



History in a Map: Discussion

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¹⁰⁴ *Placita de Quo Warranto temp. Ed. I, Ed. II and Ed. III. Record Commissioners, 1818, p. 755.*

¹⁰⁵ Such difficulties are inevitable in studies of small areas since the survival of MS. material is quite fortuitous. Some extra information might be gained from a study of plea rolls, but for most counties the plea rolls have not been calendared, and the task would be formidable.

¹⁰⁶ Jones, E., "Some aspects of the study of settlement in Britain," *Advancement of Science*, 8, 29 (1951).

¹⁰⁷ A similar development may have taken place in parts of Kent. The large village of Wye, set in an area of dispersed settlement, was the administrative centre for the manors of Canterbury.

DISCUSSION

Afternoon Meeting, 27 April 1959

Before the paper, the CHAIRMAN, Professor W. G. EAST, said: It has been the proud task of this Society for over a century to assist in the exploration of the world; for rather more than a quarter of a century, it has been the task of university geographers to explore parts of the world in a rather different way. The purpose of their work has been to establish the different qualities of the different parts of the world and to explain their present geography. In that side of our subject this country has made very distinctive advances during the last generation. We have with us tonight Dr. Yates, who comes from the King's College, University of London, who has for some years devoted himself to historical geography, with reference particularly to areas small and near at hand.

We are well aware how complex and variegated is the countryside within which we live, whether in village or in town, and we are well aware, too, how it has grown into its present form. The past is very much in it, visible to this day in the features which it presents, and it is to some of those in a part of West Sussex to which Dr. Yates will turn our attention. The study of small areas—and his is certainly small—at its worst can be merely parochial. At its best it can be highly illuminating.

Dr. Yates then read his paper

The CHAIRMAN: We are fortunate in having some experts here tonight in the field that is of interest to Dr Yates. Mr. Skelton, Superintendent of the Map Room of the British Museum, may like to say a few words.

Mr. R. A. SKELTON: Mr. Chairman, I have not much to add to Dr. Yates's extremely interesting paper. As a map curator I applaud his critical and discriminating use of maps in relation to documents. His paper illustrated in a constructive way two dangers which the use of maps as historical evidence sometimes creates. In the first place he drew attention to the uneven areal coverage of early maps; one of his maps was incomplete because the early map evidence was incomplete. The second danger, which he was careful to warn us about, was the incomplete coverage in time. His map evidence (working backwards) came from today, from 1813 and from 1628. I think an unskilful worker in this field might tend to give us a historical development not in a smooth curve, as it should be, but in a series of steps. One must be very careful (as indeed Dr. Yates has been) in using this evidence in building up the smooth curve that historical development really is. I should have liked to hear more from Dr. Yates about the correlation of the thinning out (as he called it) between 1628 and 1813 with agricultural use. A significant point mentioned by him was the development of water meadows by the cutting of a channel after 1628, which he associated with the development of sheep farming, notoriously a form of agriculture which requires very little labour. I take it there is some association here.

The CHAIRMAN: Dr. Finberg is here, and I hope that he will speak to us too. I think everyone knows that he comes from the University of Leicester.

Dr. H. P. R. FINBERG: I should like to congratulate Dr. Yates on his extremely interesting paper. It is by dint of such detailed local investigations as this that the history of the English landscape will eventually get written. He has demonstrated, if

demonstration were needed, that documents will not get us very far historically without the additional use of maps, and I think he would probably agree that the converse is also true. May I just remark also that as a lover of the English language, I was particularly grateful to Dr. Yates for not using the horrid term "cultural landscape." One point which particularly interested me was the point where he touched on possible continuity between Roman-British cultivation and that of the Anglo-Saxon invaders. This interested me all the more because in the first of two volumes on 'Medieval England' published last year by the Oxford University Press, my friend and colleague Dr. Hoskins said something about that; but unlike Dr. Yates, he felt obliged to postulate an interval between the two systems which he vaguely puts at about a century. I suppose we are to understand either that there was no population left, or that if there was it subsisted entirely on grass and acorns. That I find difficult to believe. When Dr. Yates pointed to the east and west fields in these two parishes I wondered if they resembled the system described by Lord Rennell in his book on the Hindwell valley in Herefordshire,* where incidentally we do not have to postulate the presence of any Jutes. The two original small fields, later enlarged, and the small ones possibly added by dint of piecemeal assarting: this is a type of landscape which is not at all peculiar to Sussex. And it may be that we need not bring in any sort of racial explanation to account for it; it seems to be a kind of system that is common to many regions of primary settlement. Finally, I have only one criticism to make. It would, I think, have been interesting if Dr. Yates had had time to correlate his findings with some findings about changes in population in the area under review. There are materials in the fourteenth century poll tax returns, and further back of course in Domesday Book and also in manorial records—payments of heriot and the like. I'm sure he would agree that in any period this is an important factor in the development of cultivation.

The CHAIRMAN: May I next invite Miss Campbell of Birkbeck College to speak?

Miss E. M. J. CAMPBELL: I should like to congratulate Dr. Yates on an intensive study of a very small area. There is, I believe, much to be gained by taking a "hand specimen" of the English landscape and subjecting it, as it were, to the microscope of history. Dr. Yates has shown us how maps and documents from the past can throw light on present-day geography. In recent years it has been the exponents of local history, notably Dr. Finberg, Dr. Hoskins, and Dr. Beresford, who have stressed the importance of history on the ground. Tonight we have seen the results of an investigation by a geographer, and I think that Dr. Yates has introduced to a Royal Geographical Society audience a technique which may well prove important to the development of geography in the next decade. Like Dr. Finberg I favour the view that the small fields indicate piecemeal assarting rather than former Jutish influence. I should like to ask Dr. Yates if he has been able to date the present field boundaries.

The CHAIRMAN: We are fortunate in having Mr. Prince here, another historical geographer, this time at University College London.

Mr. H. C. PRINCE: I was particularly interested this evening to hear Dr. Yates's account of his patient study of settlement in north-west Sussex, particularly because he has produced evidence not only for continuity, but also, quite conclusively, for the disappearance of certain settlements. Until recently it has been assumed from an examination of modern maps that the great majority of existing places which are named in 1086 have been continuously occupied since then; and from this inference the conclusion has been drawn that the original colonists had a very fine eye for country which led them invariably to select the right spot. While this may be true of many places, the evidence assembled by Dr. [now Professor] Beresford and others clearly warns us that continuous occupation of settlement sites is by no means universal and that many villages, including some established after 1086, disappeared entirely in the later Middle Ages. Dr. Yates has now investigated a related and still more neglected theme: he has shown that single farms and dwellings within a parish may also appear and disappear, and that a study of the addition and subtraction of individual home-

* 'Valley on the March,' London, O.U.P. 1958.

steads is indispensable to a proper understanding of the pattern of dispersed settlements. Dr. Yates's account prompts me to ask two questions. First, would it not be profitable to have a map, or maps, showing deserted farms and the extent of land abandoned at different times, similar to the maps we have seen this evening, showing the extension of settlement and its period of occupation? Secondly, why were so many lost farms in Harting and Rogate deserted more recently than the late medieval period when most desertion of villages took place in the Midland counties of Leicestershire and Warwickshire?

Dr. E. M. YATES: I would like to express my thanks for the kind comments made, and will endeavour to reply to the points raised.

Dr. Finberg asked about population numbers. I did make use of the poll tax returns and records of heriots contained in the manorial material. Unfortunately manorial material is most incomplete and the poll tax returns not completely intelligible. The evidence obtained showed that East and West Harting were then more important in terms of population than South Harting. I noted Dr. Finberg's and Miss Campbell's views on Jutish settlement, and I would be in agreement if it were merely a matter of field patterns. Here, however, this pattern of small fields is present in association with dispersed settlement, in an area where dispersed settlement comes as something of an anomaly. Also to be considered are the dialect words, like the suffix in Nyewood, which were used in Kent and this part of West Sussex, but not elsewhere.

Mr. Skelton inquired about the changes in agriculture. The fourteenth century nonae returns show that Harting was already important for sheep and wheat, and that the emphasis on sheep was even more marked in Rogate. Durford Abbey sold wool to the Italian merchants. The improvements in the meadows do not appear to have been associated with any marked change in emphasis. Rather it may be related to one of the issues mentioned by Mr. Prince. He asked why it was that so many habitations disappeared at a late date. The break-up of the open-field system and consolidation took place some time in the late sixteenth or early seventeenth century. This consolidation led to the disappearance of farmsteads and made improvements possible. Mr. Prince further asked whether it would be possible to create a map showing the disappearance of these farmsteads. I think it would be difficult, owing to the small amount of really early material.

Finally, in reply to Miss Campbell, I did study the distribution of fields belonging to individual farms as shown on the tithe maps, and became aware of the amount of hedge removal that has taken place, but I have not done much on the precise dating of field boundaries.