

KENTISH HISTORIOGRAPHY

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THE wider study of history embraces both the theory of historical research and the practice of historical writing. This latter topic, historiography, is equally significant whether in relation to the publication of works on local or national history and bears especially on the character and outlook as well as the scholarship of individual writers. In offering a paper on such a subject the author is not only aware of the limited research which he has been able to undertake, but also of entering what is for him a new field of study. Nevertheless, it seems that as the Kent Archaeological Society and its journal reach a century of activity, some résumé of historical writing in Kent is not out of place.

The first volume of *Archaeologia Cantiana* was produced at a time when general historiography in this county was at its lowest ebb for three centuries. The amazing industry of Hasted had been followed by the sterile work of Ireland, and although interest in archaeology and things antiquarian was growing on an unprecedented scale, no new writer, as yet, had ventured into the wide and difficult field of county history. Today, one hundred years after, this is still largely the case. Of monographs and the results of detailed research we have unlimited evidence, the larger work of Furley and of the compilers of *Victoria County History* has opened up fresh paths, but no new volume has appeared which takes the place of those works, already old in 1858. As the days of Hasted and his predecessors become more and more remote, the works remain as monuments of scholarship but the authors become less vivid both as men and as historians. It is hoped, therefore, that a general paper on Kentish historiographers may stimulate others to follow the work of individual historians and topographers in greater detail and so to prepare the way for a definitive study of Kentish historiography.

In a single brief paper of this kind a measure of strict limitation is essential. Thus it is intended to refer only to some of the best-known historians who wrote of the whole or a major part of the county. Inevitably this means that so able a writer as William Boys of Sandwich is eliminated and with him many others whose names should be honoured among all who love Kent and its story. So, too, we must reject those antiquaries of Kent to whom we owe so much: Sir Edward Dering, John Philipot, Somerset Herald, or at a later date the Rev. Lambert Larking. Such men provided our historiographers with evidence.

They did not write history themselves, but their collections of MSS., and their transcripts and notes, were and remain in part, a store house for the searcher into the past of this corner of England.

Before discussing individuals and their works, certain general observations must be made. It is axiomatic that history is the story of the past written for the present. Seldom, if ever, does the historian consciously write for future generations. Nor would we expect that, for he, however shrewd his guess, has no special ability to judge future taste and fashion. We revere the names of Gibbon and Macaulay, but we do not expect modern scholars to adopt their style and conceits. While knowledge increases from age to age, literary taste and indeed society itself change and make their own demands on authorship. What was once the summit of research and stylistic writing becomes outdated and outmoded. An admirable example occurs in Vol. I of *Archæologia Cantiana*, p. 186, where that excellent antiquary Lambert Larking writes of Sir Roger Twysden as “. . . engrossed . . . in those learned researches to which we are largely indebted for the little we know of the early history of England”. Who now looks to Twysden for knowledge of Anglo-Saxon society?

Again history is usually written with a definite purpose in mind. It may be the specialist monograph proving a point of detail, the broad sweep of a Trevelyan or the still wider view of a Toynbee or a Butterfield. Whether accuracy of factual account is related to prophetic message or not, written history cannot reside in a vacuum but for good or ill is purposive, since it involves a measure of interpretation.

Thirdly, the conception of history at any one time is largely determined by the political, religious and economic thought and practice of the day and of the place where it is written. Just as history written in communist Russia or catholic Spain varies from the English conception, so too the history of Livy, Camden or Gibbon varies from that of today.

These general factors influenced our authors just as they influence our approach to them and without due regard for them no comparative study is possible or reasonable.

The medieval period was not one of great historical scholarship. Various chronicles were compiled of a general and usually heroic character but local history as we know it did not exist. The stories of early mythical residents of this island coupled with the conquests of Brut of Trojan descent over the tyrannical giants of early days and later with the much expanded glories of King Arthur formed the basis for a “British history” which few dared to question. The sixteenth century saw the beginning of change with the pioneer topographical work of John Leland and the equally pioneer critical history of Polydore Virgil, an Italian living in this country. Such scholarship resulted in a growing interest in local and antiquarian study and it is from this date

that the earliest of county historians appear, of whom William Lambarde represents Kent.

William Lambarde, 1536-1601, was born of parents connected with the business life of London, who were also fortunate enough to acquire "a house and land in Kent". Thus from his earliest years his connections with Westcombe Park, Greenwich, brought Lambarde into contact with this county, while family links brought him into touch with the life of the metropolis. At the age of twenty he was admitted to Lincoln's Inn, where under the tutorship of Lawrence Nowell he developed a lasting interest in the law and an appreciation of the legal outlook of the Anglo-Saxon period. Thus from the opening of his career his legal and antiquarian interests were welded together. By 1568 he had completed "Archionoma," a study of Saxon Law, and by 1570 his *Perambulation of Kent* was already prepared, though not published for another six years. Lambarde's subsequent career does not greatly concern us, for his later and greatest work was legal, but his close connection with Kentish justice kept alive his interest in the county and it is doubtful if anyone, as yet, has fully appreciated the value to Lambarde of his first marriage to Jane Multon. His wife died in 1575, but following his appointment to the Commission of the Peace four years later, he worked constantly by the side of his father-in-law for whom he seems to have had a deep affection and who may well have aided the younger man considerably in his career as a gentleman and justice in this county.

Lambarde's twin loves are fully apparent in the *Perambulation*. His pleasure in presenting the county of his choice is matched by his eagerness to display his knowledge of the pre-Conquest laws and the contemporary judicial picture. Thus we have his excellent "Estate of Kent" followed by topographical information of a modern Guide Book character. From thence, having dealt with the See of Canterbury, he covers such places of the county as he deems worthy of serious historical attention and completes the picture with the customs and laws of Kent. The whole presents an unusual form to modern eyes and something less than we now should regard as a county history. Nevertheless Lambarde produced a book of great interest and significance, not least in that it represented a pioneer activity.

This fact is linked with the author's day and generation. He is looking both backwards and forwards and this explains some of the peculiarities of the book. A follower of John Leland, he finds it necessary to uphold the badly shaken "British History" of Geoffrey of Monmouth although it has little to say of Kent. He accepts the wholly mythical Samotheans and the Brut legend and yet he does not lack critical ability. On the other hand, having made his apology, he admits that it is scarcely germane to his subject and, virtually omitting

the Roman occupation, dives into his own world of the Anglo-Saxon invaders.

Again he lived in a period of fierce religious passions and he takes delight in debunking monasticism and the medieval church, in this matter allowing his natural partisan feelings to overrule his critical faculties.

What, then, is the value of the *Perambulation* to us in the twentieth century? In the first place it is a pioneer work: no similar topographical account of a single county of like merit was attempted before this.<sup>1</sup> Secondly it presents clearly and concisely the Kent of the late Tudor period including judicial economic and social data of the greatest merit to the modern searcher. As a history of Kent it is good reading, contains much that is genuine and much that has been superseded. As a study of Kentish custom it is still valuable and not to be ignored, and it demonstrates the new and growing interest of that period in pre-Conquest affairs. But it is as a record of Elizabethan Kent, as a great lover of that county, who was also scholar and lawyer, saw it, that Lambarde's work stands the test.

It is reputed that Lambarde designed a much greater work than this, covering the whole country, but that he gave way to the younger Camden in this respect. This story, whatever its factual basis may be, serves to focus attention on Lambarde's near contemporary who far outstripped him in antiquarian and historical acumen. While William Camden hardly falls within the limits laid down for this paper, he did reside in Kent at Bexley, and he brought to the study of history and topography a fresh outlook and skill which make him justly revered. With Lambarde there is uncertainty and a distinctly medieval flavour, Camden is sure of his path and reaches out to the eighteenth-century writers and beyond.

More closely in harmony with the work of Lambarde, though lacking in its historical knowledge, is that of Richard Kilburne, 1605-78. Kilburne also was a lawyer and was five times Principal of Staple's Inn. His approach seems to have been a strictly utilitarian one. He presents the Kent of his own day with all its topographical divisions and, so far as he was able, he gives the reasons underlying these divisions. In this way he covers lathes, hundreds and parishes and also gives fresh information regarding the bailiwicks and liberties. In many respects his factual "Survey" is of more lasting value than the less sound historical narrative of the period. We do not turn to Kilburne for Kentish history, but for the pattern of seventeenth-century Kent, for he depicts the county as it was before the Civil War, despite the fact that his book was published in 1659.

<sup>1</sup> Carew's *Cornwall* appeared in 1602 and according to A. L. Rouse is a far more finished production than the *Perambulation*.

The second seventeenth-century author worthy of note is Thomas Philipot who died in 1682, son of the still better known John Philipot, Somerset Herald. With his *Villare Cantianum* we enter a new phase of Kentish historiography. The relationship with Lambarde and other earlier work is still apparent but the author is primarily an historian with all the advantages—scarcely acknowledged—of parental skill in the same field. Thus Philipot offers us a general if brief symposium of Kentish history supported by documents and evidence, as with the list of Sheriffs, from his father's work; and then follows with a much more detailed parochial study than any hitherto attempted. There is in this book a veneer of scholarly arrangement lacking in the rather haphazard plan of the *Perambulation* and we can see in this single volume the basis for Hasted's monumental work. There is, too, a changed approach. Lambarde's legal training repeatedly overcomes his antiquarian outlook, but Philipot has something of a truer historical sense. He emphasizes the significance of Kent from the naval and maritime aspect and is interested in the growth of local administration. In fact we are no longer presented with a "survey" but with an antiquary's "history." There are, of course, faults and difficulties: Philipot digresses with by no means happy results—as where he attempts to analyse the decadence of the monastics without any evidence in the modern sense; he has a most odd conception of alphabetical arrangement which seems to approach a phonetic list dependent on vowel sounds—thus Barfriston is followed by "Badhurst" and Blackmanstone is noted before Beakesbourne. In fact the whole arrangement suggests a dangerously haphazard approach and to the modern student is a warning that the contents may be equally haphazard and unreliable. In the third place there is an appendix setting out the supposed etymology of Kentish place names. That this list will not stand the tests of the English Place Names Society is not surprising, but it is more than a little significant that in the late seventeenth century an attempt of this kind should have been made on so full a scale.

The very character of this book makes it difficult to assess. Normally Philipot will be passed by for the fuller and better-developed Hasted, but that is unfair to one who took Lambarde's pioneer efforts and with his own and his father's researches produced a recognizable county history on the pattern which would be adopted and expanded for more than a century.

Our next author is the most difficult of all to assess. Scholar and mountebank Dr. John Harris, 1667-1719, has passed down to history as a charlatan who failed to bring his scheme to fruition, who uncritically copied his predecessors while claiming to be original and who equally uncritically added a good deal of rubbish to what passed for

county history. Yet is this wholly fair? Harris deserves more consideration than he has had if only because of his "grand design." To blame an historian for being a plagiarist is always dangerous, for nearly all depend on the work of others and may tend to accept generalizations and more detailed statements without due research. The seventeenth and eighteenth centuries were notorious for copyists who often slavishly followed another's work—even to the wording—and having added some small matter of personal knowledge or opinion claimed the whole as a new presentation. While Harris was uncritical and followed Philipot to a degree, his basic failure was his inability to complete the task he had set himself. Had his plan been accomplished the result might well have taken the place of Hasted's work, but the single volume appears bombastic and pretentious, to be regarded as a monumental failure and Harris's "folly."

The author of *Bibliotheca Cantiana* says that "though Harris was a man of unquestionable abilities and attainments, he was charged with culpable imprudence in his conduct; and, notwithstanding the preferences he enjoyed, was generally in distress". His ability as an historian tends to be damned in part on the grounds of his conduct as a clergyman, and it is more than difficult to judge these forerunners of Edward Hasted in a manner wholly fair to them or to their work. Harris's scheme was larger than Hasted's and indeed embraced almost as much as the more recent *Victoria County History*, excluding the economic sections. Hasted undoubtedly thought him valuable if not wholly reliable, and sought vainly the notes for his unwritten later volume. He took Philipot and expanded his work, even if he went no further in genealogical research and manorial ownership. He thought of civil and administrative history as a separate study—a most modern concept; and dealt with Roman roads and other archæological remains, matters untouched by earlier writers. Had he carried through his plan and finished off the ecclesiastical history of Kent, its natural history and the development of the Royal Navy, what a valuable whole might have resulted. As it is, Hasted supersedes Harris and we remember the earlier man's faults and failures rather than his breadth of purpose and modest achievement. It has been said that he would never have completed his task, for he was too unstable. Let that be as it may, he alone of the early historiographers attempted to describe in detail the Weald, Romney Marsh, the rivers and antiquities of Kent, or realized the full importance of maritime history to this county.

Edward Hasted, 1732-1812, presents so vast a canvas that several papers might be written on him and his work, rather than a single short paragraph. His alone of the early Kentish histories fully stands the test, and in his volumes no one who has been concerned with aspects of our history has sought wholly in vain.

A barrister, magistrate and deputy lieutenant, he spent forty years preparing his massive work, the footnotes to which alone testify to the quality of his researches. Naturally Hasted used the work of his predecessors: he owed much to all those mentioned already in these pages and he sought original or transcript evidence wherever it might be. With Hasted one is on surer ground than with the earlier men. Lambarde within his lights was clearly reliable and his whole account was limited in scope. Philipot and Harris spread themselves much further, but they seldom give chapter and verse for their statements and thus an element of doubt remains. Hasted was determined to prove everything to the best of his ability.

Even so, and surprisingly so, his scope and scheme is more limited than that of Harris. He packs general topography, civil history and the rest into a mere hundred pages, presenting for the main part a vast historical guide book parish by parish within the desperately confusing though topographically sound arrangement of lathes and hundreds. Because of this Hasted is not easy to use, and his overwhelming concern with the "descent of the manors" results in the omission of material which the modern historian would seek. Nevertheless his great value cannot be denied: not only is a vast amount of genealogical and topographical knowledge packed into these books, but for the student of the eighteenth century Hasted's evaluation of each parish in his own day is irreplaceable. That there are faults, omissions and evidence of lack of knowledge at times is no real criticism of a life work of outstanding merit and fundamental accuracy. The person who has worked in a county without a comparable eighteenth-century history knows from bitter experience the debt we owe to Hasted and his contemporary historians outside Kent.

The *New Topographical, Historical, and Commercial Survey* issued by Charles Seymour in 1776 raises yet again the problem of the copyist. Seymour claims to have had access to new material but his book is largely a re-hash of what previous writers had written, and his opening description of the county is almost word for word that used by the Rev. Thomas Cox in his *Britannia* (1720). Seymour, in fact, answers his own pretensions: in his introduction he speaks of the need for a concise but accurate account published at a price within the reach of most. This, despite his use of contemporary airs and graces, he gave to his public, and his book within its limits remains a useful guide book arranged alphabetically and therefore simple to use.

In contrast with Seymour, William Henry Ireland's *History of Kent* published between 1828 and 1830 has the sole merit of containing an attractive and useful set of prints for the early nineteenth century. Ireland, notorious for his Shakespearean forgeries, was a dilettante

incapable of producing more than a pastiche of the work of his predecessors. What is of value comes from Hasted, but there is no attempt to enlarge or expand the earlier work and no real evidence either of knowledge of Kent or of original research.

With Ireland, however, we reach the end of an historiographical era, and were it not that the approach of these men whether giants or dwarfs varies so greatly from that of today it would be well to leave the story there. The changes of the last century and a half have been so great in historical thought and knowledge that it would seem wrong not to refer to them. All our historians from Lambarde to Ireland were topographers; they concentrated on actual administrative divisions (not their history) and on the history of the parish as seen through the descent of lordships and patronage of the living. All relied to a great extent on the material support of noble and gentle households, and their approach was governed by this mercenary factor. To make their work acceptable and profitable it must please, perhaps even flatter, those for whom it was intended: thus general history is glossed over except for the glories of Kentish Kings and the lists of nobles and gentry who served as sheriffs, justices, Knights of the Shire, and so forth. The economic growth and political democratization of the nineteenth century had their own reflection in historical writing, and it is with these facts in mind that we turn to *The History of the Weald of Kent*, by John Furley (1871).<sup>1</sup>

Nothing could be more distinct and different than the works of Furley and of Hasted. The Victorian owed much to his predecessor, but his whole approach is far removed. Here is local history written from the standpoint of national history. The earlier writers are concerned with Kent or even with the individual parishes of Kent; national affairs are incidental and neither make nor mar the story as it unfolds. Furley, in contrast, relies on national history as portrayed by his great contemporaries like Macaulay, as the basis for his work, fitting local incident into a larger pattern. Thus his chapters are arranged chronologically with the emphasis on the reigns of kings, and one is presented with a collection of facts woven into narrative for each epoch. The result is peculiar but typical of its period, and on the whole good compared with some other similar writers, for Furley never forgot Kent nor felt that a well-known incident must be retold irrespective of its Kentish connotation. Here is narrative history supported ably by original research as we understand it, and in Furley we can find much that is hidden or obscure in Hasted and the earlier books. Nevertheless it is unfair to compare two such dissimilar works, for they

<sup>1</sup> This is something of a misnomer. Furley, though emphasizing the Weald, deals with the history of the whole county and for that reason is included in this study.



require handling with due regard to their particular purposes. Hasted's is the great county history written for and of the gentry. From it we can see how estates rise and fall and can judge the collapse of monastic Kent from the statistics of the land market. Furley presents Kent's story for the newly educated masses who know vaguely of the major affairs of national history, but his own idiosyncrasies are apparent. Like many of his generation history to him became progressively less interesting and important as his own age was approached. Thus his chapter on the eighteenth century is a woeful affair, whereas the Civil War, Reformation and other periods of action are brilliantly presented. When all is said and done, however, Furley is telling a story which lasts until he nears the end of his third volume. Its faults are largely those of imperfect knowledge for which he can hardly be blamed, but in the last few chapters of the book we meet a new man. Here is Furley facing the problems and enigmas of Kent which still trouble us at times. In his handling of *lathe, den*, and other special features of Kentish topography and society he is giving us himself and the best years of research and thought. It matters not if his results do not always tally with our own, in his last chapters there is something new in Kentish historiography comparable only with Philipot's valiant efforts with place names.

Thus over a matter of three hundred years we can follow the writing of Kentish history from the brilliant but pioneer efforts of Lambarde to the amazing peaks of industry of Hasted and so to the very different and far from final work of John Furley. Approaches so different and scholarship so varied require a symposium such as it was hoped *Victoria County History* might present. The triumphs and failures of that scheme in Kent are not for this study, suffice to say that no previous writer other than the much maligned Dr. Harris conceived such a design for local history, and he could not carry it through. We still lack a definitive history of Kent, and *Victoria County History* as originally conceived would have wedded Hasted and his predecessors to the writers of Furley's approach. Yet it may be well that the great plan did not come to fruition, for recent research, archæological and documentary, has amplified and modified much of our historical thinking. This brings us to a final factor in the picture which is lacking throughout our historiography.

Lambarde dwelt on Saxon law and custom and this pattern was continued by his successors with due notice of the Kentish leaders and kings from Hengist to Baldred. So long as local history was centred in the landed families and their vicissitudes this sufficed, but it tended to reproduce those traditions of the conquering West Saxon house which survived the Norman conquest. So long, too, as Bede's story was the final word in early history Jutish and Saxon tradition were one.

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In the 1930's a small volume was published on *The Jutes*<sup>1</sup> which with some justice was scathingly reviewed in this journal.<sup>2</sup> Nevertheless Jolliffe's main contention of a Jutish society, distinct from and overlain by that of the West Saxons remains, and until Kentish history is approached with the background however sketchy of three hundred years of independence, with a separate royal house, laws and economic system, the enigmas and curious survivals of this most fascinating county will not be solved. There remains for the future this great task of rewriting Kentish history from a new and more convincing standpoint.

To us, who study now, however, there are the books referred to above and many others, full of factual material for our purposes if we can but find it. These books, especially the best, are not easy to use: their approach is different, their wording peculiar, their material occasionally unreliable but they remain as a great monument to those who deeply loved Kent and regrettably, in some cases, as a warning to those whose designs overrun their skill or who regard the writing of history as a simple and casual affair. No one will re-write these books: some like Furley for all his good points will be superseded, some justly forgotten, but the two giants Lambarde and Hasted will remain to await some future unknown writer who may add yet another lasting pillar to the temple of Kentish historiography.

<sup>1</sup> *Pre-Feudal England: The Jutes*, by J. E. A. Jolliffe. O.U.P. (1933).

<sup>2</sup> *Archæologia Cantiana*, XLV (1933), pp. 290-4.