



ALAN EVERITT

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1926–2008

ALAN EVERITT's name will always be associated with the remarkable flowering of local history in England from the 1950s onwards. Yet he did not start out as a local historian, and I dare say that he would readily have admitted his own surprise that he was led that way. But from his earliest days he was instinctively drawn to observing people around him in the finest detail, noting their dress, mannerisms, and idiosyncrasies, listening to their accents and small talk at the bus stop, silently capturing fragmentary impressions of others' lives, and coming gradually to realise that everywhere, in country or town, anywhere outside one's own familiar circle, people experienced a different flavour of life from his own. Thus, when he trained as a historian and developed a deep interest in local history he became a shrewd and original observer.

Looking more broadly at his personal and family life, a task that is greatly helped by two autobiographical pieces that he wrote in the 1980s and 1990s, one can see how his upbringing helped him on his way.¹ He was born in 1926 into a well-to-do professional and markedly bookish family, and was early accustomed to a lot of intellectual conversation at home; it was not only his parents that spurred him on but also his 'beloved Aunt Esther', 'the most voracious reader I have ever known', he wrote. His father was a patent lawyer, having been trained as an engineer, so he

¹ These two autobiographical pieces were entitled 'A World Apart' (dealing with his neighbourhood and neighbours in Sevenoaks) and 'The Harvest is Past' (dealing with his own and his family's life). If not otherwise stated, these are the sources used below. Copies are held in the Centre for English Local History at Leicester University.

enjoyed a substantial income that allowed the family to keep a servant along with other household help all through the 1920s and 1930s.

Alan's childhood was scarcely affected by the economic depression that hit other families hard from 1929 until 1939; he was living in a leafy quarter of Sevenoaks, Kent, and the daily commuters by fast train to London from there were not yet conspicuous. Alan described Sevenoaks then as a quiet, small market town; his education started at a small, local preparatory school, Neyland House, and continued at Sevenoaks School, the boys' public school that has greatly enhanced its reputation since his day.

Alan's teacher of history did not spark his imagination, whereas his teacher of English literature had a powerful influence. He insisted on his pupils reading authors' full texts, not just commentaries on them, and so Alan left school having read all the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century classical authors in English literature, and describing himself as 'a ferocious reader'.

Alan's family, both parents and grandparents, were Plymouth Brethren, and belonged to the Exclusive Sect, so his upbringing did not run along conventional middle-class lines—he was never allowed to go to the cinema, never listened to the radio, and all members of the household were expected either to attend a daily family reading from the Bible or to read the Bible quietly on their own at night.

Such constraints on his life did not seem to rankle with him; rather he appreciated the strong sense of community that it engendered. He also noted a tradition of generous hospitality that Brethren far and wide always gave to each other; his own parents entertained innumerable visitors, and intermarriage between Brethren became common. Indeed, when his researches at Leicester at one point led him to detailed work on Northampton, it caused him to generalise about the bountiful hospitality that was a convention among all Nonconformists.²

Certainly, cohesion within the Brethren was a prominent feature of members' lives, nurtured by their weekly meetings, the regular 'breaking of bread' on each occasion, and intermarriage which bred quite ramified dynasties; in some gatherings of Brethren, including his own, Alan said, intermarriage within the denomination almost developed into a rigid rule. Yet, in his later days, Alan claimed that his recollections of his youth among the Brethren were nearly all happy ones. It was only in the late 1950s and 1960s that dissensions within the Brethren set up severe tensions that

²I too had noticed something of the same sort of hospitality and intermarriage in my husband's family who, in the nineteenth century, had been Scotch Baptists.

unsettled his outwardly serene pattern of life; it became clear to his friends that Alan lived under the greatest strain. He left the Brethren in 1963.

Life in Sevenoaks gave Alan as a young boy the good fortune to wander endlessly in the woodlands that so closely surrounded the town. Thus he learned to love its wildness, probably without realising how rare it then was in southern England. In the reflective mood of his later years, he reckoned that this had laid the foundation of his agricultural interests, which were greatly deepened and broadened when he joined the Department of English Local History at Leicester University. However, many varied experiences intervened before that moment came.

Alan was only thirteen when the war broke out and, living in south-east England, his family suffered severely from German air raids, sometimes nightly. Their house was destroyed in one raid, though mercifully they all survived, and the family moved for some months to Devon. They returned to Kent as soon as they found another house, but Alan's schooling was disrupted, and somehow or other, though he did not explain the exact circumstances, he had a short spell of teaching in a preparatory school in Devon. Was he perhaps waiting for call-up into the army? As a conscientious objector, Alan appealed for exemption from military duties, and was called before a tribunal at which the decision ordained his service in the army on non-combatant duties; he served for four years from 1944 to 1948. Army life took him to stations all over the country and opened his eyes to a world of very differing lifestyles from his own (although almost certainly the most congenial friends he made were Brethren, for they kept in close contact with each other when moving to unfamiliar parts of the country). He found himself in places like Nottingham, Hereford, Ashton-under-Lyne, Guildford, York, and the army college at Welbeck Abbey. In his autobiography, however, he gave no more than passing reference to what he called these 'peregrinations'.

In 1948 Alan returned to civilian life, and enrolled as a student at the University of St Andrews, studying English, History, and Political Economy in the first year, but then deciding to switch to History. He secured a first-class degree in 1951, and his search for a job began when the employment situation, he said, was difficult. He counted himself lucky, therefore, with a recommendation from St Andrews, to be offered a post as editorial assistant at the Commonwealth Universities Association in Gordon Square, London. He had to accept a three-year contract that irked him, but the job had the compensation that he could live at home. It enabled him to start work in his leisure time on a Ph.D. in History at the University of London, but when his contract with the Commonwealth

Universities Association ended, he won a Carnegie scholarship that financed his studies for his remaining two years; as a graduate of a Scottish university, he was an eligible candidate for this award.

Life in London gave Alan ready access to good academic libraries. In his own words, 'I had the golden opportunity to spend all my evenings, from six o'clock to nine o'clock, at the Institute of Historical Research, and all my Saturdays at the Public Record Office or British Museum.' A fellow-student expressed dismay at Alan's lack of social life under such a regime. But that, wrote Alan, was 'for me "life itself"'. It was my way out of the prison of office-routine in Gordon Square.'

J. D. Latham was appointed to be Alan's supervisor, and at his suggestion Alan chose the English Civil War in Kent as his subject for research, starting in October 1952. He had evidently been struck by the way the war had torn families apart, destroying family cohesion which his own life had shown to be such a powerful force running through personal relationships. I myself, owning a house in Kent from 1954 onwards, came also to realise what a powerful tie of loyalty ran through Kent families; I always attribute it to the tenacious hold of gavelkind, the inheritance custom by which land was divided between all sons, and if there were no sons, then between daughters. It was the favoured custom among middle-class and some gentry families in the county, deemed to have been brought to England by Jutish settlers from Jutland. Some of us early-modern historians see it exerting a notable long-term influence on the social structure of Kent society, in contrast with primogeniture which from an early date prevailed over most of the rest of England. Alan, however, did not insist on the role of gavelkind in those terms; rather, his attention was directed at the sense of kinship among the Brethren, making him sensitive to the power of what he called 'Kent cousinages', without delving into their ancient origins.

Once Alan's research began, he soon discovered what a wealth of family diaries and letters survive in Kent archives, shedding light on this tangle. In other words, his choice of research promised to mingle history with personal experience in a way that would give him a unique understanding of the trauma of civil war. So one tenet settled itself firmly into his philosophy and persisted to the end of his days. Far earlier than for most of us, he lived with a strong sense of the role of history in the background of our day-to-day lives.

Economic and social history was a newly developing subject in the 1920s and 1930s, and after the war ended in 1945 senior historians, sitting under the chairmanship of Sir John Clapham on a government committee

on social and economic research, were keen to broaden its horizons. Money towards that end was being offered, and as a result of discussions between G. D. H. Cole and W. G. Hoskins, Hoskins was invited to suggest a project for research that would use some of the money.³ In 1951 I received the grant along with a senior research fellowship at Leicester University College, to work for three years under Hoskins's supervision on the agrarian history of Lincolnshire.

At the same time that I was appointed at Leicester, considerable public interest in farming policy was developing, acknowledging how vital had been the supply of home-grown food to our survival during the war, when compared with its shameful neglect between 1918 and 1939. My 1957 Lincolnshire book also aroused interest in the much longer and highly diversified history of farming regions across the kingdom.⁴ Professor H. P. R. Finberg, therefore, being by then Head of the Department of English Local History, and having been a prime mover in setting up The British Agricultural History Society in 1953, decided, with the warm support of Professor R. H. Tawney, to embark on a much larger study of agriculture, covering the whole of England and Wales. I was chosen to be the editor and part-author of the first volume to be started, volume IV, covering the years 1500–1640. The result was an eight-volume history, completed in 2000.⁵

As each volume of this agrarian history required massive new research and a number of authors were needed for each volume, a post was financed by the Nuffield Foundation for a research assistant to join me in the task of scouring local archives for the source material. Alan applied for this post, but it went to Miss Margaret Midgley who became the much-travelling researcher among provincial archives, transcribing those of agrarian interest, always making carbon copies, and circulating them to all the contributors to Volume IV who were gradually recruited to write chapters for it. Shortly afterwards, the Nuffield Foundation found sufficient money to finance a second research assistantship, and Alan was appointed to it.

I had not met Alan before, but a long and harmonious friendship began between us. The setting up of the project was thoroughly informal

³See Martin Daunton, 'Clapham, Sir John Harold (1873–1946)' *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, 2004, <<http://www.oxforddnb.com/view/article/32416/>> accessed 31 March 2010; personal knowledge

⁴Joan Thirsk, *English Peasant Farming from Tudor to Recent Times* (London, 1957).

⁵Joan Thirsk (ed.), *The Agrarian History of England and Wales, Volume 1V, 1500–1640* (Cambridge, 1967), and seven further volumes completed in 2000; Joan Thirsk 'The British Agricultural History Society and *The Agrarian History of England and Wales: new projects in the 1950s*', *Agricultural History Review*, 50 (2002), 155–63.

and economical; we had no office accommodation, no stationery, no clerical assistance; we often met to discuss the work in hand in the forecourt of the British Museum, for we both worked intensively there or in the Public Record Office in Chancery Lane. Then, when I discovered where Alan's leading interests lay, I asked him to write two chapters for Volume IV, one on 'Farm labourers' and the other on 'The marketing of agricultural produce'. This plunged him into a countrywide search along with me for documents relating to these two topics, which we both transcribed for each other (since my subjects overlapped with his). I often reflect on what labour we might have saved if photocopying had then been possible! Still, we managed to complete and publish Volume IV in 1967, and regional differentiation became one of the pioneering and influential themes among historians thereafter.

I have already explained how Alan, when working for the Commonwealth Universities Association, had chosen to work on a Ph.D. thesis for the University of London on the Civil War in Kent. He had finished it when he was appointed in 1957 to work on *The Agrarian History*. Civil war history was undoubtedly an even livelier subject of debate among early-modern historians at that time, and, given the originality of Alan's argument, his work clearly deserved publication. In 1960, however, in order to give as much attention to town history as to the countryside, Finberg set up a Fellowship in Urban History, appointed Alan to it, and settled for its subject the town of Northampton. The final preparation of Alan's book on Kent's Civil War thus became a task for his leisure hours.

Alan finished this book in time for publication in 1966 by Leicester University Press.⁶ But in view of his shift of interest to agrarian history after finishing his Ph.D., it was an extensive revision of the original text. It benefited from further study of the civil war in other counties, especially Suffolk, for which he prepared a volume of documents in 1960 for the newly established Suffolk Records Society.⁷ This was a sensitive, discerning examination of the Suffolk gentry, showing the strong differences in their civil war sympathies and handling of their County Committee when compared with Kent; it taught Alan the supreme importance of regional comparisons.

Another lesson emerging rather more slowly from Alan's work was a changing attitude towards political history as he accumulated more and more historical experience. He neatly explained this in 1985 in his next to

⁶A. M. Everitt, *The Community of Kent and the Great Rebellion, 1640–60* (Leicester, 1966).

⁷Alan Everitt (ed.), *Suffolk and the Great Rebellion, 1640–1660*, Suffolk Records Society, Volume III (Ipswich, 1960).

last book, on *Landscape and Community in England*, citing the words of Joyce Grenfell when she prepared a lecture using material already deployed in an earlier talk: 'I realized that I no longer stood where I had when I (originally) wrote it; the view had opened up. I had had different experiences and made new discoveries. The horizon had altered.'⁸ Much earlier than that, in 1966, I saw Alan's changing interests when he sent me a copy of his book on Kent's Civil War and wondered how he could ever have been interested in such a subject. Politics no longer stood at the centre of his historical world: 'It is largely your responsibility', he wrote, 'for making me more interested in economic and social history rather than political.' The underlying theme of his book was now 'the close-woven fabric of Kentish family life', and that was 'the only point that still interests me'.

The fact remains that *The Community of Kent and the Great Rebellion* sparked animated discussion among early-modern historians. Similarities and dissimilarities with other counties were brought to light and these continue still to be endlessly debated, for family and class attitudes in each county could vary subtly between the two extremes of fearsome loyalty to Parliament or to the King, or they could settle on a neutrality, based either on firm principles and deeply rooted localism, or on a long-meditated indecision. At some points in his later life, Alan's own wording on the central issue suggested to me that he had moderated his views in yet another way, downgrading the traumatic effect on people of civil war when set against other crises in life like the experience of harvest failure and acute food shortages. Charles Phythian-Adams has astutely suggested that that change of viewpoint could well have been brought about by W. G. Hoskins's article on harvest fluctuations, appearing in *The Agricultural History Review* in 1964.⁹

Throughout all his work, however, Alan gave most weight to a cultural ethos in the Kent community that belonged essentially to the moderately wealthy rural gentry, most of them indigenous, and dominated by a conservatism that could yet absorb change. It showed well when another group of what he called 'pseudo-gentry' entered the same circle. These

⁸ Alan Everitt, *Landscape and Community in England* (London and Ronceverte, 1985), Introduction, p. 1.

⁹ Alan Everitt, *Change in the Provinces: the Seventeenth Century* (University of Leicester, Department of English Local History, Occasional Papers, 2nd Ser., I, 1969) and *The Local Community and the Great Rebellion* (Historical Association Pamphlet, 1969), reprinted with an Afterword by the author in R. C. Richardson (ed.), *The English Civil Wars: Local Aspects* (Stroud, 1997), pp. 15–36. W. G. Hoskins, 'Harvest fluctuations and English economic history, 1480–1619', *Agricultural History Review*, 12 (1964), 28–46.

were gentlemen who dwelt in the towns, many of them belonging to the newly rising professional classes, medical men and lawyers, in particular, who after 1660 were allowed to command the same authority as the old established gentry. They were certainly newcomers on the scene with a somewhat different outlook. They promoted a provincial self-awareness which actually enriched the flavour of Kent's cultural life.

Inevitably, the prominence given by Alan to the gentry class and their fraternities brought critics to the fore who cited other counties demonstrating less social cohesion within that class; they noted also the absence of any reference to other classes, notably the humble village folk whose struggle was mainly concerned with sheer survival. The debate centering on Alan's thesis promises to continue, while its predominantly economic and social concerns have become intermixed with explorations of broader cultural change, and a sharpening interest in deep-seated socio-geographical differences in Britain as a whole.¹⁰

After Alan was appointed Fellow in Urban History in 1960, when his own researches became centred on the history of towns, he produced some of his most adventurous and original work. The agrarian historians had already ventured on a typology of farming regions which gave a desirable teaching framework to their enquiries into different farming specialities across the kingdom. A pioneering step towards a typology of towns had been taken by Maurice Beresford and H. P. R. Finberg in 1967, compiling a handlist of medieval boroughs.¹¹ Now Alan began to differentiate two other kinds. The first in 1970 were named 'Lost Towns', actually meaning 'Lost Markets', and were explained in Alan's inaugural lecture as Hatton Professor of English Local History when W. G. Hoskins resigned unexpectedly early as Head of the Department of English Local History at Leicester and Alan was appointed in his place.¹² He identified these as towns that had originated as villages, acquired markets, and then lost them, and he discussed their later fortunes. Some of the markets had ceased to function by the sixteenth century while the rest either enjoyed shining success or chequered fortunes as towns thereafter. Alan's second

¹⁰ R. C. Richardson, *The Debate on the English Revolution*, 3rd edn. (Manchester, 1998), pp. 172–81.

¹¹ Maurice Beresford and H. P. R. Finberg, *English Medieval Boroughs: a Handlist* (Newton Abbot, 1973).

¹² Alan Everitt, *New Avenues in Local History. An Inaugural Lecture* (University of Leicester, 1970); somewhat revised and reprinted in Alan Everitt, *Landscape and Community in England* (London and Ronceverte, 1985), pp. 109–27.

essay in 1975 identified what he called 'primary towns'.¹³ These had the earliest urban origins of all, usually before the Norman Conquest, and betrayed their existence in a mix of erratic, indirect clues, like lying on Roman sites, near Roman or even prehistoric trackways, having prehistoric cemeteries near at hand, or having minster churches. It was a courageous, still tentative exploration, but it put a typology of towns firmly on the urban agenda. Perhaps it was the scale of that task that partly explains why Alan subsequently published so little on Northampton's own history, for he had completed an immense amount of original research on it. But there were also cogent reasons for his absorption in other tasks by then for in 1968 Alan's departmental duties changed radically.

Professor Finberg reached retirement age in 1965, and W. G. Hoskins, to some surprise, chose to return to Leicester from Oxford, becoming again Head of the Department of English Local History. In the event, he stayed only until 1968, and Alan then succeeded him as Hatton Professor of English History. He now took on heavier administrative responsibilities. In addition, he had to present to the public a much broader view of his subject, as was noticeable in a booklet which he wrote for The Standing Conference for Local History in 1972, expounding his views on what local history should be about.¹⁴

Nevertheless, those primary towns and lost market towns remained at the centre of his thoughts thereafter. He made frequent reference to them whenever he identified significant networks of communications and road junctions where he believed such towns had first taken root. They also led him on to two other urban themes that struck a memorable chord among his students. The first was town inns, not surprisingly since so many students came to local history from an urban background and were familiar with some of their fine buildings and yards that still adorn the urban scene.

In recent years some evocative probate inventories have come to light that list the names, number, and furnishings of some of our larger inns, and in Alan's essay in 1973 we catch sight of his treasure trove in Northampton. In George II's reign he found sixty-two inns, and was even able to give his readers a measure of The Peacock's size, extending across eleven bays of Northampton's market square and possessing an inn yard

¹³ Alan Everitt, 'The primary towns of England', *The Local Historian*, 11 (1975), 263–77, repr. in *Landscape and Community in England*, pp. 93–107.

¹⁴ Alan Everitt, *Ways and Means in Local History* (London, 1971).

that stretched more than 200 feet behind it; one visitor to Northampton exclaimed at 'such gallant and stately structures, the like is scarcely elsewhere to be seen'.¹⁵

Not all Alan's inns were urban, however. As he assiduously examined his maps, he had a sharp eye for some eccentric sites. How many others besides myself, I wonder, have been prompted by Alan to stop and look at Foster's Booth on Watling Street? Now that we have come to realise how any settlement near a border could have intriguing historical significance, it stirs curiosity, being situated in woodland near the Northamptonshire and Buckinghamshire borders, and having a name that tells us how it started, as a night's stopover for a forester in the seventeenth century. But through regular use it was transformed by the eighteenth century into 'a fair street of inns' with twelve or thirteen hostelries. Two are there still.¹⁶

Alan's eagle eye similarly alighted on Sittingbourne, an inconspicuous place in Kent that was not mentioned in Domesday though pilgrims on the way to Canterbury halted there. In 1599 it was given a charter of incorporation that was never implemented, an untold story which Alan did not explore. But he did find a later explanation for its expansion, for Kings George I and II found it a handy resting place on their way to Hanover, and thus it became a substantial coaching centre, possessing in the 1790s perhaps 'the most superb inn and entertainment of any in the kingdom'. From a different perspective, moreover, we might also reflect on the fact that by the 1860s its two churches co-existed with five dissenting chapels.¹⁷

Reading maps while surrounded by his books, Alan had a keen eye for the exact siting of alehouses and inns if they sat on ancient common lands. Their coaching history was bound to be different from those sited in a busy market place. Thus, in the mind's eye, Alan introduces us to Moulsham, a suburb outside Chelmsford, Essex, which he identified as a settlement on common land with 'hedge alehouses'. By 1628 it had acquired seven inns and twenty-two alehouses and, not surprisingly, was a reputed nest of pickpockets and highwaymen.¹⁸

The other attractive urban theme stirring Alan's curiosity in the 1970s concerned country carriers, whose services he mapped for the nineteenth

¹⁵ Alan Everitt, 'The English urban inn, 1560–1760', in *Landscape and Community in England*, pp. 155–208.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 160.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 160.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 163.

century.¹⁹ In the background of their lives he saw first of all hardworking wheelwrights and blacksmiths who served the need for horses, and he calculated the numbers in England that must have been required, three and a half million of them. By thinking through the carriers' daily routine, Alan depicted them as humble villagers rather than townsmen, driving a cart and not a wagon, sleeping at home each night, but essentially linking the town with its surrounding villages. He also recognised how the railway, far from killing off their livelihood, made them more necessary than ever. His imagination was further fired by finding a carrier's notebook for Kimcote where he lived, and getting his students to search in their own home districts for oral evidence of such men and for archives yielding other traces of their existence. He rightly found reason to call them 'shopping agents', for the evidence showed how villagers living on the carriers' routes actually got them to alight en route and bring them back personal packages. That picture brought to life a figure that might well serve us again in the changing circumstances of the twenty-first century!

Over some four or five years while focusing on carriers, Alan recruited students to reconstruct the travelling routes of about 5,000 carriers for which he compiled tables showing their numbers, places served weekly, maps of routes round Leicester and Maidstone, plus a comparison of the standards achieved by such local services. I dare say that students were startled to uncover such stores of documented information well before the age of computers.

The range of Alan's urban interests broadened as he made more accidental discoveries connecting one idea with another, forming possible linkages in his mind that led on to connected chains. One of these chains had been spotted in the course of our work on agrarian history when I recognised the connection between farming types and religious radicalism. Nonconformity found a more congenial home in pastoral and woodland country than in arable areas. This was much developed by Alan in his substantial *Occasional Paper* in 1972 looking for a more refined pattern of rural dissent in the nineteenth century, when Nonconformists divided themselves into more numerous sects, and different social and industrial structures in the pattern of settlements had begun to be more carefully distinguished. Alan's curiosity was particularly aroused by towns that he could group into types, for example, decayed market towns, boundary settlements, parishes in which the land was greatly subdivided between

¹⁹ Alan Everitt, 'Country carriers in the nineteenth century', in *Landscape and Community in England*, pp. 271–307.

freeholders, and villages that supported industries. He rounded off that particular study with four more detailed statistical portraits of social structures in Lindsey (Lincolnshire), Leicestershire, Northamptonshire, and Kent, and his many tabulations, which made exemplary use of J. M. Wilson's *The Imperial Gazetteer of England and Wales* (6 volumes, London, 1870) will surely tempt others to explore the details further in search of a typology that may prove to have national significance.²⁰

Not only did the religious affiliation of different regions preoccupy Alan, but changes in the theological doctrines of the sects stirred his sympathies. Around 1965–6 he stumbled unexpectedly on an inhabitant of Northampton whose ideas obviously engaged him in a deeply personal way. This was Philip Doddridge, a distinguished evangelical pastor, living there from 1729 to 1751, who represented a new evangelical movement that gave rise to fresh denominations including the Plymouth Brethren. His encounter with Doddridge clearly stirred a fresh excitement that shines through every page of his essay on him, and surfaces again in the instructions that he gave for a hymn by Doddridge to be sung at his funeral.²¹

By 1982 Alan had been Head of his Department for fourteen years, but a serious back injury in 1975 was leading to frequent bouts of pain that kept him from full attendance among his colleagues in the university. More and more often they had to stand in for him, sometimes at short notice. So in 1982 he was named Associate Professor with much reduced teaching duties, and this regime lasted for another couple of years, until in 1984 he handed over the headship of the Department to his colleague, Charles Phythian-Adams, and retired completely.

Alan, nevertheless, managed to complete two further academic books in 1985 and 1986. In the first of these, some of his most significant, previously published essays were selected for a volume entitled *Landscape and Community in England*, showing Alan's growing interest in landscape. That paved the way for his last academic work in 1986 that was wholly concerned with the landscape of Kent.²²

²⁰ Alan Everitt, *The Pattern of Rural Dissent: the Nineteenth Century*, Department of Local History, University of Leicester Occasional Paper, Second Series, No. 4 (Leicester, 1972).

²¹ Alan Everitt, 'Springs of sensibility: Philip Doddridge of Northampton and the evangelical tradition', in *Landscape and Community in England*, pp. 201–45.

²² The two books were Alan Everitt, *Landscape and Community in England* (London, 1985) and *Continuity and Colonization. The Evolution of Kentish Settlement* (Leicester, 1986).

As Alan's increasingly frequent bouts of illness tied him so much to his bed, while he still fretted to carry on with some research, I suspect that he worked ever more intently on maps and landscape. They can spark many stimulating and original discoveries, and they could satisfy his continuously creative mind when he could no longer visit archive offices. Thus, six out of the twelve essays in his 1985 volume sprang from a study of landscape.

The volume as a whole consisted of essays already published, apart from the Introduction and a significant last essay on the force of family dynasties in Kentish society, a subject on which Alan surely had a lot more to say, though much of it has gone unsaid. His last book in 1986 was concerned entirely with the Kent landscape and, in view of his failing health, its completion owed much to the help of Mrs Margery Tranter, and of Charles Phythian-Adams who edited it as one of his monograph series.

In this last work Alan was tackling the most difficult period of Kent's history, from the end of Romano-British rule until the thirteenth to fourteenth centuries. Kent was so near to the mainland of Europe, it was always accepting migrants from every side, while leaving so little in the way of any documentary record of the newest settlements. I regard it as one of his most deeply thoughtful and original works. It is full of newly uncovered facts and connections, mingled with insights and speculations that await a response from scholars versed in the same early period of settlement in other parts of the country. Another generation of scholars is needed to compare and contrast, including those who will more confidently combine archaeology, place-name study, and other disciplines with history. Doubtless, they will be spurred on by yet other concepts starting from a fresh viewpoint.

Full retirement for Alan saw him settled in the small hamlet of Kimcote, near Lutterworth, where he had bought a new house in 1971. He had named it 'Fieldedge' since it looked straight across the fields, and, without a teaching routine, he led a more solitary life than before. His letters at Christmas became filled with accounts of the trees, birds, animals, and natural world encircling him, plus the cats that took possession of his house. Persistent pain obliged him to rest for hours on end and greatly curtailed his ability to read for more than short spells at a time.

Part of this time was now spent in writing the two highly informative autobiographical pieces already mentioned. He learned to use a dictating machine while lying on his bed, and was startled sometimes when rereading those texts after a lapse of a few weeks at how much he had totally forgotten. He could scarcely believe that the events he described had

actually happened, let alone that he had remembered them. But he felt that he achieved a new understanding of their significance in his life; and he was able to set them in a wider historical context that would have been beyond his ken before he had that long training in local history.

In this lonely time, yet another enthusiasm took hold of Alan that had lain deeply embedded in his consciousness, quietly maturing for a decade or more. He asked himself how the very poorest country folk, landless and homeless, had kept themselves alive by making use of the natural resources of their common lands. They yielded, after all, the only available natural materials that by tradition could be (almost) freely used by the commoners. Most local historians have at some time stumbled upon such records of the commons, and have noticed how at particular periods those usually nameless, uncounted people seemed positively to crowd onto common lands. They then suddenly caught the anxious attention of the authorities, and more public discussion and alarm ensued. In some parts of England the commons were surprisingly extensive right through to the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and when loud complaints found their way into written documents they were occasionally specific enough to reveal the ingenuity with which the commoners were making use of those resources. They fashioned saleable goods like clothes pegs, baskets, brooms, brushes, pots and more, and so earned enough to survive. Alan was drawn into this investigation in county after county, and letters to me bore witness to his excitement, indeed exhilaration, as the evidence increased and diversified.

In fact, Alan was wrestling with a tough problem in local history that has not so far been tackled on the scale that he was attempting. As I was then editing a volume of essays on *The English Rural Landscape*, and separate kinds of countryside were being differentiated in ten of the essays, I persuaded Alan to contribute one on 'Common land'. The resulting book was published in 2000 and gave a foretaste of further work in prospect.²³ It emphasised the large acreages of common land not only in the thinly populated areas of northern and western England, but in many broken, but extensive patches in the south-east. It also reflected Alan's growing fascination with handicraft industries that the commoners developed by using the free resources of the commons. His friends were aware that he practised carpentry at home, and this had clearly sharpened his appreciation of the skills involved. Hence, the intriguing last pages of his

²³ Alan Everitt, 'Common land', in Joan Thirsk (ed.), *The English Rural Landscape* (Oxford, 2000), pp. 210–35.

essay on 'Common Land' recalled the makers of trugs, spoons, crooks, spindles, clogs, wooden shovels, butchers' skewers, and more, and gave his readers a sharp reminder of their makers—small-scale, independent craftsmen, not in the employ of anyone, often working in family groups. This remark may well prompt future investigation when more informative documents turn up.

As in so many of Alan's speculative essays, he again called for more research on details that had sparked his ideas. One of these fresh notions in the 'Common land' essay concerned the scale of small enclosures of commons, carried out on the order of manorial courts or of quarter sessions. He also mentioned private agreements that were sometimes no more than verbal. We are familiar with these last, but their scale has never, I believe, been seriously estimated. Yet he found significant examples in Kent, and gave a taste of the informality by which some of them had been achieved. Thus, Alan ventured on a fresh evaluation of enclosure proceedings. For example, minerals were dug up from some commons that usefully created a solid new industry; and vested interests were strong enough to defy any desire to extinguish it. Communities sometimes arrived at a willing consensus to enclose common land in order to build hospitals, workhouses, asylums, or army barracks. These were instructive illustrations of significant enclosures, gathered up by studying history from below, rather than accepting the large and handy generalisations that compel first attention when historians collect their information in the traditional way from above; they underline the value of the new frameworks that local history will doubtless continue to construct. In exploring common land Alan has left a lot of half-written manuscripts, and it is to be hoped that some of them will spur other scholars to follow in his footsteps.

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When I knew Alan best as a young man between the 1950s and 1970s, I formed the impression of a scholar in his element, enjoying much congenial companionship and intellectual stimulation. He was in good health and the supreme satisfaction that he got from his work brought to the fore his contentment and pleasure in life. He was finding a most exciting intellectual niche for himself, even though it was not the career that he had anticipated in his teenage years. He had originally expected to become an architect, picking up the same enthusiasms as his parents and Aunt Esther. At one point, indeed, his quietly observant father bought him a set of drawing instruments that he still possessed to the end of his days. Another

of his treasures was Dent's series of volumes from the 1920s on Cathedrals, Abbeys and Famous Churches which had built up even greater enthusiasm on his part to become an architect. This was added to all the family encouragement that came his way, including the fact that he regularly visited his grandfather at Easter in north Cornwall, and on their return journeys his parents always stopped with him to visit cathedrals and abbeys in places like Wells, Sherborne, or Salisbury, continuing to discuss their impressions when once they got home. He only abandoned the idea of architecture as a career on the advice of an older family friend who recognised that Alan's architectural interests were deeply historical and not modern; as a working architect he could never have submitted to the fashions of the day for a style that he called 'international modernism'.

Hindsight enables us to see how Alan's conversion from architecture to local history converged with a rising tide of public interest in local history of which W. G. Hoskins is now recognised to have been the leader and populariser. In Alan's judgement, Hoskins 'created a new subject'; and it is certainly true that he 'opened a new world to many people' by his writings, radio talks, and television programmes after 1945. Public interest swelled quite slowly, but when Hoskins went back to Leicester University in 1965 after his years at Oxford, he built a warm and respectful friendship with Alan, while Alan enjoyed some carefully planned field trips with him and his wife, Jane, which he recounted joyfully in an article in the journal *Landscapes* in 2004.²⁴ Jane was always the driver of the car, and had often prepared a veritable feast for their picnic lunch. If not, then Hoskins had chosen a restaurant that offered them the best of food.

So life in the Midlands satisfied Alan enough for him to remain there and not hanker to return to Kent, as I once had anticipated. His deeply religious faith intensified as he spent ever more time in introspection, continuing to ponder and to debate calmly and tolerantly with sympathetic friends the most refined doctrines of his faith. This went along with a mature gratitude to the intellectual influences of family members, which he acknowledged when he came to dedicate his last two books. The dedication of his penultimate book was to his Aunt Esther, and his last book on Kent settlement to his mother and father.

Alan's students remember him as a most genial, gentle listener as well as teacher, often self-effacing, and with a warm sense of humour. His compelling, always elegantly constructed writing, thronged with fascinating detail and imaginative speculations, promises to hold the attention of

²⁴ Alan Everitt, 'Founders: W. G. Hoskins', *Landscapes*, 5/i (2004), 5–17.

generations to come. What we cannot foresee is where they may lead local history in the future. This writer guesses that local history, archaeology, and place-name study will become more tightly and creatively enmeshed than at present. But the revolution in computer technology could profoundly alter methods of research in local history in ways that are unpredictable.

Professor Everitt was elected a Fellow of the British Academy in 1989. He was born on 17 August 1926 and died on 8 December 2008 from cancer of the spine and a chest infection leading to heart failure.

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