

Book Reviews

LORDSHIP AND THE URBAN COMMUNITY: DURHAM AND ITS OVERLORDS, 1250-1540. Margaret Bonney. 1990. Cambridge University Press, £30.

The dramatic appearance of Durham, dominated by a magnificent cathedral and castle built on a narrow rocky promontory, high above the river Wear, is the starting point for this new history of medieval Durham. Margaret Bonney's book literally grows from a consideration of the town's topography, beginning with a survey of the archaeological and other evidence for its early origins. She argues convincingly that the town developed from a group of six related settlements (four of them called 'boroughs'), each with a distinct character, on and around the site of the defended central precinct. The basic topography of later medieval (and indeed modern) Durham was in place by 1250, but the greater abundance of later records allow a much more detailed survey of the urban landscape and buildings after that date. Dr Bonney's edition of the title deeds for Durham properties, which provide the foundation of her detailed knowledge of the fabric and appearance of the medieval town, are to be published separately elsewhere. However the fruits of her intensive labour, together with an analysis of the fluctuation of urban property values, are the central focus of this book. Two last chapters deal with the lay inhabitants of Durham by trade and occupation, and with the administration of the various borough courts.

Durham Priory was overlord of three of the six parts of the medieval town, and it is the surviving account rolls and court records of its obedientiaries on which this history of the town is largely based. The Bishop's borough, which occupied the heart of the town outside the castle gates, and which contained the town's major market place, is less well served by surviving records. Nevertheless, it is apparent that by the later middle ages the Bishop's borough was the most prosperous and commercially dominant of all Durham's boroughs, and the only part of the town outside the castle precinct to be defended by walls. By the later fifteenth century the Bishop's courts also exercised a jurisdictional dominance over the whole town — as the only courts competent to hear pleas of the crown and serious criminal cases. By the same date the emergent organisations of Durham craftsmen also came directly under the Bishop's supervision. The relative lack of evidence from the episcopal archive is thus obviously regrettable, if unavoidable. This lack of sources for the central part of the urban community may also, however, influence some of the general conclusions drawn by the author about the relative quiescence of the townspeople and the late emergence of craft organisations.

The wealth of the priory's archives are a great compensation. From them Dr Bonney deduces that the peak of Durham's prosperity was reached before 1300 and depended on Durham's importance as both the seat of the 'prince-bishops' of the palatinate of Durham and an important ecclesiastical centre with the famous shrine of St Cuthbert. There was no single dominant craft or trade and, indeed, after 1300 local craftsmen and traders gradually lost ground to the competition of larger markets elsewhere, as the priory increasingly used Durham market only for 'smaller-scale purchases of goods of inferior quality'. Economic contraction was matched by population decline, which was, perhaps, especially noticeable in the less central parts of the town. The final dissolution of the priory in 1540, and transfer of its landed endowments to a new dean and chapter had a minimal impact on the town's fortunes.

The last decade has witnessed a significant expansion in both the volume and scope of medieval urban studies to which this study is a welcome addition. The author justifiably concentrates on the Durham evidence, but there is much here which will contribute to our broader understanding of late medieval urban society. For the local historian and the enquiring tourist this study of Durham, with its initial emphasis on the appearance of the town, also provides a welcome and well-illustrated history.

SARAH REES JONES

APOLLONIUS OF TYRE, MEDIEVAL AND RENAISSANCE THEMES AND VARIATIONS. Including the text of the *Historia Apollonii Regis Tyri* with an English translation. Elizabeth Archibald. 1991. D. S. Brewer, an imprint of Boydell and Brewer Ltd., Woodbridge, £35.

If, out of a wish to understand their minds, one should attempt to read the fiction that Edward IV or Richard of Gloucester could have read, does one just go through the stories known in their time, taking them as they come, accepting the limitations of one's mood of the moment and of one's knowledge? Or does one pick up a study like the present one that by its thorough scholarship leaves nothing, as it were, to the imagination and informs one in exhaustive detail about all the attitudes and knowledge of readers in the past? The question is an old one and both ways of approach seem legitimate. If the story is good it can be enjoyed without help; if it is very good, however, one is likely to want to know more; if it is puzzling and complicated, like *Apollonius of Tyre*, seeking assistance may be essential.

Edward IV may have owned a manuscript containing *Apollonius*: BL.Ms.Royal 20 C ii is one of the big Flemish books that are usually attributed to his library. The manuscript contains no signs of ownership and all coats of arms are blank or have been thoroughly erased, but there is little doubt that the story was well known at the Yorkist court. It was generally popular at the time and had been so since the sixth century. Originally a novel from late antiquity, unique in its long survival, it was translated into most vernacular languages, adapted and 'medievalised', used by Gower and dramatised in the Shakespearean *Pericles*.

The story itself is long and involved; it does not contain the elements of romantic love and martial prowess one would expect in a tale that remained popular for so long. It contains features from classical culture, such as the gymnasium, that later adaptors found hard to understand. It cannot be properly called a romance; in manuscripts it was often linked to historical texts, especially stories of Alexander. One suspects that its popularity in the later middle ages was partly due to its being set in the mysterious countries where the unbelievers lived. The present author chose to call the story a chameleon: its lack of colour allowed it to be retold and reread in different styles and periods. Its main theme, if there is one, is the relationships between fathers and daughters. Apollonius is a husband and father, rather than a knight and lover.

The book is not supposed to replace the edition by Kortekaas (1984), but is meant to give in one volume information on the story of Apollonius to students in many fields, including those interested in early printing and Shakespeare. Its first part covers the structure of the story, its value, its many themes and sources, its influence on other literary works and its reception. The second part supplies a Latin text and a literal translation. There are appendices listing and discussing chronologically the many versions and their editions (43 in all) and the allusions to the story in a variety of sources from Venantius Fortunatus to Ben Jonson. There is a select bibliography and indices of manuscripts cited, as well as a general one. All Latin and French texts and quotations are translated.

The book covers everything one would wish. Because of its nature it does not make exciting reading, but the reader does not, as one commentator said of the story of Apollonius itself, 'need the virtue of patience like the long-suffering hero himself'.

LIVIA VISSER-FUCHS

THE MEDIEVAL CASTLE IN ENGLAND AND WALES. A Social and Political History. N. J. G. Pounds. 1990. Cambridge University Press, £30.

Castellologie (Castle Studies) is today more popular than ever. New academic associations have been founded lately; at least one major new periodical has recently appeared; well researched and well turned out monographs on individual or groups of castles have just been published. In addition there have been further works of a more general nature, attempting to provide an overview of the subject as a whole. While these works have not necessarily taken quite the same approach to their subject, they have focused on the architectural and archaeological aspects, looking at castles *per se*, and not so much at why they were built where, what they were for, and how the answers to these questions (and hence the castle itself) changed as the medieval period progressed. A general work — on the castle in its context — free of the encumbrances of avalanches of pretty pictures and detailed architectural descriptions — has long been overdue, and undoubtedly an historian with a knowledge of medieval social history must be, *at least*, as well qualified to write it as an architectural historian or an archaeologist.

But does Professor Pounds succeed? The first points to bear in mind are the sheer size of the task and the lack of agreed definition — both in reference to the 'castle' itself, and to the influences of castle on society and vice versa. Pounds makes it clear that the word *castle* was used, from the outset, to refer to structures of varying dimensions that plainly had very different functions, and of course, this continued down to and beyond the end of the middle ages. He spends considerable time on analysing these functions, and this is where the great strength of the book lies. A natural corollary of this approach is a categorisation that would not be encountered in architectural analyses — thus instead of such chapter themes as would conventionally be seen (e.g. the concentric castle etc.), we have treatises on baronial castles, sheriffs' castles, and border castles. That all such castles might, to a greater or lesser degree, resemble each other, is a secondary issue which is properly subordinated in the overall approach.

Pounds also looks at how castles were manned and provisioned. He recites the evidence on castle guard (which is really fairly fragmentary) and on 'garrisoning' (strictly speaking an anachronism), which leads to the matter of expense, which of course is where architectural development becomes a major consideration. This becomes an issue when Pounds turns to explanations for the decline of the castle in the sense that, after 1300, very few new buildings were commenced, and of course many existing ones were neglected. Certainly, by 1300 and after, only the wealthiest of magnates could afford to build and sustain a fully developed castle, and inevitably, any such lord wishing to do this would hail from the newly emerging parliamentary peerage. Pounds points out that this 'new class' of peers was accumulating an unprecedented expanse of estates and that this helps account for the decrease in the number of castles. This is quite right, but how far 'decrease' helps explains 'decline' remains a matter of debate.

In a book of this size, it is perhaps inevitable that one can find and recite instances of factual error on matters of detail. Additionally there are a number of cases where castles are ascribed to the wrong counties which is perhaps a little galling given Pounds' initial declaration of sensitivity to the pre-1974 boundaries. More importantly, there are some highly doubtful interpretations of military history, as in undervaluing the role of fortifications in the Barons War of 1264-6 and in considering that much of the period of the Wars of the Roses was filled with skirmishing. Worse are confusing, even inconsistent comments such as those on tower houses (thus p.279 — 'the ground floor was . . . unlikely, especially in northern England, to be vaulted in stone . . .' and p.287 — 'The northern tower house . . . ground floor was in almost every instance vaulted in stone, . . .') and on the influence of cannon (thus p.252 — 'their role in castle warfare has perhaps been exaggerated'; p.300 — 'The castle proved inadequate for . . . it was not built with artillery in mind').

These are blemishes which could be rectified without altering the pattern of the book. Any such revision would also provide opportunity for Pounds to give as much attention to the period after 1300 as he does so well to the period before it. Even so, as the book stands, it remains a remarkable *tour de force* of the voluminous material relevant to a *history* of the castle in England and Wales. Its great achievement lies in its synthesis of this information into a thesis on this most important, and most difficult, aspect of the castle.

JAMES O. PETRE

THE ENGLAND OF *PIERS PLOWMAN*. William Langland and his Vision of the Fourteenth Century. F. R. H. Du Boulay. 1991. D. S. Brewer of Boydell and Brewer Ltd., Woodbridge, £29.50. ISBN 0 85881 312 0.

Professor Du Boulay begins his book with a brief discussion of whether we can ever understand the past. The question is particularly appropriate to a study of *Piers Plowman*, a poem

full of ideas, scenes and images which bring to life an English past and at the same time speak to our condition, which is not so different from that of fourteenth-century people as we sometimes like to think.

Du Boulay does not attempt to dismiss our blood-and-genes ancestors as mere biological kin, nor the past as something totally irrecoverable, but acknowledges the values of sympathetic imagination and the assistance offered by such writers as William Langland to 'stir the dead bones'.

... the more one thinks about the fourteenth century the less it seems to belong to a mythical 'dark age' and the closer its style to the more modern world. (p.47)

This is a view with which the present reviewer, at least, is totally in sympathy.

The book aims to work 'both ways': to explain the historical background and Langland's often obscure references, and by constant use of the poem's own words (in the original and translation), to recreate the realities of the poem which enrich bland historical facts. It also presents the author's own interpretation of the complex visions in the text.

Professor Du Boulay adopts the theory that Langland was a holy minstrel or entertainer, an 'intense preacher of Christian love' (p.37), a man with his own prejudices, jealousies and other human frailties — the supporting evidence is extracted from the text with a care that Will's vanity might not have appreciated! The author's background as an historian makes the analysis of the biographical and locational problems of the poem particularly rewarding: see the chapter devoted to the countryside from the west midlands to the south-east, with its corn and its sheep, and the busy world of London, where Langland lived on Cornhill. The chapter on the 'religious scene' ranges from an explanation of the aspects of faith and dogma, especially repentance, central to Langland's view of life, to the more prosaic details of the church's hierarchy, the way priests were paid and parishes organised, the enormous numbers of clergy at every level of the community, and the role played by the Friars (for good and evil). Most telling are the paragraphs visualising the real impact of a medieval parish church when you walked into it and found its space dominated by the Rood (pp.75-6).

In describing the dreams and the unique quality of the poem effective use is made of the cinematic term 'dissolve' which exactly conveys Langland's technique; this is one example of the useful and frequent juxtaposition of the modern world to that of 1400 in this attempt to 'explain' *Piers*.

The book will be a *vade-mecum* for the non-historian seeking to know the England of *circa* 1400 described by Langland; it could be an inspiration to the historian in its emphasis on the life-giving value of 'literary' sources; and if you have decided that *Piers Plowman* is the ideal book to take to your desert island you should make sure this study is bound in at the back.

ANNE F. SUTTON

SANDAL CASTLE, WAKEFIELD. The History and Archaeology of a Medieval Castle. L. Butler. 1991. Wakefield Historical Publications, 19 Pinder Grove, Wakefield, Yorkshire WF1 4AH. £4.50 plus £1.35 (p.&p.) from publisher.

In 1983, Wakefield Historical Publications issued one of the largest volumes ever to appear on a single castle, when it published the detailed archaeological report of the ten years excavation carried out on Sandal Castle from 1964 to 1973. Much of that volume was devoted to specialist reports on such matters as pottery, of interest perhaps only to fellow specialists, though certainly all of value in contributing as they do to the overall understanding of the castle.¹ Dr Butler, who led the excavations for much of the time, and co-wrote and edited the 1983 work with Phil Mayes, his predecessor at Sandal, has now produced 'a more general account', as he calls this 1991 volume, designed for the general reader. Even so, Butler frequently punctuates his narrative with detailed archaeological comment, usually on pottery sherds. One such excursion is enlivened by a speculation on the practice of alchemy in the castle: perhaps in 'search for an elixir of youth or an alcoholic spirit' (p.59). It is no doubt wizard stuff such as this that grabs the reader's attention, rather than the identification of sherds from afar reflecting the Warenne Earls peregrinations among their castles, etc. Still, this is a book of the dig as much as anything else, so discussions of pots and pans are inevitable and fair enough.

Dr Butler's published works on Sandal Castle are undoubtedly noteworthy additions to the field of castle studies and it is splendid to have this important West Riding castle so well recorded. Having said this, I have to indicate some unhappiness with certain points of detail where the book leaves the subject of Sandal Castle itself. Thus we are told that Edmund, first Duke of York was given the castle of Wark-on-Tweed (p.49), whereas in fact he was granted Wark-on-Tyne, which was a quite distinct castle and lordship altogether. Flodden was surely not in 1515 (p.74) and Edgehill is not usually described as a crushing victory for the royalists (p.86) by Civil War scholars. I was puzzled by Butler's description of Pickering as a royal, rather than Duchy of Lancaster castle, but as the rear cover of the book says that Butler has written a guidebook on Pickering, no doubt he knows best! Still, Michael Thompson's guidebook to Pickering certainly shows it to be Lancastrian, and since Butler is inaccurate on even the name of Thompson's work *The Decline of the Castle* (p.118) who knows?²

Ricardians will naturally focus on Dr Butler's comments on Richard's additions to Sandal and his possible motives for these. Dr Butler compares Richard's Well Tower, added to the Great Tower on the motte, with Raglan's Yellow Tower, which does seem rather flattering. The innuendo that Richard was a 'secretive and suspicious king' and saw Sandal as an appropriate royal base because it did not depend on the loyalty of the adjacent town, also appears to be an odd judgment. As Butler says, certain other leading Yorkshire castles are approached 'by a main entrance through a thriving town', unlike Sandal, but of course one can postulate that such castles would allow a suspicious lord to control his local subjects all the better.

Wakefield District Council has two front-rank castles within its charge, the other being Pontefract. As Butler says, this is a heavy financial responsibility and

it is to be hoped that the authority can continue to care for both and so justify the digs that have taken place at each. In any event, we now have good general accounts of both, which are in part complementary. You can actually take Butler's map of the Manor of Wakefield (p.5) and fit it like jig-saw pieces with the map of the Honour of Pontefract in Roberts' work!³

1. P. Mayes and L. A. S. Butler, *Sandal Castle Excavations 1964-1973*. Wakefield Historical Publications, 1983. Reviewed *The Ricardian*, vol. 6, no. 84 (March 1984), pp.317-8.
2. M. W. Thompson, *The Decline of the Castle in England and Wales*, Cambridge 1987 — not as given in Butler's suggestions for further reading, *The End . . .*, 1988.
3. I. Roberts, *Pontefract Castle*, West Yorkshire Archaeology Service, 1990.

JAMES O. PETRE

Notices of Books and Articles

The following list consists of recent books and articles, mainly published in the last twelve months, although earlier publications may be included. The appearance of an item does not preclude its subsequent review.

BOOKS

Elizabeth Crowfoot, Frances Pritchard and Kay Staniland, *Medieval Finds from Excavations in London 4: Textiles and Clothing*. Illustrated. 250 pages. 1992. HMSO for the Museum of London, £29.95 (pbk).

Knitting, tapestries, silk hairnets, fragments of oriental and Italian silks and many kinds of woollen textiles, as well as pieces of made-up garments allow for detailed study of the range of cloths available to medieval Londoners, and the high standards of workmanship. Black and white and colour illustrations; bibliography.

Geoff Egan and Frances Pritchard (with contributions from others), *Medieval Finds from Excavations in London 3: Dress Accessories c.1150-c.1450*. Illustrated. 410 pages. 1991. HMSO for the Museum of London, £39.95 (pbk).

Detailed report on excavation site and conditions with catalogue of each item found. Extensive information on manufacture, method of wearing and the types of accessories. Excellently illustrated in both black and white and colour. Bibliography.

ARTICLES

Ian Arthurson, *Espionage and Intelligence from the Wars of the Roses to the Reformation*, *Nottingham Medieval Studies*, volume 35, 1991, pages 134-54.

Survey covering c.1450-c.1530 of the surviving data about these vital under-cover activities that all English kings involved themselves in. Looks at the role of ambassadors, merchants, doctors, musicians, heralds and criminals, at counter-espionage and the use of ciphers, the consequences for spies that were caught, the dangers of false reports and rumours, and at the cost of all these goings-on.

Judith M. Bennett, Conviviality and Charity in Medieval and Early Modern England, *Past and Present*, number 134, February 1992, pages 19-41.

On scot-ales, church-ales, help-ales and bride-ales: social and convivial gatherings organised locally to collect money for charitable purposes, both individual and corporate. Though not always purely charitable and facing increasing opposition, they may have been more immediately useful to the needy than the donations of the rich.

P. W. Fleming, The Lovelace Dispute: Concepts of Property and Inheritance in Fifteenth-Century Kent, *Southern History*, volume 12, 1990, pages 2-18.

Traces in detail the dispute, circa 1465 to 1503, over ownership of lands and manors among the members of a family with strong London merchant connections and newly-attained gentle rank. Includes an analysis of several aspects of the conflict: personal, legal, social and political.

John A. Goodall, A New Version of the Fifteenth Century English Royal Arms from Bruges, *The Coat of Arms*, New Series, volume 9, number 155, 1991, pages 135-137.

Describes a coat of arms once on a tomb connected with Sister Catherine de Verste, a recluse and apparent *protégée* of John Morton. In one quarter of the royal arms is a very early use of the harp for Ireland.

Margaret Hotine, *Richard III* and *Macbeth* — Studies in Tudor Tyranny?, *Notes and Queries*, volume 236, December 1991, pages 480-6.

Argues that Shakespeare is following a well-established practice of using historical subjects as a cover for comment on contemporary events in a period of strict censorship. Contrasts *Richard III* with the earlier *The True Tragedie of Richard III*, which is plain propaganda with an epilogue lauding the benefits conferred by the Tudors, ending with prolonged flattery of Elizabeth I; Shakespeare's ending, the speech of Richmond, is very low key. Suggests that Shakespeare is attacking the tyranny of the real masters of England, William and Robert Cecil, known as 'the old fox and his crooked cub'. Robert, later Earl of Salisbury under James I, had a hunched back. His oppressive practices are documented, including the use of *agents provocateurs* to foment and foster plots for the government's benefit.

John J. Kennedy, The Arms of Ireland, Mediaeval and Modern, *The Coat of Arms*, New Series, volume 9, number 155, 1991, pages 90-109.

Discusses the origin of the harp now used in the fourth quarter of the royal arms to represent Ireland and the previous arms used. Includes a reference to an enquiry under Edward IV to determine the true arms of Ireland.

Medieval Theatre, volume 11, 1989 (published 1992), 186 pages.

The entire issue is devoted to a series of articles: 'Evil on the Medieval Stage'. Illustrated.

Evelyn Newlyn, Unconventional Evidence of Early Drama: the Stained and Painted Glass of St Neot's Church, Cornwall, *Records of Early English Drama*, volume 16, number 2, 1991, pages 1-7.

Examines the Creation window in St Neot's; the church being rebuilt 1480-1530. Suggests that the depiction of certain characters was affected by seeing the local drama, in particular the two-legged male serpent in the Temptation, Cain and his servant Lamech, and the death of Adam.

Notes on Contributors

Barbara Coulton. Worked on documents in Shropshire Record Office for National Trust: wrote short life of builder of Attingham Hall, *A Shropshire Squire*, Shrewsbury 1989; still working on the Corbet family.

Heather Falvey is a member of the South Herts Group of the Society and attended the 1991 Research Weekend. She has been researching the More for several years.

Isolde Martyn. BA History Hons, Exeter University. Freelance historian and editor. Author and tutor of University of Sydney Discussion Group Course, *Richard III: His Life and Times*.

James O. Petre. A member since 1967. BA(Wales) and MA(London). He did two years full time research into the later history of English castles. He now works for the Institute of Legal Executives.

Sarah Rees Jones is a lecturer in history at the University of York, and is currently engaged in a study of medieval York.

Livia Visser-Fuchs is working on the literary background and propaganda of Anglo-Burgundian relations of the Yorkist period.

Ricardian Indexes

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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.

Anyone interested in taking display advertisement space—full, half or quarter page—or in placing an insert should contact the Editor. (Classified advertisements should be sent to the Editor of the Bulletin).

Contributions for the December 1992 *Ricardian* must reach Miss Anne Sutton, 17 Enfield Cloisters, Fanshaw Street, London N1 6LD, by 30 September. Articles should be sent well in advance. Further advice on presentation may be obtained from the Editor.

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