

Reviews

The Sandford Cartulary, vol. 2. Edited by Agnes M. Leys. Oxfordshire Record Society, vol. xxii, 1941. Pp. 179-328.

With the issue of *The Sandford Cartulary*, part 2, Mrs. Leys has completed her useful work. It is true that the late Miss Beatrice Lees published most of the early charters in her edition of the 'Templars' Inquest of 1185, printed by the British Academy, but some of them escaped her, and the deeds after 1185 were of course omitted. This volume contains charters about Oxfordshire, Berks., Bucks, Hants. and Wilts., and in Oxfordshire the manors of Sibford Gower, Sibford Ferris, Merton and Hensington are specially prominent. When (if ever) the parishes of the county are tackled for the V.C.H., this volume will be valuable.

H. E. SALTER.

A Map of Old English Monasteries and related ecclesiastical foundations, A.D. 400-1066.
By Alice M. Ryan. Cornell Studies in English, xxviii. Cornell University Press, 1939. Pp. vi+36 and folding map. 4s. 6d.

Miss Ryan's map of Old-English ecclesiastical sites was originally intended to serve the larger purpose of a standard map for the Anglo-Saxon period. The publication of the Ordnance Survey *Map of Britain in the Dark Ages*, caused her to confine it to ecclesiastical sites while retaining the terminal date at 1066, and it thus serves quite a different purpose from the Ordnance Survey Map, while necessarily duplicating part of its material. On an uncoloured outline map she has marked with different symbols monasteries, nunneries, double monasteries, bishops' sees, minsters, hermitages, cells, churches vouched for by existing remains, crosses, Roman roads, and a rather vague group of 'places with ecclesiastical association.' The classification suffers from unnecessary complication,—in particular the distinction of monasteries and minsters is one impossible to maintain satisfactorily in this period—and the symbols chosen for the different groups are too confusing to serve their purpose. Many omissions will strike the eye: thus in the Oxford district few, if any, of the churches containing structural evidence of pre-Conquest origin are marked, nor are such places as Headington or Bampton or Lambourne, which must certainly have been 'old minsters.' Indeed it would appear that Miss Ryan was inadequately qualified for the task before her: it could only be done properly by someone with an exhaustive knowledge, not only of the literary sources and their implications, but of the architecture of village churches all over the country. Surely Hertford and Hatfield, the sites of Theodore's famous synods, are 'places with ecclesiastical association' sufficient for a mention. The index has numerous misprints and other infelicities: even Miss Mary Bateson has turned into Bateman; and why should Oxford be placed in Surrey?

J. N. L. MYRES.

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An Inventory of the Historical Monuments in the City of Oxford. Royal Commission on Historical Monuments, England. London: H.M. Stationery Office, 1939. Pp. 244; 217 plates; plans; 1 map. £1 1s.¹

THE PHOTOGRAPHY.

Oxford must be one of the most photographed places in the world: she has an almost limitless wealth to offer the camera. The volume before us reveals this happily in the first pages, with good pictures of fire-places, vaults, overmantels. These subjects, mainly interior, have usually been well rendered here. When we turn to exteriors, selection is less ready with examples for approval. The frontispiece is welcome for its unusual viewpoint, but it is a dull, unattractive photograph. Yet it should have been masterly and set that standard for the book. We proceed to turn over plate after plate seeking in vain for that sunshine and liveliness that the camera can convey so charmingly. We realise that the hard garishness of effect is due to an elementary fault in technique. A list of half a hundred plates that fall short of an acceptable standard on this ground alone has been made out; plates 162, 170, 181, 200 may be quoted. These are frankly bad photographs, and there are too many of them. Blank blotches of black do duty for the luminous shadows that ought to be there. It is necessary to say that there exist many photographs of the same subjects as here, taken for commercial publications; and not one of them commits this deplorable puerility of technique. Those in charge of this undertaking must often have seen good photographs; but the unbiassed onlooker is forced to the conclusion that the art-editors of the Commission are not entirely aware why a good photograph is good, or a bad one not good. It is held up to us for virtue that all these photographs were 'taken expressly for the Commission.' We would not dispute that; but the loan of blocks from trade-houses would have ensured a higher standard of excellence.

There are further infelicities. While the flashlight of the cramped little ante-chapel of Corpus is inevitable, and a good job in the conditions, there was no need to have used flashlight for the chapel-side of the same screen, nor for the parallel case at University College. Again: no one who had seen a competent photograph of the grand screen to the chapel at All Souls would have wished to dispense with that most apt semicircular tier of steps; to pare it ruthlessly in half is an unpardonable ineptitude. A similar niggardliness for the Trinity gates make an ill-balanced composition that deprives this fine entry of its impressiveness.

The rendering of the stained glass, with few exceptions (the Merton set and some at Christ Church) is throughout so poor that one wonders why it should have been given at all. Glass of all things should seem transparent; and these blotted things are just shows of clogged opacity. The cause is the same as that above suggested, that produces the hard, void shadows—an inexpert timing of the exposure. These and such things as the Sheldonian (pl. 60) and the house on pl. 11, iv are lessons how not to take a photograph. The viewpoint is often unskilful, the lighting simply untutored. Photographs 'taken expressly' could and should have had the whole range of season and opportunity to draw upon, with repeats for innumerable bungled attempts.

We accept the selection of the subjects offered; it must have been an exacting task to appoint from the vast possibilities what should be included. But the casual order of

¹This review was (through no fault of its author) unavoidably held over from volume V, in which the R.C.H.M. volume was reviewed from the general, heraldic, and architectural points of view. [EDD.].

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the plates in some sequences strikes us as inexplicable, and must leave any reader not fluently familiar with Oxford's intricate topography bewildered.

But it is distasteful to pile up indictments where one had hoped only to admire. It has been earlier indicated that many good and passable photographs are included. That is not enough. We had a right to look to a work so eagerly anticipated, reposing under the majestic ægis of a Royal Commission, for a magisterial rendering of at least the outward semblance of Oxford's treasures. We are met with disappointment; a unique opportunity missed. Five hundred photographs at a guinea on these terms are not all a bargain. Those who have a camera-sense will know best how Oxford, above all, is alluring to photograph; but no one thumbing the leaves of this book would be much led to think so.

S. M. COLLINS.

Oxford, as it was and as it is to-day. By Christopher Hobhouse. London, B. T. Batsford, 1939. Pp. 120; 138 plates. 8s. 6d.

The publishers have provided this book with their usual array of most excellent photographs. Out of 138 illustrations it is not perhaps surprising that a few, for example no. 21 of Mercury fountain and no. 82 of All Souls pinnacles, are bad and out of focus, but the majority are beyond criticism, and provided an admirable basis on which to found a story of Oxford and its institutions. But the author has failed to back up the publishers' munificence.

His conception of the book is good, but it needed a firmer background of scholarship and good judgment for its proper execution. The tone, with its pseudo-clever asides and immoderate conceits, jars; and this jarring note is accentuated by the author's incomplete acquaintance with the subject.

He is prone to an 18th century bias and will hear little good of the 19th and still less of the 20th, not only in architecture, but in modes and mannerisms. Modern Oxford, it would appear, only pleases him in so far as it perpetuates the 18th century and earlier. The Gothic revivalist architects come off badly; Butterfield, of course, and Jackson, Street and Blore as well, are flayed time and again, and even Buckler is twice referred to with contumely as 'a' Mr. Buckler. Rhodes House is an 'extraordinary edifice', and the new Bodleian building is 'huge, formless and eccentric'; one suspects that in the latter instance the author's judgment is biased against the building by its purpose and its cost, of both of which he speaks more than once with scorn.

But these are matters of opinion. It is otherwise when he sneers and jibes at the University, its institutions, and its members. Bad taste of that sort may not be forgiven; nor does the present reviewer propose to perpetuate it by citing instances, which abound in the latter part of the book.

Throughout the book mistakes and inaccuracies are frequent; the account of the work Buckler and later architects did on the statues on the tower of St. Mary's church is badly bungled; St. Giles's Fair is not always held on September 5th and 6th; Antony Wood was not ignored by his contemporaries, as the mere fact of his indictment by Clarendon would testify; the Bodleian Library does not receive a copy of every book printed in England unless it asks for one, and the Bodleian catalogue does not occupy an entire wing.

All this is a great pity. The book promised well and the pictures gave it a fine background, and one has the feeling that the author might have done better had he not been so elated with his own conceits. As it is the book merely disappoints and angers.

D. B. HARDEN.

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Christ Church Mall : a diversion. By 'Carfax.' Oxford, Hall the Printer, Ltd. (1941). Pp. 8; 1 plan. Privately circulated.

Under the pseudonym of 'Carfax' there lurks the name of a well-wisher of Oxford who in this pamphlet states the case for a new 'Mall' along the southern edge of Christ Church meadow, linking Iffley Road (Marston Street), with Oxpens Road. Such a Mall, with the further developments which it would bring in its train in St. Aldates and elsewhere, would, in Carfax's eyes, not only solve the traffic problems in the High (restoring to that street its scholarly calm), but would also permit the district between St. Aldates and Oxpens Road to be developed as a civic centre. The latter may be; but we doubt the former. As Carfax himself admits, the traffic in the High is *local* traffic; and unless it were proposed to remove the shops in that street and thereabouts which cause the traffic, there seems little hope of the High benefiting much from the author's Mall. But we are grateful, none the less, to Carfax for his public spirit in preparing this pamphlet, and more particularly for the admirable plan at the end signed 'T.L.D.'

D. B. HARDEN.

Notes on Brass-rubbing. Oxford, 1941; printed for the Oxford University Archaeological Society and obtainable at the Ashmolean Museum. 8½ ins. by 5½ ins. Pp. 24. 1s.

The Oxford University Archaeological Society has done well to publish its *Notes on Brass-Rubbing*, which will prove useful to those wanting a concise account of the technique of rubbing. The pamphlet gives notes on the methods and materials to be used, the costume and armour—ecclesiastical, academical and civilian—the chronology of inscriptions and details of some useful books for further reading. A list of brasses in some of the churches within a ten-mile radius of Oxford and in college chapels in Oxford is given. In particular it is satisfactory to see that stress is laid on the necessity of noting certain details without which rubbings are valueless as records, such as marking the outline of the indent, rivet-holes and the outside edge of the slab; also that the rubbing should not be cut out for mounting if it is intended to be a record of permanent value. A note of caution is welcome too, on the practice of colouring shields of arms on a rubbing; this, quite rightly, should not be done unless adequate evidence of the tinctures or metals can be derived from the brass itself.

Although primarily intended to assist members of the O.U.A.S., this pamphlet will prove of much use to many others who wish to find practical hints on brass-rubbing and to make sure that they are working on the right lines.

P. S. SPOKES.