

## Book Reviews

**ENGLAND'S ICONOCLASTS. VOLUME I: LAWS AGAINST IMAGES.**  
Margaret Aston. 1988. Clarendon Press, Oxford, £48.

Toward the latter end of the reign of Henry the eight, and throughout the whole reign of Edward the sixth, and in the beginning of Queene Elizabeth, certain persons of every County were put in authority to pull downe, and cast out of all Churches, Roodes, graven Images, Shrines with their reliques, to which the ignorant people came flocking in adoration.

So in 1631 William Weever summarized the sixteenth-century attack on religious images in England (*Ancient Funerall Monuments*, p.50). The motives for that assault, and the profound transformation which it wrought on English perceptions, have until now lacked their historian. Margaret Aston addresses these important matters in a work which is at once erudite and compelling. This book reviews the anti-image legislation of the mid-sixteenth century, in relation both to older teachings on the theme and to contemporary continental arguments. A projected second volume will treat more fully the application of iconoclastic theories in practice.

The devotional image had been surrounded by controversy throughout the Christian Middle Ages; sixteenth-century polemicists drew heavily on the older literature. As Michael Camille has recently stressed (in *The Gothic Idol. Ideology and Image-Making in Medieval Art*, Cambridge University Press 1989), medieval discussions reveal a continuing anxiety and ambivalence about the power and the latent danger of images. But the biblical injunction ('Thou shalt not make unto thee any graven image . . . Thou shalt not bow down thyself to them') seems originally to have been intended not as a ban on all representation, but as a warning against the confusion of image with prototype which leads to the worship of idols. In keeping with this reading, the handful of Lollards who in late-medieval England voiced opposition to the 'worship' of Christian statues did not reject images altogether. Early in the sixteenth century Martin Luther, similarly, urged restraint in the elaboration and use of images, rather than their wholesale abolition. (Margaret Aston tentatively ventures the fascinating speculation that the production in Germany around 1500 of monochrome wooden statuary may represent a reforming response to such critics, p.407 n.82). Yet the medieval debate also made its contribution to the development in the sixteenth century of more radical opposition to images. Of particular relevance to the timing of this development seems to have been the late-medieval emphasis on inward devotion, and on the irrelevance of externals. Aston finds this somewhat austere religious and aesthetic strain exemplified in the 1520s in particular texts

and individuals associated with the nunnery of Syon. However, the real change in England came in the next decade, as a result of the translation of a German iconoclastic text emanating from Strasbourg.

The striking feature about the subsequent decades in England is that official legislation constantly lagged behind the few campaigning iconoclasts, tempering their extremism. What Henry VIII began in the 1530s and 1540s in order to expedite financial requirements (although under the cloak of reforming zeal: as Aston wittily observes, 'One had to be careful, serving both God and Mammon') he did his best to undo in his latter years. The extension of restrictions on religious imagery by Somerset and Cranmer, and by the young King Edward himself (whom Aston convincingly credits with an independent view), had not satisfied radicals before the Catholic reaction of Mary's reign. And Elizabeth (the subtlety of whose position is examined here with particular delicacy) effected a settlement which was far from excluding images altogether from legitimate religious practice. Even Archbishop Laud would be able to cite the survival of many images under Elizabeth as justification for his own commissioning of visual aids to devotion.

Although the implementation of the laws against images awaits discussion in the second of Margaret Aston's volumes, it is worth noting in anticipation evidence that English iconoclasm was never a mass movement. From the Exeter women who in 1535 barricaded their church against official image-breakers, to the indignant bystanders of Banbury who murmured against those who pulled down their town cross at the turn of the next century, to the satirists who mocked the destroyers of Cheapside Cross in London in 1643 ('They thought, God wot, / It had a plot'), there runs a strain of conservatism in this matter which radicals were foolish ever to suppose could be entirely overcome.

Nevertheless the sixteenth century did witness a significant change in the status and treatment of images. In a careful discussion of catechisms and related literature, Margaret Aston shows how a marked puritanism in respect of visual stimuli crept into religious education; and how the crucial term, 'idolatry', was extended during the century to embrace not only images and objectionable ceremonies, but also (when the legislators proved insufficiently zealous for reform) the whole structure of church government. By 1600 the radicals had moved on to attack mental no less than physical images of the divinity; and here again the impact was not confined to radical separatists, but touched the population at large.

Margaret Aston recreates effectively the intellectual and ideological context of the sixteenth-century reform of images in England. She does not here address directly underlying questions about responses to art which are brought into focus by iconoclastic movements, as it is to be hoped she will in the succeeding volume. The fact is that iconoclasts, no less than their opponents, the iconodules, betray through their behaviour a profound sense of the *power* of images. Iconoclastic acts tend to be as ritualized as the acts of veneration of the defenders of art. Both the opponents and the supporters of images in the late Middle Ages felt equally that these were the more potent in so far as they were more realistic: by this token sculpture was; in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, believed to be more highly charged than two-dimensional forms of imagery. When Thomas More observed London wives gazing at an image of the Virgin in the Tower until they thought it

smiled at them, he recorded both the potency and the danger of the portrayal. Those who later were to smash such images expressed by their actions nothing so much as fear. Yet for all that both they and a resister of images such as More pretended to link susceptibility to the power of pictures with the simplicity of women and children, it must be acknowledged (for our own part as much as theirs) that visual representations have retained throughout history an ability to move the beholder which it would be folly for either the religious reformer or the historian to deny.

GERVASE ROSSER

**FROM LORD TO PATRON: LORDSHIP IN LATE MEDIEVAL ENGLAND.** J. M. W. Bean. 1989. Manchester University Press, £29.95.

This book appears at an interesting time. Just as students of the later Middle Ages are being urged to forsake the narrow confines of 'bastard feudalism' in favour of the wider issues of constitutional history and political ideology, and the first broadsides are being fired against the 'shallow two-dimensional image' presented by much recent work on clientage in fifteenth-century society,<sup>1</sup> Professor Bean has produced a study of the seemingly now unfashionable subject of lords and patrons. But in fact this book is neither about lordship nor patronage, at least not as most people fully understand these terms, being restricted to the topic of retaining by indenture, with occasional furtive glances in the direction of grants of livery and the award of annuities. Put at its baldest, the Professor's main contention is that the practice of recruiting men by indenture had its origins in the households of great noblemen; that the wars of Edward I gave a considerable impetus to this means of enlisting support; and that with the passage of time the promise of concrete rewards, such as food, drink and a share of military prizes, gave way to the less tangible attractions of 'good lordship' (as offered, for example, by Richard, Duke of Gloucester, to his clients in the North). Given the right treatment, this perfectly reasonable argument might have provided the basis for a couple of interesting articles, but it is certainly not, at least as propounded by Professor Bean, destined to hold the reader's attention for 237 closely printed pages (excluding appendices and index). Perhaps in the hope of pre-empting criticism, the author warns us that the first three chapters may prove 'excessively technical, overdetailed and even dull'. He is absolutely right. Surely it ought to be possible to embark on such a study without overloading the text with so much information of a highly repetitious nature, presented, by and large, with little concern for style or readability. (The constant reiteration of the phrase 'to be sure', for example, produces the same effect as a dripping tap, and suggests that the author either lacks the courage of his convictions or else failed to re-read his manuscript.) A significant amount of the copious and detailed evidence about individual indentures which Professor Bean has assembled ought to have been presented succinctly and analytically in an appendix, where it would have been more accessible for immediate reference. It is also unfortunate that this book does not contain a proper bibliography, which likewise reduces its value for

research purposes. To be fair, the author *does* provide a tabulated list of John of Gaunt's retinue, but since this has already been done far more effectively and with greater insight by Simon Walker in his outstanding D.Phil. thesis on the ducal affinity (Oxford, 1986), such an exercise seems superfluous at best. Although the most glaring omission, Professor Bean's neglect of Dr Walker's work is matched by his failure to profit from the recent contributions of a whole generation of young scholars who have greatly enlarged our understanding of the mechanics of 'good lordship'. Partly because of this, and also as a result of his very confined, legalistic approach, he simply does not address the *fundamental* question of just how seriously medieval noblemen, knights and gentlemen regarded these pieces of parchment, and precisely what they hoped to get out of them beyond a few bags of oats and a money fee. Consequently, the men portrayed here seem little more than bloodless ciphers, detached as much from the grim world of ambition, intrigue and political reality as from the chivalrous *milieu* in which they lived. It is all very well for Professor Bean to tell us that he is only interested in the 'form of relationships', but without a proper investigation of the historical background these 'forms' become nothing more than words. Nor does his sanguine view that 'a man's moral obligation to remain loyal to his lord' could usually be relied upon to outweigh the sordid considerations of profit or self-interest carry too much conviction to anyone who has more than a nodding acquaintance with the late medieval gentry. In point of fact, far from regarding their indentures as an earnest of real commitment, an appreciable number of the individuals considered here were either chiefly loyal to another patron altogether (like William Rees, who used the Earl of Arundel as a temporary port in a storm and abandoned him for the Mowbrays at the first opportunity), or else cynically manipulative (in the style of Sir John Russell, who entered a contract with the Earl of Warwick in 1383, only to sell him down the river by joining Richard II's household soon afterwards, contriving the downfall of his most valued supporter and, as an ultimate irony, sharing the spoils after the Earl himself was attainted for treason).

It is, perhaps, unreasonable to dwell too much on the limitations of a work which clearly does not set out to examine patronage from all angles; and in certain respects (notably the last two chapters on the importance of retaining and the development of royal policy towards it) Professor Bean has marshalled his extensive battery of evidence with more telling effect. But even here there are some curious *lacunae*: such an important figure as George, Duke of Clarence, ought, for instance, to merit more than one passing mention in the text, not least because the findings of his biographer, Dr Michael Hicks, impinge at so many points on what is said here. Surprisingly, too, in a book which concentrates so closely on the legal aspects of retaining, remarkably little use has been made of the records of the King's Bench and Common Pleas which provide a goldmine of information about the gentry as both givers and receivers of liveries. In short, this book is something of a missed opportunity, for, although there can be no doubt of the author's impressive scholarship, he could have produced a far more searching study had he pursued his investigations further into the real world of late medieval England and a far livelier one had he made just a few concessions to the reader. Perhaps the propagandists for constitutional history are right, and it

really is time to wrap patronage up in mothballs and turn to something more intellectually stimulating.

1. E. Powell, *Kingship, Law and Society*, Oxford 1989, p.6.

CAROLE RAWCLIFFE

**MEDIEVAL WESTMINSTER, 1200-1540.** Gervase Rosser. 1989. Clarendon Press, Oxford, £40.

In *Medieval Westminster*, Gervase Rosser provides us with a valuable urban study that bridges the gap between medieval and early modern studies of towns. Historians previously have examined the Abbey of Westminster but the surrounding town or 'vill' has been neglected despite the importance of the abbey and royal palace within its limits. Although its economic and social life were thoroughly urban, Westminster was not incorporated by charter and so was governed by a manorial system more usually associated with agrarian communities. The significance of Westminster's 'anomalous legal status' is a point explored in detail by Dr Rosser. It is one of his main contentions that the vill of Westminster maintained coherence despite the complexity of its urban society and the lack of formal structures, such as trade guilds.

*Medieval Westminster* focuses primarily on the 'secular society of the resident townspeople'. Dr Rosser's account is particularly good in showing how the twin forces of the Abbey and the royal palace shaped the development of the town and the everyday life of Westminster residents. Since the Abbey owned two-thirds of all property within the 'vill' of Westminster by the fourteenth century, the voluminous property deeds and accounts of the Abbey form the basis of Rosser's study. The book looks at the fluctuating demand for the property in the town and the Abbey's acquisition and management of its urban estates there. The late fourteenth and early fifteenth centuries marked a period of great prosperity and the Abbey undertook extensive building in the town. This mostly took the form of 'small-scale housing and retail premises', built in response to a growing population of small craftsmen and shopkeepers. A period of contraction followed in the fifteenth century, when the population of Westminster remained static or may even have declined. In response, the monks reduced rents and introduced longer leases. By the late fifteenth century, however, the population was recovering, but by this time the Abbey had largely abandoned its policy of direct control and so new profits accrued to the Abbey's lay tenants. This situation seems to have obtained up to the Dissolution; as an interesting 1530 survey of properties in King Street demonstrates. One Thomas Brightman, for example, paid the Abbey £3 6s 8d for the 'Beer House', while collecting £13 19s 8d in rents for the same property.

But Rosser moves beyond the study of the urban property market. An imaginative use of sources also allows him to establish the contours of Westminster society. The presence of Westminster Abbey and the Court and a high proportion of transients led the town to develop a service-based economy. Brewers, butchers, bakers and other victuallers served an army of travellers and temporary residents — courtiers, pilgrims, suitors at law and parliament men. As

consumers, the latter group also supported an impressive number and range of small craftsmen. Not surprisingly, the retail and finishing trades predominated in Westminster. Officials employed by the Abbey or the Crown also made up a significant proportion of its population. In particular, the fifteenth century witnessed a 'marked increase in the proportion of royal household servants among the recorded resident population'. Such an increase was reflected in appointments to local office, though from 1364 to 1514, victuallers always comprised at least half of those serving as chief pledges. Rosser associates Westminster's amicable relations with its Abbey to the service-based nature of its economy and contrasts this with other towns subject to monasteries, such as Bury St Edmunds, where the Abbey and townspeople fought over an economic advantage that only one party could enjoy.

Despite the number of residents who possessed links with the Abbey, Rosser notes that by the late Middle Ages, the Abbey ceased to be 'the primary claimant of local religious loyalty'. By this time inhabitants had transferred their support to the 'town church of St Margaret'. This was not the result of excessive and disillusioning fraternization with the monks. On the contrary, Rosser finds that the period of greatest intimacy between townsmen and religious had ended by c.1250, as the Abbey became more exclusively the burial place of kings and aristocrats.

Dr Rosser gives special emphasis to the strength of communal ties in Westminster, as reflected in the practical and religious activities of its nine guilds and the loyalty its parish church commanded. The most prestigious guild, that of the Virgin's Assumption, came to function as a 'surrogate town council'. The guild also loomed large in the ritual life of the town, playing a prominent role in parochial celebrations, such as St Margaret's Day and organizing splendid feasts for its members every three years. But if this single guild came to be associated with 'the image of the town as a whole', then the larger body of Westminster inhabitants could participate in the activities of the smaller guilds and the parish church. As Rosser demonstrates, the gulf between rich and poor widened considerably in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries. It is all the more impressive, then, that between 1487 and 1523, St Margaret's Church was rebuilt largely by public conscription, at a cost of over £2,000 and that this sum included contributions from virtually every parishioner.

Rosser continues to develop the theme of communal identity in his chapter on charity. Westminster lacked the trade guilds and urban taxes upon which relief was based in other medieval towns. But as poverty increased during the later Middle Ages, Westminster residents possessed a sufficient sense of shared interests and communal responsibility to overcome these structural deficiencies. Rosser's claims for his townsmen are modest, but significant. An old hospital, such as the Rounceval, was revitalized when adopted by the townspeople as the focus of a guild, yet the poor it succoured were mostly non-guild members.

For the later Middle Ages Rosser paints a convincing picture of the sophistication and religious awareness of Westminster laymen. Their parish church was rebuilt in a modern style (possibly to facilitate preaching), three new feasts were introduced, with their offices, in the late fifteenth century, while learned preaching was occasionally to be heard at St Margaret's, at Westminster Abbey and also in the separate guild chapel of the Rounceval Hospital.

Dr Rosser treads less surely, however, when he deals with the Reformation. Because he finds little evidence that parishioners actively resisted Protestant reforms, he assumes that this is explained by their receptivity to new ideas. As a result, Protestantism is too simply equated with modernity. The problem here is Rosser's closing date of 1540. Although he generalizes about the period to 1558, his researches are not as thorough as for the earlier period. In fact, there is substantial evidence to label St Margaret's parish as a bastion of conservatism well into Elizabeth's reign.

Such reservations aside, *Medieval Westminster* is an impressive achievement. It is far more than the book of the thesis. While Rosser's overall picture of communal identity may be too rosy for some readers, he faces such objections squarely. He also reminds us that social disorders in other towns related to their specific circumstances, not to the mere existence of urban élites and disparities in wealth. Part of the fascination of Westminster lies in its very uniqueness. But Dr Rosser's beautifully written study conveys this diversity while leaving those with interests in other areas with plenty of food for thought.

J. F. MERRITT

**JOAN OF ARC AND RICHARD III.** Charles T. Wood. 1988. Oxford University Press, Oxford, £26.

This is an extraordinary book, quirky in its contents, idiosyncratic and frequently implausible in its interpretations. Joan of Arc and Richard III are strange enough bedfellows to begin with: yet here we have, as well, St Louis, Edward I and Richard II, not to mention a couple of contrasting Popes, Celestine V and Boniface VIII. Even the author admits his book is 'a series of studies' only 'loosely linked'; nevertheless, he would have us believe, all 'culminate in, and gain purpose from, the lives of Richard and Joan'. It is difficult to see how. Only three essays out of nine relate directly to the book's title; much of the material has already appeared separately and elsewhere; and the specifically written connecting passages, designed to provide coherence, hardly begin to do so.

The sub-title 'Sex, Saints and Government in the Middle Ages' raises mind-boggling possibilities; regrettably, they are not realised. Sex, in fact, is in distinctly short supply and most of what there is has a familiar ring. Pope Boniface VIII was, as Wood points out, accused of sexual deviation; so was Edward II: probably that was all they had in common! Edward II was surely bisexual at least: he 'especially delighted in the sin of sodomy', declares one fourteenth-century source; his gruesome murder, featuring the unorthodox employment of a red-hot poker, was, according to another, a symbolic re-enactment of sexual perversion; while, if we are to believe Jean Froissart, Hugh Despenser's private parts were cut off because he was 'guilty of unnatural practices, even with the King, whose affections he had alienated from the Queen by his wicked suggestions' (although she did find consolation in the arms, and bed, of her obnoxious lover Roger Mortimer). Meanwhile, across the Channel, the French Court was rocked by a spectacular scandal when, in 1314, it was

alleged that two of Philip IV's daughters-in-law had been involved in adulterous relationships with a pair of knightly gallants ('Queens, Queens and Kingship').

Saints certainly pop up provocatively from time to time. There is a rather whimsical piece on Louis IX of France ('St. Louis and the Mise of Amiens'). Pope Celestine V, rapidly canonized for the very simplicity and inexperience in worldly matters that made him such a pontifical disaster, figures briefly ('Celestine V, Boniface VIII and the Authority of Parliament'); so do Edmund the Martyr, Edward the Confessor and John the Baptist as doubtful stand-ins for Edward II, Edward III and the Black Prince in the Wilton Diptych ('Richard II and the Wilton Diptych'). The bizarre story of St Kenelm, whether relevant or not to the coronation of Richard II, provides a nice moment of light relief ('The Child Who Would Be King'). Joan of Arc has a full chapter to herself since, in Wood's judgement, her impact 'on the political culture of France was immense, confirming and strengthening as it did the assumptions that had long shaped its governmental practices'. Yet was her role really so crucial? Perhaps, as an anonymous Burgundian chronicler declared, her 'marvellous deeds' did indeed inspire the belief that 'here was something divine'; yet, according to Enguerran de Monstrelet, this young woman who 'dressed just like a man' *did* have with her at Orleans in 1429 'most of the noble knights and captains who had been in the city throughout the siege' and played no significant role (if any role at all) at Charles VII's coronation.

Insofar as there is a theme running through this book, it centres on the reasons why England and France, so similar in their government assumptions in the eleventh century, had become so dissimilar by the end of the fifteenth. Both, Wood argues, experienced similar crises in government (such as Kings who were children, madmen or absentees): yet, while the later medieval French monarchy moved steadily in the direction of absolutism, England's became more limited and representational in character. Again, doubts soon come crowding in: for instance, the notion that Edward I, far from being defeated by his lords in 1297, 'actually achieved most of his goals at a price he was willing to pay' is contentious to say the least ('Edward I and the Confirmation of the Charters'). Less convincing still is the argument that developments in government in the fifteenth century were *decisively* influenced by Joan of Arc and Richard III: Joan, by restoring the sanctity of the French crown through her divine mission; Richard, by rendering legitimate the restraining role of Parliament.

In 1975 C. T. Wood published a long article entitled 'The Deposition of Edward V' (*Traditio*, vol. 31). Here we have two chapters, 'The Deposition of Edward V' and 'Richard III', roughly corresponding to the two sections of the earlier study. There has been a good deal of re-writing; the author has become less critical of chronicles and more circumspect in his use of record evidence; and he has acknowledged recent contributions to the debate. Yet his argument remains fundamentally unchanged. Richard of Gloucester, in the weeks following Edward IV's death, is still a man lacking in political foresight, ever moving from 'one unexpected crisis to the next', and pursuing a notably 'blundering path' to regality. As King, too, his political acumen is distinctly suspect: during his early weeks on the throne he lived in a fool's paradise; the rebellions of October 1483 took him completely by surprise; and, in 1485, he had no choice but to abandon his foolish project of marrying his own niece. Wood remains firmly committed, as

well, to the doubtful notion that the Parliamentary endorsement of Richard's title to the throne in 1484 has deep political and constitutional significance.

Clearly, this is not a good book: it lacks coherence; much of it, already published elsewhere, does not bear reprinting; and the arguments advanced are too often unconvincing. Yet, for the hard-pressed history teacher, it does have at least one major attraction: as a rich source of just those gems of information so vital for bringing history alive in the classroom!

KEITH DOCKRAY

**THE MEDIEVAL WARHORSE, ORIGIN, DEVELOPMENT AND REDEVELOPMENT**, R.A.C. Davis. 1989. Thames & Hudson, London. £14.95.

Anyone familiar with the historiography of the origins of feudalism will know that the story of the medieval warhorse deserves a prominence it has hitherto not received. 'Feudal society' came into being as a direct consequence of the introduction of heavy cavalry by the Franks in the eighth century, and interestingly, it began to change into something else when heavy cavalry, as the principal element in western armies, was gradually superseded by alternative arms. In addition to its military advantages, a good horse also endowed the rider with dignity and respect; society became increasingly horsey, or 'chivalrous', and possession of a fine stud and especially of warhorses became a matter of pride and prestige. In these respects, the horse, and more especially the warhorse — *dextrarius* deserves a place alongside church and castle as a leading symbol of its time. Unlike buildings however, there has been very little published on the subject in this context, and certainly part of the explanation lies in the difficulties of the evidence. This is a matter which Professor Davis refers to in his introduction, but the masterly survey that follows shows that they are not at all insuperable.

This is not Davis' first publication on warhorses, for he contributed a paper to the Battle Conference Proceedings of 1987, specifically on the Normans' warhorses.<sup>1</sup> This paper is very much more detailed in dealing with horsebreeding and selling in Normandy than the book under review, but both make it clear that although the Normans were well equipped with horses on the eve of the Conquest, the English also most certainly possessed their own (and indeed, as Davis' paper tells us) had a preponderance during the period 946-1020. This is fascinating stuff for the debate on the origins of feudalism in England, for in spite of occasional attacks, Sir Frank Stenton's view that there was no feudalism in England before 1066 because there were no mounted knights, is still followed in the main. Now that Davis has emphasised that the Anglo-Saxons had warhorses, coupled with his correction of Stenton's contention on the origin of the Anglo-Saxon office of 'staller', we must see that Norman and English societies were closer to each other in their attitudes to horses than was previously believed. Although Davis stops short of relating this directly to the issue of English feudalism, he has certainly provided ammunition for future historians who wish to question Stenton's great thesis.

Now, to look at *The Medieval Warhorse* in more detail, let us begin with chapter two. This traces the beginnings from Bactria via the Greeks, and Romans who introduced studs, to the Arabians and Barbs of the Muslim armies of the seventh and eighth centuries. From North Africa the Arabs took their mounts to Iberia where they may have cross-bred with the indigenous horses, and thence north into the realm of the Franks. Subsequently, Spain became a major supplier of quality warhorses for the Christian Kingdoms of north-west Europe, including, after 1100 especially, England. In the next chapter, Davis recounts the other principal line of development: from Tunisia via Norman Sicily to Apulia and Calabria, areas particularly suited for horsebreeding. There, the Angevin successors to Frederick II inherited his studs and sold their stallions to the Italians of the north. These were put to great mares and the resultant 'Lombards' exported to England in the thirteenth century, and in greater number in the fourteenth century when Spanish involvement in the Hundred Years War interfered with the supply of Spanish mounts. Through all of this, Davis is at pains to emphasise two themes as he did in the earlier paper: the purpose and method of selective breeding, and the ease with which a breed could be lost. From the outset of the book, he makes it clear that warhorses did not occur naturally, for like modern race horses they had to be specially bred. Moreover, up till the fourteenth century, they had to be constantly improved. Arms and armour increased to a peak at that time, and correspondingly the demand was for ever larger and stronger warhorses. Appropriately, the maximum size for the warhorse was attained in the fourteenth century: this was the *magnus equus* or *grant chival*: a term coined at the end of the thirteenth century which in the following century became the technical name for a *dextrarius* of the first order. The favoured method for improving the breed was of course to pick out mares with all the requisite qualities and permit them access only to stallions with complementary characteristics. Davis tells us that the mating itself was, in medieval England and Europe, accomplished by keeping the stud stallion in his own stable and introducing chosen mares to him only when he was ready. He provides a good understanding of the costliness of breeding by reference to the purchase price of good warhorses, and by the expenses of running a stable and stud (and on this matter he offers a fascinating speculative comparison on expenditure on warhorses and expenditure on castles as items of capital investment — p.44). The enormous expenses involved most definitely constituted a major discouragement to the maintenance of a breed: in a period of economic depression, particularly when the nobility's income was reduced and its military aspirations curtailed, warhorses were extravagant luxuries that were sold off. At the same time, Davis explains that in time of strife, stud or more properly 'park' palings would be broken down; feral stallions would reach the mares; prize herds would simply be taken as plunder and their all important value as a source of future specially bred horses lost forever.

The fourth chapter concentrates on England. Here we have enlightening discussion on the origins and significance of the offices of the Anglo-Saxon 'king's horse — thegn' and 'staller' (above), the French *comes stabuli* and his subordinates the *marescalles*. From c.1311 to 1361 there were keepers of studs north and south of Trent, and later, certainly from 1383, a 'Master of the Horse'. In both cases, Davis puts on record all known officers and the terminal years of

their commissions. Much of his information for their activities are found in the appropriate royal records or *equitia* (part of the Public Record Office E101 class). These *equitia* are, as one might expect, more plentiful in periods when the king wanted to enhance and enlarge his stock of *dextrarii* and lesser types. Interestingly enough, there are no *equitia* during the periods 1459-80 and 1484-9 and hardly any in 1490-1531. Davis accounts for this by arguing the likelihood of a desire to economise coupled with the difficulty of maintaining studs in the period. This does not seem an altogether adequate explanation, and Davis' other thought that an administrative irregularity is responsible seems more plausible.

The final chapter ('The Impact of the Renaissance; Veterinary Medicine and Equestrianism') falls into two halves; the first dealing with tracts on veterinary science and the second with the history of the warhorse in England from Henry VII's time. The keystone of this is the decline of the *dextrarius*, or perhaps rather, its transformation into the English Thoroughbred during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Here again we see an interesting parallel with the castle, for like the castle, the warhorse remained in demand in England long after its military use had fallen away, because of the prestige it conferred on its owner.

Chapters two to five discussed above, and the two short appendices, concentrate heavily of course on the horse itself. Chapter one 'Medieval Cavalry Warfare' is perhaps a little different in this respect and in consequence, readers will find much in there on medieval warfare which is familiar. Much has been written on this subject and Davis may have wondered how much of this to take on board. His synthesis is excellent however, although I was left wondering what the fourteenth century knight did with his lance, *after* receiving it from his squire, *before* couching it for the charge.

Anybody seriously interested in understanding medieval warfare and the nobility and most of all the warhorse itself, should read this book. It is an excellent work on a highly important but neglected subject and is written so lucidly that even more technical matters are readily appreciated. It also contains a number of surprises: did you know for instance that the origin of the word 'management' which first appeared in English in 1550, was as a translation of the Italian *maneggiare* meaning the handling of horses?

1. 'The Warhorses of the Normans' in *Anglo-Norman Studies*, vol. 10. Proceeding of the Battle Conference 1987, ed. R. Allen Brown, Woodbridge, Suffolk, 1988.

J. O. PETRE

**ENGLISH JUSTICES OF THE PEACE 1461-1509.** J. R. Lander. 1990. Alan Sutton Publishing Ltd., Gloucester, £24.

Local men ruled the localities of Richard III's England as sheriffs, escheators, and justices of the peace. J.P.s were local government from Elizabethan times until 1889, running their counties and upholding local interests nationally. The system worked well because of the middle-class virtues that J.P.s brought to public duties. Was this also true of Richard's day? The doyen of Yorkist historians replies.

It was trespasses not felonies, misdemeanours rather than serious crimes, that J.P.s tried with procedures more summary than those of the higher courts. If 80% of justices were gentry or lesser aristocrats, there were also peers, bishops and other clergymen, judges, and townsmen, varying in proportion by time and place. Very few attended quarter sessions: a handful were assiduous; many almost invisible. Outside quarter sessions, J.P.s may have implemented royal commands, bound over to keep the peace, and arbitrated disputes. Most were busy in other public capacities. Often criminal themselves, J.P.s needed constant oversight from government, which in 1472-4, 1483-4, and the early 1490s intruded trusted outsiders into local commissions. Richard III's use of northerners was typical in arousing local hostility without achieving much. If crime was endemic and law-enforcement inadequate, the deficiencies of J.P.s were a major cause.

Naturally Lander wants more than such limited and unremarkable conclusions and raises many issues of importance. Inadvertently he also illustrates the pitfalls. Sadly he found no new source and hence has no direct evidence to explain, for example, patterns of appointment. Original commissions and payments to justices are his only unprinted sources. He relies on appointments and never uses returns. Among his many minor errors, Ricardians know that Lord Hastings did not die in 1485, that Elizabeth Shore did not marry Morgan Kidwelly, that Edward Grey Viscount Lisle was not obscure, that Judge Littleton was not called William or the Earl of Suffolk Edward. And Lander lets his own assumptions pass unquestioned.

His analysis of commissions deserves respect. But what do they mean? Bishops 'were evidently an important group in government strategy' used, 'it seems plausible enough', to interfere locally, and were 'a valued element in the system of local government'. Yet no evidence is cited that *any* bishop *ever* did *anything* as a J.P. For peers, too, it is

easier to establish figures than find an explanation for them. However, they *obviously* suggest that the traditional interpretation of the nobility as no more than the ceremonial figureheads of the commissions of the peace is very wide of the mark. Such variations in the extent of appointments *surely* possess some significance though precisely what it was remains uncertain and obscure . . . The government *obviously* did not take such trouble and practise such discrimination for nothing. The answer *must* be that the government was anxious to exercise some additional form of control in the localities at intervals as and when necessity arose . . . [my italics]

This is wholly unsubstantiated assertion. What evidence makes it 'surely inconceivable' that the Duke of Norfolk 'would have no interest in the sessions of the peace', that 'bastard feudalism and lordship played a considerable part in the selection of justices', that 'magnates and gentry were jealously and tensely concerned about appointments to the commissions of the peace'? None is cited. Perhaps it is true; perhaps not. It is speculation from dangerous preconceptions. Many big questions are unanswered, sometimes because unanswerable, often because smaller issues are not faced. Were all commissions enrolled? How were J.P.s appointed? Who authorised the commissions? Seldom the king himself, on the evidence of *British Library Harleian Manuscript 433*, which refers to nobody touting for *these* appointments. What did J.P.s do in practice? The ancient

indictments, which Lander ignores, record hundreds of cases and attendances at quarter sessions. What did J.P.s do out of court? Nothing reveals them implementing royal wishes, taking sureties, or even arbitrating *as J.P.s*. Did the commission do any administration — any county government at all — or was it merely a minor judicial tribunal? Why do letter-writers tell us nothing of quarter sessions? Were J.P.s ever bribed? Perhaps they were not bribed or mentioned in letters and perhaps their posts were undersubscribed *because* their work did not matter politically — excluded felonies and land-titles — and could thus be safely ignored? Was it not the county elections, sessions of oyer and terminer, inquisitions post mortem, and the shrievalty that were occasions for violent debate? Was the office of J.P., like that of coroner, politically neutral? If so, are appointments a *measure* of local standing rather than the *result* of local politics? Or, as Lander himself suggests, not even that?

Professor Lander has opened up a fertile new field. His book is lively and well-argued. But it says little about Richard III.

MICHAEL HICKS

**ALCHEMY. THE MEDIEVAL ALCHEMISTS AND THEIR ROYAL ART.**  
Johannes Fabricius. 1989. The Aquarian Press, Wellingborough, Northants., £14.95.

Any hopes that by reading this book one will find the philosophers' stone or succeed in making gold in the garden shed, had better be dashed at the outset. Nor will the ordinary reader emerge any the wiser on the subject of alchemy and its influence on medieval life and culture.

'Alchemy is the art of transmuting base metals into silver or gold by freeing the crude materials from their "impurities"'. From Aristotle on this was thought possible because he had stated that all 'matter' essentially is one, coming into actual, separate existence only by taking 'form' in the shape of the four elements, fire, air, water and earth, each possessing and sharing in various proportions the qualities of heat and cold, fluidity and dryness. Transforming one element into another could in theory be done by adding or removing any of these qualities. Working on this premise alchemists experimented with virtually any material, down to the most unsavoury, and made several chemical discoveries in the process. Their hopeless, frustrating and lonely work and, possibly, their use of hallucinogenic drugs led them to what the author calls their greatest achievement: the discovery of the unconscious. The mystical system they developed, which was surrounded by the utmost secrecy, and the relation of their experience to modern psychological knowledge are the subject of this book. The author interprets some four hundred mainly seventeenth-century illustrations and by quoting and making innumerable obscure statements leads the reader deeper and deeper into a dark labyrinth of esoteric words and concepts from which escape seems impossible.

This scholarly but difficult book is recommended to psychologists, astrologers and people with the infinite patience to unravel the mysteries it contains.

LIVIA VISSER-FUCHS

**ILLUSTRATED LETTERS OF THE PASTON FAMILY.** Edited by Roger Virgoe. 1989. Macmillan London Ltd., £16.95.

The book is aimed at the general reader and assumes little prior knowledge of the period. The introductory section runs to over thirty pages, setting the history of the Paston family within the framework of national events. It includes a list of the main characters, a calendar of religious feasts and a map of Norfolk. Dr Virgoe gives a basic explanation of life in the fifteenth century covering the standard topics of upward mobility, religion, king and country and so on. The section on the selection of the letters which also deals with the problems of dating, punctuation and vocabulary might usefully have been placed in the introductory section so that the reader could bear Dr Virgoe's comments in mind, rather than discover them after he has read the text. Dr Virgoe might also have told the general reader how the letters survived and where they are now.

Dr Virgoe has very sensibly decided to quote long passages from a small number of letters, enabling the reader to get some feel for the letters and their writers. The letters are arranged in chronological order, linked by short explanatory texts which give an idea of the context of the letters. Set within this framework are short discussions of topics suggested by the letters. These cover most subjects of interest, although he does not discuss physical growth or maturity which is a strange omission in view of the fact that John Paston is supposed to have married Margaret Mautby in 1436/40 when she was about twelve and she is supposed to have had her first child in 1441.

The book is well illustrated with photographs of buildings associated with the Pastons, giving added interest and colour. For my part I found it slightly irritating that the captions often did not give any indication of the type of manuscript that the illustration came from and it was not always possible to work it out from the picture credits. In the section on Courtship and Marriage the caption to the illustration seems to contradict the text by suggesting that the marriage vows only became binding when made in the presence of a bishop and other witnesses.

All in all this is a pleasant and useful book, opening up a fascinating collection of letters to a wider audience than a purely academic treatment of the letters would do and encouraging people to think about the archival heritage of this country.

ANN WINGFIELD

**THE BEGINNINGS OF NETHERLANDISH CANVAS PAINTING: 1400-1530.** Diane Wolfthal. 1989. Cambridge University Press, £40.

This is a history (37 pages) and a catalogue of the ninety-four, neglected survivals of Netherlandish paintings on linen, to which are appended eleven Hispano-Flemish examples. All of them are illustrated in black and white; as many are in bad condition few can have demanded colour. Most are in Italy where the climate has favoured their survival, and more than half of them date from the early sixteenth century. So the author is dealing with a few precious examples of what is now a little known art of the middle ages, but which was once a substantial trade.

Linen painting goes back to the ancient world, and famous examples from earlier in the middle ages even entered the realms of legend: St Veronica's cloth(s) and the Turin shroud (the author skirts tactfully around the last example). Some of the techniques used must actually have encouraged the credulous to attach such legends to works on linen: delicate, soft modelling and flesh tones depicted by very thin washes: the paint was thin so that it would not flake on the supple cloth, and the whole effect might be transparent.

Linen paintings had many uses, from flags, hangings for cathedrals, houses and guildhalls, to organ-shutters, maps and altar-pieces. They included cartoons for tapestries, these having their own independent value as well, quite apart from the expensive tapestry. Painters as well known as Robert Campin designed linen hangings and Rogier van der Weyden painted them. Linen paintings were also important as a tapestry substitute, but no Netherlandish example survives. The 'stained cloths' of the English must have fallen into this category in a country that lacked a native tapestry industry (though hangings of worsted were warm and cheap too). Hugo van der Goes probably painted hangings for the entry into Bruges of Charles the Bold and Margaret of York in 1468.

Linen might be used for more precious items: a favourite portrait or a religious scene to be gazed at while one prayed, could be easily rolled up and transported if it was on fabric. On the whole, however, paintings on linen were cheap because the fabric could be swiftly prepared and painted with a faster technique than the laborious methods of the panel-painters. Their very cheapness may have made them less valuable to the connoisseur: Italians like the Medici were the first to place Netherlandish paintings on linen in their collections, René of Anjou had a few, but the princes of the Netherlands only followed suit in the sixteenth century.

Dr Wolfthal has examined all the records of St Luke's Guild in Bruges to discover the artists—Bruges was a leading centre for *drap de Bruges* by the fifteenth century. Her haul is meagre but impressive for its thoroughness. Few of the works can be firmly ascribed (like the flag of the Maid of Ghent painted by Agnes van den Bossche) or linked with documents. We are still waiting for the results of a similar search for the names of London painters and stainers, the latter being apparently the name for linen painters in England. They were two separate guilds in London till the early sixteenth century, and no doubt they had rivalries as they had in Bruges. The linen painters were more numerous than the *schilders* (panel-painters) and they were influential but they were often of lower status. A list of the London artists will aid the study of the exchange of artists and

the trade in their wares between the Netherlands and England which undoubtedly existed for 'stained' goods as much as for decorated manuscripts.

Any fully illustrated catalogue is invaluable to the student of the fifteenth century, whether for the trivial pleasure of finding a nice example of a book-bag hanging from a saint's belt (54/116), enjoying a solemn Christ-child sitting on his mother's knee carefully studying her book of hours with her (43/106), or for the satisfaction of having a worthwhile reference book to which one can always return. The catalogue provides the essential details of title, location, size, provenance, and, more important, the author's own commentary on the painting's quality and her contribution to any scholarly debate about it.

This is a satisfactory book in many ways, the only major flaw being the decision not to have notes at the bottom of the page. The reader has to be patient and work hard with the catalogue entries separate from the plates (each with a different sequence of numbers), and with separate sequences of notes for each of the five short chapters of the introduction and for each of the catalogue entries. Everything is there, however, including the indispensable bibliography.

ANNE F. SUTTON

**CIVILITY AND SOCIETY IN WESTERN EUROPE, 1300-1600.** Marvin B. Becker. 1988. Indiana University Press, Bloomington, \$27.50.

Charting the course of a cultural revolution is an ambitious task for any historian. The task Professor Becker has set himself is doubly difficult in that he has chosen to compare and contrast the changing cultures of Tuscany and England over three centuries by means of a wide-ranging study of the language, literature, customs, ceremonies, arts and architecture of these diverse societies. Professor Becker attempts to show how both Tuscany and England, at different times and to different extents underwent a subtle but decisive shift from what he terms 'archaic' value systems and cultures, based on ties of kinship, feudal obligation, and violence, to societies centred around wider obligations towards a more abstract notion of civil society based on written law, contract, and a more complex level of rhetorical and symbolic discourse. Evidence from curtesy books, poetry, drama and prose are used to show how Renaissance humanists increasingly differentiated themselves from their supposedly more unsophisticated forebears by means of an increased emphasis on personal deportment, linguistic skills and the acquisition of knowledge. This resulted in a decline in the need for large-scale displays of feudal hospitality, courtly ceremony and demonstrations of homage. In this densely argued study the underlying assumption appears to equate the earlier 'archaic' period (for England, read the fifteenth century) with a lesser stage of cultural development, just as anthropologists used to categorize the non-Europeans which they studied as 'primitive'. Divorced from any wider discussion of changing social structures, 'civility' only seems to come to England with the ascent of the Tudors. The problems of such an approach will no doubt be familiar to readers of *The Ricardian*. The shift from one cultural paradigm to another is largely taken as

given. Surprisingly no mention is made of the impact of the Reformation on changing mentalities. We learn quite a lot about culture, which is granted a largely autonomous role as a force for historical change, but little of the societies in which this change supposedly took place. This is not to say that this is not a worthwhile and thought provoking study which deserves to take its place alongside the growing body of work on the subject.

MICHAEL BERLIN

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These are welcomed on any subject relevant to the aims of the Society. These may be illustrated by photographs (glossy prints showing good contrast) or by line drawings. All contributions, including letters, must be typewritten, with double spacing and adequate margins, on one side of the paper only. Permission must be obtained for the use of copyright material, but this is not usually necessary for short quotes. References and footnotes must be given in one sequence at the end of the article. Details need not be given in full for second and subsequent references to the same source. They must take the form of the following examples:

R. Horrox and P. W. Hammond (eds.), *British Library Manuscript 433* (4 vols. Upminster and London 1979-83), vol. 1, pp.45-6.

Daniel Williams, The hastily drawn up will of William Catesby Esquire, 25 August 1485, *Leicestershire Archaeological and Historical Society Transactions*, vol. 51 (1975-6), p.48.

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Contributions for the December 1990 *Ricardian* must reach Miss Anne Sutton, 17 Enfield Cloisters, Fanshaw Street, London N1 6LD, by September 30. Articles should be sent well in advance. Further advice on presentation may be obtained from the Editor.

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