

The ‘Open-Closed’ Settlement Model and the Interdisciplinary Formulations of Dennis Mills: Conceptualising Local Rural Change

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Abstract This article is an examination of the value of the ‘open-closed’ settlement model. The model has endured as a helpful point of reference in historical investigations of local rural change in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and in particular in the study of property and class relations and their influence on the evolution of settlement form. The article is also a consideration of the significance of the work of a chief architect of the model, the historical geographer and local historian Dennis Mills. The model and the contribution of Mills are discussed in relation to initiatives seeking to develop local history of the twentieth century, including the promotion of engagement with interdisciplinary historiographies.

Introduction

The body of work published by Dennis Mills is considerable.¹ His publications span six decades and his many books and articles are of significance for geographers and historians of Lincolnshire, his home county, the east Midlands and beyond.² At the micro-scale, a number of places have become a particular focus of attention for Mills, notably Melbourn in Cambridgeshire and Canwick in Lincolnshire.³ Some of his thoughts and findings have achieved both a continuing relevance and general appeal. These include his accessible reflections on the evolution of the concept of community and how it might be approached by historians in methodological terms.⁴ He also extended understanding of, and modes of exploiting, key sources, such as census enumerators’ books and trade directories.⁵ In addition, there is his leading role in the formulation, adaptation and application of the ‘open-closed’ settlement model.⁶ These important contributions and in fact much of the research of Dennis Mills have enhanced knowledge and comprehension of local rural life in the nineteenth century.

It is also apparent that his published output is of value for historical and geographical investigations of the twentieth century. Mills was part of the Open University team that helped to secure recognition for community history as a sub-discipline. Community history, as an integration of ideas and practice, could claim to be somewhat different from, if still in essential coexistence with, family history and local history. Community

history acted to promote, among its agenda items, a greater engagement with the past of more modern times, against the tendency of the wider tradition of local history towards pre-modern and pre-industrial contexts.⁷ Dennis Mills also edited one of the first county histories of the twentieth century, for Lincolnshire, which was compiled a decade before the turning of the Millennium. In introducing the volume, the encouragement that he gave to local historians to engage with the contemporary history of the county has a prophetic quality about it:

The notion of writing contemporary history has developed only in our century and has been strongest in the fields of national and international history. . . . What is new is that discussions have started within the lifetimes of the participants, and with their active involvement. It is, of course, accepted that these histories will have to be rewritten as new perspectives emerge, a practice already well established in the history of earlier centuries. Nevertheless, this is not a reason for doing nothing now, for to leave the writing of history entirely for succeeding generations is to abandon our duty at least to capture factual records made and the views of events and periods held by those who lived through them.⁸

In 2010 the British Association for Local History and the Society for Lincolnshire History and Archaeology came together to support a conference on ‘Researching and Writing Local Histories of the Twentieth Century’. This event sought to capture and consolidate some of the established and more recent ideas relating to thought and practice in twentieth-century local history. Contributions to the conference included recognition of the work of Dennis Mills in furthering and facilitating this engagement.⁹ This article draws upon ideas set out in conference and seminar papers of 2010, which were presented to, among others, Dennis Mills. Aspects of these papers were also set down subsequently as provisional thoughts and findings for a chapter within a *festschrift* for Mills published by the historical community of his home county of Lincolnshire.¹⁰ This article here surveys a wider historiography and makes more searching geographical and conceptual connections. Its consideration of the significance and relevance of Mills’ work focuses most on the open-closed settlement model. The role of the model in enhancing understanding of the nineteenth-century countryside is returned to, while insights that the model might offer for those analysing twentieth-century development are also examined.

Returning to the work of geographers, historians and sociologists of the 1950s, ‘60s and ‘70s and their close-at-hand ‘community-study’ explorations of life in the twentieth century has become something of a sub-genre.¹¹ The likes of Ronald Blythe’s (1969) *Akenfield*, Michael Havinden’s (1966) *Estate Villages* and E. W. Martin’s (1965) *The Shearers and the Shorn*, set in Suffolk, Berkshire and Devon respectively, have all been revisited.¹² Some decades ago Dennis Mills was also to be found among those exploring and fostering the possibilities of interdisciplinary research across geography, history and sociology, and then drawing upon this progress in order to encourage advance in local and community history practice.¹³ Re-examining this historiography can stimulate reassessment of the nature of continuity and change over the last half century, and a re-evaluation of the methodologies that have been and might still be applied to the study of rural localities in the near past. Kate Tiller recently revisited various studies, including Marilyn Strathern’s (1981) investigation of Elmton in Essex, David Steel’s (1979) *Corby Glen* in Lincolnshire, as well as Mills’ (1989) *Twentieth Century Lincolnshire*.¹⁴ For

Tiller, these texts can continue to inform both the development of interdisciplinary approaches to twentieth-century local history, and the exploration of the impact of major processes of change on local societies: war, imperial decline, macro-economic fluctuation, technological innovation, the role of the state, population growth and change, and increasing individualism. Other themes can be added to Tiller's list. The broadening and strengthening impulses to preserve, conserve, commemorate and commodify the past, for example, are also conspicuous, in both private and public spheres. Moreover, these can be found to be central among the motivations that have driven forward the cultural practices of popular local history over the last five years.¹⁵ Dennis Mills has also been among those inspiring popular engagement between local history and heritage.¹⁶

This article revisits certain aspects of Mills' work from the 1950s, and considers how his contributions have helped in the development of conceptual and methodological approaches to the histories of the nineteenth- and twentieth-century countryside. Open and closed settlements, rural planning and development, and case studies in Lincolnshire and elsewhere are among the perspectives featuring in this appreciation. Although the body of literature that Dennis Mills has created is considerable, one piece in particular is central to this article: the epilogue to *Lord and Peasant and in Nineteenth-Century Britain*, published in 1980.¹⁷ The chapter opens up, or rather reopens on revisitation, some interesting lines of enquiry for those examining change in rural Britain over the last few decades.

Dennis Mills' concluding epilogue to *Lord and Peasant* is entitled 'Lord and Peasant Today'. It commences: 'A title of this kind relating to modern Britain will strike the reader at first sight as totally discordant'. And yet, he continues, 'I am often asked what happened to the peasants? Moreover, there are still some very large estates and crofting still going on in north-west Scotland'. Mills' conclusion of 1980 acknowledges the temptation of projecting forward particular understandings of social relations in the past in order to analyse and comprehend more recent times and indeed the present. This article is similarly tempted, albeit on a, as Mills put it thirty years ago, 'very speculative, intentionally provocative basis'.¹⁸ Mills' *Lord and Peasant* is a culmination of a period of work extending and applying the open and closed settlement model and refining its conceptualisation of the form and function of 'peasant' and 'estate' systems. The epilogue is understandably fairly short, for the book is primarily about the nineteenth century, but in it Mills sought to relate some of the historical themes that he had been investigating in the preceding century to the twentieth century.

The open-closed model and the nineteenth century

The open-closed model is explanatory and predictive, a conceptual connection of links between the ownership of property and other dimensions of local life, including: population size and growth trends, housing supply, pauperism, poor rate levels, economic activity and diversity, farm size, resident labour levels, religious provision, leisure and welfare services, and political culture. Mills opened up this line of enquiry in the late 1950s. In one of his earliest studies he discussed the evolution of 'dispersed' and 'grouped' types of settlements located within a fifteen mile radius of Lincoln. Among the 'grouped'

were two further sub-types: the 'estate' and the larger and denser 'freeholder' villages. Mills was clear that the difference arose from a causal relationship that existed between population size and density and the nature of local landownership and property tenure, a relationship established through the function of poor law legislation and its administration through parish vestries. He observed:

This difference was largely due, not to variations in soil or husbandry, but mainly due to the differential operation of the Poor Laws. Up to about 1860 each parish or township had to maintain its own poor by means of a parish poor rate and it was therefore to the advantage of landowners and occupiers to restrict the working population and thereby reduce the numbers of potentially destitute persons. This restriction was most effective where a squire owned all or most of the land in a township and had control over the building of cottages. It was least effective where there were a large numbers of owners and occupiers, forming a large leaderless vestry which was unable or unwilling to discourage the building of cottages for 'poor' people.¹⁹

In a later study in Nottinghamshire, Mills adopted the terminology that had been employed by commissioners investigating the impact of reforms of poor law administration in the mid-nineteenth century.²⁰ Estate villages were classified under the term 'closed' (or, in the language of much of the commentary of the day, 'close') and the freeholder villages were labelled 'open'. Mills was interested in how contemporary investigators categorised the open and the closed, and their discussion of the extent to which housing supply, population levels and poor law assessment were being influenced by landowners and property interests. He also mapped the relationships being observed between villages, including the daily and weekly movement of surplus labour from open villages to meet shortfalls in the closed.

His conceptualisation of the relationships within and between open and closed settlements had become quite sophisticated by the 1970s.²¹ In closed settlements, a product of the 'estate system', there was monopoly holding of landed property, development was relatively more prescribed and contained, life more regulated, and the social economy more narrowly agrarian in its focus. In open settlements, an outcome of the 'peasant system', property holding was more dispersed, development less restricted, life less controlled, and the social economy dynamic, more diverse and expansive. Open and closed settlements comprised a dichotomy or, rather, formed part of a looser continuum of settlement types ranging between the open and closed extremes, from the 'wide open' to the 'firmly shut'.²² The spectrum included the open and closed extremes, and two further categories that were more middling in type. One was comprised of the 'absentee' settlements, tending towards the closed form in character, but with no resident or local squire; the other, tending towards the open, was made up of the 'divided' settlements, where ownership and authority saw some separation. The presence of 'principal', 'main' or 'sole' landowners, or forms of proprietorship that were termed 'divided' or 'by the peasants', feature regularly in the formulaic descriptions of parishes compiled for nineteenth-century trade directories.²³ The dichotomy or continuum could be applied spatially and analytically 'on the ground'. Contextualisation of the model could illuminate settlement differences, and their internal and external relations. Mills' exploration of the potential of the model reached its most developed and expansive in *Lord and Peasant* of 1980.

Others have also explored the contemporary political debates surrounding the presence of open and closed settlements, and have tested out how conceptualisations of the dichotomy can offer a range of opportunities for exploring nineteenth-century processes and patterns. B. A. Holderness, for example, found lower population density and slower rates of population growth to be key features of closed communities in various regions of England.²⁴ Brian Short, together with Dennis Mills, argues that the open-closed dichotomy has utility in explaining the local conditions necessary for fostering social and political protest, and for predicting the spatial distribution of disturbances.²⁵ In Lincolnshire, Heather Fuller has studied the large estate of a resident landowner and a small estate owned by an absentee institutional proprietor, both located in the Wolds. The former estate exercised a noticeably greater level of influence upon the development of the local 'cultural landscape', as represented in architectural design features, the manner of woodland and parkland planting, and contrasting rates of growth for open and closed villages.²⁶ Also working on the Lincolnshire Wolds, Charles Rawding has examined a larger number of estates and their corresponding parishes. His observations reflect the Mills typology. Both open and closed parishes, especially closed parishes with resident landowners, demonstrated 'classic' characteristics in terms of farm sizes, and the proportions of local populations employed in agriculture, domestic service and trades. Rawding is not critical of the Mills formulation, but he does extend the open-closed typology a little further by examining differences in gender balance, showing the degree to which ratios weighted towards males were more noticeable in closed parishes.²⁷

This body of work has not gone uncontested, however. Sarah Banks has pointed out that inconsistencies in the meaning and use of the terms open and closed in the nineteenth century rather undermines the soundness of attempts by historians to evolve a conceptual and analytical tool. Moreover, local quantitative analysis, in Banks' case in Norfolk, can erode the strength of the assumption that landownership causally determined local demographic characteristics and poor law expenditure. The likes of Mills and Holderness, Banks claimed, had been 'duped by the laxity of the language to turn a nineteenth-century scandal into a twentieth-century model'.²⁸ While the investigation of open and closed settlements could shed light on contrasting characteristics of population size, landownership and occupation, as well as relationships between settlements, Banks argues that the function of landownership was not powerful enough to be adopted as a key causal determinant within a general, predictive framework. Despite Banks' critique, Byung Khun Song could conclude later that the open-closed conceptualisation retains an appeal and utility: 'the typology has been so widely accepted as a meaningful conceptual framework that it now appears in much research into the history of agriculture and the labour market'. Song's case study, in Oxfordshire, does not have the same level of emphasis on landownership and property rights as is evident in the work of Mills. Analytical attention is drawn to the way that settlement typologies are characterised by differences in local population levels, poor law provision and labour supply. Song is persuaded, nonetheless, of the value of the 'open/close distinction' as the basis for a conceptualisation that could be used to explain the deterministic relationships between local economic circumstances and poor law provision.²⁹ Mills later rejoined that 'Banks

rejected the model, but in fact the results of her main statistical tests . . . provide support for it', while 'Song . . . concluded that the model had significant validity in it'.³⁰

When Keith Snell and Paul Ell examined parish typology and the geography of the Victorian religion they adopted a position of compromise. They employed the descriptive dichotomy, but steered away from accepting the causal model. Clearly there are relationships to be found between landownership and settlement character, as represented in Sunday school and church attendance and in the presence of dissent, as Mills has indicated. Higher levels of attendance in Sunday schools and Anglican places of worship was typical of closed parishes, as were lower levels of dissenting practice. However, Snell and Ell decide to apply the terms in 'a conservative and restricted manner', and 'in the manner of contemporaries, as applying rather loosely to the nature of landownership'. They suggest that, methodologically, 'parochial and regional variety make it impossible to squeeze parishes into tight definitions'. They note that the terms 'closed', 'estate' and 'model' for different villages presented historians with challenges of neat classification, while the wide range of examples to be found under the term 'open' is such that it 'has lesser relevance here than the term "closed" or "estate" parish, even though it is needed for comparative balance'. They add that 'It is clear also that the most 'closed' category of parishes has the strongest analytical viability',³¹ concluding that:

No historian ought to be fastened by historiographical precedent, nor is there much reason to expect historians to agree with each other when contemporaries, from so many regions, came up with such differing accounts.³²

Evidently there is some degree of consensus, recognising the various possibilities that the open-closed settlement typology opens up for local, empirical and explanatory analysis. Yet it is apparent that more developed modelling of the concept into a generalising and predictive framework is vulnerable to criticism. Mills was, however, open to adaptations of the model, moving, for example, towards the notion of a continuum rather than a dichotomy. He also recognises the presence of forms of mixed regime where large, perhaps absentee, owners coexisted with a significant number of smaller freeholders: 'In large parishes, there was sufficient land and property to present possibilities for both the peasant *and* estate systems'. He concluded that 'this is one reason why the systems approach should be kept in mind alongside use of the open-closed parish model'.³³

The searching scrutiny of Banks focuses on Mills' application of the model to the conjunction of landownership, labour and welfare. However, the larger relevance of the Mills thesis lies in the many looser connections that it identifies between landownership and property rights and a diversity of other, local social, political, economic and cultural attributes. Mills explores only a selection of these connections quantitatively and predictively. The stimulating composition of these various settlement attributes, as outlined by Mills, prompted Kate Tiller to adopt one of the versions of his framework for her introductory 'handbook' for local historians. Tiller does not skip over the principal limitations of the typology. The model does overemphasise the significance of landownership, but it still remains, she notes, 'one of the most useful to historians of rural communities'. Dennis Mills' formulation offers a starting point for identifying aspects of local settlement character: population size, density and change; landownership

and occupancy; poor rate levels; rural industry; shops and public houses; housing quality and supply; religious denominations; political culture; and poaching and gamekeeping.³⁴

The open-closed model and the twentieth century

In 1959, before his work on formulating the open-closed settlement model, Mills observed that:

Despite the changes of the twentieth century, including the decay of the landowning class, it is still possible to distinguish in the field the mixture of settlements which the changes of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries brought about.³⁵

Later, in his epilogue to *Lord and Peasant*, Mills signals the possibilities that exist for placing various relationships that are integral to the open-closed typology in a longer view setting. Certain historical continuities are of relevance in the study of the more recent, local past. Mills' epilogue discusses three trends, or 'futures', for rural communities. Beginning with the 'estate system', he notes that:

It exerts one of two influences on rural community development . . . In the areas remoter from towns, the estate village tends, at least outwardly, to be a museum of itself, especially where property has remained in the hands of a few people.

Elsewhere, he adds that in some places the influence of the landed classes 'on rural landscape and more directly on rural life has been more pervasive during our own century', with surviving estate villages 'visited by enthralled masses on Bank Holidays, or, when near enough to towns, the secluded haunts of prosperous middle class commuters, pleased to take on some of the status of the once-great house'. Here Mills cites the case of the estate village of Blankney, to the south of Lincoln.³⁶

On the other influence of the estate system, Mills continues:

Where the once model village has found itself in the path of strong development pressures for suburban or 'dormitory' development . . . [it] has succumbed. It has usually done this on a totally different basis from the former open village. Instead of large numbers of three bedroom semi-detached houses, there will be limited numbers of individually-designed detached houses, enhanced in desirability by the leafy environment surviving from estate days. Sometimes the big house has gone and smaller houses have been built on the site, sometimes it remains as a block of flats, with new houses in the grounds. Stable blocks, laundries, servants' quarters, gardeners' cottages, barns and granaries have all acquired a status which would have made the former inhabitants smile. And this status is protected by planning policies which prevent developments not in keeping with the character of the locality.³⁷

It is in describing the unfolding of this second trajectory that Mills makes reference to some of his detailed local investigations into the 'long-view' life course of Canwick, just south of Lincoln. Canwick features as a case study in a number of his publications.³⁸ The village mutated through the later twentieth and into the early twenty-first centuries, as land and property changed hands and demands for redevelopment pressed upon the place. The owners of the Canwick estate, the Sibthorps, sold it to Jesus College, Cambridge, in 1940 and Jesus College subsequently sold much of the land, allowing for further local

development. But through its legacy of buildings and designed landscapes, the estate has continued to act as a relict cultural check on the rate and nature of local change.

Turning to the peasant system and the 'open' village, Mills observes:

By virtue of recent and current planning policies, housing developments have been channelled into the bigger villages, i.e. mainly those which were open villages in the nineteenth century. Although this policy has been evolved on the basis of providing adequate services in a limited number of places, the result is much the same as could have been predicted on the basis of the open-closed model.³⁹

Through the second half of the twentieth and into the twenty-first century, rising levels of car ownership and commuting, the location of light industry in the countryside, the spread of information and communication technologies, and the implementation of settlement planning policies have all contributed to a process of counter urbanisation. This has brought some reversal of the general trend towards rural population decline evident from the late nineteenth to the mid twentieth century. However, the impact of this demographic turnaround has been spatially uneven, with some settlements experiencing greater recovery than others.⁴⁰ Various villages near Lincoln have seen rapid growth, and for a few settlements this has brought absorption into the city limits, especially to the south. It is also evident that, within the Lincoln hinterland, local patterns of landownership have exercised an important influence on development, with growth particularly associated with the historically 'open' and 'divided' settlement types, and also with some of the 'absentee'. In such places successive rounds of development have been encouraged, permitted and accommodated by the planning system. Inter-war development in 'ribbons', small blocks of post-war local authority accommodation, sinuous lines of bungalows, and housing in many variants and degrees of the 'modernist', 'quasi-neo-vernacular' or 'executive' styles, have all added to the expansion and appearance of settlements like Nettleham and Welton to the north of Lincoln, and Skellingthorpe and Metherringham to the south.⁴¹

The processes of negotiation apparent between property owners, developers and local authorities, as well as countryside interest and pressure groups, have brought contrasting development outcomes for settlements, and this was a particular focus of attention in some of the rural studies literature emerging around the time of and following the publication of Mills' *Lord and Peasant*. In the 1970s sociologists observed that landowners and owner-farmers were continuing to play a significant part in bringing about different courses of local rural development, despite the diminution of their status by rounds of fiscal, financial, legal and political restrictions. The collective ideology of good stewardship espoused by landowning and farming interests remained a force of some substance.⁴² By the early 1990s, geographers found that diversification within the agrarian economy, and intensifying and competing use demands upon a 'contested' countryside, were contributing to much uneven development and an enhancement of local and regional difference.⁴³ Even if late twentieth-century countryside researchers were not explicitly employing Mills' open-closed model, the persistence of tendencies akin to 'closedness' and 'openness', or some state between the two, is evident in their findings. In Buckinghamshire, Murdoch and Marsden contrasted the fortunes of the 'estate village'

of Swanbourne, which was 'stable' and with 'rurality retained', with Weston Turville and Wingrave, where the presence of absentee and more divided landownership structures has resulted in a weaker resistance to external and internal pressures to develop. Crucial factors include the processes of local class formation, and how far established landowners and farmers, residents of long standing and new middle-class incoming groups can reach consensus over the scale of settlement expansion. Understanding the reconstitution of class interests and relations through time will assist in explaining the reconstitution of settlement forms.⁴⁴

Some studies have developed typologies to aid analysis and explanation of settlement development in the second half of the twentieth century. Sarah Harper has drawn up classifications for conurbation hinterlands in Staffordshire and Hampshire relating to population size, property tenure, age profile, and level of commuting. Harper identifies larger and more expansive 'metropolitan' settlements, with higher levels of property ownership, a younger population and more commuting; smaller 'established' settlements, with more tied or rented accommodation and an older age profile; and, in between, the 'uniform' villages, which are more balanced and in some state of transition or consolidation. Although the complexion of class structures and interests has evolved through the twentieth century, of continuing relevance is 'a trend towards the polarization of settlements along lines dictated by socio-economic class'.⁴⁵

Murdoch and Marsden, as well as Harper, unravel at a local level the processes that contributed towards uneven development in the face of the pressures of counter urbanisation and the demands of local, regional and general planning policies aiming to direct and control the scale and location of rural growth. This line of enquiry is also of interest to the geographers Brian Short and David Spencer. Short and Spencer see value in revisiting Mills' 'open-closed' settlement model as a key point of reference in analysing the longer term development of settlement form. Both recognise the various weaknesses that have been identified in the Mills model: its focus on a framework of internal mechanisms; its inability to capture the range of behaviour of landowners and the options open to them; its over dependence on the parochial unit of administration as an analytical space, with the attendant problem of dealing with regions of scattered settlement; and its shortcomings in capturing the full nature and meaning of rural life. The model lacks the flexibility to cope with changes over time and space and also developments in human attitude and action.⁴⁶

Short and Spencer, like Mills, turn for inspiration to progress in sociology. Mills was active in promoting the value of sociological insights in evolving historical approaches. He draws on work such as Ferdinand Tönnies' 1955 concept of *Gemeinschaft* (community) and *Gesellschaft* (society), W. J. H. Sprott's 1958 study of *Human Groups* and W. M. Williams' investigations into the communities of *Gosforth* (1956) and *Ashworthy* (1963), in order to inform his conceptual interrelating of social structure and evolving settlement form.⁴⁷ He develops what he terms a 'sociological classification' that would capture the intersection of class type and village type.⁴⁸ Short and Spencer are also concerned with social structure and class relations, but argue for a greater emphasis to be placed on the wielding of power. Short, making reference to structuration theory, is attracted more to the concept of 'structures of domination' than of class, with the essential analytical

theme being questions of where power and domination reside and the ways that they are exercised. This shift in approach helps historical research to move away from the rather self-contained and functionalist construct of the open-closed model, towards a more flexible framework. For Short 'the pattern of "open" and "close" has not vanished'. He calls, however, for a conceptual decoupling of landownership and power: the two are related, but are not, as indicated by the Mills model, one and the same thing. Short concludes that 'possible constellations of power relations, local economies and ecologies, changing either subtly or dramatically through time, yield infinite landscape variations, which mirror the rural society itself, and in turn help to give it shape'. The focus should be less on pattern and more on process and 'rather than describe the diversity of form', the aim should be to 'explain them in terms of the power relations between people, and the spatial structures to which such reciprocity gives rise'.⁴⁹

David Spencer, like Short, seeks to address the various problems of agency, space and time that are associated with the Mills model. He claims that, even by 2000, there was 'no comprehensive critique of Mills' work that embraces his initial formulations, methodology, and approach to explanation', although he does recognise the breadth of Short's earlier evaluation. Indeed, far more than Short, Spencer is able to translate aspects of the language and working of the Mills model into the context of the twentieth century. He wants to rework the model in a way that would not incorporate the 'significant theoretical weaknesses' of the Mills formulation nor produce an adapted socio-spatial model, but rather develop a more appropriate conceptual framework 'which highlights the role of human agency in producing, reproducing, and contesting the systems of power and control which are capable of shaping and reshaping different types of rural communities'. Rather than embracing structuration theory, Spencer turns even further away from thinking that bears 'deterministic trappings', and towards the micro-sociological methodology of 'actor-network' theory, influenced by the adoption, articulation and promotion of this approach by a set of rural geographers studying the post-war countryside. The theory proposes that 'actors-in-networks' are followed, in order to show how, for example, different landowners as actors behave in different contexts. The study of structures may indicate the likelihood of what might be regarded as typical actions on the part of landowners, but does not explain what actually occurs and why in individual contexts. Actor-network theory allows for the conceptual differentiation of 'power *in potentia* and power *in actu*'. Spencer again advocates a move from the study of patterns to the study of processes. He proposes, first, 'a shift of emphasis from the "closed" parish as a descriptive entity to the broader notion of closure as a generic process'. Second, there should be a shift in analysis from structures to landowner interests and the translation of those interests into action. Third, 'attention must switch from landownership . . . to landowners as human or institutional agents whose interests in a community stimulate them to act as to "close" it'. Fourth, in relation to space, Spencer turns for assistance to structuration theory, arguing that 'rather than fixate on the parish', the focus should be 'upon what Giddens termed the *locale*; a socio-spatial construct which is the setting or context for interaction'. Finally, on the question of time, he suggests that 'the theory of action lends itself to an open-ended approach as opposed to Mills' rigid periodisation'.⁵⁰ Spencer, having reconceptualised the typology, claims that:

As systems of closure are produced, reproduced and ultimately brought to an end the locales in which they are practiced will be placed upon one of a number of trajectories whose duration may well extend beyond the periodisation envisaged by Mills.⁵¹

Spencer gives three examples. Under *uninterrupted closure* the landlord-tenant system endures, sustained by senses of tradition and esteem, economic diversification strategies and the perpetuation of the ideology of stewardship. Under *fractured closure* property and interests in land have been redistributed and the community is made more 'open' to some development. Under *interrupted closure* a period of property redistribution and development is replaced by a new phase in which a fresh group of proprietors pursue a strategy of resisting further change.⁵²

However, Spencer's reconstitution primarily revolves around the closed parish thesis. It reflects the interests in the study of landowners and locales demonstrating closure that are central to his investigations in Oxfordshire, especially in relation to collegiate proprietorship.⁵³ He does not reformulate the 'open' type or define a process that might be termed, alongside *closure*, one of *opening*. Nor does he give enough recognition to what is signalled in Mills' epilogue to *Lord and Peasant*. For the nineteenth century, Mills' detailed, local studies of Melbourn in Cambridgeshire reflect his interest in open villages and the 'peasant system', while his later investigations of Canwick in Lincolnshire turn to micro-level discussions of the closed and the 'estate system'.⁵⁴ If brief and 'speculative', Mills deals in *Lord and Peasant* with twentieth-century trajectories for both the historically open and the closed. Moreover, he discusses the projection forward into the twentieth century of processes, embodied by both the 'estate' and 'peasant' systems, as much as he does the open and closed typology. Mills also includes an example, in the account of Canwick, which closely resembles Spencer's *interrupted closure*. Indeed, his interest in continuities is so broadly framed that he sketches out how elements of the operation of the estate system can be discernible in the setting out of twentieth-century new towns and post-war council estates. Aspects of property holding, the exercise of power, development interests, and social relations in such planned contexts are an echo of the culture and aspirations of the 'model' estate village.⁵⁵

In 2006, in a review of the historiography on the open-closed model, Dennis Mills acknowledges the various perspectives offered in the critical evaluations of the likes of Banks, Song and Short, but he does not refer to the Spencer reformulation. Nonetheless, Mills evidently recognises the value of micro studies of landowners that employ 'behavioural' approaches and are, in effect, examinations of 'action-in-context'. Large scale, regional research, he observes, has explored different variables and causes and effects, and his own work has shifted its focus from the operation of the laws of settlement to the functional significance of landownership. Such research, supported by quantitative analysis, has given 'a satisfactory level of authority to the model'. However, such wider-ranging investigations would benefit from further, complementary analysis at smaller scales: 'it is only at the local level of individual parishes or small groups that it is possible to examine in detail the mechanisms at work within the general model'. Mills is primarily discussing the nineteenth-century context here, but his call for such behavioural investigations is also of relevance for the study of twentieth-century change. It strikes

a chord with the proposals of Short and Spencer for reconceptualisation and a revised methodology with a greater focus on process rather than pattern, mechanism rather than outcome, concept rather than conceptual 'model'. Mills, by 2006, also emphasises the need for a systems approach to be employed alongside one based on the typological model.⁵⁶

The relevance of the 'open-closed' model, 'estate' and 'peasant' systems, and processes of 'closure' and 'opening' for studies of the twentieth-century countryside needs more testing. In Mills' home county, moreover, there is a particular settlement 'type' that would prove a stimulating context for investigating further reconceptualisation. These are the former Royal Air Force 'estate' settlements that are something of a Lincolnshire speciality, given the concentration of airbases in the county and the rate of their decommissioning in recent decades.⁵⁷ The contrasting life courses of places like Hemswell to the north of Lincoln and Nocton to the south make for interesting studies. The spatial and functional compartmentalisation of Hemswell is determined to a large extent by the architecture and infrastructure of its life as an air force base. The base is now an out of town antiques retail park. The former barrack blocks, ranged around the central parade ground, are now units selling antiques and collectables, and frequently form the backdrop for 'Bargain Hunt' television programmes. Beyond the retail park are buildings which were constructed as 'other ranks' accommodation and on the other side of a main road from Lincoln to Gainsborough are former officers' houses which are grander in scale and standing in more finely landscaped plots. In Nocton, the construction of a military hospital complex led to one of a number of distinctive phases of development, with zones laid out for the accommodation of officers, non-commissioned officers and other ranks. The area was previously at the centre of a landed estate, with tied cottages, a Gothic Revival church and a 'big' house. The house later became the hospital and is now a burnt-out shell. The village's current and most prominent incarnation is as a dormitory settlement. The socio-spatial composition of Nocton is today quite an entanglement of rounds of redevelopment, re-segregation and identity reforming. Places such as Hemswell and Nocton offer challenging opportunities for micro-study. They invite exploration of the constitution and reconstitution of property ownership structures, development interests and action, and class relations in the twentieth century, along with the perpetuation of or divergence from historic settlement forms and development trajectories.⁵⁸

Conclusion

The construction of the open-closed settlement model was something of a personal quest for Mills, as well as an exercise in interdisciplinary thought and method, as he brought to the attention of readers at the very beginning of *Lord and Peasant*, especially those inclined to 'go in search of bias':

Born on a Nottinghamshire estate of Lincolnshire peasant stock, I was subjected in childhood and youth to the influence of both lord and peasant . . . I was inoculated at an early age against paternalism, however, by a strong dose of independence, which came from my mother's milk, for her father was a cottage farmer in a fenside parish, and my father became a self-employed market-gardener.⁵⁹

Whether appreciated for its personal tone, its social-scientific methodology, or its keen insight into the historical and contemporary rural scene, or for all three of these, the Mills oeuvre is much cited. For Charles Rawding, 'the most comprehensive attempt at constructing a nineteenth century historical geography of rural Britain is to be found in the writing of Mills'.⁶⁰ The virtue of the Mills' thesis, for Rawding, Tiller and others, is its grounding in the observations of contemporary commentators. For critics of Mills, the translation of this nineteenth-century discourse into a predictive model has various conceptual and methodological limits and, for Banks in particular, is a rather self-defeating exercise.

Even if the Mills model has certain weaknesses, the breadth and depth of his attempts to explore the various intersections of the processes of property ownership, power wielding and place making in the countryside are undiminished. Moreover, as a new round of historical, geographical and sociological research has shown, for the investigation of the late twentieth century, this area of study has not lost its attractiveness or potency as a focus for analytical enquiry. Mills' observations and 'predictions' will be of increasing interest to historians as they embrace the full chronological range of the twentieth century and engage with the work of the 'pioneers' of interdisciplinary thought and practice who have analysed the recent rural past. The work of Mills on the nineteenth and the twentieth centuries will hold a fascination, relevance and prescience.

Notes

1. A bibliography brought together to inform a *festschrift* to Mills identified 127 publications: Shirley Brook, 'Bibliography', in Shirley Brook, Andrew Walker and Rob Wheeler, eds, *Lincoln Connections: Aspects of City and County since 1700: A Tribute to Dennis Mills* (Lincoln, 2011), pp. 12–15.
2. Among his earliest publications are: D. R. Mills, 'Regions of Kesteven Devised for the Purposes of Agricultural History', *Lincolnshire Architectural and Archaeological Society: Reports and Papers* 7 (1957), 80–2; 'Lincolnshire Farming Regions', *East Midland Geographer*, 9 (1958), 41–3; 'The Poor Laws and the Distribution of Population, c.1600–1860, with special reference to Lincolnshire', *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, 26 (1959), 185–95. His most recent to date are: Dennis Mills, 'Local Studies in Sanitary Reform: The Importance of the Engineering Aspect, Lincoln, 1848–50', *The Local Historian*, 39 (2009), 207–17; 'St Giles Avenue', in Andrew Walker, ed., *Uphill Lincoln II: The North-Eastern Suburbs* (Lincoln, 2010), pp. 44–6; 'Where were George Giles and Motherby Hill?', *The Lincoln Enquirer*, 19 (2010), 2–5.
3. See, for example: Dennis R. Mills, 'The Christening Custom at Melbourn, Cambs', *Local Population Studies*, 11 (1973), 11–22; Dennis Mills, 'Canwick (Lincolnshire) and Melbourn (Cambridgeshire) in Comparative Perspective within the Open-Closed Village Model', *Rural History*, 17 (2006), 1–22; "'Recollections" of the Romans in Canwick Village', *Lincolnshire Past and Present*, 59 (2005), 3–6.
4. On community, see, for example: Dennis Mills, 'Community and Nation in the Past: Perception and Reality', in Michael Drake, ed., *Time, Family and Community: Perspectives on Family and Community History* (Oxford, 1994), pp. 261–85; 'Defining Community: A Critical Review of Community in *Family and Community History*', *Family and Community History*, 7 (2004), 5–12.
5. Guides to the use of the population census and commercial directories include: Dennis R. Mills, *Rural Community History from Trade Directories* (Aldenham, 2001); Dennis Mills and Michael Drake, 'The Census, 1801–1991', in Michael Drake and Ruth Finnegan, eds,

Studying Family and Community History, Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries, 4, Sources and Methods: A Handbook (2nd edn, Oxford, 1997), pp. 25–56.

6. Among the important texts on the development of the model are: D. R. Mills, 'The Geographical Effects of the Laws of Settlement in Nottinghamshire: An Analysis of Francis Howell's Report, 1848', *East Midlands Geographer*, 5 (1970), 31–8; Mills, 'Has Historical Geography Changed?', *New Trends in Geography* (Milton Keynes, 1972), pp. 58–75; Dennis R. Mills, *Lord and Peasant in Nineteenth Century Britain* (London, 1980).
7. Andrew J. H. Jackson, 'Process and Synthesis in the Rethinking of Local History: Perspectives Contained in Essays for a County History Society', *International Journal of Regional and Local Studies* 2 (2006), 5–19; Mills, 'Community and Nation', p. 282; George Sheeran and Yanina Sheeran, 'Discourses in Local History', *Rethinking History*, 2 (1998), 66–72; Kate Tiller, 'Local History Brought Up to Date', *The Local Historian*, 36 (2006), 148–62.
8. Dennis R. Mills, 'Introduction', in Mills, ed., *Twentieth Century Lincolnshire* (Lincoln, 1989), pp. 12–15. See also: Andrew J. H. Jackson, 'Researching and Writing Local Histories of the Twentieth Century: An Introduction and Review', *International Journal of Regional and Local Studies*, 6 (2010), 7–15.
9. From the proceedings of the conference, see: Andrew J. H. Jackson, 'Problematising and Practising "Community-Focused" Local History: On the Ermine, A Council Estate in 1950s and '60s Lincoln', *International Journal of Regional and Local Studies*, 6 (2010), 48–71; Kate Tiller, 'Local History and the Twentieth Century: An Overview and Suggested Agenda', *International Journal of Regional and Local Studies*, 6 (2010), 16–47.
10. Jackson, 'Problematising and Practising'; 'Rural Lincolnshire from the Mid-Twentieth Century: Landscapes and Settlements', for *A Century of Lincolnshire's Past: A Conference to Mark the Centenary of the Lincoln Record Society*, Lincoln, 22 May 2010; 'Open and Closed Settlements Revisited: Twentieth-Century Rural and Urban Change', *Lincolnshire Archives Research Progress Seminar, 21: Twentieth-century Rural Lincolnshire and Beyond*, Lincoln, 13th November 2010, which was reproduced in the *festschrift* for Mills as: 'Towards the Late Twentieth Century and Beyond: Rural and Urban Change and the Task of the Historian', in Brook, Walker and Wheeler, eds, *Lincoln Connections*, pp. 136–43. I am grateful for the comments of Dennis Mills and others at the Lincolnshire Archives seminar, and from Dennis in *pers. comm.*, 22nd April 2011.
11. For a general review of the evolving character of the community studies literature see: Sarah Harper, 'The British Rural Community: An Overview of Perspectives', *Journal of Rural Studies*, 5 (1989), 161–84; Susan Wright, 'Image and Analysis: New Directions in Community Studies', in Brian Short, ed., *The English Rural Community: Image and Analysis* (Cambridge, 1992), pp. 195–217.
12. Craig Taylor, *Return to Akenfield* (London, 2007); Michael Havinden, *Estate Villages Revisited: A Second Up-dated Edition of the Study of the Oxfordshire (formerly Berkshire) Villages of Ardington and Lockinge* (Reading, 1999); Andrew J. H. Jackson, 'The Shearers and the Shorn Revisited: Twentieth-Century Rural Devon through the Writings of E. W. Martin', in Devon History Society, *Devon People and Landscapes* (Exeter, 2011), forthcoming.
13. See, for example: D. R. Mills, 'English Villages in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries: A Sociological Approach. Part I: The Concept of a Sociological Classification', *The Amateur Historian*, 6 (1965), 271–8; Dennis R. Mills, 'The Peasant System', *The Local Historian*, 11 (1974), 200–6; 'The Relations between History and Geography', *Cambridge Institute of Education Bulletin*, 3 (1967), 2–5.
14. Tiller, 'Local History and the Twentieth Century'. See Marilyn Strathern, *Kinship at the Core* (Cambridge, 1996); D. I. A. Steel, *A Lincolnshire Village: The Parish of Corby Glen in its Historical Context* (London, 1979); Mills, *Twentieth Century Lincolnshire*.
15. Jackson, 'Local and Regional History as Heritage: The Heritage Process and Conceptualising the Purpose and Practice of Local Historians', *International Journal of Heritage Studies*, 14 (2008), 362–79; Catherine Nash, 'Local Histories in Northern Ireland', *History Workshop*

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16. Dennis Mills, ‘Local History on the Council Agenda’, *History Today*, 43 (1993), 10–12; ‘Heritage and Historians’, *The Local Historian*, 24 (1994), 225–8.
 17. Mills, *Lord and Peasant*, pp. 223–8.
 18. Mills, *Lord and Peasant*, p. 223.
 19. D. R. Mills, ‘The Development of Rural Settlement around Lincoln’, *East Midland Geographer*, 11 (1959), in Dennis R. Mills, ed., *English Rural Communities: The Impact of a Specialised Economy* (London, 1973), pp. 83–97.
 20. Mills, ‘The Geographical Effects of the Laws of Settlement’.
 21. Mills, ‘Has Historical Geography Changed?’, pp. 58–75.
 22. Dennis R. Mills and Brian Short, ‘Social Change and Social Conflict in Nineteenth-Century England’, *The Journal of Peasant Studies*, 10 (1983), 254.
 23. Andrew J. H. Jackson, ‘Investigating the Break-Up of the Great Landed Estates of Devon: The Use of Commercial Directories, 1875–1939’, *Transactions of the Devonshire Association*, 136 (2004), 165–74; Mills, *Rural Community History*, pp. 94–5.
 24. B. A. Holderness, “Open” and “Close” Parishes in England in the Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries’, *Agricultural History Review*, 20 (1972), 126–39.
 25. Mills and Short, ‘Social Change and Social Conflict’, 253–62.
 26. Heather A. Fuller, ‘Landownership and the Lindsay Landscape’, *Annals of the Association of American Geographers*, 66 (1976), 14–24.
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 28. Sarah Banks, ‘Nineteenth-Century Scandal or Twentieth-Century Model? A New Look at “Open” and “Close” Parishes’, *Economic History Review*, 41 (1988), 51–73.
 29. Byung Khun Song, ‘Parish Typology and the Operation of the Poor Laws in Early Nineteenth-Century Oxfordshire’, *Agricultural History Review*, 50 (2002), 204, 224.
 30. Mills, ‘Canwick (Lincolnshire) and Melbourn (Cambridgeshire)’, 20.
 31. Keith Snell and Paul Ell, *Rival Jerusalems: The Geography of Victorian Religion* (Cambridge, 2000), pp. 274–394.
 32. Snell and Ell, *Rival Jerusalems*, p. 367.
 33. Mills, ‘Canwick (Lincolnshire) and Melbourn (Cambridgeshire)’, 5.
 34. Kate Tiller, *Local History: An Introduction* (2nd edn, Stroud, 2002), pp. 221–2. This ‘summary’ of characteristics is also in Mills, *Lord and Peasant*, p. 117.
 35. Mills, ‘The Development of Rural Settlement’, p. 96.
 36. Dennis Mills, ‘Sustaining Rural Communities’, in John Blunden and Nigel Curry, eds, *The Changing Countryside* (Milton Keynes, 1985), pp. 175–6.
 37. Mills, *Lord and Peasant*, p. 223.
 38. Dennis Mills, *A Walk Round Canwick: The Lincolnshire Estate Village of the Sibthorps with the Enclosure Award Map of 1787* (Lincoln, 2003); ‘Canwick (Lincolnshire) and Melbourn (Cambridgeshire)’.
 39. Mills, *Lord and Peasant*, p. 223.
 40. Bill Goodhand, ‘Changes in the Quality of Rural Life: A Case Study of Welbourn’, in Mills, *Twentieth Century Lincolnshire*, pp. 181–211; Dennis Mills, ‘The Fall and Rise of the English Village: Or Rural Planning and Technological Change’, *Lincolnshire Past and Present*, 3 (1991), 18–21; Steel, *A Lincolnshire Village*, pp. 216–32.
 41. Jackson, ‘Towards the Late Twentieth Century’; Mills, ‘Sustaining Rural Communities’, pp. 174–9; Mills, ‘The Development of Rural Settlement’, pp. 92–97; Dennis Mills, ‘The Revolution in Workplace and Home’, in Mills, *Twentieth Century Lincolnshire*, pp. 23–6.

42. Howard Newby, *Green and Pleasant Land? Social Change in Rural England* (Harmondsworth, 1979); Howard Newby, Colin Bell, David Rose and Peter Saunders, *Property, Paternalism and Power: Class and Control in Rural England* (London, 1978).
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44. Murdoch and Marsden, *Reconstituting Rurality*, pp. 94–124.
45. Sarah Harper, 'The Rural-Urban Interface in England: A Framework of Analysis', *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, 12 (1987), 284–302.
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47. For example, in Mills: *English Rural Communities*, pp. 18–19; 'English Villages', 271; *Lord and Peasant*, pp. 21–3; 'The Peasant Tradition', pp. 200–202.
48. Mills, 'Has Geography Changed?', pp. 70 - 71.
49. Short, 'The Evolution of Contrasting Communities', pp. 20–1, 36, 40–1; Short refers here to Anthony Giddens, *The Constitution of Society: Outline of the Theory of Structuration* (Cambridge, 1984).
50. Spencer, 'Reformulating', 85, 90–3. Spencer refers to the evaluation, endorsement and application of actor network theory in: Marsden, Murdoch, Lowe, Munton and Flynn, *Constructing the Countryside*; Murdoch and Marsden, *Reconstituting Rurality*. I am grateful for the encouragement of Richard Munton, David Spencer and Brian Short during an earlier, if more fleeting, investigation of the significance of the open-closed settlement model and actor-network theory in the context of twentieth-century change; see, for a study in Devon, Jackson, 'Rural Property Rights and the Survival of Historic Landed Estates in the Late Twentieth Century' (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of London, 1998).
51. Spencer, 'Reformulating', p. 93.
52. Spencer, 'Reformulating', pp. 93–4.
53. David Spencer, 'Oxford Collegiate Landownership and Rural Residential Development: Some Preliminary Considerations', Discussion Paper No. 37 (Reading, 1995); 'Oxford Collegiate Landownership and Rural Residential Development: The Case of Chalgrove', Discussion Paper No. 38 (Reading, 1995); 'Pulling Out of Landed Property: The Oxford Colleges and the Church Commissioners', *Area*, 32 (2000), 297–306.
54. Mills, *A Walk Around Canwick*; 'Canwick (Lincolnshire) and Melbourn (Cambridgeshire)'; 'The Peasant System'.
55. Mills, *Lord and Peasant*, pp. 223–8. This urban perspective is the main focus of discussion in Jackson, 'Towards the Late Twentieth Century'.
56. Mills, 'Canwick (Lincolnshire) and Melbourn (Cambridgeshire)', 2–3, 5.
57. Barry Holliss, 'The Impact of the Royal Air Force', in Mills, *Twentieth Century Lincolnshire*, pp. 151–4; Mills, 'The Fall and Rise of the English Village', 19.
58. Jackson, 'Towards the Late Twentieth Century', p. 138; 'Rural Lincolnshire'.
59. Mills, *Lord and Peasant*, p. 13.
60. Rawding, 'Village Type', 53.