

## 11.2 Captain Swing's other spaces

Room 104

Convener: Carl Griffin

Chair: Peter Jones

**Peter Jones** is currently a Lecturer in History and the History of Medicine at Oxford Brookes University. Before taking up this post, he was a Research Fellow for three years on the Westminster Pauper Lives Project (<http://research.ncl.ac.uk/pauperlives/>). His research interests lie in two distinct but related areas of demotic history: popular protest and popular consciousness in the early-nineteenth century (and in particular, the Swing risings in the south of England), and the experience of the old poor laws in Hanoverian England. His most recent publications are 'Finding Captain Swing: protest, parish relations and the state of the public mind in 1830', *International Rev. Social Hist.* (2009), and "'I Cannot Keep My Place Without Being Deacent": pauper letters, parish clothing and pragmatism in the South of England, 1750-1830', *Rural History* (2009).

### 11.21 Carl Griffin – Swing in the 'city': alien presences and phantasmagoria

Swing's various historians have claimed that the protests of 1830 represented a rural 'movement', a response to the social failings of agrarian capitalism in the English countryside. And yet Swing assumed its potency by virtue of the fear that rural lawlessness would spill over into urban society. These fears were grounded in observed and phantasmagorical 'presences'. Reports that groups of mobile Swing activists were to 'invade' market towns, combined with the sight of nearby fires, helped to generate something close to hysteria. But Swing was not just a spectral presence, it also had physical, if alien, urban presence. The seemingly constant conveying of prisoners to gaols and Houses of Correction and the attendant cavalcades of soldiers and constables made for dramatic spectacles, materially bringing Swing into the town. Sometimes protests also targeted urban dwelling tithe holders, machinery makers or even semi-urban farms, whilst 'invasions' to attend magistrates' benches or to free incarcerated comrades rendered the rural-urban distinction opaque. Through these dynamics, the notion that Swing was confined to the countryside can be discarded. Instead, Swing not only served to highlight the hybridity of rural-urban space in agricultural districts but also weaved, albeit temporarily, rural and urban life together.

**Carl Griffin** is a Lecturer in Human Geography at Queen's University, Belfast. He trained as a historical geographer at the University of Bristol, and held post-doctoral positions at the universities of Bristol, Southampton and Oxford. His research embraces studies of popular protest, as well as cultures of unemployment, human-environment interactions, and the history of political economy. He has published papers in, amongst other places, *Rural History*, *Journal of Historical Geography*, *International Review of Social History*, *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, and *Past and Present*.

### 11.22 Rose Wallis – 'What a phantom they contrived to conjure': the spectre of Swing and the Somerset magistracy

Somerset was described as one of the 'marginal' Swing counties by Hobsbawm and Rudé, distinguished only by the fact that its disturbances had a 'physical connection' to those spreading from Wiltshire and Dorset. Despite remaining relatively peaceful throughout the winter of 1830, the Somerset magistracy were active, indeed at times panicked by, the spectre of Swing. Rather than focus on an enumeration of the attacks on threshing machines, the incidence of riot and incendiary fires, an analysis of the actions of the local justices can reveal an alternative manifestation of Swing as *context*: what impact the threat of popular tumult had on the administration of the law and the interactions of authority with their communities. This paper will consider how the Somerset justices sought to prevent rebellion, and on a few occasions suppressed it; their communications with central government; and revealingly, their discussions amongst themselves. It also explores their framing of prosecutions during the disturbances. By focusing on the actions of the county magistracy, this approach reveals alternative perspectives and, possibly

more significantly, the perceptions of authority of Swing as a *movement*: its causes, the scale and scope of protest, and debates regarding the most effective solutions for its suppression.

**Rose Wallis** is a doctoral student at the University of the West of England. Her research seeks to explore the relationship between English rural magistrates and their communities, and, connectedly, the decline of paternalism in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. She is the author of a forthcoming paper in *Southern History* which examines attempts to prosecute Swing in the English west.

### 11.23 Iain J. M. Robertson – Putting Swing in its space: beyond orthodoxy in rural Gloucestershire

Space is much more than passive setting. It is both shaped by and shapes social and cultural processes and is, therefore, both cause and effect of social life. Historians of Swing have, to date, failed to significantly engage with the constitutive role of space in their engagement with these significant events. This paper is a tentative attempt to address this spatial lacuna. The focus is the north-west of Gloucestershire, an area seen as peripheral to Swing. This paper asserts, however, that considering space as an active agent in rural protest helps to challenge notions of peripherality.

Conventionally, a rick fire at Pardon Hill near Winchcombe, Gloucestershire, in December 1830 was the only ‘Swing’ activity that took place in the area. Yet this is a narrow perspective. Rick burning was a frequent activity in the locale, Sunday riots were a regular feature in the town, turnpike gates were attacked, and organised poaching a serious problem. To view Winchcombe as peripheral and quiescent is therefore wrong. Swing was not a unique, closed entity, nor an exceptional ‘explosion’ of protest, but was instead a particularly intense point on a spectrum of conflictual expressions. The notion of peripherality is, consequently, rendered redundant.

**Iain Robertson** is a Senior Lecturer in History and Historical Geography at the University of Gloucestershire. His early research focused on the historical and cultural processes shaping the landscape of nineteenth and early twentieth century Highland Scotland, not least through the lens of popular protest. He is also interested in how we can understand landscape as a cultural ‘product,’ particularly from the perspective of heritage. He is author of numerous articles and chapters on these interrelated fields of enquiry in such journals as *Rural History* and the *Journal of Historical Geography*. He is editor of (with Penny Richards) *Studying Cultural Landscapes* (Arnold, 2003) and *Heritage from Below* (Ashgate, 2010, forthcoming).

### 11.24 Katrina Navickas – Swing in the North: incendiarism and agricultural machine-breaking in northern England, 1812-34

The ‘Captain Swing’ disturbances were not, as many historians have assumed, confined to southern England. Incendiarism, the sending of ‘Swing’ letters, and threats to threshing machines were all present in Yorkshire, Cheshire, Derbyshire and Cumberland. Yet there is more to this paper than simply an argument that Swing was not exclusively southern. Beginning with a study of Swing in Carlisle, before examining agricultural disturbances elsewhere in the North, this paper argues that we should rethink the causes and meaning of Swing within a wider framework and timescale. The paper therefore embraces understandings of socio-economic change in the agricultural north, the permeable boundary between countryside and town, changing modes of social control, and threats to agricultural machinery during the 1812 Luddite disturbances. By looking at this longer chronology, Swing can be placed within the context of a community defence of custom and a challenge to changing definitions of popular rights. Utilising hitherto under-used sources, the paper argues that the myth of ‘Captain Swing’ was more a product of the authorities’ reliance on rumour and panic, than an imaginary creation by the activists themselves. Arson and machine-breaking in the North were Swing-like, but not Swing as we currently conceive it.

**Katrina Navickas** is Lecturer in History at the University of Hertfordshire, and previously taught at the universities of Edinburgh and Oxford. She is author of *Loyalism and Radicalism in Lancashire, 1798-1815* (2009), and several articles

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on Luddites and on popular politics in such journals as *Social History* and *Northern History*. She is currently working on a cultural geography of popular protest in northern England, 1780-1848.