

BOOK REVIEWS

Kenneth Richardson, *The 'Twenty-Five' Churches of the Southwark Diocese: An interwar campaign of church-building*, published by the Ecclesiological Society, 2002, price £19, post free. Hardback, x plus 198pp, many illustrations. ISBN 0 946823 15 4

The surviving traces of the Second World War defences of Britain have become an accepted subject for archaeological study, so it is hardly surprising that the buildings of the inter-war years are being seen as history. Studies such as the one under review, which sets out in a dispassionate, detailed and well-illustrated way the evidence for church-building in just one diocese, will be seen as increasingly valuable.

The inter-war architecture of South London was hardly distinguished. Mrs Bridget Cherry, in her introduction to 'Pevsner' (1983), deals with it in just two pages, devoted almost entirely to public buildings, which can be compared with the eleven pages allocated to post-1945 building. Mrs Cherry mentions only three inter-war Anglican churches, and one of those is from north of the Thames. Domestic buildings receive little more attention and Mrs Cherry is perhaps unnecessarily dismissive of the architecture of the LCC's extensive but 'cottagey' estates at Bellingham, Downham and St Helier. These were notably more aesthetically acceptable than the miles and miles of contemporary speculative housing around them but the division of ownership in the last two or three decades has seen their aesthetic coherence becoming irredeemably damaged.

Other local authorities were also building housing estates in and around South London, rarely rising to the design standards of the LCC. This substantial public housing was initially stimulated by the Housing Act of 1919 and by far the lion's share of it fell in the dioceses of Southwark. Fortunately, Cyril Foster Garbett was an outstanding man (he eventually became a notable archbishop of York) and he immediately recognized the challenge to the Church presented by the housing developments. He established the Twenty-five Churches Fund and initiated the diocesan programme of church building that is the subject of Mr Richardson's painstaking volume. The author carefully, succinctly and readably charts the birth and progress of this programme and provides a comprehensive and well-illustrated gazetteer of its products.

As with most building of the time, the churches lack a coherent architectural vocabulary and several were distinctly dull. The aesthetic of the majority was based in the declining 'Arts and Crafts' movement but, overall, they nevertheless form an interesting if distinctly eclectic oeuvre. In many cases shortage of funds and the intervention of the Second World War prevented the architect's designs from achieving completion (projected but costly towers being major casualties) and others suffered 'bomb damage', which inhibits aesthetic judgement. Of the churches that depart from the 'Arts and Crafts' mainstream, those that looked to Byzantine models (Downham, St Barnabas; East Wickham; the uncompleted Mitcham, St Olave), were probably the visually most successful: the most eccentrically individual was the Church of the Good Shepherd at Carshalton Beeches in 'Spanish mission chapel' style (bravely chosen by Mr Richardson to illustrate his cover). Only one architect working within the programme attempted to reflect the modern movement, N F Cachemille-Day, who was appointed to the programme after Bishop Garbett had been replaced by Bishop Parsons. The tower of his award-winning church of St Saviour, Eltham (1933), has been likened to a medieval castle keep but today the nave looks more like a junior forerunner of Bankside Power Station (Tate Modern). The whole is mildly Kafka-esque.

Mrs Cherry accused the South London churches of having 'watered down' detailing, and one can see what she meant – but the generalization is too sweeping. The detailing of some of the churches is quite good and, in almost every case, it is superior to that of most post-war work – as Mr Richardson's workmanlike volume clearly demonstrates. Many of the

original architect's drawings are reproduced and these are supplemented by photographs and fine original drawings (in suitably 'inter-war' style) by John Bray.

DENNIS TURNER

Peter Gray, *Surrey medieval buildings – an analysis and inventory*, The Domestic Buildings Research Group (Surrey), 2001, £6.50 plus p&p. 86 pp including tables and maps. Available from the DBRG and Local History Centres. ISBN 09511553-1-8.

This book is an amalgamation of two papers prepared by the late Peter Gray and has undergone minor editing by Martin Higgins to assist publication by the DBRG (Surrey).

The first of these papers is an analysis of surviving timber-framed construction up to the 16th century. The data were drawn from over 700 record surveys of approximately 850 relevant identified buildings, mostly carried out by the author or the DBRG. A number of notable buildings less capable of analysis have been summarized separately.

Peter Gray has analysed numerous facets of the varying styles, geographical trends and constructional forms each discussed and presented in a very clear and logical form. This includes the work of the last 100 years from the first list of historic buildings to the current position where the greater part of these historic buildings have been inspected or recorded in some way. His simple and direct approach includes many questions and he also points to areas where other factors such as economic influences and landscape history need consideration.

The second paper comprises an extensive inventory of those medieval buildings already identified by numerous authorities, groups and individuals and of which a high proportion have been recorded in detail by the DBRG and by Peter Gray himself. Churches and farm buildings have not been included. The inventory is simply set out by parish headings for each local authority area reflecting the extent of the administrative county of Surrey in 1974, with sources indicated.

While acknowledging the varying degrees and extent of survival of such buildings, differing levels of recording, accessibility and other limitations, particular recognition is given to the owners of the properties that gave access and the many individuals, alone or in groups (such as the DBRG) that have worked hard over some 30 years to develop such a fundamentally important resource.

Peter Gray consciously embarked on more than a lifetime's endeavour hoping 'that the inventory will form the basis of other studies'. This is an understatement of the value, purpose and direction given by him via these papers for many areas for further research. His achievements and challenges to us all are fitting testaments.

This book should be regarded as an essential reference work for historians, researchers and practitioners, and its existence needs to be widely publicized.

ANDREW NORRIS

Alan Bott, *A guide to the parish churches of Witley and Thursley, Surrey*, Parochial Church Councils of Witley and Thursley, 2003, price £7. Softback, 144 pp, illus. Available from Witley and Thursley Churches and The Surrey Bookshop, Godalming. No ISBN.

To the substantial guidebooks which he has already written to the churches of Godalming and Compton, Alan Bott has now added a third – to the churches of Witley and Thursley. Like its predecessors, this is a work of scholarship. The two churches are amply deserving of such de-luxe treatment. Both are of 11th century origin. Each of them, as the author shows,

originally consisted of a two-cell structure with rubble walls 1m thick and a nave 6.5m in width. The buildings are so similar as to suggest that they were commissioned by the same patron. The only helpful clue to their dating is provided by the small single-light windows with wooden frames discovered in each church early in the last century. At one time such windows were regarded as Saxon, but they are now generally considered indicative of the continuity of Saxon styles after the Conquest. Alan Bott eschews the modern revisionism on dating in favour of a date in the late Saxon period, and he may well be right. He plausibly suggests that the builder of the churches was the pre-Conquest lord of the manor, Earl Godwin. Given the later ownership of the manor (the Crown or a royal grantee) it is difficult to see who else could have been responsible. Mr Bott proceeds from a discussion of the churches' origins to a comprehensive survey of their later development and restoration in the 19th century. The attention which he pays to the restorations will give pleasure to those readers, doubtless now an increasing number, who consider the post-medieval history of church buildings of equal importance to the medieval. Mr Bott is unduly modest about what he achieves in this book. He says that he is heavily dependent on the scholarly work of others, and perhaps he is. But by any standards this is a superb book. It covers every aspect of the history, architecture and furnishing of the two churches on which a visitor or local resident would want information. There are even good scholarly appendices. In Appendix I, Mr Bott makes available in print for the first time the inventory of the goods of Witley church compiled in 1447, a highly important document showing just how well equipped the church was. Visually the book is enhanced by the splendid series of illustrations, among them colour reproductions of Hassell watercolours in the Surrey History Centre, which trace the changing appearance of the two churches over the centuries. Mr Bott is once again to be congratulated on producing a first-rate publication.

NIGEL SAUL