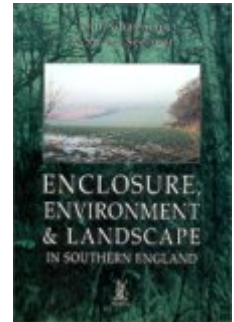


**John Chapman, Sylvia Seeliger.** *Enclosure, Environment and Landscape in Southern England*. Stroud: Tempus, 2001. Viii + 160 pp. \$49.99, paper, ISBN 978-0-7524-2079-0.



**Reviewed by** Brian Short

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Transforming the Agrarian Landscape of Southern England

This is not a book that overtly makes connection with the debates on the timing and location of the agricultural revolution. Instead, it focuses on one particular aspect of that debate, namely the residual process of enclosure by parliamentary action after 1700. It also focuses on a very particular area: the southern English counties of Dorset, Hampshire, Sussex and Wiltshire, which form part of the National Enclosure Project, something that is referred to somewhat too casually in passing (e.g. p. 53), and which should have been more fully explained for the non-specialist. The choice of the four central-southern counties is explained in the early stages of the book as giving a more balanced view of the enclosure process than has so far been gained from the dramatically altered landscapes of the East Midlands on the one hand, or the basically untouched (by parliamentary enclosure) landscape of Cornwall on the other. This is certainly to be welcomed, although the reader does gain the impression from time to time that these counties have been extracted from a

wider survey, whose purpose is presumably the same as that developed in this book, but whose description and progress is left open to conjecture. We are constantly referred to other texts, especially to John Chapman's own extensive analyses of parliamentary enclosure, and to those of Michael Turner--useful intertextual references but again enhancing the impression that this book is but part of some greater whole. From time to time the authors actually use the opportunity to update Chapman's own previously published material (e.g. on Hampshire p. 81, and on Sussex p. 94).

That apart, the book is clearly written and most informative. In structure, it provides a chapter offering an overview of the enclosure process, a most useful section, together with one giving an evaluation of the source material for the data gathered by the authors. These two preliminary chapters are perhaps the most useful in many ways for the general local/regional historian, providing broad treatment of the subject matter. By contrast, the book then divides up into four further and very detailed chapters--one per county--

before a short concluding chapter. Each county is given a standard treatment: an introduction, some background, a section on parliamentary enclosure, on formal agreements, on informal enclosure, and a summary.

The detail speaks to the enthusiast or the expert agricultural historian, and for them this book is an essential companion to the standard treatments of parliamentary enclosure. The story is overall one of local complexity within each county, and one which emphasises the very diverse nature of the enclosure process. This included, for example, the clearing up operation of those remnants of open field left after informal enclosure. We are reminded of the often long time scales involved: although land at Findon (Sussex) was already being withdrawn from common use by 1542, there were still open field remnants by 1839 (p. 107). And we are informed of the independently functioning multiple field systems operating within some Wiltshire parishes (p. 112). The reader also learns that many of the enclosures in Wiltshire were partial, and that one, at Bower Chalke, actually produced a new group of open fields altogether. This last county appears to the authors to have borne the strongest resemblance to the classic midland open field system, although the more southerly location is correlated with a greater amount of non-parliamentary enclosure than in the midlands. It is classed as an 'intermediate' county. Incidentally, this is another clue to the authors' eyes looking to wider horizons than the four counties analysed here, as is their reference to "the national parliamentary diffusion model" on p. 113, or indeed the Appendix, which lists the parliamentary enclosure acts for the four counties, with their reference numbers taken from the National Enclosure Project, and starting with Abbotbury, Dorset, number 10,001!

The final concluding chapter pulls the foregoing material together in an informative way, and relates the enclosure process to the local farming systems, rural society and the environment. It

demonstrates that enclosure here could increase fragmentation through the enclosure of the commons; and that enclosure did not necessarily lead to reduced holding sizes or exclude small areas.

Some small criticisms are necessary. A purist would note that there are some inconsistencies in the application of superscript numbers; there are some minor proofing errors; there are also inconsistencies in the bibliography in the rendering of PhD details (see, for example, references to the theses of Afton, Brandon or Neeson); Alan Baker's initials are wrongly given; and the date of Young's General Report on Enclosures should certainly not be 1908! The columns of the Dorset appendix entry are incorrectly set out. This reviewer would also have welcomed larger maps, although the authors are clearly constrained here by the dimensions of the volume. But the map symbols are not always clear; the map of location and timing of informal enclosure agreements in Wiltshire (p. 124) lacks a key; and a little more detail on environmental background, such as regional subdivisions, geology or soils would have been a useful addition—the maps are somewhat sparse, basically offering the reader a spatial reference without any real context.

Chapman and Seeliger's basic argument here is that by tracing all land that was open or commonable in 1700 and painstakingly tracking down how each area came to be enclosed, we shall discover a more revealing and complex picture than the traditional midland story. Indeed, they contend that in time we may come to appreciate that counties such as these represent a truer picture of England as a whole than those of the East Midlands. The practical complexities, the local detail, and the elongated chronologies set out here make for fascinating reading, and the book is thus thoroughly recommended as a companion for the enclosure enthusiast as well as for those attempting to unravel the history of the landscapes of these four southern counties.

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