

## REVIEWS

TOWN AND COUNTRY, VERULAMIUM AND THE ROMAN CHILTERNs by Keith Branigan, 152 pp. 90 figs and 31 half-tones, map on the inside cover. Spurbooks Ltd., 1973, £2.95.

This book is not intended, according to the author's preface, for the scholar or serious student. The kind of *haute vulgarisation* at which the French are so excellent is not common in Britain and indeed some scholars consider it beneath their dignity to attempt such essays. But it is very necessary that the public should be supplied with books of good quality if only to offset the 'coffee table' litter much of which is beautifully illustrated but sadly ill-informed. Dr. Branigan's brave attempt at a regional study for the general public must be welcomed, and considered at this level.

The chapters are arranged on a chronological basis as their headings indicate—'From Caesar to Claudius'—'Invasion, Rebellion and Romanisation'—'Catastrophe, Recovery and Stagnation'—'The Age of Constantine'—'Into the Dark Ages', with two further chapters on Farming and Everyday Life. Much of this evidence comes from the extensive excavations at Verulamium by Sir Mortimer Wheeler in the Thirties and those of Professor Frere more recently. Although the Catuvellauni were probably more sophisticated than most of the other British tribes, the process of Romanisation was slow, and not until the second half of the second century do the houses in town and country begin to display evidence in size, architectural treatment and decoration to be associated with a developed province of Rome. The third century is depicted here as one of stagnation and decay, following the argument first established by Wheeler, but not supported by the more recent work of Professor Frere, who was able to show some major private development soon after A.D. 275. This prompts Dr. Branigan to suggest a Gallic migration, but when all the evidence of third-century decay is critically re-examined, it will probably be found that the picture drawn by earlier investigation is overdrawn and distorted. The violent political upheavals would have caused changes in ownership of some of the large estates and businesses, and the serious currency inflation must have created difficulties.

Wheeler's view of the third century at Verulamium was based to a considerable extent on the evidence of the hoard of coins deposited in a 'ruined tower' in the city walls. But the evidence of his section (Pl.XXI) suggests that the tower had been deliberately demolished, since the destruction deposit continues above the outer wall of the tower after it had been reduced to ground level. The occasion for this would have been the building of the bastions in front of the wall, now generally dated to the end of the fourth century, when the defence of the towns was re-organised by Count Theodosius. In this case, the hoard of c. A.D. 273 could hardly have been deposited in a layer not laid down until c. 380. The only possible solutions are that either the reduction of the tower was earlier than 273 or that the hoard had been disturbed by those doing this work c. 380, which means that the coins could have had no value at this date. The position of the hoard over the reduced wall could not possibly mean that it was put into a tower in a state of collapse, but it places it firmly in a demolition layer. If the coins had been buried in this layer, the hole dug for them would have been observed and the proper conclusions drawn. The evidence of the decline in the houses is more difficult to assess, since layers which contain building debris, including fragments of roof slates and tiles are interpreted as 'collapse and abandonment', whereas the same effect could be

produced if in a reconstruction, an existing building was demolished and the material left on the site and levelled out before the new structure was erected.

There was certainly a great deal of construction taking place in the early fourth century, many buildings being in a totally different plan from the earlier ones and much of the work was inferior to that of the second century, a decline in standards found generally in the Empire at this time, except in the Imperial establishments and the great houses of the very wealthy. All this illustrates great social changes and a shift in the pattern of wealth, but it is doubtful if it also means that much of the city was in a ruinous condition at the end of the third century, and the amount of occupation material of the period would hardly suggest such a serious decline in population. The abandonment and decay found in villas is more probably due to amalgamation of estates with landowners' houses unoccupied and left to fall into ruin, demolished for their materials or turned over to the bailiff. The overall picture is one of a continued expansion of affluence, culminating in the Age of the House of Constantine, although wealth may have been concentrated in fewer hands and public patronage in the cities ceased.

The chapters on Farming and Everyday life are those most likely to prove interesting to the lay reader. There are many points of detail on which this reviewer could take issue with the author. The saucepan handle (Fig. 9), which is a *patera* is not a *patella*, is not necessarily a military object and could be second century, while among the jewellery of everyday life (Fig. 63) a decorated mount (No. 2) is a military stray. There has been no recognition of the relationship of the temple to the theatre at Verulamium and the implication in their historical development. This is why, in all probability, the Christians closed down the theatre and had it desecrated by its use as a rubbish dump for the Forum, at the same time converting the temple into another use. There is a useful classified bibliography and many illustrations, the quality of these, however, varies, some of the drawings being very poor and many of the plates suffer by not being on better quality paper; one wonders also if some (e.g. Figs. 42 and 55) are really necessary. The book is a very honest attempt at providing a work of popular appeal at a reasonable price and the sales will demonstrate its success or failure. The text is not too difficult, but assumes knowledge of words and terms by the reader (such as *mortaria*, demesne farms, *municipium* which are only partly and not accurately explained, etc.).

Graham Webster

THE BEACONSFIELD PARISH REGISTER. Beaconsfield and District Historical Society.

The admirable introduction speaks of thanks due "to a small group of the Society's members for the immense amount of time and care which they have devoted over a period of more than four years to the daunting task of preparing" this volume. They have refused to be daunted, and they and the Society are to be congratulated on producing this valuable piece of work. It is to be hoped that it will inspire other local history societies to emulate their example.

The substance of the book is derived from the parish registers from 1631 to 1837. But (a) some earlier burials noted by Lipscomb are added; (b) the parish register entries are supplemented by entries from the Bishop's Transcripts between 1575 and 1647, in another appendix; and (c) the marriages printed in Phillimore, vol. 5, are omitted. This method keeps the Parish Registers intact (except for the part abstracted by Phillimore); but it involves, for the enquirer, a good deal of turning to and fro.

There are some pages missing from the first volume of the register, which now begins with the baptisms of 1631. Familiar names soon appear, such as Aldridge and Idle, Pusey, Pitcher and Pepys. The reader may trace some of the ramifications

of the Waller family, in which the names Robert and Edmund persist. Not that they lacked imagination; one was named Praxhead and another Carret. We learn that, in Commonwealth times, Mr. John Pepys was appointed "Register", who must have been a descendant of that Richard Peppis who was Sir William Bulstrode's steward, and is mentioned in his will of 1527, a will which names also his servants William Cely and Robert Waller.

Beaconsfield, because of its situation and its numerous coaching inns, had an unusual number of births, marriages and deaths of "outsiders". Many "a stranger that came by pass" figures here: the burial, in January 1826, of the five-weeks-old son of "a pauper travelling to her parish in Somersetshire" recalls a Thomas Hardy story. Another visitor, "abode not known", arriving in 1819, "died of small pocks"; and the subsequent deaths from smallpox of several children of the parish are recorded. But the worst epidemic was one of typhus in 1811.

Some sections of the registers give a fascinating picture of the town by adding "Occupations", which range from chair-turner and riband manufacturer and soldier to excise-officer, musician, school master at the Sunday School, and gamekeeper to Sir Gore Ouseley Bt.

The Register is defective in the Commonwealth period, as so many are, and one wonders why? The Rector in 1634 wrote: "They have been so mistaught hereabouts that . . . they think there is scarce any necessity for the Sacrament of Baptism at all". But Calvinists were not generally indifferent to Baptism, and certainly not to Burials. A Dissenter is naturally interested to find a short section headed "Dissenters' Children 1707-1747", and there are numerous other references to Dissenters (including "John Butcher, a Dissenter and gingerbread baker"), and five names of Dissenting teachers, including the Rev. Samuel Clark, whose house was registered as a meeting-place in 1697, and who may be regarded as the first Minister of Beaconsfield United Reformed Church.

The work of transcription appears to have been done carefully and accurately; and again I express the hope that other Societies will follow.

G. C. Edmonds

LONG CRENDON. A SHORT HISTORY by Joyce Donald. Part I, To 1800 (1971). Part 2, 1800-1914 (1973).

The current increased interest in local history must be welcomed but it has unfortunately resulted in a number of highly unsatisfactory so-called village histories, of some use perhaps to the very young with a "project" on their hands, but basically superficial, unresearched and gossipy. Mrs Donald's two booklets are in quite a different category and will indeed be welcomed not only by the fortunate inhabitants of Long Crendon but by a much wider circle; they show how a village history should be written—with a mastery of all available sources used with knowledge and authority, but also with the affection and understanding that only a local author can bring to such a work.

There are nearly one hundred pages of text together with twenty well selected early photographs (though unfortunately printed facing the "wrong" way) and some map reproductions. The author has made excellent use of the long memories of some of the older villagers; some of these families have been in the village continuously for six centuries and their names—Towerseys, Shrimptons, Dodwells, Reynolds—occur again and again through her pages. These families were farmers, yeomen, even labourers, and we are mercifully spared long chronicles of manorial descents. Indeed, as Mrs Donald points out, from the death of Eleanor Marshall, Countess of Pembroke (and daughter of King John) in the thirteenth century the manor has been divided into three portions with the result that there has never been a resident manor-

ial family. Through the centuries this has clearly resulted in the village developing a spirit of independence which has persisted until to-day.

It is all here. The impact of Notley Abbey, the local building materials, the excitements of the Civil War, the high proportion of Dissenters, the needlemaking and lacemaking industries, the enclosures of 1827 and much more fascinating detail besides, for instance "The Holywood [sic] film star, Mae West, is descended from the West family of Long Crendon". Some errors have crept in. On page 35 of part I "Cottrill-Dormers sold out to George Greville of Wotton" should be "Cottrell-Dormers" and "George Grenville of Wotton" but all in all this is a first-class addition to the local history of Buckinghamshire. E.V.

A HISTORY OF MISSENDEN ABBEY by Elaine Kaye. Governors of the Missenden Abbey Adult Education College. 1973.

Miss Kaye, who was deputy Warden of Missenden Abbey for five years, has left on her departure for Oxford, an admirable short history of the Abbey. In fifty succinct and scholarly pages she traces its history through four centuries as a house of Augustinian Canons, another two as the home of the Fleetwood family, and then in succession, Oldhams, Aytons and Carringtons until its eventual and fortunate purchase by Bucks County Council in 1946. The 1944 Education Act had given power to local education authorities to set up Adult Education Colleges; the acknowledged success of Missenden Abbey in the last thirty years has fully justified the purchase and, incidentally, ensured the preservation of an historic and interesting house. Miss Kaye's account is most interesting; in particular she has unravelled for the first time the rebuilding, in Gothick style, by John Ayton around 1810. E.V.

LATIMER: A SHORT HISTORY. B. Forwood and M. Armitage. Latimer P.C.C., 1972.

Mrs. Forwood and Wing-Comdr. Armitage have produced a useful guide, with illustrations and a map, covering the history of the village from Roman times up to the transformation of the old Joint Services Staff College into the National Defence College in 1971.