

## Reviews

**A MILL ON THE SOAR. A personal and Company narrative, by Shirley Ellis.** Privately printed and published (1978). 147 pp. Illustrated. Available from the Midland Educational Company Limited. £3-00.

Many business histories have, unfortunately, in the past suffered by being hurriedly compiled to celebrate a company's centenary or some other anniversary, often relying more on personal anecdotes and tradition than history. It is, therefore, refreshing to find an important exception to the general quality of private business histories. This handsomely produced volume is rather more than a history of Friars Mill, the oldest industrial building in Leicester still used for manufacturing, or of the firm now occupying the site. Mr. Ellis has written not only about the involvement of the Donisthorpe and Ellis families in the business, but also of their private and social life, including the houses they lived in and those they built. The first three chapters set the historical background and recount the involvement of the two families in woolstapling and worsted spinning up to 1889, when the author's father became the first Ellis to work at Donisthorpe's. The author also prints an interesting account by Kenneth Ellis of the work of a nineteenth-century woolstapler, as well as briefly mentioning the important contribution made by George Edmund Donisthorpe to mechanised woolcombing. It is unfortunate that, despite Mr. Ellis's efforts, the origins of both the present factory building at Friars Mill and the early partnership of Messrs. Donisthorpes remain obscure. The second half of the book concerns events within the author's own memory or from the recollections of his father. He provides an important account of the post-war changes at one firm of spinners, and illustrates how Donisthorpe's made the transition from worsted spinning to the manufacture of sewing thread, and more recently, the Company's successful introduction of synthetics. These changes in manufacture help to explain Donisthorpe's success, unlike so many other Leicester spinners who have either disappeared or lost their independence. Perhaps the most important contribution made by Mr. Ellis, to the historian's overall knowledge of the industrial history of Leicester, is his illustration of the role of individual families in the creation and management of businesses and firms, a feature which played a major part in the city's economic life until the early 1960s, the period when many of the largest of these independent firms became part of national conglomerates. Mr. Ellis has also given a fascinating description of his childhood at Quorn and his social life before the last War, which will doubtless prove of interest to future social historians. The author in the first

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chapter, where he describes the early history of the Friar Mills site, occasionally allows speculation to replace the historical content of the narrative, but this is only a minor criticism compared with the overall narrative which Mr. Ellis tells so well. The high quality of the illustrations should also be mentioned; particularly the publication of a drawing of 'Mr. Donisthorpe's house in the Newarke' by John Flower and a water-colour of a framework-knitter's shop by Albert Findley, both previously unpublished, as well as the splendid colour reproduction of G. M. Henton's water-colour painting of Friars Mill which forms the book's frontispiece. Though clearly written for personal pleasure and for the interest of his friends and colleagues, Mr. Ellis's book is of considerable interest to historians. The author is to be congratulated for providing this important contribution to the industrial history of Leicester; it is now up to other businessmen to provide similar pictures of their own firms and to the historian to provide the overall picture for the city.

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**THE PARISH CLERGY UNDER THE LATER STUARTS.** *The Leicestershire experience*, by *John H. Pruett*. The University of Illinois Press, 1978, 203 pp., £7.50.

Dr. Pruett, of the University of Illinois, has taken as his subject the condition and character of the parochial clergy between the Restoration and the Hanoverian Succession. As he points out, since Macaulay published his famous description of the country parson of the period, no historian has really attempted to substitute a statistical method for his brilliant impressionism. Such a method, on a national scale, presents great difficulties. As an alternative, Dr. Pruett offers an intensive investigation of the clergy in a single county and chooses Leicestershire as a typical example. Considering features such as situation, size, economy and distribution of population, he makes a good case for regarding it as 'a fairly average English county' of the period. How far generalisations derived from the East Midlands can hold good for, say, the West Country or the Northern counties might be disputed; but from our local viewpoint we have good reason to applaud his choice.

After a lucid introduction, in which he explains the ecclesiastical organisation of Leicester Archdeaconry (almost exactly coincident with the county) and reminds us that, at any one time, it provided for some 200 clergy occupying 170 livings, Dr. Pruett devotes his first chapter to the Civil War and Restoration. He suggests that perhaps a quarter of the Leicestershire clergy had been firm Church and King men at the beginning of the Civil War, but rightly finds it difficult to determine what proportion of the rest can be regarded as convinced Puritans. The important point he makes is that between 1642 and 1659 there had been a large turnover of clergy and four out of five livings had changed hands, so that the Restoration was bound to cause dislocation, however moderately it was conducted.