

BOOK REVIEWS

The Business of the Suffolk Parish: 1558–1625. By David Dymond. x + 118pp., plates, glossary, bibliography, index. The Suffolk Institute of Archaeology and History, 2018. ISBN 978 0 9521390 7 2. Price £10 pb.

The Business of the Suffolk Parish: 1558–1625 is purported to be David Dymond's 'last book'. It is a brief yet penetrating study of ways in which parishes initiated and coped with numerous changes in religious worship and parish organisation imposed and altered during the reigns of Henry VIII, Edward VI and Mary, and worked out in the reigns of Elizabeth and James. This erudite yet accessible discussion is based mostly on churchwardens' accounts, some of which have been published, such as those of Boxford (edited by Peter Northeast) and Cratfield (edited by W. Holland in 1895), but many are currently unpublished, such as those of Mendlesham and Wattisfield. In some localities the accounts were described as 'town books', for example Bardwell, because they included accounts of other local officers, as well as churchwardens. In all, accounts from fifteen communities across Suffolk have been used, ranging from small villages to substantial market towns.

A brief introduction to parish government is followed by a discussion of the office of churchwarden and the two main roles that they played: on the one hand they were responsible for maintaining the church and its services, the churchyard and all parish possessions, on the other they were expected to implement at local level the policies of central government (p. 7). Their surviving accounts take a variety of forms including rough working accounts, fair copies, and composite accounts not only of the wardens but also of other parish officers, such as constables and overseers of the poor. The ensuing text weaves together examples from various parishes to construct the immediate post-Reformation 'business of the Suffolk parish'.

Regarding the ordering of services and the church itself, there are sections on, for example, 'Maintaining the church internally' and 'Bells, clocks and chimes'. 'Another liturgical revolution' discusses not only changes that were wrought on fixtures and fittings but also books that had to be provided, in particular the *Book of Common Prayer* and John Foxe's *Book of Martyrs*. The text here is illustrated with pictures of the relevant publications still in the cathedral library in Bury St Edmunds. 'Sitting in church' discusses the installation of seating, which sometimes took place piecemeal fashion over time. One motive was 'to keep parishioners under control and stop them from walking about and talking during services' (p. 56).

During the 'Tudor century' the parish became a unit of civil administration, thus there are sections on 'Purveyance', 'Education', 'Relieving the poor' and 'Law and order'. The latter included providing and maintaining local instruments of punishment such as stocks and pillories, illustrated by a picture of the stocks and whipping post at Ufford, located by the churchyard gate (p. 72). As well as aiding the poor, parishes, via 'watchers' or carers, also gave basic medical treatment to the sick and injured (see 'Medical treatment'). Churchwardens, on behalf of their parish, often became embroiled in law suits and records generated by the courts are additional rich sources of information about early modern parishioners' activities. 'Military defence' shows parishes shouldering responsibilities in defence of the realm. From Muster Rolls we know about able-bodied local men and the weapons that were available to them; churchwardens' accounts give details of military equipment owned by the parish. Amazingly, the armour belonging to the parish at Mendlesham is still on the church premises, in a locked vestry above the north porch (picture on p. 78).

In conclusion David notes that wardens had to be 'reasonably good communicators and negotiators, knowledgeable about local affairs and financially competent' (p. 89). Although it

is clear that many of their records have been destroyed, for example, accounts are rarely written up in date order, they are simply a list drawn up at the end of the year, nevertheless enough survive to demonstrate the demanding nature of their task, and by implication ‘the main talking-points and anxieties of parishioners’ (p. 90).

A comprehensive glossary defines unfamiliar words and ‘translates’ early modern Suffolk dialect words into modern English. I particularly like ‘“boot leggs, a payer of”: unofficial alcohol costing 6d, consumed by masons when in 1605 the tower at Metfield was being repaired’. The text is lavishly illustrated not only with modern photographs of surviving medieval and early modern furnishings and fittings in Suffolk parish churches, but also with reproductions of pages of early modern manuscripts and printed artefacts. The text is written as a long essay, with side-headings and continuous footnotes.

As well as being of general interest to local historians of Suffolk, the date-span of the book means that it will be of interest to historians of religion in England. Most published churchwardens’ accounts are from the years during which the Reformation and brief Counter-Reformation were enacted; this study, on the other hand, covers the activities of parishes and their wardens during succeeding decades when times were uncertain (Who would the queen marry? Who would succeed her?) and when new policies and strategies had to be implemented and established.

HEATHER FALVEY

Love and Dishonour in Elizabethan England: Two Families and a Failed Marriage.

By Ralph Houlbrooke. xx + 273pp., plates, bibliography, index. Woodbridge:

The Boydell Press, 2018. ISBN 978 1 78327 240 2. Price £50 hb.

Ralph Houlbrooke’s study of the failure of the marriage of Charles Forth of Butley and Elizabeth Jerningham of Somerleyton between 1582 and 1593 is a hugely important contribution to the historiography of early modern Suffolk. The book is not just a microhistorical study of a single case in the Court of Requests, but also a case study of two very different Suffolk families at a critical time in the county’s history. The book is structured in three parts. The first introduces the two families and, in more detail, Elizabeth Jerningham’s father John Jerningham of Somerleyton. The second part examines the clandestine marriage itself and its breakdown, based on an analysis of the proceedings of cases brought in the Court of Requests. The final part of the book looks at the aftermath of the marriage’s collapse, before Houlbrooke draws his conclusions.

Houlbrooke provides an account of the Jerningham family that reaches back to the pre-Reformation period. The first chapter throws light on the ‘prehistory’ of East Anglia’s close-knit network of gentry recusant families – the first marriage between the Jerninghams and Bedingfields, for example, occurred before 1515 (p. 22). Long before 1559, East Anglia had a ready-made network of religious conservatives ready to become recusants. Houlbrooke shows that the duke of Norfolk’s replacement of the earl of Oxford as the principal magnate in East Anglia catapulted the Jerninghams to a position of influence. Yet Henry Jerningham’s key role in Mary Tudor’s successful bid for the throne in July 1553 really established the family’s political significance (pp. 29–34).

Houlbrooke concludes that Queen Elizabeth’s progress of 1578 failed to stamp out East Anglian recusancy completely because Thomas Cornwallis and Henry Jerningham (who dominated Lothingland) were not targeted (p. 41). Houlbrooke then turns his attention to Elizabeth Jerningham’s father, the hapless John Jerningham of Somerleyton. John became

involved in the plot to free the duke of Norfolk in 1570; Houlbrooke speculates that the rebels may have envisaged Lothingland as a potential landing place for the forces of the duke of Alba (p. 60). Jerningham was imprisoned in the Tower of London, but released on payment of a fine. The first trace of a relationship between the Jerningham and Forth families occurs at this time, when Philologus Forth of Hadleigh appeared as one of John Jerningham's sureties for payment of a fine of 500 marks (p. 61).

Houlbrooke speculates that when John visited Spain in 1575 he was serving as 'a sort of scout or outrider' for the English ambassador Sir Henry Cobham, who arrived in Spain shortly afterwards (p. 67). If John was secretly acting on behalf of Elizabeth's government it did his personal finances no good, as he was forced to alienate a number of manors to his Bedingfield relatives (pp. 68–9). By 1581, John was virtually begging for relief from influential friends (p. 71). Houlbrooke paints a picture of a man who ultimately navigated the difficult waters of Elizabethan recusancy without success, and ended his life in obscurity and penury. The contrast between the decayed Jerninghams of Somerleyton and the up-and-coming Forths of Butley Priory could not have been greater.

Houlbrooke concludes that, in all likelihood, Charles Forth first met Elizabeth Jerningham when he was living in Norwich and she with her cousins at Costessey Hall (p. 116). Elizabeth's mother was the key mover behind the 'enticement' of Charles Forth into a secret match. Houlbrooke's suggestion that the mysterious man in a 'blueish coat' who solemnised the clandestine marriage was the Jerningham family's chaplain John Dereham is plausible (p. 122). The marriage flouted social convention because it circumvented parental consent and prevented the Forths making a proper marriage settlement with the Jerninghams. Instead, friends of Elizabeth Jerningham raised a retrospective dowry of £300 for her – a sum that Charles's father considered so derisory that he refused to accept it (p. 133). Houlbrooke lays much of the blame for the failure of the marriage on Philologus Forth's refusal to accept this portion (p. 232).

In 1588 Elizabeth left Butley and went to stay with her sister Frances Bedingfield. Houlbrooke speculates that the anticipated Spanish invasion of England and overthrow of the Protestant faith may have encouraged Elizabeth to stay with Catholic relatives (p. 147). Elizabeth gave birth to a daughter, but Charles suspected he was not the father. Elizabeth eventually returned to Butley in 1592, but then left while the Forths were at a sermon. As Houlbrooke observes, 'Her choice of this moment was cruelly apt, a gesture that seems to symbolise her rejection of the godly household regime of the Forths at Butley' (p. 157). When Elizabeth gave birth to another son, Francis, Charles was adamant it was not his and fled the country, dying before the end of 1593.

Both Elizabeth Jerningham and her mother defied the patriarchal norms of Tudor society – Elizabeth's mother because she arranged the marriage and Elizabeth because she acted on her own initiative to leave her husband's household and refused to return to his bed. One question that the evidence presented by Houlbrooke fails to resolve, in spite of its richness, is the true extent to which religion played a role in the breakdown of the couple's relationship. Houlbrooke occasionally relies on surprisingly old scholarship dating back to the 1960s and 70s, especially in his discussion of recusancy. There is a rich and vibrant contemporary debate on issues surrounding the definition and boundaries of Catholic identity in Elizabethan England. Houlbrooke's statement that 'Catholics in England lacked leadership and clear guidance' in the 1560s (p. 13) is belied by the clear influence of the Jerningham family's chaplain John Dereham, and doctoral work currently being undertaken by Frederick Smith at Cambridge University is showing that former cathedral clergy played a key role in the early development of recusancy in the 1560s. Nevertheless, this book is first-rate scholarship and essential reading for anyone interested in the gentry of early modern Suffolk.

The Restoration of Blythburgh Church, 1881–1906: The Dispute between the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings and the Blythburgh Church Restoration Committee. (Suffolk Records Society vol. 60). Edited by Alan Mackley. lix + 313 pp., plates, glossary, bibliography, index. Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2017. ISBN 978 1 78327 891 3. Price £25 hb.

For depopulated and frequently impoverished villages, maintaining their great medieval churches has long seemed an albatross no dispensation would remove. The very buildings might appear as acts of ‘hubris’ instead of piety. Intervention by well-meaning metropolitan aesthetes could easily exacerbate feelings.

Such a scenario may be inferred from Dr Mackley’s thorough presentation of ‘The Dispute’ between preservationists and restorers that extended over twenty-five years in volume 60 of the General Series published by the Suffolk Records Society. Familiar to present-day parishioners having to meet the demands of English Heritage, the narrative presents a range of conflict. On one side were the parishioners seeking no more than a secure church roof over their heads. With them, the recently instituted vicar, Henry Sykes, was energetic, high-handed and perhaps devious. Sir John Blois, the patron, would read *The Times* during sermons and was less than enthusiastic about church maintenance. On the other was the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings (SPAB) with a manifesto written by William Morris in 1877, the year Sykes was ordained, that stated ‘the nineteenth century has no style of its own’ and, in the name of restoration, would produce ‘a lifeless and feeble forgery’.

Hardly likely to endear itself to architects, the SPAB argued for ‘Protection in the place of Restoration’ on grounds ‘that modern art cannot meddle with [the past] without destroying’. It did not become involved with Blythburgh until 1882, some months after a committee for restoration had been formed, and was ‘alarmed’ that G.E. Street, an architect of ‘High Victorian’ taste (p. xxv), had been appointed. Street’s death left his son, Arthur, to present the report and proposed works and to succeed him. Sykes agreed to put a report by the SPAB before his committee. He claimed to have done so in October 1882 but there is no reference in the minutes. At a meeting in December Sykes overruled a ‘preservationist’ proposal. He later wrote of the SPAB as ‘an irresponsible body of men’. The only hindrance to the restoration that he clearly had in mind was its cost.

Equally familiar will be the fund-raising endeavours – in those days without the inflationary problems of today – that fall short of targets. Some of these had the advantage of wealthy or royal patronage; many were managed by Henry Sykes. In an attempt to increase donations he may even have been, as Dr Mackley hints, the *agent-provocateur* ‘Churchman’ who attacked the niggardly contribution of Sir John Blois. He also seems to have been determined to push through the proposals of his committee’s chosen architect despite the early, detailed specification of repairs rather than restoration made on behalf of the SPAB. He resigned the living for one in Norfolk in 1885 but this could not halt the work.

Continued correspondence tends to confirm entrenched views as successive patrons, vicars and churchwardens participate. An attempt to involve HRH Princess Louise, daughter of Queen Victoria, was fraught with risk for the SPAB position, as her equerry Probert, was ‘a Suffolk man and ... may have taken the side of the committee’. In spite of positive signs the committee confirmed its position, ‘against both Prince Frederick’s and my advice’ (p.128) wrote a frustrated Sir Ralph Blois, who had succeeded Sir John in 1888 and was more sympathetic to the SPAB. Prince Frederick Duleep Singh, MVO, TD, FSA, second or third son of the deposed Maharaja of Lahore (the ‘Black Prince’) and a supporter of the SPAB, had joined the Blythburgh committee late in 1905 hoping, in his own words, ‘to stop the “restoration” and other waste of money proposed.’ This was early in 1906, when he resigned

his membership and, as Dr Mackley notes, ‘the SPAB lost the battle’.

Nonetheless, with insufficient funds to carry out its wishes, the committee eventually lost the war: William Weir, architect and committee member of SPAB was later appointed to the Diocesan Advisory Committee and continued to write reports on Blythburgh in 1926, 1933, 1934 and 1947. These are quoted in Appendix A, where a final report of later than 1950, when Weir died, summarises the condition of Blythburgh church very much as it may be seen today.

The book can be read as an epistolary novel: its complex characters, schemes and deceptions suggest Henry James rather than Coleridge’s simple Mariner. It might well tempt a maker of documentary drama, especially as there are very helpful ‘Notes on People’ among the four appendices.

Interesting illustrations in both colour and monotone as well as detailed quotations of work proposed and fund-raising accounts add to the value of this handsome volume, enhancing the growing number of studies that contribute to the history of Suffolk churches. It is a fitting Diamond Jubilee celebration of the Suffolk Records Society.

JOHN PELLING

St Edmund and the Vikings 869 to 1066. By Joseph C.W. Mason. 158 pp., maps, plates, gazetteer, bibliography, index. Norwich: Lasse Press, 2018. ISBN 978 1 9997752 1 6. Price £12 pb.

Edmund: In search of England’s Lost King. By Francis Young. 256 pp., maps, plates, bibliography, index. London: IB Tauris, 2018. ISBN 978 1 7883117 9 3. Price £20 hb.

The month of April this year saw the publication of two books on St Edmund. In one, Joseph Mason looks in detail at the early years leading up to the Norman invasion and, linking the three main sources to church dedications and oral tradition, seeks to support his hypothesis that Edmund was killed at Hellesdon outside Norwich and that the body was guarded by nuns close by at the small village of Lyng. Much of his argument is based on an analysis of church dedications, more numerous in Norfolk than anywhere else in the country, although he acknowledges the dangers of doing this. He also contributes a novel theory for the myth of the head crying out to his searchers, suggesting that they mistook the wolf for Edmund’s loyal guard dog and the dog’s crying for the saint crying out ‘over here’. He demonstrates a high correlation between churches dedicated to St Edmund and watercourses, suggesting that the Danes used the rivers as their main way into the countryside after the battle at Hellesdon and that the churches with dedications to the saint represent places where he authored miracles. In suggesting a Norfolk setting for the life and death of Edmund, he discounts the potential Suffolk locations for the saint’s death, namely Bradfield St Clare and Hoxne, perhaps a little too hastily, and his account concludes with the arrival of the body at Bury St Edmunds, therefore without need to undertake analysis of any later authors.

Francis Young’s account, on the other hand, argues strongly for the site of Edmund’s death being Bradfield St Clare, near to Bury St Edmunds. Interestingly, he uses the same sources and evidence as Mason, but with perhaps more incisive argument. Unlike Mason, he cites the recent discovery by metal detectorists of a ninth century *aestel*, possibly of a royal source, in a field at Drinkstone, close to Bradfield. Young, born and bred in Bury St Edmunds, is concerned, however, more on where the king saint might be buried today, and constructs his theory on all the available evidence with the intrigue and pace of a detective novel. Along the

way he attempts to piece together the history of the shrine and the travels of the body, during which he assesses the various alternative ideas that have emerged over the years as to what happened to the body itself. He finally arrives at a single conclusion which is that St Edmund's body is most likely to reside in an iron coffin under the tennis courts which have been built over the monks' cemetery in the Abbey ruins at Bury St Edmunds.

Both books reflect on the speed with which St Edmund was regarded as a saint by both the Angles and the conquering Danes, appearing as little as thirty years after his death on locally minted coinage. Both books also reflect on the part played by miracles apparently performed by the dead king in the subsequent conversion of the Danes to the Christian faith. Mason focusses on the significance of Edmund being a virgin king and on his portrayal as an English St Sebastian, a saint who was also killed by an army of occupation for refusing to deny his faith. For Young, it is the incorruptible nature of the body in later years and this impact on his sainthood which is more important and he compares him to his near contemporary St Cuthbert, resting in Durham cathedral. Young notes how many later English rulers thought it important to visit the shrine, perhaps to give greater legitimacy to their own power, as well as to St Edmund himself as a powerful national rallying figure. Both agree that Edmund was foremost amongst the English martyrs in the early Middle Ages; Young therefore asserts that his body would neither have been dismembered, the fate of many martyrs in the Middle Ages, nor discarded or ignored. He simply went out of fashion somewhere in the sixteenth century, along with pilgrimages in general, after the abolition of the doctrine of purgatory.

Young points out that, unlike Richard III who was discovered in 2012 under a car park in the city of Leicester, Edmund has no known relatives and so there is no possibility of corroborating any buried evidence by matching modern DNA. We can only hope that if his body is found in Bury, he was buried with an indisputable calling card of some sort.

TONY REDMAN

Maritime Suffolk. By Robert Malster. xv + 300pp., references, bibliography, index.
Woodbridge: Poppyland Publishing, 2017. ISBN 978 1 909796 36 2.
Price: £19.95 pb.

In the preface to his book, Robert Malster informs readers that its publication completes his trilogy on the maritime history of East Anglia, a life-time project involving sixty years of research. The author's diligence and depth of knowledge are evident throughout the book, most penetratingly in the wealth of detail about individual ships, their crews and the regional fishing industry. There is scarcely a page without a picture or map, mainly drawn from the author's own collection of photographs, engravings and reproductions of paintings. Most of these images are necessarily monochrome, contrasting nicely with the full-colour photographs taken in more recent years, giving a sense of pictorial history to accompany the text.

The book is arranged in twenty-one chapters, beginning with 'Saxon Seamen' and ending with 'The Port of Felixstowe', the early chronological chapters giving way to a more thematic approach; each chapter can be read as a self-contained vignette, a facet of the entire complex history of the area. The result is slightly unbalanced, however, with a mere five illustrated pages on the early Scandinavian settlers, moving swiftly through the Romans and the Sutton Hoo burial mounds. The reader then jumps to read about the construction of warships used to repel the French invaders in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, where the author's extensive knowledge of early ship-building and the associated costings adds interest to these short early chapters.

The narrative really gets underway with the introduction of the commercial history of this coast in chapter three; trading and fishing are where Malster's focus of interest is located, and in this long chapter he provides an account of the trade in coal from Newcastle to East Anglia and hay from Suffolk to London as far back as the sixteenth century, to include examples of the tolls paid to the early port authorities on the unloading of cargoes from Suffolk vessels. The attention to detail is impressive and in this chapter we are presented with a range of factual material (198 visits to the Tyne by Dunwich ships between 1508–1511), anecdote (the dying words of a sailor on the *Mary Anne* from Aldeburgh in 1559) to surmise (perhaps flint cobbles from Dunwich beach were used to pave the streets of Newcastle), although sometimes it's difficult to disaggregate fact from informed supposition.

Three chapters can be considered as case studies of specific parts of the region: the old port of Orwell (chapter 4), the 'life of a river' in the nineteenth century (chapter 12) and the modern port of Felixstowe (chapter 21). When read alongside the chapter exploring the navigation of the Stour as far as Sudbury (chapter 13) and the problems caused by the eventual silting up of rivers and harbours, we are presented with a clearly emerging picture of the changing shape of the Suffolk coast and its ports, rivers and estuaries, which form both the natural and the man-made backdrop to the developing industries of the region and, in many cases, their sad decline. This cycle of growth and decay is particularly clearly addressed in chapters nineteen and twenty, which chronicle the history of shipbuilding in the area, from the East Anglian shipbuilders who were impressed to build warships for Henry VIII in Woolwich, through the growth of this industry in Ipswich, Aldeburgh and Woodbridge, to the closing of the last major yards, Richards Shipbuilders and Brooke Marine, towards the end of the twentieth century. Malster tells us rather wistfully that although there is still some trade in the refitting of ships in Lowestoft, 'it seems extremely unlikely that large ships will ever again be built in the county' (p. 259). The following chapter begins with the bold statement that the Port of Felixstowe is 'Britain's busiest container port, used by the world's largest merchant ships' (p. 261). History marches on!

The author reveals both an understanding of, and empathy with, the lives of the men who lived and worked in the region: lifeboatmen, fishermen and merchant seamen, of whom he writes, 'Those who went to sea formed a distinct class of their own, distinguished from other working people not only by their employment but by their wider experience of the world, however imperfect their understanding of that world may have been' (p. 155). His chapters on their working conditions both at sea and on land are rich in textual detail and images; he recognises the hazards they faced and the too-frequent early deaths that they suffered, presenting their stories to the reader vividly and with feeling.

The longest chapter in the book (chapter 18) is on the herring fishery of Lowestoft and Malster's passion for the industry is in evidence here, as he takes the reader through its history, beginning with the story of Robert Gylbank the elder, who willed his 'fish house and salthouse beneath the cliff' to his son Thomas, listing also his three ferry boats 'along with appurtenances that belong to them' and his fishing boat, the *Anthonie* 'with all her tackle'. A fascinating section of this chapter concerns the arrival of the Scots in the 1850s, fishermen who came with their boats and the women who came to process the fish, an annual trade that continued until the mid-twentieth century. Again, he ends the chapter on a dying note: 'And then it was all history: the herring fishery was no more' (p. 225).

The book's factual information and copious anecdotes are generally well-referenced, although sometimes it would have been helpful to access more specific detail. An example of this occurs on p. 17 where there is a boxed account of the will of a dying seaman, referenced only as SROI plus document number, but with no further information or key to abbreviations to enlighten the general reader. It would be interesting to know the extent to which the on-board conversations

here were reported by the peers of the unfortunate man, or whether they were the fictional re-imaginings of a later writer. This may appear to be a minor cavil but such stories, along with the lack of date attribution of many of the pictures in this book, can prove frustrating. The bibliography is extensive although, like the references, the layout is slightly unorthodox. The general index is adequate and there is a useful additional index of vessels named in the text.

Perhaps inevitably this is the story of the *men* of Suffolk, their hardships and their bravery. Apart from the Scottish women who worked in the herring fishery and the beetsters, skilled repairers of fishing nets, the only women featured here are those few who, like Elizabeth Cordwell of Thorpe, were the beneficiaries of shares in fishing boats on the deaths of their husbands. In his preface the author apologises for the possible disappointment of readers whose particular interests have been left out, but the part played by the mothers, wives and families of the seafarers could have found a place without changing the focus of the book; indeed, it would have further enriched Malster's work. Perhaps there is now the need for a work that explores the contribution of women to the development of maritime Suffolk.

JUDITH ROBERTS

'A Handsome and Substantial Building ...'. A History of Bury St Edmunds Corn Exchange. By John Orbell. vi + 64pp., plates, appendices, tables, index. Ixworth: Taylor's End Press, 2017. ISBN 978 0 9566111 2 3. Price: £14 pb.

This monograph provides a fascinating overview of the history of the corn exchange buildings in Bury St Edmunds. The author is local historian John Orbell, whose father was a corn merchant at the Corn Exchange, and he vividly describes his memories of making his way 'across the Exchange's trading floor amidst huddles of darkly clad men in cloth caps or trilbies, enveloped in the swirling fog of tobacco smoke'. No doubt these memories, along with the knowledge that his grandfather and great-grandfather also sold their grain at the Corn Exchange, helped to provide the motivation to carry out the extensive research of the various sources of records in the Suffolk Record Office in Bury St Edmunds which have informed this book.

It is worth noting at the outset that the existence of a corn exchange in Bury predates the building now known as the Corn Exchange. The chapters of the book reflect this, with the first chapter describing how the early development of corn trading in the town was originally carried out on the ground floor of the market cross, which Robert Adam had remodelled in 1774. The town's first purpose-built corn exchange building, in fact the 'handsome and substantial building' referred to in the title, was originally constructed in the 1830s. The Bury Corporation had decided that Bury, in keeping with all the other major East Anglian towns of that time, needed to have a purpose-built corn exchange, and the costs were largely met by the Corporation after an attempt at encouraging private funding failed to generate enough capital. The building was constructed by a Stowmarket building firm 'despite protests from Bury builders', and was completed in 1837. The 3700 square-foot trading hall provided capacity for fifty-eight stands initially, growing steadily year on year. Unfortunately during this time the Corporation found itself in dire straits financially, partly due to the costs of building the exchange, for several years between 1841 and 1845 the ratepayers had to make up the shortfall, and as Orbell puts it 'the proud borough had been utterly humiliated'.

The second chapter deals with how, despite these problems, the growing success of the corn exchange meant that it was not long before it became clear that a larger building was needed to accommodate the corn market. In 1860, a petition signed by 112 merchants, farmers and sellers

demanded that facilities be enlarged and improved, and a Corn Exchange Enlargement Committee was formed to oversee the design and construction of a new facility. The site chosen was next to the existing corn exchange, and necessitated the removal of a row of butchers' shops known as the Shambles, which unsurprisingly caused some protest from the traders who operated there. The competition to design the new corn exchange offered a top prize of £25, and the winning design was selected in January 1861. The Corporation borrowed the £6000 costs from HM Treasury, and building started in June 1861 with the Exchange opening on 15 July 1862. The chapter includes several interesting plates of the proposed design and other related documents, and a description of the protracted development of the pediment decoration which still adorns the façade of the Corn Exchange today.

The important role that the Corn Exchange played in the commercial life of Bury St Edmunds is discussed in the next chapter. The corn market itself was only in operation for half a day per week, so the challenge was to find a commercial model that would generate an income for the Bury Corporation through the rest of the week. The presence of the Exchange clearly presented an opportunity for additional revenue from the merchants themselves who needed to eat and drink somewhere and potentially required accommodation. Orbell estimates that the presence of the Exchange meant that from 1901 to 1950, between 800 and 850 individuals per week visited Bury to attend the Exchange, which made 'a very substantial contribution to the town's economy', not to mention the potential for additional family members to join them.

The final chapter describes the changes in the use of the Corn Exchange building throughout the twentieth century, which saw the introduction of the venue as a space for large-scale meetings and entertainments, ranging from the Bury Chrysanthemum Show in 1903, a skating rink, boxing and wrestling matches, to a venue for a celebration of the Silver Jubilee of King George V and Queen Mary in 1935, which is illustrated with photo of Bury's finest enjoying the splendid-looking decorations. It was also used as a billet for First World War troops in 1915, and Home Guard training in 1939. In the early 1960s, the Bury Corporation secretly decided to redevelop the site of both the old and new corn exchange buildings into a truly horrendous-looking modern retail development, but fortunately the plan was rejected after a public meeting which voted 600 to 8 against the scheme. By the late 1960s a first floor was inserted into the building which allowed for the creation of a number of retail units on the ground floor, with the first floor continuing as the venue of the corn market, as well as continued use as an entertainment venue for school concerts, Christmas fairs and an infamous appearance by The Clash in 1978. The market finally ceased trading in 1997 and now the first floor provides a valuable service to the town as the local branch of JD Wetherspoon.

Orbell's book is the result of countless hours trawling through what few records exist in the Suffolk Record Office in Bury St Edmunds, where the primary sources of information were newspaper archives from the *Bury and Norwich Press* and the *Bury Free Press*, as well as the minutes of council meetings. As the author himself admits, the lack of corn pricing records limits the ability to provide a more thorough analysis of the data. Having said that, the repeated themes of council financial difficulties, incompetence, attempted steamrolling of redevelopment plans, paying lip service to the views of townspeople and the stories of unsuccessful ratepayer revolt are all recurring themes in the story of the corn exchanges, which have echoes in more recent developments in Bury St Edmunds, and surely in many towns throughout the country. This, combined with a number of wonderful illustrations throughout the volume, makes for an informative, fascinating and hitherto untold story of these key buildings in the town.

JULIAN BIRKBY

Farming, Famine and Plague: The Impact of Climate in Late Medieval England.

By Kathleen Pribyl. xi + 307 pp., figures, bibliography, index. Cham (Switzerland): Springer, 2017. ISBN 978 3 319 55953 7. Price: £126 hb.

The study of the historic climate is not new, but has been given fresh impetus by the growing concern over global warming and by recent work of earth scientists and historians. Bruce Campbell has been foremost amongst medievalists in showing that, while not the sole determinant, climate was a key factor in driving economic and social change in the late Middle Ages. Kathleen Pribyl's volume, which is based on her doctoral research, is a valuable contribution to the debate. It is of interest to students of Suffolk history because she focuses on East Anglia.

Her main source is the archive of account rolls of the manors of Norwich Cathedral Priory. In her view 'those 600–700 year old parchments open an unprecedented window into the changing meteorological conditions of late medieval England'. In many of the accounts the entries relating to the harvest tell us two things, namely when the harvest began and for how long it continued. These are invaluable data sets. The first reflects the mean temperature during the growing season, which was spring and early summer, and the second the amount and frequency of rainfall during the period of the harvest itself which could begin as early as late July and end as late as Michaelmas (29 September). Pribyl uses this data to track both inter-annual and long-term variability in the weather from the second half of the thirteenth to the first half of the fifteenth century. She compares and seeks to verify her medieval data with records of farming in Norfolk around 1800, a date after instrumental temperature measurements had become available, but before husbandry had been mechanised. In an early chapter she explains the meteorological conditions that triggered the Great Famine of 1315–17. In the penultimate one she analyses the climate-driven vegetation productivity and tree-mast cycles that regulated rodent populations and so influenced the timing of successive plague waves after the Black Death. You were most at risk of pestilence in a hot dry summer, such as that of 1361, which followed a mild winter and several indifferent summers.

Pribyl's conclusions confirm previous understanding that the weather became more variable and generally colder, and in this sense are not surprising. 'The mild conditions of the Medieval Climate Anomaly, and the transition towards lower temperatures in the mid-fifteenth century in association with the onset of the Little Ice Age are clearly visible'. Rather ambitiously, she cross-refers to the later Norfolk farming data to add greater precision to mean temperatures. Until 1315 springs and early summers were rarely cooler than 12°C. The frequency of growing seasons colder than 12°C increased over time and were common after c.1360. The average April–July temperatures decreased from about 13°C at the beginning to 12.4°C at the end of her period of study.

Pribyl's research is both exciting and original, but inevitably she will have her critics. For instance, by her own admission, the weather was not the only factor in determining the length of the harvest. The amount of labour per cultivated acre and the harvest size were also influential. Moreover, after the Black Death mowing increasingly replaced reaping of corn and, while more wasteful, was much quicker. Another criticism is that, to an extent, her eleven chapters and six appendices overlap and sometimes become repetitious. Finally, with a price tag of over £100 this volume will sadly be beyond the purse of most individuals and even many libraries which is a shame because it merits a wider readership.

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