

## 13.2 Choices and changes: sharefarming in a global context Room 104

*Convener: Elizabeth Griffiths*

*Chair: Mark Overton*

**Professor Mark Overton** has been Deputy Vice-Chancellor (External Affairs) at the University of Exeter since 2006. Previously he was Dean of Postgraduate Studies and Professor of Economic and Social History. His research interests include the agrarian history of England from the middle ages onwards, and much of this research is incorporated in his book, *Agricultural revolution in England 1500-1850* (1996). His most recent book on agrarian history, *Farming to halves: the hidden history of sharefarming in England from medieval to modern times*, was published in 2009. Another major research interest is in early modern English households, published in his *Production and consumption in English households, 1600-1750* (2004). He was elected an Academician of the Academy of the Social Sciences in 2004.

### 13.21 Elizabeth Griffiths – Sharefarming in England and New Zealand: a twenty-first century perspective

By identifying the existence of sharefarming in England, Griffiths and Overton overturned a central premise of economic history that the distinguishing feature of English agriculture was its avoidance of such a system. In part this can be explained by the apparent absence of *metayage* in England in the eighteenth century, when Arthur Young claimed it was the point of difference between French and English agriculture. From a twenty-first century perspective we can now see that the English landlord tenant system flourished for a relatively short period when the landed elite controlled the levers of political and economic power. As that power faded and conditions deteriorated, English farmers and landowners in the twentieth century once again resorted to sharefarming.

English landowners were also influenced by the successful example of share farming in New Zealand in the 1980s as it offered a way of avoiding the creation of a tenancy and tax on unearned income. However, since then New Zealand farmers have consolidated their holdings, increased herd sizes and intensified production, making it more difficult for sharemilkers to raise the capital to buy a herd or a farm. Increasingly, they resort to contract labour and a range of relationships more akin to the English experience. So what is going on?

With the other speakers in this session, this paper will reassess the role of share farming in the rural economy and its value to rural society. Is it a force for the good as the revisionists maintain, or a menace to the environment as some argue in New Zealand? Did Arthur Young have a point after all?

**Elizabeth Griffiths** spent four years sharefarming in New Zealand, before completing a PhD on estate management in seventeenth century Norfolk in 1987. From 2003 to 2005 she worked with Dr. Jane Whittle at Exeter on the household accounts of Lady Alice Le Strange, and then persuaded Prof. Mark Overton of the need for a research project on sharefarming in England. The result was *Farming to Halves: the Hidden History of Sharefarming in England from medieval to modern times* (2009). She is now editing a volume for the Norfolk Record Society on the farming records of Lady Alice Le Strange and is an Honorary Research Fellow at the University of Exeter.

### 13.22 Rui Santos – For a diversified approach to sharecropping: a comparative framework

Rural history and rural economics are rife with generalisations about sharecropping, its rationality or lack thereof, its role as a deterrent or a facilitator for agricultural progress and productivity, its social results, etc. The recent publication by Overton and Griffiths about share-farming in England has raised yet other issues while discussing the common understanding that such practices did not exist there, as opposed to Continental Europe. In this paper, I will argue that the notion of sharecropping conceals too wide a variety of contractual situations and social configurations of agricultural organisation to allow for generalisation. I will combine the insights of contract choice

and property rights theory with historical literature to attempt to disaggregate the notion of sharecropping into a meaningful framework for comparative analysis.

**Rui Santos** is lecturer in the department of Ciências Sociais e Humanas of the Universidade Nova of Lisbon. His PhD thesis investigated the origins of large estates in the Alentejo region. Since then, his research has focused more widely on property rights, types of agrarian contract and how these have affected the organisation of rural space.

### 13.23 Annie Antoine – Revisiting French sharecropping from the medieval period to the mid-twentieth century

Among French historians, there are two conflicting interpretations about sharecropping: from the nineteenth century a very critical historiography developed about sharecropping, while more recent works have focused on the economic performance of this type of labour contract in different areas. I will try to do a synthesis of the topic based on the interaction of different subjects (such as the history of law about contracts) and from studying other systems of sharecropping in European countries. The conference which took place in Rennes in 2007 (sharecropping in Europe) is an important base for this paper.

I will discuss sharecropping linking it with labour relations in rural society and with property rights. My paper will deal with the following three points:

1. Where and when in France was sharefarming a way of enhancing the performance of husbandry?
2. What kinds of labour relations existed within this type of contract in modern France? Sharecropping was neither self-employment nor wage labour, but a kind of relationship between those who had land and money and those who worked it. This explains the bad reputation of this system in France from the nineteenth and also in the twentieth century, when professional organisations have upheld the social status of farmers and self-employment in agriculture as a better way of organizing labour relations
3. I will explain in what social and economic contexts sharecropping occurred. Sharecropping was closely linked with the growing of large ‘métairies’ on the demesnes of the lords, in a feudal context, during medieval and early modern periods. This fact has had a loud and long-lived influence on this kind of tenancy in France.

**Annie Antoine** is Professor of Modern History at the University of Rennes 2, and Director of the Centre de Recherches Historiques de l’Ouest. Her research interests lie in the social history of rural social world, the history of *seigneurie*, and of the countryside. Her publications include *Le paysage de l’historien. Archéologie des espaces bocagers de la France de l’Ouest à la fin de l’ancien régime* (2002) and (with Dominique Marguerie) *Bocages et sociétés* (2007). Her current research is on the farm accounts in the modern era, and on *métayage* and farm specialisation.

### 13.24 Jennifer Holt – Farming to halves in the north-west of England

Griffiths and Overton have revealed the existence in England of farming to halves; constructed categories and discussed the experiences of those involved across a number of farming regions. However, the varied experience of farming to halves in the early-modern period in the north west of England has not previously been discussed.

The writer’s attention was first drawn to farming to halves by the common practice, throughout the Lune Valley in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, of leaving a gimmer (female) lamb to grandchildren, godchildren and others with the clear intention that the legacy would provide a small income for those (probably landless) beneficiaries. Further investigation showed a widespread ownership of livestock by those without land or grazing rights of their own. From this, it was a short step to considering the range of strategies available to those who needed land – whether for

arable or pastoral farming – as revealed by wills and inventories and complemented by manorial and private records.

This paper will examine the evidence from an area of mixed farming in the Lune valley, demonstrate the range of share-farming options found there in the early-modern period and show how one important strand continues to the present day, albeit in a much altered form. It will be suggested that this is by no means a unique experience and we may anticipate similar situations throughout those areas where heafed sheep (i.e. sheep bred to their native fell) are still to be found.

**Jennifer S. Holt** has recently retired from a career in accountancy and (latterly) teaching. Her interests lie in the economy, society and landscape of north Lancashire about which she has published a number of articles and is the editor of a forthcoming volume for the Chetham Society. Amongst other projects, she is developing a database of probate inventories for this area to use in a large-scale study of credit and trade.

### 13.25 Benedita Câmara – Landlord’s choice between agricultural contracts in an entail of Madeira in the nineteenth century

The evolution of the incidence of sharecropping contracts in certain places is much debated. Our analysis focuses on a landlord’s choice between sharecropping and fixed rent contracts. The study is based on primary sources: accounts of administration of lands belonging to an entail located in Madeira where, between the first and second half of the nineteenth century, there were both changes in crops and increased irrigation. Our analysis focuses on transaction costs in the sense of the costs of enforcing the sharecropping contracts compared with fixed rent contracts. Sharecropping contracts is associated with high costs in measuring and dividing the harvest. We intend to analyse the factors that explain the choice between the two contracts namely focusing on the cost implications associated with the measurement and the division of the harvest in an agricultural environment where multi-cropping was common

**Benedita Câmara** is in the Department of Management and Economy at the University of Madeira. Her recent publications include *Economia da Madeira, 1850-1914* (2002); ‘The Tourism Industry in Madeira (1850-1914)’, in Laurent Tissot (ed.), *Development of Tourist Industry in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Century. International Perspectives* (2003); ‘The Portuguese Civil Code and the *colônia* tenancy contract in Madeira (1867–1967)’, *Continuity and Change* 21 (2006); ‘The evolution of the Portuguese Hotel Sector (1950-1995)’, in *Europe at the seaside. The Economic History of Mass Tourism in the Mediterranean Sea*, Luciano Segreto and Carles Manera (eds) (2009).