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of the social system of the people of the Northern Isles, their beliefs and customs, seasonal celebrations, weddings and funerals, nicknames, education and religion, their views of the world, all the things that make up the business of living as opposed to or in parallel with working. It soon became evident that the presentation of an adequate cross-section of the basic information on working life and organisation was more than enough for one book. The rest must remain for some other time.' (p. 623) Many would share with me in hoping that the time will come soon.

Doreen J. Waugh

The Diary of Patrick Fea of Stove, Orkney, 1766-96

Transcribed and edited by
W.S. Hewison.

Tuckwell Press, East Linton,
Scotland, 1997.

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This edition of an eighteenth-century Orkney farmer's diary forms Volume 5 in the series *Sources in Local History* sponsored by the European Ethnological Research Centre, which is based at the National Museums of Scotland under the aegis of Professor Alexander Fenton.

In his foreword Professor Fenton recalls that the transcript of Patrick Fea's diary proved 'a first-class source of Orkney words' for the Scottish National Dictionary, as well as providing a wealth of material for his own ethnological researches on the Northern Isles. Scholarly interest in the data to be gleaned from farmers' diaries and account-books has greatly increased in recent years, now that

these highly personalised and localised source materials have largely been replaced by computerised records and official questionnaires with boxes to tick, and research projects and conferences are organised under the auspices of the International Association for Research on Peasant Diaries. One wonders what Patrick Fea would have made of it all!

The editor of the diaries, W.S. Hewison, is also their owner, and with thirty years' service on the editorial staff of the *Orcadian* newspaper behind him, he is clearly well-qualified for the task of preparing them for publication. His fifty-six page Introduction belies its modest title, being a veritable treasure-trove of genealogical, geographical, historical and socio-economic information about the Fea family and their setting in place and time, with additional sections on Orkney weights and measures and the functioning of the cottar system on Sanday.

The actual diary entries take up almost 500 pages of

text, and are written in the terse, abbreviated style of a busy farmer. Weather and work are inextricably intertwined:

A brisk gale of wind all day done wt ploughing the Short land and a part of the Pow the Nth Sheed of Volyar & harrowed it planted the head rig of the Sands wt Potatoes yt day 1 Firken and about 3 mks more.

Like most countrymen Mr. Fea has a sharp eye for the natural phenomena of his locality:

A gale of wd all day one thing I observed this day that I never saw or heard of befor That the Sea for 12 Hours never fell or Rose in the Bay of Stove above a foot.

As the owner of three boats he is by no means cut off in his northern outpost, and many entries speak of inter-island travel and sociable encounters with neighbours and extended family. Impassable roads frequently make sea travel a necessity, and, as Hewison points out,

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similar conditions have arisen in more recent times: e.g in January 1955, when the only way to travel between Kirkwall and Stromness was by hastily commandeered fishing-boat. Given the topography and climate of Orkney, some degree of continuity between past and present is inevitable, and these diaries by no means present a quaint picture of a long-vanished era.

Natural disasters and exotic shipwrecks add a touch of colour to the general picture of unrelenting toil, and elicit a degree of feeling from the diarist that is absent in the laconic accounts of ploughing and harvesting:

A very violent gale or rather a Storm att NW & WNW wt severe haill and Snow no work done in the forenoon got ane Express from Westove advising a large Ship from Archangel bound for Amsterdam being wrecked upon Rive about 3 in the Morning the Capt & 12 men being drowned only one man Saved her loading consisting of 100 lasts of Rye 100 lasts of Sink Lead 50 lasts of matts & 49 large Casks Tallow wherof saved

only 13 Casks of Tallow by his appointment I went there befor Dinner and Seed the Wreckt & some of the dead men a very mournful Sight to See...

This edition of *The Diary of Patrick Fea of Stove* reflects great credit on its editor and publisher alike, and testifies to the contribution that the best kind of local historian, untrammled by sentimental parochialism, can make to our understanding of the past.

Harry D. Watson