Working-Class Housing in Lindsey, 1780-1870

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Until recently, it was widely held that a deterioration of the housing standards of the British working-class occurred in the later eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries as one of 'the problems created by continuous urbanization.' Overcrowding, poor standards of construction, and inadequate sanitation were all viewed as the inevitable results of a lag of investment in housing and public utilities, and of improvements in building codes and regulations, behind the rapid population growth and rural-urban migration associated with the Industrial Revolution. By the 1840s in the cities, according at least to Engels, 'The dwellings of the workers are everywhere badly planned, badly built, and kept in the worst condition, badly ventilated, damp, and unwholesome.' And such dwellings were concentrated upon restricted areas of land in the burgeoning urban centres of industry and commerce to form slums, which the working-class was 'crowded together'; and 'a very considerable portion of the population of the slums was reduced to the circumstances of dwelling in 'subterranean dens', or cellar rooms.

That contemporary assessments of housing conditions in urban Britain during the era of the Industrial Revolution were predominantly pessimistic is perhaps in large measure a result of the novelty of the urban condition. Of course, cities existed in pre-industrial Britain; but with the addition of the factory to commerce and administration as sources of city growth their number and average size experienced an unprecedented increase from the eighteenth century onwards. And conditions in them, before urban values were sufficiently articulated and predominant, were largely judged from a rural standpoint based upon a time-honoured and therefore more acceptable situation; and they were found wanting. By comparison, the contemporary rural labourer's cottage was believed to contain more homely comforts than the hovels in the crowded lanes of a manufacturing town.

For example, the study of a farm in the East Riding in the 1830s observed:

Were any one accustomed to see the filthy and crowded tenements in which the manufacturing population reside, either in towns or in crowded villages in the districts of Leeds and Manchester, with their dirty walls and large heaps of ashes accumulated before the door, - - - we had, in the course of a one to be suddenly put down before the neat cottages at Ridgemont [Holderness], with their walls covered with neatly-trimmed useful fruit-trees, and ornamented with shrubs and flowers, would he seem to have been transported at once to a little paradise.

However, with the passage of time and the establishment of an urban society and urban values in Britain, observers began to peer behind the foliage of Arcady to expose the existence of appalling housing conditions in the countryside. To Joseph Kay in 1850: 'The miserable homes of our peasantry is, of itself, and independently of the causes, which have made the houses so wretched, degrading and demoralizing the poor of our rural districts in a fearful manner.' In the words of another observer of the following year: 'so far as I have seen of English labourers' cottages, the seeming want of cheerfulness was even more distressing than the absence of material comforts.'

During the present century housing conditions in rural Britain during the era of the Industrial Revolution have received comparatively little attention from historians. In part this situation has arisen from a widespread belief that such conditions were static over that period of time, when industrial cities were being formed on the basis of migration from the rural areas, and therefore they lack a history. According to the 'standard histories of building construction', 'no important change in the technique of building' rural cottages occurred between the later eighteenth century and the middle of the nineteenth. The authors of one of the few studies of rural working-class housing in the eighteenth century has further extended this view and state that 'little change in the conceptions of cottage builders took place between the end of the eighteenth century and the twentieth.' Insofar as 'conceptions' and 'techniques' of cottage-building are concerned this is correct. And in regard to styles nineteenth-century architects and builders often delved even further in the past than the eighteenth century, to Gothic and to the Tudor era, to find designs that might be adapted to suit Victorian middle and upper-class tastes. At South Elkington on the Lindsey wolds, for example, the 1840s witnessed the transformation of the mud-walled cottages into neat 'domiciles of the Elizabethan style.' Nevertheless, in the nineteenth century there was an unprecedented increase in the extent to which the most advanced techniques available to eighteenth-century builders were applied, which at least in the county of Lindsey was associated with a radical change in the nature of building materials. As M. W. Barley has observed: 'Until after 1775 a brick house in an East Midland village was a rarity; in the next century the local idiom changed from mud ... to brick.'

For the working-class of Lindsey the beginnings of this transformation was delayed until the end of the century, and in some districts even until well into the nineteenth century.

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In contrast to many other parts of the country Lindsey lacks an abundant supply of local stone readily adaptable for the purposes of residential construction, and there are no deposits of slate within the county. Amongst the sedimentary rock formations, the Spilsby sandstone around the village of Salmonby in the southern district and the Tealby limestone in the central district of the wolds are both 'suitable for building purposes'. But these, and the chalk of the majority of the wolds, have not been extensively used in the construction of houses. In contrast to the oolitic limestone of the Heath of Kesteven, which has been widely used as a building stone both locally and elsewhere, only a relatively small proportion of that of the Cliff north of Lincoln possesses sufficient homogeneity for use in residential construction. Therefore, before the spread of brick and tile manufacture in the clay lowlands during the nineteenth century, and before communications were improved and transport costs lowered sufficiently to permit the carriage of coal for brickmaking and of bricks, tiles and slates over distances, the majority of the Lindsey working-class was housed in cottages built of 'stud and mud' or 'mud and stick', and thatched with straw or reeds.

In the lowland centres of settlement the local clay was mixed with straw to provide the 'mud' for covering the timber frames of cottages, and in those villages in the valleys of the wolds lacking local clay deposits the 'stud and mud' cottages were built of 'plaster' made from the local limestone. As it was used in the 1840s to construct farm outbuildings: This plaster is the white marl mixed with water having straw chopped up amongst it; and after standing a week before used, makes a hard and cheap walling for light buildings.

Cottages built of mud and timber predominated in all parts of Lindsey in the later eighteenth century. Sir Frederick Eden noted in the 1790s that on the wolds the cottages were 'made of clay and thatched with straw.' In the early 1800s, Aby, like many other settlements on the wolds, was 'a small stud and mud hamlet'. In the
Outside the fens, small 'stud and mud' cottages continued to be built by and for agricultural labourers in Lindsey up to and beyond the end of the Napoleonic Wars, largely on account of their low cost and the speed with which they could be made ready for occupation in comparison with brick and tile cottages. In the late 1790s Arthur Young recorded that: 'A cottage of stud and mud may be built for less than thirty pounds'. Yet even in districts where the local clay was suitable for the manufacture of bricks, Young noted that 'a brick cottage for two families will cost 80 guineas; and the smallest sort, for one family, will cost £50'.

Cottages built of brick, of course, were more durable than those built of mud and timber. But during the war period and for some time after, especially on the uplands where an extensive acreage of pasture was brought under the plough, emphasis appears to have been placed upon overcoming the immediate problem of catering for the housing needs of a rapidly growing population and demand for labour by the construction of cheap 'stud and mud' cottages. Moreover, the increasing demand for brick for purposes other than cottage-building, and the advance of wages arising from a shortage of labour, which particularly affected processes such as brickmaking in which the labour content was far higher in 'stud and mud' building, may have widened further the gap in costs between the two types of construction.

During the war years in most of rural Lindsey outside the fens, the change in residential building materials from mud and timber to brick and tile appears to have been largely confined to farmhouses and farm outbuildings. As a local writer observed in 1812: 'The farmhouses have improved considerably within the last thirty or forty years'. The old farmhouses were like the cottages of the labourers only on a larger scale: being framed with 'timber, walled with clay, called stud and mud, and covered with reeds; some with wheat or rye straw'. By 1812, when the labourers' cottages mostly retained the form of the farmhouses of a generation earlier in the materials and form of their construction, the farmhouses were 'mostly built of brick and tile'. This was particularly the case on the uplands, where the conversion of land from pasture to permanent tillage during the war years often necessitated the relocation of the farmsteads from the villages in the valleys of the wolds and at the base of the Cliff scarp to the 'tops' of the hills. The parish of Haugham, in the 'dry Wold Country [of] good Tump & Corn Soil inclosed', was typical of many early nineteenth-century upland villages in possessing 'two superior farm Houses' on the hills and a number of 'small Stud & Mud Cottages' in the village.

After the Napoleonic Wars 'stud and mud' cottage-building declined in Lindsey. Instead, new cottages were increasingly constructed of brick and roofed with tiles, or occasionally with slated roofs. The resulting transformation in the appearance of settlements was most marked in the towns, such as Lincoln and Louth. In the 1780s a traveller had observed that: 'The houses in Lincoln are for the most part old, particularly those at the bottom of the hill; but towards the top there are many buildings in the modern taste'. Sixty years later it was the 'below-hill', or working-class, districts of the city that were changing most significantly in appearance.

Hundreds of red brick houses, with their red tiled roofs, beginning at the margin of the river, spread gently upwards and sideways upon the hill . . . Here and there a single dwelling, with more pretension to modern fashion, exhibits its white or stone coloured front, contrasting with and diversifying the monotony of the general red mass.

Most of this transformation occurred after 1815, and particularly after 1830. Between 1831 and 1841 the absolute number of houses in Lincoln is estimated to have increased from 2,294 to 3,170, or by nearly 40 per cent; and the majority of the increase consisted of brick and tile tenements in the working-class districts.
Here and there in the Lindsey countryside villages were almost entirely rebuilt in brick and tile during the years immediately following 1815. According to an account of the village of Messingham, written in 1825: 'As most of the buildings have been erected within the last five and twenty years, or undergone such alteration as to be almost new, ... the present may be considered a modern village'. But, generally speaking, the pace at which cottages were built, or rebuilt, outside the market towns was extremely slow after 1815, and brick and tile dwellings hardly outnumbered those built of 'stud and mud' before the 1850s. This was particularly the case on the uplands, where the process of building cottages ... proceeded very slowly before the middle of the century. But of the county generally in 1850, it could be said that, although 'Many convenient and comfortable habitations are to be seen in all parts ...', the greater part of the cottages are small, low, and inconsiderable; the interior generally damp, dark, and badly ventilated'. And amongst these dwellings were 'many stud and mud' cottages that had been erected in the previous century.

From the end of the Napoleonic wars to the 1840s, as in earlier years, the most significant progress occurred in the houses of the farmers, and especially in those occupied by the large farmers of the uplands. On the wolds the substantial occupiers came to live 'in the manner of the best country squires', being accustomed to a 'capital and superior Residence seated upon a Lawn'. Throughout the estate of the Earl of Yarborough, which embraced a substantial proportion of both upland and lowland in north Lindsey, 'the residences of the tenants' by the 1840s were 'more in the style of small mansions than farm-houses'.

The 'Farm-buildings' generally on 'the better class of farms in Lincolnshire' were considered by James Caird in 1850 to be 'superior to most ... in the more southerly counties'. The same could not be said, however, for the dwellings of the majority of the county's working-class.

Only in the 1850s and the 1860s did the pace at which the 'old style of costs' in Lindsey were replaced by brick and tile dwellings appear to have been considerably accelerated. Of the parish of Clec it was said in the late 1850s that: 'The houses were anciently built of mud and stones, but have within the last few years been taken down, and good brick and tile cottage farm houses erected on their sites'. Of Marsh chapel by the mid-1860s, it could be stated that 'The cottages are mostly of brick and tile'. In the county generally in the 1870s only 'instances' of 'stud and mud' dwellings were 'still to be seen'.

In contrasting southern Lindsey in the 1880s with the same district in the early 1870s, a retired Wesleyan minister remarked that 'substantial houses have taken the place of mud-walled cottages'; and only a few villages remained in which the cottages were 'chiefly old'.

The transformation of working-class dwellings in Lindsey from 'stud and mud' to brick and tile was viewed by some as amounting to a lowering of aesthetic standards and a deterioration in the appearance of the countryside. In the late 1840s a visitor to the wolds was vexed with much unnecessary ugliness in architecture. 'Cottages are mostly built on one uniform and frightful plan: bare brick, without ornament in stone or wood, after the model of a deal box with square holes for doors and windows.' The change from thatched 'stud and mud' to tiled brick cottages was an improvement in housing standards that was also noted by the visitor. Tiled roofs maintained a far more even room temperature throughout the year than those of tile or slate. According to one authority writing in the early 1840s, 'No one who has not experienced it can conceive the discomfort of a cottage covered with tile or slate. Ask the inhabitants, and they will tell you what they suffer from heat in summer and cold in winter.'
The timbers are of the slenderest possible description, and the floor-joists are propped together with small cross-bearers to prevent them from bending and giving way. Perhaps it would be going too far to concur with one writer, who stated in 1849 that 'During the present century, we have been building dwellings for the poor, as if we were running up sties for pigs'. But certainly, the increased durability of brick and tile cottages over those built of 'stude and mud' was to a large extent merely the product of a reduction of the fire-risk. In January 1839 a fire in a small cottage at East Barkwith, the last of the two neighbouring but detached dwellings, and 'being covered with thatch, and having much old timber in their construction', all three were totally destroyed within two hours. Fires in brick and tile dwellings, on the other hand, were far more contained and usually left at least the shell of the dwelling intact; and having little timber of any description in their construction, they usually burnt at a pace that permitted the horse-drawn fire-engines located at the market towns to arrive on the scene before the damage became extensive.

With the change from 'stude and mud' to brick and tile dwellings, there is some evidence of an increase in the size of dwellings or in the living-space allotted for labouring families; although the amount of the increase was far from substantial, probably did little more than keep pace with the growth of average family size associated with the rapid population growth from the later eighteen century onwards, and was to some extent counter-balanced by an increase in multi-family occupancy resulting from a lag of construction behind demand. At Marshchapel in the 1860s, when the cottages were 'mostly of brick and tile', the ground floor of brick tenements consisted of two rooms of 12 by 13 feet and 8 by 12 feet respectively. Upstairs there were two bedrooms, although in many cases the second bedroom was merely an 'enlarged stair-lair'. At Willoughton even by the 1860s there were still 60 single-bedroom cottages, 38 with two bedrooms, and only 'two or three with three bedrooms'. In the three 'worst villages' visited by an investigator in the 1860s, there were 59 single-bedroomed cottages, a mere three cottages with three bedrooms, and in the 48 two-bedroomed dwellings 'the second bedrooms were described as being only apologies for rooms'.

The restricted size of the majority of the cottages built in Lindsey after 1815, apart from the fact that they represented no advancement upon their eighteenth-century predecessors, was essentially the product of three considerations. In the first place, the high cost of brick and tile dwellings threatened to place the occupation of them beyond the means of agricultural workers, and therefore - as did in fact happen - to leave many untenanted, unless the space allotted to each family was severely restricted. Secondly, the size of tenements was often deliberately restricted as a means of avoiding multi-family occupancy, although even this policy was not always successful. And finally, the small size of tenements reflected the conceptions of the amount of space that ought to be allotted to a labourer's family held by the middle-class, who provided the land, the finance, and the architectural expertise consumed in the erection of the majority of working-class dwellings in Lindsey. The labourer, at least after 1815 when the erection of 'stude and mud' dwellings on waste land by land which came to an end, had 'nothing to do with the planning of his house, nor has he much choice as to what kind of house he will live in'. The size of cottages planned by architects employed to build model estate villages which accommodated a minority of the agricultural working-class in superior cottages, tended to be somewhat generous. According to Sir George Gilbert Scott, 'Every cottage should contain a good-sized living-room, a pantry, a small shed, and three bedrooms. This is the minimum accommodation. A class above this may have a little parlour, and perhaps a back-kitchen. In the opinion of George Nicholls in 1847, 'there ought always to be means for decent separation of the sexes at night, and this can hardly be effected with less than four rooms'. But to the small freeholders and builders who were responsible for building most of the cottages erected in Lindsey during the first half of the nineteenth century, the need to realise a return on their investment and conceptions of working-class housing needs demonstrated that such views as those of Scott and Nicholls were little more than wishful thinking.

The considerations taken into account in the design of realistic labourers' cottages were amply illustrated in the plans drawn up by a Lincoln architect in the late 1840s, which appear to have been particularly based upon conditions prevailing in his native county. In commenting on his plans, the architect emphasized that 'As the surest preventative of the house becoming a residence for two families, and as being more consonant with the wants and means of the labourer, one living-room only is provided'. The living-room of 13 by 11 feet, with a recessed fireplace, adjoined a scullery of 8½ by 7 feet from which the fireplace was 'purposely omitted' to prevent multi-occupancy; and because 'the cooking required for a labourer's family is never of such magnitude as to require two fireplaces'. No access to the cottage was provided from the street, because in the architect's opinion it would be 'objectionable, not only on account of its publicity, but because the indolent tenant is in the habit of throwing ashes and other refuse matters into a heap immediately before the door'. And the 'Out-Offices', or lavatories of the block of tenements were detached, because it was 'economically impossible to make these independent of the part of the cottage'; and they were 'so contrived to conceal as much as possible the purposes for which they are designed', because it was 'offensive to good taste . . . to have such a primitive outline as indicates unmistakably their uses'.

To a restricted amount of living space within the individual Lindsey tenement even after 1815 was added an increasing degree of excess demand, as supply fell further and further behind demand. During the war years in England generally, the supply of housing appears to have fallen markedly behind the needs of a rapidly growing population, as resources were diverted towards increasing agricultural production, armaments, and the size of the armed services. These activities, particularly the latter, were likely to compete for the supply of migratory and casual labour upon which the building industry depended. Naval construction and enclosures in agriculture competed for the available supplies of imported timber, which were restricted by war conditions. And the high prices of foodstuffs during the war years were likely to have forced costs upwards at a rapid rate in such a labour-intensive industry as building. Like every other, this 'war is said to have checked building operations . . . builders joined the army or navy and materials became dearer'.

In Lindsey local factors tended towards making the housing shortage particularly acute during the war years. The rapid conversion of the light soils of the uplands from pasture to permanent tillage from the 1790s onwards, in response to rising grain prices, was dependent upon the re-location of the farmsteads, from the villages to the hills. The shift of tillage to the uplands and into the newly-reclaimed fens brought about a dramatic increase in the demand for farm-buildings to occupy the land under arable. As regards the accommodation of farm-workers, however, it was said that 'on the lands thus brought into cultivation, farm houses and farm buildings were built for its occupation, but few cottages'.

The 'few cottages' that were erected with the new farmsteads on the Lindsey uplands contributed less towards the alleviation of the housing shortage than towards the establishment of an important status division within the agricultural working-class. The cottages in question, which were often built about the farmyards, were reserved for
confined labourers hired on annual contracts to provide for the farmers' most pressing needs for gatemen and shepherds, while the majority of day labourers and casual workers, or 'catch-work men', were left to compete for the limited accommodation available in the villages. With the conversion of the uplands from pasture to permanent tillage, therefore, the 'tied cottage system' appeared in Lindsey, whereby a limited number of confined labourers were provided with accommodation as a part of the terms of employment on a particular farm. This 'system', while it did provide housing of a generally superior kind for a minority of workers, was used to discipline that minority to work longer and more regular hours caring for the livestock of the farms. As one agricultural writer observed of confined labourers in 1840: 'their is a situation of great comfort, and... either a noble principle of gratitude, or the more fear of losing their place, must operate upon all in rendering them obliging, industrious, and valuable servants'.

Instances are not lacking in Lindsey in which the 'tied cottage system' produced what might be termed 'the better face of feudalism'. On the wolds in the late 1840s, Samuel Sidney noted that:

A number of cottages are attached to most farms, in which the married labourers live. I saw very old men living in these cottages, past work, but hobbling about doing little jobs of mending and watching. There are men who have been ten, twenty-five, and thirty-two years in the service of the same family.

However, in general, as one observer with a wide knowledge of local conditions put it:

that class of cottages which are dependent on farms is the biggest piece of slavery... in England, by its being in the power of an avuncular principal to fix the wages of his labourer at what price he pleases on pain of quitting his cottage.

A case that illustrates the problems of the 'tied cottage', although the action of the principal was somewhat unique, was tried by the Crown Court at Lincoln in 1832. In this case, Margaret Wallace, the thirty-year-old wife of a labourer formerly employed by a large wold farmer, was found guilty of burning a dwelling house belonging to the Earl of Yarborough. The farmer, having given Wallace notice to quit the house on his leaving to work on another farm, 'sent two men... to remove the house uninhabitable by taking off the thatch' when the notice to quit expired.

In the days before slates and tiles became common roofing materials on labourers' cottages, the removal of the thatch was the usual last resort on the part of the owner to secure vacant possession, and was far more efficacious than calling upon the services of court bailiffs. In this particular instance, however, Margaret Wallace:

in a state of excessive rage... assaulted the men by throwing stones and striking, with a poker, for which she was knocked down in return. She also cut down the windows and doors, and was seen to set them on fire in the floor of her cottage, till the flames reached the ceiling; she also fetched the garden gate, and added it to the fire, saying to the neighbours who tried to dissuade her, and who were removing her furniture, that she "had only lain in a month, and had need enough of fire". She also tried to prevent its being extinguished, and the place was entirely consumed.

Perhaps in part as a consequence of this case, by the 1840s most labourers on the Yarborough estate rented their cottages directly from the owner.

After the pent-up demand for housing created during the war years does not appear to have been satisfied, and in fact the supply of housing seems to have continued to lag considerably behind a rapidly growing population at least until the 1850s. The rate of population growth in Lindsey did not peak until the 1820s, and there was no marked falling off in the rate of growth before the 1850s. The demand for labour in agriculture continued to expand rapidly after 1815, as the farmers responded to falling prices for foodstuffs by converting more and more land from pasture to labour-intensive tillage, in an effort to maintain farm incomes by increased output. With falling prices and the cry of 'depression', landlords were motivated to raise the level of their investment in agriculture in an attempt to forestall demands for rent abatements and reductions, and in order to release tenant capital for investment in raising output per acre of land. But only a small proportion of landlord investment was directed to the building of cottages, the majority being devoted to improvements that added directly and visibly to the viability and value of their farms. Amongst such outlays, the most important was the rising investment in field drainage, which commenced about 1820 'with horseshoe tiles and "bats", or soles', and which competed directly with the building industry for the capacity of local brickkilns. In 1840 it was said of Lindsey that:

Millions of draining tiles have been buried, and so extensive is their use, that brickmakers employ their whole labour to the obtaining [of] a stock previous to the winter, and neglect the making of bricks for building, which are thereby become a scarcer commodity, the brickmakers not being able to sell a fifth or half of their produce on tiles.

In the 1840s, the spread of railways in Lindsey, in which a large amount of capital was invested by the larger local landowners, created a competing source of demand for bricks with the building industry; an 'immense number of bricks' being required for the construction of tunnels and stations.

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The failure of the supply of housing to meet the rapidly growing demand of the post-war decades was reflected in examples of overcrowding which bore a closer resemblance to the worst of the contemporary urban slums. At the village of Branston near Lincoln in the 1830s, a labourer in receipt of 12s. a week for wages paid 1s. 6d. per week for a one-bedroomed cottage of 9 by 9 feet, in which he accommodated his family of seven. The parents, with three children at their feet, slept in one bed, and three children in another at a corner. When a free-standing cottage at Eresby on the wolds caught fire in June 1833, three families were made homeless. In 1856 the family of eight, all 'suffering from low fever', were found sleeping in one bed in a small cottage at Gayton le Wold. In 1867 a similar case came to light at Grinthorpe in the marshland, in which 'the father and mother and seven children were found in a room with only one bedstead, all ill with fever; no window except one in the roof'. Another example of overcrowding was reported in September of the same year, after a sixteen-year-old girl at Yeddlethorpe girl was crushed to death in a threshing-machine.

The house in which the parents live is a mere hovel, and their only dwelling-room is not more than 10 feet by 12. The family consists of nine persons, who have to live in this room, where all the cooking, getting their meals, and other household transactions have to be done; and in this room, not more than five or six feet from the fireplace, the corpse was obliged to remain. The body became so offensive and had by morning that it was absolutely necessary to remove it...

Although there were many large families who were forced by poverty to occupy small one-bedroomed cottages, there was often a broad correlation between the size of a labourer's family and the size of his dwelling. In the mid-1860s, for instance, Mrs. Bland of Kirkton had 'four children, and only one chamber'. Her neighbour Mrs. Rhodes, on the other hand, had 'the children, and two chambers to live in'. Those with large families were generally distinguished by a greater difficulty in obtaining accommodation than those with small families, for it was said that 'Landlords dread families'; and by their occupation of houses of inferior quality rather than size. As the vicar of a large wold parish observed in the 1860s: 'The largest families get the worst houses.'
peculiar circumstances. Of the village of Glee in the 1850s, it was noted that: 'Glee Hall was formerly the seat of the noble family of Mordaunt; it is a building of great antiquity and surrounded by a moat... It is now occupied by two families of tenant farmers'. At the other extreme, on a farm at Legshy in the late 1830s, there was 'a brick and tile Barn and Stable, part of which has been converted into a Tenement for a Labourer'. At Scopwick in Kesteven in the late 1830s: 'The old Rectory and Vicarage were low, damp habitations, unfit for human residence; with rooms five or six feet in height, and altogether destitute of convenience'. But the former was 'inhabited by serving men'.

To some extent the overcrowding of Lindsey cottages was alleviated by the maintenance of the living-in system for farm-servants, and by a high level of demand for female domestic servants to serve in the houses of the opulent farmers of the uplands. Without relief from this source the extent of overcrowding would have been absolutely unbecarable. When a labourer's wife, 'who had a large family and a small house', was asked 'how she managed to keep them all warm', she simply replied: 'Ah oats 'em as an 'is 'em'. In many cases, however, and especially after 1815, the farm-servants were themselves crowded into cottages on the farms or in villages thereby reducing the supply available for labourers with families. At Withcall on the wolds in the 1860s, for instance, three of the 17 cottages in the parish were 'taken up as lodging houses for farm lads, eight in each'. Moreover, as a consequence of the living-in system, the cottages occupied by labouring families were extremely overcrowded 'in May-day week, when all the farm and household servants take a week's holiday'. The vicar of Willoughton, a parish in which the shortage of housing space was acute at all times of the year, objected to the 'May Day holiday', because 'the cottages are then crowded beyond belief'.

To the chief constable of Lincolnshire in the 1860s: 'the annual feasts, when all the members of a family come together with nothing to do, and crowd into the cottages', and in which the lads and girls were herded together 'without any control', were the two main causes of illegitimacy in the county. Overall, while the transformation of working-class dwellings in Lindsey after 1815, from 'stud and mud' to brick and tile, involved a debatable improvement in the quality of dwellings and a marginal addition to the space allotted to each family at a time when the average size of families was increasing, it contributed to alleviating a growing shortage of accommodation available at rents that labourers could be reasonably expected to afford. Rather than substituting expensive bricks and tiles for cheap 'stud and mud', the transformation exacerbated the housing problem and contributed towards an increase in the proportion of wages that had to be devoted to rent in the period after 1815. By the 1860s the housing situation in Lindsey was such that landowners and farmers were compelled, in the form of low interest loans and subsidies to provide for the accommodation of the agricultural working-class.

But before such requests bore fruit the onset of the 'Great Depression' in agriculture from the late 1870s, and the massive 'flight from the land' which it engendered, brought a solution of sorts to the housing problem in Lindsey.

Footnotes

1. The research upon which this paper is based was originally undertaken as part of a doctoral dissertation registered at the University of Hull.


deliberately appealing to public opinion at large.' In doing this it includes a chapter by A. J. Peacock on ‘Village Radicalism in East Anglia, 1800-50’ and another by Pamela Horn, ‘Agricultural Trade Unionism in Oxfordshire’. The book discusses conditions in Scotland and Wales. The result is an uneven mixture and its use and interest for the local historian varies from chapter to chapter.

A. J. Peacock’s analysis of village radicalism in East Anglia in the first half of the nineteenth century discusses the forms of protest open to the agricultural labourer during this period: theft, arson, animal maiming, the destruction of fences and banks. It is useful to have the insights this chapter provides when looking at our own newspapers reports, but when do these acts cease to be protests against social and economic conditions and become the result of personal pique, which has few or no political overtones? Dr. Peacock is well aware of the difficulty of identifying this type of evidence and points to the example of a pyromaniac whose ‘only object was to occasion a necessity for working the (fire) engine, for which, as one of the assistants, he received 6s. 6d. each time’; or the insurance swindlers who heavily insured property and then set it alight. This type of crime contrasts with the example of Stephen Spicer, of Wicken, Cambridgeshire, who threatened to set fire to the property of farmers who reduced wages. Sheep and cattle stealing are another activity discussed by Dr. Peacock, but again we are faced with the problem of deciding when this ceases to be an act of political or social protest. The abolition of capital punishment for horse, sheep or cattle stealing in 1832 may help to explain the rise in the incidence of this particular crime after this date, but here again the gangs who worked in collaboration with local butchers, such as two farmers and a servant who operated around Eastwick in Hertfordshire, can hardly be described as protesters against the existing social order; nor can the gang, two of whose members were arrested at Osbournby in 1834, who had stolen from 80 to 100 horses in the previous three months and later sold them. Dr. Peacock’s essay might have gained from a more extended discussion of the social background to rural crime in the nineteenth century. He notes that, ‘Some villages became known as trouble spots and conditions in them would be worth studying in detail’. It is a pity he has not done this and so provided a local framework on which to base his discussion.

In the chapter on ‘The Rise and Fall of Agricultural Trade Unionism in England’ J. P. D. Dunbabin comments that ‘if rural unrest in the first part of the (nineteenth) century was mainly the product of desperation, in the second half it was mainly that of hope’. Dr. Pamela Horn’s detailed account of ‘Agricultural Trade Unions in Oxfordshire’ looks at their development in the county in the 1870s with some discussion of later activity in the field of village charities, the extension of the parliamentary franchise and trade union activity in the 1890s. Dr. Horn might have used this local investigation as the basis for a more detailed examination of the roots of the labourers’ movement. Some aspects of the background to the transformation of the labourers’ attitudes from individual acts of vengeance to the wider movement are discussed in the chapter on the rise and fall of agricultural trade unionism: the spread of cheap newspapers, nationally organized benefit societies, the railways and the penny post, but the effect of these and other factors are not to be studied in a local context. Dr. Horn also dismisses too lightly the small scale unions of the late 1860s. Did these provide a link with the earlier manifestations of discontent discussed by Dr. Peacock? Is there anything the local historian can do to throw light on the way this change took place through the study of individual villages or groups of villages? This book raises many questions for the local historian and provides a number of pointers to areas of study where he has much to contribute.

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