

PATRICIA CROOT. *The World of the Small Farmer: Tenure, Profit and Politics in the Early Modern Somerset Levels*. Studies in Regional and Local History 15. Hatfield: University of Hertfordshire Press, 2017. Pp. 240. £18.99 (paper).
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Researchers in English local history tend to divide between those who engage with the history of a place because they were born there or live there, or have some other personal connection, and those who are footloose and are drawn to a place by the quality of its documentation. Patricia Croot's selection of the Brent Marsh in the Somerset Levels as the subject of her study arises out of family connection and long familiarity. She offers a study that is scholarly and rewarding but cannot quite escape the problem that there is no especially rich documentation for her to draw on and this offers special challenges. It is a reflection of the character of the area that this is emphatically not a study of estates. Croot's concern is with the independent small farmer, whether a copyholder for lives or a leaseholder, much less often a smallholder. The sources relating to farmers are always scanty, and as one might expect, the book lacks big, detailed accounts of individuals: instead it is based on the careful accumulation of hard-won detail. Perhaps because of Croot's reliance on court rolls and wills, it is also much fuller than are other recent studies on questions of tenure, the descent of land, and the provision that testators made for their widows and children. This forms a useful contribution to a debate that has largely stalled in recent years.

Croot addresses many areas of concern to historians without any prior interest in Somerset. There is useful information here on sub-tenancy and the market in leases; on the increase in the numbers of gentry; and in the discussion of farming, including an account of a rarely considered crop, teasel. Although one would not guess it from the contents page, there is a detailed consideration of the role of women in farming and society.

Croot's main concern is to show the commercial orientation of the small farmer; she focuses the account to explain why we should not see them as merely subsistence producers. To a degree this is an argument that no longer needs to be made. It perhaps reflects how far we have come in accepting that farmers were capitalist entrepreneurs that some of Croot's conclusion takes the form of a critique of the middle-period work of W. G. Hoskins. As this was a district with a heavy commitment to cattle rearing, dairying, and cheese and butter production, it is inevitable that the farmers there would be commercial operators. Croot shows that there were opportunities to accumulate money to invest in leases and pass over to the next generation. The lack of inventories means that there is less information about the standard of living as seen through possessions and furnishings than one might expect. Croot offers no comments on housing, not even a discussion of any vernacular housing still standing. Nor does she offer any comment on schools or the education of young men at Oxford and Cambridge, even though education should be seen every bit as much as a form of consumption and investment in the next generation as would be buying a lease or an apprenticeship for sons or daughters.

Croot does offer a telling account of popular politics. The Brent marsh might seem a remote area, but it did not lack either a political life or a religious one, and its inhabitants had a good knowledge of and reacted to events elsewhere. Men from the district joined Monmouth's rebellion (and suffered after its failure): we have an account of disturbances in 1687 that shows that divisions in local society remained raw.

There are a couple of points where I ought to express reservations. There is much less in this book about the marshes (moors) themselves than one might expect, or about their management. This was a wet landscape, at least in part. Sedgemoor was drained, albeit probably not terribly efficiently, in the 1630s, and at some periods the prospect of drainage and enclosure of the moors must have hung over the heads of the farmers of the Brent marsh. While the marsh was extensive (Croot says 10,000–13,000 acres), a map of its extent, even at the time of its enclosure and drainage, would have been useful. I also thought that Croot tended to

homogenize experience over the long period she considers. The Civil War is discussed, but it forms less of a turning point than it does in other studies, and the agrarian depression of the later seventeenth century is made into less, rather than more, of a distinctive period.

Overall this is a good book to have. It will not have been an easy book to research or write and Dr. Croot is to be congratulated in bringing it to a conclusion. It fully describes a species of rural economy that has attracted little attention since the pioneering work of Joan Thirsk on Lincolnshire nearly seventy years ago. I hope it brings the present-day inhabitants of Somerset as much pleasure as it will bring Dr. Croot's professional peers.

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JAMES DELBOURGO. *Collecting the World: Hans Sloane and the Origins of the British Museum*. Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2017. Pp. 504. \$35.00 (cloth). doi: 10.1017/jbr.2018.92

James Delbourgo has written a remarkable book that evaluates the life of Hans Sloane (1660–1753), as well as his collections—a massive achievement, matching in proportion to the collections themselves. The collections consisted of specimens of plants and animals, crafts from other cultures, manuscripts, books, and paintings. First displayed in Sloane's house in Bloomsbury Square and later expanded to his manor house in Chelsea, the collections became part of the basis for the British Museum, an institution that Sloane himself initiated by calling for it in his will. The figure that emerges through Delbourgo's perceptive analysis of Sloane is that of a very intelligent man on the make: rising from his servant family in northern Ireland to wealth and celebrity in London as a famous doctor and president of the Royal Society, using the objects of the developing British Empire to place himself at the center of it, preserving the knowledge gained through the new science, and concerned about British society as a whole by establishing the British Museum as a public institution. Delbourgo demonstrates why the previous methods of the history of science have obscured the significance of Sloane through "triumphalist narratives of scientific progress" and of heroic single figures like Newton working alone, rather than "reconstructing past structures of thought and practice" to illuminate "the pursuit of natural history on a global stage through the many exchanges of knowledge that took place across cultures in this era" (xxiii, xxvi). Delbourgo uses the methods of Atlantic studies to show how indigenous cultures and Africans transplanted by slavery made significant contributions to the collections and to the knowledge of the new science. Delbourgo proves the virtue of his approach in this work, certainly an extraordinary achievement. However, he does not quite acknowledge, as in general the practitioners of Atlantic studies do not, that other cultures are valued in this approach only to the extent that they contributed to Western science.

Delbourgo does justice to the colonial origins and travels of Sloane in the first part of the book, aptly called "Empire of Curiosities." Sloane's upbringing as a member of the Anglo-Irish community in northern Ireland sets the stage for his zealous justification of Protestant colonization in his travels to Jamaica. His father's success at social mobility and the rule of primogeniture that left Sloane with no inheritance explain the energy with which he embraced his study of medicine in London and Paris, and his effective cultivation of influential contacts. The two chapters on his journey to and residence in Jamaica as physician to the governor display the power of the Atlantic studies approach. Delbourgo brings out the contribution of Indians and Africans to the remarkable collection of specimens that Sloane gathered and the botanical