

## Start 'em young

I FELT compelled to share this with you—a photograph taken this morning (*below*). This is my daughter Imogen Hawkins-Coates, 19 months old and an avid fan of COUNTRY LIFE. What better way for a young lady to start her morning? One day, when she reaches the age of maturity, we hope to have her photograph on the Frontispiece page.

Robert Burchett-Coates, by email



Paul Barker; Oleg Kozlov/Alamy; Sir James Cropper/Hunting Scraps: The Diary of Charles James Cropper; London Stereoscopic Company/Getty Images; Superstock/Alamy

## Parish poverty

JOHN MARTIN ROBINSON'S exemplary analysis of Michelmersh Court (*March 12*) contains an uncharacteristic slip. Queen Anne's Tory Ministers did not introduce tithes. That system was very much older and persisted into the 20th century. The tragedy of the Church of England is that, when tithes were abolished by buying out by way of commutation, it was at the very bottom of agricultural depression with pitiful compensation. The Endowments and Glebe Measure 1976 then confiscated separate endowments of parishes and imposed a grim equal poverty upon all. Educated Anglican clergy residing in comfort in the country are now, sadly, rare.

Roger Evans, London

## COUNTRY LIFE APRIL 2

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# Food and farming need women leaders

THE countryside is still dominated by agriculture. It's shaped our landscape, fed our people and still provides its financial base. Indeed, the food industry, more widely defined, is one of Britain's largest employers and a significant generator of exports. Its importance to the economy will increase as demand grows and volatility of supply is driven by political uncertainty and more frequent extreme weather. Drought in Australia or turmoil in the Ukraine will only add to the importance of home production and processing. No wonder our retail and food-manufacturing giants are urgently seeking to consolidate their home base and extend their commitment to British farming.

It is in this expansive context that the spotlight is bound to be focused on the way the food and agriculture industry works and how far its businesses and institutions properly reflect the interests of producers, manufacturers and consumers. Any such consideration reveals almost total gender exclusiveness. Agromenes cannot fairly be accused of political correctness. Fashionable attitudes to balance and equality do not weigh with him against the primacy of appointment on the basis of excellence. Nonetheless, any organisation that undervalues the contribution of women is bound itself to underperform. And the position of women in the food and farming industry is a disgrace. That's not only bad for women, but thoroughly bad for the industry.

The CLA has never had a female president. Nor has the NFU, despite the fact that 23,000 women farm in their own right. Indeed, Minette Batters, who was elected deputy president earlier this year, is the first woman to hold national office in the organisation. Soil Association boss Helen Browning is a rare example of a woman at the head of an important grouping. The recent

appointment of Christine Tacon as the first supermarket ombudsman was the proper recognition for a woman who had already successfully run the Co-op farms for many years. She was, and remains, a rare example of a woman in a leadership role in food and agriculture. Even more exceptional has been the choice of Dame Helen Ghosh to follow Dame Fiona Reynolds as director-general of the National Trust. Two women in a row must be unique!

Yet such women as there are in the industry are showing real leadership. Melanie Leech has led the Food and Drink Federation (FDF) through some difficult years with real skill; Fiona Kendrick

successfully heads Nestlé UK, one of the key companies in FDF membership; and Penny Hughes, non-executive director of Morrisons, has had a long and successful career. There are, of course, less happy examples, such as Irene Rosenfeld, the CEO of Mondelez, whose management style, exemplified in the takeover of Cadbury,

has conformed to the worst of male exemplars. However, for the most part, women have shown how much they can contribute to businesses whose consumers are overwhelmingly female.

And that's the peculiarity. If ever there was an industry that ought to be in touch with women, it is the food industry. It's simply an unacceptable oddity that, where politicians of Right and Left have given us two female Secretaries of State responsible for food and agriculture, none of the industry's representative structures can claim anything like that record. It's not enough to say that there are no obvious barriers to women—there are simply too few role models to make emulation by young girls very easy. The fact is that food and farming need women leaders and have to take concerted measures to ensure that they find them.

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