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in a couple of the chapters. Anthony King, in 'Why Labour won – again', contains a beautiful illustration of the diversity of the UK national picture and its no longer being about uniform national swings, by comparing the contrasting fortunes of the Lib Dem 2001 gains in Cheadle and Guildford. In his chapter, 'New Labour's Hegemony: Erosion or Extension?', Ivor Crewe provides the most damning indictment of the Liberal Democrats' campaign and its result to be found in any of these books. Yet he does concede that, provided there is a change in overall strategy, the party has put itself in a position whereby it could make its much-vaunted breakthrough at the next election.

At the beginning I implied that you could be forgiven for feeling a sense of *déjà vu* on

the morning of 6 May 2005. Of course, 2005 was better than 1983. Achieving sixty-two seats in a night made up largely of gains is better than winning twenty three seats in a night mainly of losses. However, the sense on the one hand of moral victory and on the other of total exasperation is one that has not been felt in the same way since 1983. There is enough information and advice in all four books to ensure that the Liberal Democrats do not have to wait another generation for their potential breakthrough to come about again. Party strategists would do well to read these books and take heed of them.

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when the dispossessed burst the silence 'by the only power at its command'.

*The Village Labourer* caused a sensation when it was first published in 1911, selling over a thousand copies in the first six months. It caught the wind of the public debate on the 'flight from the land' which had found its precursors in F. G. Heath's *The English Peasantry* (1874) and G. C. Brodrick's *English Land and English Landlords* (1881). More importantly, it added to the debate surrounding the land reforms of the Liberal government, particularly after the publication of *The Land* in 1913, the report of Lloyd George's Liberal Land Enquiry Committee. Upon reading *The Village Labourer*, Arthur Clutton-Brock claimed never to have seen so powerful an argument for 'democracy in all its aspects'. A. E. Zimmern thought the style 'quite Thucydidian' and Graham Wallas praised its 'over-mastering sense of dramatic force'.<sup>1</sup> G. M. Trevelyan felt that if a cheap version of the book were made available to the poor, Britain might face a revolution.

Formal academic opinion, however, has been less kind to the Hammonds. The assault started with J. H. Clapham, who disliked the bias against the upper classes. For him, enclosure was necessary to increase productivity, and he criticised the Hammonds for the naivety of their statistical analysis. This gave rise to one of the longest running historiographical debates of the twentieth century, the so-called 'standard of living' controversy.

On the one hand were ranged the 'catastrophic school' epitomised by the Hammonds and the Webbs and continued by E. P. Thompson. On the other side were the economic historians, such as Clapham and – later – Chambers and Mingay, who stressed the effectiveness of enclosure in stimulating industrial growth and feeding a growing population. Like

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## The radical soul of liberalism

J. L. & Barbara Hammond: *The Village Labourer*

(Nonsuch, 2005)

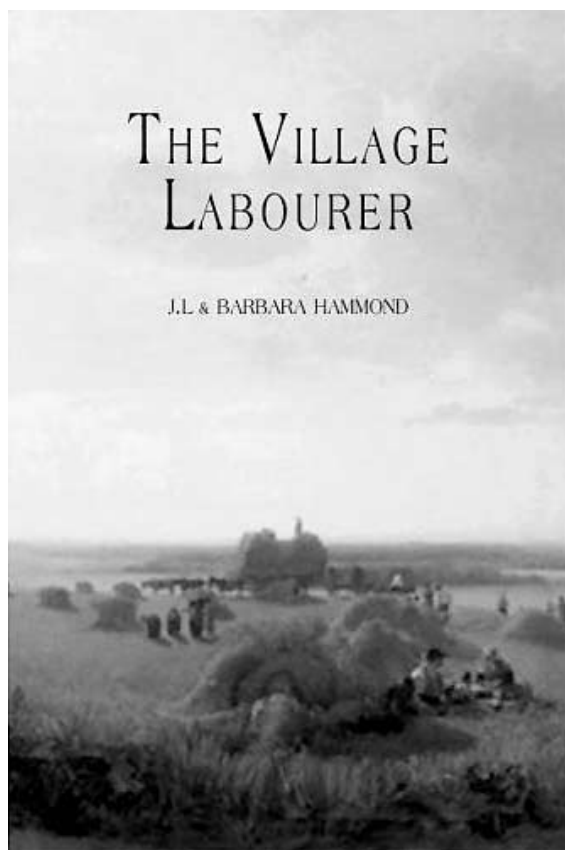
Reviewed by **Tom Villis**

**T**he conventional view of the enclosure movement, today as in 1911 when the *Village Labourer* was first published, is that it provided for the modernisation of agriculture, helped feed a growing population and kick-started industrialisation. Changes in agriculture can often be analysed in rather abstract ways: in terms of rising labour productivity, for example, which made a surplus of labour available for manufacturing. What Barbara and Lawrence Hammond remind us – and we cannot be reminded too often – is that such 'efficiency' was achieved at the cost of immense suffering and the degradation of the rural poor. The authors do not deny

that enclosure made England economically more productive. However, in a series of chapters written in Lawrence's powerful prose and backed up by Barbara's scrupulous research, the reader is shown how enclosure was in effect a series of legalised thefts perpetrated by a parliament which acted only in the interests of the landed gentry. These acts, the Hammonds argue, stripped the village labourer of his common land and his economic independence. In an attempt to alleviate the distress which followed, the Speenhamland system of poor relief merely institutionalised pauperism. The final part of the book then describes the swing riots of 1830

many such debates, however, it has generated as much heat as light. Some qualifications to the Hammonds' catastrophic vision are useful, notably that the Speenhamland system was not as systematic as they have indicated. Nevertheless, as E. P. Thompson famously pointed out in *The Making of the English Working Class* (1963), it is perfectly possible to maintain that a slight improvement in average material standards was accompanied by intensified exploitation and greater insecurity. Lawrence in private expressed his irritation with 'the new school which argues that if only one paid attention to statistics it wd become clear that everything went well at the Ind. Rev.'<sup>2</sup> It is testament to the Hammonds' continuing importance that their work remains the starting point for these debates nearly a hundred years later.

Above all, one senses, it was the mixture of moral and scientific language which jarred on the ears of Clapham and subsequent professional historians.



Even E. P. Thompson takes issue with their 'outraged emotion' and their attempt to moralise history. Yet this overtly moral standpoint gives the book its enduring appeal. This is not to say the substance of the historical evidence has been entirely discredited; Peter Clarke for one has shown that the empirical part of their research has stood the test of time surprisingly well.

The Hammonds, however, explicitly wrote the book to effect change in the present. It forms, therefore, part of the Whig historiographical tradition in its tone, style and intended popular audience. Indeed, many of the preoccupations of traditional liberalism are evident in the book. The original subtitle was 'A Study in the Government of England Before the Reform Bill'. This was dropped from subsequent printings, restored in 1987, but dropped again for the present edition. Nevertheless, this subtitle was evidence of the Hammonds' continuing faith in constitutional reform in the Whig tradition. Enclosure had been passed by an unreformed parliament; the Hammonds had not lost faith in the power of liberal constitutional reform to provide for the resolution of social injustice. The book itself was intended to further the constitutional struggles of the early twentieth century. If the process by which land had been acquired in the past could be shown to be questionable, it therefore ceased to be authoritative justification for arrangements in the present. This became an important argument for the taxing of landed wealth in the People's Budget of 1909 and the constitutional crisis which followed.

Nevertheless, one of the attractions of the Hammonds' book is the way one sees this traditional Whig belief in the power of constitutional reform in tension with the rights of the poor labourer. Despite

the attempts of some to fit the Hammonds into a proto-Marxist tradition, they never entirely lose faith in traditional liberalism. Unlike the Webbs, their outrage is always with untrammelled capitalism rather than with capitalism itself; unlike Hilaire Belloc, their problem is with unreformed parliament rather than with parliamentarism in general. In contrast to Marxist approaches to the subject, shades of grey abound in the Hammonds' account. Like true liberals, they cannot completely dismiss the gentleman class which had been the driving force behind English constitutional development:

... it is only just to record that in other regions of thought and conduct they bequeathed a great inheritance of moral and liberal ideas: a passion for justice between peoples, a sense for national freedom, a great body of principle by which to check, refine, and discipline the gross appetites of national ambition. (p. 268)

The great service of the Hammonds' book is to show us that this class, so admirable in so many respects, could be so morally bankrupt with regard to those less fortunate than themselves.

However, the most striking part of the *Village Labourer* is the way in which the dispossessed are not treated as a mere abstraction but allowed to speak with their own voice. This was the first time that the long-forgotten riots of 1830 were exposed to the reading public. Lawrence had come across the disturbances while leafing through old editions of Cobbett's *Political Register*. For readers at the beginning of the twenty-first century as much as those at the beginning of the twentieth, this final section on the riots which spread over southern England and the brutal repression with which they were met make compelling reading. The historical concern

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with the governed as well as the government, which is illustrated so effectively in this book, becomes part of an academic tradition taken up by Rudé, Hobsbawm and Thompson. One of the tragedies from the Liberal Party's point of view is that this moral outrage has been hijacked so effectively by the socialist left. We can remind ourselves in this book, however, of the radicalism which still nourishes the soul of British liberalism.

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- 1 S. A. Weaver, *The Hammonds: A marriage in history* (Stanford, 1997), pp. 111–12.
- 2 P. Clarke, *Liberals and Social Democrats* (Cambridge, 1978), p. 246.

society than a country governed centrally from Westminster' (p. x). Using Lloyd George's own early correspondence and diaries and those of his political contemporaries, and a great deal of searching through national and local newspapers over many years, the author has quarried a large amount of evidence to support his contentions.

The volume is consequently a thorough and detailed account of Lloyd George's political career in a Welsh context before his election as the Liberal MP for the Caernarfon Boroughs in a by-election in April 1890, and his record as a MP until about 1899. This is followed by a brief closing chapter which examines the Lloyd George legacy to Welsh life in the twentieth century. There is much fascinating material on Lloyd George's intervention in the politics of Merionethshire in 1886 when he came close to selection as the Liberal candidate for the county, eventually happy to stand down in favour of his young radical associate Thomas Edward Ellis (1859–99). This is followed by detailed accounts of Lloyd George's contribution to the tithe and disestablishment debates, his founding of the short-lived newspaper *Udgorn Rhyddid* (throughout his career LG was always fully aware of the potential power of the press), and the battle to secure the Liberal nomination for the six highly disparate boroughs within the Caernarfon District in 1888–89. Some new material emerges of Lloyd George's firm commitment to labour issues and the welfare of the Welsh language even at this very early stage of his career.

A full analysis ensues of the closely contested by-election in the Boroughs in April 1890 when Lloyd George secured election to parliament by a wafer-thin majority of just eighteen votes. After he had arrived at Westminster Lloyd George remained true to his commitment to Welsh home

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## The young Lloyd George and Wales

Emyr Price: *David Lloyd George* (University of Wales Press, 2006)

Reviewed by **Dr J. Graham Jones**

With the publication of this important volume, the new 'Celtic Radicals' series recently launched by the University of Wales Press and edited by Dr Paul O'Leary (senior lecturer in Welsh History at the University of Wales, Aberystwyth), has got off to an auspicious start. The author, Emyr Price, is well known in Wales as a prolific author, lecturer and broadcaster and as one of our acknowledged experts on the life and career of David Lloyd George. Indeed, his preoccupation with Lloyd George now extends back more than three decades, beginning with a pioneering MA thesis 'Lloyd George's Pre-parliamentary Career', presented to the University of Wales as long ago as 1974. Since then he has published a substantial number of monographs and scholarly articles which have enhanced our understanding of Lloyd George. A few years ago he published the well-received Welsh volume *Lloyd George: y Cenedlaetholwr Cymreig: Bradur neu Awyr?* (Gomer Press, 1999). In two reviews published in

Welsh journals at the time, the present reviewer expressed the hope that the author would soon adapt his work for an English audience.<sup>1</sup>

To some extent the present volume is an English version or adaptation of the Welsh volume published seven years ago. In both volumes Emyr Price confidently challenges head-on the view of other biographers of Lloyd George – such as Bentley B. Gilbert, the late John Grigg and Kenneth O. Morgan – who tend to interpret Lloyd George's early career as a relatively insignificant precursor to his success as a radical British politician from 1905. Their argument tends to be that during his early career Lloyd George paid little more than lip-service to the national rights of Wales as a convenient stepping-stone towards stardom and career success as a radical British politician at Westminster. Mr Price takes a totally different line. In his opinion, 'Lloyd George had a committed and visionary view of a self-governing Wales which could create a vibrant, more progressive and a more equal

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