



<http://kentarchaeology.org.uk/research/archaeologia-cantiana/>

Kent Archaeological Society is a registered charity number 223382

© 2017 Kent Archaeological Society

## REVIEWS

*A History of Gillingham (Kent).* By Philip Rogers. 7½ × 5. Pp. 172, and 10 illustrations. Publisher: Borough of Gillingham; obtainable from Public Library, Gillingham, 1951. 6s.

This is a pleasant little book, reminding strangers to a normal English industrial town, rarely heard of in our general histories, of the fascination of following its roots into the past, and of the adventures which may have overtaken its citizens. Beginning with an account of the local place-names, for which he gives the various possible derivations, Mr. Rogers has evidently collected the material for his survey of the history of Gillingham with great care, although his brief examination of the sources of information prior to the Norman Conquest only serves to show how difficult it is to piece together with any certainty the early history of a particular place. Thus three possible references to Gillingham are quoted for the 11th century, only to be rejected as more likely applying to other towns.

A considerable section of the book is devoted to the affairs of the Royal Navy and Dockyard, and their importance in the development of Gillingham; but outside the chapters directly concerned with naval matters, there is constant reference to the part played by the sea in the history of the town. From its early days the closeness of the sea has been the largest single factor in shaping its fate, and it is right that this should be thoroughly emphasized. The medieval fishermen and traders (as is pointed out more than once, the district was connected in a minor way with the Cinque ports system through Grange, a member of Hastings) gave way to the Dockyard workers of the 17th and 18th centuries, who built some of our most famous warships, and even to-day, when attempts have been made to introduce other industries, Gillingham is still "dependent to a large degree on the work provided by the presence of part of the Fleet." The achievements of the dockyard workers in Stuart times appear the more remarkable as one reads the account of the neglect and corruption present everywhere. The notorious Peter Pett, on whom Mr. Rogers lays most of the blame for the disaster of 1667 when Dutch warships penetrated the Medway defences (then in a neglected state) and burnt or captured part of the Fleet, is merely the most outstanding figure in a story of parsimony on the side of the government, and speculation by the men on the spot. In view of the fact that, in 1691, the eight hundred men of the dockyard were "living on bread, cheese and water, and . . . becoming too weak to do their work," it is plain that even the events of 1667 did not result

in the reform which might have been expected. It is a pity that we are not told what light the Parish records throw on the considerable problem of poor relief which these conditions must have created in Gillingham.

Knowing the modern attempts to make Gillingham less dependent on a single industry, it is interesting to read of the efforts of the last century to change the character of the town by turning it into a popular watering place. However odd the idea of spending holidays or convalescence there may seem to us, that it was not unreasonable a hundred years ago is clear from the account of the amenities of the district quoted by Mr. Rogers from Wright's *Topography of Rochester*. This reads very like the contemporary guides to the Thanet towns, and other pleasantly situated places then becoming popular, and it would be worth knowing if, in fact, the experiment met with any success, or remained the ingenious idea of a few local enthusiasts.

One chapter deals with the career of Will Adams; as strange a one as any ever experienced by an Englishman. Born in Gillingham in 1564, he went to sea as many of his fellow-townsmen must have done, and died in Japan, possessed of a large estate and a position of some importance in maritime affairs. His story is an example of the chances which might fall to sailors of his time, and the courage and initiative with which they met them.

In his final notes Mr. Rogers touches briefly on several episodes in the later history of Gillingham, leaving his reader with the desire to know more of them. What, for example, was the strength and local influence of the peculiar sect of the Jezreelites, who left, in the tower headquarters for which they could not pay, a landmark for the town, and who must have been for many years an entertaining element in its life.

The book also contains an account of the churches and of the material to be found in the Parish records, while the maps are a useful guide to the growth of the town. Mr. Rogers makes careful acknowledgement of the sources of all his information in the text, and summarizes his authorities at the end. It might, indeed, be said that he is too careful in this respect, as the constant use of parentheses tends to interrupt the text in a most irritating fashion.

In all, the book is a good collection of the available information about Gillingham, and a useful introduction to the town. It can be obtained from the Public Library, High Street, Gillingham.

J. M. ROBINSON.

*Kent. By Reginald Turnor, with wood engravings by Monica Poole.*  
9 x 7. Pp. 128. London, Paul Elek, 1950. 15s.

This book is one of a series of personal books about the English scene to which the author has already contributed volumes on Sussex

## REVIEWS

and Oxfordshire. It is not intended to be a formal description of the county, which is just as well for it contains inaccuracies in fact. The author does not inspire his reader, and for all one can tell the vision was based on a one-inch map and the use of a motor car; inevitably this book will be compared with Mr. Richard Church's *Kent* in the County Book series, a delightful and sensitive book written with profound feeling.

There are many photographs, most of them of very high standard and not a few quite unfamiliar. The captions, written in true travelogue fashion, suggest the publisher's office rather than the countryside.

R. F. JESSUP.

*A Yeoman of Kent. By Ralph Arnold. 7½ × 5. Pp. xii + 203, with 28 halftone illustrations and map. London, Constable, 1949. 12s. 6d.*

Although the name of Arnold has long been associated with archaeology in Kent, and particularly with the activities of our Society, Mr. Ralph Arnold deserted his family's traditional field of study in *The Hundred of Hoo* to reveal his predilection for local social history and his interest in the lives of individual local personalities.

One of the most impressive and encouraging characteristics of the present day is this new and vigorous interest in history and the fact that this, one might almost call it compelling interest, is focussed not so much on national history as on local and parochial history. It is, after all, from that mine of social history that the general historical conception is expanded.

In *A Yeoman of Kent* Mr. Arnold has painted a picture of the 18th-century scene in the pleasant and peaceful village of Cobham, with the Yeoman, Richard Hayes (1725-1790) as the central figure.

The first chapters set the stage, unfolding the countryside, the village itself and the characters who peopled it, with a reality and an intimacy that spring from the author's warm affection for his native neighbourhood. Cobham had a long history before Hayes was born, and to-day its medieval College, its church, its famous Cobham Hall with a long line of wealthy landowners, the many good houses built down the centuries, all speak of the singularly good fortune it has enjoyed from earliest times. Mr. Arnold, whether describing the interest and beauty of buildings, the up-and-down swell of the fields, chimneys or cherry trees, wayside ponds, paintings or cricket, imparts realistically the spirit of this well-farmed and well-cared-for village in the 18th century.

But the story is of Richard Hayes, who lived at Owletts, a house built by his grandfather, Bonham Hayes in 1684. From a mass of

material, carefully collected and skilfully marshalled, the story of this upright bachelor, this strict, serious-minded, diligent yeoman, for whom farming was an inherited calling, has been drawn and the pattern of contemporary life gives colour and richness to the scene. It is, however, from Richard Hayes' diaries that the day-to-day life, with fascinating details of Kentish land tenure, social customs, shooting, cricket, politics and the whole economy of arable farming of his time, has been reconstructed. "Cobham was his world and he was never happy away from it."

With consummate artistry the author has published a diary without appearing to have done so. Even the dust-wrapper intriguingly asks, "What is this book? A footnote to history?" Mr. Arnold has given a satisfactory answer, and by his own infectious enthusiasm persuades us that history is not necessarily written only in "history books" nor is it necessarily specialist in character, but embraces every aspect of living, economic, political, archæological and social. The book is a "pattern and example" to those who would illustrate the tradition and continuity of village life.

How disappointing to find the book has no index!

A.R.

*Kent, our Glorious Heritage.* By H. R. Pratt Boorman. 10½ × 8. Pp. 143, illustrated on each page. Maidstone, Kent Messenger, 1950. 20s.

Kent is indebted to one of our Council members, Mr. H. R. Pratt Boorman, for this book of pictures of the county, and particularly for its production at a time when much photographic material is in short supply, which adds considerably to the printers' difficulties.

Although the book is not intended primarily to serve archæological purposes, it includes countless places of outstanding historic interest which are such an integral part of our Kentish heritage. In contrast to the many attractive pictures of medieval castles, bridges and churches, there are carefully chosen scenes illustrating the industries and agriculture of the county, hunting and cricket, and many old traditional customs, such as the tilting at the Quintain, the Fordwich Ducking Stool, Deal Fair, Blessing the Folkestone Fishing Fleet, and the Court of Admiralty held on a Rochester barge to regulate the oyster fisheries. There is little of real importance which is not included, but one wishes the captions had been more carefully written.

This book is a delightful and welcome addition to Kentish bookshelves as well as an excellent example of the modern trend for pictorial presentation or "visual aid" in education. It should tempt many,

who might not otherwise have made the venture, down the enchanting by-ways of their own county, and it will certainly have an appeal far beyond the Kentish border.

A.R.

*The Old Book of Wye.* By G. E. Hubbard. Derby, Pilgrim Press, Ltd., 1951. 12s. 6d.

*The Old Book of Wye*, a volume of churchwardens' accounts ranging between 1515 and 1663, was, as it were, re-discovered during a post-war investigation of the town's records. It had been erroneously docketed as a "Poor Book," and its unique interest overlooked for more than a century. Mr. Hubbard, of whom we must regretfully speak in the past tense, did for local history, not to mention a wider field, invaluable service by his study and skilful dissection of 119 folios of accounting items. His findings are ranged under various headings which include pre-reformation years; the dislocation following the surrender of Wye College to Henry VIII; the Marian martyrs; and Wye's outstanding personalities. Each section offers a wealth of interesting details, illumined by the author's care in relating them to wider issues.

Before 1572 Wye possessed five great bells and a Sanctus bell, silenced at the Reformation. The *Old Book* tells of the sexton's daily ringing, of the peals sounded on royal birthdays or the bishop's entry on horseback into the town. After the disaster of 1572 the parishioners set themselves to restore their well-loved bells. They first employed, with but ill-success, local bell-founders, Robert Dodds, settled at Lenham, and a townsman, Thomas Kempe. Ultimately Robert Moth, a Canterburian, and founder of the Whitechapel Bell Foundry, still flourishing to-day, was called upon, and his peal of five rang out from the tower for over two centuries.

In pre-reformation years the wardens were much concerned with the structural maintenance of the church; the re-leading of the roof figures prominently in their accounts. The kilns at Nacolt, close at hand, were reputed to produce the best roof-tiles in the county. Wye church had thirty images of saints before which great candles of bees-wax shone on festal occasions. The vestments originally given by Cardinal Kempe long continued in use, thanks to watchful repair; Lady Kempe sometimes supplying the old silk needed for the purpose. The provision of coal for some form of heating, Mr. Hubbard interprets as charcoal; but sea-coal came early into Kent from Newcastle.

The wardens, aware of local sympathies, were often behind the times in their records. In 1542 the *Old Book* first accords to Henry VIII his title of supreme head of the Church of England and Ireland, acquired ten years earlier. The College of Cardinal Kempe's foundation was



surrendered to him in 1545 and the property granted to Walter Bucler, secretary to Catherine Parr. This for Wye was of all the greatest upheaval. "Wye," says our author, "resisted the reformation movement with more than the usual obstinacy of the country parishes of the time." The Kempes who dominated the place, were confirmed Papists.

The stained glass windows in the church only escaped destruction by the process of blotting out the principal figures. These were restored to view in Mary's reign. An attack upon them by the "Blue Dick" of Wye, a puritanical shoe-maker, failed of its purpose; the offending figures, possibly those of the church's patron saints, Martin and Gregory, remained at least to the close of the 16th century. The author suggests that fragments may still exist, partly in Wye College, partly incorporated into a cathedral window at York.

Under Queen Mary, Wye, on the Wealden border, was one of the places chosen for the execution of "heretical" wealdmen; the two Wye burnings, one victim from Tenterden, the other from Biddenden, are mentioned in Brice's *Register of Martyrs*:

"When not long after two at Wye  
 "Suffered for Christ His testament,  
 "Whome whyly wolves put there to death,  
 "We wishte for our Elizabeth"—

A copy of Foxe's *Book of Martyrs* was purchased and chained in the church.

Under Elizabeth the wardens doled out money for a very different purpose, the destruction of pests—foxes, badgers, otters, polecats and the like, even hedgehogs, down to the humble sparrow.

Mr. Hubbard attributes Elizabeth's avoidance of Wye, though in 1573 she slept at Hothfield five miles away, to her quarrel with an elder branch of the Derings of Surrenden. Still the town witnessed to her popularity by bell-pealing on her coronation day as late as 1660.

The chapter on the Poor of the Parish is full of illuminating details: in the writer's estimation they evidence:

"A greater spirit of humanity than is usually to be found in documents of the period."

Wye had its links with the Civil War; a skirmish on the road between Wye and Olantigh is commemorated by the mention of seven soldiers in the burial registers of June, 1648, and on the tomb of Major Sumner, killed in "Wye fight," and buried in Margate Church. No more need be said to emphasize the variety of interest afforded by Mr. Hubbard's volume, built up with imaginative, but never haphazard interpretation, from the columns of the Old Book of Wye.

D.G.

## REVIEWS

*Canterbury.* By William Townsend.  $7\frac{1}{4} \times 4\frac{3}{4}$ . Pp. viii + 88, and 51 halftone illustrations. London, Batsford (*British Cities Series*), 1950. 8s. 6d.

Mr. Townsend's is an artist's book, presenting through the medium of words a series of vivid pictorial descriptions. He has been familiar with Canterbury from boyhood, and is able to depict the city not only, after careful study, in its historic past, but in the days before and since the disaster of June, 1942, which reduced a quarter of its walled area to ruin. He describes the resulting "tufted wilderness," the "weeds sprung from the mortar and plaster of broken walls and the tangles of buddleia stems," soon to be numbered with other memories of what has been. The burning of "the huge Georgian town mill" in 1931 he no more overlooks than the burning of Conrad's choir eight centuries before. There are too, pleasant descriptions of surrounding hills and countryside, no less than of St. Lawrence Cricket Ground.

Though he excels in re-vivifying the past, the author is critical of such practical revivals as the repainting of Cathedral monuments, and regards the attempt to restore their first appearance as liable "to turn them into museum specimens of period craftsmanship." His quotation from an article by M. Jean Bony, tracing back to a destroyed church in Valenciennes the use of dark marble shafts against white stone, is of exceptional interest; while few readers will fail to endorse his caustic remarks on Pyffers' statues on the south porch and west front of the Cathedral: "they bear," he says, "the same lack of expression as sea-gulls on the ledges of a cliff." His very knack of vivid description occasionally leads him astray. In the Trinity Chapel the grooves in the floor-stones, according to Dr. Mason, were scraped rather by the heavy toes of kneeling pilgrims' boots than by their soft knees. What is the evidence for a Roman church at St. Augustine's?; and the dedication of St. Martin's church is certainly "not likely to have been made before the Romans left." But these, and such as these, are small blemishes upon pages which will stir the imagination of the modern pilgrim. The illustrations, as befits a Batsford book, are well-chosen and finely reproduced.

D.G.

*Cobham Hall, Kent.* By Ralph Arnold.  $7\frac{1}{2} \times 5$ . Pp. 32, 5 illustrations, and a block plan. Obtainable at Cobham Hall. 3s. 6d.

There have been many signs in recent years that public opinion is becoming aware of the need to preserve and maintain our historic country mansions, and we in Kent must not fall behind in our appreciation of our own part of this general heritage. Every effort to encourage visitors to these houses and, having got them there, instruct them in



## REVIEWS

their history and architecture, must command the support of our Members. We therefore welcome this little booklet, written by Mr. Ralph Arnold at the suggestion of the Earl of Darnley, and hope that it will help to swell the number of visitors to this historic Kent house. Short as this little Guide is, it is worthy of its subject, well written and pleasantly produced. It contains notes on the development of the house, an excellent succinct account of its owners—the Cobhams, Stuarts and Blighs—a section on the Gardens and Park and concludes with objects of special interest in the house.

J.H.E.