

REVIEWS

E.M. Elvey, Ed., *THE COURTS OF THE ARCHDEACONRY OF BUCKINGHAM 1483-1523*, Buckinghamshire Record Society, 19, 1975. Pp. xxx + 449, 1 map.

The Buckinghamshire Record Society and Mrs. Elvey have put many people in their debt with the publication of this extremely interesting collection of records, records of a type of which all too few have appeared in print before. Those who have had occasion to see the difficulties under which the editor has laboured will realize why this has been so, and why this particular text deserves high praise. The introduction barely hints at the immense palaeographical problems involved in editing the archdeaconry papers. The result is certainly a labour of love, but a triumphant one in that Mrs. Elvey has obviously succeeded admirably in establishing a correct text and a logical order. The Society's publisher and proof-readers are to be congratulated on the finished product which is pleasant to handle and virtually free of printing errors.

What we have, then, is a book which offers something to everyone. On one level, the scholar interested in the history and workings of church courts has a mine of detailed information; on another, the ordinary 'man in the street', curious about the history of his county, will derive pleasure from the English wills. There are plenty of pickings for the genealogist and the local historians. For all groups, the editor's notes are unobtrusively and consistently useful – Mrs. Elvey has saved us a lot of tedious reference work. Here she has been helped by the recent publication of the Muster Book of 1523. When taken in conjunction with the archdeaconry records, it is self-evident that Buckinghamshire at the beginning of the sixteenth century is very well served. It would be splendid to think that the Record Society might one day undertake an edition of one or more of the fine series of manorial court rolls in the custody of the Buckinghamshire Archaeological Society, thereby giving us an unparalleled insight into the county society at virtually all levels at the end of the Middle Ages.

The wills, rightly or wrongly, dominate the volume, and will, no doubt, be the most used part. Nearly all are formal in style, and there is a danger in their constant similarity that some of the 'tit-bits' will be overlooked. However, Thomas Halle's 'peryll of deth' (no. 475) strikes a discordant note among the bland opening sentences. Many wills should prove useful for the light they shed on the

topography of settlement and fields; one or two provide useful reminders of the strength of custom. William Long of Astwood (no. 205), for example, bequeathed his village church *unam acram meam magnam . . . juxta le Grene dych*, an interesting reminder that customary acres were not all the same size. John Pastrell (no. 456) bequeathed his daughter 20 sheep 'as they runne owte of the folde', a stipulation reminiscent of some thirteenth-century customal.

It is impossible in a short review to do anything like justice to the richness and variety of the acta. All that can be done is to suggest that it is well worth persevering with the routine cases, as the more spectacular amply repay the effort. To mention a few at random, there is a case of wife-selling (no. 46), more than one of sorcery (no. 349 in particular), and a nice case of attempted character assassination (no. 148).

One further aspect of this book deserves attention, and that is the abundant evidence it provides about surnames and their evolution. With the Muster Book in print as well, someone could have a flying start to a study of Buckinghamshire personal nomenclature.

ANDREW JONES

THE ARCHAEOLOGY OF THE COLNE VALLEY PARK by Maryann Bowen. (Greater London Council Research Memorandum RM 516). 296 x 209 mm, ii + 46pp, 2 maps. London: Greater London Council, 1977. £3.

The Colne Valley Park occupies 104 square kilometres of metropolitan green belt to the west of London between Rickmansworth and Staines. By far the largest part of it, at least 50%, lies in Buckinghamshire; the rest is divided between Hertfordshire, Greater London, Surrey and Berkshire. Its object is a dual one of conserving an area of outstanding beauty and developing its potential for rural, rather than urban, recreation. The work under review arises from a survey carried out on behalf of the Colne Valley Park Standing Conference, the consortium of those local authorities administering the area of the park. Initially its aim was to provide information for a consideration of the alternative routes through the Park of the proposed M25 (London orbital) motorway, but the Standing Conference recognized the value of such archaeological survey to its work and it was extended to include the whole of the Park. The report claims, in its introduction, to be 'an example of the integration of archaeology and the historic environment into the planning process'.

The title should not mislead potential readers. The work is a descriptive list of all the archaeological sites and finds in the Park arranged chronologically in the conventional period divisions from palaeolithic onwards to mediaeval. It includes all the archaeological sites and finds that could be ascertained from printed sources and county sites and monuments records where they existed. This list is competently produced and the material well organised. Special attention is drawn to particular groups, or special classes, of sites, by means of fifteen tables. Two further tables detail the sites principally or marginally affected by the Department of Transport's preferred line for the M25.

The author's approach, as outlined above, works well to analyse the effect of the proposed motorway: it is easy to see that, aside from a medieval hollow way and three Roman roads, the principal sites directly affected are a multi-period cropmark site at Thorney and an extensive flint scatter near Gerrard's Cross. An approach which concentrates wholly on sites and finds cannot however, claim to be an analysis of the historic landscape. This is particularly evident in the chapters on the Saxons and medieval periods. Miss Bowen lists only four finds of Saxon date, and takes up less than a page in discussing the period. A simple study of the distribution of place-names, which are mostly Saxon in origin, would have given a much less misleading impression of Saxon occupation in the Colne Valley. Easily available documentary evidence, such as Domesday Book, could have supplemented this. As it is, the impression is created that there was little or no Saxon settlement in the Colne Valley, whereas in fact the settlement patterns of that period form the basis of our present-day landscape. Similarly Miss Bowen considers deserted medieval settlement features: deserted villages, abandoned moats, dissolved priories, but not those still functioning at the present day, of which the village and its church are usually the most obvious. Her lop-sided approach to survey leads

her to ignore in her discussion a major problem facing medieval settlement archaeology: that of the shrunken village. Present-day planning policies encourage infill, and thus some shrunken villages will expand again over the archaeological remains of their earlier selves. Unlike totally deserted villages, no policy is yet evident for dealing with this threat, and Miss Bowen's survey might have thrown some light on its extent.

Miss Bowen's lack of sympathy with the medieval period is perhaps less serious than her limited comprehension of the relationship of archaeology and planning. The introductory note says that the survey 'will serve as a warning system, should rescue archaeology be required'. Archaeologists should not rest content with knowing what is to be destroyed, especially in a regional park among whose aims are the conservation and enhancement of the environment and the development of potential for rural recreation. The survey could have indicated those sites that merit preservation and protection against threats as well as those that need to be excavated. The planner will look in vain here for any way of distinguishing in importance between a single flint find and a major crop-mark complex. It would be useful for a planner to know which sites have visual potential, both so that they may be enhanced, and to draw the attention of the public to them. From this might follow 'Archaeology Trails', on the model of the now common-place 'Nature Trails'. Consideration of archaeology should be seen as an integral part of the planning process, not as a by-product of its decisions, and conservation of the environment should include conservation and preservation of archaeology. These are not novel concepts (though, of the counties that form the Colne Valley Park, only Hertfordshire employs an archaeologist in its planning department to give it professional advice), and they might easily have been reflected in a more extensive and considered conclusion.

If this review seems somewhat harsh, it is because the standard of presentation of archaeological survey has risen enormously in the last five years or so, and one has a right to expect only the highest standards from the Greater London Council. This survey still has its place and will no doubt form a starting point for many archaeologists in future years.

Finally, three pounds is a great deal to ask for not quite fifty typewritten pages in paper covers; it will be a pity if the price reduces the circulation of what is still a useful document.

MARTIN PETCHEY

CHEARSLEY A SHORT HISTORY OF OUR VILLAGE, Dennis Lane (1977) 40 pp., 16 photographs. A HISTORY OF NASH, Celia Duncan and John King, 23 pp., 35p.

To celebrate the Queen's Silver Jubilee in 1977 many village histories appeared and gave great pleasure to local people. The history of Chearsley goes back to the origin of the place-name and to Domesday Book, but perhaps the most interesting parts describe the last century or so and a way of life which suddenly passed away, together with many old houses and landmarks. The account of Nash is similar, but tells us more about the old inhabitants.

COLESHILL A SHORT HISTORY, John Chenevix-Trench (1977) 8 pages, map of Coleshill, plan and elevation of a farm, 30p.

The author is a medievalist, he has walked the whole area, and knows most of the old houses inside and out. He solves a problem that has puzzled many people – why Coleshill lay in Hertfordshire until 1844, and goes on to describe its development up to 1300. An excellent map enables us to follow the narrative and indeed go out and see for ourselves the farms and fields of the Middle Ages. He also deals with some of the changes that have taken place in later centuries, particularly the rise and fall of yeoman families. This pamphlet is a condensed and popular summary of some of the work which went into two articles published in *Records*, one in volume XIX part 3, 1973, and the other beginning on p.406 of this issue.

E.M.E.