EXPLORATIONS IN LOCAL AND REGIONAL HISTORY

Centre for Regional and Local History, University of Hertfordshire and Centre for English Local History, University of Leicester

SERIES EDITORS: NIGEL GOOSE AND RICHARD JONES
Portrait photograph of Alan Milner Everitt.
THE COUNTY COMMUNITY IN SEVENTEENTH-CENTURY ENGLAND AND WALES

EDITED BY JACQUELINE EALES
AND ANDREW HOPPER

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Abbreviations

BL  British Library, London
Bodl.  Bodleian Library, Oxford
CCA  Canterbury Cathedral Archives
CJ  Journals of the House of Commons
CKS  Centre for Kentish Studies, Maidstone
ERO  Essex Record Office, Chelmsford
HALS  Hertfordshire Archives and Local Studies
HL  Parliamentary Archives, House of Lords
HMC  Historical Manuscripts Commission
HRO  Hampshire Record Office, Winchester
LJ  Journals of the House of Lords
NLW  National Library of Wales, Aberystwyth
NRO  Norfolk Record Office, Norwich
ODNB  Oxford Dictionary of National Biography online
SBT  Shakespeare Birthplace Trust Archive, Stratford-upon-Avon
TNA  The National Archives, Kew
WCRO  Warwickshire County Record Office, Warwick
WYAS  West Yorkshire Archive Service
The genesis of this book was a conference held at the Centre for English Local History at the University of Leicester on 12 December 2009. The original intention was to commemorate the passing away the year before of Professor Alan Everitt, a former director of Leicester’s Department for English Local History. The conference re-examined his influential work *The community of Kent and the Great Rebellion*, and explored new avenues through which Everitt’s ideas about the county community might be approached and reassessed. The editors would like to thank all who attended and participated at the conference, in particular Professor Christopher Dyer, and the organisation and administrative support of Lucy Byrne and Danielle Jackson. We are grateful to the staff of the University of Hertfordshire Press, in particular Jane Housham and Sarah Elvins for their unfailingly helpful assistance. We are also thankful to the Aurelius Trust, the Isobel Thornley bequest, London University and Canterbury Christ Church University, whose generous financial support has greatly aided in the publication of this volume.

Jacqueline Eales and Andrew Hopper
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Series Editors’ Preface

The series of Explorations in Local and Regional History is a continuation and development of the ‘Occasional Papers’ of the University of Leicester’s Department of English Local History, a series started by Herbert Finberg in 1952. This succeeding series is published by the University of Hertfordshire Press, which has a strong profile in English local and regional history. The idea for the new series came from Harold Fox, who, with Nigel Goose, served as series editor in its first two years.

Explorations in Local and Regional History has three distinctive characteristics. First, the series is prepared to publish work on novel themes, to tackle fresh subjects – perhaps even unusual ones. We hope that it serves to open up new approaches, prompt the analysis of new sources or types of source, and foster new methodologies. This is not to suggest that more traditional scholarship in local and regional history are unrepresented, for it may well be distinctive in terms of its quality, and we also seek to offer an outlet for work of distinction that might be difficult to place elsewhere.

This brings us to the second feature of the series, which is the intention to publish mid-length studies, generally within the range of 40,000 to 60,000 words. Such studies are hard to place with existing publishers, for while there are current series that cater for mid-length overviews of particular historiographical topics or themes, there is none of which we are aware that offers similar outlets for original research. Explorations, therefore, intends to fill the publishing vacuum between research articles and full-length books (the latter, incidentally, might well be eligible for inclusion in the existing University of Hertfordshire Press series, Studies in Regional and Local History).

Third, while we expect this series to be required reading for both academics and students, it is also our intention to ensure that it is of interest and relevance to local historians operating outside an institutional framework. To this end we ensure that each volume is set at a price that individuals, and not only university libraries, can generally afford. Local and regional history is a subject taught at
many levels, from schools to universities. Books, magazines, television and radio all testify to the vitality of research and writing outside universities, as well as to the sustained growth of popular interest. It is hoped that Explorations in Local and Regional History will make a contribution to the continued flourishing of our subject. We will ensure that books in the series are accessible to a wide readership, that they avoid technical language and jargon, and that they will usually be illustrated.

This preface, finally, serves as a call for proposals, and authors who are studying local themes in relation to particular places (rural or urban), regions, counties or provinces, whether their subject matter comprises social groups (or other groups), landscapes, interactions and movements between places, microhistory or total history should consider publication with this series. The editors can be consulted informally at the addresses given below, while a formal proposal form is available from the University of Hertfordshire Press at uhpress@herts.ac.uk.

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The portrait photograph of Alan that adorns this volume and the staircase at Marc Fitch House glowers at us, disapprovingly. He could be like that occasionally – I have a letter from him in which he describes the publisher of one of his books as ‘a malicious oaf’ – but that is not how I and other old friends remember him. He was a kind and gentle man, very supportive of his staff and students and always ready to take an interest in their work. I met him first in 1968 when I was doing a part-time PhD under William Hoskins at Leicester. Shortly afterwards, William retired and Alan became my supervisor. Then in 1969 I was his first appointment when he became head of department. I was a research fellow in agrarian history at Leicester until I moved to Sheffield University in 1973, but we remained in close contact and I have always thought of my time at Leicester under Alan’s guidance as my formative years as a local historian.

But, of course, as I did not meet him until 1968, I can offer no insights into the origins of his book The community of Kent and the Great Rebellion that will be discussed in this volume. By the time that I first knew him he had moved on to other interests. He had finished his PhD on this subject in 1957, but in that year he was appointed as research assistant at Leicester, to Dr Joan Thirsk, working on volume four of The agrarian history of England and Wales, 1500–1640. In 1960 he became research fellow in urban history at Leicester, and therefore the conversion of his thesis into a book was done in his leisure time and it was not published until 1966. Joan tells me that when Alan sent her a copy of his book, The community of Kent and the Great Rebellion, upon its publication he wrote that, thanks to her, he had become more interested in economic and social history and that the study of the probate inventories of ordinary Kent farmers had set him off on a new track. He also said that the underlying theme of his book had changed since the completion of his original thesis. It was now ‘the close-woven fabric of Kentish family life’, which was ‘the only point that still interests me’.

This probably explains why he never responded to the later debate about county communities stemming from his book. His interests had moved elsewhere. Another point that Joan makes is that, later on, he seems to have downgraded the traumatic effects on people of the civil wars when set against other crises such as acute food shortages resulting from harvest failure.

My own memory is that ‘the close-woven fabric of Kentish family life’ was indeed a major and abiding interest of Alan’s and one that stemmed from his childhood in Sevenoaks, which he remembered as ‘a quiet, small market town’. He wrote a memoir of his younger days, which we hope will be published, and which he asked me to comment on some twenty years or so ago. I was impressed by his vivid, detailed memories of an environment that was totally different from my own upbringing on the edge of the Pennines. Two things in particular stand out in my memory. One is his love of the streets, houses and shops of Sevenoaks and particularly the wooded countryside around the town at a time when there was little traffic and plenty of freedom for a child to roam. This nourished his lifelong interest in woodlands and commons, culminating in his great book Continuity and colonization: the evolution of Kentish settlement and the research on commons and greens that occupied his later years, but which, alas, he never finished. He had a sharp eye and a fondness for nature, as well as a deep feeling for the built environment and the history of the countryside. Any discussion of his work on Kent must start with the depth of his emotional attachment to and deep knowledge of his native county, which I noted at first hand when I went with his MA students on a field trip there one spring. An unresolved puzzle is why Alan continued to live in a south Leicestershire village when he took early retirement rather than move back to Kent. Perhaps he realised how much Sevenoaks had changed and preferred to rely on his memories as a continued source of emotional support for his later research? But this, of course, is just speculation.

The other thing that I remember vividly from his memoir is his upbringing in a family of fully committed members of the Exclusive Sect of the Plymouth Brethren. Although he broke away from the Brethren in 1963, after a period of great strain, his memories of his upbringing amongst them were happy ones. Alan was a deeply religious man, although he kept his beliefs private amongst his colleagues. His own background as a member of the Plymouth Brethren and his detailed knowledge of the Bible certainly informed his work on religious nonconformity, such as his essay on Philip Doddridge, the eighteenth-century

evangelical minister from Northampton, whose writings he came across during his tenure of the fellowship in urban history, and his occasional paper on The pattern of rural dissent: the nineteenth century, in the new series that he started when he became professor and head of department at Leicester in 1968. As I shared an interest in nonconformist history, he asked me to comment on his paper. He was on study leave at the time and I have a closely written eight-page letter in which he replied in detail to the points I raised. In it, he taught me a valuable lesson in not being too hard on other historians with whom one disagreed, for in my reply I had criticised an influential article on which he had relied. He agreed with my criticisms but pointed out that the article was a pioneering one. Alan wrote, ‘It is possible – not, I think, probable at all – that his theory is true in some areas. But I will leave the trouncing of the poor nitwit to you.’ He ended his letter with a detailed explanation of the meaning of ‘Jehovah Jireh’, an inscription which I had seen on a Sheffield chapel and had asked him about, then perhaps smiling to himself he apologised for ‘that little homily (which you asked for!)’.

In his memoir, Alan noted the strength of family life and the cohesion of the Brethren through their weekly meetings and their intermarriage. These memories reinforced his historical interest in the importance of family connections, starting with the diaries and letters of the Kentish gentry in the civil wars. His own experiences during the Second World War, when his home was destroyed by a bomb and families were torn apart, informed his work on the breakdown of family relationships and what he called ‘Kent cousinages’ during the 1640s. Three hundred years later, he himself was conscripted into the army as a non-combatant in 1944, serving until 1948.

When he became Joan Thirsk’s research assistant for The agrarian history Alan’s interests turned from the gentry to other social groups. He wrote an influential chapter on farm labourers for volume four. When I was a member of his department he was working on inns and country carriers and on decayed market towns, as well as on religious dissent. That was an exciting time, in which the frontiers of the relatively new subject of local history were pushed out in all sorts of directions as Alan encouraged us to follow our interests. His own interests moved back in time to the origins of settlement in Kent and forward into the Victorian and Edwardian period. I was impressed by his tremendous knowledge of English literature. I learned later that he had read all the eighteenth- and nineteenth-century classical authors in English while he was still at school. Now the novels of George Eliot, Elizabeth Gaskell, Margaret Oliphant and Arnold Bennett, in particular, informed his work on the intense lives of dissenting families up and down the land.

Alan’s interest in Kentish families and their inter-connections, first revealed in his work on the civil wars, underpinned his later research and writing. Two of his collected essays, published in 1985 as Landscape and community in England, are ‘Kentish family portrait’, a study of the family of the great antiquarian Edward Hasted, and ‘Dynasty and community since the seventeenth century’, which dealt with ‘entire networks of regional and dynastic connexion which extended beyond the limits of the individual community, and which developed largely outside the ranks of the aristocracy and squirearchy’. Here we see his interests extending beyond the county gentry and going much lower down the social scale. He described ‘this principle of dynastic connexion’ as ‘an extraordinarily pervasive feature of English provincial society’ which:

not only shaped the structure of politics, where it has long been familiar: it influenced the course of regional trade; it facilitated the evolution of technical skills; it moulded the development of many professions; it channelled the diffusion of ideas; it bounded the society of town and country together. It affected farming; it affected industry, it affected retail trade, it affected craftsmanship. It affected the church, it affected nonconformity, it affected the army and the navy.

He went on to say that, ‘in studying any provincial society, we need to identify the core of dominant families who for one reason or another came to form the focus of influence within it’. Leading on from this, ‘we need to consider the origins of these central or focal families’, most of which were drawn from ‘the indigenous families of the area in question’. He demonstrated this by a detailed study of what he called ‘some 220 paramount dynasties’, comprising 4,450 separately established families, virtually all of which were confined to Kent, with such distinctive local names as Blaxland, Denne, Hambrook, or Kingsnorth. In such ways, his early interests persisted, but within the sphere of social and economic history rather than the political, and widening in their social and geographical compass.

I have three quick, unrelated memories of Alan to finish with. First, Alan came to speak at an extramural day-school that I organised at Sheffield in the 1970s. He was on after lunch, but I also had to see to the main speaker in the morning, Maurice Beresford. Maurice was a garrulous man who loved a good meal and the lunch went well over time, leaving me to race back to the lecture theatre to apologise for my bad manners in leaving Alan to fend for himself in setting up his slides. But I need not have feared, for he was sitting on the stage...

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serenely regarding the audience. ‘There is a seriousness of purpose about a northern adult audience that I approve of,’ he said. He put it down to the West Riding nonconformist tradition and thought that midland audiences were lacking in comparison.

Second, he stayed overnight on another occasion and at six o’clock in the morning I was woken by the sound of voices. To my dismay, I realised that my two young children were in his bedroom. I raced in to apologise, but found Alan sitting on the edge of his bed talking to my enthralled offspring about some old coins, which he had found on the window sill. He was not at all fazed about their intrusion at that early hour and always took an interest in my children as they grew older.

The third memory is rather a perplexing one. We all have our little quirks and Alan was able to laugh at his, but on this occasion I do not think that he intended to be funny. He lived alone with the company of a succession of cats. I have to confess to a certain indifference to cats, but they meant much to Alan. In 1999 he finished a long letter to me by writing: ‘Must stop, as my cat Shadow has come for his tea. The history of cats needs looking into next – a most interesting topic is the changing attitudes to them. Did you know that windows were not invented to let light in, but for cats to look out of?’ Alan did not joke about cats, but I do not think he pursued this particular line of research any further.

After the retirement of William Hoskins, Alan became the leading English local historian of his time. It is very fitting that this memorial volume should arise from a conference held in his old department, now the Centre for English Local History, at the University of Leicester.