

PROCEEDINGS
OF THE
CAMBRIDGE ANTIQUARIAN
SOCIETY

(INCORPORATING THE CAMBS & HUNTS
ARCHAEOLOGICAL SOCIETY)



VOLUME LXVI

JANUARY 1975 TO DECEMBER 1976

IMRAY LAURIE NORIE AND WILSON

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REVIEW

A History of the County of Cambridge and the Isle of Ely, volume V, ed. by C. R. Elrington (The Victoria History of the Counties of England, published for the Institute of Historical Research by Oxford University Press), 1973, pp. 337, 31 plates, 5 figures, £18.

THE Victoria History of Cambridgeshire and the Isle of Ely, of which this is the fifth volume to appear, was projected as early as 1935,¹ when Dr L. F. Salzman, who had recently become general editor of the series, attempted to persuade colleges and local authorities to assist in the financing of a county history. Although Salzman only partly succeeded in his fund-raising, and was unable to appoint a full-time local editor, the first volume, including articles on natural history, early man, and Anglo-Saxon remains, and translations of the Cambridgeshire Domesday and *Inquisitio Comitatus Cantabrigiensis*, was issued in 1938. It was another ten years before the appearance of the second volume, which was devoted to general articles on ancient earthworks, social, economic, political and religious history, and detailed accounts of religious houses, schools, and industries. Since this point topographical volumes, covering the Isle of Ely (1953), and the City of Cambridge (1959), have also appeared. The Cambridge volume was edited by Dr (now Professor) J. P. C. Roach, but all the other volumes, including the one now under consideration, have been compiled and edited by the relatively small staff available to the general editor, in the intervals of their other duties.

This present volume, the second 'rural topographical' instalment of the Cambridgeshire history, incorporates the new features which as Professor Pugh has recounted² have, since 1950, been added to the 'old standard features'. The parish histories had at first aimed at 'a systematic collection of accurate data for the history of every village, parish, and manor in the country', under the heads of, manors, churches and charities, with a brief general introduction. Since 1950 new sections dealing with recusancy and nonconformity, schools, local government and economic history, have been added, and each of the parishes described in this new volume is treated in this way.

The parishes so described belong to two of the western hundreds of the 'old' county of Cambridge, Longstowe and Wetherley: Bourn, Caldecote, Caxton, Croxton, Eltisle, the Eversdens, Gamlingay, Little Gransden, Hardwick, Hatley St George, Kingston, Longstowe, Toft, Arrington, Barrington, Barton, Com-

¹ R. B. Pugh *Victoria History of the Counties of England, General Introduction* (Oxford University Press, for Institute of Historical Research, 1970), p. 15.

² *Ibid.*, p. 23.

berton, Coton, Grantchester, Harlton, Haslingfield, Orwell, Shepreth, and Wimpole. The sources used for the histories are firstly those common to the *Victoria History*: printed and unprinted public records, including parliamentary papers, manuscripts in the national collections, and diocesan and archidiaconal records, with much use of local historical and archaeological periodicals. The present volume has also been able to draw on the muniments of a number of Cambridge colleges, and on numerous deposits in the County Record Office and University Library, so that the footnotes of the articles provide a rich quarry for the local historian seeking to take his parish history further. Opportunity has also been taken to include in this volume general articles on sport, including a very spirited account of rowing, largely contributed by the late F. Brittain. Football can be found a little earlier than the compiler of this article thinks, for was it not a subject for prosecution, when played on Sundays, at Wisbech and in many parishes near Cambridge, in 1597?³

Conscientious attempts have been made, in the introductions to the hundreds, and in the general sections of the individual parish histories, to discuss the evolution of settlements. This no doubt owes much to the parallel work of the Royal Commission on Historical Monuments, and to the writings of landscape historians. It is, at best, a speculative and subjective business; not all of the attempts made here are equally successful, and some must be used with caution. They are less easy to appreciate than they could be, because of the complete absence of village or parish plans, and of the lack of any delineation of relief or geology. We must presumably turn back to the first volume for this, but its absence here makes any discussion of roads, tracks and settlements in terms of natural features very difficult. At the same time one becomes increasingly aware that matters such as settlement cannot be satisfactorily discussed in terms of single parishes, or indeed of any artificial division. The same criticism inevitably arises when one thinks of the lines of trackways and Roman roads, and of the pattern of ecclesiastical parishes. Is it too much to hope that future topographical volumes will include these general discussions?

Other topics could also have been treated equally well, or better, in an introductory discussion which would have avoided repetition and provided a coherent picture to which the parochial history could be related. We already have such a general background for tenurial and feudal arrangements, but there is nowhere a discussion of the peculiar state of the established church in this diocese in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, which would clarify the repeated information about non-residence and non-conformity. The section

³ Ely Diocesan Records, B2/15, f. 144. Roger Marshall and nine other Wisbech men presented for 'using to play foteball and stooleball in time of divine service.'

of Hearth Tax returns for these two hundreds, which is as usual admirable, might well provide a model for discussions of dissent in relation to the state of church provision in the area, rather than in individual parishes, just as it might also be accompanied by sections on communications and markets within the limits covered by the parish histories. Did the parishes treated here, for example, use markets in St Neots, or Cambridge, and by what roads did they travel to market?

The coverage of the sources is exhaustive, and sometimes even overpowering. This is particularly true of the parishes in Wetherley hundred, where the collegiate muniments are in some cases so ample that the compilers have been almost defeated by the luxuriance of their material, and some of the histories are almost too detailed and elaborate, especially for the medieval period. It is odd to find a medievalist making this sort of criticism, but a local history must strike some sort of balance and the average reader may well be defeated by the quantity of evidence put before him. At the same time one might justifiably point out some startling omissions, especially of modern information. Why, for example, is G. M. Trevelyan's connection with Whitwell Farm (Barton) not mentioned? Is the part played by Trevelyan himself, and the Cambridge Preservation Trust in the villages close to Cambridge not worth mention? The minute books of parish councils, and the memories of their clerks would have been obvious sources, too; in one village they would have revealed a correct date for a village feast, and news of its survival into the sixties, as well as a note of a gift of poplars made by the late F. A. Simpson to adorn the boundary of a village recreation ground.⁴

More alarming (at least for the custodian of the records), is the compilers' failure to exploit the information about social and economic conditions which can be gained from a careful study of the records of ecclesiastical visitations and of tithe, matrimonial and defamation suits in the sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries. The tithe causes, in particular, are a mine of information about husbandry, enclosure and marketing procedures and it is bitter to see them (with one honourable exception) completely ignored.

These are all minor grumbles, specks on the surface of a most useful and excellent volume, to which we shall all have continual recourse. Mr Elrington and his staff are to be congratulated on a handsome, and (one must add) an admirably illustrated volume. It is sad of course for a resident of the hundred to think that its 'characteristic landscape' should be the cement works at Barrington, but most readers will not quibble at the rest of the illustrations.

Wolfson College

Dorothy M. Owen.

⁴ The parish is Coton, where the village feast, at Trinity week-end, was still attracting a fair in 1965, and where Mr Simpson's poplars may still be seen.

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