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Cambridge Studies in Historical Geography  25

LAND AND SOCIETY IN EDWARDIAN BRITAIN
Cambridge Studies in Historical Geography

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LAND AND SOCIETY IN EDWARDIAN BRITAIN

BRIAN SHORT
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Preface

This book reports on an excavation of material: material that was kept from public view until the 1970s and which is in process of taking its place amongst the key sources for the study of the geography of the British Isles at the very end of the reign of Edward VII. However, it is not only the geography of that period which can be illustrated – but its sociology and many varieties of history, among them architectural, social and economic, as well as local and genealogical studies. It is a prime source in the reconstruction of a period of British history that has remained of great fascination but for which sources have until now been fragmentary, specialised or spatially incoherent.

In what follows the materiality of the source itself sometimes holds centre stage, sometimes the empirical reconstruction of historical geographies of places scattered throughout the British Isles, sometimes the non-material discourse over land and its significance. The emphasis throughout is necessarily upon land, its ownership, value, use and perhaps, above all, its ideological importance. Intellectual movements, political events of great importance and the development of state machineries of taxation form contexts which come to the fore to greater or lesser extents throughout the volume, but which are never intended to take precedence over the purpose of the text – the demonstration of an archival source. The methodology has of necessity been an interdisciplinary blend of geography, history and possibly many more disciplines as the need to trace the archive and its uses has dictated. Archival material, after all, does not dictate one methodology and one alone – it is open to new conceptual developments and new approaches to understanding and utilisation.

This study has been a long time in progress: so long in fact that my researches have now lasted as long as the original legislation upon which the 1910 survey was based (1910–20)! Indeed the material source is huge, and the temptation remains to continue working on it. Another case study, another search for a different set of documents, another literature search for contemporary views about the political and practical considerations of the great
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survey initiated finally in 1910. The problem may be perceived readily enough by those who have excavated other comparable sources: how far can one go in making generalisations, when life is too short to cover all the available material? I can only plead that I know full well that other researchers might well discover variations, negations and, hopefully, confirmations of what I have written. But I am confident that I have at least managed to set out the basic outlines of the processes leading to the 1910 survey and the most common forms of documentation that others will encounter.

In undertaking such a long-term piece of work, the debts that one accrues to other scholars and colleagues in the interconnected worlds of Academe and Archives are enormous. Those who have been particularly helpful include friends and colleagues, presently or formerly at the University of Sussex: John Lowerson, Alun Howkins, Susan Rowland (who executed most of the diagrams), Jonathan Rowell, Terry Diffey and especially Mick Reed, without whose enthusiasm, knowledge and skill at the very beginning of the project this text could never have emerged. Past and present postgraduate students have helped too, and I am especially grateful for the shared interest of Charles Rawding, William Caudwell, John Godfrey, Hazel Lintott and Mandy Morris at Sussex, and Olivia Wilson (Durham), David Bell (Birmingham and Staffordshire), Mona Paton and Janet Waymark (Birkbeck). Help has come from universities and archives throughout the United Kingdom and the Republic of Ireland. I am also indebted to all those archivists who responded to the initial questionnaire concerning the location of the 1910 material in 1985–86, and I freely acknowledge help and encouragement received from the following: Dr Geoff Armitage (British Library Map Library), Dr John Andrews, Dr Paul Barnwell (RCHME), Dr Madeleine Beard, Miss Geraldine Beech (PRO), Professor John Beckett, Mr Simon Best (Wiltshire County Council), Mr Michael Bottomley (West Yorkshire Archive Service), Mrs Annette Burton (Glamorgan Record Office), Mr Peter Cassells (Valuation Office Dublin), Mr R. Davies (Department of Pictures and Maps, National Library of Wales), Mr Paul Ferguson (Trinity College Dublin), Mr Albert Fallsow (Inland Revenue Chief Valuers Department, latterly the Valuation Office Agency), Mr William Foot (PRO), Mr John Goodchild (Wakefield Library), Mr Hugh Hagan (Scottish Record Office), Professor David Hey, Mr Ian Hill (Scottish Record Office), Professor Roger Kain, Mr Alfred Knightbridge, Dr Peter Laslett, Mr Carl McGee, Mrs Frances McGee (National Archives Dublin), Mr Geoff Mead, Dr Dennis Mills, Ms Michelle Neill (PRO Northern Ireland), Dr Richard Oliver, Professor Charles Phythian-Adams, Dr John Post (PRO), Mr Hugh Prince, Mr Bill Riley, Dr Chris Searle, Dr Keith Snell, Ms Liz Statzicker (Surrey Record Office), Professor Michael Thompson, Mr John Trevelyan (The Ramblers Association), Mr Martin Tyson (Scottish Record Office), Dr Malcom Underwood (St John’s College, Cambridge), Dr Sadie Ward (Centre for Rural
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My greatest debt, however, remains that to Valerie, David, Matthew and James, with apologies for too many lost weekends.