

## REVIEWS

*The History of the Borough of High Wycombe, From Its Origins To 1880*, by L. J. Ashford. xiv, 343 pp.; 35s.

*The History of the Borough of High Wycombe, From 1880 To The Present Day*, by L. J. Mayes, x, 94 pp.; 15s.

*The History of Chairmaking in High Wycombe*, by L. J. Mayes, xiv, 174 pp.; 25s.

(All published by Routledge & Kegan Paul, Ltd., 1960.)

The appearance of these long-awaited books is the most important event in Buckinghamshire historiography for over thirty years, since the publication of the last volumes of *The Victoria County History*. Students are indebted not only to the authors, but also to the Corporation of High Wycombe, for its initiative in sponsoring much recent research into the antiquities of the borough: Mr. Ashford undertook his work at the invitation of the Council, which is also the titular publisher of the volume dealing with the modern period.

Although issued together in uniform format, these three books are separate

entities—the authors have not collaborated beyond discussing their respective contributions.

Mr. Ashford's account of the ancient borough from its origin down to 1880 is an uneven work. The early growth of the town is well done. Its favourable situation, astride the only important route through that part of the Chilterns, encouraged the development of a market, and the town grew up around its market place. Mills established on the River Wye handled corn from a wide area, and Wycombe became intimately connected with the food trade; its bakers supplied the royal household in the thirteenth century, and later on it supplied the corn market of London. To offset this advantage, proximity to the capital prevented the growth of an important fair.

The merchant gild established its privileges against the encroachments of Alan Basset, lord of Bassetbury manor, early in the reign of Henry III, and thereafter the borough made steady progress under its governance. However, this period is treated in rather dull fashion. It is difficult to take much interest in the dealings of obscure burgesses over small pieces of land, and one looks in vain for an analysis of the population and economy of the town as a whole. Taxation records are almost entirely neglected, and modern methods of dealing with them apparently ignored.

Approaching modern times Mr. Ashford becomes progressively more at home with his material. The constitutional developments, and religious and civic discords of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries are vividly recounted, while the picture of the life of the town in all its aspects from the Restoration to the Age of Reform after 1830 will hardly be bettered. Here are truly authentic descriptions of the people of a small country town in the eighteenth century, their work and play, their local government, and their politics. Perhaps politics is too euphemistic a term; rather should we say that the burgesses of Wycombe devoted themselves wholeheartedly to the interests of their patrons, Whartons, Wallers, and Pettys, and regularly elected them or their nominees to Parliament, making sure of doing so by the expedient of packing the burgess body with complacent "foreigners". Strangely enough the borough was not scheduled for disfranchisement in 1832, for it did not qualify as a rotten borough. However, it had henceforth to share its franchise with the £10 householders of the surrounding parish, and this was a portent for the future, for despite reform of the corporation in 1835, the borough eventually proved too restricted, and in 1880 became merged in the larger unit required for efficient local government.

As we have indicated, Mr. Ashford has by no means exhausted his subject, especially in connection with the earlier periods. At the same time it must be added that what he has done in many places is to avoid needless repetition of Parker's earlier *History and Antiquities*, with the important difference that where the nineteenth-century antiquary is content to record, the twentieth-century historian is at pains to interpret. Transcripts of charters, lists of dignitaries, and other staple material of local research is therefore sacrificed in favour of less well known, yet more intimate documents which form useful appendices to most chapters.

It is unfortunate that so valuable a work should be marred in places by evidence of uncritical proof-reading. Some dates are wrongly stated, and footnote references are not all as clear as they might be; some are misleading. Reference to Aylesbury on page 209 does not make it clear that the town was a borough only in the Parliamentary sense in the eighteenth century. However, these minor slips cannot detract from the overall importance of the work.

In tracing the growth of modern Wycombe, Mr. Mayes has confined himself to a simple factual record. The result is none the worse for this, indeed it is a positive advantage since the surest path through the maze of contemporary history is a straightforward story, in this case of the evolution of a small market town to a thriving

industrial centre, against the background of the "Second Industrial Revolution". The tale is well told, and the reader is grateful for being spared the tables and graphs which commonly disfigure recent history.

*The History of Chairmaking in High Wycombe* is in many ways the best volume of the three. After many years of answering enquiries about chairmaking the author, curator of the town's museum as well as Borough Librarian, undertook the writing of the history largely as a measure of self-defence. For his material he has gone to the best possible source, namely the craftsmen who actually make the chairs, one of whom still works in traditional fashion in the Chiltern beech woods. The result is all one could hope for; a fascinating description of the processes of manufacture leads to a vivid piece of social history in which the transition from handicraft to machinery, from chairmaking to the furniture industry, and the rise of trade unionism are all fully dealt with. Nor are related topics, marketing of the chairs, and the life of the workers, for example, forgotten. (With bodgers, bottomers, and makers off, to name only a few, the industry should be a paradise for compilers of television panel games!) As a piece of industrial history it would perhaps gain by the inclusion of some statistics; however, it is better written in English than in terms of mathematics, and is a work that will be read with pleasure and profit by specialist and general reader alike. It should appeal to the latter in particular since it concentrates on the actual tasks and the people who perform them, and as such forms an important contribution to the social history of the last century and a half. Local studies of this sort do much to correct the over-generalised impressions which have for so long coloured our view of the industrial age in Britain, and it is impossible to have too many of them.

Both Mr. Mayes's volumes are amply illustrated with well-chosen plates, and the three volumes make a handsome set. J.C.

*The Buildings of England: Buckinghamshire*, by Nikolaus Pevsner. Penguin Books, 7 × 4½ in. Paper covers, pp. 340+ map and illustrations. 10s. 6d.

The long awaited Buckinghamshire volume in this famous series is a somewhat uneven and disappointing production. There are many excellent points; and the idea of a "Perambulation" in such places as Amersham, Beaconsfield, Aylesbury, Buckingham, etc., which contain many good houses of widely varying dates and styles, is an admirable one. But to balance this there seems undue emphasis on Georgian and later architecture at the expense of the earlier work. And the book is full of inaccuracies of fact or attribution; and there are, inevitably, many omissions of what one would have considered more important material.

A few instances out of dozens may be mentioned. P. 18: For Bedconford read Bedcanford. P. 57: The Old Gaol. This is in the *Bierton* not Bicester Road; was a Women's Borstal and is now once more a Prison. P. 72: For an account of Bradwell Abbey Chapel, see Notes in this issue of the Records. P. 159: Strong Ring-work round Hawridge Court Farm should be mentioned. P. 143: Great Hampden Rectory. Presumably the Old Rectory is meant. It was built about 30 years ago; present Rectory is also a very modern building. P. 171: The Roundabout, Horsenden, medieval circular moated site might have been noticed. P. 190-1: Little Kimble. Site of Roman villa south-east of the Church deserves mention. P. 293-4: The former Church Library at Willen deserves mention.

The introduction on p. 19 speaks of the "Norman West tower of Bradenham with its Saxon-looking details": while on p. 70 it is assigned to the Perpendicular period. In fact, it is the South doorway that has Saxo-Norman features. P. 19: The nave at Upton is 19th century. P. 22: The cross at Stoke Poges was removable from the base for processional purposes. P. 61: Street's horrible addition to the medieval West

tower at Beachampton receives an unaccountable encomium. P. 65: The superb and homogeneous early 14th-century Church at Bierton receives scant praise. P. 66: The wall paintings at Bledlow are inaccurately described: the scrollwork and masonry in the nave arcade spandrels are 13th century; the Adam and Eve and cinquefoils in the South aisle 14th century; and the St. Christopher in the North aisle, late 15th century. P. 70: The "sculpture" at Boveney is all that remains of a 15th-century Nottingham alabaster retable. P. 77: No indication is given of the remarkable earlier history of Bulstrod: the "Gothic Tower" was the porte-cochère of an earlier, 18th-century layout. P. 81: Chalfont St. Giles wall paintings inaccurately and inadequately described—the architectural painting is nearer 1500 than 1400; and the scenes from the life of St. John Baptist, and the Tree of Jesse are not mentioned. P. 83: Chalfont St. Peter. No mention of remains and fittings of medieval church; and the Greyhound dates from 16th century (timber) on. P. 89, under Chequers, for Lady *Jane Gray* read Lady *Mary*, her sister. P. 93: Recent research has shown that Archer had nothing to do with the building of Chicheley Hall. P. 97: Clifton Reynes. The most interesting development of the medieval church plan from Saxon times on is simply not coped with. P. 111: It might have been stated that the 15th-century East window at Drayton Beauchamp shows the Apostles' Creed. P. 135: The interest of the window at Fenny Stratford and the two earlier roundels are quite missed. P. 137: Fulmer "A Jacobean font cover recently restored and re-coloured" is, of course, completely wrong. The wooden font-case enclosing marble basin is complete in oak, and the flat mouldings have merely been re-gilded. P. 150: The village of Haddenham, its intricate plan and the use of wicket, is barely noticed. P. 158: It seems pretty silly to give detailed description and a photograph of Hartwell Church as it was years ago, when it has been a roofless ruin for at least five years. P. 160: The dedication of Hedgerley Church is St. Mary not St. Mark. P. 168-9 and 217: No connexion is traced between the identical work at Hillesden and North Marston, which are by the same masons, who worked in Eton and Windsor. And there is no mention of John Schorne and his shrine. P. 170: The Nine Orders of Angels and Four Evangelists in 14th-century cut-glass at Hitcham might have been identified. P. 176: The only Saxon work at Iver is in the north-east and south-east quoins of the nave where Roman brick is used. The window is 12th century. P. 191: Another inaccurate and incomplete description of the wall paintings at Little Kimble. P. 192: The brass in Little Marlow is to *Nicholas Ledewich* and Alice, his wife. P. 210: The extremely interesting Church at Monks Risborough receives very cursory notice, in contrast to p. 213 where the rather dull and heavily Victorianised Church at Newport Pagnell receives the best part of a whole page. P. 223: The importance and rarity of the Doom at Penn, only discovered in 1938, and the fact that it is palimpsest, are entirely missed. While Stowe is admittedly a remarkable monument, 14 pages (251-65) seems an excessive space to allot in a book of this compass. P. 267: My favourite "orphan" church of the deserted village of Tattenhoe comes off poorly in this dry-as-dust volume, where the romance and beauty of its situation count for nothing. The account of Thornton is astonishingly astray (p. 268). The whole church is late medieval, with 19th-century heavy restorations; and the church was refitted in the late 18th century when the chancel was pulled down. No mention is made of the recovery of the Ingylton tomb from a grotto in the grounds of Thornton House.

Mr. Pevsner's 18th-century enthusiasm again runs away with him at West Wycombe, where  $7\frac{1}{2}$  pages (283-90) are given over to House, Park and Church, and only about 20 lines to one of the most beautiful village streets in Buckinghamshire, and even some of that goes on a Victorian Vicarage and Church. In spite of these criticisms, this is a useful book, and the architectural information is usually sound. E.C.R.

*The Signatories of the Orthodox Confession of 1679*, by Arnold H. J. Baines, M.A. 8½ × 5½, pp. 40, paper covers. (Carey Kingsgate Press, London, 1960, 2s. 6d.)

This useful booklet is a revised and re-set version of the original paper in the *Baptist Quarterly* (Vol. xvii), 1957. In his Preface Mr. Baines points out that though the *Protestant Confession of Faith, containing Fifty Articles* (the orthodox Confession), is the classical statement of the faith and order of the General Baptists, yet little has up to now been known about the men who signed it. Buckinghamshire is especially rich in early Non-conformist history: but more seems to be known of the Quakers than of the Baptists, though the little chapel at Winslow, founded by Benjamin Keach in 1657 should be familiar to many.

The author here sets down what is known of the fifty-four General Baptists who met together, probably in Aylesbury, on 30th January, 1670, to sign the Fifty Articles.

Many of the entries give interesting biographical and topographical details concerning Buckinghamshire, and Mr. Baines's work is well documented and annotated. This is an excellent piece of research in a somewhat restricted, but consequently most interesting and hitherto neglected field.

E.C.R.

#### NEWS LETTERS

The NEWS LETTERS of the Wolverton and District Archæological Society have been received which give useful accounts of work being done in the north of the County. The principal contents are:

No. 5 (January 1960). Accounts of work done at Abbey Barn and Roman Site, Bradwell. "Roman Road Survey, 1959".

No. 6 (January 1961). "The Surprises of Wakefield", "Thornton", "Romano-British Haversham".