

concludes that "the process of trial in treason cases had much to recommend it" and that "few were found guilty when, under the laws as they then stood, they should have been acquitted" (pp. 178-79). He is right to say that the matter was not controversial, but all this raises the familiar question about an establishment which can make legality by making law. Perhaps there should also be a more incisive attempt to confront the changing nature of statute in the sixteenth century and its relationship with common law.

However, all was not hopeless. It is concluded that evidence was rarely fabricated. As Coke remarked, somewhat idealistically, the proofs ought to be so clear that no defence was possible. In fact a number were acquitted — although some jurors found themselves punished in consequence — and others pardoned, for example on the grounds of "simple nature" or youth. Indeed when an example had been made of leaders, there was always some hope of clemency for lesser but equally guilty followers. Others were accused of seditious words, a lesser offence, and escaped with a whipping, the pillory, or the cucking-stool. Incidentally, the latter was not entirely confined to women and some advocated its extended use. One character, not cited here, was eventually pardoned although he had greeted the accession of James I, whom he called "Shamy Jamey", with a flourished dagger, a declaration for the Duc de Bourbon, and a public pronouncement that he defied "the Scot and a fart for him". As always, some were lucky whereas others suffered disproportionately for drunken utterances.

W. J. JONES,
University of Alberta.

* * *

EDWARD BRITTON. — *The Community of the Vill*. Toronto: Macmillan of Canada, 1977. Pp. xvii, 291.

ALAN MACFARLANE. — *The Origins of English Individualism*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1978. Pp. xv, 216.

Modern historical scholarship on medieval English agrarian society is now into its second century. Although the flashpoints of debate, and with them the proximate stimuli of inquiry, have shifted over the years, much careful research has resulted in a cumulative broadening and deepening of our knowledge of rural life. During the past several decades no branch of this subject has commanded more sustained or creative attention than the life of the husbandman. To the earlier concentration on the countryman as he played out his manorial role or as the common law meagrely defined his status and privileges has been added the complementary and corrective approach to the husbandman as villager, as member of a community shaped and dominated not from without and above but from within and by his own fellows. Attention has shifted to the husbandman as a creator and not merely a creature of the society in which he had his being.

Edward Britton in *The Community of the Vill* takes these inquiries a significant step further. Employing a famous archive and concentrating on one well-documented village, Broughton, over the two generations between 1288 and 1340, Britton sets out to investigate the "internal structures" (p. 4) of 128 village families, to discover what was the status of wives and the treatment of children, whether delinquency and infidelity were problems, how village hierarchy affected family structure and the means by which dominant village families attempted to maintain their dominance from generation to generation. According to the extent of their village office-holding Britton divides Broughton's families

into three groups in descending order of activity, the top group holding the majority of village offices, the bottom group excluded altogether from positions of public responsibility in the village. Britton then tests the divisions thus established with reference to other areas of familial behaviour and finds they describe significant patterns of group variation among the villagers in these areas as well. The top families are also the largest, with thirty-three percent of the total number of village families but fifty percent of the village population, the families at the bottom the smallest, with the percentages reversed. When decline set in during the fourteenth century it affected the families differentially along the same lines: four percent of the top families disappeared, as against twenty-three percent of the families that were excluded from all office, and this notwithstanding that the seventeen percent decline in the number of individuals in the lowest group was only one percent more than the sixteen percent decline in numbers of individuals among the upper group. The families in the lowest group who survived did so "primarily at the expense of those lesser families" who disappeared (p. 142). Top families paid most of the taxes, and avoided most of the village trades, with the exception of brewing where women from office-holding families enjoyed predominance. Adultery too was a specialty of the top families, committed not quite so often among themselves as with members of the lowest group. Since these cases were brought before the court by the members of the office-holding families themselves Britton surmises that these families used the courts to discourage a "practice which threatened not only the internal stability of families, but the very social structure of the village as a whole" (p. 37). Nor was the group that excelled in adultery behindhand in assault, much of it directed against their inferiors; aggression was the predictable bedfellow of dominance. But the families that led in battery also led in mutuality — within the courts they regularly served not only for one another but also for the lesser families as the "pledges" of performance of court-imposed penalties on which the whole court system relied. Britton's village combined mutuality with aggression and with the assertive family maintenance from generation to generation of their political and social prerogatives.

Perhaps the most serious reservation that arises from this work is the question, raised by Britton himself, whether some of the distinctions among the three groups of village families are not more apparent than real. How greatly does the fact that the information used here came largely from the top families themselves bias this information in the direction of the interests of these families? For example, was this group really the most violence-prone within the village or was it merely more concerned to use the courts to control its own violence than to control that of the rest of the village; was it perhaps content to remain ignorant of the intragroup violence of its inferiors on the grounds that they could ordinarily regulate their brawls in other ways and places? Was the disappearance, measured by their disappearance from the court rolls, of the large number of non-office-holding families relative to that of office-holding families partly a result of the courts' bias toward recording the activities of the top families more fully than those of the other families in the village? Probably not. Various evidence suggests that the records do not fundamentally distort the realities of village life with which this study is concerned. Thus, while relatively few of the bottom families appear on the records for assault, many appear for gleaning offences; nor do the rolls ignore trade offences in those trades in which the top families took little part. The rolls may reasonably be taken as providing a fair reflection of the structure and nature of family society in the village.

The success of this study in revealing for the first time the existence of patterns linking family structure, social behaviour and political role within the village community is yet another vindication of the wisdom of choosing to work on the scale of a village. The meticulous linkages without which Britton's conclusions would not carry weight are scarcely possible save for the single village community.

By way of contrast to *The Community of the Vill*, Alan Macfarlane in *The Origins of English Individualism* has set out to challenge certain received ideas on the nature of En-

glish agrarian society with an argument of great generality that relies on examples culled from the whole historical and sociological literature of the subject. Macfarlane's *terminus ad quem* is the industrial revolution. His chief concerns are to try and discover why England was the first country to experience it; when the crucial differences between England and the Continent which permitted this development appeared; and what those differences were. His avowed method of procedure is, first, to amend the definitions of peasant society offered by historical literature with more probing definitions furnished by sociologists and economists and then, thus equipped, to discover why England, rather than France or Italy, was the first to industrialize by contrasting medieval English husbandmen with twentieth-century Polish peasants.

Macfarlane argues that the crucial characteristic of a peasantry, without which none exists, is the practice of "household ownership. This means that the most widespread and most important form of ownership will be family ownership; small peasant farm-holdings will constitute the bulk of the landholding units" (p. 67). Having established his definition he turns to the task of discovering what was the nature of the English husbandman's rights over the land he worked between 1200 and 1750. Beginning in the seventeenth century, he examines the extant diaries and autobiographies of the period to discover their authors' attitudes toward their land. None of the writers, apparently, practiced family ownership of his land. Not one of them was a peasant. Next, two contrasting parishes with which Macfarlane's own work has made him most familiar are surveyed, yielding a "picture of mobility and wage labour, of nuclear family households where the children moved away from home before marriage and often lived in separate villages" (p. 79) throughout the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Concluding from this hasty survey of two parishes and the autobiographies that household ownership of land and hence peasant society did not exist in early modern England Macfarlane next turns to demonstrating that it had never existed in England, or at least that it had not been present since 1200. The evidence is asserted. Freehold "gave an individual complete and total rights over his land" and was thus "diametrically opposed to the form of land-holding that is characteristic of peasant societies" (p. 89), an active land market and enormous amounts of litigation in Chancery testify to the weakness of the link between family and land. Historians who hold that succession to customary land was based on rights conferred by blood are challenged to produce their evidence, and countered with the proposition that "the child has no automatic right or seisin in his parents' property — it has to be formally transferred to him" (p. 119). The grand result of such conditions was an agrarian society in which "the majority of ordinary people in England from at least the thirteenth century were rampant individualists, highly mobile both geographically and socially, economically "rational", marked-oriented and acquisitive, ego-centred in kinship and social life" (p. 163).

Here is a bold challenge to reigning orthodoxy. And a salutary one, at least insofar as it reiterates the importance of one of Kosminsky's seminal demonstrations — the land market as a cardinal feature in shaping the medieval English husbandman's economy and social structure; and inasmuch as it insists that a child's right to inherit his parents' land will be defeated by the parents' alienation of that land. Nevertheless, in my judgement, the book fails to maintain its broader contention, that from at least 1200 onwards the economic practices of English husbandmen destroyed settled, village-based, family-oriented agrarian communality. Its definitions and its evidence are too selective to furnish a convincing case for its hypothesis. The study fails to confront the difficulties inherent in the evidence it uses: practices of land alienation and mobility are evidence for the absence of a traditional "peasant" agrarian society only if present on a certain scale and productive of certain effects. A comparison with Britton's study will illustrate the point. In Broughton, although there is considerable evidence of mobility, land transfers, and villagers' economic interests that broke the bounds of both manor and village, it is clear that these activities did not destroy the core of family-oriented continuity on the land which kept the traditional communal society intact. In short, the question is not whether mobility, land sales and so

forth occurred; there has for years been no serious argument about their existence. The crucial question, to repeat it, concerns their scale and their effect and Macfarlane's study, which turns its back on "statistical tendencies" (p. 86), fails to measure scale and hence to determine effect. Such measurements are indeed at the present time impossible on any but the limited local level. Perhaps we shall yet have from Macfarlane's pen a local study in which he will submit his hypothesis to a meaningful test. When that study comes we may confidently expect that it will not conflate autobiographers with peasants, nor substitute arguments based predominantly on theoretical possibilities for measurements based primarily on actual practices.

R. B. GOHEEN,
Carleton University.

* * *

JOAN THIRSK. — *Economic Policy and Projects: The Development of a Consumer Society in Early Modern England*. Oxford: The Clarendon Press, 1978. Pp. vi, 199.

Dr Thirsk's story is a fascinating one. Spanning the period 1540 to 1700, it concerns the myriad new schemes to manufacture or produce on the farm, goods for consumption at home. In the 1540s England was menaced by the terrible problems of inflation and harvest failure, which combined with population growth to render the plight of most Englishmen truly desperate. It was this convergence of economic and demographic problems which led a group of intellectuals, the Commonwealthmen, to search for ways of relieving the poor, lowering prices, and reducing England's dependence on imports. Their solution, which the government adopted, was "projects". (A projector in sixteenth and seventeenth-century terminology was a cross between an entrepreneur and an innovator.)

Projects began slowly, but were well off the ground by the 1580s, thanks partly to the encouragement of enlightened men like Elizabeth's Treasurer, Lord Burghley. Skilled foreign craftsmen were brought in: Breton canvas makers, Huguenot and Dutch clothworkers, French stocking knitters, Dutch flower growers and so on. The fact that a number of European countries were expelling their Protestants helped. Projectors, both native and foreign, were encouraged by the granting of patents for the sole making of a new product or the sole use of a new technique. The first English patent was granted in 1552 for glass-making. After 1560 patents were handed out thick and fast for everything from the extraction of oil from rapeseeds to the manufacture of playing cards.

Not all projectors enjoyed a monopoly, however. Stocking knitters, for example, were soon found all over the kingdom and, by the 1690s, Thirsk estimates one person in every fourth labouring or poor household was a stocking knitter. Another project, tobacco growing, was introduced in 1619, but outlawed the next year. Nevertheless, the demand for the crop was so insistent that the government was unable to prevent small farmers from raising it, so that by the 1670s it was being grown in twenty-two countries. The ideal poor man's crop, it required little capital and much hard work. Many projects spawned other projects. Starch makers found that they could rear pigs as a sideline with the by-products of their process. The production of rapeseed oil made possible a host of other industries, and also promoted the drainage of the fens, which proved to be ideal rapeseed-growing country. Many projects were exploited by workhouse administrators as sources of employment for the poor — woad growing, stocking making, lace, pin and button making, etc. "The period from 1540-1600 and beyond was a long hard struggle for working men and women... Projects saved their lives" (p. 52).

By the end of the seventeenth century projects had substantially corrected the problems that the Commonwealthmen of the 1540s had addressed. Inflation had been wrestled