Friends of the Department of English Local History

NEWSLETTER

UNIVERSITY OF LEICESTER NUMBER 2 • SEPTEMBER 1989

Some People: W. G. Hoskins

With Mud on his Boots

For four score years and one you have travelled
Uncatalogued libraries of footpath and parish,
You bicycled leagues of manorial rolls,
Over aerial photos you flew like a kestrel.

In your lectures and books we heard Saxons and navvies
Wield axes and spades, your diagrams smelt
Of Steeple Barton and ledgers, of markets and mills,
And the palimpsest landscape came alive in the archives.

You translated the scribble of hedgebanks and boundaries,
Midland students were smeared with red Devon marl,
Your eyes in our boots found lost hamlets and highways
– Sir, you smudged mud on our maps, here's mud in your eye!

C. R. T. Nankivell

INTRODUCTION

This is the first regular Autumn number of the Friends' Newsletter. A special introductory number was circulated in August and the next issue will appear in October 1990. The bad news is that, unless you are a student of the Department, it is the last number which you will receive free of charge! A membership form is enclosed for your use; we regret to say that only fully paid-up members and current students will be sent the 1990 issue. Please ignore this request if you have already paid.

Friends receive the following: an annual Autumn Newsletter; free admission to the annual Friends lecture (see 'Future Events'); an opportunity to meet other friends in Marc Fitch house after the lecture; notice of the Department's seminars (see 'Future Events') and access to them, subject to availability of space; access, by arrangement, to certain facilities in the House.

This second Newsletter follows the format of the first. It describes events and activities in the Department over the last year and gives notice of future events. Abstracts are given of all theses, dissertations and published work produced in the Department. The Newsletter will also contain, as regular features, descriptions of the facilities of Marc Fitch House. In this issue we begin with a description of Salisbury Road, the setting of the house, by Dr Martin Cherry, once an Honorary Research Fellow of the Department and now an Inspector of Buildings with English Heritage. Future issues will provide information on the architecture of the interior and on the collections - books, maps, archival material, and pictures - which it contains. We end with short pieces such as the description below of The Rows Research Project in Chester, written by Jane Laughton, once an M.A. student in the Department. We prefer not to publish the results per se of research in local history for which there are many other outlets; rather to include short pieces on research projects in progress, on the work of local historians as teachers, curators, archivists and group leaders, and on exciting new methodologies. Contributions of this kind will be very welcome indeed and should be sent to Harold Fox. We hope to have a regular feature on the contribution made by local historians to the museums world: the Chiltern Open Air Museum was described in issue 1 and in this issue Mike Glasson, another former M.A. student, writes on the Walsall Leather Centre. A future Newsletter will contain news of ex-students of the Department - if enough people reply! All that is needed is a line or two. Your comments on the contents and design of the Newsletter will be heeded.

The first Newsletter was financed from donations and from the proceeds of a booksale held in March 1989. Another booksale will take place next March and any contributions will be gratefully received. It may be the case that, alternatively, you wish to donate unwanted books (relevant to our subject) to the Department as additions to the Marc Fitch Fund Library. Recently Mr Howard Usher kindly presented us with a collection of books and pamphlets on Warwickshire and Dr Constance Fraser gave copies of her own work on north-eastern England. Emeritus Professor J. Simmons made a generous donation with which the Department purchased a number of volumes on railway history, a subject to which he has made such a notable contribution. Dr Roy Hart of Stilton, once an Honorary Research Fellow in the Department, gave a collection of volumes from national and local record societies. There have also been donations of individual volumes, and more are needed.

Production of this Newsletter has been in the hands of Harold Fox, Ralph Weedon, Margery Tranter and Chris Thornton.

Useful contact addresses are:

Membership enquiries: Dr Anne Mitson, 61 Trowell Road, Wollaton, Nottingham NG8 2EJ.

Attendance at seminars and use of facilities in Marc Fitch House: Mrs Pauline Whitmore, Department of English Local History, Marc Fitch House, 5 Salisbury Road, Leicester LE1 7QR.

Contributions to and comments on the Newsletter: Dr Harold Fox, at the Department's address.

Books for sale or as donations: address to 'Friends' at the Department's address.

EVENTS IN THE DEPARTMENT

Opening of Marc Fitch House

All too often the University's flag is raised over the Fielding Johnson Building to mark a sombre occasion, but on April 11th it was hoisted at full mast to honour the presence on campus of Major-General His Grace the Duke of Norfolk (President of the Marc Fitch Fund), Dr and Mrs Fitch and many other friends of the University and the Department. The events of the day began with the formal opening of Marc Fitch House. Compared to the reception and inauguration ceremony which followed, the formal opening was a small

affair, numbers being restricted by the size of the Seminar Room where a plaque was unveiled. Dr and Mrs Fitch, the Vice-Chancellor and Executive Pro-Vice-Chancellor, the Lord Mayor of Leicester, certain members of the Department and of the Marc Fitch Fund, the designers of the purpose-made fittings and furnishings in the house and a batch of photographers from the Press and University watched as the Duke of Norfolk unveiled the plaque at 10.45 a.m. This very select group then toured the house stopping longest, perhaps, in the Reading Room of the Library where Mr Tom Fisher explained his work on the table which he has designed for readers of one of the Library's treasures - the 'Penny' edition of the Alecto facsimile of Domesday Book. The setting proved to be a favourite with the photographers: the Duke of Norfolk turning the pages of the facsimile edition flanked by the Vice-Chancellor and Dr Fitch.

By 11.45 the Vice-Chancellor was beginning to suggest that the party be drawn away from these treasures, for in another part of the University over sixty further guests were gathering to study a photographic exhibition featuring the work of the Department and to attend a champagne reception and inauguration ceremony. At the ceremony the Duke of Norfolk spoke of Dr Fitch's long career as patron of historical studies and of the University's good fortune at having been given the Marc Fitch Fund Library together with a very substantial grant for the renovation of the buildings which house it; the Vice-Chancellor in his turn thanked both the Duke and Dr Fitch, referring to the Department as 'the jewel in the crown' of the Faculty of Arts. Guests then sat down to lunch after which they were whisked (literally, by an April storm of whirlwind proportions) back to Marc Fitch House for separate tours. There the Seminar Room had been transformed for an exhibition of books by members of the Department and of series which have been associated with it (the Agrarian History of England and Wales, the English Surnames Series, the Department's Occasional Papers and the Victoria County History of Leicestershire); the Map Room had been set up to exhibit rare items from departmental collections and from the Marc Fitch Fund Library; there were demonstrations of computing and of the work of the English Surnames Survey. The tour leaders - Paul Ell, Trevor Hill, Nan Hume, Jon Kissock, Lynn Marston and Linda McKenna - for the most part deftly avoided clashing their respective troups on the two stairways of Marc Fitch House. Guests departed just as the Leicester Mercury went into the newsagents carrying a full picture feature of the Duke's visit.

Departmental Seminar Programme 1988-9: Spring Term

The first seminar of the term was presented by Martin Cherry (English Heritage) whose paper on 'Vernacular origins and regional variation in domestic building' looked at the development and use of dendrochronology as a method of dating building timbers and provided a brilliant overview of spatial pattern and chronological development in English vernacular styles. Putting a precise date to a building can be a difficult task, and here dendrochronology is proving invaluable. For example, early models of smoke removal screens have been recognised with the aid of dendrochronology, and because of this it has become necessary to reconsider the time-scale of their evolution and of their spread throughout the country.

John Beckett (University of Nottingham) very bravely marched into the enemy camp to discuss 'The region in history, or the history of the region?' with particular reference to the East Midlands. The East Midlands appears to be a pseudo-region, which occasionally demonstrates its regionality, while at other times shows that the whole is rather less than the sum of its parts. The region is now popularly defined in terms of independent T.V. stations. Beckett's presentation was followed by lively questions during which the need to study regional history at all was questioned. The combatants then withdrew to their respective corners.

Social network analysis is a relatively new way of looking at social connections between people, parishes or businesses. It enables connections to be quantified and compared. The main problem appears to be knowing where to draw the boundaries of the network. John Scott (Department of Sociology, University of Leicester) showed us how such analysis can be used to plot the progress of families up and down the social scale, and how the approach can be applied in different areas of study. This tied up closely with the next seminar, in which Christopher Marsh (Corpus Christi College, Cambridge) used a similar approach in his study of the Familists in Balsham. In his paper, 'The Family of Love and the local community', he showed that the members of this heretical sect were in fact closely involved with the community, serving as parish officers and witnessing wills while still maintaining Familist beliefs. Even after being tried for heresy the leading members continued in their parish activities. This

outward conformity and inward heresy was condoned by the sect, which was essentially a quiet and private group, seeing no point in martyrdom and willing to swear to anything in order to remain free. They sought to make converts only from those whom they knew to be sympathetic. A close examination of the network of activity in the village showed that a large proportion of villagers had at least one connection with a Famulist, as family or in business, and it was suggested that many of the people concerned could have been sympathizers, if not active supporters of the sect.

The programme was brought to a close by Jon Kissock, who made a polished presentation of his paper 'Home thoughts from abroad - rethinking the Norman Conquest of South Wales'. Arnulf de Montgomery was put forward as a candidate for the backer of planned settlements south of the boundary formed by the Landsker. These settlements were distinct from the Flemish colonies imported by Henry I, in origin and form. Those planned villages not on the Landsker are similar in plan to villages in Holderness, also part of the de Montgomery estates. In the German lands locators were used as agents to collect the people who were to set up such settlements. It was suggested that men with broadly similar duties operated in South Wales. But there the locators were more than mere agents: they took a share of the land for themselves, and apparently stayed in the settlement.

Nan Hume

New Part-time M.A. Course

All members of staff in the Department have spent a great deal of time this year in planning the new part-time M.A. course, 'English Local History: societies, cultures and nation', beginning in October 1989. Part-time students attend one session per week (either in the daytime or in the evening) over two years and also come to occasional Saturday schools and to the residential field course. In order to make the part-time degree compatible with the continuing full-time M.A., the whole timetable has been streamlined. Because of the need to streamline and also as a result of growing sophistication in the literature of the subject, all M.A. students, whether full-time or part-time, will be allowed from October 1989 to specialize in two out of four options: Anglo-Saxon, Medieval, Early Modern and Modern. These exciting new developments will draw many students into the new and improved facilities at Marc Fitch House. The target of an intake of eleven students for October 1989 has been met. For further information about admission in October 1990 please write to Mrs Pauline Whitmore at the Department.

The University Funding Council's Research Selectivity Exercise

In a recent review of research performance in the universities, the Department of English Local History (linked with the Department of Economic and Social History) was given a rating of 4, on a scale ranging from 1 (lowest performance) to 5 (highest performance). The University Funding Council's description of the fourth point on the scale reads as follows: 'research quality that equates to attainable levels of national excellence in virtually all sub-areas of activity, possibly showing some evidence of international excellence; or to international level in some sub-areas and at least national level in a majority'.

Visits to the Department

The Lord Mayor of Leicester and Lady Mayoress (Councillor David Taylor and Mrs Taylor), visited the Department on July 5th as part of the annual mayoral visit to new developments in the University. Over thirty members of the University's Departmental Staff Common Room Association visited the Department on July 13th.

Postgraduate Workshop

A workshop, to discuss the aims and objectives of postgraduate research, was convened by Evelyn Lord and Jon Kissock in mid-July. The participants - Ralph Weedon, Evelyn Lord, Jon Kissock, Pam Drinkall and Lynn Marston - each presented a short paper outlining the progress of their present research project, their hopes, their joys and the problems involved. Each of the papers was followed by discussion. The half-way point was marked by a buffet lunch served in the Common Room. Everyone enjoyed the relaxed atmosphere of the proceedings and felt that the day had been a worthwhile experience, one which should be repeated. If you would be interested in joining us when we meet again in the Spring term to exchange ideas and encourage each other please write to: Lynn Marston, at the Department as soon as possible.

FUTURE EVENTS

Departmental Seminar Programme

19 October 1989. Intensive pastoral husbandry in medieval England: some evidence from Norfolk **(Dr Bruce Campbell,** Department of

Economic and Social History, University of Belfast).

16 November 1989. Readings of ritual: the ceremony of childbirth in early-modern England (**Dr Adrian Wilson,** Urban History Centre, University of Leicester).

23 November 1989. Bampton, Oxfordshire: a minster church and its territory in the Early Middle Ages and after (**Dr John Blair,** The Queen's College, Oxford).

7 December 1989. 'Gnawing it out': neighbourhood exchange in nineteenth-century S.E. England (**Dr Michael Reed,** School of Cultural and Community Studies, University of Sussex).

14 December 1989. Medieval Glastonbury: a town or not a town? that is the question (**Miss Lynn Marston,** Department of English Local History, University of Leicester).

11 Jan 1990. Lineage myths and the education of the English gentry in the Middle Ages. (**Dr Philip Morgan,** Department of Adult and Continuing Education, University of Keele).

25 Jan 1990. The importance of kinship in rural communities: south-west Nottinghamshire in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries (**Dr Anne Mitson,** School of Adult and Continuing Education, University of Hull).

8 February 1990. Rochester: bridge, city and territory over 2,000 years (**Professor Nicholas Brooks,** School of History, University of Birmingham).

1 March 1990. Women's understandings of work in the 1920s and 30s (interim title) (**Dr Sally Alexander,** History Workshop Journal).

15 March 1990. Merchants, masters and men: the ship-owning industry of north Devon, 1786-1841. (**Mr Michael Nix,** Bodmin, Bude and Launceston Museums).

If you would like to come to any of these seminars, you will be very welcome. They are held in Marc Fitch House at 2.15 (with the exception of the seminar on 8th February which will begin at 3.00 p.m.). It is essential that you notify Pauline Whitmore (Leicester 522762) the day before, because there may well be limits on the number of spaces available on some occasions. The seminars are followed by tea in the Common Room.

The W.G. Hoskins Lecture

The first annual lecture sponsored by the Friends will be given on May 19th 1990. In answer to a request that the series of lectures be named after him, Professor Hoskins replied as follows: 'Stoke Canon, near Exeter, 1st August 1989. Dear Dr Fox, Thank you very much for your letter. I am honoured to hear of the proposal to call the lecture after me. Please forgive the short note, but I have been rather ill lately. Yours sincerely, W.G. Hoskins'.

We are very pleased to announce that the first W.G. Hoskins Lecture will be given by Christopher Taylor, Principal Investigator for the Royal Commission on Historical Monuments and President of the Medieval Settlement Research Group. Many of the Commission's volumes on Dorset and Northamptonshire owe much to Chris Taylor's pioneering approach to fieldwork. Among his other works are Fieldwork in Medieval Archaeology, Fields in the English Landscape and Roads and Tracks of Britain. His Village and Farmstead was described by a reviewer in The Times as 'the most startling work of history I have ever read'. The provisional title of the lecture has been given as 'Medieval rural settlements: problems and possibilities'.

Paid-up members will receive full details in the New Year. Please do come and help to make this first W.G. Hoskins Lecture an enjoyable event.

Conference on Naming, Society and Regional Identity

In conjunction with the Marc Fitch Fund, the Department is convening a symposium to relate anthroponymy, social organisation, historical demography and regional identity. Papers will be presented by about a dozen distinguished speakers on four grouped themes: the period after the rise of hereditary surnames (Middle English period); naming patterns in N. America (colonial and post-colonial); naming patterns and regional identity in early modern and recent England and Scandinavia; isonymy and genetic structure. Overseas speakers include: Gabriel Lasker (surnames and genetic structure); Gillian Fellows-Jensen (Scandinavian personal names); Dan Scott Smith (post-colonial N. America); Ingrid Hjerstedt (French nicknames in England). Also speaking will be Malcolm Smith, Jack Langton, Evelyn Lord, Roger Thompson and Cecily Clark. The symposium will be held in Marc Fitch House from 6-8 July 1990. Cost: ninety pounds residential; forty-five pounds non-residential (but including lunches). Further information may be obtained from David Postles at the Department.

FUNDED RESEARCH IN THE DEPARTMENT

The last three years have seen an unprecedented level of outside funding to the Department, amounting to over £50,000. Three major grants have been received: to Dr Harold Fox (from the E.S.R.C. for research into

medieval Taunton), to Dr Keith Snell (from the British Academy for research on the bibliography of the regional novel, his grant being officially described by the Academy as a 'larger than average' personal research award) and to Mrs Margery Tranter (from the Leverhulme Trust for research on the origin of the boundaries of southern Derbyshire). These grants come on top of continuing major research funding from the Marc Fitch Fund, for the English Surnames Survey. The projects which they support are described briefly below. The progress of the English Surnames Survey will be described in the next issue of the Newsletter.

Arable Productivity and Peasant Holdings at Taunton

This project investigates two central and related themes in the economic and demographic development of England during the 150 years before the Black Death: first, the productivity of arable farming on demesnes and secondly the performance of peasant holdings and peasant farming under conditions of population pressure. The primary sources are the account rolls of the Bishopric of Winchester between 1208 and 1347. The locality selected for study is the Bishopric's 'federated' manor of Taunton, a group of six sub-manors lying in the fertile Vale of Taunton Deane and on its fringes.

The first part of the project, an in-depth reconstruction of demesne arable farming, has been virtually completed. Significant results have emerged, although lack of space allows only two to be mentioned here. First, two distinct groups of Winchester manors have been identified within the Vale. On the lower, more fertile, lands surrounding the town were located a 'central group' orientated towards large-scale grain production, whilst on the higher, less fertile lands towards the Quantocks and the Blackdowns was located an 'outlying' group with less emphasis on grain and more on pastoral husbandry. These differences had important implications for levels of arable productivity in the Vale, with a 'productive hierarchy' of high yields on the central demesne and lower yields on the outlying manors. Second, analysis of the determinants of yield trends indicate that established 'neo-Malthusian' or 'Ricardian' interpretations of productivity change in the Early Middle Ages are quite suspect. At Taunton there was no overall decline in yields under population pressure; instead yields started to decline as population fell from its peak around 1310 or 1320. In addition, the crude ratio of livestock to land (manure potential), much emphasized in earlier studies, has been eliminated as a critical factor in decline in productivity; on the Taunton manors there appears to be an inverse relationship between that ratio and both the levels and trends of productivity. Some developments have been identified which explain how yields were maintained, or even increased, in periods of population pressure. These include improvements in agricultural technology (through better seed, use of legumes to nitrify the soil, etc.). Other important changes were associated with the labour supply: yield variations between manors were influenced by their respective labour forces and yields fell from the 1320s most markedly where labour inputs were cut back sharply.

The second part of the project, concerned with peasant holdings, is now far advanced. A considerable body of information has been abstracted on peasant livestock, as revealed through death duties, with interesting material relating to topics such as the proportion of tenants with no livestock and seasonal mortality among tenants. Important modifications have been made to previously published figures from Taunton's annual 'census' (the hundredpenny) through more rigorous analysis of who was obliged to pay and through examination of trends for each sub-manor. A nominal database containing all information relating to peasant holdings is now being computerized and promises to provide much detail and insights into the changing pattern of landholding, inheritance customs, the peasant land market and family structure before the Black Death. The project will conclude with the construction of a series of model peasant budgets between circa 1250 and 1348, in order to illuminate economic conditions prevailing during the crises of the end of the Early Middle Ages. These will cover holdings in different size classes, use being made of the relatively rich data on peasant crops, livestock, prices, seigneurial exactions such as rents and fines, and (with some adjustments) yields derived from the first part of the project. Account rolls and inquisitions post mortem from the whole of western Somerset are also being examined.

Chris Thornton

The Regional Novel in the British Isles, c. 1800 to the Present Day

This British Academy funded project has as its intended outcome an edited work on the regional novel. Ten or so scholars from different disciplines (English literary criticism, historical geography, local history

and social history) are writing essays on the different features of the regional novel, to appear in a book to be published by Cambridge University Press. That book will feature an enormous bibliography of regional novels in Ireland, Scotland, Wales and England, arranged largely by county, which it is hoped will prove invaluable to scholars working in this area, whatever their discipline. Ms Linda McKenna, funded by the British Academy, has been working on the bibliography for the past academic year, using her prior expertise in Victorian Studies to gather together references to a formidable collection of regional novels expressing a strong sense of place and local identity, and describing the peculiarities which distinguish the life, culture, social relations, landscape and settlements of given regions.

In addition to the bibliography, the volume will contain essays by scholars of renown such as John Barrell, Declan Kiberd, Elizabeth Bellamy, Stephen Heath, Phillip Dodd, Robert Colls, Wyn Thomas, Harriet Guest and Raphael Samuel. Their coverage ranges from the origins of the regional novel in Ireland and Scotland, to James Joyce and the formative regional influences on literary modernism. Mrs Gaskell, the novelists of the north-eastern coalfield, the literary construction of Yorkshire, the relation of Raymond Williams' novels to his more academic output, Emyr Humphreys, Thomas Hardy's senses of geography, and William Pett-Ridge will all be treated as case studies, demonstrating the fruitfulness of interdisciplinary co-operation and study, and the varied approaches now increasingly found to cultural and literary topics such as this. Local historians will find that the project does much to strengthen their resolve to enter more fully into the discussion of cultural subjects, and to appreciate the sort of contribution they can make to literary and historical exegesis of very subjective senses of place, expressed in novelistic form or in other high literary genres. They will also be able to use the bibliography as a guide to further analysis of particular regions, incorporating subtle interpretations of novels alongside other forms of documentation in their understanding of their subject.

Keith Snell

The Origin of Boundaries in Southern Derbyshire

The area of the Midlands being studied is that part of Derbyshire which projects south of the river Trent and the adjacent areas of Leicestershire, Staffordshire and Warwickshire. Here, in contrast to other parts of the county, the boundaries of Derbyshire do not follow noticeable topographical features and, until the end of the nineteenth century, there was considerable inter-mixing of both counties and parishes.

Boundary problems in this region may, therefore, be considered under three main headings. First, there are those related to the county boundary; these raise questions about the irregular extension of the county south of the river, about the origin of the often minute detached portions of Leicestershire, Staffordshire and especially Derbyshire which lie within another county, and about the factors which underlie the division of parishes and townships between counties. Secondly, disputes over parish boundaries in the region lead to a consideration of the persistent and late influence of areas of intercommoning on parish or township definition, and thirdly, the complexities of both parish and county boundaries in certain specific townships raise the possibility that settlement took place within a fluctuating marginal area in the pre-Conquest period.

The approach to these problems has been two-fold: on the one hand analysis of place- and field-name elements, of archaeological findings, of charters and of Domesday entries; on the other what may be termed a 'retrospective' approach - the use of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century estate papers, correspondence, tithe surveys and Ordnance Maps to identify the complexities of the county relationships. The pre-enclosure settlement and tenurial patterns have had to be established through the investigation of links between archaeological, ecclesiastical, linguistic and tenurial data thus obtained. Preliminary analysis based on this material suggests, firstly, that there is a chronology of boundaries to be established possibly beginning in the ninth century; secondly, that the social effects of sub-division found within certain specific settlements may have been a contributory factor towards the stability of these townships until the exploitation of minerals in the nineteenth century.

Margery Tranter

STAFF DISTINCTIONS

Charles Phythian-Adams

Awarded a personal chair from the beginning of the academic year 1989/90.

Alan Everitt

Emeritus Professor Alan Everitt has been elected to a Fellowship of the British

Academy, a distinction held by no other member of staff at the University of Leicester since the death of Professor Ralph Davies in 1978.

W.G. Hoskins

On his 81st birthday, Emeritus Professor W.G. Hoskins was honoured by a poem in The Guardian. The poem is printed on the first page of this Newsletter.

STAFF CHANGES

Paula Cowin

Paula joined the Department for a few months during the summer of 1989 in order to make a start at providing a professional catalogue for the Marc Fitch Fund Library. She was admirably suited to the task, having a B.A. in History and American Studies from the Liverpool Institute of Higher Education and a training in Library and Information Studies at Loughborough University. Her work in the Department was, in fact, an assignment which formed part of the M.A. course which she is completing at Loughborough. She will be remembered for her tremendous contribution in initiating the new catalogue and for the pleasure of her company at lunch time in the Common Room. Paula leaves us to take up a post at the B.B.C. Film and Videotape Library.

Linda McKenna

Linda joined the Department as Research Assistant for the bibliographic project on 'The regional novel in Britain and Ireland'. Her first degree is from Trinity College Dublin and she also has a Leicester M.A. in Victorian Studies; her M.A. dissertation on 'Women's responses to art and religion in five works by George Moore' helped to earn her an overall distinction on the course. The project on which she has worked over the last year is described separately elsewhere in this Newsletter and has taken Linda to the British Library, to the Bodleian and back to Dublin in order to work on Irish entries for the bibliography. She rapidly became a lively member of the community of Marc Fitch House and will be much missed when she leaves.

MARC FITCH HOUSE AND ITS FACILITIES

The Houses of Salisbury Road

Salisbury Road (or Street as it was then known) was laid out in the late 1870s and the houses - most of which survive - erected over the next five or six years. Most of these were speculative builds but some were occupied by their owners, including part of what is now Marc Fitch House occupied by Mr George Padmore, a Leicester hosiery manufacturer. A detailed discussion of the house itself, placing it in the context of the development of the late-Victorian suburban villa, will follow in the next issue of the Newsletter.

The south end of Regent Road (and the streets that run off it towards New Walk and which include Salisbury Road) mark an important stage in the physical growth of the city. For most of the early nineteenth century, the prodigious increase in Leicester's population was largely contained within the old city area. The old town had struck contemporary observers, such as Cobbett, as fair and spacious. The earliest nineteenth-century developments outside the confines of the old centre were concentrated to the north around Belgrave Gate where much of the turn-of-the-century industrial development lay, near the principal wharves on the canal. But most of the population - which rose from about 17,000 in 1801 to 48,000 in 1841 - found accommodation in existing dwellings or in extensions to older buildings which gradually filled the medieval gardens and open spaces. Many of the owners of the primarily domestic hosiery industry lived by their workshops and it was not until later in the century that they began to move out of the city and into the suburbs.

The real expansion of Leicester came only in the 1850s and beyond. Its dependence on a single industry - hosiery - made it peculiarly prone to slumps, and it was not until the town's industry became diversified after the 1850s that the economic base for large-scale physical expansion became adequate. The removal of much of Northampton's boot and shoe industry to Leicester after the 1861 strike and the arrival of displaced Coventry ribbon workers (who helped to form the core of the elastic web trade) did much to aid this process. As Leicester's industries prospered and industrial relations grew calmer, so the owners moved away from their workshops and factories; the early growth of the city's working-class population was concentrated northwards, and thus the owners moved south. New Walk had been laid out as early as 1785 in an attempt to control future development on the common lands that lay south of the town (the remnants of which are now occupied by Victoria Park). The earliest fashionable houses were built along the Walk and can still be seen (e.g. the pre-1844 houses on de Montfort Square). Much of Regent Road, and Salisbury Road, came later. The two principal industries of the city were represented among Salisbury Road's earliest

residents: Mr Padmore the hosier has already been mentioned; Mr Morgan of Morgan, Squire and Co., a drapery establishment, lived here too; and the row of five houses opposite Marc Fitch House were developed by Mr Stanyon, a boot and shoe manufacturer. Accountants, senior bank clerks, coal merchants and others can be numbered among their neighbours. Gradually the professional and business men moved further south, beyond the park (which was laid out in 1883) to the leafier suburbs of Stoneygate and Knighton, with their larger detached villas. The fate of Salisbury Road and the interior of its houses, including Marc Fitch House, must await further examination in the next issue.

Martin Cherry

DEPARTMENTAL PUBLICATIONS

H. Edwards

'Pitching stooks and making tea: farming wives of Leicestershire and Northamptonshire', Common Voice 4 (1989), pp.7-9.

H.S.A.Fox

'The people of the wolds in English settlement history', in M. Aston, D. Austin and C. Dyer (eds), The Rural Settlements of Medieval England: Studies dedicated to Maurice Beresford and John Hurst (Basil Blackwell, 1989), pp.77-101.

In this paper, dedicated to the two excavators of Wharram Percy in the deserted landscape of the Yorkshire Wolds, it is suggested that villages in countrysides with the characteristics of wolds were particularly prone to late medieval desertion because of the special circumstances of their early settlement. Drawing largely upon evidence from the wolds of Leicestershire, Nottinghamshire, Northamptonshire and Warwickshire, the paper begins by examining possible meanings of the Old English term wald and offers the tentative suggestion that it could imply 'open woodland' of a type particularly attractive for grazing. There follows a presentation of the sub-strata of evidence - written in the faint language of minor place-names, of tracks and boundaries - for an initial largely pastoral use of the wolds, in many cases by people of adjacent river valleys. The filling-up of these pastoral landscapes with permanent settlements took place relatively late and, in the East Midlands at least, was a process in which Scandinavian peoples played no small part; the paper questions the latest interpretation of Scandinavian place-names which sees them as products of 'estate colonization' rather than 'real settlement'. It is perhaps no coincidence that in the tenth century - just at the time when the wolds were coming to be fully occupied, and the grazing grounds of vale settlements thereby diminished - we have our first evidence of the development of mature commonfield systems in what can now be called the feldens. By the thirteenth century, when we can first see the agrarian landscapes of the wolds in some detail, their villages were subtly different from those of the feldens. Analyses of poll taxes, of inquisitions post mortem, of charters and of lay subsidy returns all show that villages in the wolds were relatively small, poor and unproductive of grains, that they tended to possess two-field systems more pastoral in orientation than their three-field counterparts. Such characteristics, it is suggested, to some extent reflect the late settlement and pastoral heritage of the wolds. Small settlements were particularly prone to desertion during the later Middle Ages, whether it was through internal disintegration of the village or through seigneurial depopulation. For that reason, and also because settlements on the wolds found it difficult to produce grains for the market during a period of depressed prices, these regions tend to exhibit concentrations of deserted villages - as the last section of the paper, 'The return of the flocks', demonstrates.

The volume in which this paper appears was presented to Maurice Beresford and John Hurst at a special ceremony on the site of Wharram Percy village on July 18th.

'Social relations and ecological relationships in agrarian change: an example from medieval and early modern England', Geografiska Annaler 70B (1988), pp.105-15.

Delivered to the 12th meeting, at Stockholm, of the Permanent European Conference for the Study of the Rural Landscape, this paper is an extension of the author's 'Alleged transformation from two-field to three-field systems in medieval England' (Economic History Review, 39, 1986). It examines the lack of 'progress' from two-field to three-field systems during the early Middle Ages from the viewpoint of different classes, concluding that no particular sector of rural society was set against the transformation by virtue of its own particular attitudes and aspirations. In other words, no conflict of interests between the different groups whose livelihood the field system determined could have acted as a brake on the transformation. Distributions of two-field and three-field

systems suggest, rather, that the fundamental barrier was an ecological one; medieval husbandmen did not change from the former to the latter because they were aware that to do so would have had an adverse effect on yields. These ecological barriers were broken down by agricultural progress during the Early Modern period, when no small number of communities did in fact change two fields for three. The places which were now transformed tended to be concentrated in some of the least attractive environments of the Midlands, many of which were wolds. The paper concludes with brief details of the transformation as it occurred at Barrington, on the flanks of the Cambridgeshire Wolds in 1645.

'Agriculture and the village', Agricultural History Review 37 (1989), pp.111-2.

J.D. Harrison

The Somerset and Dorset Railway in Public Archives (Somerset and Dorset Railway Trust, 1988), 71pp.

This is a guide for those wishing to do research among archives held in record offices, museums and libraries open to the public. It does not cover material held by specialist societies or individuals. Although it deals specifically with material relevant to the popular Somerset and Dorset Railway, its principles and general range of material are applicable to research into any railway undertaking. The introduction refers to the need for preliminary research and the reasons for house rules and booking procedures. Each chapter is devoted to a separate archive repository and contains practical details on address, telephone number, whether a reader's ticket is required, directions, opening times and reprographic facilities. The core of each chapter is an archive catalogue complete with references. The aim of this publication is to enable the researcher to scan the catalogue at home so that he can either order his documents in advance or immediately on arrival instead of spending an inordinate amount of time in fathoming out the cataloguing system at a record office.

J. Kissock

'A morphogenetic approach to village origins in South Wales', Archaeology in Wales 28 (1988), p.40.

'Gower field systems', Archaeology in Wales 28 (1988), pp.36-7 (with R.N.Cooper).

E.A. Lord

'Fairs, festivals and fertility in Alkmaar, N. Holland, 1650-1810', Local Population Studies 42 (1989), pp.43-53.

R.A. McKinley

The Surnames of Sussex (Leopard's Head Press, English Surnames Series, 1988), 483 pp.

Sussex was for centuries a thinly populated and somewhat isolated county, with relatively little migration into it from other parts of Britain. Until after c. 1800 the surnames in the county were predominantly ones that originated there. Some local surnames increased considerably in numbers in the course of time, probably through the proliferation of individual families in most cases. Hereditary surnames evolved rather earlier in Sussex, and in Kent and Surrey adjoining, than in most other parts of England. After about 1800 the position in Sussex changed, with the growth of resorts on the coast, and later with the tendency of some places in north Sussex to become places of residence for people commuting to London. These developments brought many new surnames into Sussex from other regions, so that today the county contains a great variety of names originating in many parts of the British Isles. Despite this, many old established Sussex surnames, often ones first found in the twelfth or thirteenth centuries, are still present in the county.

A characteristic of Sussex surnames over a long period is the great number of topographical names, which formed a higher proportion of the total body of names in use than in any part of England. There are many surnames formed from a topographical term with the suffix -man (Bridgman, Hillman, etc.) and with the suffix -er (Bridger, Fielder, etc.). There are many surnames, long persisting in the county, derived from local place-names. The proximity of Sussex to France has led to the presence in the county of some surnames with French origins including some derived from French place-names, and including some surnames present in the county from the twelfth or thirteenth centuries.

The county has over a long period possessed many surnames derived from Old English personal names. However surnames from a personal name with the suffix -son (Williamson, Robertson, etc.) or with a genitival -s (Williams, Roberts, etc.) have for long been scarce in Sussex, and are still less common there than in other parts of England.

C.V. Phythian-Adams
'Local History, English', in J. Cannon, R.H.C. Davis, W. Doyle and J.P. Greene (eds), The Blackwell Dictionary of Historians (Basil Blackwell, 1988), pp.250-2.
The author argues that the modern academic study of English Local History emerges out of the recent fusion of two older historiographical traditions both of which had originated during periods of national self-enquiry. During the earlier of these two periods, the Elizabethans were much concerned not only with 'the discovery of England' but also with the 'the discovery of the English' in terms of their language and their earlier polity - hence the nature of Lambarde's pioneer work on Kent (1576). Out of this stemmed the later development of regional and county surveys which were usually organized by parishes in gazetteer format. In the nineteenth century, by contrast, the new analytical history was concerning itself with the origins of national institutions and the law and sought general answers to such enquiries in models of the English village 'community' and of its subsequent dissolution. It was thus only when the gulf between these two separate traditions of the over-particular and the over-general could be bridged by the exploitation of non-documentary techniques (e.g. by W.G. Hoskins and H.P.R. Finberg) that the genius of place could be re-instated and more localised and socio-economic questions concerning the development of communities themselves could be pursued comparatively, even to national levels by M.W. Beresford. More recently, if community studies have become more sociological, thanks to the work of A.M. Everitt and Joan Thirsk, the main focus of interest also has widened to cover forms of local society that embrace more than the single community at the levels of county and pays.

K.D.M. Snell
'English historical continuity and the culture of capitalism: the work of Alan MacFarlane', History Workshop 27 (1989), pp.154-63.
This article assesses the work of the Cambridge historical anthropologist Alan MacFarlane, whose last four books (including The Origins of English Individualism and The Culture of Capitalism) have proved so controversial in recent years. It outlines some of his main arguments, on the nature of 'individualism' and the absence of a 'peasant' society in England, and then proceeds to an assessment that is perhaps more favourable than has so far been common among historians. It considers his work alongside other recent developments in British historiography, like the results of the Cambridge Group for the History of Population and Social Structure or of the more political work summarised in J.C.D. Clark's books, and tries to explain what may lie behind such historiographical trends.

H. Tomida, K.D.M. Snell and E. Parker
Fame and Feminism in Twentieth-century Britain (Geirin-Shobo, 1988), 82pp.

E.M. Tranter
'"Many and diverse dissenters": the 1829 religious returns for Derbyshire', The Local Historian 18 (1988), pp.162-7.
The returns of non-Anglican places of worship made in response to a resolution passed by the House of Commons on 19 June 1829 may be found among the Quarter Sessions papers in county record offices. They constitute a useful source for comparison of the strength of non-Anglican religious adherence between counties, provided that they are used judiciously and that a number of caveats are borne in mind. The adequacy of each individual reporter's local knowledge, his interpretation of the government's directive, and of the phrasing of the questions asked as well as his understanding of terms such as 'adherents' when applied to differing denominations are likely to influence comparative conclusions between counties. The form in which the returns survive also affects their usefulness.

The whole of the county of Derby is covered and from the information given emerges a picture of a great variety of dissenting sects in rural Derbyshire set within the dominating framework of Methodism. In addition to the numerical information given many of the forms have illuminating, if subjective, comments and provide insights into local conditions and attitudes which can be usefully compared with those of other counties. Any census or similar return encapsulates a static situation and comparison of the evidence provided by the 1829 returns with other sources is essential for an analysis of the fluctuating fortunes of dissent in the nineteenth century. Of particular value is comparison with the other major religious survey initiated by central government directive - the 1851 Religious Census. However, the detail of the resulting mass of material to be analyzed imposes a need for the information to be grouped or tabulated in a manner applicable to both sources. Hence, the article ends with a suggestion of a statistical method which could be used for this purpose.

R.L. Weedon
'Agriculture in the Harborough area', The Harborough Historian 7 (1988), p.19.

'Agriculture and farming life in the Harborough area', The Harborough Historian 8 (1989), pp.22-3.

'Agriculture and farming life in the Harborough area', Common Voice 4 (1989), p.5.

RECENTLY COMPLETED THESES AND DISSERTATIONS

M.P. Carter
'An urban society and its hinterland: St Ives in the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries' (Ph.D. thesis, 1989).
This thesis has examined the contention of the late Philip Abrams that a town should not be considered as a distinct social entity but in relation to its setting and to the 'complex of domination' in which it is embedded. It was decided to use St Ives in Huntingdonshire as the area of study. Sources included manorial, parish and dissenting records, inventories, marriage bonds and the Pettis Survey of St Ives, with its maps, lists of property owners and land tax payments.

After a definition of the boundaries of the hinterland its demography and economy and those of the town were studied. Four adjacent villages revealed urban features. The economic, social and religious networks that bound their inhabitants to the town were so dense that they produced a cohesive unit or 'urban society'. A core of focal families provided continuity of leadership in administration, business and nonconformity. The strengths and weaknesses of the society's component parts have been traced, particularly through the experience of dissenters and watermen. The relationship of this urban society to the wider world has also been analyzed. The Duke of Manchester controlled most of the manorial lordships. In the town, he protected his interests by the deployment of key personnel in the vestry and the manor. The Church of England was less successful in protecting its position, and eventually had to accept symbiosis with three nonconformist churches. The proximity of St Ives to the county town of Huntingdon ensured that, instead of competing with one another, they formed a dispersed urban conglomerate with complementary functions. In its attempts to meet Abrams' requirements this thesis proposes the concept of an urban society as a useful device for comprehending the breadth of local networks which united the inhabitants of a town and its neighbouring areas.

C.C. Thornton
'The demesne of Rimpton 938 to 1412: a study in economic development' (Ph.D. thesis, 1988).
The agricultural history of the well-documented manor of Rimpton in south-east Somerset provides an opportunity for a detailed reconstruction of one medieval demesne farm and for testing generalized models of economic development in one specific local context. Background information is provided concerning the evolution of the manorial economy through to the twelfth century. This analysis suggests that manorialization might have been a significant factor in the adoption of nucleated settlement, common-field agriculture, and certain peasant tenures and customs.

Quantitative and qualitative information from the pipe rolls of the Bishopric of Winchester between 1208 and 1412 is used to describe the operation of the demesne farm under direct management. Topics addressed include the field system, the physical resources (buildings, crops, livestock) and human aspects (administration, labour, marketing) of production. Despite the basic inflexibility of the manor's agrarian structure, significant chronological changes in production types, agricultural technology and administrative systems are detected. Some of these reflect the influence of market pressures upon arable and pastoral husbandry, others the importance of social relationships between lord and peasant for the success of manorial farming.

The thesis concludes with a statistical investigation of arable productivity, agricultural investment and manorial profit. Earlier hypotheses emphasizing over-cultivation and lack of manure as determinants of yield trends are discarded in favour of management decisions concerning labour supply and production techniques. Although technology was not static, analysis of investment at Rimpton still shows that buoyant market conditions led to expansion in the scale of manorialised production rather than intensive applications of capital. Trends in productivity, investment and profit therefore reflected the impact of wider movements in population and the money supply on market demand. Despite the success of pastoral production over the fourteenth century, a contracting market for grain undermined farming success and led to the lease of the manor.

M.A. DISSERTATIONS FOR 1988

A. Autton

'The forgotten boroughs of Devon: a study of the structure and composition of the "village boroughs" of Bow, Colyford, Newton Poppleford and South Zeal during the nineteenth century'.

The casual twentieth-century tourist is more than likely to regard these places as typically quaint or even sleepy Devon villages of no particular interest or great historical significance. Such a view entirely neglects their origins and long and fluctuating histories; the physical evidence of urban form is clear in original patterns of burgage plots remarkably preserved and fossilised in the existing patterns of fields and garden plots. For these communities date back to the thirteenth century, being hopeful urban speculations planted at strategic points on major communication routes. This distinct settlement type, first termed 'village borough' by W.G.Hoskins, has been sadly neglected by most modern scholars. The aim of the study was to investigate the nature and function of four examples during the nineteenth century by examining their demographic, occupational, economic and social structures. A wide range of sources was drawn upon, including the census, land tax assessments, tithe returns, trade directories and contemporary descriptions. A distinctive class of community was revealed, neither wholly urban nor wholly rural in character, and reflecting the origin of and later evolution of these places as speculative borough plantations which, in some cases, underwent considerable decline later in their history.

P. Crouch

'Cheese making in East Leicestershire, 1610-1911: the genesis of Stilton cheese'.

The dissertation began as an attempt to deconstruct the mythical and profitable stories which surround this 'King of cheeses'. To do this systematically, five parishes in East Leicestershire were selected and subjected to detailed analysis. The intention was to compare two areas of production - the northern edge of the Leicestershire Wolds, which first produced Stilton in the seventeenth century, and the Vale of Belvoir, which became the centre for the industry from 1850 onwards. Probate inventories were used to build up a picture of agriculture for the early period; tithe files and the agricultural returns did the same for the nineteenth century. A wider discussion was attempted for the later period using directories and secondary material; the growth of markets and the move towards a specialised industry were also examined. The dearth of solid documentation for the eighteenth century caused some problems of continuity; hence the conclusions were somewhat ambivalent, though it seems certain that volume production was a relatively late phenomenon in line with developments in dairying as a whole.

H. Edwards

'Farming wives of Leicestershire and Northamptonshire: their working lives, 1918-1950'.

The subject of this dissertation was inspired by a research project at Market Harborough Museum in Leicestershire where the author worked as a volunteer. The main sources were the oral testimonies of eight women, supplemented by three local autobiographies. All the interviewees married their husbands during or after the Second World War. Several of them, however, could vividly recollect their mothers' and elder sisters' lives; the study therefore developed into a comparison between the farming wife of the inter-war period and her counterpart of the post-war era. The first and second chapters of the dissertation examine the impact of factors such as the declining birth rate and improved domestic technology on the home-centred activities of the farming wife. The third chapter looks at the effects of changes in farming (such as its commercialization and the out-migration of large numbers of labourers) on the involvement of wives in farmwork. An interesting contrast emerges. It was discovered that the contribution of the farming wife of the inter-war period to the running of the farm was indirect, through the preparation of meals and other home-based activities. The contribution of her counterpart of the post-war period was, however, more direct through manual and secretarial work.

I.G. Watson

'Career and community: a study of the officeholders of the town council of Leicester, 1485-1535'.

This is an attempt to capture the office-holding experience of one particular town in the late Middle Ages through an analysis of 'career' and 'community' as the key subjects. A definite structure was seen to exist in officeholding careers - gradational, peaking with the mayoralty and effectively controlled by a ruling elite. A great deal of interactivity beyond the strictly civic was seen to occur among officers in residential

proximity, occupation, church and gild membership, friendship and marriage. Indeed Leicester was found to be a highly oligarchic town dominated by a few inter-related families. In many respects, therefore, Leicester's experience differed from that of other contemporary urban centres - York, Coventry and Stamford, for example. The sources for the study were, principally, Mary Bateson's Records of the Borough of Leicester, the 1524 lay subsidy for Leicester and the wills of numerous officers.

S.R. Willis

'The Stroudwater Primitive Methodist Circuit'. This dissertation seeks to explore the occupational and geographical adherence to the Primitive Methodists in the Stroudwater valley of Gloucestershire, and to test the hypothesis of relative deprivation as a catalyst to adherence to the sect. The work is based on the baptismal register of the circuit and a surviving circuit plan. It draws on the 1839 Report on the Handloom Weavers in Gloucestershire by W.A. Miles, some other baptismal registers and the work of J. de L. Mann on the cloth-based economy of the area to identify periods, places and occupations that might have been prone to relative deprivation. However, no correlation was found. The circuit did not grow significantly in periods of depression, nor did it attract a significant adherence from the places and occupations that experienced the lowest physical quality of life. The work also discusses the problems and limitations of baptismal registers for a study of this kind.

ANNUAL FIELD COURSE 1989

The weather was sunny, and often warm on this year's fieldcourse to Cumberland. The views were spectacular, and the only really bad weather was experienced at Birdoswald, where Hadrian's Wall faded mysteriously into the snow. Here, and at Hardknott, we began to understand just how tough the Roman Army had to be! Whitehaven also knows how tough life can be. The depression hit the town in the nineteenth century, and stayed. The gloom was dispelled for us by Michael Moon's unbelievable bookshop, and by the friendliness of a traffic warden, who waltzed one bemused team member along Lowther Street while her colleagues pretended not to know her.

For the tour group the only sour note in an otherwise marvellous week was the difficulty we had with the minibus. One red Bedford Midi has now entered Cumbrian mythology. Filling up with petrol required the effort of all six of us: one filling, one paying, and four rocking the crate sideways to break the airlock in the system. Fifteen minutes to put in one gallon was the record. The airlock prevented fuel from reaching the engine, so we stammered and hiccupped our way around Cumberland throughout the week. The drivers put in effort beyond the call of duty, and plumbed new depths of exhaustion. They were often seen, in the evenings, sitting by the fire like Darby and Joan (not H.C. and Thirsk!), unable to move.

Our local wine bar, 'The Natty Archivist', did a roaring trade in the evenings. Its superb contents were only matched by the quality of the restaurant, which had a different guest chef each night. Vegetarian lasagne and Iranian aubergine dishes were contrasted with beautifully cooked shepherd's pie and Stilton pie. The tour operator was seen drooling jealously, so we invited him to our last-night party. He was allowed to mellow somewhat before we revealed that we had to be out of the cottage by 10 a.m. instead of 2 p.m. the next day, leaving no time for us to discuss our work. His revenge consisted of some very blatant cheating at Scrabble.

Although this year's group had no expectant fathers one member, Dave, had kittens every time he went into a church, when he turned pale and fled. The field trip became a desensitizing programme for his condition, and we are pleased to report an almost total cure. The cure was vital if he was to carry on his search for defensive church towers. It is perhaps those churches which we will remember best. The varying degrees of remoteness or centrality which they possessed within their respective parishes helped in our understanding of the development of the church in Cumberland. Arthuret church, whose precursor housed the famed 'Black Book' in which the medieval Cumbrian Mafia entered its accounts, proved to be very moving. Our analysis of early christianity, to an accompaniment of hymns, psalms and coffee, in a parish which only a few minutes before none of us could find on the map, kept discussion alive until well into the evening.

The heady atmosphere of the trip was too precious to give up lightly, so the journey back included diversions to Fountains Abbey and West Tanfield. Even then the excitement was not over: three members of the team continued the search for defensive church towers into the wild Welsh marches, and retured three days later, triumphant.

Nan Hume

LOCAL HISTORIANS IN THE MUSEUM WORLD

Beyond the Pale: News from the Black Country

Located on the northern fringe of the Black Country, Walsall has generally been ignored by topographers and tourist boards alike. One of the few writers to mention the town, Nikolaus Pevsner, commented sharply: 'Walsall is a mess'. J.B Priestly in English Journey was even less generous, conjuring memorable images of a blighted industrial wasteland. Nevertheless Walsall's 260,000 residents are proud of their town and its distinctive traditions: the Borough admittedly is not pretty, but this rather misses the point. Its local nickname 'the town of a hundred trades' reflects the area's rich tradition of skilled crafts some of which originated here long before the Industrial Revolution. It is this which makes it such a fascinating place for the local historian.

The Walsall Leather Centre, which was opened last June, represents Walsall MBC's commitment to support and raise the profile of one of the most interesting of these trades. Since the late Middle Ages the town has been an important centre for the manufacture of bits, stirrups and spurs. From the eighteenth century onwards this developed into the making of complete saddles and sets of harness, and latterly light leather goods such as belts, handbags and wallets. By 1900 the town's leather trades were remarkably comprehensive and were exporting throughout the Empire and to the crowned heads of Europe. With over 120 leather firms still in Walsall the industry remains an important local employer, successfully dominating the British output of saddlery and small leather goods.

The chief aim of the Leather Centre is to record the achievements of Walsall's leatherworkers past and present and to make the history of the trade more widely known through a programme of displays, exhibitions, demonstrations and publications. The trade suffers from a long tradition of secrecy and, with a relative dearth of historical material, much of our initial effort has been directed towards recording and collecting, not just items from the past but also photographs, videos, oral recordings, trade catalogues and contemporary products which help to document the industry today.

Our location in a Victorian leather goods factory has fortunately given the museum a very sympathetic environment and two of the galleries have been returned to their original role as workshops where the skills of leather-working are demonstrated to visitors, undoubtedly the most popular aspect of the museum. The historical galleries culminate in a 'Trade display' area showing the current local products of the industry, and an expanding reference library.

There is unfortunately not enough space here to discuss some of our more ambitious aims, for example our efforts to bring new ideas into this rather conservative trade by importing the work of contemporary leather designers outside the 'Walsall tradition' and to break down the artificial boundaries between social history and the rather esoteric history of decorative art and craft. With over 25,000 visitors since the opening of the Centre it is nevertheless well on the way to becoming an established local landmark, and future efforts will be aimed at reaching the audiences further afield.

Anyone requiring a 'Leather Centre Fact Pack' should write to me at the Leather Centre, 56-57 Wisemore, Walsall, West Midlands, WS2 8EQ - or better still visit the Centre which is about 10 minutes drive from Junction 10 of the M6.

Mike Glasson, Curator

THE ROWS RESEARCH PROJECT - CHESTER

The Rows Research Project began in Chester in 1985 after a pilot study of Watergate Street revealed the great wealth of medieval fabric surviving within later structures, thereby stimulating sufficient interest and funds to attempt a comprehensive survey of all Row buildings.

These Row buildings are found fronting all four main streets in the city, forming a series of covered galleries at first-floor level which run continuously through properties of various architectural styles and dates, creating a unique two-tier shopping system. The project aims to visit each building, to identify all surviving medieval fabric and to make a detailed record of all pre-1700 elements as well as of interesting features of later periods. The survey of Watergate Street, Northgate Street and Lower Bridge Street has been completed and preliminary reports published (A.N. Brown, J.C. Grenville, and R.C. Turner, Watergate Street (1987); R.C. Turner, 'Early carpentry in the Rows of Chester', Vernacular Architecture 19 (1988)).

Documentary research into the development of the Rows was envisaged from the outset but not accorded high priority. In July 1987, however, my own work on late medieval Chester undertaken for the dissertation element of the M.A. in English Local History

at Leicester (see Newsletter no.1) brought me into contact with the project team and our association has continued. For the last eighteen months I have been working on the city archive, moving backwards in time in an attempt to trace the various stages in the evolution of the Rows.

The final development, namely the loss through enclosure of approximately one-third of the system, was easily traced. Most enclosures took place in the century spanning approximately 1640-1740 and were only sanctioned in those stretches furthest removed from the commercial heart of the city. Near the Cross the Rows were strictly maintained and neither great wealth nor high status could effect a breach in the system: hence the persistence of the Row through the elegant facade of Booths Mansion.

Activity in the late Tudor period is documented in the City treasurer's accounts (e.g. new rents for small shops newly constructed on some stallboards), while the assembly books attest the apparently traditional use of certain sections of the Rows as sites of particular commodity markets. The quarter sessions files occasionally reveal an additional function of the Row as viewing gallery for periodic displays of civic ritual while probate records help assess the use to which Row chambers and parlours were put.

The most significant architectural discoveries of the project lie in the medieval period, however, and this must be the primary focus of documentary attention. But as yet this crucial period remains the great imponderable and the sources are difficult and dispersed. I have been looking at collections of deeds but while they provide welcome information about patterns of ownership, etc., they rarely give architectural details. We are hoping that the voluminous City court rolls, as yet virtually unsearched, together with the Palatinate Records in the Public Record Office and the Harleian MSS in the British Library, will prove more rewarding.

Current archaeological investigation is pushing the date of the earliest Row building ever further back, to about 1200-20 now suggested (by dendrochronological analysis) for the Falcon in Lower Bridge Street (Medieval Archaeology, forthcoming). Just how this squares with the Byzantine parallel recently put forward remains to be seen (World Archaeology, forthcoming). The project is at a most exhilarating stage of enquiry, and a heady cross-fertilization of ideas is provided by its multi-disciplinary team. The architectural survey continues and I myself begin full-time research on medieval Chester in October 1989.

Watch this space!

Jane Laughton

A LETTER FROM JAPAN

On the 11th April, 1985, just after lunch, Dr H. Fox of the Department of English Local History was going to take me by his fifteen years old Datsun to see a house at Oadby which I was thinking to rent. Outside the Charles Wilson building at the University of Leicester the weather was very bad. It was not an April shower but an April storm with heavy rain. "Weneedabout," said Dr Fox. "Sorry?" I asked. "We need a-bout, not car." "...A-bout?" "Yes, a-bout....A ship, a small ship." "Oh, I see! Boat! Joke!"

For a Japanese at the age of fifty who had totally lacked practice of communicating in the English language everything in daily life in England was not easy to manage. Introduction to the University library, accommodation, shopping, school for three children - in almost every problem the staff of the Department gave me friendly help. Above all, Mrs M. Phillips, the secretary of the Department, kept watching for my need and offered timely help of her own accord. I still well remember the homely atmosphere of the Department and its small secretary's room at the top floor of the Attenborough tower where the people gathered and chatted during the tea-break.

In spite of the language difficulty, I enjoyed my English life very much. Apart from the parties and tours, the University library was very good, especially in respect of the rich collection of books on English Local History. I attended two classes on topography, the one English in general and the other Devonshire in particular. And although I could not understand the lectures well, I enjoyed enormously the field course to villages and towns including Hallaton, Laxton, Ingarsby and Coventry, and the field trip to Devon for a week at the end of the Spring term. They gave me what I lacked most, the real, so to speak, knowledge in contrast to bookish knowledge of English landscape and townscape. Only I regretted that I had not come twenty or thirty years earlier.

Toru Higuchi

(Professor T. Higuchi of Fukushima University was visiting fellow at the Department in 1985-6).