

BOOK REVIEWS

The Royal Charters of Faversham including Magna Carta. By Peter Tann with contributions from Michael Frohnsdorff and Duncan Harrington. vi+210 pp. Fully illustrated in colour throughout. The Faversham Society, 2013. Hardback £30 (£36.50 incl. p+p) from The Faversham Society, the Fleur Bookshop, 10-13 Preston Street, Faversham, ME13 8NS, 01795-534542 or email: ticfaversham@btinternet.com. ISBN: 978-1-900214-68-1.

This beautiful production is a model of how to present records which have both local and national importance to a wide readership. Reproductions of royal charters might not necessarily be thought to appeal to non-specialists, but they are preceded by a series of (usually) short introductory essays written by those with a deep knowledge of Faversham and its records. These introductions cover both the nature of the records and aspects of the history of town, including the Abbey, jurisdictions and the relationship of Faversham with its Head Port Dover and the Cinque Ports confederation. With these introductions, this volume begins to make a compelling narrative of Faversham's medieval history. The introductions are divided into readable sections, beautifully illustrated and printed on good-quality paper with large pages, allowing plenty of white space around the text and pictures. The book is hardback and the pages stay open when the book is in use, making it easy to use especially when consulting the main part. This part consists of transcriptions of the documents, translations of those in Latin, transcriptions of those in English, and, notably, commentaries on each. As well as the royal charters, there are other documents such as Letters Patent and grants by laymen. There are many high-quality reproductions of some documents and we are told that digital images of them all will be available on CD-Rom at £20 from the Faversham Society for those who wish to study them in detail. This is particularly important since Faversham has retained its own civic records, one of the few towns of the Cinque Ports confederation to do so.

The contributor Michael Frohnsdorff gives the charters relating to the foundation of Faversham Abbey from William Dugdale's *Monasticon Anglicanum*, together with translations and commentaries relating to their possible dating. One document amongst the *Chartae Antiquae* of

Canterbury Cathedral Priory is identified, which is said to include copies of material dated between c.1148 and 1363 but no further detail beyond the catalogue entry is given. This may be of course because Canterbury Cathedral Archives was temporarily closed during the production of this book, and there must be scope for further work on this document. The introduction to Faversham Abbey concentrates on the possible reasons for its founding by Stephen and Matilda in 1148 and concludes that these include its strategic location on the tidal Faversham Creek which was ‘designed to impress’ travellers by ship, and its possible siting on an earlier manor house held briefly by William de Ypres who was obliged to exchange it for lands in Milton. The foundation charters should, as noted, be read with the (online) *Victoria County History of Faversham Abbey* for a wider perspective since the next charters relate to its Dissolution.

The Introduction to Faversham, Dover (its Head Port) and the Cinque Ports, together with the commentary on the charter of 1252, make detailed and heroic, perhaps even unnecessary, efforts to demonstrate the town’s early importance. For greater breadth, it might have been better also to consult other recent works, such as those on Dover (S. Sweetinburgh in *Townwall Street, Dover, Excavations*, ed. K. Parfitt *et al.*), Sandwich (Clarke and Pearson *et al.*) and Rye (Draper *et al.*) which deal with similar subjects: early charters and seals, the townfolk and their relationship with the monarch and their overlords (Dover Priory, Christ Church Priory and Fécamp Abbey, respectively) and the development of town governance.

There are minor niggles such as the lack of an index, the incomplete Bibliography, and the footnotes where the first reference does not contain full details, which turn up later. This reviewer is not sure that Samuel Jeake can be called ‘the recognised leading authority on the history of the Cinque Ports’ although he was an important antiquarian publisher of the Ports’ charters, with annotations, published posthumously in 1728. That recognition should go to K.M.E. Murray, whose Oxford B.LITT. thesis was published in 1935 as *The Constitutional History of the Cinque Ports* and which does not, as stated, appear in the Bibliography. In addition, Murray’s article ‘Faversham and the Cinque Ports’ is a clear account of the development of the town’s role as a Cinque Port limb and of its relationship with Dover and the confederation, based on numerous sources (*The Transactions of the Royal Historical Society*, 1935). Peter Tann makes a number of points in relation to Murray’s work in the introductory sections and his readers need to take on board her narrative too.

The Faversham society, author and contributors have succeeded in producing a book which succeeds on many levels. It will be very significant for future students of local and urban history because it brings together a large number of notable documents and opens them up to further consideration. Such students may wish to accept or challenge some aspects of the introductory essays but their doing so would add

greatly to the study of this and other Cinque Ports and their limbs. All university libraries, and many individuals, should obtain a copy of this book.

GILLIAN DRAPER

Negotiating the Political in Northern European Urban Society, c.1400-c.1600. Sheila Sweetinburgh (ed.). 227 pp. ACMRS Medieval and Renaissance Studies, Vol. 434, 2013. Hardback, 55 Euros (from Brepols Publishers). ISBN 978-0-86698-482-9.

These essays edited by Sheila Sweetinburgh span the period known as the end of the Middle Ages and beginning of Early Modern Europe – a very rich period: the recovery from the Black Death in the middle of the fourteenth century; the readjustments to changing power and labour structures; the repercussions of the renaissance in northern Europe; the discovery of the wider world and its economic consequences; and the socio-political impact of the religious reformation. Urbanisation was a vibrant symbol of this changing world as trade and early industries drew the growing populations to the ports and regional and national centres. For historians of Kent this volume offers a very welcome insight into the comparative experiences of Dover, Sandwich and Canterbury with other English urban centres (Bristol and Bury St Edmunds) and the northern European cities of the German states (Osnabrück), the Dutch province of Holland (Dordrecht, Amsterdam together with Gouda, Delft and Leiden) and the three towns which made up the Bohemian capital (Prague). The excellent brief concluding essay by Caroline Barron welcomes the shift away from traditional urban studies based on major cities like London with its proximity to the royal centre of government.

The theme of the volume, underpinned by this context, is how the political groups in these towns and cities developed effective local government and judiciaries through ‘negotiating’ influence and power both within the towns/cities and with aristocratic, religious or royal/imperial overlords. The persistence of feudal traditions comes face to face with urban mercantile and burgher politicians, each nuanced by the particular local conditions and concerns, and the research interests and expertise of the individual authors. The essays are divided into two sections ‘The View from Inside: Urban Politics, Power and Identity’ and ‘The View from the Outside: Relations between Crown and Town’, but each stands very well on its own and the order is not essential to the development of the central argument, which Sweetinburgh sets out with clarity in the Introduction.

The first chapter examines the role of the individual within the ‘public sphere of political, social, and civic life’ of Bury St Edmunds, a borough

which had no control over its own local administration being governed by the Abbey. By looking at the life and *post mortem* creation of a symbolic biography of John Smyth, a leading member of the Candlemas Guild (*John Smyth's Book*), Mark Merry highlights the fifteenth-century tensions between the emergence of the individual in society and the imperative to conform to the 'communal identity'. Merry shows how the community, through the re-establishment of the Candlemas Guild, were able to develop and assert their civic identity and meet the growing needs of trade and markets, the essential life of the town, despite the overlordship of the Abbey.

In contrast to Bury, the German city of Osnabrück had been free of church rule since the thirteenth century and Karsten Igel looks at the manipulation of annual elections to the council and the restructuring of the town centre of the 'Old Town' around a new town hall. Igel uses these symbols of civic government to explore the exclusivity of the ruling elite and the way this could be enhanced by the use of public spaces, which were in effect less than public. This chapter introduces a further theme within the volume, drawing on the way the rediscovery of the classical in the fifteenth century encouraged a new architecture of public buildings, which was profoundly political in its implementation.

Sheila Sweetinburgh follows on the theme of public spaces in her study of 'the St Bartholomew's Day festivities in early sixteenth-century Sandwich', on the cusp of the Henrician Reformation. Since the thirteenth century Sandwich's civic authority had gained enough political influence to assert itself against the powers of church (Christ Church Priory) and Crown, and Sweetinburgh uses the 1532 Bartholomew's Day procession, originating in an early thirteenth-century myth, as a symbol of these tensions. By the early sixteenth century Sandwich's economic decline and anti-clericalism were adding further to the disputes between the civic and clerical community. The complete breakdown and consequent renegotiation of relations centred on the curate of St Peter's Church's refusal to fulfil his part in the ancient tradition and the mayor and jurats committing him to gaol, together with the chantry priests and church wardens. Sweetinburgh draws on a wealth of sources to bring alive the Sandwich communities and the impact of the religious and economic changes on civic and church politics.

From Sandwich to Canterbury where on the face of it, in Paula Simpson's study of the (1593) case of the preacher, Arthur Kingsmill, who accused the ecclesiastical judge, Stephen Lakes, of injustice and corruption in a sermon delivered in the well-attended Chapter House, the ecclesiastical authority seems to have had the better of it. Simpson examines the text of Kingsmill's sermon through its etymology and the use of historical and classical allusions. Once again, but this time in the later context of post-Reformation divisions, anti-clericalism is an underlying theme, and

despite the action brought by Lakes against Kingsmill which as Simpson says ‘demonstrates the important role which the ecclesiastical courts played in providing a forum for the articulation of complaint...’, Lakes’ own career was not a noted success thereafter. [See also the general article on the work of the Canterbury diocesan courts in the late sixteenth century on pp. 263-281.]

The third Kentish study, and the final one in the first section, is another textual analysis, of the negotiations over the late Elizabethan restoration of Dover Harbour. The removal of church authority in the Reformation and quasi-independence of the town, together with its status as head port of the Cinque Ports, was challenged by the Crown when the Queen moved to improve the port. Claire Bartram and Mary Dixon examine how the difficulties between the crown and the civic authority were ‘negotiated’ through textual analysis of John Tooke’s manuscript detailing his role on behalf of the town in discussions with the crown authorities and the Lord Warden of the Cinque Ports. By the time Tooke was elected mayor in 1605 relations had been restored through political expediency.

The three contributions in the second section look more closely at the relations between city and royal and local magnate authority. The case study of Bristol by Peter Fleming makes a startling contrast to the experiences of the Kent towns of the first section. Bristol from 1399 to 1485 was caught up in the struggles to establish a strong monarchy, culminating in the Wars of the Roses and the establishment of the Tudor dynasty. The crown was effectively the ‘feudal lord’ of the city and the lords of Berkeley were both the crown’s tenant and opposition. This very medieval scenario is countered by the growing mercantile strength of the country’s third largest city (*c.*10,000), which gave rise to a political elite who were prepared to honour their loyalty to their lord, often by accepting bribes, while ensuring that their commercial strength was not compromised.

For the Dutch towns of the major province of Holland their absent Count was not only King of Spain, but also the Holy Roman Emperor. The increasingly large urban centres (*c.*10,000-40,000) were well-placed for trade and, from the later fifteenth century, were developing strong local government dominated by their merchant elites. As the complex system of state government was dependent on agreement by all representatives the wealthier cities could have been in a strong position. However, religious divisions and the harsh treatment of heresy after the reformation gave rise to disputes between the cities and again we see the negotiation of influence through what Serge ter Braake calls ‘gift strategies’. But, within a decade of the period covered by ter Braake 1480-1558, the Dutch were in open revolt against Philip II and on their way to forming a new, republican, state.

In the Prague of 1436 to 1526, studied by Christian-Frederik Felskau, the

Bohemian city was caught up in the uncertainties of the ‘Unquiet Times’ of the transition from Jagellonian to Habsburg rule, and the aftermath of the Hussite pre-reformation. Imperial interference in the privileges and balance between the three towns (New, Old and Lesser) exacerbated the religious and political differences, but as the imperial power waned and in effect became absent, a period of political stability was achieved, not without difficulties, through reconciliation and continuity within the political elite. In essence the Old and New towns, working together against imperial impositions and despite ideological differences, were able to maintain a strong civic identity.

Although one or two of these papers do give an impression of artificially meeting the aims of the book, on the whole close reading of this impressive collection of studies brings out the similarities of experiences within the political and religious upheavals of the period across the breadth of northern Europe. Local circumstances were echoed abroad and differences could be quite acute nearer home. The one common theme that does emerge from all the studies is the perseverance of urban elites to establish themselves as bodies of influence in the face of fracturing royal, aristocratic and religious authority during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries.

ELIZABETH EDWARDS

The Medway Towns: River, Docks and Urban Life. By Sandra Dunster. xi+164 pp. 101 illustrations and maps. Victoria County History, ‘England’s Past for Everyone’ series. Phillimore 2013. Paperback, £18.99. ISBN 978 1 86077 728 8.

This splendid history of Rochester, Chatham, Gillingham and Strood from c.1550 to 1914 is the final volume in the Victoria County History (VCH) ‘England’s Past for Everyone’ series. It is a useful complement to Andrew Hann’s volume, in the same series, on the transformation of the landscape of the lower Medway published in 2009. Although Sandra Dunster, of the University of Greenwich, is the author, as with other books in the series there have been numerous local contributors whose role is duly acknowledged. The purpose of the series is to produce local studies based on solid recent scholarship, in an all-colour format, accessible to a wider readership than the high-priced large red volumes which are the characteristic mark of the VCH. This is taking the VCH message to the people. And that work continues with the recent formation of a Kent VCH Trust (which seeks financial support) which has two volumes in preparation, one on Faversham, the other on Sevenoaks in the long nineteenth century.

There are many possible approaches to writing local history, and clear

objectives and disciplined restraint have been carefully exercised by Sandra Dunster in her well-written book which deals with ‘the inter-relationships’ between the four towns as they developed and ‘the dynamic interplay between their respective inhabitants, economies and politicians’. Further, four themes run through the text: people, politics, the environment, and the economy. The scene is clearly set in the Introduction – the significance of the Medway as a conduit for trade into Kent and via the Thames to London, and Rochester with its castle, cathedral and corporate status at a bridging point on the road to the metropolis. The town was eminent by 1550, while Chatham, Gillingham, and Strood west of the river, were rural parishes dependent upon farming and fishing. There is a breadth beyond the parochial in this local past which is properly explored here, in part demonstrated by a page on ‘ethnic minorities’. The Medway and the Thames linked the County into an expanding global market; by the 1580s a very large proportion of the grain consumed in London came from Kent, the county also providing the capital with locally produced fish and ragstone for building. The development of shipbuilding in the Navy yard at Chatham, from the mid 16th century onwards, meant that increasing supplies of timber and iron came from the Wealden heartland while other materials vital to maritime business were imported from the Baltic. Over the next 150 years Chatham developed to become a small industrial town, its docks and shipbuilding stimulated by wars with Spain and The Netherlands.

As the book’s title suggests, the river and the expanding dockyards at Chatham largely dominated the economic life of the Medway towns, so it is right that several chapters emphasise their significance. At the same time due attention is given to the impact of civil war, plague, and the Dutch attack on the English fleet in the mouth of Medway during the years 1640s-80s. Rochester and Chatham were commercial rivals although the civic institutions of the older town failed to protect its ancient market rights from Chatham which continued to be governed by the vestry.

Chatham became Britain’s premier naval dockyard as result of foreign wars; by 1720 the population had grown to *c.*5,000, equal to that of Rochester, and a high brick wall surrounded the docks. The increased labour force was heavily reliant on the conduct of government finance, orders for ships, and the state of international affairs. Workers in Chatham could not escape the harsh and varying economic winds that blew within and without the kingdom, and disputes over wages and working conditions were common. Men who were laid off had to rely on ancillary work, including agriculture, and were often in debt to local women acting as money lenders.

Chatham’s role as Britain’s major operational dockyard was lost to Portsmouth and Plymouth during the 18th century owing to a change in focus of British foreign policy and regular conflicts with France. The

Medway was often difficult to navigate which prevented the fleet from getting to sea speedily. However, sizeable ships continued to be built and repaired at Chatham, for example the *Victory* which was launched in 1765, and newly built defensive lines with a military garrison guarded against a French invasion. The presence of large numbers of soldiers and sailors inevitably led to frequent public disorder. Prostitution thrived in Chatham. Serious outbreaks of cholera in 1832 and again in 1848, decades when population and urbanisation were increasing, added weight to the demands for sanitary improvement. After mid-century the age of steam, iron and then steel brought radical change to the Medway towns and villages. The railway crossed the river in 1858; the dockyards expanded northwards; brewing, engineering, cement and brickmaking industries expanded or developed; and a growth in population transformed rural Gillingham and Strood into urban areas with continuous housing tying the four towns together.

Common with all good histories, this book addresses the major issues and answers many primary questions, at the same time provoking further questions. It would have been interesting to have been told more about the supply side of the dockyards (it received 12,000 tons of timber annually by the early 19th century), more on urban reformers and the battle over local rates, and particularly more on religious belief and practice, and political parties. Both the latter tend to be treated in a way that conveys little of the impact that religious – primarily Christian – beliefs (and non-belief) had on personal lives, or of the factions and passions generated by political issues. But these are small quibbles about a text that for want of space has had to be tightly disciplined. In this book the inhabitants of the four Medway towns are fortunate to have such a sound, reliable and superbly produced and illustrated history of their communities.

DAVID KILLINGRAY

Canterbury and the Gothic Revival. By Lawrence and Marjorie Lyle. 128 pp. 42 b/w and 14 colour illustrations. The History Press, 2013. Paperback, £14.99. ISBN 978 0 7524 6294 3.

It is a pleasure to be able to include a review of this latest publication from Lawrence and Marjorie Lyle on the origins, spread and influence of the English Gothic revival in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. The first two chapters describe the rise and fall of the English Gothic through its late medieval heyday and the traumas of the post-Reformation period. But the core of the book is the complex story of the revival of Gothic. Canterbury's Gothic buildings, with much on St Augustine's College, are the central exemplars, but the discussion of the shifts and trends is far broader looking not only at other British locations, but also the importance of the establishment of churches, cathedrals and missions in

the colonies. Many of the more celebrated clergy, builders and architects cut their teeth on these undertakings. It is pleasing to see the caption to the illustration of Christchurch Cathedral is up-to-date, referring to the devastating damage in the 2011 earthquakes.

This short book is not an architectural history of Gothic, but a serendipity of the historical background underpinned by a wide and very sound knowledge of the buildings, their origins and developments. We also learn of the early secular origins of the Gothic revival with the building of 'abbeys' and 'prieories' as homes for the wealthy inspired by the romantic movement in the late eighteenth century. Throughout the story we are introduced to a wide range of characters whose lives are coloured with fascinating anecdotes demonstrating the interests and enthusiasms of the authors for the people as well as their works. Architects, archbishops and philanthropists come alive with the struggles and tensions within the Anglican Church and the influence of Catholicism in the nineteenth century. Butterfield, Beresford Hope, Pugin, Scott and Dean Alford are but a few of the influential characters who fill the pages of this extremely readable volume. The brevity of the book, taken together with the wealth of material in it, does occasionally expect rather too much background knowledge of their reader, but this may be the spur to further reading and field investigations, which must be a good thing.

ELIZABETH EDWARDS

Elizabeth Carter of Deal, 1717-1806, a Social History. By T.L. Richardson. vii+77 pp. 44 colour and b/w plates. Sandwich Local History Society, 2013. Paperback, £4.95 (£6.95 incl. p+p) from Dr F.W.G. Andrews, Hon. Sec. Sandwich Local History Society, 14 Stone Cross Lees, Sandwich, CT13 0BZ. ISBN 0-9542424-4-0.

This latest book from the fluent pen of Dr Tom Richardson is a lively and fascinating account of life in late eighteenth- and early nineteenth-century Kent (and London). A member of literary society, acquainted with all the leading literati of the day, a prolific letter writer, classicist, walker, and maker and mender of shirts, Elizabeth Carter lived her 89 years mainly in Deal, but also spent considerable time among the social delights of Canterbury and the more serious intelligentsia of London. Chapter one introduces us to this shy but formidable woman through the words of Dr Johnson: 'My old friend Mrs Carter, could make a pudding as well as translate Epictetus from the Greek and work a handkerchief as well as compose a poem'. Richardson has drawn considerable riches from her correspondence of over 40 years and produced a readable, and very well-referenced, booklet which should give great pleasure to anyone fortunate enough to discover it.

The History of Faversham in 50 Objects. 107 pp. 50 colour illustrations. The Faversham Society, 2012. Paperback £12 (£14.50 incl. p+p). ISBN 1 900214 69 5.

50 Years of the Faversham Society, 1962-2012. By Christine Rayner. 49 pp. B/w and colour illustrations throughout. The Faversham Society, 2012 Paperback £4.95 (£6.50 incl. p+p). ISBN 1 900214 70 9.

History Revealed: The Faversham Society Houses. By Sarah Pearson. 24 pp. B/w and colour illustrations throughout. The Faversham Society, 2012 Paperback £4.50 (£5.50 incl. p+p). ISBN 1 900214 71 7.

[All from Fleur Bookshop, 10-13 Preston Street, Faversham, ME13 8NS, 01795-534542 or email: ticfavershamsociety@btinternet.com.]

Three very different publications celebrating fifty years of the Faversham Society.

The History of Faversham in 50 Objects is a fascinating and eclectic collection of artefacts ranging from early archaeological finds to the latest DVDs of the town's history. Each 'object' has a two-page spread for text and illustration presented by a variety of local experts. The entries are brief and clear and aimed at the interested amateur. Objects include books, clothing, industrial and agricultural implements, banknotes, posters, standing buildings, and the bullets used by Sir William Courtenay in the Battle of Bossenden Wood and Lord Harris' gold ticket – his permit to travel on the London, Chatham and Dover Railway. The entries by Patricia Reid deserve mention for their clarity and sound historical and archaeological base.

50 years of the Faversham Society, 1962-2012, is a celebration of the efforts and achievements of the original members, many of whom are still closely involved, and of the ongoing and changing membership and their aspirations. Without the Society much of the town and its environs now so appreciated by residents, newcomers and visitors would not be recognisable. The achievements of the Society are listed at the end of the booklet. It is of course a self-congratulatory production which strives to include as many of those involved over the years as possible. It does however, show a realistic awareness that there are always new and different challenges to be met. But for all that is still being done, it is the story of the earliest members and their vision and persistence that really inspires, and their sometimes rose-tinted view of the 'community' can be forgiven.

One of the most recent of the Society's achievements is the completion of the purchase and refurbishment of the, now, three properties it owns at 10/11, 12 and 13 Preston Street. In *History Revealed: The Faversham Society Houses* Sarah Pearson has written a very readable and erudite

study of the buildings with brief histories of their development and their place in the history of Preston Street and the town. It is well illustrated throughout with useful maps, plans and photographs of surviving features. It will serve equally well as a contribution to Faversham's and the Faversham Society's history, and as an introduction to the structure and development of timber-framed buildings from the medieval to the present day.

The Life They Left Behind. Those Who Lost Their Lives 1914-18, 1939-1945. Remembrance: the Holy Trinity War Memorial East Peckham, Kent. By Margaret Lawrence. iv+60 pp. 31 b/w photographs. East Peckham Parish Council, 2012. Paperback, £10 (email: p.lawrence.801@btinternet.com. Proceeds to Help for Heroes). ISBN 978-0-9524828-1-9.

Thorough research has enabled Margaret Lawrence to put together a comprehensive collection of not only those lost to the two world wars, and commemorated on the war memorial and every year at the Remembrance service, but also of all those who served, together with the memories and experiences of those left behind, and the world everyone faced during and after the wars. It is an honest and straightforward compilation and, although Lawrence admits the research was emotional, she avoids sentimentality allowing the people, events and photographs to speak for themselves.

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