Review Article. Fifteenth-Century Historical Studies

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The McFarlane Legacy. Studies in Late Medieval Politics and Society. (The Fifteenth Century Series, 1) Edited by R.H. Britnell and A.J. Pollard, Stroud, Alan Sutton, 1995,. xviii + 218 pp. ISBN 0-7509-0626-X. £40.

Crown, Government and the People in the Fifteenth Century. (The Fifteenth Century Series, 2) Edited by Rowena E. Archer, Stroud, Alan Sutton, 1995, xix + 252 pp. ISBN 0-7509-0588-3. £40.

The North of England in the Age of Richard III. (The Fifteenth Century Series, 3) Edited by A.J. Pollard, Alan Sutton Publishing, Stroud, 1996. xx + 204 pp. ISBN 0-7509-0609-X. £40.

Courts, Counties and the Capital in the Later Middle Ages. (The Fifteenth Century Series, 4) Edited by Diana S.Dunn, Stroud, Alan Sutton, 1996, xii + 228 pp. ISBN 0-7509-1149-2. £40.

The fact that the fifteenth century is no longer the historical Cinderella it once was is amply demonstrated by the profusion of books which has appeared over the last twenty years or so. This veritable flood shows no signs of abating: the number of fifteenth-century topics appearing in the Institute of Historical Research's listings of 'Theses Completed' and 'Theses in Progress' shows how much new work has recently been brought to a successful conclusion or is still underway. In the last issue of *Reading Medieval Studies* I saluted the recent reprinting of the volume of essays which had arisen out of the first meeting of fifteenth-century historians at Cardiff in 1970.[1] It was this

volume (whose editors, Charles Ross, Ralph Griffiths, and Stanley Chrimes did much to stimulate serious study of the fifteenth century and in whose debt we must still stand) which inspired much of what was to come. Equally, if not more, significant was the association from 1978 onwards of Alan Sutton Publishing with fifteenth-century historical studies. In that year was also held the first of what turned out to be thenceforward a continuous series of fifteenth-century colloquia, the gathering organised by Charles Ross at Bristol. I was privileged to participate in this event, and to have my paper printed in the first of the volumes of proceedings published by Alan Sutton.[2] This was my first publication, which I now cannot read without feeling both gratitude and embarrassment. Gratitude for the encouragement which Charles, Tony Pollard and others then present gave me, and embarrassment for the fact that I insisted on retaining the sections on Weber's organisational theory (which Charles had doubts about) because they had been suggested to me by the man I was about to marry, and who, as my husband, had to suffer my attending the 1979 colloquium at Swansea two weeks after our wedding, as well as the whole assembly of fifteenth-century historians partying in our garden when the colloquium was held in Reading in 1983.

The colloquium and the publication of its papers have become regular features of the conference and publishing calendars. A sort of system has now emerged. One year sees a senior conference, where papers are given by those longer established in the field (frighteningly, of course, that now includes those of us who once saw ourselves as the 'enfants terribles'). The next year sees a 'junior' event where contributions are largely by those currently working at the coal face. Indeed, one reason why fifteenth-century studies have thrived has been the deliberate inclusion of those in the opening stages of their research, for it is there where much valuable and precise work into the sources has been, and continues to be, carried out. I am by no means the only person whose career and publishing record began with such an event. It gives considerable satisfaction, as well as reassurance for the future success of the subject, to observe the next generation of fifteenth-century scholars coming along, and having similar opportunities and stimuli made available to them. Over the years, some colloquia and their resulting volumes have concentrated on a particular theme: church; gentry; towns; economy; England and the Low Countries.[3] Others have contained groups of papers on a wider range of themes,[4] setting successive editors two invidious tasks: first,

the devising of an introduction which tries to create some logic out of what might otherwise be the chaos of a set of random papers; and secondly, the dreaming up of a title which embraces the whole gamut of the book. The first volume arising out of the 1978 meeting was also one of the most eclectic, with papers ranging chronologically from the sense of dynasty under Henry VI to ruling elites in the reign of Henry VII, and wandering geographically from Yorkshire to Normandy via Japan. Its title, *Patronage, Pedigree and Power in Later Medieval England*, has proved a model for, if not a millstone round the neck of, subsequent volume editors who are finding new, double- or triple-headed, alliterative forms increasingly difficult to invent. On an equally flippant note, the use of a colon in the title of one's paper has almost become *de rigeur*.

The fact that there has been a minimum level of constraint placed upon contributors even when the volumes have been 'themed' is significant, for it has permitted, even encouraged, the dissemination of a wide variety of research. There has been no restriction to political history alone. Social, economic, religious, cultural – all aspects have been represented, and, whilst the main focus has remained on England, there has been opportunity for the representation of research by English historians investigating other parts of Europe, and by continental and American scholars working on England or elsewhere. Thus many aspects of fifteenth-century history have been included, testimony to the richness of the period's sources and the energies of its interpreters. As a result these volumes taken together reveal a much more rounded picture of the century than might be expected. Variety has also been maintained by the fact that the colloquium is held in a different geographical location each year with the local organisers subsequently acting as editors. From time to time, there has been a feeling in one quarter or another that some topic or area has been receiving short shrift. So for instance, the organisers of the 1991 event at Royal Holloway and Bedford New College remedied the lacuna they had perceived by dedicating the theme to the cultural, political and economic interplay between England and the Low Countries. In 1996, it was to the 'End of the Middle Ages' that attention was turned at Aberystwyth. On other occasions too a 'long fifteenth century' has been treated, with sorties into both earlier and later centuries. It would be going too far to claim that the fifteenth-century colloquia were the inspiration to historians of other centuries to 'get their act together', but their assembly is certainly long established.[5]

The volumes which provide the impulse to this review article stand as the first four publications in a new series launched in 1995. Although Alan Sutton, whose own personal interest in the period did much to inaugurate the colloquia and resulting volumes, is no longer connected with the firm (which from 1996 has traded as Sutton Publishing), the commitment to the period has survived the change in ownership. 'The Fifteenth-Century Series' is, appropriately, under the advisory editorship of Ralph Griffiths, Professor of Medieval History at the University of Wales Swansea, who contributed to the pioneering volume *Fifteenth-Century England* as well as to *Patronage, Pedigree and Power*. To date four volumes have appeared in the new series, three arising out of fifteenth-century colloquia. The first in the series, *The McFarlane Legacy*, is the proceedings of the senior meeting at Durham in 1993, and volumes two (*Crown, Government and the People*) and four (*Courts, Counties and the Capital*) derive from the 'junior' events at Manchester College Oxford in 1992 and at Chester College in 1994 respectively. The remaining volume, the third in the series, *The North of England in the Age of Richard III*, was the product of a different strand of conference organisation, the fifth triennial conference of the Richard III Society held at Durham in 1993. But, as its editor, Tony Pollard, observed in his introduction, 'For the society, the fifteenth century *is* the age of Richard III'. Thus, the volume did not restrict itself to the reign nor even the lifetime of the fifteenth-century's most infamous and controversial persona. Nor was this the first time that Alan Sutton Publishing has produced volumes originating elsewhere than in the fifteenth-century colloquia. In 1986, for instance, a volume was produced as a posthumous Festschrift for Charles Ross.[6]

The first volume to appear in the new series, *The McFarlane legacy*, was a landmark in its own right. The importance of K.B. McFarlane, Fellow of Magdalen College, Oxford, to fifteenth-century historical studies is well-known and universally accepted. As the editors put it, 'he more than anyone else was responsible for transforming the study of the period, especially the fifteenth century, from the malign neglect which he inherited in the 1920s, to the intense scrutiny which he left on his death in 1966'. His central theme is best expressed in his own words of 1940: 'if we wish to understand the nature of the English state, what is necessary is a study of the evolution of its governing class'. For him this could be achieved by studying individuals, but individuals within the social and political

structures of the time: the methodology he used is well illustrated in his Ford lectures of 1953, published posthumously as *The Nobility of Later Medieval England*.[7] A major influence was undoubtedly Sir Lewis Namier's work on the eighteenth century, and both men gave much place to the importance of patronage as a social and political force. In McFarlane's case this gave rise to a new emphasis on 'bastard feudalism' as a distinguishing feature of late medieval English society; older tenurial ties were replaced by other forms of connection and interdependence, such as money and clientage: affinities and networks were built up, which at worst contributed to the lack of political stability in fifteenth-century England at times of royal weakness. McFarlane's work remains exceptionally important in its own right, and essential reading for anyone working in the field. Equally significant is the fact that McFarlane's distinctive approach was inherited by the many he taught and in turn by their own postgraduate students, becoming a model for fifteenth-century historical studies well beyond his own death. This led to a proliferation of studies of individual magnates and of their affinities, and of county-based analyses of noble and gentry networks.

In recent times there has been questioning of the approach of McFarlane himself and also of the way his successors have interpreted and emulated both his philosophy and his methodology. The fifteenth-century colloquium held at Durham in 1993 was, as the title of its proceedings suggests, an attempt to evaluate his legacy. As the editors state, 'Now his legacy is being questioned, and rightly so, especially by a younger generation of scholars who are but indirectly his inheritors. Has the very proliferation of theses and narrowly-focused studies, exploiting precisely those rich sources of documentation which he first explored, led his heirs to lose sight of the wood for the trees? Have they followed each other too blindly down the cul-de-sac of 'patronage studies'? Has McFarlane been misconstrued? Was he always correct in his judgements and conclusions? Was he even going in the right direction? This volume addresses these questions and asks whither now'. In Christine Carpenter's contribution, 'Political and Constitutional History: Before and after McFarlane', we see the most overt criticism of McFarlane and the 'McFarlanites', although it is accompanied by a fascinating historiographical investigation of how McFarlane came to the views and approaches he did. Here we have in a nutshell not only the influences on him but also an appreciation of English academic traditions 'before Mcfarlane' relating to the study of

late medieval history, when the Whiggish emphasis on the history of the constitution, governmental administration, and representation within a parliamentary system predominated. But Carpenter's piece was also aimed at proselytizing for it put forward a plea for the return of constitutional history to centre stage, 'not only the history McFarlane inherited from the Whigs and rejected but, following McFarlane, something far more difficult and challenging, a constitutional history conceived in terms of the world that our late medieval protagonists knew and grappled with'.

To some degree Carpenter's observations were presaged in Edward Powell's contribution to the 1989 colloquium at Manchester, 'After McFarlane: the poverty of patronage and the case for constitutional history'.[8] Most importantly, Powell challenged 'one of the basic assumptions deriving from the use of patronage as a tool of historical analysis. This is the belief that the formal machinery of government and the informal machinery of patronage formed two distinct and exclusive systems: on the one hand an official bureaucracy and judicial structure theoretically dedicated to the enforcement of royal power and the maintenance of the public interest in justice and defence; on the other hand a web of personal relationships devoted to private gain and self-advancement'. That both Powell and Carpenter were associated with Cambridge is significant, for it is there that the new wave of emphasis on constitutional history has perhaps been devised and developed as a counterblast to the Oxford-originating McFarlane approach.[9] *Henry VI and the Politics of Kingship*, a recent monograph which perhaps best epitomises this new 'constitutional' approach to the fifteenth-century, is the work of another product of the Cambridge stable, John Watts.[10] The first three chapters of Watt's book are devoted to a discussion of the language of politics, 'the scheme of values, expectations and practices which shaped the relations of king and nobility in this period', fulfilling Carpenter's desire cited above relating to 'terms ... which our late medieval protagonists knew and grappled with'. The events of the reign are then analysed with such concepts in mind, and the resulting conclusion is essentially contrary to that commonly upheld by the McFarlanites. For Watts, 'The crisis of Henry VI's reign was not brought about by over mighty subjects, by the misapplication of patronage, by defeat in war, by dynastic struggle: or by financial insolvency. Its fundamental cause was truly constitutional: the inability of the monarchy, a means for the satisfaction of the public interests in the body of a single man, to

adjust to one of the possible extremes of human frailty'. This new approach is certainly refreshing, thoughtful and well-researched (it uses different materials as well as looking at old sources in new ways) and invites a serious reconsideration of certain central tenets of fifteenth-century politics. The debate will no doubt continue for some time but can only stimulate further research in what is already a lively and popular field of activity.

To return to 'The Fifteenth-Century Series'. The nature of the fifteenth-century colloquia ought to ensure that these volumes contain a reasonably representative sample of what is now going on in terms of historical research into this period. What do they suggest about the current state of play? To what extent do they reveal the survival and perpetuation of the McFarlane approach, the penetration of the new 'Cambridge constitutionalists', or indeed other trends in historical interests and methodologies. Where are fifteenth-century historical studies going?

It would be fair to say that the volumes contain much less on topics such as patronage and nobility than was once the fashion, but this style of approach lives on and should by no means be dismissed as old fashioned or inappropriate. In *The McFarlane Legacy* Simon Payling expands upon and corrects McFarlane's observations on the development of the late medieval marriage settlement which preserved the interests of the future heir of the marriage by placing 'restrictions on the freedom of alienation of the groom's father'. No one doubts the continuing importance to the nobility and gentry of family and lineage to which McFarlane gave emphasis. In the same volume Linda Clark gives us a judicious review of 'Magnates and their affinities in the Parliaments of 1386-1421' based upon the prosopographical approach to Members of Parliament stimulated by Lewis Namier. There is much here that is typical of the McFarlane line, showing interconnections between people, the influence of lords in elections and so on, but there is also a constitutional line. Lords and Commons were interdependent but much management of Parliament was needed. This was assisted, Clark argues, by links between lords and knights, but the Lower House was still difficult to control, partly because of the role of the lawyers and merchants who represented towns, and even lords powerful in their locality might wield little influence in this parliamentary context. In *Crown, Government and the People*, Helen Castor's discussion of 'The Duchy of Lancaster and the Rule of East Anglia 1399-1440: A prologue to the Paston letters' also shows how

clientage and 'traditional and legitimate structures of power' operated together but were complementary rather than contradictory or conflicting. This serves as a solid practical exemplification of Edward Powell's observation cited earlier. East Anglian studies have to date been dominated by the picture presented in the Paston letters, which includes the portrayal of William de la Pole as illegally exploiting his national position for the sake of local power and dominance. Instead, as Castor shows by her study of what preceded de la Pole's period of ascendancy 'the earl did not exploit his position in central government to subvert established political hierarchies in the region: rather he represented those hierarchies'.

Clark and Castor look at major issues through administrative and governmental structures. Our appreciation of the role and position of parliament and of its members has already been boosted considerably by the four-volume study of *The House of Commons 1386-1422*, also published by Sutton.[11] In Castor's case, the 'institution' is the duchy of Lancaster, essentially a noble structure which became royal as a result of the usurpation of Henry IV, and which has received scant historical attention since the pioneering days of Somerville.[12] There is certainly more potential here, as also relating to the duchy of Cornwall, although it is pleasing to see that the earldom of Chester is already engaging a goodly number of historians, as is revealed by four papers in *Courts, Counties and the Capital* and one in *Crown, Government and People*. Structures are perhaps coming to the fore in a new way. If the Order of the Garter can be included under the heading of 'governmental structures' – it does, after all, constitute a splendid example of patronage operating within an institutional format – then Hugh Collins' study in *Crown, Government and People* provides another useful example of how such themes coincide and coalesce. Surprisingly little research has been done on the Garter which makes this overview of the Order's 'practical utility in English politics' all the more significant. Collins adds a further piece to the complex jigsaw of the royal affinity. Recent writers, most notably Chris Given-Wilson, have been making much more of the king's direct and legitimate use of patronage in periods of strong as well as of weak monarchy, redressing the balance, perhaps, of McFarlane's tendency towards a noble-centred approach.[13] Contemporary ideas and concepts are also stressed: Collins concludes that the idealistic aspirations and objectives of the Order were as much a key to its success and longevity as its practical function as an instrument of royal policy.

Patronage and collective action were not necessarily indicators of corruption and partiality but might be (as McFarlane himself realised but perhaps failed to develop fully in his discussion of the nobility and chivalry) an expression of the highest ideals.

McFarlane had given considerable thought to the king in this period if not, it must be admitted, to kingship.[14] In this latter area, therefore, the new constitutional approach has much merit. McFarlane tended to see kings in terms of personalities, of successes and failures. Edward II, Richard II, and Henry VI, as he put it (and as cited in Anthony Gross's contribution to *The McFarlane Legacy*, 'The Fallibilities of the English kings'), 'were the penalties that monarchy paid for its dependence upon the chances of heredity'. Gross shows how writers have not only emphasised materialist reasons for the crises of the period but also re-evaluated the nature and concept of monarchy *per se*. He concludes that 'at least after the dynastic upheaval caused by the usurpation of 1399, there was an entrenched moral and ideological malaise that was beyond the capacity of one monarch to rectify', and he makes suggestions as to why the Tudors succeeded where the Lancastrians and Yorkists failed. Whilst it is possible to talk in broad terms about kings as successes or failures, each had elements of both present in their rule and personalities. As is well known, Richard III was both before and after his accession, a great, and apparently successful northern magnate. In *The North of England in the Age of Richard III*, Sandy Grant stresses the significance of Richard's northern interests in his impressively detailed study of the king's relations with Scotland. Here the upshot is that Richard was tough, diligent and successful (the much contested Berwick, recovered by Richard as duke of Gloucester has remained in English hands ever since), but that 'his main effect on both Anglo-French and Anglo-Scottish relations was to take them back to the era of the Hundred Years War and the Scottish Wars of Independence. He met his death in battle against an essentially Franco-Scottish army'. The international dimension remains central, as indeed it should, to a study of fifteenth-century kingship. Anthony Tuck's examination of 'Henry IV and Europe' in *The McFarlane Legacy* adds useful details to McFarlane's own appreciation of the usurper's need to gain international recognition of his regime.

The themes of patronage and kingship are brought together by Dominic Luckett's study of 'Patronage, Violence and Revolt in the reign of Henry VII' in *Crown, Government and People*. As the author points out, Henry had difficult decisions to make concerning the

distribution of patronage in the early years of his reign, given the
supporters he had to reward without causing the alienation of his new
subjects in general. He did not want to repeat Richard III's mistake of
operating 'too narrow a patronage policy', which, as Horrox had
shown, gave too much to northerners.[15] Luckett chooses to focus on
the counties of central southern England and comes to the conclusion
that 'the young and inexperienced King Henry distributed his largesse
in an extremely ad hoc way'. Important local differences are pointed
out, and the author deals with the difficult issue of explaining why
popular rebellion erupted in 1497 in the very shires where Henry had
enjoyed most support in 1485. 'In the shires where rebellion took
hold, Henry had not just failed to enlarge his base of support since
Bosworth, he had actually succeeded in limiting it'. Indeed, it would
seem that Henry had been no more adept than Richard and had relied on
'a dangerously narrow base of support'. Only after 1497, Luckett
argues, did the king 'move away from favour to coercion, and a more
aggressive statecraft'. Patronage was not enough in itself to ensure
royal control.

But had it ever been so for usurpers? Philip Morgan's 'Henry IV
and the shadow of Richard II' in *Crown, Government and People*
shows that claims of Richard's bodily survival or ghostly presence had
to be, and were, taken seriously. Astrology, prophecy and superstition
were amongst the influences on action, belief and political language, a
point which Gross also stresses in the paper noted earlier and in his
recent more extended study.[16] The political saint was quite a feature of
the time, as Simon Walker's superbly researched contribution to *The
McFarlane legacy*, 'Political Saints in Later Medieval England'
demonstrates. Whereas Richard's ghost as portrayed by Morgan was a
force for disunity, Walker argues that political saints could be a force
for unity 'seeking to effect the recreation of concord in a disordered
body politic by the reintegration of the defeated and marginalised'. He
adds a rejoinder – all the more timely in that our period is too often
characterised as one of conflict and disunity – that 'late medieval
English society was also rich in the resources of compromise and
conciliation'. (It is worth noting that a strong theme in Watts' recent
study of Henry VI is how everyone tried to make monarchical
government work, and to some degree, hoped for the best even when
Henry VI plainly showed his incompetence). Kings tolerated even the
cults of those who had been their enemies: as Walker puts it, 'far from
being a threat to royal authority, they provided an important point of

contact with a diverse popular audience, a potentially significant resource in the constant dialogue of rulers and ruled by which a polity as varied and sophisticated as later medieval England had necessarily to be governed.'

A further two papers in these volumes remind us that politics did impinge upon the lower orders. Doig's 'Propaganda, public opinion and the siege of Calais in 1436' in *Crown, Government and People* shows the mechanisms which the crown had at its disposal, and considers them 'sophisticated and efficient', testimony to the fact that public opinion was a factor to be courted and counted. Using the case study of the response to the congress of Arras, where the Anglo-Burgundian alliance finally faltered, he demonstrates that 'the crown placed the national agenda before the mass of the population frequently and effectively.' His conclusion is also instructive, especially in the light of the recent criticisms of, and challenges to, the McFarlane approach. 'This is a point which tends to be muted or sometimes contradicted in local studies of the gentry. Such studies are important, indeed crucial, to extending our understanding of the fifteenth century: however they tend to emphasise the limited horizons and localized concerns of their subjects'. In *The McFarlane Legacy*, Isabel Harvey addresses the difficult question, 'Was there popular politics in fifteenth-century England?' She also points out the shortcomings of the 'patronage and affinity' approach, for although 'in recent decades more emphasis has been laid on the broader based communities who existed below the magnates, these gentry have been revealed themselves as members of the same ruling elite'. This elite was small, representing only 2% of the total population. What of the rest? Whilst we can know what the government told its subjects, we cannot be too sure what the latter really thought. But as Harvey indicates 'common people entered the political sphere with their requests and grievances'. Economic and social changes do seem to have increased political awareness, and the government was undoubtedly afraid of 'the growing political and social confidence of the people'. She concludes that 'credulous and volatile they may have been, but their beliefs and actions told upon the politics of fifteenth-century England'.

It would be going too far to suggest that a novel wave of interest in the lower orders has developed. These volumes do not contain any articles on the peasantry or on manorial issues. Indeed it would be fair to say that the fifteenth-century colloquia have not so far embraced much in the way of economic history. Even the social history they

contain has tended to be centred on the upper strata of society. *Crown, Government and People* contains two papers on old age, a topic of research which has been engaging more attention of late.[17] But the bias and accessibility of sources means that it is more feasible to look even here at the upper orders. In a sensitive and entertaining piece, Rosenthal uses wills and inquisitions post mortem to investigate how often three generations coexisted, in other words how many grandparents would have lived long enough to see, let alone enjoy, their grandchildren. Margaret Wade Labarge exploits another type of source, the treatise, with her study of *Gerontocomia, On the Care of the Aged*: A fifteenth-century Italian guide by Gabriele Zerbi (1445-1505), a book which contains the usual mix, by modern standards, of sensible advice and frighteningly inappropriate remedies.

Much scope exists for further study of late medieval towns. It is pleasing to see here several useful case studies. In *Crown, Government and People*, Matthew Davis explores 'The tailors of London: corporate charity in the late medieval town', which also tells us much about provision for care of the elderly. It stresses the need to look at institutions such as gilds and fraternities when examining charitable activity: 'concentration upon the efforts of individuals, particularly through studies of testamentary provisions, only reveals half the picture'. In *Courts, Counties and the Capital*, Caroline Barron looks at the opposite end of the age spectrum with 'The education and training of girls in fifteenth-century London', making the most of all too slender references to women in the sources. Jane Laughton undertakes a similar task in her study of 'The alewives of later medieval Chester'. Both articles gain strength from being set firmly in context. These are not merely opportunities to look at women, but at women in the community. Fifteenth-century historians have been no less active than their counterparts elsewhere in rescuing women from the historical scrap heap. In *Crown, Government and People* Diana Dunn provides a much-needed reassessment of the role of Margaret of Anjou, suggesting that before 1453 she was 'a dutiful young wife and effective distributor of patronage rather than ... an imperious and passionate power-seeker'. Another queen with a generally bad historical reputation, Isabeau of Bavaria, Queen of France 1385-1422, undergoes a similar rehabilitation in Rachel Gibbons' study of the queen's piety *Courts, Counties and the Capital*. By means of such articles we are developing a much more rounded picture of medieval women, although it must be admitted that neither Margaret nor

Isabeau was typical of the customary experience of queenship let alone of medieval womanhood as a whole. But serious study of the exceptional roles they were forced to adopt, in both cases by reason of their husband's madness, can inform patronage-centred and constitutional studies alike. The role of the queen and of the royal family in general deserves more attention in both schools of thought.

Those who favour a renewed attention to constitutional history have elsewhere lamented the relative lack of attention paid to law and to legal institutions, pointing out that increased study of this subject would assist in the fuller understanding of patronage and of royal government in practice.[18] Older studies tended to use legal records to show the extent of corruption and the level of violence, both themes being seen as typifying much of the century. There has always been some irony in this. Can we say a century is violent when much of the evidence for this derives from trial records? Can we conclude that the judicial system was necessarily corrupt and ineffective when men apparently still had confidence in it, as is revealed by their willingness to have recourse to the law and by the growing significance of lawyers as a professional and social group? These elements are not mutually incompatible if one believes that the judicial system had been corrupted to serve the needs of some and to damage those of others, but there is undoubtedly a need for continuing research in this area. It is thus pleasing to see a number of papers in this area. Rosemary Hayes study of 'Ancient Indictments for the North of England 1461-1509' in *The North of England in the Age of Richard III* demonstrates by detailed quantitative study that 'those who should have been conserving, and indeed were, in many cases, actually commissioned to conserve, the king's peace, were the very ones who disturbed it most'. The exact significance of this needs further study, as does the finding that there were proportionately more indictments from the north in the reign of Henry VII than under the Yorkists. As Hayes points out, we return to the central dilemma facing the use of legal records. Does the difference indicate the north was more law-abiding under the Yorkists, or that it was at that stage more out of royal control than it was to be later?

Courts, Counties and the Capital contains several contributions based on legal records. Carrie Smith reassesses the historical value of the coroners' rolls, suggesting that they can tell us 'about community solidarity and the astuteness of community responses to royal officials'. It is undoubtedly worth stressing just how valuable legal

records are as one of the few sources to allow a penetration into the minds and *mores* of the lower orders. A further insight into awareness of law, particularly relating to land tenure, and to belief in the efficacy of the written record is revealed by Deborah Marsh's study of information gathering in later medieval Cheshire which also tells us much about the fifteenth-century gentleman's view of history. Another Cheshire contribution by David Tilsley, 'Arbitration in gentry disputes: the case of Buclow Hundred in Cheshire 1400-1465', shows how arbitration was linked to litigation and how it was central to the resolution of gentry disputes. Several local studies have now highlighted the importance of arbitration in the fifteenth-century, reminding us that violence was not the only way to solve disputes.[19] Much can be gained from more locally focused studies, and here Christine Newman's analysis of the various court rolls of the liberty of Allertonshire in North Yorkshire in *The North of England in the Age of Richard III* is revealing. It demonstrates just how regulated society was and how generally law-abiding. Whilst she admits that 'by their very nature, sources such as court rolls do tend to impose a heightened and probably exaggerated sense of order and control upon the issue with which they deal', she feels justified in suggesting that the general picture is of coherence and continuity 'in a society where, for the great majority of the population, the unremitting round of everyday economic and social activity carried on regardless of the political upheavals of the age'. Structures and institutions could here, therefore, coexist peacefully within and alongside networks of friendship and clientage.

'Relationships between court and country, the centre and the provinces' (as Pollard puts it) have been central to fifteenth-century studies since the first generation of McFarlanites. Charles Ross's own doctoral work was on the Yorkshire baronage. But whereas it was often assumed that the provinces did their own thing, contributing to the undermining of central authority, recent work is tending to emphasise the strength of royal control, again by virtue of accepted institutions and procedures. Pollard's contribution to *The North of England in the Age of Richard III,* focusing on the Palatinate of Durham, another structure which was in need of further work, suggests that 'the crown always had Durham at its disposal. It was not forced in the fifteenth century to surrender control over the Palatinate, or to abandon the practice of promoting of its own servants'. The north is no longer seen as 'another country', characterised by disorder and

separatism. The proximity to the Scottish enemy and its remoteness meant that it would be a problem for any king, as Henry Summerson shows in the same volume with his study of Carlisle and the West March, yet royal power in the region was real albeit fluctuating according to the 'policy and personality of the monarch wielding it'. Barrie Dobson's discussion of 'Politics and the Church in the fifteenth-century north' reinforces the conclusions of both Pollard and Summerson. Tim Thornton's contribution to *Courts, Counties and the Capital*, 'Local equity jurisdictions in the territories of the English crown: the Palatinate of Chester, 1450-1540' shows that this area was also firmly royal not by virtue of the central, Westminster-based authority but because of the position of the king or Prince of Wales as earl. Penny Tucker's study of the 'Relationship between London's courts and the Westminster courts in the reign of Edward IV' in the same volume shows the survival of London's privileges in legal jurisdiction as a positive, conflict-free phenomenon rather than one riddled with abuse. Finally, Maureen Jurkowski's study in *Crown, Government and the People* of 'Lancastrian royal service, Lollardy and forgery: the career of Thomas Tykhill', brings us full circle in that it offers a prosopographical approach to a lawyer and royal administrator fortunate enough to enjoy royal, queenly and princely patronage despite his being, in terms of religious inclinations, a successor of K.B.McFarlane's Lollard knights.

It would be unfair to ask whether these volumes hang together, for the diversity of their subject matter means that they are united only by a common chronological focus. Many of the articles come from the PhD stable: they are firmly based on intensive documentary study but can offer no more than case studies of what one hopes will be developed more fully in monograph form. Some articles help to fill gaps in our knowledge of the fifteenth century. Several will provide grist to the mill of future synthesizers called upon to write about the century as a whole or about thematic aspects of late medieval life. In terms of approach, it is pleasing to see that the dogma of a specific approach has not displaced the sheer graft of research. Whilst there are differences of emphasis, this is serving to enrich rather than to rewrite. There is a sense in which the mind of the fifteenth-century historian has been broadened by debate and also by the expansion in topics deemed worthy of consideration. As Dunn suggests in her introduction to *Courts, Counties and the Capital* 'the tools at the historian's disposal should be widened to embrace literature, drama and political

texts as well as the more commonly used archival material'. That this is being done is revealed by David Mills' study of the Chester Mystery plays and David Rundle's consideration of humanist texts in fifteenth-century England in this very volume. The growing juxtaposition of literary and historical study is also well evidenced in Jonathan Hughes' study of northern religious life and the piety of Richard III in *The North of England in the Age of Richard III*. Here too there is fascinating study of art historical themes such as the jewellery sported by Richard in his various portraits which may also have religious connections and connotations.

There is no danger, therefore, that fifteenth-century historical studies show any sign of flagging and the programme for the forthcoming junior event at Huddersfield (September 1997) is certain proof of this, with no less than 29 contributors on themes as diverse as watermills in Berkshire and the Scottish parliament. Much has been done already, much is being done now, and yet there remains much still to be done, for the century offers an abundance of untapped source materials. Moreover as Gerald Harriss's stimulating keynote article in *The McFarlane Legacy* makes clear, 'fifteenth-century England did not operate as a political unit but as a series of political contexts'. He also reminds us that it went through 'a series of formative experiences'. A lot happened in the fifteenth century! Sutton Publishing, who are also releasing an ever increasing portfolio of extended studies of the period, deserve considerable credit for disseminating by means of 'The Fifteenth Century Series' much small scale work which might otherwise be hidden in unpublished theses. It is a pity, perhaps, that the volumes are set at a price which threatens to rule out extensive purchase by individuals, but they are beautifully produced, with excellently full annotation. As a participant in the field of fifteenth-century historical studies I can only conclude by saying how pleasing it is to see that the Cinderella once sitting neglected by the fire in her rags has finally arrived at the ball in her finery.

NOTES

[1] *Fifteenth Century England 1399-1509. Studies in Politics and Society*, edited by S.B. Chrimes, C.D. Ross and R.A. Griffiths. Originally published in 1972 by Manchester University Press. Second edition, Alan Sutton Publishing, Stroud 1995, reviewed in *Reading Medieval Studies*, 1997.

[2] A. Curry, 'The First English Standing Army? Military Organization in Lancastrian Normandy, 1420-1450', in *Patronage, Pedigree and Power in Later Medieval England*, edited by Charles Ross (Alan Sutton Publishing, Gloucester, 1979), pp. 193-214. After the Cardiff event of 1970, a meeting was held at Bristol but its papers were not published. In 1976 an Anglo-French colloquium was held at Sheffield in 1976 with its papers appearing later as *The Crown and Local Communities in England and France in the Fifteenth Century*, edited by J.R.L. Highfield and Robin Jeffs (Alan Sutton Publishing, Gloucester 1981) .

[3] *The Church, Politics and Patronage in the Fifteenth Century*, edited by R.B.Dobson (Alan Sutton Publishing, Gloucester, 1984);*Gentry and Lesser Nobility in Later Medieval England*, edited by Michael Jones (Alan Sutton Publishing, Gloucester, 1986); *Towns and Townspeople in the Fifteenth Century*, edited by John A.F.Thomson (Alan Sutton Publishing, Gloucester, 1988); *Enterprise and Individuals in Fifteenth-Century England*, edited by Jennifer Kermode (Alan Sutton Publishing, Stroud, 1991); *England and the Low Countries in the Late Middle Ages*, edited by Caroline Barron and Nigel Saul (Alan Sutton Publishing, Stroud, 1995).

[4] *Patronage, Crown and the Provinces in Later Medieval England*, edited by Ralph A. Griffiths (Alan Sutton Publishing, Gloucester 1981); *Property and Politics. Essays in Later Medieval English History*, edited by A.J. Pollard (Alan Sutton Publishing, Gloucester 1984); *Profit, Piety and the Professions in Later Medieval England*, edited by Michael A. Hicks (Alan Sutton Publishing, Gloucester 1990); *Trade, Devotion and Governance. Papers in Later Medieval History*, ed. Dorothy J. Clayton, Richard G. Davies and Peter McNiven (Alan Sutton Publishing, Stroud, 1994).

[5] The Battle Conference on Anglo-Norman Studies also first convened in 1978. Scholars of the thirteenth century started to meet regularly from 1985.

[6] *Kings and Nobles in the Later Middle Ages. A Tribute to Charles Ross*, edited by Ralph A. Griffiths and James Sherborne.

[7] *The Nobility of Later Medieval England. The Ford Lectures for 1953 and Related Studies* (Clarendon Press,Oxford, 1973).

[8] *Trade, Devotion and Governance*, pp. 1-16.

[9] Powell's initial research was at Oxford, but he was subsequently associated with Downing College, Cambridge.

[10] Cambridge University Press, 1996. Another excellent work which stresses the contemporary view is *Fifteenth-Century Attitudes*.

Perceptions of Society in late medieval England, edited by Rosemary Horrox (Cambridge University Press, 1994).

[11] Edited by J.S.Roskell, C. Rawcliffe and L. Clark (1993).

[12] R. Somerville, *History of the Duchy of Lancaster*, vol.ume 1, 1265-1603 (London, 1953).

[13] *The Royal Household and the King's Affinity. Service, Politics and Finance in England 1360-1413* (Yale University Press1986). Given-Wilson's *The English Nobility in the Late Middle Ages* (Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1987) provides an update of McFarlane's own work on this subject based upon the research of the intervening thirty years, and also focuses more obviously on the lower nobility.

[14] *Lancastrian Kings and Lollard Knights* (Clarendon Press, Oxford, 1972).

[15] R. Horrox, *Richard III. A Study in Service* (Cambridge University Press, 1989).

[16] A. Gross, *The Dissolution of the Lancastrian Kingship: Sir John Fortescue and the crisis of monarchy in fifteenth-century England* (Paul Watkins Press, Stamford, 1996).

[17] J.T. Rosenthal, *Old Age in late medieval England* (University of Pennsylvania Press, Philadelphia, 1996); Shulamith Shahar, *Growing Old in the Middle Ages* (Roultledge, 1997, orig, pulbished in Hebrew, Tel Aviv, 1995).

[18] E. Powell, 'After 'After McFarlane': the Poverty of patronage and the case for constitutional history', in *Trade, Devotion and Governance. Papers in Late Medieval History*, p. 13. See his own *Kingship, Law and Soceity: Criminal Justice in the reign of Henry V* (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1989).

[19] Full references are given in the first footnote of Tilsley's article.