

Book Reviews

W. G. HOSKINS, *The Making of the English Landscape*. Hodder and Stoughton, 1955, 240 pp. 25s.

Dr Hoskins's work on the English landscape has opened a department of historical studies which is of interest to the specialist as well as to the general public. It has its own clearly defined objectives with its appropriate instruments for attaining them, and it calls for a combination of techniques and attitudes that can only be acquired as a result of careful training and strenuous preparation. If, as may be the case, it is taken into the canon of academic 'subjects', it will certainly not be found among the soft options.

The basic requirement is a knowledge of archaeology and of economic history; but an indefinable feeling for landscape, which is more the result of endowment than of training, is also necessary. Perhaps, in the last resort, it is a study intended for those in whose veins the blood of their farming ancestors still runs and feeds the imagination with memories which a large-scale map or a view from a church tower will recall to life.

In the early chapters the archaeologist is entrusted with the main theme, but the historian has some interesting and thought-provoking passages, and the relation between changes in the landscape and underlying agricultural techniques receives frequent emphasis. Perhaps this ought to be still stronger. It was for agricultural purposes that settlement took place at all, and the relation between the actual implements of cultivation and the Bronze Age corn plots, the Iron Age square fields, and the long strips of the Roman villas and the English settlers is strictly relevant to Dr Hoskins's theme. It is perhaps a little confusing to have villages "with enclosed fields of Celtic type" side by side with Roman villas in "large open fields" without some explanation of the technological reasons for the difference; and to explain the Kentish square fields in terms of the turnwrest plough "which could produce either

strips or square plots, and either of these shapes could be associated with open-field agriculture" does not carry us very far. There is a footnote reference for which we are grateful, but the intricate problem of the Kentish field system is not disposed of in the few lines which Dr Hoskins devotes to it. And can we discuss balks (in the Seebohm sense) and ridge and furrow without entering into the technicalities of ploughing? The plough with a fixed mouldboard, as Dr Hoskins says, would leave a wide furrow between the lands, so that balks could be—and perhaps were—dispensed with; and all land so ploughed would be in ridge and furrow though not necessarily in 'high-backs'; on light soil the ploughing would be practically flat, but the lands would still be separated by wide furrows so that balks would be no more necessary than on heavy soil. It is worthy of note that of the many aerial photographs that have appeared of ridge and furrow on deserted medieval sites not one suggests that balks existed, and examination on the ground has not supplied the missing evidence.

It should perhaps be taken as a delicate tribute to the late Dr Orwin that no explanation is anywhere offered of the actual process of ploughing, and that no mention of his famous book on the Open Fields is made in any of the recommended reading; but as one who has tried to introduce modern town-bred youth to the alien mysteries of field systems and landscape study, this reviewer would plead for a constant recapitulation of the mechanical basis of the art of cultivation; and for triumphant demonstration of the part played by ploughing in the making of field patterns it is not necessary to go further than the masterly article in the last number of this journal by Dr Eyre, the findings of which must surely be incorporated in any future edition of Dr Hoskins's book.

Even if Dr Orwin is so well known that he can be ignored, the subject of his study, the open fields of Laxton, might have been

allowed to speak as the only surviving example of the authentic open-field village (as distinct from remnants of open fields). As Dr Hoskins says, no poet has arisen to describe the life of the open fields before they were extinguished by enclosure (though there is an effusion in Latin, as he no doubt knows, celebrating the benefits enjoyed by a village in Northamptonshire *after* enclosure); but Mr Rose, the bailiff of the Manor Court of Laxton and farmer of 70 acres of which all the arable is in the three open fields, has a story to tell which is not without its poetry, though it smacks more of Crabbe than of John Clare. And when Dr Hoskins writes, under a picture of a deserted Leicestershire village, "here we have an entirely medieval scene," it is worth remembering that a view from Laxton church tower provides the best picture England can offer of a medieval village that is still alive. It has recently been bought by the Ministry of Agriculture in order to avoid piecemeal sale and enclosure, and though the tenants are a little apprehensive at passing out of the hands of an ancient family into those of the Welfare State, they go on as before and the village still lives. Let us sometimes praise famous survivals as well as lament forgotten losses.

Throughout the book Dr Hoskins presents us with a succession of bright ideas and new points of view to which students of the rural and urban landscape will return again and again. His book may be enlarged and improved but it is difficult to think that it can ever be superseded. While using archaeology and economic history as instruments, not ends, he throws new light on both. In regard to economic history—the only tool in his well equipped workshop that this reviewer shares with him—he raises many questions which invite discussion. He speaks of depopulation in late Roman times, and refers to the farms and villages, silent and in ruins, which the Anglo-Saxons found and in many places inherited. Much of the arable land appears to have been given over to sheep pasture, and the Germanic invaders seem to have occupied, if not an empty land, at least a land

where "most of these [the villages] were probably deserted by the fourth or fifth century" (p. 42). If this is the case, the age-old problem of racial continuity largely disappears, together with the supposition that there may have been continuous occupation of village sites on any significant scale. Dr Hoskins is not satisfied that any such site has yet been satisfactorily established, though there are "exciting clues" to suggest that some may yet be found. And it would be interesting to have Dr Hoskins's views on the origin of the numerous slave population of Anglo-Saxon England.

A contribution which all economic historians will welcome is the reference to the two building booms of 1570–1620 and (*circa*) 1690–1720. Of the first, Dr Hoskins says very rightly "it was an age of profit inflation for farmers as well as merchants and industrialists" (p. 122); but since farmers were many times more numerous than merchants and industrialists put together, the economic impact of their prosperity represents a factor in the history of economic change to which justice has not yet been done. The coincidence of Dr Hoskins's visual evidence of agricultural profit inflation with Professor Nef's industrial revolution of the same period will not be lost on students of the subject.

The second building boom is even more interesting. It was especially marked, he says, in the Midlands and the North, and as regional historians know, it coincided with expansion in every department of the local economy. The parish registers show that it was also a period of substantial population growth. The study of the landscape corroborates the view derived from more conventional sources that this was a period of boom, and that it ended with the commercial collapse of 1720 and the beginning of the demographic depression of the following two decades.

Dr Hoskins has an unrivalled eye for the detail which others overlook: the increase in the singing-bird population as a result of the enclosure of fields with white-thorn hedges; the fox covers laid out by the fox-hunting

gentry; the furlong brought in from the waste perhaps in the twelfth or thirteenth century and cutting across the direct path of the next village; the absence of lanes in recently enclosed country; and—on the subject of roads and green lanes—the “immense continuity of English boundaries.” To the subject of roads Dr Hoskins brings an almost poetic insight, and the treatment of canals and railways provides some of his most evocative pages. On the landscape of towns he has a chapter of twenty pages which bring together what little is known of this neglected subject; but it is a pity that all he can do for the landscape of today is to blot it out with the boiling lava of his quite unhistorical and indiscriminating rage.

On this subject, the poet in Dr Hoskins gets the better of the historian; the techniques of the London School of Economics in which he was trained are yoked with the brooding nostalgia of Wordsworth and John Clare, and the result is sometimes a flurry of feet and a cloud of dust, including, as we have come to expect, a quantity of mud at the expense of the Royal Air Force. But the desiccated calculating machine of the economist goes on grinding all the same, and there are times when it conveys a message which should be taken into account by the lovers of the pre-industrial landscape. Its beauty depended partly on the maintenance of a particular ratio between space and numbers of inhabitants, and this in its turn depended on the fact that the latter died almost—but not quite—as fast as they were born. When, in the villages and towns during Dr Hoskins’s “flowering period” of England, the seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, it is found that burials rose again and again above baptisms; when in Nottingham, that “Paradise Restored” (p. 218) between 1732 and 1739, there were 1022 “infant” burials out a total of 2226; when in the beautiful city of Norwich John Evelyn noticed the naked corpses piled high on one another awaiting decomposition because there were too many to bury; when the poor who lived outside the newly repaired walls of Chester were so rank with disease and filth

that the respectable citizens who lived within the walls held their noses and gave them a wide berth; when gibbets, for those who survived the hazard of infancy, were so numerous that travellers are said to have used them as landmarks, there is some reason for thinking that the melancholy lucubrations of Wordsworth on the coming of “social industry” to the countryside and the lament of poor Clare for his vanishing commons are a very partial rendering of the still sad music of humanity which these writers—and Dr Hoskins—are at pains to convey during the period of transition to the industrial age. There were features in the landscape of the “flowering period” of England which would have offended Dr Hoskins if they had survived; and it is surely a weakness of the aesthetic interpretation of history if its judgments are to be determined by the superior durability of the dignity of free-stone compared to the evanescent squalor of stud-and-mud.

If Dr Hoskins’s complaint is that the industrial age condemns men to live as tools of the productive process rather than as human beings, many would agree; but the fact has to be faced that the industrial process has made possible a vast increase in the number of those who can live at all, and some of their efforts to come to life in a fuller sense might well fall within the purview of the historian of the landscape. Is there no significance in the individuality which is sometimes seen in domestic and institutional building, in the loveliness of flowers and trees which sets off many of our most commonplace houses and streets, in the parks and open places where twentieth-century man can possess his soul in quietness if he likes? And a reference to the post-war Dutch landscape as an example of what can be done by imaginative corporate planning would not have been out of place. The twentieth century may be doomed, but it is not yet dead. Some would say it is very much alive.

But whatever we may think of Dr Hoskins’s views on the twentieth century, his pre-eminence in the field which he has made so

conspicuously his own is unchallenged and unchallengeable. He has not only opened up a new branch of historical study, but in a single slim volume has placed it on a firm foundation for further development from prehistoric to modern times. This is a remarkable achievement and has come when it was most needed. It provides an organized centre of resistance to the tide of vulgarity and sheer vandalism which threatens to engulf the historic English landscape, and by its uncompromising challenge it stimulates the expression of the vital forces of our own age. Dr Hoskins thinks it is irretrievably lost. It is one of the special virtues of his book that it will help to prove him wrong.

J. D. CHAMBERS

R. B. PUGH and ELIZABETH CRITTALL (eds.),
The Victoria County History of Wiltshire,
Vol II. Geoffrey Cumberlege, O.U.P.,
1955. xviii+246 pp. 63s.

This, the second volume of the *Victoria History of Wiltshire*, is virtually a work by one hand, Professor R. R. Darlington having written seven of its eight sections. It is natural to think of it as the Domesday volume, for a text from the Exon Domesday smiles austere from the dust-jacket, and Domesday and its satellites with their several commentaries occupy one hundred and eighty of the two hundred and twenty-odd pages of text. Such a short title, however, would do less than justice to the editor's intentions, for its contents are explicitly described (p. xiii) as including a survey of "all aspects of Wiltshire civilization from the seventh century to the eleventh."

Readers of the *Agricultural History Review* may expect such a survey to comprise an account of the Saxon settlement and economy of the shire, referring closely to its topography. If so, they will be disappointed. This is not entirely because a discussion of the Domesday Survey is bound to overweigh, in a volume of this size, the history of the centuries that preceded it. The impressiveness of Domesday Book, and the difficulties that its study entails, naturally focus the historian's attention upon it. Yet it may be asked whether

in a volume of a county history in which material from Domesday Book is included, both as a commentary upon the end of the Dark Ages and as a great historical source whose elucidation is still in progress, it should be allowed to dwarf the earlier history in this fashion. And if it be urged that the documentary material of earlier date than Domesday is indeed very slight in comparison with the Survey, then surely that fact enhances the value of all supplementary evidence, especially that of topographical enquiry? Professor Darlington does not accept Dr G. M. Young's arguments for continuity between some Romano-British and Saxon settlements; he observes that the Saxons eschewed the uplands in favour of sites in the valleys of streams, but he says very little about what they did there. If Britain was really severed from her past by the Saxon invasions and her economy modelled entirely anew, the process by which the revolution was effected and maintained might be thought to merit exhaustive study. The outlines of the political and ecclesiastical history of Wessex have been drawn in other works, and we are not presented here with anything more than this conventional skeleton.

Only one manor in Wiltshire is described in the Exon Domesday, so the text of the Exchequer Domesday is not, as is its account of other south-western shires, duplicated and supplemented by that manuscript; but the Exon Domesday does contain three texts of geld rolls for Wiltshire, and these, translated and collated, add considerable weight to the Domesday section. The reader who turns from the translation to the commentaries will find no lack of information. The text will tell him what Domesday says, but he will not as readily discover what he is to make of it. The interpretation of Domesday's information in geographical terms will have to wait for the relevant volume of Professor Darby's survey, though even then the enquirer may find himself referred back to some such discussion of technicalities as the *Victoria County Histories* ought to provide. These technicalities make for reading that ranges

from the difficult to the prohibitive, and here the difficulty is increased by the existence of the geld rolls. Professor Darlington dismisses Professor V. H. Galbraith's argument that the geld rolls depend upon the Domesday Survey and are not earlier than 1086, but their discrepancies still exist; he admits, indeed, that "on some matters it is unlikely that any two scholars would ever reach agreement" (p. 177).

It may be noted in passing that if the V.C.H. convention of rendering *masura* by messuage is now to be discontinued, so ought that of translating *servus* as serf.

One's surprise in finding seven pages accorded to a chapter on Saxon art in Wiltshire is not abated by reading them.

G. H. MARTIN

V. R. WEBSTER, *Cruck-Framed Buildings of Leicestershire*. Reprinted from the *Transactions of the Leicestershire Archaeological Society*, xxx, 1954. The Guildhall Leicester. 32 pp. + plates, figures, and folding table. 6s.

To review a single article from a local journal is unusual; the Leicestershire society is to be congratulated for making articles available, and one wishes that all local societies were as cognizant of the wider interest that particular contributions to their transactions may evoke. The article is also an indication of the valuable field-work that members of a local society, without specialist training, can do: members of the Vaughan College Archaeological Society have helped to track down these houses, and one must echo Mr Webster's tribute to them.

The article makes a valuable contribution to the study of peasant houses. The distribution map shows that cruck building was widespread in Leicestershire; examples are scarce on the eastern limestone uplands, but, as we know, the jurassic ridge was an interruption and not a barrier. The concentration in the north-west of the county shows that timber from the waste of Charnwood Forest was an important source, though more than geographical factors are needed to explain the

distribution in detail. In the case of a village like Rothley, where cruck houses are so plentiful, one would like to know more about local conditions of land tenure; had the medieval sokemen become freeholders or copyholders? Mr Webster has good photographs and some scaled drawings and plans. He is aware of the importance of recording details of construction, and the plans of the best examples, at Hoby and Rothley, are most valuable. One observation which may be new is that crucks were sometimes pierced at the foot, so that ropes could be passed through them while rearing the house. One instance is quoted from Twyford in east Leicestershire of the common East Anglian practice of filling panels with upright stakes inserted in the main timbers. In many cases all that Mr Webster can do is to record surviving details of frames which have been in part removed or obscured by later work.

The most difficult problem is that of dating cruck construction. It does not seem possible to regard the position of a house in relation to the road as an indication of date, nor are crucks planted directly on the ground necessarily older than those mounted on bay stones or on a stone plinth. One wishes, however, that the author had tried to use such features, together with constructional methods, to suggest a more detailed chronology; it might have been hypothetical, and open to error, but it would have been a start. It is tantalizing to have only a verbal reference to mouldings together with *upper cruck* construction on the newer part of the house at Thurstaston; they can no doubt date it, and help to date the older portion. Will Mr Webster go on to do a detailed study of that house?

M. W. BARLEY

A. R. BRIDBURY, *England and the Salt Trade in the Later Middle Ages*. Oxford University Press, 1955. xiii + 198 pp. 21s.

Salt, in the 'storage economy' of the Middle Ages, as the late Professor Hecksher has pointed out, was a commodity of long-distance trade whose importance can nowadays hardly be grasped. Without it, meat and

above all herrings would not have been available as food; and perhaps barley would have been a less important medieval crop, since the enormous medieval thirst for beer was the consequence of eating salted food.

England was fortunate in the early Middle Ages in her brine springs in Cheshire and Worcestershire and her east coast salines. She was able to supply her home needs for salt, and even to export, through both aliens and denizens, perhaps a thousand pounds' worth or more a year in the early fourteenth century. But from the 1360's onwards England ceased to be a salt exporter, and became an importer of this still vital commodity.

This change is the central fact, while not constituting the greater part of the content of Mr Bridbury's book. For in the comparatively small space of 150 pages the author also gives us the essential facts about the main European areas of production, their techniques of production, their connection with the herring fisheries (Lüneburg with the Scania fisheries, for example), the changes in the pattern of the international salt trade, and the forms of local distribution in England. He shows how the salt produced from the salines of the Atlantic coast of France (especially from the Bay of Bourgneuf) conquered the English, Low Country, and Baltic markets because of its cheapness. For although inferior in quality, it was still cheap enough to be worth while importing for further refining and use by the Low Country fisheries.

The story is quite straightforward in its main outlines, but Mr Bridbury also fills in, with both skill and economy, some highly significant details. His treatment of the political events and social structure of fourteenth- and fifteenth-century Brittany and Poitou is a case in point, and incidentally a comment on the grave limitations of 'pure' economic history. Of even greater interest is his deft account of conditions in England which prevented the expansion of the English salt industry when the German and Low Country industries were declining. He em-

phasizes that the late fourteenth century was precisely the time when the expanding country cloth industry was attracting labour which might otherwise have been available. Mr Bridbury's refusal to become straight-jacketed in the over-simplification of the stagnation theory of later medieval development is worthy of note by agrarian historians.

It may be that the statistical side of Mr Bridbury's study will stand up least to further examination. His calculation of the total volume of the Bay Salt trade in the middle of the fifteenth century depends on too many dubious factors to be convincing. And recent suggestions by some French historians that English customs figures are not as impeccable as we had thought them to be may undermine some of Mr Bridbury's other figures. However, no work is ever definitive, and meanwhile Mr Bridbury is to be congratulated on a model study of a problem of economic history in its total setting.

R. H. HILTON

JOYCE YOUNGS (ed.), *Devon Monastic Lands: a Calendar of Particulars for Grants, 1536-58*. Devon and Cornwall Record Society, 1955. xxxviii+154 pp. 30s., from Mrs Miller, 7 Cathedral Close, Exeter.

The redistribution of estates that followed the Dissolution of the Monasteries was the greatest upheaval the English land-market has ever known. Its economic and social effects must always engage the attention of historians. Of the abundant documentary materials, many have been printed; but in the volume under notice the lately resuscitated Devon and Cornwall Record Society publishes a calendar of certain records which have been comparatively neglected until now. These are the Particulars for Grants, containing brief surveys and valuations of all the monastic lands in the county of Devon that were disposed of by the Crown from the Dissolution to the end of Mary's reign. All students of the subject will be indebted to the society and to the editor, Dr Youings, for this scholarly and fully annotated publication. In a valuable introduction Dr Youings describes the machin-