

REVIEWS

P.H.W. Booth, *The Financial Administration of the County of Cheshire, 1272-1377* (Chetham Society, 3rd ser. XXVIII. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1981. Pp. xiii + 207. £16.50).

The medieval county of Cheshire, as Mr. Booth begins by saying, was an unusual one. It was a landed estate as well as a unit of local government; in the period with which he is concerned it was under the direct lordship either of the king or of his eldest son; and it possessed "palatine" privileges which, in important respects, set it apart from most English counties. Mr Booth, of course, is not concerned with the whole story of Cheshire under the three Edwards: he concentrates attention upon the county's financial administration, but financial administration very broadly conceived. After sketching in the background he begins with the sources and, in particular, certain distinctive features of the form of the Cheshire accounts from the late 1340s onwards which need to be appreciated if misleading comparisons with earlier periods are to be avoided. Three substantial chapters follow treating in turn the administrative structure of the county during the century or so after 1272, the financial history of the lordship of Macclesfield with an emphasis upon the response of the administration to the situation created by plague mortality after 1349, and finally the history of the taxation of the county dealing especially with the search from the 1340s for alternative revenues to compensate for older resources which were contracting or at best no longer expanding. At every point the mid-fourteenth century, when the Black Prince became the effective lord of Cheshire, when the French war was his dominant preoccupation and when the Black Death undermined the foundations which had long supported territorial society, emerges as the significant time of change in the county's administration. The discussion of these themes is supported by appendices listing the chief accounting officers and analysing the Macclesfield and other accounts as well as the *valor* of the Black Prince's estate drawn up after his death in 1376.

It will be evident that, in many respects, administrative history for Mr. Booth is administrative history with a difference. The machinery through which Cheshire was governed is only the beginning of his story: the political and economical background against which it operated is at least equally his concern together with an attempt to determine why particular courses were followed and how particular decisions were reached. This broad conception of administrative history makes this a significant contribution to local studies, and all the more so because it is founded upon a comprehensive investigation of the sources whether published or in manuscript. Its importance, moreover, is more than merely local. Precisely because Cheshire was a "royal lordship", it responded to national as well

as regional influences. Even its models of accountancy were found in the Westminster exchequer, and the calls of Welsh wars under Edward I and of French wars under Edward III shaped its administration. Other matters, too, are of a wide general interest. Medieval administrators, for example, have attracted less attention than the systems which they operated; but in what we can learn from this book about Wingfield and Delves there are indications of the extent to which the systems themselves might be moulded by the personalities of those who staffed them; and the career of Adam Mottram suggests some of the attributes needed by those on the lower rungs of the administrative ladder, including not only "a certain spicing of ruthlessness" but also the "qualities of a survivor". Students of national conciliar and parliamentary institutions, too, would be well advised to read Mr. Booth's pages on the Black Prince's councils and the petitioning that occupied some of their attention; and historians of taxation will find much of interest in his quest for revenue from his Cheshire lordship, for it demands comparison with some of the devices of Edward III. This is perhaps the more natural when it appears that Sir William Shareshull was as prominent in the counsels of the Black Prince as he was in the counsels of the king, making the analogies between their responses to financial stringency in time of war the less surprising. Even more than is usually the case Mr. Booth demonstrates how good local history is a contribution to the history of the kingdom.

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