

REVIEWS.

- 1.—*The Conservation of English Wallpaintings*. Published by the Central Council for the Care of Churches, London, 1959. Illus. 7s. 6d. plus 6d. postage—obtainable at the Council's office, Fulham Palace, London, S.W.6.

The transformation brought about in the twelfth-century painting in the chancel of Kempsey Church, Gloucestershire, is splendid testimony to the skill and technique in preservation which have been developed over the last decade. Hitherto this painting, like so many others, had deepened in tone so much as to be almost indiscernible. The fact that the painting was cleaned successfully and its colours brought back to something like their original clarity and the painting afterwards conserved safely represents the fruits of the work of a committee appointed in 1953 by the Central Council for the Care of Churches and the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings. The book under review is the report of that committee. The aim of the Committee was to consider the technical processes involved in the treatment of ancient wallpaintings with the hope of arresting the deterioration which for some time had been noticeable in the condition of certain paintings. It had been suspected that the method of preservation had contributed in many instances to the state of deterioration. It had become the usual practice when a wallpainting was discovered or thought to be in need of treatment to apply to it a protective coating based on varnish or beeswax. This coating deepened progressively in colour and by its impervious nature impeded the porosity of the plaster, with disastrous results to its structure. The problem before the Committee was to examine means by

which the offending coat of varnish or wax could be removed and the painting preserved in its original form.

Members of the Committee made a visit to Denmark in 1954 to examine methods used in the preservation of medieval paintings in the country which had been devised by Konservator E. Lind of the National Museet, Copenhagen. In Denmark the conditions were similar to our own and their problems had been under investigation for some years. In the same year Professor K. Wehlte, of Stuttgart, visited this country to inspect some wallpaintings and presented a report. The following year Konservator Lind and Konservator Wildenstam, of Stockholm, made similar visits.

The report summarizes the methods developed to suit the character of our own paintings and includes Appendices dealing with technical data.

L. C. EVETTS.

2.—*The Vikings*, by Johannes Brøndsted (translated by Estrid Bannister-Good). 320 pages, 24 plates. A Pelican Book. Penguin Books, 1960. Price 5/-.

Exactly thirty years have passed since the publication of the last English account of the Vikings and the turbulent world which they created around them. That account was written by a distinguished English scholar, T. D. Kendrick as he then was, whose modest hope was only that his book might be the forerunner of some more comprehensive work, "a great and gallant book", as he put it, which would be worthy of these stirring times. Professor Brøndsted, the author of this new survey of the Vikings, is a distinguished Danish archaeologist whose contributions to the study of the Viking age, in this country no less than in his own, have long been valued by scholars. His account, which is full and generously illustrated (though it lacks a map), covers not only the political narrative, but also such various aspects

of the period as transport, coins, runic inscriptions, art, religious beliefs and other topics. In those chapters whose theme is illustrated by archæological material Professor Brøndsted writes with obvious mastery of his materials, but his touch is less sure when he turns to topics of a predominantly historical or literary kind. A brief glance at his bibliography will readily show how much of his material is drawn from publications written in languages which not many English people can read, and perhaps the greatest value of the book is that it brings to the attention of English readers (for the price of an ounce of tobacco) the result of work done by a whole generation of Scandinavian archæologists.

It is a bold man who is ready to cover such a wide range and Professor Brøndsted will not expect all his views to be accepted without criticism. The recently discovered hoard of silver on St. Ninian's Isle is not wholly compatible with the view that the Norwegians found the Shetlands "virtually uninhabited" (p. 31). That Alfred withdrew under pressure to the security offered by the Somerset marshes and forests is no "legend" (p. 50), but an episode witnessed by contemporary evidence of undoubted authenticity. There are many who would not accept the view that the Bayeux tapestry was the work of "Norman needlewomen" (p. 208), and there must be many more who would challenge the sweeping statement that "Anglo-Saxon decorative art was partly derived with little sign of originality from the Irish and partly from a motif borrowed from Syria" (p. 200).

The general reader may well not perceive that this book is a translation from the Danish in which its author wrote, and to that extent Professor Brøndsted has been well served by his translator. So much the more pity it is that the English translation seems not to have been read by some person well informed about the period as a whole. Even a cursory reading would have removed a number of follies which may irritate where they do not amuse. We find "male" and "female" nouns for the customary "masculine" and "feminine". The Scandinavian "older" and "younger" is

used in place of the usual "earlier" and "later". A moment's thought is needed before "Henry the Birdcatcher" can be identified with the more familiar Henry the Fowler. A number of Old Norse terms are given in a modern Danish form instead of either English or Old Norse and there is some inconsistency in the forms of personal names—but irritation is relieved by the joyous thought of "some early ninth century bronze tibulas from Gotland" (p. 202), yet it was perhaps a proof reader, rather than the translator, to whom thanks are due for this error.

This is not the "great and gallant book" which the Viking age invites, but it is none the less a useful book, wholly free from romantic notions about winged helmets, and full of factual information much of which is not easily accessible to the kind of reader for whom the book is intended. The section dealing with the great military fortresses of the kind exemplified by Trelleborg will be of particular interest to mural archæologists. The types of house found at Trelleborg, and also at Hedeby, may well prove to have some relevance to the recent discoveries made by Mr. Hope-Taylor in his excavations at Yeavinger, for the southern part of Denmark was not only the homeland from which many Vikings came. It was also the homeland from which the English came some four centuries earlier.

PETER HUNTER BLAIR.

- 3.—*York Metropolitan Jurisdiction and Papal Judges Delegate (1279-1296)*, by Robert Brentano. University of California Publications in History, Volume 58, University of California Press, Berkeley and Los Angeles, 1959. pp. ix, 293. \$6.00.

Hitherto too little attention has been paid to the machinery of medieval church government and to the hierarchy of church officers and their special courts. Pro-

fessor Brentano has now attempted to make good this deficiency for the province of York and in a fresh and vigorous study has examined the theoretical duties of an archbishop towards his suffragans and their subjects, and the practical expression of these theories in the relations between York and the sees of Durham, Carlisle, and Whithorn in Galloway during the pontificates of William Wickwane and John le Romeyn (1279-1296). In the cases of Carlisle and Whithorn these assertions of authority were perforce accepted with docility. Durham was another matter. The church of St. Cuthbert had traditions of antiquity rivalling York itself, and by possession of the incorrupt body of its patron it had the advantage of York, who could only boast of St. William, whose sanctity was asserted on very slender grounds. In consequence, bishop and chapter at Durham repudiated the claims of Wickwane and Romeyn to visit the suffragan see, administer during a vacancy and entertain appeals: and defended themselves both by appeals to the archbishop of Canterbury and to the pope for protection against metropolitan aggression, and by recourse to stones and cudgels when the archbishop made a personal appearance at Durham in 1281 and 1283. The kernel of Dr. Brentano's study, in fact, is a consideration of the law-suit between Wickwane and the Durham chapter of Benedictine monks whereby the archbishop sought to exact recognition of his metropolitan authority especially with regard to visitation. This began in 1281 and was brought to a compromise solution only in 1286, after the death of two of the original protagonists, Archbishop Wickwane and Bishop Robert of Holy Island, and the resignation of Richard of Claxton as prior of Durham.

There is much lively reading to be found in this account of Wickwane's unwavering determination to bring at least the monks of Durham to heel under his metropolitan authority. Messengers on both sides were beaten up: their horses maimed. Appeals for justice reached the pope, King Edward I of England, Archbishop Pecham of Canterbury,

and such cardinals and bishops as were deemed sympathetic. Alongside such emotional outbursts the machinery of the Courts Christian was set in motion to reduce the claims of both parties to a series of items which might be judged according to the rules of Canon Law. Into this maze of technicalities the layman ventures at his peril, but Dr. Brentano with the aid of diagram and illustrative appendixes essays to unravel the web of legal arguments and show how Prior Claxton schemed to win by bribery in high places what he feared to lose from the decisions of special judges whom he believed to be avowed partisans of York.

The strength and weakness of this book lies in Dr. Brentano's passionate belief in the righteousness of the York claims over Durham. In this cause William Wickwane is raised to the dignity of virtual saint and martyr and the bishops and priors of Durham are blackened as parvenu, overbearing, scheming and factious. The same partisan spirit leads the author to exaggerate the consecration of Antony Bek as bishop of Durham, which ended the vacancy so favourable to Wickwane's metropolitan pretensions, as "the nadir of the archbishop's humiliation". In the eyes of the prior of Durham this same ceremony was specially arranged to reflect on the excommunicate and unworthy state of the Durham monks. Nevertheless Dr. Brentano does right to stress the legal claims of York over Durham, which are the easier to overlook in that Durham has preserved its medieval archives and *pièces justificatives* almost intact, whereas the York records have ill-survived the ravages of the Civil War and the great fire of 1840. There is all too much material to enable the historian to condone the sometimes outrageous means by which Durham asserted independence of York; and all too little, apart from general canons, to uphold the York assertion of supremacy.

The study, which includes examination of the legal stages of the dispute and numerous specimens of documents which illustrate the shifts and stratagems of the church lawyers and their clients to gain their respective points, is primarily a

book for the specialist in medieval administration and law. It also contains much to interest and enlighten the lover of northern history.

C. M. FRASER.

4.—*Local History in England*, by W. G. Hoskins. Longmans, Green & Co., Ltd., London, 1959.

I suspect that Dr. Hoskins wrote this book with two objectives in his mind. In the first place, he has provided a handbook on the tools of the local historian's trade and how these tools may be used, and secondly, he makes it very clear that the local historian has too often in the past concentrated on a special interest without relating it to the locality as a whole. In this respect Dr. Hoskins means that the small patch of England in which we live has always been an environment for habitation, and not just an area within which specific examples of tombstone carving or land tenancy occur.

With the author's other recent book in mind—*The Making of the English Landscape* (Hodder & Stoughton Ltd., London, 1955)—one can justly say that Dr. Hoskins makes us view local history in the same light that Dr. G. M. Trevelyan shed upon our national heritage in his *English Social History*.

It should be obvious that in the author's view the local historian's tools must include those which will lead him to the attainment of the second objective, including stout boots, field glasses and Ordnance Survey Maps. In fact, the map is seen as the shorthand version of local history, and advice is given on its use in piecing together the story of life and work in bygone days. Thus, the relevant map of the Geological Survey may disclose the reason for the establishment of a particular settlement and its precise location, and water supply is cited as an example. Indeed, the local historian cannot safely avoid making friends with the water engineer

of his district, and will also benefit from a talk with the soils expert of the Ministry of Agriculture or the nearby University. We are liable to give a wrong judgment if we assume that our ancestors had no ability to find the better soils on which to establish themselves. This leads us to the detail pattern of settlement—the field boundaries and the use of natural and artificial drainage channels—facts which can disclose dates and influences. Indeed, it may surprise local historians to learn that the Dutch soil survey organization has a group employed on the study of old field names and boundaries, for these often help to build up a picture of the natural fertility of an area of land.

The antiquarian, as such, receives strong censure in this book, or perhaps it is fairer to quote that “local historians have not yet succeeded in emancipating themselves completely from the tradition of the great antiquaries of the past”. The accusation being that local histories tend to comprise chapters of unrelated facts without making them part and parcel of the life, work, or the resulting landscape (in its widest sense) of the locality.

On reading this book it will be seen that the local historian can expand his view considerably. He will have more work to do, but Dr. Hoskins is not the man to preach without teaching. He quotes the likely sources, tells what to look out for and how to relate the facts to men living their lives. We are to question all the time, not in the sense of doubting the apparent truth, but why something happened at a particular time.

Although the local historian is generally an amateur, this does not mean that his work is superficial. There are doubtless advantages when the local doctor tackles the history of a parish, and people like him and the schoolmaster are now writing the local histories in place of the village parson. Perhaps a gap might be filled, and Dr. Hoskins satisfied, if these local historians would draw on the special knowledge available among the members of county antiquarian societies.

BRIAN HACKETT.