

expansive  
versions

Review of Michael Turner

The end of geography is a map, the end of history a story, the end of economics a model that fits both. The three are not always compatible. A series of maps of how England finally eliminated its cumbersome system of open fields does not always lead to an interesting story; the story of enclosure does not always contribute to a useful map; the models do not always fit either the map or the story. Michael Turner's attempt to meld historical geography with economic history, therefore, is ambitious. Without claiming that it is in every feature successful, it is nonetheless a very useful book.

Its chief usefulness is that it places the county totals of numbers and amounts of parliamentary enclosures on as firm a base as one man's energy and intelligence can be expected to place them. Turner draws his statistics from his own editing of the papers of W. E. Tate, published recently as A Domesday of English Enclosure Acts and Awards. As Tate's heir in more ways than one, he thus fulfill's Tate's plan to check and amend the figures collected so hastily 70 years ago by the pioneers of professional history in

the field. He abjures any pretense of finality, but the modesty is more a matter of modern style in scholarship than of substance: the Edwardian (and early Georgian) writers such as Tawney, Gray, Slater, and Gonner wrote with much more finality and on much slimmer evidence than suits Turner or Yelling or Baker and Butlin et alii. The figures given in the appendices of the book, carefully criticized for frailties of concept and source in the first chapter, will stand a long time.

The book is meant, however, to use and not merely to present the new statistics. The plan is rather spoilt at the outset by the similarity of Turner's figures to the traditional though sloppy ones. In consequence he does not have any striking new map to draw or story to tell. As we already knew (or thought we knew), the enclosures by special act of Parliament were large in relation to the agricultural land of England, were concentrated in a great triangle bounded by the North Sea, the Thames, and the hilly spine of the west, and they came in two great spurts of 20 years each before and after a pause in the 1780s. The second chapter is a not very gripping discussion of the spatial pattern, indulging in the historical geographer's chief vice, namely, that of drawing maps as the sources come (county by county, for example), then spending many inconclusive pages attacking the inevitable crudeness of the maps thus drawn. The third chapter outlines the statistical story from 1750 to 1820 with more verve, emphasizing that the enclosures before the 1780s were disproportionately towards the north of the triangle (e.g. Nottinghamshire) and were enclosures of arable, but those after the 1780s were more southerly (e.g. Bedfordshire)

and involved more enclosure of waste lands.

The fourth and fifth chapters are, after the appendix, the most meaty part of the book. They build to a statistical test of the factors responsible for variations in the rate of enclosure.

By the usual standards of statistical sophistication in history the work is quite remarkably good. As elsewhere in the book, the argument is put forward carefully and honestly, making clear every step. Turner goes so far as to actually reproduce his data for his regressions, a procedure quite natural to the historian but unheard of in economic circles, where it is thought wiser to bury the weapon after the murder is committed. The substantive conclusion is that the interest rate was an important consideration to landlords contemplating enclosure, a result that should not surprise Americans in the early 1980s but that has been mildly controversial among British historians. The last chapter, unfortunately, spoils the tour de force of the penultimate chapter by descending again to unmotivated ruminations on the geographical literature, in the form of an irrelevant treatment of stinting of land before 1750. Turner asserts repeatedly that a shortage of grazing land earlier was the cause of the enclosures of 1750 to 1780, but the argument is not proven.

The end of geography is a map, the end of history a story, the end of economics a model that fits both. The three are not always compatible, and Michael Turner's attempt to meld them is therefore ambitious. Though not on every count successful, the book is a useful one.

Its chief usefulness is that it places the county totals of numbers and amounts of parliamentary enclosure in England on as firm a base as one man's energy can be expected to place them. The appendices to the book amount to a compilation from Turner's own editing of W.E. Tate's posthumous *A Domesday of English Enclosure Acts and Awards* (1978); the text of the book amounts to a commentary on and use of the appendices. The conclusions are not strikingly novel: the movement was concentrated in a great triangle centered on the East Midlands and came in two spurts before and after the 1780s. But we know the conclusions

for sure, and are on altogether firmer ground than the first professional historians of the matter left us 70 years ago.

A secondary usefulness of the book is its fine chapters on the explanation of the rate of parliamentary enclosure. These reach very high standards of econometric sophistication and historical candor. The conclusion is, again, not shocking: interest rates were important to investors contemplating spending thousands of pounds on an enclosure. What is perhaps more important is the careful scepticism with which other arguments are met.

The less useful parts are those more geographical in focus. The book is not an especially skillful piece of historical geography. Those wanting a geographical treatment of the enclosure movement will turn instead to recent books by Yelling and others (the field has become very active again in the past five years). But Turner has nonetheless spoken the last word on the county statistics of enclosure by act of Parliament, or at any rate the last word for another 70 years.

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