remarkable success of the National Trust. She was keen that it should be called a trust because that would ‘bring forward its benevolent . . . character’. She also believed that the new organisation should develop and grow like her housing initiatives, stone by stone, property by property. In a concluding chapter, Ben Cowell shows how it was her friendship with Robert Hunter, a senior civil servant, which led to the creation of a charity that was independent of government, but with considerable powers granted by Parliament and set out in the National Trust Act of 1907. It is this body which has become a model for similar organisations around the world.

Her achievements, as well as her sometimes controversial housing initiatives, justify these finely nuanced essays. Hill emerges from their scrutiny as a more sympathetic figure than her detractors allow, and with her historical significance undiminished.

Merlin Waterson

doi:10.1017/S0956793316000145


In 1994, my research into the organic movement’s history led me to visit the Rev. David Peck. He had been a key figure in the Council for the Church and Countryside, a 1940s initiative advocating a reinvigorated rural society based on organic husbandry. When he introduced me to his wife and outlined my interests, she responded abruptly: ‘Nasty men in black shirts’, and disappeared. Mrs. Peck may well have been remembering Jorian Jenks in particular when she made this remark. Peck told me he had once shared accommodation with Jenks on Rolf Gardiner’s Dorset estate, and Philip Coupland reveals that Peck liked Jenks ‘immensely’ while being aware that, in late 1945, Jenks remained ‘an unrepentant fascist’.

Jenks was crucially important to the Soil Association’s early years, editing its journal from 1946 until his death in 1963, but the Association would prefer quietly to forget him, since he provides cheap ammunition for those wishing to tarnish its reputation. How was it that a leading Mosleyite could be acceptable in such an important role? And why should a blackshirt have embraced an ecological philosophy of agriculture?

Coupland’s biography answers these questions, though in a way that the organic movement may not find altogether comforting. He argues that Jenks’s political commitment was inseparable from his experiences as a farmer and his concerns about the future of British agriculture. The cover photograph of a mud-spattered Jenks standing by his horse and cart should not mislead us into imagining that he was some sort of yokel; his father was an academic authority on jurisprudence, one of whose students was William Beveridge. Jorian Jenks studied agriculture at Harper Adams College; spent much of the 1920s in New Zealand, where he became aware of the problems caused by soil erosion; and after returning to England studied with C. S. Orwin at Oxford’s Agricultural Economics Research Institute.
His time there, and his struggles as a Sussex farmer in the 1930s, convinced him that agriculture could not flourish under a system of capitalist free trade. Corporatism was the antidote, and from the mid-1930s onwards Jenks was an active member of the British Union of Fascists, becoming its Agricultural Adviser and undergoing wartime incarceration. On release, he struggled to find work as a journalist. Coupland traces the stages by which Jenks drew close to the organic movement, and examines his links with other blackshirt farmers after the war. Of major importance was Derek Stuckey, whose personal archives proved a treasure trove for Coupland. Jenks collaborated with Stuckey to produce the Rural Reconstruction Association’s 1955 report *Feeding the Fifty Million*.

Coupland’s detective work has been remarkable. Jenks’s complex family life is discussed in some detail, and the biography emphasises the centrality of Jenks’s Christian faith. For some, this will sit awkwardly with his fascism and his chilling comparison of Jews to rabbits. *Tout comprendre* may not be *tout pardonner*, but Coupland demonstrates that there was more subtlety and logic to Jenks’s ideas than the abusive term ‘fascist’ might lead us to expect.

Philip Conford
University of Leicester