

Books

The Victoria History of the County of Middlesex: Volume IV. Edited by J. S. Cockburn and T. F. T. Baker. Published for the University of London Institute of Historical Research by *Oxford University Press*. £10.

THE *Victoria County History* is a major work of reference and the backbone of local historical research. One cannot do better than to quote the words of R. B. Pugh, general editor of the series, writing some years ago.

"The *V.C.H.* is not a collection of entertaining essays on local history . . . It is an amalgam of hard facts, tersely presented and implying in the reader a certain familiarity with the main trends of English domestic history. It is designed to be consulted in the library rather than read before the fire . . ."

The appearance last July of Volume IV of the Middlesex series is, therefore, an event that should not pass un-noticed in these columns. Readers of the Middlesex series have had to wait a long time since the first volume appeared in 1911 (Volume II) but following the revival of research and publication since 1955, Volumes I, III, and now IV have been published. Volume IV is a "topographical" volume, that continues the detailed history of the north-western part of the former county of Middlesex, concluding the description of the Hundred of Elthorne and starting that of the Hundred of Gore. More recognisably these are the ancient parishes of Harmondsworth, Hayes, Norwood, Hillingdon, Ickenham, Northolt, Perivale, Ruislip, Edgware and Harrow and include such places as Pinner, Southall, Uxbridge and Wembley.

As is the practice in the *V.C.H.*, the early history of the parish, its manors and estates are detailed, together with the history of the churches, local government, charities and the economic and social background. As this is an area of Greater London overcome to a large extent by the expanding *wen* much of the text describes the comparatively modern suburban and industrial developments that followed the construction of the railways and the arterial roads. This is particularly well brought out for Harrow parish, as is the equally important fact that the use of the Middlesex countryside by Londoners is a process that has been going on for centuries.

Concerning the older settlements, the chapters on Uxbridge in Hillingdon and Harrow on the Hill stand out. Uxbridge, once a fine market town, cruelly treated within the last year or so by redevelop-

ment and road construction contrasts with the hill top village where the residential and small town character has been preserved by the presence and activity of its famous school. Much else is covered in depth, particularly the villages and hamlets now absorbed into the modern pattern of housing, industrial estate and carefully retained countryside. The plates highlight these contrasts with Northolt Green placed next to the multi-storey Hillingdon Hospital of the 1960's, or as in the air view shown, the juxtaposition of the Hoover factory in the sprawl of Western Avenue with the tranquility of Perivale Church. There are 20 pages of plates and 13 parish or town plans. The *V.C.H.* is a magnificent piece of book publishing and remains, from the opening dedication to Victoria and in format, as conceived in the early 1900's, so that it is rare to handle such a fine production.

Deserted Medieval Villages: Studies edited by Maurice Beresford and John G. Hurst. *Lutterworth Press*. £8.

THIS IS A large and seminal book which sets out to bring between one set of covers the work in this country on deserted medieval villages. This work results, in the main, from a partnership of historians and archaeologists joined in the Deserted Medieval Village Research Group. The research activities, sponsored by it since its founding in 1962 are fully chronicled up to 1968 and are shown to have resulted from the efforts of many varied persons working through the group.

The book falls into four parts, covering England, Scotland, Wales and Ireland with, not surprisingly, the greater part devoted to England. Maurice Beresford contributes first a review of the historic research accomplished since the publication of his pioneer *Lost Villages of England* in 1954, and comments on this progress using *Lost Villages* as his starting point to discuss the phenomena of medieval depopulation as a whole. This is complemented by John Hurst's review of the archaeological evidences combined with some pungent comments on the pitfalls of interpretation associated with building studies. This chapter contains important descriptions of medieval building materials, construction and the peasant house, distinguishing for the first time, the medieval types, with comparative plans in the text from the accumulating evidence of excavation. This is concluded by a gazetteer of some 290 excavations at medieval house or village sites.

As these first two chapters were written independently of each other, Maurice Beresford then contributes a short appraisal of the archaeological research from the viewpoint of a "pure" historian to draw the various threads together. For one wild moment one searches ahead to see if John Hurst has contributed an archaeologists' appraisal of "pure" medieval historians. However, all is well as a county by county gazetteer of 2,263 known English sites and a bibliography completes the first part. This part of the book also provides a valuable background history to the development of medieval archaeology in this country and a rare insight into the problems of scholars, for the lack of a Cornish section in the *Lost Villages* gazetteer resulted from it falling behind Maurice Beresford's piano. It leads one to wonder if the time lag between 1968, as the closing date for research included in this book, and 1971 results from the publisher having a similarly placed piano.

The other national contributions, while shorter as they represent an earlier stage of research, are equally valuable and certain gazetteers and biblio-

graphies. H. Fairhurst and John Dunbar discuss rural settlement and the peasant house in Scotland in a summary which emphasises the great divide from England and the need for research. For Wales Lawrence Butler, with rather more material to discuss, provides a sharp commentary on the current views on Welsh depopulation and rural change, and Robin Glasscock attempts a similar task for Ireland, which like Scotland, has to ask more questions than can be answered at this stage.

An appendix contains the D.M.V.R.G. memoranda on the preservation of village sites and the group's fieldwork questionnaire. The 31 plates are a fresh series and include new air views and the 42 figures, if not all new, have the advantages of being presented together in a convenient form. This is the keynote of this series of studies, the bringing together of appraisal, summary of results and research, gazetteers and bibliography in one place. While the spacious format ensures a high price, it will be an essential book for the many archaeologists and historians with an interest in the post-Roman period.

JOHN ASHDOWN

Letters

ILL-TREATMENT OF LECTURERS

TONY ROOK'S ESSAY "First Slide Please," was a relief to read. It was wonderful to be reminded that these things happen to others too.

Neither my wife nor I have been invited to lecture to "the other lot" but my wife's recent experiences of lecturing to the Young Conservatives have been even more dire than were Tony Rook's. The never-empty tankards were also present as was the reluctance to pay expenses. In addition there was a complete lack of interest in keeping to the time-table the speaker had been booked for (ten minutes delay is one thing, a full fifty minutes quite another).

One puts up with quite a lot "for the good of the cause" when lecturing to fellow enthusiasts but when one is invited to address non-archaeological clubs whose programme secretary seems only interested in completing her booking sheet, one wonders whether it is worth it and concludes, reluctantly, that usually it is not.

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PRACTICAL COURSES: RESCUE

MAY I ENLARGE on two points raised in an article and a letter in your last issue.

In Mr. Bloice's account of "Beginning in Archaeology in London: 6," he felt that practice and instruction on excavation techniques was not given sufficient coverage in University Extra-Mural courses. It is, of course, not

easy to acquire excavation skills through lectures or otherwise than on excavations, but the Certificate in Field Archaeology which he mentions has half the lectures in each of the three winter courses devoted to field problems and publishing techniques. In addition, work on the processing of finds, as well as work on excavations, is compulsory. Residential and non-residential courses in archaeological surveying, field prospecting, environmental archaeology, and the study of Romano-British pottery are also currently available. For those interested in the wider aspects of the subject, the three-year courses on World Prehistory and the current series on "Recent Development and Research in Asiatic Archaeology" might also be mentioned.

In Mr. Farant's letter, the comments on the Trust for British Archaeology (RESCUE) might be expanded. To undertake a national campaign to increase awareness in the destruction of our archaeological heritage and to raise the funds necessary to arrest that destruction, require the organisation and co-operation of many people. It presses very heavily on those whose conscience insists that they take part in it. The Crisis is the crisis of a generation, and when the report of the first year of the now-established Trust is presented, I am sure he will not feel that the time has been wasted.

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