

NEW BOOKS

A History of Cheshire
by Dorothy Sylvester

(Darwen Finlayson Ltd, 1971. 96 pp. 21 maps 16 illus. £2·25)

Until the *Victoria History of the Counties of England* completes the first volumes of its Cheshire history this volume will provide a brief introduction. It is intended as a general survey for the non-specialist reader but is not wholly successful in achieving the balance expected between useful detail and an easily assimilated text.

The pattern of settlement within Cheshire, and those areas in Flintshire lying between the river Clywd and the Welsh border which were formerly part of Cheshire, is outlined from the Old Stone Age to 1284, and within Cheshire county from that date to the present day. Suggested routes of invading Anglians and Scandinavians can be plotted by the surviving names of their settlements; from the -ingaham endings of Warrington and Tushingham, the -burys of the Anglo-Saxons, to the -by endings of the Norse in Irby and Whitby. Periodic encroachments on the three great forests of Wirral, Mara, Mondrem (now known as Delamere) and Macclesfield, which once covered Cheshire, reflect the demands of a growing population for timber and land. The contraction of the forests has been mapped and a table of population 1801-1969 has been provided as an appendix.

The network of eighteenth-century turnpikes, spreading from the Roman roads which traversed the county south from the Mersey crossing at Warrington and east from Chester to Congleton and Macclesfield, improved communications and encouraged industrial development, as did the cutting of canals and waterways. Dr Sylvester devotes two chapters to their history and that of the railways, and the accompanying maps are helpful. The growth of individual industries, salt, chemicals, and ship building, are concisely described, and the rise of such towns as Nantwich, Birkenhead, Crewe and Stockport is well discussed in the context of their industrial development. Chester is singled out for treatment in a separate chapter, mainly topographical. Politics and the social life of Cheshire are dealt with sketchily, although the Welsh Wars and the Civil War are described in some detail.

The author is disadvantaged by the small number of recent publications on Cheshire and omissions and uneven coverage are inevitable but not always understandable. Education and the social and political history of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, for example, are hardly mentioned. The numerous maps are used to present a wealth of information and require careful study to extract all that they contain. The economic advantages of the county can be appreciated from these maps but perhaps too often they provide the detail missing in the text and, as a result, much of what is said loses particular significance for Cheshire and could apply to any other county in England.

J. I. KERMODE

The Place-names of Cheshire Part I

Ed. J. McN. Dodgson

(English Place-name Society Volume XLIV. Cambridge University Press 1970. 338 pp. Price £4.50)

The first three volumes of the long-awaited survey of Cheshire place-names are now available. They provide a fundamental addition to the library of any Cheshire historian. Since, however, the general introduction will appear as the fifth and final volume, a full review will follow in a later number of the *Transactions*.

The surveys of the English Place-name Society have steadily grown in magnitude and scope and the size of the Cheshire survey is so far exceeded only by that of the West Riding. It also manifests all the signs of meticulous scholarship that we associate with the E.P.N.S.

The county, regional, forest, river and road names are followed by the survey of Macclesfield Hundred. Subsequent volumes work systematically westwards by hundreds, and within these, ecclesiastical parishes are arranged in a similar geographical fashion, the townships being taken alphabetically within each parish. As well as a comprehensive explanation of topographical names there is an extensive list of field-names for each township. This invaluable source of information is not, however, a work for casual acquaintance. Careful study of notes and abbreviations is an essential prerequisite to comprehending the arrangement of the material and the 'shorthand' of the text. There are twenty pages of references and abbreviations—in very small print!

The policy of publishing the introduction last has many disadvantages, not least the unnecessarily complicated referencing system. The value of the early volumes is much reduced by the lack of the general guidance (e.g. the analyses of elements and personal names) yet to come. However, the anticipation with which we await Dr Dodgson's final volume is thereby considerably increased.

P. LAXTON

Old Cheshire Families And Their Seats

By Lionel M. Angus-Butterworth

(E. J. Morten, 1970, xviii and 218 pp. Price £1.75)

The reprinting of Lionel Angus-Butterworth's book, first published forty years ago, provides further evidence of the growing interest in the history of Cheshire. This book is intended for the general reader with an interest in the county's past rather than for the specialist local historian. The author attempts to encourage this interest in two ways. First, he describes the rise of some of the great county families and, secondly, he gives detailed descriptions of the halls and manor houses in which they lived.

The author takes ten of Cheshire's most famous families and traces their history from their earliest mention in surviving records. With so much ground to cover these ten surveys are necessarily brief ones, concentrating mainly on the successive heads of each family. The danger of this approach is that the book could become merely a lengthy and tedious list of names. The author avoids this danger successfully by pausing frequently to deal with the more illustrious members of each family in greater depth, while maintaining the flow of his narrative by refusing to clog it with trivial or irrelevant information. The serious student will demand more comprehensive histories of the families treated but for his intended readers the author strikes a happy medium between brevity and elaborate detail.

Any arbitrary selection of families is open to the objection that some important ones have been omitted. Certainly the author is on dangerous ground when he claims for his families that their work 'largely makes up the history of the county'. Several other families, like the Egertons, the Cholmondeleys and the Wilbrahams, have made contributions of the highest importance to Cheshire's history. The Fittons are another example of a possible omission. A long-established gentry family distinguished in many branches of local government and royal service, they have an added claim for inclusion in this particular study in that their fine residence at Ganesworth still stands, attracting a constant stream of visitors. However, with the possible exception of the Moretons, who probably owe their inclusion largely to their magnificent residence, all the families selected by the author have played an important part in the county's affairs and deserve to be considered in such a study.

The author's information on the families is generally sound, based mainly on the outstanding nineteenth-century historians of Cheshire, notably Ormerod and Earwaker. One error should be noted however. In dealing with the Carringtons, the author accepts the legend that a male descendant of the family settled in Essex under an assumed name in the fifteenth century and that from him are descended several distinguished families. J. H. Round has proved this legend to be false, being based on two elaborate genealogical deceptions perpetrated in the sixteenth and nineteenth centuries respectively.

The descriptions of the halls and manor houses are a welcome addition to the family histories. Cheshire can boast several buildings of outstanding historical interest, notably some superb examples of sixteenth century domestic architecture. Among the houses dealt with are Little Moreton Hall, probably the finest instance of 'black and white' work in the North of England, and two of its greatest rivals for that distinction, the halls at Bramhall and Adlington. Mr Angus-Butterworth expresses the hope that visitors to the houses will find his descriptions useful. The clarity with which they are written and the wealth of valuable information which they contain ensure that they will be.

Attractively produced and reasonably priced this book deserves a successful reception.

G. P. HIGGINS

Cheshire in the Later Middle Ages

by J. T. Driver

(Cheshire Community Council, 1971, viii and 168 pp. 8 plates
and 8 figures. Price £2·10)

This is the sixth volume to be published by the Cheshire Community Council in the History of Cheshire series, under the general editorship of Mr J. J. Bagley. As with other volumes in this series, it is concerned with a span of years meaningful in terms of Cheshire history—in this case from the deposition of Richard II who had relied so much on the resources of his Cheshire palatinate, to the dissolution of the monasteries and the creation of the diocese of Chester in 1540-1. The appearance of the volume is especially opportune in two respects. First, the last generation has seen the remarkable development of the Cheshire County and the Chester City Record Offices at the same time as the increase in the number of researchers, resulting in particular from the expansion of the universities. Much new work had been done on this period; and though much remains to be done, it was time for a book which would pull all this work together. Secondly, there has never been a satisfactory general history of Cheshire for this period, although it is one of special interest, ranging from the full development of palatinate institutions and customs to the creation of a distinctive style of Cheshire architecture, both ecclesiastical and secular. All who are interested in the history of the county must rejoice that the Leverhulme Trust and the Cheshire County Council have now generously provided the

funds to start a Victoria History of the County and that the University of Liverpool has appointed a Research Lecturer in Local History to research in and to stimulate the study of Cheshire history. But it must be some years before even the first volume of the Victoria History can appear and it must be a generation before this great enterprise can be completed. There is ample room for a good survey which sums up the work of the past and points the way to the tasks of the future.

Mr Driver's book fulfils these purposes admirably. As befits the work of a scholarly historian, the book is not only based on a wide knowledge of the sources and careful techniques but takes into its field the whole life of Cheshire in this period, instead of limiting itself to the ecclesiastical patronage and manorial descents of Ormerod's time. Each of the chapters—on military activities, towns, buildings, the economy, the gentry and clergy, religious life, mystery plays, literacy and education, the dissolution of the monasteries and the establishment of the diocese—provides both soundly based information and fruitful stimulus. The stimulus is not only to undertake further research in this fascinating subject but to rethink, in the light of Cheshire developments, the generalizations that are made for wider spheres. For example, no one will be able to describe any longer in the same terms the development of literacy among the laity in this period, and the establishment of public libraries, after he has pondered the implications of the foundation of the library at Pott Shrigley by Geoffrey Downes in 1492. The illustrations of the book are apt and well produced, and the bibliographies are clear and illuminating. Altogether it is a volume to be strongly recommended to all who are interested in the history of Cheshire in this fascinating period.

A. R. MYERS

Elizabethan Recusancy in Cheshire

by K. R. Wark

(Chetham Society, 3rd series XIX, 1971, viii and 200 pp. map.
Price £3·60)

How widespread was recusancy in England in the reign of Elizabeth? What were the recusants' social origins? How severely were they punished? These are some of the questions to which answers can be given more and more confidently as each new detailed study of recusancy at the local level is published. Mr Wark's excellent book is as substantial a contribution to the history of recusancy in England as to the history of the county of Cheshire.

The high standard of recent Chetham Society publications has been maintained by this book which is a very thorough study of Elizabethan recusancy in Cheshire, a subject on which hardly a reliable word had been written before. To acquire his facts Mr Wark has had to comb through a mass of documentary evidence at Chester, York and London. From his hard-won findings he has produced an analytical narrative which is backed by three very valuable appendices.

The main conclusion from the book is that there were few recusants in Elizabethan Cheshire. In the final decade of the century, the well-documented 1590s, when recusancy was at its height, only some 200 recusants in Cheshire can be listed. These were not evenly spread throughout the county; concentration occurred in the city of Chester and especially in the south-west of the county, in the parishes of Bunbury and Malpas. Elsewhere, however, except for the gentle recusants of the Wirral, very few catholics can be found, only twenty-four living east of the River Weaver. No entirely satisfactory explanation of this distribution of recusancy can be given, though there were enough gentle catholic households in the parishes of Bunbury and Malpas to offer some sort of protection for recusant tenants there. It is also true that these were the only two parishes in the county in which catholic priests are known to have

been active during the first twenty years of Elizabeth's reign. Two non-Jesuit priests seem to have achieved much in south-west Cheshire in keeping alive the catholic faith which was clearly strengthened by family and personal relationships. The recusants came from most levels of society, the lesser gentry forming a disproportionately large group. No head of a really important Cheshire family was recusant. In and after the 1580s recusants were liable to severe punishments. In Cheshire some were imprisoned (in a few cases for long periods) but more (at least 28) were penalised by the loss of lands or goods. Yet recusancy continued and in the 1590's developed a vitality that no penal law could crush.

These are the author's main conclusions and they are of value to the scholar. To the general reader Mr Wark's re-discovery in the quarter sessions files of secret masses such as the one at Malpas in 1582 will be of greater interest. Mr Wark is clearly happiest when dealing with the detailed evidence culled from the local archives. The intimate details which these reveal make convincing reading. On the other hand, letters from the privy council, or, to a lesser extent, from the mayor of Chester or the keeper of Salford jail, though important, are less convincing sources; and there is perhaps in this book a tendency to overquote these and other original sources. Some parts of Mr Wark's text could, I feel, have been cut with advantage, such as the rather lengthy extracts from a catholic pamphlet which was allegedly circulated in Chester in 1562. Similarly, other points of marginal relevance are included: the visions of the young maid; the various rather tiresome details concerning the keeper of Salford jail; the young non-Cheshire catholics who in the 1590's were caught trying to leave the realm *via* Chester to become priests (it surely would have sufficed to describe in detail the one Cheshire case of Huxley and Stevenson); and the case of the seminarist Thomas Leake which, though interesting, tells us nothing of recusancy in Elizabethan Cheshire.

But these are minor defects (if defects they be) in a very strong piece of original research. Perhaps one day a zealous Elizabethan scholar will turn the microscope on the parishes of Bunbury and Malpas and find out more of the social and economic background of this peculiarly recusant area. Lacking such a study nothing substantial can be added in the future to Mr Wark's definite treatment of Elizabethan Cheshire.

GEOFFREY CHESTERS

*Liverpool Social History, 1820–1870.
A Guide to Government Reports and Papers.*

Iain C. Taylor

(Liverpool History Resources Committee, 1972, 23 pp.

Price 10p)

In the early nineteenth century the governing bodies of such rapidly expanding cities as Liverpool faced social problems of a nature and scale previously unknown. Earlier assumptions about the role of administrative authority, together with the non-democratic nature of most municipal corporations, meant that they were ill-equipped to deal with these problems. The 1835 corporations act, which made municipal authority both responsible and democratic, revealed an increased concern both locally and centrally in urban living conditions. Most of the reports of the parliamentary committees and royal commissions on this subject are contained in the parliamentary papers for 1820–70.

In listing the Liverpool references in these papers and classifying them according to subject (public health, emigration etc.) Mr Taylor has provided a valuable guide for the historian of Liverpool society. The reports, however, as he points out, contain a certain bias, not only in the evidence of witnesses each

with their individual axes to grind, but in the nature of the material, the object of the enquiries being to find evils to reform not achievements to praise. Nevertheless, one must agree with him in emphasising the importance of this unique source of detailed social and statistical evidence. A similar listing of local bills and petitions contained in the House of Commons journals might complete the picture by giving some idea of the activity taken independently of the central government by local bodies ready to deal with their problems themselves.

E. MENZIES