

Village Notables, despite its solid base in the archives, is anything but a systematic study. It is impressionistic, ranging across virtually the entire century, with scant attention to the chronology of succeeding regimes. The exception is the last chapter, by far the book's finest, on the village schoolmaster of the Third Republic, 1880-1914. One wonders if this study would not have profited from a focus on the *départments* Singer studied in greatest detail — the Gironde, the Vaucluse, and several of the Breton *départments* — with supplementary evidence drawn from other *départments* (Michael Burns' recent *Rural Society and French Politics: Boulangism and the Dreyfus Affair* is an excellent example of this kind of approach).

Indeed, the impressionistic quality of *Village Notables* is also part of its charm. The struggles of mayors, priests, and schoolteachers with their superiors, each other, and their clients are evocatively presented. These interesting and significant tales might be called mini-history or what the author once refers to as *petite histoire*. There is nothing wrong with that. Singer is at his best when speculating on aspects of life in rural communes that historians have not sufficiently considered: the sexuality of schoolteachers and even of *curés*, why schoolteachers remained outsiders in the communes in which they lived (too poorly paid to be accepted by the bourgeoisie, yet separated from the world of their charges by language — their use of French in communes where most people preferred Breton, Provençal or patois), the necessity of maintaining a suitable distance, and so on. He notes what schoolteachers contributed to their communities beyond their teaching (besides serving as secretary for the *mairie*, some helped with vaccinations, others surveyed land, offered advice to farmers, encouraged them to cooperate with their neighbours). We pity the poor teacher whose salary, like most, was too low to allow him to buy books. Singer empathizes with his subjects: the schoolteacher in Gouesnou in the Finistère unjustly accused of improper conduct with the girls from the church school; the priest whose poor hearing meant that he had to insist that his parishioners shout out their confessions (and with the poor people whose darkest secrets could be heard by virtually everyone else in the church); schoolteachers who contracted T.B. in dank schoolhouses; the unmarried schoolteacher eager to find a mate, yet constantly sensing the lack of opportunity inherent in her position (unable to dress up, or, for that matter, dress down), caught between the village élite and the ranks of ordinary people. It is that difficult position of being an "in-betweener" that Singer captures so nicely. At times, he belabours the very obvious, as when, discussing the attachment of teachers to their native regions, he notes that the thoughts of a teacher caught in a World War I no-man's land, his comrades lying dead around him, turned to his Breton village. The material is rich and the writing generally evocative, although its tone sometimes is excessively informal and chatty. References to the American baseball player Roger Hornsby, and to Groucho Marx (who would have loved some of the stories Singer tells) will certainly confuse many European readers, and perhaps North American and English ones as well. Yet Singer's lively prose inevitably carries the day; he writes very well, elegantly in places. He occasionally falls into the old modernization trap ("hastened the advent of modernity", "grew modern", etc.), but his sketches of rural notables and interpretation of their roles are valuable. *Village Notables in Nineteenth-Century France* will not cast a long shadow like the study by Eugen Weber, but it is a book worth reading.

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CAROLYN STEEDMAN — *Policing the Victorian Community: The Formation of English Provincial Police Forces, 1856-80*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1984. Pp. x, 215.

Steedman's concern in this work is to probe the silence surrounding the formation and operation of rural police forces in mid-Victorian England. She examines the relations between central authorities

and local power structures over the issue of police power and through this examination discounts a view of rural policing as a simple extension of metropolitan models to the countryside. Steedman investigates the organizational structure of rural police forces, details the class and occupational origins of their personnel, and attempts to reconstruct the contradictory self- and social-identity of the rural policeman. She is further concerned to trace in broad outline the development of an occupational or “professional” consciousness amongst members of the police, and points to the role of little-known police strikes in this process.

Part of the significance of this book is its investigation of aspects of that process of political development whereby political rule has been translated from the exceptional intervention of armed force to the operation of what Foucault called “a constant policing”. Steedman shows us the appearance in rural England of a regular police force, intended in “normal times” to replace standing armies and local militias. She demonstrates the close connection and subordination of the police to petty magistrates and borough watch committees. She examines ways in which the connection of police to local power structures contributed to the solidification of a particular definition of “normal times” — where “respectable” residents were “not to be interfered with”.

In addition, and in sharp contrast to earlier authors who have presented rural English society after mid-century as clamped in a vice of police repression, Steedman argues that police were “unimportant”, but in a significant fashion. Rural and borough police were simply not sufficiently numerous to effectively watch, let alone repress, common activities in their respective jurisdictions. Until the game laws of the 1880s, they were very tightly regulated by the local judiciary and possessed none of the discretionary powers of modern police agents. Police were the servants of local power structures, and as such were a moral force and an informational source in normal times.

Policemen were especially subjected to the series of moral and characterological demands sought by nineteenth-century governing classes in the working population as a whole. In some ways they were model workmen: temperate, punctual, regular and calm even in extreme situations, their children were well-shod and their wives, often approved directly by chief constables, were forbidden to work. As a force of largely working-class men intended to work to serve the interest of the property-owning classes, police were particularly exposed to that attempt so common in the nineteenth century to situate the conditions of rule in the character-structure of the ruled. Steedman allows us to glimpse something of the loneliness of the policeman, recruited in part because of his detailed knowledge of the structure and culture of the working class, a knowledge bred from direct involvement, and yet cut off by the policing function from participation in that culture and community.

Steedman also situates the development of rural police forces in the context of centre-locality relations. The important police act of 1856 did not simply centralize power. Rather, the central authority attempted to strengthen the structure of power in the countryside based on traditional patterns of deference and a local land-holding magistracy, while maintaining the balance of power amongst sections of the governing classes. At the same time, exceptional clauses in the police acts allowed owners of newly menaced enterprises to use police as permanent property guards; and especially with the game laws of the 1880s, power began to shift more markedly in favour of large property.

In addition to these important contributions, through the examination of individual diaries and autobiographies, and through newspaper accounts of police strikes, Steedman attempts to reconstruct the movement towards a corporate identity amongst police.

The importance of this work is clear. However, for unknown reasons, the publisher has seen fit to present the text in a shoddy typescript riddled with errors. Penetrating the maze of mistakes is sometimes irritating, but worth the trouble.

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