

Notices of Books and Articles

THE FOLLOWING list consists of recent books and articles, mainly published within the last twelve months, although a few earlier publications are included. The appearance of an item in this list does not preclude its subsequent review.

BOOKS

Susan Reynolds, *An Introduction to the History of English Mediaeval Towns*, 256 pages, 1977, Oxford University Press, £7.95.

Surveys English urban life from the fifth to the early sixteenth century, and is concerned with towns as communities, their social structure, political organisation and economic livelihood.

Barbara Harvey, *Westminster Abbey and its Estates in the Middle Ages*, 504 pages, 1977, Oxford University Press, £15.

Traces the accumulation of the vast properties of the Abbey to 1535, examining the role of the monks as landlords, and their response to economic trends.

Howard Mayer Brown, *Music in the Renaissance*, 384 pages, 1976, Prentice-Hall, £8.75 or £6.35 (paperback).

A concise and readable introduction to Renaissance music, with examples of music.

Joseph and Frances Gies, *Life in a Mediaeval Castle*, 250 pages, 1976, Abelard Schumann, £3.50.

A portrait of mediaeval life, based on Chepstow castle. Deals mainly with pre-fourteenth century life, but useful background material.

Peter Saccio, *Shakespeare's English Kings*, 200 pages, 1977, Oxford University Press, £1.75 (paperback).

A concise account of English history from Richard II to Richard III (with added chapters on John and Henry VIII), showing that Shakespeare's view of history was not that of today.

ARTICLES

A. R. Williams, Some Firing Tests with Simulated Fifteenth Century Hand-guns, *Journal of the Arms and Armour Society*, Vol. 8, No. 1 (Part 2), 1974, pp.114-120.

Shows that the efficiency of handguns as weapons in the 15th century was higher than generally realised, and that steel bullets penetrated a simulated breast plate five times out of eight in the tests.

A. J. Pollard, The Tyranny of Richard III, *Journal of Mediaeval History*, Vol. 3, No. 2, 1977, pp.147-166.

Argues that the tyranny lay in his replacing the natural rulers of the southern counties by trusted northern adherents, thus transgressing an unwritten law.

Book Review

RICHARD III: THE MAKING OF A LEGEND, by Roxane C. Murph, Scarecrow Press Inc., New Jersey, 1977, 148 pages, \$6.

'Of making many books there is no end,' says the wise compiler of Ecclesiastes. This is certainly true of books about Richard III. Since that King died authors have been writing descriptions of him, of his reign and of his 'crimes.' The number was at first few, grew to a trickle in the last century, and in this has become a flood. A few authors have written historiographical studies of these works, notably Professor Myers (*Richard III and Historical Tradition, History*, Vol. 53, No. 178, 1968, pp.181-202), but this is the first full length such study to be published.

The book is divided into eight chapters. It begins with an Introduction, then goes on to two chapters briefly summarising events from 1452 to 1485. This owes rather too much to Kendall (as the author admits), and one wonders if it was justifiable to give nearly twenty per cent of the book's total length to something which, by its nature, must over-simplify the often complex events. A much briefer summary would probably have been perfectly adequate.

The historiography proper is treated chronologically, and begins with two chapters on The Early, and The Later Historians. These discuss the works of the historians from the Tudor chroniclers to the present day. Inevitably the earlier part, up to Sir Thomas More's work, suffers rather in comparison with Alison Hanham's book (*Richard III and his early Historians 1483-1535*, Oxford, 1975), but the descriptions of the later works, particularly some of the more obscure historians of the seventeenth to nineteenth centuries is interesting and useful.

The next two chapters are, somewhat unusually for a historiography, on the Early, and Later Fiction. The 'Early' chapter contains only plays and poetry, as might be expected, and the 'Later' one only novels, omitting any mention of the many nineteenth and twentieth century poems and plays. Since these two chapters describe some unfamiliar material they are in many ways the most interesting part of the book. Some of the author's comments on the novels are refreshingly sharp, although naturally her views may not be those of all readers.

The book ends with a Conclusion, notes and references, bibliography and index. There is a separate fiction bibliography listing a few novels not described in the body of the work.

In all, members of this Society will find this book of interest. It is useful to be able to trace the vicissitudes of Richard's reputation, and it will doubtless inspire many to read some of the less familiar books described. It may, however, be criticised, as I have indicated, for deficiencies in coverage, both in the non-fiction and fiction sections. In the second edition, which will doubtless be called for, it would be good to see the books of the seventeenth to early nineteenth centuries more comprehensively covered, and many more of the plays, poems and novels described. Members whose interest has been aroused by this book would find much of interest in K. A. Heathcote's B.A. thesis *A Study in the Historiography of Richard III* (Liverpool University, 1952).

Copies of the books and articles mentioned in this review are available for loan from the Society's Library.

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