

Reviews

The English Mediaeval House. By Margaret Wood. Pp. xxx, 448 ; 60 = 32 plates and 117 text figures. Price £8 8s.

This is a most splendid and most encouraging book ; encouraging to those who are working in the field, encouraging to those who are beginning. If one may be allowed to use an over-worked phrase, it does indeed mark an epoch. On the one hand it sums up Dr. Margaret Wood's own invaluable work during the last few decades ; and on the other hand it provides a stock-taking of all the serious work that has been done on the subject of medieval English domestic architecture during the last 150 years. That period has been a rather chequered one. The early and middle years of the 19th century produced some excellent collections of plans and measured drawings, such as the Pugins' *Examples of Gothic Architecture* (1838-40) and Dollman and Jobbins' *Analysis of Ancient Domestic Architecture* (1861-63), and above all it produced Turner and Parker's four volumes on the *Domestic Architecture of England* (1851-59), which was for so long the fundamental work, to which Dr. Wood has now succeeded in producing the modern counterpart ; and it is a tribute to the lasting quality of these works that Dr. Wood has included some 30 pages of their illustrations. Curiously enough the second half of the century, which saw the triumph of the Gothic Revival, also saw something of a slump in serious works on medieval domestic architecture and a decline in draughtsmanship. Things improved after the turn of the century, with the work of men like Gotch, Brakspear, St. John Hope and Walter Godfrey, and the stream of steadily improving articles in *Country Life*. The increasing attention paid to domestic architecture in the volumes of the Royal Commissions on Historical Monuments is one symptom ; the creation of the National Buildings Record (now the National Monuments Record) is another ; the realization that minor, 'vernacular' architecture may be as important as the architecture of the great houses, is yet another symptom of the revival that is going on. Dr. Wood has made full use of what contemporaries are doing and is well aware of contemporary trends, which she herself has done so much to foster ; and she has been able to include some 'stop-press' items like the Winchester excavations (p. 215).

In a work like this, one of the problems is to choose between several possible principles of arrangement ; chronological, topographical and analytical. Turner and Parker had adopted chronology for their main divisions, and within these, the treatment was partly analytical—the house plan and its component parts—and partly topographical—with a gazetteer of surviving buildings, county by county. They were pioneers, clearing their way through the untracked forest, and this was the necessary log-book of their clearance work. Dr. Wood has rightly departed from this arrangement ; a topographical gazetteer was no longer possible—it would have been too unwieldy—and no longer necessary, because of the enormous amount of work that has been done in the last half century on individual buildings, for instance in *Country Life* and other journals, national and local. Instead, apart from one or two concessions to chronology, like the opening chapter on Norman town houses and a later chapter on domestic plans in the later Middle Ages, the treatment is mainly

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analytical, dealing with such subjects as the various types of hall, first floor and ground floor, aisled and aisleless, solars and their undercrofts, tower-houses, lodgings for retainers, chapels, kitchens, fireplaces, staircases, windows and so forth down to garderobes and baths. All this is very well worked out; and perhaps the best feature in the whole book is that almost every chapter is followed by a chronological list of house-components or features—halls, chapels, fireplaces and the like—sometimes amounting to over a hundred examples, each with bibliographical references; this is one of the things that will make this indispensable as a work of reference. The Oxford region is well represented by such examples as the Abingdon Abbey buildings, Broughton Castle, Charney Bassett, Minster Lovell, Stanton Harcourt, Sutton Courtenay. Stonor, whose chapel is here cited, might also be quoted as providing two different halls: a 14th-century timber one, and a 13th-century stone one of peculiar plan, two-aisled, like Acton Burnell. Dr. Wood suggests that the uppermost chamber, with an oriel, in the south-west tower at Minster Lovell was Lord Lovell's great chamber, but the room seems rather small for this, and perhaps this was more in the nature of a study, rather like the lofty study, contained in a tower, which Prior Selling added to the prior's house at Canterbury; the great chamber at Minster Lovell was perhaps in the long west range, leading to the tower, above the range of lodgings. Numerous as domestic chapels are, I do not think one can quite say that every lord had one (cf. p. 227), for parochial rights were strictly guarded, and a domestic oratory needed an episcopal licence; the bishops' registers need combing for these licences. The book is full of illuminating discussions; one might single out Dr. Wood's accounts of how the parlour developed out of the cellar under the solar (pp. 91 ff.) and of how the familiar hall oriel developed out of the oriel chamber (pp. 103 ff.); indeed the whole account of the oriel is particularly interesting to a member of a College named after such a feature. The book is lavishly provided with well-chosen illustrations, old and new, including a large number of Dr. Wood's own photographs. There is a full bibliography, which ties in with lists of examples appended to each chapter.

W. A. PANTIN.

Traditional Domestic Architecture in the Banbury Region. By R. B. Wood-Jones. Manchester University Press, 1963. Pp. 309. 83 figs. and 24 plates. £3 3s.

The serious study of English vernacular architecture is a development of the last twenty years. It has come none too soon, for in many areas the great redevelopment of the 20th century will soon have left all too few examples of the 'great rebuilding' of the 16th and early 17th centuries. In the Banbury area much fortunately still survives, but several of the houses so meticulously investigated by Mr. Wood-Jones were recorded while actually in process of demolition, and one at least (College Farm, Hempton) has been destroyed since his book was written. It is fortunate, therefore, that the region should have been made the subject of this careful and scholarly study, which may well serve as a model for other areas.

The Banbury region, as defined by Mr. Wood-Jones, is essentially geological, consisting of those portions of Oxfordshire, Warwickshire and Northamptonshire which are characterized by the outcropping of the red marlstone beds of the Middle Lias. It is this ferruginous stone, attractive in colour, but somewhat deficient in

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durability, that gives to the vernacular architecture of the area its local identity, distinguishing it both from the superior masoncraft fostered by the finer oolites of Northamptonshire and the Cotswolds and from the inferior rubble of southern Oxfordshire. Within this area Mr. Wood-Jones's investigation of the surviving examples of domestic architecture of the 16th and 17th centuries has been of exemplary thoroughness, and all the principal examples are illustrated by plans, elevations and sections of admirable clarity and precision. From these he has drawn important conclusions about the character of the domestic architecture of the region both in planning and in architectural treatment. He thinks, no doubt rightly, that as there is no single surviving example of a cottage or yeoman farmer's house that can be dated before 1500, the medieval villages of the area must have consisted of timber-framed houses of poor quality, for elsewhere the old timber-framed structures were frequently retained as the nuclei of new buildings. In the Banbury area, therefore, the great rebuilding meant the wholesale substitution of stone for timber, and it is the stone-built house which forms the subject of Mr. Wood-Jones's study. His analysis of its characteristic features will be read with pleasure by every architectural historian, and the liberal manner with which the text is illustrated enables every point to be clearly understood. The picture that emerges is one of a simple, unpretentious, style, with many modest refinements, but few fanciful enrichments. Thus it is above all the absence of the gabled dormer that distinguishes the Banbury house from its Cotswold counterpart, while transomed windows are a rarity, and porches an uncharacteristic luxury. There are excellent drawings of mouldings, and the analysis of roof structures is one of the most valuable features of the work.

Only in one respect is the book open to criticism, and that is in its use of documentary evidence. There are disappointingly few references to those probate inventories and glebe-terriers that elsewhere have been made to throw so much light on the domestic arrangements of the past, and in very few cases has Mr. Wood-Jones attempted to identify the original owners of the houses he has recorded, even when dates and initials have provided a visible clue. His suggestions about the social status of the occupants are, therefore, less firmly based on ascertained fact than his architectural observations, and the relationship between the architectural quality of the houses and their owners' economic status is not as well defined as one might have wished. Though more detailed documentary research might have added considerably to the historical value of Mr. Wood-Jones's survey, it is, however, unlikely that it would have affected his architectural conclusions to any significant extent, and it is these that make the book the definitive study of its subject.

H. M. COLVIN.

Monuments in Merton College Chapel. By Alan Bott. Oxford, Basil Blackwell, 1964. Pp. xii, 173 ; 7 illustrations, 6 plans. Price £1 10s.

Most appropriately the publication of this volume was sponsored by Merton College in connexion with the celebration of the 700th anniversary of its foundation. Apart from considerations of college *pietas* the monuments in Merton College chapel by reason of their antiquity and their representative character well warrant a descriptive record being undertaken. They have found a most painstaking and well-informed recorder in Mr. Alan Bott. It perhaps needs to be remarked that Merton

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College chapel unlike any other college chapel in Oxford continued to serve a dual function as college chapel and a parish church from its first erection until 1891 when the parish of St. John the Baptist was united with that of St. Peter in the East.

It is an eloquent commentary on the 17th-century antiquarian zeal that three records from that century should survive relating to monumental inscriptions in Oxford college chapels: those of a young cavalry officer in the army of Charles I; those of Dr. Michael Hutton; and of course the survey made by that eminent Mertonian antiquary, Anthony Wood. Thereafter Mr. Bott has had recourse to the 18th-century collections of Dr. Richard Rawlinson, and, in the 19th century, to the account compiled by Herbert Hurst and the admirable plans that accompany it.

Of prime interest are the memorial brasses, both those that survive and those of which descriptions made by one or more of these antiquaries are available. Both brasses and matrices during the course of seven centuries have suffered loss or damage, through 'the sacrilege of an army of reprobates under the countenance of a rebellious Parliament', through the collapse of a large portion of the roof of the south transept in 1655, through re-paving later in the century and through the activities of 19th-century restorers. Mr. Bott has done his best to identify the mutilated surviving matrices which bear the impress of 14th-century brasses.

In assigning one of these matrices to the lost brass of Dr. Richard Campsale, Mr. Bott accepts the assumption that Campsale died c. 1350-60. But in so doing he misreads his source of information for this approximate dating of Campsale's death. Mr. Edward A. Synan, the author of an article on this 14th-century theologian published in 1952, commits himself no more precisely than to give this date as a *terminus ad quem*, basing his supposition on the probable date of a book-list of the contents of the theological works in Merton College library which contains the titles of five books bequeathed by Campsale. There is, however, no evidence in the surviving bursars' accounts for Campsale's continued residence as a fellow from 1326 onwards: moreover, it is not known that Campsale ever left Merton on promotion to a benefice. It is therefore, a fair presumption that by 1330 at latest he had died while still a fellow.

Mr. Bott adds considerably to the interest of his records of inscriptions by the brief biographical particulars that he gives of the deceased. One cannot help wondering, however, why he has not included Thomas Hearne's diaries as a source of information for this purpose, at least to the extent of giving references to the five instances in which Hearne has something kindly or caustic to record. It may be suggested that John Bouke, d. 1519, of whom Mr. Bott says 'nothing certain is known', is identical with John Bucke or Buke who incepted a M.A. in 1507 and supplicated in 1513, probably unsuccessfully, to incorporate as D.D. on the strength of having acquired that degree in 1511 at the University of Turin. Perhaps intentionally, Mr. Bott does not record the demise of poor William Cardonnel, admitted as a fellow in 1676, who, having been for a long time on bad terms with Warden Clayton, committed suicide in 1681 and was buried 'in aula vestiarii', where, as Warden Brodrick recalls, his skeleton was discovered about 1870.

At the end of the census of monumental inscription there are included three appendices. Appendix I sets out a list of 'those thought or known to have been buried in the chapel or churchyard but who receive no mention on the parish register or to whom no identifiable monument now exists'. This list, as Mr. Bott suggests, might be augmented if the later portion, 1522 to 1617, of *Registrum Annalium Collegii*

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Merton, not comprised in Dr. Salter's edition, were to be searched. But it must not be taken for granted that the earlier portion of this important register, that is, 1483 to 1521, contains notices of all contemporary burials. References to the sub-wardens' rolls confirms this doubt. For instance, the subwardens' accounts for 1491-92 record the burial of Richard Sparke, yeoman bedel of theology, and of Pryde, a portionist of the college; and those for 1492-93, the burials of M. John Ramson of Beam Hall and of Henley and Gregory, scholars of St. Alban Hall.

Appendix II is devoted to an interesting study of the small picture of the college which is portrayed on the monument of Sir Henry Savile, d. 1622.

The concluding appendix comprises a transcription of the burials entered in the register of the parish of St. John the Baptist ranging from 1617 to 1900.

One small slip: on p. 26, para. 4, 'prebend' should read 'prebendary'.

A. B. EMDEN.

South Newington Churchwardens' Accounts, 1553-1684. Transcribed and edited by E. R. C. Brinkworth, with bibliographical descriptions by H. G. Pollard and D. M. Rogers. Banbury Historical Society Publications, vol. 6, 1964. Pp. xxiii, 82. £1 10s. to non-members.

This volume, to which Mr. Brinkworth has contributed a most useful and scholarly introduction, is a welcome addition to the stock of local ecclesiastical records now available in print. The South Newington accounts are most complete for the years 1578-1606, but are only fragmentary for 1553-78 and 1606-84. The records of the latter period consist in fact of a series of inserted loose sheets which deal not only with what was strictly churchwardens' business but with such miscellanea as occasional constables' accounts, hearth lists, levies, original bills and memoranda on parish affairs. As usual in the Elizabethan period, as the scope of parish administration was widened under statutory legislation, one finds included in the churchwardens' accounts an increasing number of entries related to purely secular business such as was later to be accounted for separately by the other parish officers—the overseers of the poor, constables and highway surveyors.

In view of the incompleteness of these accounts for the critical periods there is little to indicate the parish's reactions to the changes in the religious settlements, though there is perhaps an occasional hint of conservatism in such references as the description of the 'customary ringing on the birthday of Queen Elizabeth as the ringing 'on Saint Hugh's Day' as late as 1603. It is interesting also to find five bells being cast during the Interregnum, in 1656-58. Rogationtide seems to have continued to be observed with traditional festivities throughout the Elizabethan period, and in 1604 there was still 18d. spent 'at the perambulation in ale and cakes'. A special local celebration was provided by 'the custom' received from Exeter College as rectors of the parish. In 1595 12d. was 'spent at Oxford in going to Exceter Colledge to demaund our custom', but a memorandum of 1650 seems to reveal a changing attitude—though probably for social rather than religious reasons: 'Whereas it hath been observed that much disorder (to the scandall of religion) hath broken out in the managing of the custom that is due from the parsonage to this towne of Southnewington at the usuall times of Christmas and Easter, upon the intrusion of many children and others not concerned in it, who were formerly in the memorie of some of us debarred of such meetings: We therefore, the inhabitants of the sayd towne . . .

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doe . . . order for the future that not above two persons of a family throughout the towne be allowed to come to the parsonage house to enjoy there the sayd custom . . . ' When did this ' custom ' eventually die? A similar conviviality at Kidlington was distressing the vicar there as late as 1738.

Like most parishes, South Newington possessed a ' church house ', for the ' byldyng ' of which 31s. 8d. was expended in 1565. Clearly its primary use was as a place where the church ales and other meetings could be held. Was it also used to house villagers in reduced circumstances? Nearby Wigginton's parish register refers to an ' almswoman in the church house ' there in 1642, and it seems possible that at South Newington the ' Widowe Hollwaie ' and ' Widowe Harries ', from each of whom 2s. was received as rent in 1581, may have been similarly accommodated for what was little more than a token payment.

A significant feature of the Elizabethan accounts is the high proportion of the annual charges represented by the payment of fees at visitations and the costs of ecclesiastical court proceedings. In 1590, for example, these came to no less than 8s. 11d. out of a total expenditure for the year of 36s. 10½d. These financial demands help to explain the unpopularity of the ecclesiastical administrative machinery and its personnel which was actively exploited by the puritans.

On the income side, perhaps the greatest interest of the South Newington accounts lies in the way in which they reveal the shift from voluntary to compulsory methods of raising funds necessitated by the growing social strains and consequent financial burdens during Elizabeth's reign. In the earlier years the main source of the churchwardens' income was the church ale and the sale of ' church malt ' brewed thereat. The last specific mention of the church ale occurs in 1584 (though the malt sales continued into the 17th century), and in the next year there appears for the first time a record of the imposition of church rates levied on the yardlands held by the parishioners. In 1585 there were two levies—of 4d. and 6d. per yardland respectively—which brought in a sum of 53s. 9d.: a demand made necessary by unusually high expenditure in the preceding year. The amount of the levies varied from year to year thereafter, and in some years nothing was demanded; but a memorandum of 1617 refers to a rate of 16d. per yardland as having been ' accustomed time out of mynde ' in the parish, and the levying of this sum annually ' for ever ' was authorized. Despite the price revolution, inflation was evidently still as yet little understood at South Newington.

F. D. PRICE.

The Victoria History of the County of Oxford. A History of Oxfordshire, edited by M. D. Lobel. Volume VII (1962): *Dorchester and Thame Hundreds*. Pp. i-xxviii, 1-248, 18 figs., 40 plates. £6 6s. Volume VIII (1964). *Lewknor and Pyrton Hundreds*. Pp. i-xxix, 1-298, 15 figs., 38 plates. £7 7s.

The two latest volumes of the *History of the County of Oxford* fully deserve to share the warm welcome given to their predecessors. The wealth of material surviving for the county as a whole is remarkable, and for the four Hundreds described in these two volumes, Dorchester and Thame in volume VII, Lewknor and Pyrton in volume VIII, it is, even by Oxfordshire standards, of outstanding interest and range. This has not simplified the task of Mrs. Lobel, her collaborators and assistants. In less

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favoured counties one may well sympathize with editors struggling to make bricks with very little straw. Here the problems are different. The sheer labour of mastering the great mass of material for parishes such as Shirburn and Pyrton is in itself truly formidable. Then to have to select, to compress, to tailor to the standard size and shape of a V.C.H. article must often have been a heartbreaking task. We should be profoundly grateful that the work has been accomplished with the ungrudging expenditure of time and skill, the meticulous attention to detail and the scholarly awareness of the wider value of the evidence which have already won high praise for the earlier volumes. A further judicious selection of prints and drawings helps to record the history of buildings since altered or destroyed. The skilfully reconstructed parish maps form an acceptable and worth-while feature of the whole series. In volume VIII they assume a new importance, clearly showing the long, narrow, strip-like shape characteristic of the great majority of the Chiltern parishes. One could not ask for a better illustration of the way in which ancient parish boundaries were determined by agricultural needs, giving to each its share of woodland on the crest of the ridge, chalk pasture on its western slopes, arable and meadow in the rich plain below.

The character of the land no doubt explains many of the differences which so sharply divide East from West Oxfordshire. The county has never had any natural unity centred upon Oxford. If in antiquity the Cherwell valley was a frontier dividing the Duboni from the Catuvellauni, the ancient pattern has survived. West Oxfordshire merges imperceptibly into Gloucestershire: East Oxfordshire looks towards Buckinghamshire and beyond it to the capital. These volumes introduce us to what may be called Catuvellauni country and we are soon aware of the change. Cotswold stone gives place to more varied building materials, timber, brick, flint and the 'wichit' of the Thames area. Elms give way to beeches. Chair-turning and lace-making replace weaving and glove-making as characteristic cottage crafts. The use of barges from Henley brought the London food market within range of producers and the gentry, we learn from the Stonor letters, did their luxury shopping in the capital. When ambitious boys left home their faces were turned towards London, while wealthy Londoners, merchants, office holders, lawyers, have for centuries been interested in buying property and rebuilding decaying mansions in this pleasant region.

In reading what these volumes have to tell us about it, we must always remember that the V.C.H. attempts to serve two different interests. On the one hand there is the local resident whose curiosity about the past may not reach beyond his own immediate neighbourhood; on the other, the general historian, whose concern will extend well beyond the confines of any one county. To meet both needs, some compromises are necessary and the difficulty of achieving a reasonable balance should not be underestimated. To a reviewer who may claim some footing in both camps, it seems that the interests of the individual parish history, considered as the study of a living community and as an end in itself, is perhaps unduly subordinated to a master plan intended to provide for uniform and easy reference.

First, it must be disappointing to the countryman who makes a considerable effort to obtain a copy of the eagerly-awaited volume containing his own parish, to find that some of the information he might reasonably hope to find is not there. Dorchester is perhaps an extreme example of such a disappointment, for to present the history of Dorchester with only a brief reference to its Roman settlement and even

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less to its medieval abbey is surely to offer Dead Sea fruit. Of course the explanation is that the first subject has been covered in the general article on Roman Oxfordshire in volume I (1939) and the second in the general article on Religious Houses in volume II (1907) and that adequate cross-reference is given. But the countryman living at a distance from reference libraries may begin to lose heart at this point and others may question whether the lapse of time since the publication of the earlier volumes might not justify more generous recapitulation, taking account of recent work. Secondly, the parish articles do not make easy reading. They suffer inevitably from having to compress too much material into too little space, to reject much that would have made an unrelieved diet of fee-farms, co-heiresses, hides and carucates a little more digestible. Perhaps the most serious drawback is that the narrative is seldom allowed to take its natural course, but has to be diverted into artificial channels created by an inflexible system of sub-headings. For these disadvantages the contributors are by no means to be blamed. They are, in fact, to a greater degree than the readers, the victims of a standard pattern imposed upon them. The introductory section very properly gives a topographical survey of the parish; but it has also to include recalcitrant pieces of information which no amount of editorial ingenuity can fit into any of the prescribed subject headings. Here we may find, in uneasy juxtaposition, notes of Roman remains, civil war engagements, minor notabilities who cannot be disposed of as lords of the manor or incumbents; for rarely can it be said as it is of South Weston, 'Weston claims no "worthies" and no events of importance are known to have happened there'. After this discouraging start, we come to the subject headings which necessitate clumsy cross-reference and cannot altogether avoid repetition and inconsistency. Only one example can be given to show the stultifying effects of this arrangement. When subjected to the full V.C.H. treatment, even the substantial figure of Lord Williams of Thame is transformed into a mere will-o'-the-wisp, constantly eluding us as we pursue him from section to section: from his acquisition of the episcopal and abbey estates (see manorial descent and religious houses, vol. II) to his house (see topography), his school (see education, vol. I), his almshouses (see charities), his funeral (see church history), to his splendidly arrogant alabaster tomb (see church fabric). At the end of it all, we are not much better able to make up our minds about this controversial magnate. Was he the convinced Protestant and enlightened philanthropist introduced to us in the opening section? Others have seen him in a less favourable light, as a man greedy for the material spoils of Protestantism, yet ready enough to play the gruesome part required of a Marian sheriff of Oxfordshire and to watch Cranmer burn, one whose benefactions can be regarded as status-symbols or conscience money. One would not expect the V.C.H. to give a final judgement on the mixture of rapacity and remorse in this characteristic Tudor figure; but his importance as the founder of two great Oxfordshire houses which were to play so large a part in the county for centuries to come would surely justify rather different treatment.

Many other examples could be given to show why the parish articles, however excellent, are likely always to fall short of the ideal local history. Perhaps it is as well that this should be so and that the appearance of these articles should act as a stimulus rather than a bar to further local studies. Clearly there will still be a place for the straightforward village history, intended primarily for local consumption and written with a freedom incompatible with V.C.H. requirements. If any such histories come to be written, and for the more richly-endowed parishes they certainly should be,

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their debt to the V.C.H. articles will be incalculable. Tribute should here be paid more particularly to one of the least popular but most serviceable parts of the parish articles, the tracing of the manorial descents. Only those with actual experience of this task are likely to appreciate how much unrewarding and tedious work can lie behind almost every sentence of these sections. In parishes such as Great Milton, Aston Rowant or Pyrton, comprising four or more manors, the complexity of the various successions has been unravelled with unfailing patience and skill. This is work which will not have to be done again and anyone who may in future undertake to write about one of these parishes will find the worst part of his task done for him, leaving him free to follow up the more attractive possibilities to which the ample footnotes offer an open invitation. It is indeed an extraordinarily generous legacy.

Since something has been sacrificed to the supposed interests of the general historian, it remains to consider whether he will be likely to find in these volumes answers to the questions he is currently asking. Clearly from this point of view the value of the county history is cumulative. As more and more parish histories come to be published, standards of comparison can be established, tendencies at first cautiously observed can be confirmed, and information which may have seemed trivial when first recorded can be shown to have a significant place in the general pattern. Interesting as these volumes are now, their interest will undoubtedly appreciate as the series nears completion. Even for the rural parishes of this area general conclusions must wait upon the publication of the volume completing S.E. Oxfordshire. In the case of Thame, we are particularly aware of the need for more comparative material. The Thame article is the outstanding contribution to volume vii and can be compared with the excellent account of Bicester in volume vi. But the history of the smaller country towns is still a curiously obscure subject, and to see these contributions in perspective we want to set them against Henley, Witney and Banbury. It may then become clearer why these succeeded in establishing themselves as important market towns, while others, such as Eynsham, just failed to make the grade and remained over-size villages. Thus it is too soon to attempt any general appraisal of the value of these volumes. It can already be said that the historian is handsomely served and the weight of new evidence put at his disposal is most impressive. Of course it is not possible for the compilers, pressed as they are with urgent work on local sources, always to keep abreast of recent trends in historical work. To give universal satisfaction they would have to be highly sensitive to every wind of change in historical fashions, some so ephemeral that it would scarcely accord with the dignity of so monumental a work to try to keep pace with them. Yet it is important that the contributors should not lose touch. Consciously or not, awareness of current lines of thought will affect both the collection and classification of material. It will probably be generally felt that the economic and social sections come nearest to the ideal, while, to the reviewer at any rate, it seems that some of the religious sections fall rather noticeably short of it.

The inclusion of so much economic and social history has of recent years fundamentally changed the character of the V.C.H. and the Oxfordshire volumes have played a leading part in bringing about this desirable revolution. If some of the questions we should like to have answered have to go by default, it is usually for lack of evidence. This is true of population changes, although it may be thought that such evidence as there is could be more effectively presented. Deserted hamlets are now carefully noted. Information about them is found rather strangely distributed

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among the sections, but attention is drawn to them in the notes on each Hundred and reference is given in the index. It is to be hoped that similar vigilance will reveal and record new settlements on marginal lands in periods of expanding population. There is some interesting evidence of the mobility of rural population, notably at Pyrton in the 15th century. In other cases it seems that the parochial framework impedes the pursuit of currently important problems. One suspects that, somewhere concealed in the files of the compilers, if not in the printed articles, lies the evidence to confirm or confute many of the dubious hypotheses advanced on the subject of the rising or falling gentry. But this cannot readily appear because it requires a study of families rather than parishes. The articles do indeed include some extremely interesting accounts of yeoman families, whose property tended to be comprised within the parish boundaries. In the case of the gentry this was seldom the case, and it will presumably be necessary to await the publication of many more volumes before the V.C.H. can supply a testing ground for the examination of conflicting views about the economic position and political power of leading Oxfordshire families. Since the family unit and family relationships are coming to play an increasingly large part in the study of social history this is one of several directions in which the V.C.H. will need to preserve sufficient elasticity to take account of it. Some material which once featured in the social and economic sections now appears under a new heading: 'Parish government'. It may be suggested that 'Local government' would be a better term, since in fact it has been possible to produce quite a lot of evidence of local administration based not upon the parish but on the manorial courts. Although the parish was entrusted with poor law administration in the 16th century, this was not inconsistent with the continued use of the manor court to regulate the common fields and the franchises to enforce many statutory requirements. Since the general books about local government so often fail to observe this, the evidence of the transitional period is of interest. But the main theme of this section is the pressure and relief of poverty, and although it may be doubted whether much is gained by considering this in isolation from the general economic history, it certainly throws into sharp relief the three great periods of distress in the mid-16th, late 18th and late 19th centuries.

In this part of the county the religious theme which strikes the imagination and wins respect is the survival of unbroken Catholic tradition despite all that imprisonment, penal taxation and exclusion from public life could do between the Elizabethan settlement and Catholic emancipation. The predominantly Catholic sympathies of South-East Oxfordshire owed much to the personal allegiance and fine example of the Stonors and other recusant families with whom they intermarried. In its secluded fold of the Chilterns, Stonor Park was the natural headquarters of a proscribed religion. But this Oxfordshire recusancy was something more than the country-house Catholicism surviving the Reformation in isolated backwaters. It clearly extended beyond the great households and immediate tenantry of the gentry; for there were widely-scattered yeoman families whose independence in matters of religion was matched by an economic position which certainly did not compel them to adopt the religion of their betters, or to become 'kitchen Catholics', a term of abuse used of the poor who accepted Stonor charity, as the term 'souper' was used of hungry Protestant converts in the West of Ireland. In contrast with this story, which is told as well as the parochial divisions allow, Puritanism might be called the compilers' blind spot. Under the heading of Nonconformity, properly used only for the post-restoration period, are to be found misleading references to 16th- and early 17th-century Puritan-

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ism, with little realization that these pre-civil war controversies were between rival groups within the national church about what sort of national church it should be. Indeed, the terms 'nonconformist' and 'puritan' are used in astonishing connexions. Shirburn, we are told, was a Puritan stronghold before the reign of Mary, when it became Roman Catholic. Clearly Puritanism was not a movement of great importance in these areas. It is of interest that in one small enclave of Puritan influence at Chislehampton and Stadhampton, a close link with the North West of the county can be shown in the marriage of John Dooley to Ursula Cope, sister of Sir Anthony of Hanwell, patron of that excellent Puritan preacher, Robert Harris. In the later 17th century and after it is not incorrect to isolate the nonconformists, but it may be questioned whether it is helpful. If there are any readers who are interested exclusively in the Church of England or exclusively in nonconformity it might be beneficial to each to read about the one in the context of the other. As it is, the interesting interrelations of establishment and dissent, revealed by the evidence of the parish histories, are somewhat obscured. As evidence accumulates of the utterly deplorable state of many of the Oxfordshire parish churches in the second half of the 18th century, the rise of Methodism and the revival of earlier kinds of nonconformity are fully explained. The remarkable revival of Anglicanism in the 19th century seems to assume something of the character of a counter-reformation, stimulated by fears of the rising tide of nonconformity and the ultimate threat of disestablishment. Of the sincerity and success of this revival there can be little doubt. One of its less attractive features, from the historian's point of view, was the almost complete rebuilding of so many of the Chiltern churches in the second half of the 19th century. Fortunately quite a number of these have retained the monuments from earlier churches, and we are grateful to the compilers for making careful record of them, more particularly of those of a date too late to interest the Historical Monuments Commission. It is sad that for reasons of space the actual inscriptions cannot be given, for iron railings, locked chapels and fading lettering make them increasingly hard to read. Some churches of distinction, of course, remain, in addition to the splendid examples of Dorchester and Thame. It is of interest that at Wheatfield and Chislehampton, where there was a tradition of devout squires and resident clergy, the 18th-century fittings should have survived without need of 19th-century restoration.

It would be impossible to make a short list of the articles worthy of special attention; readers' selection will be determined by their own interests and associations. But Pyrton in volume VIII can scarcely fail by any standards to take first place—Pyrton for Stonor. Here is a subject exciting beyond the dreams of the most ambitious local historian. At Stonor one family had owned the manor from the early 13th century until today. The house, although altered and enlarged to meet the changing needs and tastes of the centuries, has never been completely rebuilt, so that it has been possible to recover the original plan and to follow the successive alterations. Until modern changes in parish boundaries, Stonor formed a remote hamlet of Pyrton and for the parish as a whole the sources are incredibly rich. They include the Shirburn muniments, the Hamersley collection, and the records of St. George's, Windsor, in addition to the Stonor material, incomparable in that it throws light not only on the history of the property but on the way of life of the family from the 15th century onwards. Happily the stern discipline of the V.C.H. has been sufficiently relaxed to make it possible to do justice to this exceptionally precious legacy. Closely packed as it is, the article can be read with real enjoyment. The agrarian and social

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history can be told in greater detail and with greater confidence than is usually possible and throughout the article there are incidental points of interest. Among them may be mentioned the strategic position of Stonor in relation to pre-Roman trackways ; the marcher tenure of Pyrton, held by service in the vanguard going towards Wales and in the rearguard on returning ; the unusually well documented account of the deserted hamlet of Standhill ; the anomalous patronage of the Protestant church of Pishill by the Catholic Stonors, unquestioned by anyone until the 19th century. The whole article is a particularly happy example of the fruitful co-operation between compilers and owners which has been a feature of the volumes published under Mrs. Lobel's direction.

Finally, it is pleasing to find our old friend, Dr. H. E. Salter, appearing in a new guise as a worthy of Shirburn, where he was vicar from 1899 to 1922. No one has done more for Oxfordshire studies. His transcripts of the Shirburn muniments have made a substantial contribution to volume VIII, the greater part of the University volume was completed under his editorship and the whole magnificent enterprise of the Victoria County History was very dear to his heart.

EVANGELINE DE VILLIERS.