

REVIEWS

R.H. White, *Peel Castle Excavations, Final Report (1): The Half Moon Battery*, St. Patrick's Isle Trust, Liverpool, 1987, 62 pp. £7.95.

The report is pleasingly produced in an A4 magazine format. It details the results of excavations in 1982–3 on the Half Moon Battery site, within the *enceinte* of Peel Castle on the west coast of Man. The death of Peter Gelling after he had directed the first season of excavation has obviously been a major blow to the production of a complete report but the whole is dedicated most properly to his memory as the most active archaeologist working in Man from 1949–1982, whose energy and skills will be widely missed. The text is illustrated by a series of line drawings which are at least adequate (I iii) and at best praiseworthy (e.g. 16). The printing method offers little to photographs which were rather bravely included and which are predictably flat and low in contrast. At £7.95 the report does not look cheap but the rate of inflation in the printing trade may remedy this within a short period.

The excavations are difficult from 1982. We are becoming increasingly used to multi-period sites and this is no exception, producing a mesolithic flint-working floor, a late-medieval or early modern cemetery and other slightly later features before the construction of the battery in the late 16th–early 17th centuries. It was interesting to plot links between this site and the pottery industries of the high middle ages in the North-West of England. Even so, the finds were far from exciting or earth-shattering and it is difficult to see why the results were produced in monograph form rather than being inserted *in toto* in the Journal of the Manx Museum unless the report is aimed (hopefully) at an “on site” tourist market. What is particularly commendable is the speed with which the numerous specialist reports have been assembled and digested and the whole produced. It augurs well for the rest of the Peel project and I look forward with interest to the production of more in what will presumably become a small series.

University of Manchester

N.J. Higham

B.E. Harris, ed., *The Victoria History of the Counties of England, Cheshire*, Volume I, Oxford University Press, 1987, pp. 440. £60.

One knows what to expect from Volume I of a *VCH*: a thorough account

of the physique of the county concerned, of its prehistory and history up to 1066, and of its section of Domesday Book, with a translation. Predictability is a great virtue of the *VCH* and a major justification for the firmness which its directors have shown in resisting suggestions, frequently captious, that its established patterns should be changed. Predictably, we have here an authoritative work of reference.

Sheila M. Hebblethwaite's detailed account of the geology and geography of the county form an admirable introduction to the later chapters. It is impossible to make much of a coherent story of the prehistory of such an area as this. The great value of D.M.T. Longley's chapter is in its careful charting of the scattered information. Much of what we are told, for example on the Iron Age exploitation of the salt of the wiches has far more than local interest. (Here, as in other chapters, a valuable gazeteer of finds is appended.)

It is in this Prehistoric chapter that one first meets the mystery of Meols. This eroded site (or sites) on the north coast of the Wirral has produced Carthaginian coins, Armorican Iron Age coins, and a gold British coin of the same date. Only two other places in the county (including Chester) have produced more Roman coins. A pottery flask from the shrine of St. Menas near Alecandria (destroyed in the seventh century) has been found there. So too has a considerable amount of metalwork, including an early quoit-style brooch. The Anglo-Saxon coin series extends from the eighth century to the eleventh. This is a most extraordinary site, hard to parallel in the whole of Britain. (For post-Conquest finds we must await a later volume.)

Roman Cheshire has been the responsibility of D.F. Petch. The most important feature of Roman Cheshire, the fortress of *Legio XX Victrix*, underlying the centre of Chester, has been explored, and is described, in considerable, and very interesting detail. It conformed largely to type, with one major exception: it contained a big (67 m. × 34 m.) 'elliptical building' of extraordinary design, a good explanation for which has yet to be found. We are provided with a thorough and clear account of Roman activity outside Chester, where the exploitation of the salt deposits and the industrial settlement at Wilderspool were of special interest. One of the great advantages of such a careful survey as this of all the evidence from a considerable area is that it permits tentative conclusions on the density of rural settlement: e.g. that it seems to have been fairly intense in the area of Chester, almost non-existent in the area of Knutsford. But if much is coming to be known about Roman Cheshire, much remains deeply mysterious. *Legio XX* seems to disappear towards the end of the third century. What happened at Deva then? Did it later become the capital of the new province of Valentia? When, and in what sense was it abandoned? (The coin series stops in about 370.) When were the great buildings actually demolished (they certainly would not have melted away)? The last to go (excluding the wall) was the East Gate, demolished in 1768; it seems that some were standing in the late Anglo-Saxon period; but here, as in so many Roman towns, the crucial information on demolition dates is generally lacking.

A.T. Thacker's chapter on Anglo-Saxon Cheshire is the longest in the volume. His task cannot have been an easy one, not least because the area was far from any English centre in which a narrative or annalistic record was maintained. Occasional fragments and pockets of information, often preserved by a lucky chance are all we have to reveal what happened there. Bede tells us of Aethelfrih's victory at Chester, c. 616. Thanks to the twelfth century historian Gaimar we know that Coenwulf of Mercia

died at Basingwerk, 821. (Edward the Elder died not so far away at Farndon in 924.) Were it not for an Irish fragment we should not know that behind the Scandinavian (and one Irish) place-names of the Wirral lies an incursion and settlement from Dublin in 902. It is thanks only to the twelfth century 'Florence' that we have the (largely verifiable) story of Edgar's being rowed on the Dee by subordinated princes, which highlights the importance of tenth century Chester. There are a handful more annalistic references, including two which bring out the significance of Chester as a naval base, but not many.

If the annalistic record of Anglo-Saxon Cheshire is fairly thin so too is that of archaeology: the most significant physical remains, outside what has come from the ground at Chester and Meols, are curvilinear churchyards, likely to be indicative of early date and surviving sculptures, chiefly fragmentary. Dr. Thacker has made good use of both.

But the bulk of his evidence has had to come from place-names and from Domesday Book. These he has used, admirably, to reveal something about patterns of settlement and patterns of local authority. Thus he uses the distribution of *tun* and *leah* names to support a case (rather a bold case) for a substantial measure of continuity in the countryside between the Roman-British and the Anglo-Saxon periods. Of particular interest is his lucid account of Domesday's evidence on the association of settlements and their grouping in assessment units. This, with considerable aid from knowledge of medieval parochial structures and some from place names reveals much that is likely about the organisation of the countryside in large units, centred on royal villas and the like, in the period before a hundredal organisation was introduced in the tenth century. For example, he brings out the importance of Eastham as a likely early estate centre; and shows how it is possible to glimpse one, if not two, earlier schemes of organization behind that developed in the tenth century in association with the fortification of Runcorn and Thelwall.

There is one other major source of information: coins. It is a striking fact that in Edward the Elder's reign the Chester mint was the most productive in England. Later, its relative importance declined, but it remained significant. The impression of the economic importance of the late Anglo-Saxon Chester is reinforced by Domesday and by some of the discoveries of archaeology, for example that there was a considerable manufacture of pottery in or fairly near the city. (The mint output could also indicate that Chester was important as a centre for the collection of tribute.)

Cheshire was an area of more than ordinary importance in late Anglo-Saxon England: as a frontier province and even more because it was the English watergate on the Irish Sea, the Celtic, and later the Hiberno-Norse, Mediterranean. It was under influences from so many directions (for example it was where Viking settlers from the Isle of Man met the agents and power of the English state) that its history in this period is of special complexity. There are many missing pieces in its jigsaw. (Could it be, for example, that as somewhat later evidence could suggest a key to its prosperity was the export of Welsh slaves to Ireland?) Dr. Thacker has done it justice.

The Domesday chapter, by Dr. Thacker and Professor Sawyer begins with a most interesting suggestion, based on a comparison of the Domesday account of Cheshire with that of neighbouring counties, viz. that the so-called 'circuits of the Domesday commissioners' are a historians' fiction and that the evidence alleged for them is really for the returns from individual counties having been edited in geographically

contiguous groups. Among the many useful features of this chapter is a careful account of the Anglo-Saxon landowners. This brings out the extent to which the position in 1086, when there was no royal demesne in Cheshire, outside Chester, derived from that of pre-Conquest times. At some time before 1066 what had been royal estates had all passed into the hands of earl or bishop. An interesting debate is conducted (cf. pp. 264 and 300) on whether the Domesday hidage assessments represent a reassessment downwards.

The volume is carefully edited, provided with useful maps and excellent indices. It is far better printed than are most learned works, other than *VCHs*, today. This review is written in the United States. Here, as in other countries overseas, one often finds that virtually the only works available, in quite big libraries, on English local history are *VCHs*. *Cheshire I* is a worthy representative of its country and its county, both as a work of learning, and as a piece of book-production.

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James Campbell

A.J. Mitchinson, ed., *The Return of the Papists for the Diocese of Chester, 1705*, The North West Catholic History Society, 1986, pp. x + 40, £2.00

The publication of sources for the study of local history in an inexpensive format is always worthwhile and the North West Catholic History Society is to be congratulated on its latest publication. *The Return of the Papists* has been transcribed and edited by A.J. Mitchinson from the original in the Record Office of the House of Lords and copies are available from the Society's Hon. Treasurer, Mr. B.T. Farrimond at 23 Swinley Lane, Wigan, Lancashire WN1 2EB, post free.

Mr Farrimond has provided a brief introduction outlining the political background to the Return, produced at a time when the House of Lords, concerned lest Papists were increasing in numbers, was pressing for information and for the enforcement of anti-Catholic legislation. The list, which follows, records the names of "Papists, and reputed Papists" in 42 parishes of Lancashire and Cheshire; their occupations are sometimes included and, in the larger parishes, the townships in which they lived are usually recorded.

The Return is not complete: many parishes are not included and not all of these will have made a nil return. It is also difficult to believe that incumbents have made a full return when the parishes of St Martin (Chester), Eccleston-in-Chester, Woodchurch, Middleton and Prestwich have recorded the presence of only one Papist. However, lengthy returns have been recorded in a number of parishes notably Wigan, Sefton, Leyland, Walton and Kirkham. The lists record groups of domestic servants as well as a number of priests and household chaplains, whilst including representatives of many occupations ranging from 'Teacher of Mathematicks' to 'Clogger'. Many individuals were described as 'Poor' but the Return records the annual income of many others. Family sizes are commonly indicated and incumbents occasionally recorded their comments – for example, describing the inhabitants of Formby, Ainsdale and Ravenmeols as "mostly Fishermen and illiterate Rusticks." The lists provoke many questions: of eighteen Catholics in Liverpool, why should seven have been Ship's Masters, three

have been merchants and one a sailor? Altogether, the Return offers a source of considerable interest to family historians and to social historians with widely differing concerns.

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Roy G. Dottie

John T. Swain, *Industry Before the Industrial Revolution: North-East Lancashire c. 1500-1640* (Chetham Society, Third Series, Volume XXII). Manchester, 1986, pp. xi + 235, £27.50

This important contribution to the study of Lancashire's economic history paints a detailed picture of the development of industry – principally cloth manufacture and coal-mining – in North-East Lancashire during the sixteenth and early seventeenth century. Dr Swain concentrates on the manor of Colne and the forests of Trawden and Pendle and, by limiting his scope geographically, he has been able to draw on a wide range of documentary sources to produce a full portrait of that remote corner of Lancashire in the early modern period. At the heart of the study lies a meticulous analysis of the 332 wills and 253 probate inventories which survive for the study area before 1640, but to these the author has skillfully married the evidence of manor court rolls, lawsuit papers, and parish registers. Nor is the book simply an essay in industrial history: the textile and mining industries are placed in the much broader context of demographic change, agriculture, lordship, landholding, and inheritance practices.

The core of the book is an examination of the cloth industry, principally the manufacture of coarse woollen 'kerseys', which made their way from Colne, often through West Riding middlemen, to the national and export markets. Involvement in the industry was very widespread, evidence of cloth manufacture being found in some 70% of the probate inventories the author examined. The unit of production was the household of the small independent manufacturer. There was little evidence of the putting-out system, in which the yarn and cloth remained in the possession of a wealthy clothier, but large numbers of women and children, some of them itinerant labourers, were involved in the carding and spinning operations. The development of this important domestic industry was closely related to population growth in an area of pastoral farming, where subdivision of holdings forced farmers to seek additional income from another source. In this the Colne area possessed the necessary pre-requisites for industrial growth identified by Dr Joan Thirsk in her seminal paper on the location of early-modern industry. An important aspect of Dr Swain's study is his refinement of the Thirsk thesis by demonstrating that the fragmentation of holdings in North-East Lancashire was largely a product of sales, mortgages and subletting, rather than the partible inheritance suggested by Dr Thirsk. In a convincing section (pp. 72-92), he shows that the selling and mortgaging of land was stimulated in turn by inheritance customs which, while strictly-speaking primogeniture, encumbered the heir's estate with heavy obligations to pay substantial legacies to his younger siblings. The expansion in the kersey industry in the late sixteenth and earliest decades of the seventeenth centuries took place in communities in which farms were small and often encumbered by debts, and in which there were numerous younger sons and illegitimate children who could not expect to inherit land and thus turned to industry for a living. The whole

chapter on 'Landholding, Wealth and Poverty' is remarkable in that the author has succeeded in reaching behind the often misleading facade presented by estate rentals and surveys to recapture something of the complexity of rural society on the ground.

The book also sheds valuable light on the background to the mortality crisis of 1623-4 which struck particularly hard at the upland communities of eastern Lancashire. The slump in the kersey trade after c. 1620 coincided both with disastrous harvests in 1621-2 and the heavy composition payments demanded by the Crown in 1618 in return for confirmation of the security of copyhold tenures in North-East Lancashire. The crisis mortality of 1623-4, which is now accepted to have been largely due to famine, must thus be seen as the product of a combination of factors which drained the financial resources of an already poor and vulnerable population.

Dr Swain has provided a skillfully executed and comprehensive analysis of the society and economy of North-East Lancashire in the period 1500-1640. He has squeezed his data to the full with the result that much of the book is very rich and meaty fare, part of which suffer from a surfeit of percentage figures that threaten to choke the reader! Having said that, the prime reason for publishing the fruits of painstaking local research such as this is to present hard data and detailed analysis to a wider public and, to be fair to Dr Swain, he has eased his readers' indigestion by rounding off the book with a succinct and abundantly cross-referenced concluding chapter which draws out the principal threads of the arguments he has so carefully constructed.

The author submitted the PhD thesis on which this book is based in 1983 and the Chetham Society is to be congratulated for making this important research available so speedily. Sadly, the price of £27.50 will deter all but the most dedicated non-members of Chetham. This is unfortunate as, with its combination of breadth and vision and detailed local analysis, *Industry Before the Industrial Revolution* deserves to stand beside G.H. Tupling's *Economic History of Rossendale* as a landmark in the study of Lancashire's economic history.

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