

David Cressy and John Walter, who have emphasised the importance of the pre-war crisis of 1640 to 1642. It also supports the post-revisionist stress on the depth and importance of politics beyond parliaments in early modern England.

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Chris Briggs, *Credit and Village Society in Fourteenth-Century England*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2009. Pp. xiv + 254; 10 figs; 2 maps; 23 tabs. £45. 9780197264416.

If English early modernists have recently challenged the view that rural credit was oppressive before the nineteenth century, their medieval counterparts, it seems, remain more or less tied to an older view of such credit as 'a relatively intermittent feature of the rural economy which, in so far as it had any lasting impact, served largely to exacerbate pre-existing economic difficulties' (pp. 7–8). It is in order to test this view that Briggs took the debt litigation of five different court rolls, providing evidence on seven manorial villages, from the late thirteenth to the end of the fourteenth century. The villages, lying in the counties of Cambridgeshire and Buckinghamshire, are Balsam, Littleport, Willingham, Oakington, Great Horwood, Cottenham and Dry Drayton. He makes no attempt to claim them as representative of English villages more broadly. The 'midland' manors in his study were all in the hands of ecclesiastical landlords and were dominated by large customary tenancies, often large enough to require additional labour. The study, as Briggs notes, is therefore 'most revealing about the credit activities of relatively wealthy villeins in possession of holdings measuring 10 acres or more' (p. 24).

Briggs' findings are instructive. Although cash loans did exist, in contrast to the situation in contemporary Europe where they were as common or more common than credit sales, such loans were relatively infrequent in medieval England, where deferred payments for goods and livestock were the most common form of credit, with delayed remuneration for work or other services next in line. There is also some evidence of the use of the 'purchase price advance', in which the debtor agreed to supply goods to the creditor at a time in the future in exchange for a cash payment (p. 38). Nor did land constitute the usual form of security; personal securities as the preferred form of pledge enjoyed a much higher profile than either land or written instruments. Most credit was between villagers, and not from institutions, lords, or even the beneficed clergy, and few creditors were non-resident. More significantly, there is little evidence for the emergence of the serial creditor or debtor. Certainly, those involved in the credit market did not belong to the ranks of the poor; the lending tended to be horizontal among villagers in relatively wealthy positions. That the credit supply contracted in dearth years is clearly indicated, although some villagers fared better than others, suggesting that the market for credit was localised, dependent upon mortality and highly segmented.

Briggs must be congratulated for this carefully argued and painstakingly researched monograph. His deft and thorough questioning of his source material reveals in full the

problematic nature of his data and, as a result, the tentative nature of his conclusions, but it also reminds us how wonderfully imaginative medieval historians can be. His argument that credit in the medieval English village may not have been as oppressive as current historiography suggests is clearly influenced by the geography of his sources, but it does allow for the possibility that credit may have been as much about investment as exigency in fourteenth-century England.

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Ronald D. Eller, *Uneven Ground: Appalachia Since 1945*, Lexington, The University Press of Kentucky, 2009. xv + 326 pp. \$29.95. 9780813125237.

American writers have 'discovered' Appalachia on numerous occasions, typically at crucial moments when modernising urbanites want a counterpoint to their model of progress. From the savage-like frontiersman of the eighteenth century to the twentieth-century 'welfare cheat', southern highlanders have required some sort of moral uplift, personal motivation or human capital development, depending upon the reigning theory of poverty at the time. Consequently, well-meaning reformers have intermittently sought to mould a new culture from what they saw as the pliable material of the Appalachian people. No effort so galvanised America's desire to transform the upcountry South as Lyndon B. Johnson's Great Society. Absorbing more than a century's worth of stereotypes about Appalachians, Johnson's War on Poverty hoped to redeem the United States by healing one of its most persistent sores. Reformers and policy makers ultimately failed, according to Ronald Eller, not because of the inadequacies of mountain people, but rather because they treated Appalachians like clients, tried to apply urban programmes in rural areas, and refused to tackle the underlying problems of structural inequality.

Building on his now classic earlier work, *Miners, Millhands, and Mountaineers* (1982), Eller briefly recounts the region's industrial era as a period of colonial-like exploitation. Although the sweep is broad, the primary emphasis is on resource extraction, especially coal, in central Appalachia, which dispossessed landholders, triggered a mass exodus and left a pattern of economic growth resulting in 'rich land - poor people'. After 1945, the boom and, predominantly, bust cycles of coal largely determined the welfare of the central core of the region, as the nation turned to oil and natural gas for its energy and industry turned to mechanisation, which meant that even the boom times benefited fewer and fewer Appalachians. By the time presidential hopeful John F. Kennedy campaigned in West Virginia in 1960, Appalachia was ripe for rediscovery.

Over the ensuing decades poverty warriors, armed with development theories, culture of poverty ideas, and service delivery models, descended on the region. From the outset, however, they faced entrenched local power structures, bureaucratic infighting, and rural citizens who resented being told what they needed. Meanwhile, programmes stressing development did little to equitably distribute benefits, either geographically or socially. Meanwhile, activists who spoke of empowering Appalachians to confront inequality faced