woollen cloth industry of Gloucestershire, Somerset and Wiltshire are well known, while Dorset and Somerset produced, inter alia, the sail cloth, rope and nets which sustained not only local but also more far flung fisheries, including the incredibly productive Newfoundland fishery. All embraced the factory age, adopting new powered machinery while still preserving aspects of the old outworking nature of production. And, in the nineteenth century, these staples were augmented by new textile industries of silk, lace and hosiery as older markets shrank or as entrepreneurs from the midlands and north, such as John Heathcoat, spotted unused plant and a plentiful, cheaper and more quiescent skilled workforce.

Yet while the age of machinery changed the face of many old out-working centres, it also marked the beginning of protracted decay for the textile industries of the region. While water power might, as in Gloucestershire, be as productive as anywhere, in the age of steam cheaper fuel, superior communications and better finance networks gave a marked advantage to rivals in the north. The serge industry faded early and by the mid nineteenth century fine woollens were in steepening decline. While in all localities some manufactures soldiered on well into the next century, the west was clearly in debilitating economic eclipse. This decline has, however, bequeathed us a surprisingly rich heritage in old industrial buildings. While in the booming north old plant was replaced or sacrificed to new productive uses, entrepreneurs in the south west generally struggled to find capital and, when profitability slackened, there was less encouragement to replace buildings wholesale. So they were gradually adapted, modestly improved or let to alternative uses. And, since there was no great demand for the space they occupied, there they have often remained. They represent a treasure trove for historians and industrial archaeologists, as Mike Williams' excellent volume demonstrates.

This book has its origins in the meticulous work of both English Heritage and the Royal Commission on the Historical Monuments of England and combines both detailed