'In the third of a sequence of magisterial and thought-provoking books about early English rural society, Ros Faith forces us to face the problem of how lordship managed to establish itself in Anglo-Saxon England at all. Her profound and radical understanding of how peasant life works on the ground shines through at every point. Everyone who is interested in English society before 1200, or indeed later, must read this book.'

Chris Wickham, Chichele Professor of Medieval History Emeritus, University of Oxford

‘Representing the fruit of more than five decades’ work on the medieval peasantry, this book takes us closer to the lived world of the Anglo-Saxon peasantry than I would have ever thought possible. It revises traditional wisdom on a host of important subjects, from the origins of feudalism to the impact on the Norman Conquest, and will be the go-to book on early English rural society and life for many years to come.’

Levi Roach, Senior Lecturer in Medieval History, University of Exeter
The Moral Economy of the Countryside

How were manorial lords in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries able to appropriate peasant labour? And what does this reveal about the changing attitudes and values of medieval England? Considering these questions from the perspective of the ‘moral economy’, the web of shared values within a society, Rosamond Faith offers a penetrating portrait of a changing world. Anglo-Saxon lords were powerful in many ways, but their power did not stem directly from their ownership of land. The values of early medieval England – principally those of rank, reciprocity and worth – were shared across society. The Norman Conquest brought in new attitudes both to land and to the relationship between lords and peasants, and Domesday Book conveyed the novel concept of ‘tenure’. The new ‘feudal thinking’ permeated all relationships concerned with land: peasant farmers were now manorial tenants, owing labour and rent. Many people looked back to better days.

Rosamond Faith is author of The English Peasantry and the Growth of Lordship and co-author, with Debby Banham, of Anglo-Saxon Farms and Farming. Her research has focused on peasant families and farms in medieval Provence and England, on the nature of lordship, peasant resistance and how medieval people managed the different landscapes they lived in. This book is an attempt to pay long overdue attention to their ‘hearts and minds’.
The Moral Economy of the Countryside

Anglo-Saxon to Anglo-Norman England

Rosamond Faith
Contents

Preface ix
Abbreviations xi

I Rank
1 Introduction: The Moral Economy 1
2 Lordship 17
3 Our Island Story 19
4 Honour and Respect in Peasant Society 28

II Reciprocity
5 Hospitality 47
6 Hearth, Household, and Farm 49

III Reputation and Witness
7 Neighbours and Strangers 58
8 Markets and Marketing 77

IV The Wolf Sniffs the Wind
9 Hwilom Wæs: Archbishop Wulfstan’s Old Social Order 79
10 Land, Law, and Office 87

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## Contents

### V The Aftermath of Conquest
- 11 New Words in the Countryside 127
- 12 Narrating the New Social Order 151

### VI In the World of the Manor
- 13 Establishing Custom 171
- 14 Thinking Feudally 184
- 15 From Rank to Class 197
- 16 Conclusion: Forward into the Past 210

Appendix: The Family Farm in Peasant Studies 215

Bibliography 216

Index 234
Preface

Many conversations are embedded in this book and I am glad to record how much I owe to them. Jean Birrell and I have been discussing medieval peasants and their ideas of ‘what behoves’ over many years and her work has provided a unique insight into many topics we have both been concerned with. Dan Faith has read and commented thoughtfully on the entire book; Lesley Abrams, Stephen Baxter, Peter and Angela Coss, and Elina Screen have read chapters and made helpful comments; and although each of my four children has approached my interests from a very different perspective, they all have given me perceptive advice. The independent scholar can easily become the isolated one and the fact that the University of Oxford keeps the doors open to its seminars has been the lifeline for me that it is for so many others. The members of the Medieval Archaeology Seminar in particular have over the years shown great tolerance towards the questions of someone with only an historian’s training. I am lucky in my academic friends. Over the years I have had the pleasure of many discussions with young historians, most recently Hannah Boston and Richard Purkiss, who have been good enough to share their time and interests with me. Conversations with Ian Forrest have periodically reinforced my sometimes wavering belief that the moral universes of the past are a viable subject for the historian. Working lunches with Tom Lambert and Peter Coss, while both were in the process of writing books of their own, have been as stimulating as they were enjoyable, and hearing Lesley Abrams talking about her own work has over the years been a much-needed lesson in source criticism. On occasions I have shamelessly asked for the expert help one can only get from focussed discussion of one’s ideas by a small group and have been generously answered by John Hudson at St Andrews, Roy Flechner at University College, Dublin, and Alice Rio at the Institute of Historical Research. Although this book is about the remote past, I have learned a great deal that is relevant from my village neighbours.

Ever since their prompt response to what must then have seemed a very eccentric project, Cambridge University Press has been consistently
supportive and encouraging, and Liz Friend-Smith has steered me cheerfully throughout the various stages of assessment. I should like to thank her and the anonymous readers whose reports, both positive and critical, have made this an infinitely better book than it was when I began writing it, not only in correcting errors and suggesting reading, but in encouraging me to ‘raise my game’.

Although James Campbell and I were contemporaries at Oxford, I did not get to know him until quite late in his career, when we were neighbours. Visits to James, as his many friends knew, never failed to result in fascinating conversations. While I have learned a great deal from his writing, as I hope this book will show, it is our talks about the countryside which we both remembered that have informed much of what I have written about what he called the ‘curiously orderly world’ of early medieval England. This book is dedicated to his memory.
Abbreviations

OE   Old English
ON   Old Norse