DEPARTMENT OF ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL HISTORY

EH3106/3606 PATRICIANS AND PLEBS

In 1801 only one third of the population lived in towns. This module will examine the economy and society of the rural and proto-industrial regions of England in which the majority of the population lived. We consider the causes of population growth, changes in agricultural practice, increasing industrialization and improved communications and consider their impact on social structures and social policy, with a particular focus upon attitudes to poverty and social control. By the end of this module students will have a wide-ranging knowledge of the economic and social history of eighteenth-century England. Extensive use is made of contemporary sources throughout the module will enhance their understanding of the contemporary debates and give them experience in handling primary evidence.

This module develops and assesses the following subject specific skills in the manner set out below

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Skill Description</th>
<th>How Developed</th>
<th>How Assessed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Read, analyse and reflect critically and contextually upon historical texts and other source materials.</td>
<td>In reading for tutorials, through commentary upon primary sources and in writing essay(s)</td>
<td>Both assignments Exam</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Develop an understanding of the varieties of approaches to understanding, constructing and interpreting the past and of comparative perspectives on the past.</td>
<td>In reading for tutorials, through commentary upon primary sources and in writing essay(s)</td>
<td>Both assignments Exam</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gather and deploy appropriate evidence and data to develop and sustain historical arguments.</td>
<td>Through participation in tutorials, preparing presentations and the planning and writing of essay(s)</td>
<td>Essay(s) Exam</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This module develops and assesses the skills outlined in the university learning and teaching strategy in the manner set out below

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Skill Description</th>
<th>Developed</th>
<th>Assessed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>IT Skills</td>
<td>Assignment and Essay(s)</td>
<td>Assignment and Essay(s)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Numeracy</td>
<td>Tutorials, Lecture Handouts</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Written Communication</td>
<td>Assignment and Essay(s)</td>
<td>Assignment and Essay(s)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oral Communication</td>
<td>Tutorials</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Team Working</td>
<td>Tutorials</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

A number of books will be of use for most of the sessions in this module and will not be listed each time in the more specialized lists below. Many of them also have comprehensive bibliographies which you are encouraged to consult in addition to the readings suggested here.

Joan Thirsk (ed.), *The Agrarian History of England and Wales* vols 5 and 6. *(AHEW)* (These volumes have clear chapter headings which will help you to navigate round the several thousand pages!).


**Week 1**

This session will begin with an introductory lecture will outline some of the crucial themes which we will be covering over the semester and give a basic outline of the ‘agricultural revolution’, its chronology and historiography. Students, will however, be expected to have done some preparation (!) and the second part of the seminar will be devoted to a discussion of some of the historiographical issues.

*AEHW*, vols. 5 and 6.


**Week 2**

As we saw in week 1, one of the outstanding features of agrarian change over the eighteenth century was the consolidation of great estates: clearly the great landowners did very well out of these changes. We will be looking more closely at the processes by which the great landowners achieved this consolidation, and their overall contribution to the ‘agricultural revolution’. The traditional orthodoxy of improving aristocratic landlords has been extensively modified in some areas. Another area of debate is the change in the way in which estates were managed, with profit oriented capitalism often presented as replacing the paternalism of earlier periods.

**Presentations**

- Describe and explain the different patterns of land use to be found throughout England in the 18th century.
- How did the major landowners consolidate their position as landowners, and what were the wider social implications of this development?
- How did approaches to estate management and farming change during this period?

You should be using the items from Week 1 (if you have not already read them cover to cover) and the following studies which focus mainly on landownership and estate management amongst the elites.


---, *Yorkshire Baronets 1640-176: families, estates and fortunes* (1980).


Week 3
Clearly the landowners were beneficiaries of agricultural change in the eighteenth century. In this session we will be looking at those who ‘lost’. The question of enclosure was one which vexed contemporaries at the time, and historians are still divided in opinion as to the precise nature of its impact upon the labouring sort. Doubts have been expressed as to whether the English model of large estates, whereby the yeoman farmers were squeezed out, was the best way forward for agricultural progress, or whether French model of small peasant farmers might actually have been more beneficial in the long run. Historians have also drawn attention to the impact which changing patterns of rural employment had on the position of women, and we will also be discussing how this affected the construction of women’s role in society.

Presentations
Present the arguments for and against enclosure – from the perspective of two of the following: (nb – you may not find the texts discuss specifically the attitude of an industrial employer: try to work out what it might have been).

a) small yeoman farmer; b) cottager or landless labourer; c) labouring woman; d) great landowner; e) urban gentleman with concerned interest in poverty; f) industrial employer


J. D. Chambers, Nottinghamshire in the Eighteenth-Century 2nd edn (1964) chapters VI and VII.


----, ‘The female labour market in English agriculture during the Industrial Revolution: expansion or contraction?’, Agricultural History Review, 47 (1999).


**Week 4**

It is easy to forget that the industrial revolution was not a purely urban phenomenon and that some of the most important developments in Britain’s manufacturing history took place in a rural location. In this session we will be looking at ‘rural industry’ and the forms it took. We shall be considering the reasons why certain industries flourished in certain areas and the impact of industry on patterns of employment and settlement. Where did the original capital for industrial expansion take place, and how close were the connections between the agricultural and the manufacturing economy? Where did the labour for these enterprises come from? What kind of communities evolved as a result?

**Presentations**

- What did the aristocracy contribute to the development of manufactures? – was their involvement simply parasitic?
- How would you characterize the social structure and communities of the proto-industrial areas? What is distinctive about them?
- What are the connections between proto-industrial growth and urban growth and why is the concept of regionality so important?

J. D. Chambers, Nottinghamshire in the Eighteenth Century (1932).
P. Hudson, Regions and Industries: A Perspective on the Industrial Revolution in Britain (1989).

**Week 5**

This week we will be looking at the culture of the common people, through their popular customs, their relationship to the law and the ruling classes. Much of the historiography has been written in response to the seminal work of the late E. P. Thompson, who famously coined the term ‘moral economy’ to explain the culture of protest and disturbance with which the labouring sort were traditionally identified. It was Thompson also who characterized the period as one of growing conflict between ‘patricians and plebs’ and we will be examining the evidence for and against this bipolar model as an interpretation of 18th cent society.

**Presentations**
- What new forms of rural crime appeared – and why?
- What was the geographical spread of rural unrest?
- Can the concept of class conflict be usefully applied in this period
- How does riot fit in with the study of ‘popular culture’?

Michael Freeman, ‘Plebs or Predators? Deer stealing in Whichwood Forest, Oxfordshire, in the 18th and 19th centuries’, Social History (1996)
---, The Politics of Social Conflict (1999)

Week 6
In this session we will be looking more closely at the experience of rural poverty, the means by which it was alleviated and the debates surrounding the implementation of the poor laws and poor relief. Although 18th century governments have commonly been depicted as having no interest in social policies, recent research has suggested that we need to modify this view and has argued in favour of a much more responsive state. The issue of poor relief and poverty offers an excellent vantage point from which to view the first steps towards formulating what we would now recognize as social policy. Many of the arguments sound very familiar and we are still no nearer resolving the problems which vexed eighteenth-century political economists!

Presentations
- Why does rural poverty become more acute?
- What reforms were suggested and why were they resisted?
- Which aspects of the poor law were most disliked by a) those receiving relief, b) the rate-payers?

AHEW, vol. vi, ch. 8


--- and Hugh Cunningham (eds), *Charity, Philanthropy and Reform: from the 1690s to 1850s* (1998) especially essay by Innes.


**Week 7**

Historians have often portrayed the provision of poor relief as an exercise in social control of the poor. This week we will be considering government, authority and the social order in rather broader terms. How were rural communities governed? how was social control exercised by the elites and how meaningful was the practice of paternalism in a deferential society. What did it mean to belong to a local community and to what extent can we speak of local and regional identities - which begs the question of how these identities were formed and expressed. We will also be considering the role of religion in providing the basis for social structures and identities.
Presentations

• What do we mean by localism? – how have historians used it in interpreting 18th century society?
• What was the role of the church in the local community?
• What is meant by paternalism and what was its significance in local communities?

Note that many of the readings from last week will be of relevance to this week’s themes, as poor relief was administered on a local, parochial basis.

J. D. Chambers, *Nottinghamshire in the Eighteenth-Century* 2nd edn (1964) chapter III.
Paul Langford, *Public Life and the Propertied Englishman* (1990) esp ch.6
---, *Customs in Common* (1991) includes these and other essays.
And see also the review by Peter King, ‘Edward Thompson’s contribution to eighteenth century studies. ‘The patrician-plebeian model re-examined’ *Social History* 21 (1997)

Some contemporary descriptions of the life of the JP or parish officer are easily found:
David Vaisey, The Diary of Thomas Turner, 1754-65 (1985) - a vivid picture of the life of shopkeeper and parish officer in a small rural community.

**Week 8**
To what extent was England dominated by an aristocratic elite? Although the middling sort were expanding in number and influence, the landed elite still dominated Westminster and government and accounted for the vast majority of the nation’s wealth. We will be looking at how the aristocracy maintained its commanding position in British society and how open it was to change, and what shaped its cultural values. What separated the aristocracy from the gentry and those below them and how far had these distinctions been modified by the end of the century?

**Presentations**
- Why was property so important in the 18th century?
- What changes took place in the nature of the ruling elite? – how much mobility?
- What were the values and principles of the aristocracy?

Refer back to the readings for Week 2 which include a number of studies of the aristocracy and landed elite.

*AEHW* vol. 6 chapter 9
David Cannadine, The Decline and Fall of the British Aristocracy (1990).
Paul Langford, Public Life and the Propertied Englishman (1990) esp. chs 5 and 8.
Michael McCahill, Order and Equipoise: the Peerage and the House of Lords, 1783-1806 (1978).
---, The Gentry: the rise and fall of a ruling class (1976)
F. M. L. Thompson, English Landed Society in the Nineteenth Century (1963) esp chs 1-4. Despite the title, there is much of interest for our period too.
Week 9
Some of the most obvious manifestations of aristocratic power which survive today are the country houses, filled with paintings, antiquities and elaborate furniture, and surrounded by extensive landscaped gardens. This session will study trends in art, architecture and garden design in the eighteenth century and relate them to the social contexts in which changes took place. What kind of message did the aristocratic creators hope to propagate through these grandiose designs? What determined shifts in style and ornamentation? On a more basic level, what was it like to live in one of these places and did practical considerations play any part in influencing design?

Presentations
Select a country seat and/or landscape park (eg Stourhead, Blenheim, Stowe, Claremont….) and describe the buildings and grounds, with suggestions for the statements being made.


On taste and aesthetics more specifically see
J. Steegman, *The Rule of Taste from George I to George IV* (1936).

Useful architectural studies include:
Week 10
The eighteenth century saw the rise of domestic tourism and the ‘discovery’ of the English landscape, a development only made possible by improvements in transport and communications. We will be asking why people travelled, where they went, and what they sought. Aesthetic theories of the picturesque and the sublime which we looked at with respect to gardens last week were equally important in shaping contemporaries’ reactions to the landscapes which they visited. A large number of contemporary tour journals have been published, and we will be looking in more detail at a number of these and comparing their comments and perspectives. As well as the evidence of travel writing, many of our ideas and images about eighteenth-century rural life and the countryside are derived from the art and literature of the period. Sources such as these can be very revealing, but cannot always be read at ‘face value’. We will have to consider questions of genre and readership, as well as relating the texts to contemporary debates, such as the contrast between urban and rural life, or the condition of the labouring poor.

Presentations
- What was the ‘picturesque’? what kind of landscape was favoured in the 18th century and why?
- Why did ‘domestic tourism’ increase?
- Why were people so interested in antiquities?

J. D. Hunt, *The Figure in the Landscape: poetry, painting and landscape gardening in the eighteenth century* (1976).

Primary Sources:
*Journeys of Celia Fiennes* (illustrated and non-illustrated editions), ed. Christopher Morris.
William MacRitchie, *Diary of a Tour through Great Britain* (1795).
COURSEWORK

Minor Assignment

From the course handbook, select any two passages from a SINGLE topic, which offer contrasting perspectives upon one of the issues raised for that week. Compare and contrast the extracts. Your commentary should be 1500–2000 words.

Think about:
- The nature of the source from which the extract is taken; for what purpose would it have been written or created? Who would have read it?
- Who wrote it? Do we know anything about him or her?
- When was it written? What was happening at that time?
- What do you know about the general historical background to the extracts? Do they confirm or contradict what you already know?
- Is there a contested historiography to this issue? How do the extracts reflect upon that?
- What problems of interpretation do the sources present to the historian? What caveats should we employ when dealing with them? What other sort of evidence might we use to corroborate/challenge them?

You should NEVER resort to simply summarising or paraphrasing the contents of the extracts. This is an exercise in interpretation, reflection and commentary.

Essay Questions

Word length 2,500-3,000 max.

1) How was England able to escape the cycle of subsistence crises in the 18th century?
2) Did distinctions of gender become more marked in the experience of labouring men and women?
3) Did the changes in agricultural practice in this period go uncontested?
4) To what extent was eighteenth-century industrialization a rural phenomenon?
5) How successfully did the aristocracy retain their dominance over English society in the 18th century?
6) Discuss the importance of tradition for popular culture in eighteenth-century rural society.
7) How did attitudes to poverty and the practice of poor relief change between 1690 and 1815?
8) To what extent can it be argued that the legal system operated principally to secure the property and power of the landed elite?
9) Were local and regional identities undermined or reinforced during the 18th century, and on what were they based?
10) What were the most significant changes taking place in the way in which the localities were governed?
11) What kind of statements were being made by landowners in the design of their houses and gardens?
12) Why did the cult of the picturesque acquire such popularity?