REVIEWS

A Victorian Parson. By Gerald van Loo. 24 × 16 cm. Pp. 268. Privately published, 1989 (£14.50).

More than half-a-century ago, Arthur Mee, in his volume on Kent in the *King's England* series, noted in the tiny church of Ridley in the North Downs of the County the glass in the east window dedicated to the memory of Thomas Phelps, rector of the parish for over 50 years, adding the comment that 'through all these years he can hardly ever have seen more than 50 people there'. Now one of our own members, Gerald van Loo, has written a very attractive and well-researched book on the church and parish of Ridley in the days of the Revd. Mr Phelps, which is a fine addition to the many books dealing with the local history of our county.

In his preface, Mr van Loo recalls how he first saw the east window and brass plate on the wall below recording the long ministry at Ridley of Mr Phelps and decided that one day he would 'search him out', and now this book is in print to record how he fulfilled his desire. The result is a long and detailed account of the labours of a country parson in Victorian England in this quiet corner of Kent.

In these days, when a rector may be responsible for as many as four or even six parishes, each with its own (usually medieval) church, and clergymen move every few years to different posts, it will seem to many who read this account of Thomas Phelps' long stint at Ridley an extraordinary thing that a priest, who died less than a century ago, should have spent almost his whole life caring for a handful of country folk and whose place of worship was for all that time a tiny little church, which today only rates nine lines in the relevant volume of the *Buildings of England* series. It is our author's achievement to have brought to life both a man and his parish, long after all this has passed into history, by painstaking research, which enables us to catch some of the atmosphere of a Victorian parsonage and its inhabitants, as well as their contemporaries in the countryside around and in the neighbouring parishes and cathedral church of Rochester whose bishops, deans and canons became familiar figures in the life of

the rector of Ridley when he was first made rural dean and then honorary canon in 1863.

Like many of his clerical contemporaries, Mr Phelps put in hand the restoration of the fabric of his church, lengthening the chancel, adding porches, fitting up the chancel with choir stalls and recruiting a robed choir to occupy these stalls from the children and adults of the little parish. Nine years after his institution, he had a small church school built which for the next 30 years provided a simple elementary education for the local children.

We can be sure that, since the income of the benefice was very small, a good deal of money for all these improvements would have come out of the rector's own pocket. Influenced clearly by the Tractarian Movement, which was to play a great part in the revival of church life in Victorian England, Thomas Phelps emerges from this detailed study as an excellent example of the best kind of country priest of his day. Conscientious, benevolent and very caring in his pastoral ministry, he left behind the memory of a man much respected and loved by all who knew him. In these pages, we can enjoy a chronicle of an age and a clerical type, now obsolete, which have a charm all of their own. Mr Van Loo has done a fine piece of work here and put on record a piece of local history which will, it is hoped, be widely read and correspondingly appreciated.

DEREK INGRAM HILL

Faversham Parish Church: A History and Guide. By H.A. James. Pp. xvi + 74, 3 plans. Faversham Society, 1990. £1.45 (+ 55p p + p), from Fleur-de-Lis Heritage Centre, Preston Street, Faversham, ME13 0NS.

This is the thirty-third publication in the Faversham Papers series launched by the Society in 1964. It follows the customary form of local church histories and guides. The first section is a chronological account of the church building and some aspects of church history drawn from published work by others. The second provides a detailed architectural description of the building and its contents, which concludes with a perambulation of the church.

Judged by the general standard of such publications, Mr James has done a good job. He has clearly consulted all the available secondary literature and produced a very detailed study of an important ecclesiastical building. The weakness of the present publication is that it is no more than this. Yet, it is clear from the author's references to such sources, gleaned from the work of others, that

there is a substantial archive available to produce something much more substantial. Parochial, diocesan and borough records could be used to produce a study of the role of Faversham church in the community of which it is part, which could make a significant contribution to the study of both religious and social history in Kent. Readers looking for that sort of approach in the present publication will find it sadly lacking.

NIGEL YATES

Shoreham A Village in Kent. By Malcolm White and Joy Saynor. 24 × 16 cm. Pp. + + 264, 52 illustrations, 10 maps and 6 appendices. Shoreham Society, Mill Cottage, Shoreham, Kent, TN14 7RP, 1989 (£15).

Moving but a short distance up the Darent Valley through the North Downs from Lullingstone Roman villa via Shoreham to Otford, and with *Shoreham A Village in Kent* now standing alongside of Lt.-Col. G.W. Meates's two-volume study of *The Roman Villa at Lullingstone, Kent* and Dennis Clarke's and Anthony Stoyel's *Otford in Kent A History,* I wonder if there is any other corresponding stretch of valley which has been so intensively researched in recent years?

As a seemingly 'unobtrusive village' (p. vii) Shoreham's natural origins were rural, its name deriving from the 'ham or farmstead at the rock or steep slope' (p. 7). While never progressing beyond the status of being a parish and village, its population has nevertheless grown from between 100 and 200 at the time of the Domesday survey to no more than 2,007 in 1981, as against 1,589 in 1931. In 1664, as a small community containing 409 inhabitants, it was larger than Otford, Eynsford and Orpington, but had only 28 per cent of Sevenoaks' much larger population of 1,436 inhabitants in an expanding market town. By 1801, Shoreham's population had more than doubled to 828, rising thereafter to 1,021 inhabitants by 1841, occupying 5,021 acres and 206 dwellings, but with some among its 645 agricultural labourers 'sleeping in barns and sheds' (p. 134), eleven years after the traumatic agricultural disturbances of 1830.

Village status and a small population in no sense detract from an interesting and eventful history. There have been major transformations over time, so that today 'Shoreham is no longer an agricultural community, but a residential and recreational community of those who work or have worked elsewhere' (p. 223). 'Big houses' have emerged and some have disappeared along with important

families, farms, landholdings, shops, industries, the parish vestry, workhouses, chapels and other organisations.

This study of Shoreham contains masses of minute and local detail, illustrating the many facets of everyday community life, extending over several centuries, for which Shoreham's newer residents and Kentish historians must be grateful, but also there is much in this work which is of value to the general historian. The authors have chosen to approach this history chronologically, and within each chapter the argument proceeds from one topic or aspect to another. Overall, several important themes are carefully explored over a very long period which does not shy away from the increasing complexities of the twentieth century, including demographic trends; settlement patterns and types of building; agriculture and its fluctuating fortunes; land tenure; the church, both as a building and as a place of worship; successive incumbents and landowners and their contributions to the community; a changing local economy; paper-making in the village for over 230 years between 1690 and 1926; the effects of the coming of the railway from 1862; the parish vestry and other forms of local administration; living standards, entertainments and poverty, and the impact of two World Wars.

Only some of the more interesting details can be singled out for specific mention. The customary law of gavelkind was exercised in Shoreham as late as 1859 (p. 16). William de Shoreham, a poet, wrote at the beginning of the fourteenth century 'not in Latin but in the local Kentish dialect of English' (pp. 26–7), thereby predating Chaucer by a generation. George Medhurst (1759–1827), achieved distinction as the inventor of the 'equal balance weighing machine', so familiar in retail shops (p. 119). Shoreham was home to the artist Samuel Palmer for a time during the 1820s and 1830s (pp. 129–34). Among the 56 seventeenth-century wills of Shoreham parishioners in Lambeth Palace library is that of Henry Sone, a yeoman, who specified his wish to be buried in the church 'in the space against the seate where I used to sytt in safe and certain hope of joyful resurrection' (p. 81). A most interesting picture of life in the parish during the 1800s emerges from the diary of William Danks, a farmer in his forties, containing details of taxes, rates and tithes paid, mixed farming and the sale of crops, looking after lambs, shopping expeditions to Sevenoaks and a great event in 1806 in going off to Maidstone to vote in a parliamentary election (pp. 119–22). A fascinating story surrounds the Shoreham Turnpike Bill which was passed in 1810 and then repealed in 1811 (pp. 127–9). Shoreham was suspected of having during the 1950s a Communist cell which was 'plotting to take over the village' and so successful were Jean and Lewis Feldmar in selling the *Daily Worker* that 'they won a prize of a fortnight's holiday in

Russia for achieving the highest per capita sale of the paper in any village in England' (p. 224).

The amazing amount of detail culled for this book has been drawn from a range of both printed and MS sources, including oral and visual evidence, which are highlighted both in the text and accompanying notes (pp. 229–44). While perhaps a greater use might have been made of local newspapers from the mid-nineteenth century onwards, no one should underestimate the magnitude of the task undertaken. There are times when all local historians are plagued by lack of records, a fact readily admitted to on more than one occasion. 'Sadly, little is known of the life of the Shoreham community in 1086' (p. 20). Concerning land distribution between 1284 and 1608 'no very accurate analysis is possible of the changes in land-tenure in Shoreham because we must depend on documents of varying quality, produced for different purposes' (p. 59). Church records are silent on the disastrous fire of 1774 which destroyed the church tower (p. 123).

Painstakingly researched, well written, lavishly illustrated, apart from being a labour of love by two authors whose intimate knowledge of Shoreham has been enhanced by having lived there, this book has one further great virtue, in providing an excellent example of respectable local history. The threads of Kentish, national and European history are interwoven throughout this study, thereby fully acknowledging that no history of a single community makes sense by itself. Everything that happened is interpreted against a wider historical background incorporating the whole of English history with some attention to European developments.

The work exhibits few faults, but there are two which might have been avoided. 'The late 1800s' cannot be the correct dating for the illustration showing schoolchildren and teachers outside Shoreham school on (p. 164). At the foot of (p. 216) the following information on the Second World War is repeated twice, viz., nine lives were lost in those raids, and eleven more were lost in action'.

Shoreham A Village in Kent owes its publication to the Shoreham Society which was founded at the end of 1961. This worthwhile study has drawn inspiration from Dennis Clarke's and Anthony Stoyel's *Otford in Kent A History,* published by the Otford and District Historical Society in 1975, and sensibly so since they are neighbours, 'the histories of Otford and Shoreham [being] intimately entwined especially in the medieval period' (p. vii). Not surprisingly the two works share much in common, Messrs. Clarke and Stoyel having rightly benefited from several favourable reviews, including one by Bruce Webster in *Archaeologia Cantiana*, xcii (1976), 267–8. He concludes 'would that others could follow their example!' Such has been the achievement of two members of the Kent Archaeological

Society, Malcolm White and Joy Saynor. Congratulations to them and to the Shoreham Society. Let no one claim that good local history is not flourishing when books of the size, scope and detail of this study are published.

JOHN WHYMAN

Viking Age Archaeology in Britain and Ireland. By Richard Hall. 21 × 15 cm. Pp. 64, with 30 figs. and pls. Shire Publications Ltd., Princes Risborough, 1990 (£3.50, paperback).

Medieval Town Plans. By Brian Paul Hindle. 21 × 15 cm. Pp. 64, with 37 figs. and pls. Shire Publications Ltd., Princes Risborough, 1990 (£3.50, paperback).

In *Viking Age Archaeology in Britain and Ireland,* Richard Hall has set himself the task of condensing a broad and complex subject into 64 pages. The result serves well as a first introduction, and the last two sections, on Further Reading, and Museums and Sites to visit, provide clear signposts for further study.

The book begins with a brief résumé of the development of Viking studies and discusses the problems of identifying sites and features that are specifically 'Viking'. This discussion is continued in the section on the 'First Raids' for which a historical framework exists, but for which unequivocal evidence on the ground is scarce. Against this background, the significance of early defended sites such as Repton, with its mass burial, is made clear, as is the first appearance of characteristic Viking weapons in burials, and the deposition of hoards containing Islamic coins.

Hall then draws together evidence for the first Viking settlements in the Scottish Isles, Ireland (in particular Dublin), and Northern England, where the gradual establishment of the Danelaw is well-documented, and demonstrated in place-names, but where archaeological evidence is restricted to stone grave-markers.

The heart of the book lies in the section on the Scandinavian influence on the development of town. The author brings the reader up to date with recent excavations in Dublin and York. As Hall states, with the establishment of settlements rather than raiding parties, 'the archaeological pattern in England should be transformed; we ought now to be looking for the farms, villages, towns and cities occupied by these no-longer Vikings'.

The remaining sections work through Viking art, stone carving, runes, silver hoards and graves, in each case giving a brief but

comprehensive account, and indicating the value of each category as evidence for the period.

The author makes it clear that the book is *not* a historical survey, but a reader coming fresh to the subject needs to be made aware of the historical framework, *and* to know, at least in outline, the nature and limitations of the available documentary sources. Only then can the significance of the archaeology be fully appreciated.

Some discussion of the accuracy or otherwise of the traditional picture of Viking raiders, which most people have encountered at some stage in their schooling, could have been profitably included in a book presumably aimed at a fairly general readership. This is particularly pertinent now that, with the introduction of the History National Curriculum, a study of 'The Vikings' is likely to be compulsory for all primary school children, and their teachers will be looking for accurate guidance for teaching this subject.

With space at a premium, the choice of illustrations is significant, and more thought should have been given to their presentation – after all, one picture is worth a thousand words. They are not consistently provided with scales, and for non-archaeologists the photographs of excavated sites are difficult to understand. I found this particularly true of the photograph of the Repton mass-grave – a simple interpretative plan or key alongside would have helped. Similarly, the use of diagrams might have obviated the need for so much technical terminology in the section on art-styles.

However, most of these criticisms are only such as are to be expected when trying to fit a quart into a pint-pot: the book is both solid and stimulating, fills a gap and, as with all *Shire* books, is very good value for money.

R. C. SHAW

Medieval Town Plans, the most recent addition to *Shire Archaeology's* series of introductory books, sets out 'to piece together the history' of several towns' 'growth through the medieval period' (p. 6) and concludes, with a paraphrased maxim culled from another field, that 'complexity of urban evolution is more common than simplicity' (p. 61), an assertion applicable to archaeological research in general.

Beginning with Beresford's classic list of features in *New Towns of the Middle Ages*, Hindle supplements and expands it with his own criteria, some of which are reminiscent of those used to differentiate as between Romano-British towns and 'small towns', or even as between villas and buildings. As he says (p. 10), a combination of

these criteria, just as in the Romano-British countryside, is essential to raise a medieval village to the status and importance of a town.

Hindle, then, goes on to discuss the sources available to the study of medieval towns, the origins and importance of their sites for their further development, their plans, which he classifies into several categories, internal lay-outs, facilities for markets, churches and defences and property boundaries as well as the suburbs that mushroomed, somewhat on the pattern of *vici* outside Roman forts, outside the defensive perimeter of some towns.

Ludlow, finally, provides Hindle with a case study in that this medieval town demonstrates the desiderata that he previously defined as indicative of a self-respecting community organised into a town.

The whole book is written in a style that is both lucid and easy to follow. It is also well illustrated by many line drawings and photographs that are not only visual aids to Hindle's perspective examination of medieval towns, but also a pleasure to the eye. Inevitably, because of the mixture of line-drawings, photographs and half-tones made from less contrasty old maps, there is a frequent switching from one density to another, which can become a little irritating, a minor, perhaps even carping, criticism.

The value of this admirable book, certainly looked at from the objective viewpoint of the unrepentant Romanist, is that it introduces its subject, informs the reader, without being too didactic or patronising, and, with suggestions for further reading, opens new windows and invites more travelling in the discovery and understanding of medieval towns. It certainly increased my knowledge of its subject, and I thoroughly recommend it.

A. P. DETSICAS

Bromley: A Pictorial History. By Patricia E. Knowlden, 19 × 25 cm. 161 illustrations and 2 maps. Phillimore, 1990. (£10.95, cased.)

The salient developments in Bromley's history are well known. For centuries it was a market town and home to succesive bishops of Rochester. From being 'in the doldrums' when photography was being invented, modern Bromley has been wholly transformed into a thriving London Borough and suburb. This transformation was evident for all to see well before 1914. Indeed, its population, which had been 5,500 in 1861, almost quadrupled over thirty years.

Patricia Knowlden, who has edited this pictorial study of Bromley, is a well-known local historian of the area, quite apart from being a

founder member, since 1974, and Chairman, since 1983, of the Bromley Local History Society for whose membership this book has been produced. The contributions to the text by other members of that Society are generously acknowledged.

Bromley A Pictorial History falls into two parts. An eight-page Introduction is followed by 160 Plates. This study does not come up to the present day but concentrates on a narrower period, extending from Victorian times through to the end of the First World War. This limitation of period allows for greater detail in the Introduction and a wider selection of Victorian and Edwardian photographs and post-cards than would otherwise have been possible over a considerably longer time-span. The Introduction touches on many developments which characterized pre-1918 Bromley, as it was changing from a market town to a London suburb: its physical expansion, the arrival of railways and the openings of stations, local government changes, church and chapel building, education, public health, hospitals, charities and leisure activities, with commerce always being 'the mainspring of life in an up and coming place like Bromley'.

Apart from portraying several interesting street scenes, churches, chapels, prominent buildings, businesses and personalities, the Plates which are fully explained also recreate the daily life of Bromley and its inhabitants in days approaching but also beyond 'the limits of living memory'. Only a few of the many interesting illustrations can be singled out for specific mention. They include Shortlands Bridge before it was replaced in 1886, horse-drawn transport passing in front of the original Bell Hotel, *c.* 1890, or the Old Market House prior to its demolition during the 1860s when it was locally referred to as 'our old shed'. While a lone Boy Scout blew the 'All clear' from the roof of the police station *c.* 1915, 27 members of the Bromley Camera Club and a small boy, complete with all their equipment, were photographed on an outing to West Wickham in 1897. Sanger's Circus processed through the Market Square in September 1898 in front of David Greig. Crowds were likewise attracted to a fire in the same location in June 1909. Horse-drawn Borough of Bromley street cleaning justified a detailed photograph in 1912. Significantly 'sports clubs which were established in those years have loaned a number of the illustrations reproduced in this book'. Bromley Cricket Club's earliest known photograph was taken on 28 July, 1866, while a Bromley Hockey Club match versus Teddington at Plaistow Lane in 1909 survives as 'a rare action photograph'.

In the ever-mounting volume of books which portray history visually through old photographs or post-cards, the quality of reproduction and textual explanation varies considerably. There is no reason why both should not be of a high standard. Mrs. Knowlden is

to be congratulated on her editing and the publishers on the clarity of photographic reproduction. The end result is a quality publication.

The reviewer of this work believes that the photographic and literary value of old post-cards as an historical source have been underestimated. The first two Plates are concerned with these two aspects of post-cards: 'Five views of Bromley' and the 'great variety of messages' appearing on their reverse sides. From 34 London Road, Bromley, Ethel is sent 'another card for your album' and 'How is your album getting on [and] have you many cards yet?' Following on from a pre-1914 craze for collecting post-cards, it is interesting to reflect on the fact that many of them are now being avidly collected with as much enthusiasm for a second time.

J. WHYMAN

Royal Tunbridge Wells: A Pictorial History. By Roger Farthing. 24.5 × 18 cm. 13 pp. of introduction and 168 illustrations. Phillimore & Co. Ltd., Chichester, 1990 (£10.95, cased).

Yet another addition to the current proliferation of picture books where captions and illustrations tell the story, *Royal Tunbridge Wells* is a model of its kind.

Farthing, after a few pages of introduction and acknowledgements, bows his way out and lets his well-chosen illustrations take over, adding point to the obvious advantage of the visual aids over any number of printed words.

However, this book is not a mere collection of prints and photographs, but quite a travelogue in the social history of this spa town – its landscape unrolls before the reader's eye as if comfortably settled by the window of a slow-moving train (for which that line is notorious!) and the invitation to alight at the nearest station for closer exploration is virtually irresistible. In eleven separate sections, ranging from the seventeenth century to the most recent times, Farthing illustrates, with a judicious mixture of prints, paintings of various periods and photographs, a wide range of the town's development, from tents on the common, through the heyday of what the author dubs as the 'Masters of Ceremonies' and their scandalous living, which would now scarcely make a short item in one of our tabloids, to the expansion of the town after the coming of the railway and the years before, between and after the two World Wars.

The illustrations, including a most attractive full-colour dust-jacket, are not only of a high standard in reproduction, but continue, in their excellent choice, from where the introduction was but a

curtain-raiser. Scandalous though the early Tunbridge Wells socialites may have been for their less 'fortunate' contemporaries (poor Elizabeth Chudleigh, as an imaginary Iphigenia, would pass practically unnoticed nowadays), it is, perhaps, rather superior to comment *nisi novum*.

Both author and publishers deserve congratulations for this very attractively written and produced volume.

A. P. DETSICAS