

## Reviews

*The Bedfordshire and Huntingdonshire Landscape*, by Peter Bigmore (Hodder and Stoughton, 1979, £8.95).

Volumes in 'The Making of the English Landscape' series are always eagerly awaited. This is the seventeenth volume to appear and the first to consider two counties rather than one: Yorkshire's Ridings it appears will be individually treated. Bedfordshire, as in an earlier series from the same publishers is treated jointly with its north-eastern neighbour, the now superseded Huntingdonshire, and the result is an unhappy conjunction. In the Middle Ages, Bedfordshire and Buckinghamshire shared a sheriff; the eastern parishes of Bedfordshire are indistinguishable from much of west Cambridgeshire; and historically, Luton is akin to north Hertfordshire. Only Eaton Socon, Little Staughton, Pertenhall, and perhaps Bolnhurst and Keysoe merge into Huntingdonshire.

The parishes round these – Colmworth, Dean, Shelton, Swineshead – find no mention in Bigmore's pages, nor indeed do another twenty-two of Bedfordshire's villages, although some not mentioned are marked on the end paper map: Renhold, Roxton, Stagsden and Eyeworth. The eastern fringe is not considered: Stotfold, Henlow and Langford are major omissions. The area of the lesser estates, for example the Carterets at Haynes and Wilstead, receives scant attention, and this leads to the first of several remarkable, and to this reviewer dubious statements. On page 27, Bigmore states:

Few of the great landed proprietors held large estates in the northern claylands and it is significant that documents held in the County Record Office are much richer from the southern parishes.

Although, north, south and mid are not defined as terms for Bedfordshire, the St John estate at its height covered Melchbourne, Bletsoe, Bolnhurst, Yelden, Keysoe and Riseley, either in part or totally; the Crawley estate although based on Stockwood Park, Luton, included over 4,000 acres in Thurleigh, Keysoe and Little Staughton. Lesser owners like the Francklins at Great Barford and Bolnhurst, the Wade-Gerys at Bushmead, Bolnhurst and Colmworth and the Beechers and the

Polhills at Renhold and Great Barford were confined to the north-east of Bedfordshire: each has extensive muniments.

Bigmore's treatment of timber-framed buildings seems to suggest a superficial acquaintance with much of Bedfordshire; his comparison with Norfolk (p.169) strikes this reviewer as unreal. It is true that the wealth of buildings in say Great Hockham, Binham St Mary and Pulham Market could be matched by the dearth in Houghton Conquest, Haynes and Ravensden but it could be equalled in numbers and quality of timberwork in Sutton, Silsoe, Harlington, Eversholt, Maulden, Roxton and Tempsford. Similarly his discussion of Someries Castle, near Luton, is confused: the spiral staircase is to the west of and part of the same building as the gatehouse while the chapel is to the east of the gatehouse and of a later date.

Of Bigmore's 215 pages, a mere thirty (pp.32-62) are devoted to the prehistoric, Roman and early Saxon periods. The palaeolithic is dismissed in a sentence; comment on the neolithic and Bronze Age periods is concentrated to the chalk of south Bedfordshire which must now be seen as an imbalance in view of the excavation of ring ditches at Radwell and Roxton. Discussion of the pre-Roman Iron Age is sacrificed for an extended treatment of the Romans, which is marred by confusions about individual sites. For the formative centuries a remarkable and to this reviewer at first unintelligible statement about the Kempston cemetery needs correction. Bigmore writes (p.55):

At Kempston a large pagan cemetery has produced a number of pots and urns that find their parallel in those uncovered from the camps of mercenary soldiers outside the gates of Roman York and Cambridge.

The origin of the last remark would seem to be *Medieval Archaeology* 14, (1970), 25 where a vessel with chevron-and-dot ornament found at Sandy is compared to urns found at York and Cambridge, but no pots at Kempston have chevron-and-dot ornament, at least from those surviving, or known from Bradford Rudge's illustrations.

Reviewing is a thankless task, and if this notice has concentrated on points of disagreement one

should not detract from the pleasure at seeing the book appear and for the valuable things in it: hedges, Huntingdonshire and post-medieval history seem particularly well-served.

D.H.K.

*Survey of Bedfordshire: Brickmaking, a History and Gazetteer* by Alan Cox (Bedfordshire County Council and Royal Commission on Historical Monuments, 1979, £2.00).

This publication, a joint venture by the County Council and the Royal Commission on Historical Monuments, begins with a summary of early brickmaking within the county, although until the sixteenth century the evidence comes from the buildings themselves rather than from extant documents. The textbook mythology of large-scale importation during the Middle Ages is not, happily, repeated and Mr Cox rightly urges local manufacture despite the lack of any hard evidence from this particular county (there is plenty from elsewhere). He locates a period of growth from 1600 to 1725, followed by a further period of expansion to 1850; throughout this time brickmaking remained local and small-scale. The period of expansion which Mr Cox locates is probably largely due to the fact that brick prices remained steady throughout the Tudor inflation and beyond, so that in real terms brick became a much cheaper material, although this is not discussed in the book. The part played by the Brick Tax of 1784-1850 is given some discussion, though the visual evidence seems strongly against any serious retardation of the industry by the Tax. Further, as H.A. Shannon has shown, brick manufacture increased markedly throughout the period of the Tax. Its effect on prices is, in any case, impossible to gauge, since its imposition coincided with a chronic rise in all prices due to the Napoleonic Wars. Certainly there is an increase in the number of yards operating after repeal of the Tax, but aggregate figures over a period may be misleading: R.N. Price has shown that in the Manchester area between 1859 and 1870 there was a rapid turn-

over, with many small yards operating for only a short period before being replaced by others. The directory evidence for Bedfordshire shows an only slightly better situation: of twenty-three brickmakers recorded in 1854 only seven (30%) are mentioned in 1869 (out of a total of thirty-eight for that year). The 'post-Tax' industry was certainly competitive, but given the small-scale nature of most of the yards, such competition may actually have made for a somewhat *less* stable industry than in the Tax years.

In the next section Mr Cox discusses the main forms of operation: temporary works, commercial yards, estate works, and an intriguing parish brickyard at Marston Moretaine. The following section must be one of the best recent discussions of manufacturing methods available in print.

If there was an industrial revolution at all in brickmaking it came only in the second half of the nineteenth century — as a study of relevant patents reveals — and Mr Cox spends some time on the new developments of that period, including brickmaking machinery and the new types of kilns, which allowed for continuous firing and thus cut out much of the earlier wastage; the importance of the railway in distributing the finished products is not neglected. At this point it might have been useful to analyse some of the material in the gazetteer — specifically, distribution maps for different (short) periods might have been provided. From directory evidence alone it is clear that there were the beginnings of a concentration on the Oxford Clay as early as 1869, possibly as early as 1854 — long before the Fletton process was discovered. These yards used the superficial deposits rather than the Oxford Clay itself: but the pattern is interesting. The Fletton industry, from its eponymous origins near Peterborough through to the present day, is fully described, and there is a conclusion on the future of the industry.

The second half of the book is a gazetteer of all known brickmaking sites from all periods, full details of each being given. This is the raw material for much further historical work, and for such data alone we are greatly indebted to Mr Cox. The compilation has been painstaking.

But more than that, Mr Cox has provided an admirably documented, clearly illustrated, and fully indexed study — a most worthy beginning to the projected Survey of Bedfordshire.

T.P. SMITH

*The Buckinghamshire Landscape* by Michael Reed (Hodder and Stoughton, 1979), £8.95; *A History of Northamptonshire and the Soke of Peterborough* by R.L. Greenall (Phillimore, 1979), £6.95.

These two books, in different series, on Bedfordshire's neighbours illustrate the strengths and the weaknesses of the firms which commissioned them, and incidentally the standards which these publishers are prepared to accept. Reed has 288 pages, 57 plates and 29 maps and plans. It is a joy to handle, clear in its cartography, excellent in its photographs and well written. Greenhall's book is shorter, with only 128 pages, 45 plates and 22 maps. There are also 94 drawings of items of Northamptonshire interest, ranging from a Bronze Age dagger to the Greyfriars Bus Station. The overall effect is off-putting; the purchase of a good set of stencils and some symbols templates would have improved the cartography. One feels the publishers asked too much of the draughtsman (Bruce Bailey) and gave him insufficient time to prepare his work. The photographs are good, including two in colour.

The texts of the two volumes concentrate differently. Reed devotes pages 25 to 52 to prehistoric and Roman Buckinghamshire; pages 53 to 87 to the period between 400 and 1150; and an extensive section, (pages 88 to 143) to what he terms "the early medieval landscape" covering 1150 to 1350; the remaining five chapters cover late medieval and post-medieval Buckinghamshire. For Greenall, pages 17 to 29 suffice to cover everything before 1066: Domesday Book and beyond is called "later medieval". Most of the book is devoted to post-medieval material, mainly industrial and urban topics. The early centuries are dismissed as "obscure".

Within Greenall's pages there is no evaluation of the sources for the later first millenium A.D. as with the bald use of Cyril Hart's suggestion that the southern boundary of Northamptonshire from Fotheringay to Stony Stratford represents the limit of Outer Mercia. A tribe called the "Middle Angles" are located on map 5 and in the text, but no such political grouping is mentioned in the Tribal Hidage or any other contemporary document.

On a larger compass, Michael Reed can be more sensitive with nuances and interpretations finely judged. Suggestions for future research as with the location of Scandinavian place-names are interwoven into his text. The footnotes suggest a reading of the depth requisite to write a general history of a county. His discussion of the Tribal Hidage and the *Ciltern saetna* contains the suggestion that the latter represents a social unit of the pre-Roman Iron Age, if not earlier, it deserves careful examination. A preliminary comment may point to the fact that it also included south Bedfordshire if the place name Chiltern Green means the green of the Chiltern dwelling people as distinct to some other group to the east or the south. Reed does not attempt to define the boundary of the *Ciltern saetna* as being a grouping covering four counties it is beyond his scope.

Perhaps the next series an enterprising publisher should sponsor should be concerned with areas like the Chilterns and the Fenland rather than with counties. If one does, let us hope the standards he adopts will not be the slipshod and the second-rate but rather that they will emulate both in content and production those with which *The Buckinghamshire Landscape* is served.

D.H.K.

*The Bedfordshire Archaeological Council is indebted to Bedford Museum, the North Bedfordshire Borough Council, for a grant towards the costs of this paper.*