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Reviews

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Steve Hindle, *On the Parish: The Micro-Politics of Poor Relief in Rural England c.1550–1750*, Oxford, Clarendon Press, 2004. xi + 521 pp. £65. 0 19 927132 1.

On the Parish draws together Steve Hindle's researches on the old poor law in England before 1700, using a wide range of local studies, some already discussed in journal articles, others quite new, to give the book wide geographical and chronological coverage. The result is an ambitious study following the implementation of the old poor law from its inception to the early eighteenth century. It is structured in six chapters each following a broad theme: economies of make-shift; charitable resources; work schemes and work discipline for the poor; parish relief; exclusion, housing and settlement; negotiation. They move logically through the various stages of immiseration of the bottom forty per cent of the population, and the long term changes in local responses to this process. The final chapter concentrates on the extent of individual freedom of action in relation to the parish, justices, courts, and whatever other 'interlocking triangles' came in play.

This is an important book for all social historians of the early modern period. Hindle uses his many micro-studies to fashion particularly powerful sections on 'settlement' before the 1662 Act, seventeenth-century apprenticeship schemes, and housing orders by parishes and JPs, and important extended discussions of the uptake of compulsory parish rating for the poor, and of badging the poor. He makes effective connections between political and social discourses, both elite and popular, and the parish histories he relates. For all this we are all in Professor Hindle's debt. On a wide range of topics, *On the Parish* has new and insightful things to say.

Linking these studies together is the 'hero' of this book, the secular administrative parish and its growing predominance in the care and discipline of the poor paid for from local taxes. The overseers and their activities are the centre of attention, and the vestry often appears a monolithic power in the parish. Is this perhaps overdone? Churchwardens frequently controlled local charities and their accounts often include payments, particularly to the vagrant poor, that could have come from the overseers. The relationship between charitable funds, and that under-estimated resource the parish stock, over one million pounds of local funds according to one account, and the overseers' activities is worth more attention. The power of charitable trustees, landlords (resident or otherwise) and of the clergy themselves is relatively underplayed. Individual clergy are sensitively portrayed in Hindle's micro-histories, but their role as a group is dominated by rhetorical contributions to debate. Puritan commitment to village discipline before 1640 is well covered, but there is less on the impact of later non-conformity and the declining influence of established church discipline after 1660. The part played by the parochial clergy in the 'intersecting triangles' of negotiation so important to the old poor

law was considerable, particularly with their growing role as J.P.s as well as parish priests from the late seventeenth century.

On the Parish also raises methodological questions. It premises a relatively uniform impact of the old poor law on different parts of England, with parochial independence and flexibility as the major variable. It uses examples from widely dispersed geographical locations that confirm the underlying thesis. Steve King's interesting proposition that the north was different is discussed (pp. 282–95) but not systematically tested. A great strength of the book is to link national administrative, judicial, and intellectual movements to 'micro-histories'. There is no quantitative dimension to its findings, and the absence of maps diminishes the impact of the study's wide geographical range. Perhaps discussion of economic and social change and its impact on poverty, particularly the long-term structural changes in the rural economy that made the poor law so necessary, could have been more fully developed. At the micro-history level, the number and geographical range of case studies inevitably means that regional experts may see more locally nuanced dimensions to them. Finally, after c. 1690 the discussion is less comprehensive, with important contributions on badging and parish negotiation but much less emphasis on the parochial workhouse movement before 1750. There are understandable reasons for the latter, but arguably a better endpoint for the book would be 1714 or 1723.

None of this detracts from a considerable achievement. *On the Parish* is a well written and scholarly book that justifies its length through the range and depth of its coverage, and will remain a standard reference point for serious social historians of the early modern period for years to come.

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David W. Howell, *Taking Stock: The Centenary History of the Royal Welsh Agricultural Society,* Cardiff, University of Wales Press, 2003. 287 pp. £19.99. 0 7083 1825 8.

The Royal Welsh Show is the most popular agricultural event in the United Kingdom and has established itself as one of the few truly national institutions in Wales. This is a very far cry from the position in 1904 when a few far-sighted individuals in Aberystwyth set out to transform a small local agricultural society into a national organisation. It took the best part of eighty years for their vision to be realised and in this eminently readable book David Howell provides us with a comprehensive account of that tortuous, often dispiriting, but ultimately successful journey.

The embryonic Society faced immense hostility in its formative years, riven by petty jealousies and local rivalries to such an extent that the Show had to leave its home at Aberystwyth and spend half a century as a peripatetic event in a seemingly endless struggle to retain its often tenuous national support base. The many travails of that migratory period are faithfully chronicled by Howell in a section aptly entitled, 'Crisis and Mud', which largely encapsulates those difficult early decades. It was not until 1963

that the Society felt confident enough of its future to take the courageous, but once again bitterly contested, decision to settle at Llanelwedd, its permanent home. This decision proved to be the foundation for its subsequent success.

Whilst the author pays due homage to the Royal Welsh Agricultural Society's valuable contribution to agricultural education and to its advocacy on behalf of rural Wales, the book is at its most absorbing when it follows the development of the Royal Welsh Show itself. The sections detailing the Society's remarkable success in promoting improvement in the native breeds of livestock, one of the most cherished ambitions of its founders, are particularly informative. Equally enlightening is Howell's account of the Society's ultimate success in overcoming the all-pervasive local rivalries which had beset its early years through the innovative 'host counties' structure. The author also pays deserved tribute to the Society's enviable record on inclusiveness and its efforts in involving Wales' small tenant and hill farmers in its activities from the outset. He also quite rightly points out the Society's pioneering, but often overlooked, role in the promotion of bilingualism, through its introduction of Welsh commentaries to the Show as early as 1952.

This book was commissioned by the Royal Welsh Agricultural Society to celebrate its centenary and therefore represents an 'insider' view of the Society and its history. Naturally such a book could not be expected to attempt a critical assessment of the impact of the Society's activities, nor indeed place its work in the wider context of Welsh agrarian history. Within these limitations, however, this remains a splendid history, well researched and well presented. It should please the Society and its members, for whom it is primarily intended, whilst at the same time providing professional historians with valuable insights into Welsh agriculture during the twentieth century. A Welsh language version of the book is also available.

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Timothy Shakesheff, *Rural Conflict, Crime and Protest: Herefordshire, 1800–1860*, Woodbridge, Boydell, 2003. pp. vii + 230. 1 84383 108 3.

Shakesheff's main thesis is that in nineteenth-century Herefordshire the majority of rural 'property crime' was in fact a proto-political response to dearth, carried out by men who represented the community insofar as they were acting against the impoverishment which had resulted from the decline of the moral economy. In some places he gets carried away with his case, but overall it remains compelling.

One problem with his conclusions derives from his use of the surviving records of convictions for indictable offences as a proxy for all crime. In the 1850s, over sixty per cent of victims who prosecuted successfully were farmers or gentry. Shakesheff regards this as evidence of the targeting of the propertied by the rural proletariat, but does not appreciate his own admission that in the era of the private prosecutor, mounting a prosecution involved much up-front expense, which would only be recouped on conviction. Thus

poorer victims were excluded from the criminal justice process. Shakesheff is also less persuasive when he argues that juries showed sympathy for sheep-stealers: the examples he gives appear to have been prompted either by reluctance to impose the death penalty, or by suspicion of the use of paid informers.

Shakesheff is certainly convincing when he argues that sheep-stealing appears to have been driven as much by desperation and an understanding of customary rights, as by acquisitiveness. Very few thefts were organised attempts to steal a number of sheep. Prosecutions peaked during years of high prices, though this could be explained by a preemptive enforcement wave driven by landowners anxious to make an example. More sheep were stolen in the winter months, when work was scarce, than in the summer when harvest led to temporary full rural employment. The geographical evidence also points in the same direction: more sheep were taken from the grain-producing areas of the county than the largely pastoral ones. Had acquisitive 'rustling' been a significant component of the thefts, the reverse ought to have been true. In the mainly arable areas, the pool of underemployed agricultural labourers, the potential 'social criminals', was far higher, although potential targets were scarcer.

Crop and wood theft were also means by which the poor obtained a living by challenging the sanctity of private property, and Shakesheff here analyses these crimes, which have hitherto received very little attention from nineteenth-century historians. By 1827, all the legal loopholes which had prevented these actions from being charged as felony had been closed, and through the mid-century period there were numerous convictions for them, in which women featured heavily. A more familiar subject also covered is the attempt by the rural population to poach game, which in Herefordshire, though often violent, was largely for the pot rather than on large scale for profit. Like sheep-stealers, the 'desperate amateur' poachers were more active (or at least, more often caught) in the winter months and in years of dearth. The 'wall of silence' of the local community protected many poachers from the law, and in some of these cases at least, juries could be swayed to perversely acquit when told of the disproportionately draconian punishments that might be awarded on conviction.

Rural Conflict, Crime and Protest would have been more useful if it had engaged with the conclusions of relevant research published in the last few years, notably that of Storch and Philips on policing, King on prosecution, and Archer on the 'for profit' and anti-social nature of much gang-based poaching in nineteenth century Lancashire. On the other hand, this book provides a welcome re-opening of the issue of 'social crime', which has tended to be overlooked (sometimes because it was so obvious) in many recent treatments of crime and law enforcement. Nineteenth-century society was shot through with economic coercion, and while the law may have been a 'multiple-use right' universally available, it was not equally available to all, while the structural changes which left many thousands of rural people with a stark choice between the workhouse, theft, and starvation did not apply in the same measure to every Englishman. The reactions of some of the rural poor to this situation justifies Shakesheff's conclusion that much rural crime was indeed social crime.

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Margaret E Shepherd, *From Hellgill to Bridge End: Aspects of Economic and Social Change in the Upper Eden Valley, 1840–95*, Hatfield, University of Hertfordshire Press, Studies in Regional and Local History, vol. 2. 392 pp, illus. £35 hbk. 1 902806 27 1.

Hellgill and Bridge End are two farms in the upper Eden Valley in Westmorland and this is a detailed study of the nine parishes which lay between them. It builds on a Cambridge University PhD completed in 1992 which relied primarily on an analysis of census enumerators' returns for the district, but has been supplemented with a range of other quantitative and qualitative sources, and is well illustrated with pictures of the area. The book seeks to answer the question, 'how were local economic, agricultural and social structures changed during the Victorian years?' The answer suggests that many of the features identified here were similar to those found across much of Britain during the period. Whereas the area once provided employment for textile, craft and extractive industries, all of them declined dramatically in the period covered by this study. Agriculture itself was also transformed with a huge drop in the employment of waged labour and a shift towards pastoral farming. Population remained much the same in 1891 as it had been in 1851 suggesting significant out-migration. Overall, the conclusion is that the economy was 'stable, comprehensive and apparently successful' with 'stability and continuity but not stasis' much in evidence. On the other hand there were 'significant changes' and people were in the 'vanguard of modernity', exhibiting a 'forward thinking and entrepreneurial spirit' and benefiting from 'the industrialised economy of the late nineteenth century' in terms of exposure to new values and products.

The study is packed with names, places and details of specific activities. As such it will clearly have appeal to local readers with a pre-existing knowledge of and interest in the area, although the price of £35 may well prove a deterrent for some potential purchasers. As might be expected from a census study based on a database of 55,000 individuals, there is a lot of interesting information on changing occupational profiles and migration, although oddly virtually nothing on age structure or gender ratios. There are also tables and figures on, among other things, turnpike trusts, coach services, carrier networks, land use, coastal shipping and farm sizes in Cumberland and Westmorland, while the text itself is crammed with local details about numerous individuals, social life, schools, religion, businesses, freemasonry, temperance, sport, tourism, local government, and customs and even passenger and livestock movements on the railway.

This, then, is a rich, local empirical study which illustrates many of the changes taking place at the time and is a valuable quarry of detailed information on a wide range of topics. What is less clear is quite what these detailed 'aspects of change' contribute to our understanding of broader issues of regionality, 'core' and 'periphery', and modernisation which are raised in the introduction. What is also unclear is the potential distinctiveness of this particular period or location, or the reasons behind these changes. 'The area had been undergoing change, [and] the processes of modernisation and integration into the national economy were clearly operating here but were not new. They had been underway from a date that long preceded the 1841 census. However, in common with the nation in general, change in the Upper Eden Valley accelerated during the Victorian years.' (p. 340) The coming of the railway is seen as a 'crucial factor' with 'fundamental and

far-reaching' effects. It is particularly identified as undermining some local industries and facilitating out-migration, while having 'positive effects' in terms of introducing new values and products but, arguably, the critical turning point in the district's economic fortunes may already have occurred in the 1830s when previous population growth had been sharply reversed, while the area's good connections to the rest of country prior to the railway's arrival meant that this area had never been 'remote' from wider social changes. Some changes, it seems, may have been 'accelerated', but others represented a reversal of previous trends.

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Dan Stone, *Responses to Nazism in Britain, 1933–1939, Before War and Holocaust*, Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan. pp. 269. £50.00. 0 333 99405.

As Dan Stone generously and modestly notes in his acknowledgements, *Responses to Nazism* is to some extent a supplement to Richard Griffiths' *Fellow Travellers of the Right*, since 1980 a standard work in the *genre*. However, in a volume notable for the depth of its analysis, the perspicacity of its judgements and the skilful manner by which an enormous amount of material has been distilled into relatively few pages, Stone has triumphantly carried the subject forward. Arguing throughout that British fascism should no longer be seen as an aberration in British political life but rather as an indigenous development with its roots in the later nineteenth and earlier twentieth centuries, the opening chapters review the huge raft of literature on Nazi Germany available to English-speaking readers of the 1930s who might have wished to get to grips with the phenomenon and its implications for European civilisation. Most of these pre-war commentators (from across the whole of the political spectrum) could not, of course, have foreseen the horrors to come. From the Radical Right to the collectivist Left, from Social Creditors to advocates of land settlement, all found something good to say about Nazi Germany, an inevitable backdrop to political debate throughout the 1930s. Many hinted at the potential threats of Nazism to cherished notions of freedom, yet others were attracted by the irrational elements of the movement, to the 'mystical sense of belonging', to the idea of national spiritual rebirth or (before the obscenities of Belsen were finally revealed) to the alleged benefits of liberating the national economy from the influences of 'alien' usurers.

Among Stone's *dramatis personae* were pacifists who sought peace at any price, those who saw France rather than Germany as a potential threat to Britain and others yet who, though not necessarily sympathetic to the regime, viewed Nazi progress as inevitable while the democracies remained supine. Meanwhile individuals struggled manfully to reconcile their Christianity with admiration for Fascism/National Socialism, usually employing the argument that the latter creeds offered the only realistic escape from decadence, usury and Bolshevism. Whatever their backgrounds, be they Right Book Club readers obsessed with 'traditional English values' and the imperative for spiritual renewal, or leftish defenders

of Hitler's protestations of pacifism, those British people who admired the goings on in Fascist Europe were confronted with the dilemma of avoiding condemnation as traitors or, at the very least, as stooges of Hitler/Mussolini or Franco. And, as Dan Stone shows, they resorted to all manner of tortuous argument to justify their positions.

Readers of *Rural History* will be especially interested in the two final chapters of Stone's book which deal extensively with organo-fascism, back-to-the-land movements, Lord Lymington's English Array and, of course, the British Union of Fascists. Although both chapters have appeared in shortened versions elsewhere, they form an appropriate and sometimes provocative *coda* to the present volume, more especially in their treatment of important figures like Lymington, William Sanderson, Anthony Ludovici and Rolf Gardiner. There can be little doubt about Lymington's fascist sympathies (despite his frequent denials), Rolf Gardiner's pro-German proclivities, and the Fascist/National Socialist leanings of groupings like the English Array and the British Council against European Commitments. Nonetheless Stone's argument that 'organicism in Britain began life largely tied to fascist concerns' is rather more difficult to sustain, as is the notion that the views of the early organicists and members of the Kinship in Husbandry with their holistic philosophy of nature, 'are immediately recognisable today as fascism'. Taken out of context, their obsessive concern for 'rootedness' and 'pure' stock, their craving for a sense of order, their promotion of a self-supporting peasantry and their distaste for usury (which did not *necessarily* imply anti-semitism) might loosely be construed as having fascist undertones. On the other hand it has to be recognised that many of these people were genuinely concerned with the compelling need to revitalise and regenerate the decaying rural slum which characterised much of Britain between the wars. In common with many on the Left, they worried deeply over the decline of husbandry standards and the erosion of tropical soils in the interests of a 'cheap food' policy. They fretted at the prospect of over-mechanisation and rural depopulation, and divined the reality that an agricultural system floating on credit would in all probability result in agronomic excesses and over-exploitation of the soil. Leaving aside the anti-semitism of Gardiner and Lymington, the eugenicist utterings of R. G. Stapledon and the ruralist nostalgia of H. J. Massingham and others, there was, from a purely agrarian standpoint, a good deal of common sense in what they had to say. After all, their promotion of national self-sufficiency in food became a central plank of post-war policy and several of them, including Rolf Gardiner and Jorian Jenks (the author of the British Union of Fascists' agricultural policy) played important roles in the development of British agriculture in the 1950s and 1960s. If these 'fellow travellers' of the Right were anxious to promote a rural world under the control of a 'natural' aristocracy, it is in many ways ironic that farming England was subject throughout the war and for a decade beyond its conclusion to absolute control by the County War Agricultural Executive Committees and their peacetime successors. It might be argued, indeed, that these bodies were every bit as 'fascist' as the forces of totalitarianism which the country confronted!

Dan Stone's final chapters, then, provide a stimulating background to the inter-war ruralist debate. The book as a whole, drawing upon a huge range of sources, and introducing the reader to many long-forgotten contemporary commentators, lends lustre to the growing corpus of literature in the field and provides a comprehensive bibliography

for which students of the period will be profoundly grateful. Above all, as a work embracing both cultural history and the history of ideas, it is a thoroughly good read.

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Melissa Walker (ed.), *Country Women Cope with Hard Times: A Collection of Oral Histories*, Columbia, South Carolina, University of South Carolina Press, 2004. 208 pp. $39.95. 1 57003 524 5.

This book focuses on the life stories of the ordinary American women who lived on farms in rural Tennessee and South Carolina in the first half of the twentieth century, and who witnessed dramatic agricultural changes during their lifetimes. It depends heavily on oral history, and is not a comprehensive history of country women but essentially an archival document on them. The book consists of the introduction and afterword, both of which were written by the editor Melissa Walker, and sixteen chapters (stories of seventeen women, many of which are based on oral history). In the introduction the editor discusses the main objectives and research methods of the book, notably oral history and a family-history questionnaire. She outlines the significance of oral history, gives detailed accounts of how her interviews were arranged, transcribed, and edited by her interviewees, and mentions the difficulties she faced. She also provides readers with information about the historical and agricultural changes, in particular between 1900 and 1945, affecting the areas studied. She discusses women's work on the farm, their roles and the important contributions they made to local farming communities and neighbourhood networks. The background information given in the introduction is extremely valuable on the areas and their local history, and sets the context for the life stories. In the afterword she discusses the advantages and disadvantages of oral history, referring to other leading oral historians' evaluations of oral history, and examines roles which an interviewer ought to play in creating and shaping memory as it is expressed in such a way. She also assesses her own interviews, discusses the difficulties that she faced while interviewing, and gives readers suggestions about how to improve interviewing skills and conduct successful oral history projects.

Sixteen chapters present the life stories of seventeen women who were born between 1890 and 1940 and lived on farms in rural Tennessee and South Carolina. Chapter one on Elizabeth Fox McMahan was written on the basis of her daughter's handwritten memoir of her, and chapter three on Wilma Cope Williamson was based on her letters sent to the editor and an interview. The rest of the chapters were based on interviews which the editor conducted. At the beginning of each chapter the editor has written a helpful introduction, giving the date and location of her interview, its summary, a short biographical sketch of her interviewee and an overview of each woman's life.

Many of the women in the book were daughters or wives of either a landowner or a tenant farmer. A few of them were landowners themselves. Mabel Love became a

farming partner with her husband. Ruth Hatchette McBrayer took over a peach farm after her husband's death. Some withdrew from fieldwork, married and became full-time housewives. Younger women in this book had opportunities for better education, made careers off the farm, and became teachers, storekeepers or an independent insurance agent. Some of them talked not only about their lives but also their mothers' and grandmothers' lives on the farm. The book tells of their childhood, adolescence, education, marriage, motherhood and different kinds of work they engaged in. The details of the women's lives on the farm, which were dominated by endless hard work, are particularly vivid and moving. Women planted and harvested the corn, beans, greens, tomatoes, peas and other vegetables. They spent many hours preserving food for winter. They dried fruit and beans, and canned vegetables. They also preserved pork, grinding, seasoning, and canning sausage, and rendering lard. They raised livestock, milked cows, separated the cream, made the butter, gathered eggs, and killed chickens. They sold surplus vegetables, fruit, milk, butter and eggs in the market, at local country stores, or bartered such items with itinerant pedlars in exchange for salt, coffee, sugar, flour, fabric, or other necessities that could not be produced on the farm. In addition, they cooked for their families and hired hands, did cleaning, laundry, and looked after children, sick family members and elderly relatives, at a time when modern utilities (e.g. gas, electricity and water supplies inside the house) and modern domestic equipment were unavailable. Farm women also sewed most of the family's clothing. Some women were extremely resourceful, making their soap, knitting socks, gloves and hats, and re-using the cotton sacks that packaged chicken feed and flour to make children's clothes, tea towels, and even bed sheets. Their stories portray how they coped with rural transformation and how they felt about their daily lives. They also present accounts of the difficult times during the drought years, early freezes, low crop prices, poor tenant farming and agricultural depression of the 1920s and 1930s, and of how they coped then. They describe close family ties and neighbourly assistance, well-developed mutual aid networks, the loss of close community networks that sustained them in mutual support, and their nostalgia about earlier rural existence. The editor is extremely successful in preserving their unique voices.

There are a few criticisms that might be made. It would have been helpful to have had more pictures of the farms, scenes of agricultural activities and equipment and of crafts, to convey the atmosphere and background to the interviews. The provision of a couple of maps of eastern Tennessee and western South Carolina, the regions covered in the book, might have been useful to readers. It would have made this book more innovative if in the afterword the editor had compared her interviewees with contemporary country women in other parts of America interviewed by other academics, to see their similarities and differences in terms of lifestyles and experiences in agriculture.

This book is a goldmine of information about country women who have left few or no written records, and were otherwise socially marginalised, and it stands as a permanent record of a past way of life. It will appeal not only to academics but also to a much wider non-academic readership with interests in rural and local history, gender and women's studies, oral history or other fields of American history. For

anyone interested in the local history of Tennessee and South Carolina, or the oral history of American women, it is essential reading. This book can also be used as a text and guide book for students and others who are planning oral history projects.

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