



224 is the newsletter of the Deddington & District History Society. During our season we meet at 7.30 on the second Wednesday of the month, normally at Deddington's Windmill Centre. Membership is £9/16 pa singles/couples or £2.50 at the door for visitors, who are equally welcome. The editor actively encourages contributions to be sent to 1 South Newington Road, Barford St Michael OX15 0RJ. Email editor.224@nehoc.co.uk

Country planning (1944)¹ and Twenty-four square miles (1946)²

The book, and the film of the book

Picture the scene: it is 1943 and there is still a war on but, though the Normandy Landings were only a dream, the end does seem to be in sight. A group of academics at Oxford's Agricultural Economics Research Institute decide that what is needed is a study of the rural economy and, as they write in the introduction to *Country planning*, 'From the moment of the mobilization of the nation for another world war it was certain that far-reaching changes in the social and economic life of the nation would be entailed, many of which would not pass away with final victory ... it was clear that much of the old order would be destroyed; that alongside the planning of war strategy must go the planning of civil life, if the fruits of victory were not to prove bitter in the mouths of demobilized members of the fighting services and the emancipated war-workers'. The authors were, essentially, echoing the 1918 cry of Lloyd George for 'a fit land for heroes to live in'. Then the country was able to spend £7 million a day to defeat the Germans and only a fraction of that amount would be needed to fulfil his ringing promise: it should all have been so simple! Would it be better the second time round?

With the war still on one might expect complications and in this case it was a combination of the blackout and a lack of petrol that influenced the team led by C S Orwin to pick a single Ordnance Survey sheet³ to study instead of selecting representative communities around the country.

Today we are the beneficiaries of this detailed study and the film based on it. It was published to wide acclaim (there were over 50 reviews) and, with paper still

heavily rationed, the 2,000 copies were sold out in just two days and a further 3,000 had to be reprinted the following year when more paper was available,

1 *Country planning*, Oxford (OUP). 1944.

2 *Twenty-four square miles*, London. (COI/Basic Films), 1946. It is now available on both DVD and video from www.panamint.co.uk and also elsewhere.

3 OS 6" Oxfordshire Sheet IX.

making it a most unlikely publishing success.

In order not to confine the appeal of the book to Oxfordshire most traces of our location have been removed, but they are not difficult to restore with a knowledge of the area; the numbered villages are simply found, but individual farms are a bit more difficult.

The need for reconstruction was evident as rural England had been in the grip of a depression since the 1880s with the economic and social base of the countryside run down. A re-study of the same area by Lady Mary Bates and Brian Cudmore (ed G P Hirsch) was published by the Institute in 1975 but the

2006 programme

8 March Film *Twenty-four square miles* with a commentary by Graham Nottingham and Colin Cohen and also the 1992 update by Central TV (Exceptionally this meeting is in St Peter's Church)

12 April Angela Davis, 'Happy families? Kinship, courtship and change in 20th Century Britain: an oral history approach'

10 May Martin Sirot-Smith 'Sulgrave Manor'

14 June Visit to Sulgrave Manor

new study did not have the vision of the original, though it gives a good account of changes since 1943 and further lifted the veil of anonymity on the locations. OUP declined to publish this re-study at its own risk, so the Institute published 500 copies on its own.

The University Archive⁴ contains a considerable amount of material on the publishing of the book. For a start its publication was subsidised by Development Commission funds which were made available through the Development and Road Improvement Funds Act of 1909, for 'aiding and developing agricultural and rural industries by promoting scientific research ...'. The estimated cost of publishing by OUP was put at £500 and this was to be fully covered. One set of accounts shows that 4,600 copies were sold and £42/10/- was received for the German translation rights!

The correspondence on how much of this had to be repaid after the unexpected success lasted until 1948! Memos from 1948 have 'the men from the ministry' asking for £86/10/1 back, *and* they never paid the final £200 of the grant. The University had made no provision for this and it seems it might have come out of the Institute's grant—was it a victim of its own success? This was the same Commission which had encouraged the University to set up the Institute in 1913. In 1939 Orwin had become the first DLitt in Oxford's School of Social Studies, having been the Institute's first Director and retiring only in 1945.

4 AE 100, 124 and 147/1-3.

In the film A J Woolgrove of Mead Farm, Barford St John, says to camera 'I came to live here when I was six months old, and, when my father retired I took over the farm. The farm house lies in the village, with the main buildings round it, and there are close to three hundred acres of land. I've a fairish amount of arable, growing wheat, oats and barley. Then I grow about ten acres of potatoes each year and a few acres of sprouts as well. It's good land, not too heavy, although the valley is liable to flood a little in winter and it's good for more than pasture. But this is a mixed farm—like most of these parts—and I've a flock of sheep and a herd of cattle; the land's good for cattle and I do a bit of breeding—a good Hereford cross. My son George helps me with the work, and I've three other men as well. We used to keep six horses to work the farm, but now two tractors do it, and we keep one horse and a pony for odd jobs.'

Top: a German PoW with George driving the tractor and Albert by the wheel and bottom: Albert Woolgrove in the fold.





'The blacksmithy which also repairs tractors', blacksmith Tom Tibbetts and assistant at Barford St Michael nearly opposite Townsend.

The reviews include two from *The Economist*, 23 December 1944 and 13 January 1945 and *The Sunday Times* of 1 April 1945 by Sir John Russell FRS [author of *English Farming* and others, and sometime director of the Rothamsted Research Station].

In the former *Daily Herald* of 4 April 1945 John Betjeman wrote: 'It is true that the fundamental question to be answered by all country planners is not answered, namely, are we going to make British agriculture a self-respecting way of life? Or are we going to keep it as a little pet of commercialised-industrialist culture?'. Not quite the style you would expect of its successor, the *Sun*. While the picture painted by the 1946 film may have an almost nineteenth-century feel the question is still being asked in the twenty-first.

The New Statesman published a review by Clough Williams Ellis (the architect of, among other places, Portmeirion village in Wales), who wrote: 'What Rowntree did for York, the ven-

erable provincial city; what the Bournville Trust did for Birmingham, the transitional industrial conurbation; the Orwin commando [sic] has now resoundingly done for rural England'. *The Spectator* (two reviews, one of which called for a second volume), *The Manchester Guardian* and *The Observer* also joined in, and all are glowing. They did not appear until the print run was exhausted and so could not have contributed to the book's success.

That the book is well written might be a surprise for a book produced by an institution, but Charles Stewart Orwin and his wife Christabel Susan had already co-authored *The open fields* in 1938 about Laxton and were also engaged on *Farms & fields* (1944). After his death she went on to co-author *The history of British agriculture, 1846-1914* (1964).

The film

In 1946 the government information services, the COI, still

From the chair

This year's talks have been unusual in the wealth of objects brought along by our speakers. It has been a pleasure (increasingly rare in these 'hands-off' times) to be invited to handle many of them. Few of us will forget the two trestle tables that apparently held but a small sample from John Wilson's collection, and I am quite sure that none of us had ever before been in the presence of quite so many eighteenth- and nineteenth-century clock movements as we were during the talk by Tim Marshall on north Oxfordshire clockmakers.

I don't wish to tempt fate, but our March event promises to be even more special, for we shall be marking the sixtieth anniversary of the first showing of that remarkable piece of social observation, *Twenty-four square miles*. One or two of our members actually feature in that film. I assume that on this occasion we shall not be permitted to handle the exhibits!

We are now well into our seventh or eighth season—I forget which—so it is perhaps a good moment to ask members if they are experiencing a seven- (or eight-) year itch? Are you hankering for something different? Do you like the present balance of talks and events? Perhaps you would welcome talks on more general historical topics? I mention that last point because I remember the enthusiastic reception for John Maddicott's talk on Piers Gaveston and the bloody politics of the reign of Edward II. Do please let us have your views, so that in planning future programmes we can take into account the express wishes of our members.

And, finally, Colin tells me he has run out of ideas for 224, so if you want an issue in June ...

Chris Day

with rural reconstruction in mind, made a film of the book.

The film is remarkably faithful to its origins in the book, and provides a vivid image of rural life. It covers comprehensively agriculture, employment, housing, recreation, education, local government in detail, providing a clear illustration of the mid-century point from which rural planning had to re-start.

In the light of the massive changes which have since taken place in the countryside, both the book and film raise questions about the directions in which rural planning has moved since the end of the war. A useful starting point for discussion and thought is the list of rural problems and priorities which Orwin gave at the end of his book:

'These, then, seem to be the problems of country planning. First, how can rural industrial life be re-organised—and farming in particular—so that it may give better returns both in goods and services while providing more opportunity and a higher

standard of living to those engaged in it? Second, how can living conditions in the country be improved, particularly housing ... so as to bring standards of comfort in rural areas more into conformity with those of the towns? Third, how can the handicap which the small scale of so many village communities imposes upon the organisations of the churches, upon education, on all the welfare services and the help, spiritual, moral and material, which the nation sets out to provide for the countryman and his family, be removed? Lastly, given satisfactory answers to these questions, can anything be done to preserve the amenities of the countryside and the beauty of the rural scene, so that the destruction and the desecration arising from want of thought, from lack of taste, or from the pursuit of profit, which were spreading through the country on an ever-increasing scale in the years before the war, may be brought under control?'

Orwin and the team certainly viewed the countryside planning problems of the period with clarity. Can we now use his check-list of four points to see

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Images and quoted text are by courtesy of Film Images and COI Footage File.

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where we have made progress? How has agriculture fared under the CAP at the expense of other rural industries and employment? How will it change under the new regime that is now in place? How have rural living conditions been improved and what of the question of rural housing? We are still dogged by the problems of small scale in rural services: did we give too much priority to amenity conservation before other issues were resolved?

The 1992 Central TV programme

No archive copies of these three short films made that spring remain, but we were lucky to be able to borrow a copy which was probably made off-air from the Centre for Oxfordshire Studies and convert it to DVD. It is sometimes called 'Fifty years on 'though the library copy is labelled 'The making of *Twenty-four square miles*'. It included clips of the original with 'modern' colour film and interviews to match. These little films, which were shown after the news, stand in their own right as cameos, but one thing is evident in that the order of change that took place between 1946 and 1992 eclipses anything that has taken place in the country since then.

Colin Cohen

Member Alan Maddison, of Barford St Michael, is researching local schools. In Country planning there are photos of two schools, one captioned just 'Built 1832'. So, where is it? If you know please call Alan on 01869 337040, or email the editor.

