

REVIEWS

SHERINGTON: FIEFS AND FIELDS OF A BUCKINGHAMSHIRE VILLAGE, by A. C. Chibnall. xxiv+304 pp. 7 in. × 9¼ in., with 5 plates and 8 maps. Cambridge University Press, 1965. Four guineas.

To produce a parish history worthy of the name is an arduous undertaking, which is perhaps why so few are written. Certainly no Buckinghamshire local study comparable in scale or depth to this work on Sherington has so far been published and for this reason alone it deserves to be warmly welcomed. At the outset one may ask the question: how is it that a distinguished scientist, a Fellow of the Royal Society, came to interest himself in a North Buckinghamshire village and to equip himself with the technical capacity to investigate and interpret its medieval and later records? The author supplies the answer in his Introduction; it began as "a simple family inquiry" nearly half a century ago. In 1339 a John de Chebenhale appears on the scene in Sherington and thereafter Chibnalls are continuously met with in the parish as farmers and land agents for the next four centuries. But in time genealogical research was subordinated to "a comprehensive study of certain aspects of the feudal and economic growth of the village", and this fine volume is the result. The thoroughness of Dr. Chibnall's investigation of his subject is demonstrated by the inclusion of no less than fifty-seven statistical and other tables, twelve genealogies, six appendixes, and eight maps. Two of the last-named merit special mention. These are the large field maps, reconstructed by the author, of *circa* 1300 and 1580, which are in a sense a distillation of much of the relevant information in the printed book. The detailed story of how this was done is fascinatingly told in Appendix I. For good measure Dr. Chibnall has thrown in a map of Sherington fields *circa* 1950, which shows, incidentally, that not many of the sixteenth-century field-names have survived.

The book comprises a series of essays covering the period from the Roman occupation to the end of the eighteenth century. Where so much is offered, it is perhaps ungenerous to wish that Dr. Chibnall had carried the story of Sherington down to the present time. Village life has changed more profoundly in all its aspects in the last century and a half than in all the centuries of which the book treats and it seems a pity that the modern history of the parish was not written by one so well qualified to do it. As the sub-title indicates, the central theme of the book is the land, its configuration, its cultivation, its economic viability, and the people who extracted a living from it. It is not concerned primarily with the religious and social life of the community. By far the longest chapter in the book is entitled "Agrarian economy under the three-field system of tillage", which underlines the agronomic emphasis of the work and the author's main interest.

Too often the parish historian is hampered by the paucity or fragmentary nature of his sources; "he looks before and after and pines for what is not". Dr. Chibnall has managed to bring under his critical observation a vast corpus of original materials which has enabled him to present a quite remarkable picture of historical continuity. A glance at his impressive class list of documents in the Public Record Office demonstrates the width and depth of his acquaintance with the public records. Private

muniments, too, have been laid under contribution, the collections in the County Record Office and in our Society's Muniment Room, the Throckmorton deeds at Coughton Court, and, in particular, the records of the Mercers' Company. The latter held a Sherington manor from the early sixteenth century down to modern times and its records, including a fine series of court rolls, have yielded a rich harvest. It is good to know that the Company proved itself a lenient landlord and showed special forbearance towards its tenants in times of agricultural distress.

After a topographical description of the parish based on a seventeenth-century perambulation, the account of Sherington in the Middle Ages follows a normal pattern with the descent of its four manors which is treated in great detail. More remarkable is the treatment of land distribution in the medieval period. In two Tables (2 and 3) precise information is given of the holders of land and the extent of their holdings at various dates from the Domesday Survey to 1312, while in Table 4 an areal division of the territory in the latter year into common fields, demesne, woods, etc., is worked out to a total of 1,748 acres, which closely—and very satisfactorily—tallies with the acreage disclosed by the Enclosure Award of 1797. Two chapters are devoted to Sherington in the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, periods which present special difficulty to the local historian. On the Black Death Dr. Chibnall boldly states that its effect was to reduce the working population by at least twelve—four peasants and eight smallholders—and one may be permitted to wonder whether such certainty is possible. The use of the term smallholder is a little confusing in view of its modern connotation, while elsewhere peasants are described as cottagers and labourers, and even peasant owners. In the medieval period at least, difficulty might have been avoided by using the legal designations of the various types of tenants of land.

The Tudor period was marked by the transfer of the parish from the two-field to the three-field system of cultivation, credit for this somewhat tardy agricultural advance being due to Thomas Chibnall. Throughout the book Dr. Chibnall has made good use of taxation returns as evidence of wealth and population, and in particular he has subjected the great Muster Roll of 1522 to close and informative scrutiny. The ebb and flow of population in the parish is a matter of special interest to him and he has assembled much valuable information on this thorny subject, though one would need to be an expert in demography to venture a worth-while opinion of his conclusions.

As already mentioned, a long chapter is devoted to the agrarian economy under the three-field system, based mainly on tithe litigation in the mid-seventeenth century, which throws much light on the cropping programme. But something seems to have gone wrong with Table 38, which is a calendar of *circa* 1682 of the operations carried out in the common fields. In the two fields under cultivation (tilth field and pease field) it would surely not be possible to permit the entry of horses and beasts after 10th May while wheat and barley in the one field and beans and peas in the other were in active growth. In the next century changes in the ownership of farms are described, an interesting point to emerge being the gradual increase in absentee ownership which “deprived the village community of the local leadership it needed”.

Although the main concern of the book, as the sub-title indicates, is with agrarian matters, Dr. Chibnall does deal with a few other topics, but in rather desultory fashion. His account of the church, whose importance in village life through the ages hardly needs emphasizing, is an example. We have, it is true, an account of the gift of the church by the de Caruns to Tickford Priory in the twelfth century, a brief chapter on the church in the thirteenth century, evidence for the re-roofing of the church in the fifteenth, and not in the sixteenth, century as stated by the Historical

Monuments Commission, and the leasing of Sherington rectory, all excellent and original contributions. But a history of the religious life of the parish is not forthcoming. Even to extract a list of the rectors is a formidable undertaking since the Index gives no help. The incumbents of the fourteenth, fifteenth, sixteenth, nineteenth and twentieth centuries can be hunted down in various footnotes (pp. 136, 155, 176, 253), while those of the eighteenth century appear in the text (p. 252); the writer has failed, however, to discover the seventeenth-century rectors, apart from those who held the living during the Interregnum (p. 212). Nonconformity, too, receives only brief notice. There is a chapter on its "emergence", which treats largely of the establishment in the village of the Society of Friends, but one feels there is more to be said on the history of dissent in Sherington.

The Index, so important in a work of this character, is barely adequate. Under Sherington itself, the following omissions were noted: the bridge (pp. 9, 145, 252), the mill (which is separately indexed under 'water-mill'), church dedication (footnote p. 29, which also suggests a date for the building of the church, not indexed). Under Buckinghamshire [*sic*] archdeacon of, two references are given, to which should be added four more (pp. 48, *n.* 1, 120, 178, 211). But no index is perfect and one must not end on an ungrateful note. *Sherington* is a remarkable achievement and its author deserves our thanks for a most valuable addition to Buckinghamshire historiography.

J. G. JENKINS

THE PRECIOUS BLOOD: A HISTORY OF BURNHAM ABBEY, 1266 TO 1966, by T. W. E. Roche, M.A. (Oxon). Printed by Luff & Sons, Windsor, and are to be obtained from them at 6s. net. pp. 27, 3 plates and a plan, 7 × 9 in.

This beautifully produced booklet is published to commemorate the seventh centenary of the founding of the Abbey by Richard Earl of Cornwall and King of the Romans. There is a foreword by the Bishop of Oxford, an introduction, and sections dealing with a description of the Abbey, an account of the founder, the Abbey from the foundation to the Dissolution, and the Dissolution to the present day, with Appendices on the Arms of the Abbey and the founder, and transcriptions and translations of Charters and other deeds.

The most useful section is the historical account of the founder's life, times and career, and the earlier history of the convent.

Very little attention is paid to the architectural or archaeological aspect of these most valuable remains: and the plan is amateurishly drawn, inadequate and inaccurate (Sir Harold Brakspear's excellent plan in the *Victoria County History*, reproduced from the *Records of Bucks*, Vol. VIII, could well have been used.)

There has always been some argument over the arms of the Abbey: those described on p. 21 are those given in *Burke*, but differ from those blazoned in the *Victoria County History* (sable a chief or charged with 3 lozenges gules). When colour has been used on the cover it is a pity not to have got it right, for the bezants on the border of the Cornwall arms have become plates.

The details in the list of Abbesses vary considerably from those given in the *Victoria County History*; and the booklet is marred by a good many misprints, notably on page 9.

I had always understood that after the Dissolution, several of the sisters went abroad, not to Louvain, as is stated, but to Malines and set up an English establishment. From there they moved, I think in the eighteenth century, to Bruges, where Le Couvent des Dames Anglaises exists to this day as a direct descendant of the original Catholic house.

E.C.R.

BIDDLESDEN AND ITS ABBEY, by Charles W. Green. 67 pp., 7 plates and 2 plans. E. N. Hillier & Sons Ltd., Buckingham. 8s. 6d.

The President of the Buckingham Archæological Society describes his useful book as a labour of love inspired by his boyhood memories of this remote village in the north-west of the county.

He has constructed, mainly from printed sources, a useful village history which in the early chapters centres on the Cistercian abbey of SS. Mary and Nicholas, founded in 1147 and finally suppressed in 1538. The estate was subsequently owned by the Peckham, Villiers, Sayer, Verney and Morgan-Grenville families. It was Henry Sayer who destroyed the extensive abbey ruins, seen by Browne Willis in 1712, and built the present manor house. He also included a chapel in the new stable wing and this is now the parish church of S. Margaret.

There are five useful appendices.

E.V.

THE MUSEUM

As usual, a considerable amount of time was taken up with archæological field work. Visits were made to numerous sites and to building and road works in the county. The Museum carried out in August a second season of excavation, with the aid of a grant from the Ministry of Public Building and Works, on the site of the deserted medieval village of Caldecote, Aylesbury.

A card index was made of virtually all the palæolithic finds known from the county, with the exception of those in the Treacher Collection.

In the natural history field, long-term ecological experiments have been started at Bledlow, Broughton, Iver and Ivinghoe. In addition, much research and preparatory work has been done for the new natural history gallery, which will be opened during National Nature Week in April, 1966.

Miss L. Millard resigned from the post of Assistant Curator on her appointment as Curator of the Royal Museum, Canterbury, and Miss N. E. A. Tarrant, formerly Assistant at the Grosvenor Museum, was appointed as her successor. The post of Technical Assistant was established, but it was not possible to fill the appointment with a suitably qualified person. It was, however, possible to appoint Miss M. May in a temporary capacity to draw some of the archæological material in the collections, with a view to publication.

In addition to the usual circulating exhibitions borrowed from the Victoria and Albert Museum, there was an interesting exhibition of Town and Landscape Studies by the Students of Hull School of Architecture on Buckingham and Stowe; an exhibition of Creative Art in the Primary School arranged by the County Art Organiser; exhibitions by the Buckinghamshire Art Society and the Society of Graphic Artists; and a selection of embroidery from the 1962 Group of the Embroiderers' Guild.

The number of visitors was 21,758, compared with 22,075 in 1964.

C.N.G.