The Family and Kin of the Lincolnshire Labourer in the Eighteenth Century

J. A. Johnston

Most social histories written before 1960 tell us little about the personal life of the eighteenth century labourer who formed the country’s largest occupational group. Since 1960 the study of previously unexploited documentary evidence has revealed information about their customs and attitudes which they themselves were not sufficiently interested or literate to record. Analysis of documents such as parish registers, static population lists, probate inventories and court records is providing a wealth of detail about their beliefs, modes of thought and marital customs. Their wills, too, are sources which can provide insights into the complex network of social relationships they experienced.

These wills, in common with all the documents already mentioned, have their weaknesses as evidence. They were originally produced to serve a particular legal function. They were not meant to provide today’s historian with unequivocal answers to the questions which interest him. They were produced only by the wealthiest minority amongst the peasants, the majority of whom died so poor that their estate did not warrant the expense or formality of a will. The ones who left wills had diverse backgrounds which must have influenced their bequest distribution. An unmarried labourer in his twenties, with surviving parents, brothers and sisters would not have bequeathed his estate in the same way a generation later with a wife and, perhaps, children, step-children and grandchildren.

The majority of wills were made towards the end of a life that had included marriage. This means that the part played by relations by marriage in that life can be underestimated. Such kin links were likely to be strongest soon after marriage and, again, when adolescent children were establishing themselves and needed contacts and influence. Lincolnshire also contained a number of farming economies and the customs of the Fens and the Wolds were probably not the same when it came to crystallising one’s attitude to family and kin in the drawing up of a will. Despite these reservations analysis of wills can provide the best remaining evidence for the labourers’ largely unrecorded attitudes towards family, relations and friends. Such analysis can also indicate something about his responsibilities to wife and children and his attitudes towards the equality of the sexes, the ownership of land and primogeniture.

Three sets of wills were selected to provide information on these issues: all labourers’ wills proved in the diocese of Lincoln between 1700 and 1710, 153 of them, provided evidence for the early eighteenth century; a hundred labourers’ wills for a similar period from the diocese of Worcester provided a basis for regional comparison; the third set of wills, 146 of them, by Lincolnshire labourers between 1814 and 1824, made it possible to see whether the great demographic, agricultural and industrial changes of the eighteenth century had been accompanied by changes in the labourers’ family life and social network.

The basic evidence derived from each will was the number of bequests, their nature, the relationship between testator and legatee and a record of any peculiarities in the wording or in the bequests. This paper will deal first with the proportional distribution of bequests to the main areas of human contact experienced by the labourer. Second, it will concentrate upon the attitudes towards wives, children and land which are revealed by the bequests.

It is necessary to use proportional analysis of the bequests to understand the relative importance of different groups of people in the labourer’s life. Love, like most of the important forces in history, cannot be easily quantified. Evidence from the wills cannot provide comparative measures of the affection felt by a labourer towards a daughter or a nephew. Two characteristics of the wills make such measures impossible. The number of bequests made in a will depended, partly, on wealth. In an analysis of 1,181 early eighteenth century Worcestershire wills the average number of bequests made by gentlemen was 7.76, yeomen made 5.55, husbandmen 4.89 and labourers 3.45. At this time, Lincolnshire labourers made an average of 4.85 bequests and in the early nineteenth century 4.32. Moreover it is generally impossible to give any precise monetary value to the bequests. They range from items of secondhand clothes, furniture, beasts and crops to houses, land and substantial sums of money. In the larger sample of Worcestershire wills referred to above there were some from each social group where bequests were entirely in money. Here it could be seen that gentlemen left 94% of the value of their estates to their wives and children and all others, including labourers, more than 95%. Such weighting of wealth towards the nuclear family must almost certainly be true for the three smaller samples of wills discussed here. However, a study of the proportional distribution of the bequests and the ways in which these proportions change will outline the social framework in which these labourers lived.

The obvious starting point for such analysis of the bequests is to see how they were divided between the major groupings of people. First must come those related to a labourer by blood ties. These consanguinal relations were principally his parents, his siblings (brothers and sisters), cousins, nephews and nieces. He could add to this network at marriage a set of affinal relations. This would include his wife and her own network of blood relations. There would also be, for most men, the group made up of their friends and neighbours. In this group can be included ministers, godchildren, the poor of the parish, none of whom were directly related to the labourer. Usually, the relationship between testator and legatee was precisely defined although some eighteenth and early nineteenth century words for relationships are used ambiguously. The word “kin” covered a multitude of relationships but where additional phrases allow the link to be defined it usually described cousins, nephews or nieces and is therefore counted as consanguinal in the tables which follow. Another description, that of son- or daughter-in-law could then mean either step children or the relationship we understand by the word today.

The distribution of bequests to blood relations, relations by marriage and the unrelated group is summarised in Table I. In the column which gives the percentage of bequests to affines the proportion given to wives is given separately. This will help to an understanding of the place of the nuclear family consisting of wife (an affine) and children (consanguine) in the bequest pattern.

The distribution in the two early eighteenth century samples is remarkably similar. Both allocate over two-thirds of their bequests to consanguinal relations. In both
more substantial bequests. As an example of these bequests, the grandchildren of John Scott of Sibsey were to receive "the sheep they call their own with the strike down the rump." 

Rather more remarkable is the narrow range of relationships to which bequests are made. The labourers recognise only their effective kin, those with whom they had a significant relationship. There is a modern-looking selectivity about the pattern which implies a personal choice from the spectrum of relatives rather than the acceptance of conventions which required the acknowledgment of a large number of kin links. The two first columns of Table I emphatically demonstrate the dominance of the nuclear family in bequest allocation. Consideration of the third column implies that this dominance strengthened during the nineteenth century. The increase takes place at some apparent cost to siblings and other consanguinal kin. The importance of the nuclear family and its apparent increase in importance is the most significant feature of the bequest distribution.

Although family ties have always been of importance there has been wide recognition of a trend whereby the nuclear family has increased its influence. The reasons for this and the time span during which it occurred are currently the subject of much historical work. There is medieval evidence for distinctively English characteristics in family life but the status of the nuclear family seems to have been powerfully reinforced in the post Reformation period. It is argued that the policies of state and church converged to enhance the influence of the family grouping. The state systematically weakened the powers of aristocratic kinship groups and emphasised the patriarchal authority of the monarch. The protestant church stressed the importance of conjugal affection and mutual domestic support and the family group was an effective unit in which the practices of the reformed churches could be developed. These influences, over time, strengthened the status of the father and the cohesion of the family at even the humblest levels. Other theories attribute the trend to psychogenic evolution or to surges of sentiment which transformed conjugal relations and attitudes to children.

What the explanations for the underlying trends which might have increased the influence of the family, it seems best to leave the historians' debate on causality to achieve some consensus. It is most relevant to relate the eighteenth century evidence for change to two recent publications and the demographic developments of the century. A splendidly detailed and tightly argued study of South Lindsey between 1825 and 1875 can provide a framework of explanation.

The general similarity between the early eighteenth century Lincolnshire and Worcestershire samples is again apparent. The latter is somewhat more generous to sisters and the Lincolnshire labourer is ready to favour cousins, nephews and nieces. Such differences can be partially explained by the differing proportions in each group who had been married or who had died without children. The narrow generation span is understandable in a period when expectation of life was low. The bulk of the bequests go to contemporaries of the testator or to the first descending generation, 75.3% of the early eighteenth century Lincolnshire bequests and 77.36% of the nineteenth century bequests go to this generation span. Short expectation of life rather than lack of affection would explain the small proportion of bequests to parents and grandchildren. The wills do contain explicit examples of care and affection. One daughter was left a stock bed which was to come to her when her grandmother, presumably an invalid, ceased to have need for it. Grandchildren were often left a ewe and a lamb as well as
groupings heightened the insecurity of the peasants' life. A recent collection of papers has emphasized this growing eighteenth century insecurity and related it to changes in inheritance customs. A common factor in several of these papers is to show how the labourer had, through the centuries, been forced to adapt his way of life, and its associated attitudes towards inheritance, under the impact of epidemics, population change, agricultural and commercial developments. These adaptations have varied in the differing agricultural regions of the country. One of these studies, of the Fen, chalk upland and midland clay communities in Cambridgeshire, has much that is of relevance to Lincolnshire's experience. The eighteenth century labourer found himself in competition with gentry and farmers who were doing their best to provide their own children with security in the shape of wealth and status. There was stricter definition of the laws of copyhold and manorial custom, usually to the detriment of the labourer. These papers and the study of south Lindsey both converge in that they suggest a situation in which the labourer found it increasingly difficult to achieve security himself or to bequeath any kind of security to his children. One response to this worsening situation would have been for the labourer to concern himself more strongly with the well-being of his wife and children.

A contributing factor to this increased concern for the nuclear family must have been the demographic changes of the period 1700-1850. Lincolnshire's population increased from an estimated 179,095 in 1701 to 215,213 in 1801 and 321,001 in 1831. This is an increase of 79% over 130 years with the main weight of the increase coming in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. This was concurrent with a weakening of the church's influence and the developments, in industrial villages and towns, of new routines of work and familial experience. In particular, changes in marriage age and in the age structure of the population would have played a part in altering the rural labourers' attitudes and practices towards inheritance.

The links between social change, population increase and the growing influence of nuclear family are complex, but it is in this context that it becomes possible to understand this shift of bequests in Tables I and II.

The three sets of wills do more than reinforce our knowledge of the growing importance of the nuclear family. They make explicit some of the social attitudes and practices among labourers as they planned the division of their estates. Each set of wills is the product of labourers whose domestic circumstances differed. They can be studied most effectively in sub-groups according to the presence of wives, of young children, or of grown-up families in the pattern of legatees. Before separate and detailed consideration is given to these distinctive groupings two general points can be made.

One of the most interesting general characteristics, shared by all three sets of wills, is the remarkable equality in the number of bequests made to the two sexes. This equality is apparent for the brother-sister, son-daughter and grandson-granddaughter relationships, although in the last the granddaughter is usually favoured. One can assume an equality in the numbers of each sex and it would seem that there was a general absence of sex discrimination. The earlier Lincolnshire sample shows this less sharply than Worcestershire but Table II implies that a majority of labourers tried hard from limited resources to provide for all their children.

Normally the eldest son was generously favoured only when the labourer's wealth was sufficient to make significant bequests to every one of his children. There was social expectation that estates should be fairly divided even at the lowest levels of society. It could lead to some exceedingly nice judgements. In 1704 one son of John Thurslow of Langton near Horncastle, received a bald fillip as his principal bequest. His brother received a mare blind in one eye. Over a century later a Throstle labourer ensured that his will would contain the remainder to his children 'be it remembered that my daughter, Peebe (sic) has before time received the sum of six pounds which is to be considered part of her share'. Certainly testators felt they needed to explain any departure from convention when they neglected one of their children or left an inequitable bequest. Richard Baker of Claypole died in 1705 and left one shilling to his son. A shilling was the minimum, nominal acknowledgement of a relationship. It could be expressed by a pair of gloves, or, in higher society, by a gold ring. Baker explained he made this minimal bequest 'because the said Richard, my son, both by his indiscretion and extravagance hath contributed to my impoverishment'. The bulk of Baker's remaining goods was left to an executor for the maintenance of his grandson. If all his grandchildren were to die then the estate was to go to his sister and her death to a cousin.

Baker was, in fact, allocating his estate in accordance with the generally accepted priorities implied by the statistics of Tables I and II. His wife was apparently dead so his first priority was to provide for his son, then his grandchildren. Only when justice had been done here did his more distant consanguinal relations stand to benefit. The general acceptance of such priorities carried the need to justify eccentric bequests. One of the nuncupative wills contains a good example of such justification. A nuncupative will was the recording of a verbal declaration, frequently made when the death of the testator seemed imminent. In one Worcestershire example, a labourer was 'sick of the sickness and the distemper being contagious that the scribe hes'ent for to make his will durst not come near him', and there could hardly be a spoken record of the last wishes. The justification for the deviation from the convention was, in less dramatic circumstances, by a Lincolnshire labourer, Mathew Thompson of Belton in Axholme who, 'being asked of witness...if he would give anything to his brother he replied No, I will not give him anything for I have given him thirty pounds already and if I had five times more than I have already I would give it all to Margaret... with whom he intended to be married. He made his statement in the house of his fiancéé, a cordwainer's daughter, where he had lodged for the last ten weeks of his life. This carefully elicited statement was necessary if the will was to remain unchallenged in law. The example shows recognition of a convention which was recognised by both children and parents.

These two general principles, of fairness of provision, irrespective of sex, to all the children in a family were usually of subsidiary importance to the overriding expectation that adequate provision be made for the wife and mother of the nuclear family. The varying nature of this expectation is best considered by studying the wills of labourers in the various sub-groups defined in Table III. A majority of the wills were made by married labourers and sixty-eight in the eighteenth century left their wife to look after young children. It was usual to indicate minors by a phrase stating the age at which they were to receive their bequest. In the early eighteenth century Lincolnshire set, forty-four labourers left 111 children aged less than twenty-one years. These children represent 44% of the children named in all early eighteenth century Lincolnshire wills, an indication of the high proportion of orphans in pre-industrial society. The primary concern of the father, and the first responsibility for the mother and widow, was the safe bringing of these children to maturity. This responsibility is described in a variety of ways, but one
Table III
Testators and the Nuclear Family (percentage, with number in brackets)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Wills containing bequests to:</th>
<th>18th century Worcestershire</th>
<th>18th century Lincolnshire</th>
<th>19th century Lincolnshire</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Wives and children under 21 years</td>
<td>24 (24)</td>
<td>29 (44)</td>
<td>19 (28)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wives and children over 21 years</td>
<td>8 (8)</td>
<td>33 (51)</td>
<td>20 (30)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wives but no children</td>
<td>8 (8)</td>
<td>13 (20)</td>
<td>15 (22)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wives alone</td>
<td>12 (12)</td>
<td>2 (3)</td>
<td>9 (14)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children but no wife</td>
<td>21 (21)</td>
<td>16 (25)</td>
<td>27 (39)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Neither wife nor children</td>
<td>27 (27)</td>
<td>7 (10)</td>
<td>10 (13)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

produce of specific fields but is not apparent, provided with house room. 36

The consistency of practice whereby the widows are given responsibility and authority in both groups of eighteenth century wills is remarkable. Their bequests are frequently introduced by the phrases ‘beloved wife’, or ‘my dear wife’. Admittedly, such phrases could be almost meaningless conventions but the general tenor of the bequests, in content and wording, implies a marriage bond that was at least companionate. In one marriage the wife had perhaps developed an altogether excessive independence. Her husband owned a blade mill but in his will he warned his executors not to concern themselves with his wife’s debts for malt and building as he himself had never meddled with her business. 37

There are interesting differences in the fifty-eight wills made by nineteenth century labourers who left families which included wife and children. Twenty-eight of them left young children. The age at which these children received their bequests was, with one exception, twenty-one years. The money legacies they received were more substantial. Four of them were for over £50, seven were less than £1, and as far as more than half were to receive £2 this sum seems to have become recognised as an acceptable portion for a labourer to give to his children. The most obvious difference in bequest practice was that now very few, only six of the fifty-eight, wills making bequests to wives, followed the eighteenth century custom of leaving the residue of the estate to the wife and making her sole executor. The general custom now was to leave the bulk of the estate to the widow for her life and to specify the child who was to receive this at her death. In nineteen of the twenty-eight wills where widows were left with young children the estate was to be equally divided amongst them at the death of their mother. Whether the widow was left with young children or a mature family it was a characteristic of the nineteenth century wills that trustees were appointed to supervise the task of dividing the estate at the death of the widow. The trustees, usually of yeoman or farmer status and unrelated to the labourer, were named in six of the wills where the widows had young children and in eleven of those where the children had reached their majority.

Although there is a sameness in the provision made for widows and children in the eighteenth and nineteenth century Lincolnshire wills the latter are more precisely worded and contain rather more illuminating comment and exceptional provision. In one the widow was left £4 a year but the family house, which included ‘a newly erected shop’ went to two sons. 38 Two wills record the arrangements necessary because one of the children was in someway incapable. Thomas Oxbey of Carlton le Moorland arranged for his landlord, Lord Middleton, to admit his son, Robert, to a cottage. In this he was, with the help of the parish, ‘to find his brother, meat clothes, washing and lodging as he hath done in my life’. 39 In another it was the father who had received such care and although his estate was valued at less than £30 he left it with love and affection to the son who ‘hath during my bodily infirmity supported me’. 40 The love that must have been present behind the stereotyped wording of many of the bequests breaks through again when James Wood of Leake tried to ensure that his widow preserved her independence for he directed she was to ‘have the order and management of the small place she occupies and all matters belonging thereunto’. 41

There was realty as well in the bequest a contemporary of his made to his widow when he expressed the hope that she could manage on her bequest and ‘what she may be able to obtain from her own manual industry’. 42 The only explicit example of the breaking of family links is one rather
forlorn bequest to a son which directs that his share is to be kept for seven years against the possibility of his return. Two of the wills show that the medieval custom of the widow being entitled to one third of the deceased's goods lingered on into the nineteenth century. The other groupings of wills described in Table III serve to reinforce comments upon the nuclear family and its wider relationships which have already been made. The wills in which a wife is identified but which contain no bequests to children must generally be a record of childless marriages. The eighteenth century wills of this group have a common pattern. All but three make a number of nominal bequests, usually a shilling, to a number of consanguinal relations, mainly brothers, sisters, nephews and nieces. The rest of the estate goes to the widow. In the three exceptions the widow has the estate for life and it then passes to a nephew or niece. The nineteenth century wills are again more specific. Two in three of them leave the bulk of the estate to the wife, after a few nominal bequests have been made, and direct that at her death it is to go to nephews, nieces, brothers or sisters. In the wills where a single bequest is made to the wife alone there is sometimes an emphatic statement stressing her sole right to the legacy. In one such, her right to it is reinforced by being for her own use and to the absolute benefit and disposal. The priority of the conjugal over the consanguinal link is apparent throughout this set of wills. In wills where children under twenty-one years are left bequests but there is no mention of a wife it seems that they had experienced the loss of both parents. In the eighteenth century Lincolnshire wills there were six such families with nine in the nineteenth century. In the earlier period the youngsters were to be cared for by elder brothers and sisters, two by trustees and once by an uncle. In the nineteenth century four were to be cared for by their brothers and sisters and five by trustees. A small proportion of the testators made bequests to neither wife nor children. These unmarried men distributed their bequests to consanguinal kin, with nephews and nieces being most commonly preferred. Some of the wills are obviously made by senior and comparatively wealthy labourers. The expectations raised by unmarried uncles were great, even at this level of society. Many of the labourers owned real estate in the shape of houses or land. The careful treatment this receives in the wills reflects its importance to labourers and family. Some of them had hoarded security for their family by securing money on bond. The principal ways in which this real estate was bequeathed are summarised in Table IV.

Table IV

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Bequests of Real Estate and Sureties</th>
<th>Worcestershire 1699-1716</th>
<th>Lincolnshire 1700-1710</th>
<th>Lincolnshire 1814-1824</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Labourers leaving real estate—number—</td>
<td>46</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>65</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>percentage—</td>
<td>46.00%</td>
<td>22.52%</td>
<td>43.62%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Real estate left undivided</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>to sons</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>to others</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>to wives for life</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>22</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>to trustees for immediate sale</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>—</td>
<td>21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Real estate left divided</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>shared amongst</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Labourers leaving sureties, bonds, money as a major bequest</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The Table shows that the labourers' traditional disinclination to accept primogeniture as a guiding principle of inheritance custom still survived. Like their aristocratic superiors the labourers saw the security and status that came from owning real estate. It gave them status in their own lifetime and a resource which enabled them to pass on something of that security to their family. This bequest of security was of more importance than passing on an undivided estate to a single son. Land, in fact, like the rest of the labourers' wealth was subject to the fundamental concern that fairness be displayed to the family and society at large. The growing importance of the security given by invested money is seen in the early nineteenth century Lincolnshire wills.

Evidence from the wills can indicate something of the general principles and pattern of bequest distribution but the sample is too small to do more than illustrate some of the characteristics of the labourers' life. Remarriage was a common feature of eighteenth century society. It can be certainly identified in wills only when step-children are described or when the phrase 'now wife' is used. There need be no indication in a will, for instance, of an early childless marriage. Thus the identification of twenty-eighteenth century and six nineteenth century Lincolnshire labourers who had experienced remarriage is almost certainly an underestimate. The addition in one will that the step-mother show kindness and protection to her husband's son and daughter is a reflection of the tensions caused by remarriage. Improved expectation of life could have helped to make remarriage less common as the eighteenth century progressed. There is perhaps some confirmation of this in the rather surprising fact that four of the nineteenth century wills record bequests to housekeepers. One of them was left a black gown, a petticoat and a bonnet. In all the wills only two natural sons received bequests.

The wills do not provide much direct evidence except in bequests of real estate and dowries for any improvement in the labourers' material well being during the eighteenth century. A few nineteenth century labourers make bequests of items which are unparalleled a hundred years earlier. One left a tea caddy, a teapot and a twenty-four hour clock. Another left tea and dressing tables and there were two bequests of half dozens of silver tea spoons. It seems that at least the luxury of tea had become part of the labourers' life. In general far fewer nineteenth century wills make bequests of household goods, only twelve in Lincolnshire, as opposed to sixty-one in the early eighteenth century. The lists of cherished possessions identified as bequests in these earlier wills imply a lowly standard of comfort. Pewter and brass are frequently specified, one details the best suit of apparel consisting of 'my great coat, short bodied coat, waistcoat and breeches.' This impression of the paucity of material possessions in the early eighteenth century is heightened by the wills which identify especially cherished heirlooms to be passed on to the next generation. Thus in one family a set of benches with studs and gallow backs formed one bequest, in another a daughter was to receive the bed that had been her mother's, in another the set of red curtains and a chest that had belonged to her grandmother went to a daughter. The recipients of humble bequests like this were at least luckier than the families of two Worcestershire labourers who left their entire estates to creditors.

A present day sociologist studying the family would, with his interviews and questionnaires and his presence at weddings, funerals and festivities, define by table and text the meaningful relationships within which the family and the individuals in the family were enmeshed. The pre-industrial labourer suffered many hardships but he was
FOOTNOTES
2 Lincolnshire Archives Office (subsequently L.A.O.) wills for the diocese of Lincoln and the Archdeaconry of Stow. The wills are from the diocese unless otherwise stated.
3 Hereford and Worcester Record Office. St. Helen’s, Worcester (subsequently W.R.O.) 1498. B.A. 3585/358-409. These are identified by bulk accession number (3585), and box number, name of testator and date.
4 L.A.O. Lincoln and Stow wills 1614-1824.
5 See Table III, p. 50.
7 L.A.O. Wills 1709/2/105.
15 Ibid, M. Spufford, ‘Peasant inheritance customs and land distribution in Worcestershire from the sixteenth to the eighteenth century.’
22 L.A.O. Wills 1704/277.
26 L.A.O. Wills 1705/8/144.
30 L.A.O. Wills 1706/13; cf. 1702/33; 1704/4; W.R.O. 3585/366 Andrew Harris 8.4.1702.
31 L.A.O. Wills 1700/104; 1704/23.
33 W.R.O. 3585/399 Thomas Kinnan 8.5.1713.
35 L.A.O. Wills 1704/218.
37 W.R.O. 3585/395 Benjamin Whitaker 10.3.1711.
42 L.A.O. Wills 1816 Andrew Atkinson 10.4.1816.
44 L.A.O. Wills 1814/6 Thomas Knight 11.3.1814; 1816 Thomas Barton 7.10.1815; cf. E. P. Thompson, op. cit., p. 333.
45 L.A.O. Wills 1820 John Clifton 30.2.1813; cf. 1823 Edward Balderson 1.6.1820.
46 For example L.A.O. Wills 1702/161; 1709/1/115; 1824 John Williams 13.1.1824; 1824 Thomas Hard the Elder 24.1.1824.
50 L.A.O. Wills 1811 James Gillyard 12.3.1810.
57 L.A.O. Stow Wills 1705/10/54; cf. 1701/161; 1704/191.
58 L.A.O. Stow Wills 1705/10/49; 1704/184; 1700/194.
59 W.R.O. 3585/393 Joseph Spillman 18.5.1713; 3585/399 William Townshend 6.2.1709.

Book Reviews


Local historians of the medieval period — a relatively rare breed — soon find themselves facing problems relating to fiefs and fees, honors and baronies, manorial customs and servitude. It is essential to see these elements of a ‘feudal’ society in a wider context; and even local studies will be enriched by an appreciation that ‘feudalism’ is one stage in the human evolution of organising social relationships.

In this book John Critchley sets out to examine feudalism wherever it has occurred in world history — Europe, the Latin states in the Middle East, India, Japan and elsewhere. He seeks to identify its constituent parts — fiefs (property held by service dues); lords and vassals, and their counterparts, patrons and clients. He discusses the tendencies inherent in feudalism towards both disorder and yet towards integration; he outlines the changes within feudal societies and the way in which the concept has become the object of attack by later social theorists, especially Marxists.

The book is not easy reading, and some of what is discussed cannot easily fall into most people’s definition of ‘feudalism’; but it is a thought-provoking study which will widen the horizons of many who think of English (or even European) feudalism as existing in a vacuum.

ALAN ROGERS
NOTTINGHAM