

BOOK REVIEWS

Late Medieval Ipswich: Trade and Industry. By Nicholas R. Amor.
xi + 300 pp, plates, figures, maps, tables, appendices, bibliography, index.
Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2011. ISBN 978-1-84383-673-5. Price: £50 hb.

This first-class, pathbreaking study of a very complex hundred years or so in the economic and social history of Ipswich is, as it should be noted at the outset, the work of a non-professional historian. Nicholas Amor, who appears from his acknowledgements to be a local solicitor, describes his book as 'the culmination of twenty happy years spent studying late medieval Suffolk'. It has been time well-spent: the disparaging term 'amateur historian', with its negative connotations, finds no place in a critical assessment of what Amor has produced over two decades: a meticulously researched and notably well-written examination of the 'trade and industry' – very broadly defined – of late medieval (in effect, fifteenth-century) Ipswich.

The work is divided into eight chapters which ably cover the period under review. A lengthy Introduction and the first two chapters set Ipswich in its early fifteenth-century context; the subsequent chapters detail the successive phases of prosperity, mid-century decline – the 'Great Slump', and late fifteenth-century recovery, through which the town passed. Amor's intention, in all this, was to examine what he terms 'the fortunes of the town' in the late Middle Ages, and particularly in the fifteenth century, that century so much beloved by pioneering economic historians such as Postan and Power, and the period in which, as he observes, 'the modern town of Ipswich was first taking shape'. At the beginning of the century, Amor rightly observes, England's – and by definition Ipswich's – economy was relatively undeveloped and unsophisticated, prompting comparison with today's Third World in its dependence on the export of raw materials, and with a very limited range of consumer goods being brought in from abroad. By the end of the century all this had changed, and Amor perceptively illustrates the supply-side revolution in terms of local consumption – 'feather beds and pewter plates' – which had thus come about.

Amor's book will be of particular interest to maritime historians, especially to students of the history of England's fisheries. In Amor's study, as in the daily economic life of what he defines as 'England's oldest port', the sea is ever-present. As with its northern counterpart of Hull, links with the leading fifteenth-century ports of the Low Countries – Bruges, Antwerp, Middelburg, Dordrecht – across the narrow North Sea, as well as with the Baltic, were both extensive and close, and Amor illuminates this with statistics regarding alien residents of the port in the later part of the century: by 1483 there were at least 84 alien residents, of which 70 came from the Low Countries, an influx which, as Amor points out, was in part powered by the ferocious civil wars which followed on the death of Charles the Bold of Burgundy in 1477 and the collapse of the late-medieval Burgundian state.

There is also much of value in Amor's book on the fifteenth-century fishing industry, with a transition from herring, which by 1491/2 accounted for only 3 per cent of the catch, to marine white fish, the growing demand for which encouraged local fishermen/entrepreneurs to brave the cold weather and rough seas around Iceland. Such was the case with Henry Gotkens, making his will in 1487, and in it ensuring that his partner Henry Withtenbek should 'have his share of those fish which we carried together from Naudia' – *sic*; not explained – 'just as is written in our charter, and ... the said Henry shall have of my part 300 fish, *just as we agreed in Iceland* [reviewer's italics]'.

The Appendixes to the volume are also of great utility for the prosopography of fifteenth-century Ipswich, in particular Appendix 3 (pp. 236–68), a richly annotated list of ‘Fifteenth-century Ipswich People mentioned in the Text’, such as Thomas Coke (or Cok), in the 1480s a mariner, ale seller, holder of municipal office, tax collector and litigant, or his contemporary Richard Gosse, merchant in overseas trade and fish importer, innkeeper and ale-seller (again!), and holder of high municipal office.

An extensive Bibliography (pp. 279–88) gives a clear indication of the depth of Amor’s researches: apart from detailed manuscript and documentary research in the British Library, the Public Record Office (now mistakenly rebranded as The National Archives – which national archive among dozens?, one wonders), and, of course, the voluminous collections of the Suffolk Record Office at Ipswich, and a raft of printed primary sources, the extensive list of printed secondary sources appear to be remarkably complete and full, at least in terms of the English-language material.

All in all, Amor’s book is a welcome addition to the standard literature on the economic history of East Anglia in the later medieval and early modern eras. But the book goes further. Historians of the fifteenth century, that most difficult century to come to terms with in almost whatever field one thinks of, from England to the Ottoman Empire and China, will gain much from the book’s wide-ranging insights and connections, as noted above. But, overall, it provides valuable and detailed insights on the town’s coasting and overseas trade for the century or so preceding N.J. Williams’s magisterial *The Maritime Trade of the East Anglian Ports 1550–1590* (1988). Equally, Amor’s finely-drawn portraits of fifteenth-century Ipswich merchants not only precede by a century John Webb’s classic biography of ‘Great Tooley of Ipswich’, but illuminate the activities and mentalities of even later Ipswich figures now slowly coming into focus, such as the Jacobean merchant and entrepreneur William Blois, whose still unpublished account book, currently being worked on by the present reviewer, sheds much light on the Newfoundland fisheries and the Mediterranean dried fish trade in the first decades of the seventeenth century.

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Records of the Churchwardens of Mildenhall. (Suffolk Records Society vol. LIV).
 Edited by Judith Middleton Stewart. lxxiii + 243 pp, 9 b&w pls, maps and tables.
 Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2011. ISBN 978-0-85115-578-4. Price: £35 hb.

Everyone interested in our county’s medieval and early modern history owes an enormous debt to Judith Middleton-Stewart for her life’s work in exploring the spiritual dimension of those times, and will find much of interest in her final volume, on the *Records of the Churchwardens of Mildenhall*, which was published last year by the Suffolk Records Society. Judith’s love of her childhood home town shines through when she describes Mildenhall, as portrayed in the book, as ‘a buoyant Christian community rather than one clogged by redundant priests and a suspicious laity’.

Her volume begins with an introduction which puts the records in context, and describes the church building, its liturgical necessities, local clergy, ways in which the congregation remembered their dead, the bells, the clock, drinkings and drama. The principal records contained in the book are Collections for the period 1446 to 1454, and Accounts for the period 1503 to 1553, which were kept by the churchwardens, as representatives of

parishioners who contributed to the upkeep of the church and its contents. Judith also includes fifty-five fifteenth- and sixteenth-century wills of those same parishioners, as well as their brief biographical details, a glossary and a detailed index.

The Collections record receipts of extra funding for specific projects, and refer to the many churchales that were organised for this purpose. These were 'the pre-Reformation's answer to today's coffee mornings, but were probably more fun'. The only folio setting out items of expenditure, from 1449, suggests that much of the money raised was spent on the church bells.

The Accounts are more comprehensive records of both income and expenditure. Early on they mention a play of Saint Thomas Beckett, presented in 1505 in the Hall Yard, which must have drawn an appreciative audience since it raised the substantial sum of seven pounds for church funds. Anyone who has ever had responsibility for an IT budget will sympathise with the churchwardens, who incurred regular expenditure on repairs to the cutting edge technology of their day, namely the church clock. Later accounts reflect the coming of the Reformation which, particularly during the reign of King Edward VI, swept away so much of English Catholicism. Among the most poignant items are 18s 6d paid to Mother Tylney for the boarding of the masons and the glazier who whitewashed over the wall paintings, and replaced the stained glass with plain glass windows. As a means of drawing the congregation closer to God, these images gave way to books of the new Protestant religion, including the Paraphrases of Erasmus, which was purchased in 1548/9 for 5s 4d, as well as various copies of 'a boke of the new order' which came to be known as the Book of Common Prayer.

While Judith's fine volume will be of principal interest to church historians, we heathens, who are more interested in the material world of the Middle Ages, will enjoy reading the wills. They show that parishioners were mentioning, with increasing frequency, their prized possessions, especially furniture, bedding, clothes, pots and pans, silver spoons and pewter ware. Maybe it was this interest in material goods that helped undermine an older order which relied so heavily on churchales, and the other outward signs of community spirit, referred to in the churchwardens' records.

NICHOLAS R. AMOR

The Bohun of Fressingfield Cartulary. (Suffolk Charters XIX).

Edited by Bridget Wells-Furby. ix + 230 pp, fig. and maps. Woodbridge:

The Boydell Press, 2011. ISBN 978-1-84383-690-2. Price: £30 hb.

There are not many lay cartularies: this is one of them. It is also unusual because of the man who compiled it: Edmund Bohun (d. 1500). He came of Fressingfield farming stock but, as a younger son, made his career in the Exchequer at Westminster; he was a clerk there in 1473 and by 1490 was an auditor. He put together the cartulary, principally of fourteenth-century deeds, in the 1490s. The editor has written a pithy introduction to these which gives us a view into the land transactions of the busy and complicated community of a Suffolk village. Edmund's father, John (d. 1458), was an incomer at Fressingfield, but he established himself there, acquiring both property and friends. There was nothing untoward about this: there was much shifting about of families in the countryside after the Black Death, when good land became available at moderate prices. John did not, however, achieve gentility. It was his son Edmund who did that, though it should be said that while he too bought important real estate in Fressingfield he never set himself up as a country gentleman as, for example, did another man of business, John Tasburgh at South Elmham and Flixton: John bought a small manor, Edmund never bothered. We must presume he was too busy at the seat of government to want

to do so, for there is no doubt he had the means. Exchequer personnel got plenty of 'bonuses': Edmund was lending money to John Paston III as early as 1476. How he got his start remains unclear; the editor suggests John de la Pole, earl of Suffolk, but he was a nonentity at both a national and a local level; it was his redoubtable mother, Alice Chaucer, who ran the show in East Anglia, and it may have been one or other of the talented group of her councillors who saw the promise in the young Edmund. There is more to be said of him, for example that he did not disdain taking fees locally, and that he is very likely the author of an Exchequer handbook, which has at its head 'per Edmundum Bohun' and which is now in the Suffolk Record Office at Ipswich (SROI, HD 1538/87). I have written more about the compiler of the cartulary than of its contents; these are impeccably presented by an editor who knows her stuff. There are three instructive maps. The book has been attractively produced by the Boydell Press and is a credit to the Suffolk Records Society, and to all those concerned in its conception, lengthy gestation, and birth.

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