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The Leicestershire Historian, which is published annually, is the magazine of the Leicester Local History Council and is distributed free to members. The Council exists to bring local history to the doorstep of all interested people in Leicester and Leicestershire, to provide for them opportunities of meeting together, to act as a co-ordinating body between the various Societies in the County and to promote the advancement of local history studies.

A series of local history meetings is arranged throughout the year and the programme is varied to include talks, film meetings, outdoor excursions and an annual Members' Evening held near Christmas. The Council also encourages and supports local history exhibitions; a leaflet giving advice on the promotion of such an exhibition is available from the Secretary.

The different categories of membership and the subscriptions are set out below. If you wish to become a member, please contact the Secretary, who will also be pleased to supply further information about membership and the Annual Programme.

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EDITORIAL

Our cover picture of the venerable Copt Oak, which finally collapsed in the middle of the nineteenth century, is taken from T R Potter's *Charnwood Forest* and symbolizes the disappearance of the ancient woodland from that part of the county. Charnwood owes many of its unique features to its special geological composition. Not only has its vegetation and, therefore, its agricultural economy been exceptional, but it has long occupied a special place in Leicestershire people's views of their county, whether for its wild and romantic landscape or because of the association of Bradgate with queen Jane. More recently it has come to support a luxury residential area for the city and a concentration of the county's leisure activities. All this has been reflected over the years in publications about the county, from the early topographers to the recent spate of guide books and even children's painting books. Mrs Long's article in this issue covers the period up to 1900 and is the first part of a bibliographical appreciation of the local history of the area.

We are fortunate that the only university Department of English Local History is based on the university in our county town. The 'Leicester school' is widely celebrated for its pioneering work in social and economic history. Although its work covers the whole of the country, much research has been done there on Leicestershire topics. David Fleming has written a study of the Leicestershire gentry in the seventeenth century for this issue and future issues will include the fruits of research by other students.

The essay chosen this time from the *Leicestershire Historian* reminiscences competition concerns basket-making, one of the most ancient of country crafts, as practised into this century in one of our market towns.

A more detailed account from memory comes from Mr Coleman who still lives in Leicester. Part of this appeared in the *Leicester Mercury* on August 14th 1978. He has a vivid recollection of all the premises in Humberstone Gate at the beginning of the century, when he had his first jobs in that area. Checking his account against contemporary trade directories confirms the accuracy of his memory and of course the impression he gives of the premises facing onto the street is much clearer.
BASKET-MAKING IN MELTON MOWBRAY
Eva Sutherland

When I was a schoolgirl more than fifty years ago, one of the highlights of the summer holiday was the annual osier-peeling week spent at ‘Swan’s Nest’. This was a large open area alongside the River Eye, where many fine willows grew, and which has now been bought and altered greatly by the firm of Petfoods Limited. But I must explain a little more fully.

I was the youngest of a big family, three boys and three girls; my mother being a wonderfully kind and hardworking woman, which was just as well, she having five babies in six years, the birth pill, or what have you, perhaps unknown in those days, I wouldn’t know. My father in a very small way was a Melton business man. He was a master basket-maker, two of my brothers also following in the trade which, as is well known, is one of the oldest crafts in the world. The hand-woven basket in which the baby Moses was hidden in the bull rushes, proves this. I might mention here that my brothers, to gain experience, both worked at the well-known firm of Ellmores of Thurcaston, as well as at Leeds, Birmingham and London, where they were instructors in Blind Institutions.

But to return to ‘Swan’s Nest’. My father rented this ground where the willows grew and in the summer when they were ‘ripe’ they were cut down, carefully sorted, peeled, dried and finally made into baskets. A ‘Gypsy trade’ it has been called, but nevertheless, the peeling-week or so was a happy time for all concerned. My father employed about five or six local women who regularly looked forward to this year after year. I remember some of their names, Kate, Sophie, Emma, ‘Snake’, all dead now. Maybe they were a bit rough for some standards, but they were lively, good-hearted women and worked hard. They would sit in a half circle in the open air, peeling the willows which my brothers put through two tight bars of iron which was called a brake, this instrument doing just what its name suggests, breaking the peel off the willows, leaving a clean white rod which is now called an osier. Although only young, I remember the laughter and gossip of the women, no doubt every bit of local news or scandal was well and truly gone over time and again!
About 4 pm I would run home (the Osier Beds not being far from my old home in Thorpe End) to return a little later with my mother, each of us carrying big cans of hot tea. After a welcome tea-break my mother joined in with the women, she too loved the osier peeling and the jolly company.
All round it was a happy time. Of course as in most outdoor occupations, much depended on the weather, dry and sunny was necessary for perfect cutting, but somehow our peeling-week always seemed to be just that.

I might mention that my father served his apprenticeship in Loughborough, his workplace being in a kind of basement where from all accounts people would look in for a bit of a chat and watch the young man at his work. There was one little man, very quiet and reserved, with little or nothing to say, who often watched my father very intently at his baskets. Then for several days he would be absent, sometimes for weeks. After one particularly long absence, my father ventured to ask him where he had been. ‘Away boy, away’ was the only answer he received. But, as it turned out, those mysterious trips must have been of a very wicked nature, this quiet withdrawn man being none other than the notorious Charles Peace, one of the boldest burglars of his time, a dangerous man when cornered, as proved when he shot and killed a young policeman who disturbed him in one of his many robberies in Melton Mowbray.
A COUNTRY LIFE: THE GENTRY IN STUART LEICESTERSHIRE
David Fleming

Endeavour to have a general knowledge in all things, else a country gentleman that can talk of nothing but of subsidies, the provision, or petty penal statutes for the punishment of rogues, feeding of oxen or sheep, manuring of land or the changes of the seasons, that things are dear or cheap, ploughing of land or inclosure or what price corn bears, such a one if he be not talking of these things will fall asleep at his meals; unless he hears news from the Court, and then he holds up his hands as if he were at prayers, and, if he hears the King once named, he thinks it high treason. . . . . let not thy speech be loud and gaping for that will show thee to be but a country gentleman (1).

Thus wrote the fifth Earl of Huntingdon to his son Ferdinando Hastings in about 1613. He had little time for what he saw as the hollow pretensions and general boorishness of the mere ‘country gentleman’. Yet the Earl’s disdain was a survival from a previous age, for the gentry were the coming men. The Earl himself was to feel their power in 1640 when he and his son were ejected from their joint office of Lord Lieutenant of Leicestershire and Rutland (2). The Earl had been stalked by members of a class which had risen over the preceding century into a position where they could challenge and destroy the monarchy. The Hastings family was certainly no match for them.

Until the advent of industrialisation, wealth in any society is invariably measured in terms of land. Similarly, political power and social status in the pre-industrial world derive exclusively from land-ownership. The successive devastations wrought upon England’s population by bubonic plague during the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, and the wholesale confiscation and redistribution of church land in the sixteenth century had imposed a new pattern of landownership upon the countryside.

Opportunities for the purchase of land either left vacant by the plague or dumped on the open market by Tudor state policy, were seized by ambitious farmers. The terms ‘gentleman’ and ‘gentry’ attained a new prominence, applied to the wealthier yeoman farmers. Tudor statesmen saw the increasing value of this economically emergent class as an addition to and a check upon the existing provincial governors, the nobility. A hitherto negligible political force was thus taken into partnership by the monarchy—a partnership in which the senior role was to
be fought for in the Civil War of the 1640's.

In their newbuilt country houses the gentry quickly created for themselves a way of life and a protestant ethos which they shared with their immediate social, economic and political superiors, the provincial nobility. This was the class into which the gentry aspired to rise, and during the reign of James I all that was required to do so was payment of a hefty fee to the Crown. Despite the Earl of Huntingdon's lofty pronouncements on the gulf between himself and the country gentry, there was an identity of interests between the nobility and the new class based upon landownership. Social and cultural differences if they existed were rapidly disappearing as England belatedly enjoyed her own Renaissance centred on the country house.

Huntingdon's instructions to Ferdinando written while he was on (so he believed) his deathbed can therefore be seen almost as a set of guidelines which any true protestant gentleman might follow. Ferdinando was told to keep Sunday holy, and that the only proper exercises for that day were: 'Hearing the word preached or read abroad or at home, prayer, meditation, conference, the reading of sermons or any books of divinity, visiting the sick, giving unto the poor' (3).

Certainly a philanthropic inclination was a desirable attribute for any wealthy protestant. Charity for some was an act of human kindness, for others an important investment in ultimate salvation, but few gentlemen could avoid the obligation altogether, (although in 1624 Sir Henry Hastings of Braunstone tried, being more than reluctant to pay the £386 14s 7d balance of a bond entrusted by his late father for buying and furnishing a House of Correction) (4). Sir Wolstan Dixie founded a grammar school at Market Bosworth, Sir William Roberts built almshouses at Sutton Cheney, while the Earl of Huntingdon favoured more tangible, though less permanent help to the poor:

Item, that he [the almoner] purloin no meat from the alms; but that he put the same in the place appointed for the poor, which place or vessels he shall always keep sweet and clean; and that he give the said alms, with the consent and help of the usher of the hall and porter, to such as are aged, poor, and in want, and not to stout rogues and idle persons (5).

A further instruction to the Porter in the Earl's household book was 'that
he suffer no vagabonds, rogues or diseased persons, to linger about the

gates' so it is plain that Huntingdon was as selective in his charity as

were the central government and justices of the peace in their duties to­

wards the poor (6).

As far as Puritans were concerned Ferdinando ought to 'love them as thou

shalt see the graces of God the more to appear in them', and as for

Catholics, 'till the day of judgement the sheep and the goats shall live

together' (7). Not everyone, least of all Puritans, were prepared to be

quite so tolerant of Catholics, a society apart within the world of the

gentry. The attitude of the royal court may not always have been hard,

but that of the gentry could be uncompromising.

William Lord Sherard's dislike of catholics resulted in his informing the

ecclesiastical authorities of the recusancy of the wife of Sir Henry Mynne.

At an assize dinner Mynne raged that Sherard was 'a base lord, a base

informing lord, a base fellow, a base informing fellow'. The Court of

Star Chamber was merciless and fined the hapless Mynne £1,500 for

scandalous speech (8). Catholics numbered among them some of the

richest and formerly most influential families in Leicestershire, but few

could transcend the barriers between them and the prestigious county

posts in the early seventeenth century. The Shirleys of Staunton Harold

were important enough to succeed, and Sir Henry, arch-foe of the Earl of

Huntingdon, became sheriff in 1624 and was a member of the quorum, the

inner circle, on the Commission of the Peace in 1626 and 1632 (9). Sir

Henry Hastings of Braunstone was a secret catholic while he was sheriff,

senior and junior knight of the shire and member of the quorum, but he

still held office as deputy-lieutenant and remained on the quorum after

the declaration of his true faith in 1634. Even while Sir Henry was super­

ficially protestant there were unmistakable indications of his catholicism

in that two of his sons were at the English College in Rome (10). Francis

Manners, sixth Earl of Rutland was another catholic whose status saw him

onto the quorum (11). It is clear that to be a catholic in Caroline England

did not mean automatic debarment from office, only for the majority. This

included venerable but politically decadent families like the Nevilles of

Holt, who last held office in 1606, and the Turviles of Aston Flamville

who held no offices after 1589 (12).

Women received short shrift from the Earl: 'For thy discourse with women,

praising of their beauty and talking of their apparel will be subject enough
to take up a great deal of time. Care not to compliment for that will
but fill thy brain and mouth with superfluous froth' (13). A woman’s role was just about as restricted as this view indicates. They served one major purpose — to produce children who could be used to forge marriage alliances. The wife of William Danvers of Rothley Temple was not unusual in having sixteen children, and the wife of Danvers’s kinsman Matthew Babington of the same place was no oddity in having twelve children ‘before the eldest was 12 years and three quarters old’ (14).

Children were used to create bonds of kinship whether within or without the county, and for some this meant an early farewell to single status. The fifth Earl of Huntingdon married his son Ferdinando at the age of fifteen to a wife of eleven years, while he himself was a groom at fourteen (15). The ordinary gentry usually married later in life than this but even then the parents had a great deal to say in the match. It was William Wollaston of Shenton who ‘in his younger years displeased his father by some extravagance, and by marrying without his consent, was intended to be disinherited (16). Sir Thomas Burton of Stockerston initiated a court action to retrieve a marriage portion in 1624 when his daughter married without his consent (17). This attitude is not surprising because marriage could make or break a family’s fortunes, and in any case status was to be considered. Anthony Grey, ninth Earl of Kent, was a clergyman before he unexpectedly succeeded to his earldom. Until his succession his life style had been such that it was said he ‘has divers daughters, some married to farmers and some to mercers, who will be much troubled to know how to carry themselves like ladies’ and the family’s avoidance of social stigma was due largely to the imminent high eminence of the tenth Earl, Henry (18).

Economically ailing gentry could afford but few reservations in marrying a wealthy yeoman’s daughter, however, and this is what William Trimnel of Stoke Golding did in 1641 (19). Even the Earl of Huntingdon was bound to advise his son: ‘Marry with one of thy own rank, yet be not too curious herein .... match with one of the gentry where thou mayest have a great portion, for there is a satiety of all things, and without means thy honour will look as naked as trees that are cropped’ (20). Well might Theodorus Witt-good exclaim: ‘All’s gone! still thou’rt a Gentleman, that’s all; but a poore one, that’s nothing’ (21).

Huntingdon had more to say on the choice of a wife, which tempers his mercenary (if necessary) outlook on the business:
thou shalt have occasion to err but once . . . Marry not a woman that is deformed . . . Neither think that she is handsome who paints . . . Marry not one of a contrary religion, for thou wilt agree no better with her than an ox and an ass that draw together (22).

Once married: 'Deny thy wife no necessary nor fitting things . . . Nor let her have all things she would' (23). John Whatton of the Newarke, meanwhile, was in the enviable position of having no economic worries when he selected his second wife, who was chosen because of her mild disposition 'rather than greatness of birth, friends, or portion' (24).

Gentility, of course, could not prevent domestic disharmony once a marriage was arranged. Arthur Staveley and his wife of West Langton attempted to resolve their many differences in public, to the extent that even the two Houses of Parliament were involved. Mistress Staveley alleged — amongst other things — cruelties, 'wicked practices' and a refusal to cohabit by her husband (25). Sir George Villiers of Brooksby was the man who 'thinking he could be more agreeably entertained in London than in writing to his wife, wrote all the letters necessary to be sent to her before he left the country' (26).

On conversation in general the Earl advised that 'if thou enter into any argument, though with thy much inferior, argue patiently' (27). He might have added that in a community whose well-being rests on landownership, arguments over property flourish. This was certainly the case among the Jacobean and Caroline gentry. Litigation became a major occupation, frequently between members of the same family, and the Earl, who spent £120 on legal business in a year in 1608-9, wistfully observed 'that he that hath not some is out of fashion' (28). The numerous pre-war law-suits included one over possession of lands left by the late Sir Henry Beaumont of Gracedieu. The suit was between Sir John Beaumont and his cousin Barbara, wife of Wolstan Dixie of Market Bosworth. Beaumont conducted the case by proxy, being abroad while it was in progress. He wrote a letter to Secretary Windebank in 1635 thanking him for his assistance in resisting his own 'endless adversary' (29). Similarly, there was an unseemly wrangle over the custody of three wards, the granddaughters of John Bainbridge of Lockington, between the Bainbridges and Sir John Bale of Carlton Curlieu in 1632. The Bainbridges ended up spending over £400 on the case, including a £20 bribe to the Archbishop of Canterbury for his favour (30).
Life was not exactly hard for the gentry despite the odd marital problem or legal wrangle. In an age when the vast majority of people had to scratch for a living and famine still took its toll, the average country gentleman led a life of luxury and ease. For any one bored with supervising his tenants and accounts, and in need of a rest from the relatively onerous tasks of local government, there was a variety of alternative pursuits.

Education of young men was not limited solely to academic learning at a local grammar school, one of the two universities and perhaps one of the London Inns of Court; for travel too was seen as an excellent teacher. Robert Brudenell of Cranoe, who was to end up as a prisoner of the Spaniards in 1626 was granted leave to go to France in order ‘to learn the language and gain experience’ (31). Sir John Beaumont of Gracedieu began a journey in 1634 which took him to Paris, Blois, Tours, Angers, on to Madrid and from there to Portugal with plans to proceed to Italy, all the while sending reports of local affairs to Secretary Windebank in London (32). Henry Hastings, later the fifth Earl of Huntingdon, was sent to the Jacobean court by his grandfather in 1603 in the hope that some of the novel royal largesse would accrue to the Hastings family. Sir John Holles wrote to the fourth Earl stating that young Henry was too old as a companion for the prince, yet too young to please the King, and instead recommended the following:

I doubt not but you could be better contented to spare him a little abroad where it would be much less expensive and to his person and understanding more profitable. For besides the languages and other knowledges for the mind which to a nobleman are the greater ornaments as by them he is made more serviceable to his prince and country my Lord Hastings shall reap a peculiar fruit, his body shall be better fashioned, his spirits by diversity of conversation and objects quickened, and his discourse well stored and enriched (33).

Hunting and hawking were sports which set apart the landowning class from everyone else because only they could indulge in it without risking prosecution for poaching. In 1638 the Earl of Stamford caught a clergyman hawking on his estate and so jealous was the Earl of his rights that a scuffle ensued between the pair – an incongruous meeting. The Earl indignantly reported the matter to the Archbishop of Canterbury, claiming that the clergyman kept greyhounds, crossbows, guns and ‘all sorts of engines for destroying game’(34). Sir Henry Hastings was not above
some illegal hunting in the royal Leicester Forest in the 1620’s, and he enjoyed himself to the extent that he ignored a request to desist from the Earl of Huntingdon, his kinsman and Lieutenant of the Forest (35). Of healthy exercises the Earl declared: ‘Hunting, hawking and riding abroad are the exercises most usual’ (36). That he practised his own precepts can be seen from the amount of money he spent on hawks and hounds in 1609 and from his accounts for the period 1606-13 where there appear crossbow arrows and a falcon (37).

Less vigorous entertainments ranged from gambling at cards and dice and dining on a grand scale to attending tilting tournaments and watching lavish musical and dramatic performances (38). A masque staged by the Earl of Huntingdon in 1606 in honour of his mother-in-law Alice, Countess Dowager of Derby was an enormous affair, unique only in its scale (39). The Earl employed musicians to enliven his events, but music was not only listened to, it was also played. Peter Bingley of Melton Mowbray, for example, had two lutes among his possessions in 1637 (40).

Entertainment of a more inelegant nature took place at the house of Francis Saunders of Shangton, or at the house of a friend, at Christmas, 1636. Saunders had dressed as a priest and ‘married’ Elizabeth Pitto, a hog-herd’s daughter, to a lord of misrule, afterwards putting the parties to bed together. The revelry was discovered and Saunders appeared before the Commissioners for Causes Ecclesiastical to explain himself (41).

The Arts were an important source of pleasure in such a literate society, and books of all kinds abound among gentlemen’s belongings. William Lord Sherard owned books worth £20 at his death in 1640, and William Waldrom of Scalford had a library valued at £5 in 1627, a tenth of the value of his household goods, at a time when a Bible was worth no more than a few pence (42). A list survives of several which were supplied to Ferdinando, Lord Hastings in the period 1638-40 by a single bookseller, a selection which reveals wide reading:

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<th>Date</th>
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<td>Oct 24, 1638:</td>
<td>1 ‘Shakespeares Workes’</td>
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March 29, 1640: 1 Sir Thomas Hawkins 'Sejanus', 1 'Expert Farrier',
1 Peachams new Booke, 1 'Maides Trajedy'.
June 3, 1640: 1 Kinges Proclamacion, printed at Newcastle (43).

Hastings' interest in history is mirrored by William Burton's treatment of
historical events like the Battle of Bosworth and the Roman antiquities
found at Claybrook (44). Burton's book also illustrates the emphasis
placed by the gentry on family history, and a letter from Roger Smith of
Edmondthorpe informing Burton of certain inaccuracies in his work reveals
the depth to which such interest went (45).

There are glimpses, too, of scientific pursuits. In 1613 William Herrick
of Beaumanor had with him at Oxford a telescope which caused great de­
light to his tutors and fellow students as it was of very recent invention
(46). Samuel Hartopp's goods at his death included several 'Alkemie
Dishes', the use of which can only be guessed at (47). Both the books
by the Burtons also reveal an interest in, if not exactly a thorough know­
ledge of, the sciences.

Amid this variety of activities — estate management, legal, marital and
political manoeuvring, local government, the dispensing of charity and
pursuit of the godly ideal, travel, sport, the arts — the Leicestershire
gentry drank plenty of ale and wine, smoked tobacco, and ate heartily of
beef, mutton, lamb, veal, venison, rabbit, turkey, duck, capons, plovers,
larks, woodcocks, curlews, quails, lobsters, oysters and a host of other
foods and fruits, of many of which the peasantry had never even heard.
They dressed finely, and ate from silver plate, surrounded by tapestries
and expensive furniture. They wrote letters to friends and kinsmen in
which news of important local and national events bulked large. They
would visit Leicester and occasionally London, both to transact business
and to enjoy themselves, travelling on horseback or in their coaches.
The chief of them wrote:

I can say in my own experience, that have tasted of all the waters
that have issued from honest delights, that no life for the good of the
soul, of the body and estate are answerable to a country life (48).
References:

1. Historical Manuscripts Commission (HMC), Hastings MSS, IV, pp 333-4
2. Journals of the House of Lords, IV, p 625
3. HMC, Hastings MSS, IV, p 331
4. Calendar of State Papers, Domestic Series (CSPD), 1623-5, p 149
5. John Nichols, The History and Antiquities of the County of Leicester, III, p 596; ibid, IV, pp 499, 544
6. ibid, III, p 596
7. HMC, Hastings MSS, IV, p 330
9. Victoria County History (VCH), Leicestershire, II, p 57; Nichols, op cit, I, p 461
10. VCH, Leicestershire, II, p 58
11. G E C, op cit, XI, p 261 n
12. VCH, Leicestershire, II, p 64; Nichols, op cit, I, p 461; Calendar of the Committee of Compounding, I, p 110
13. HMC, Hastings MSS, IV, p 335
14. Nichols, op cit, III, pp 955, 1052
15. HMC, Hastings MSS, IV, pp 332 n, 352
16. See the memoirs written by William Wollaston’s great nephew, printed in Nichols, op cit, IV, pp 531-40.
17. CSPD, 1623-5, pp 351, 355, 365-6, 369-71
18. G E C, op cit, VII, p 175; CSPD, 1639-40, p 128 letter from Thomas Smith to Sir John Pennington, November 28, 1639
19. Transactions of the Leicestershire Archaeological and Historical Society, XIV, p 227
20. HMC, Hastings MSS, IV, p 332
21. Thomas Middleton, A Trick to Catch the Old One, 1608, Act 1, Scene 1
22. HMC, Hastings MSS, IV, p 332
23. ibid
24. Letter from John Whatton to Sir William Herrick of Beaumanor, August 2, 1639, printed in Nichols, op cit, I, p 597 n
25. CSPD, 1640, p 445; Journals of the House of Commons, IV, pp 254, 659-60; Nichols, op cit, II, pp 664, 673 n
26. ibid, III, p 194
27. HMC, Hastings MSS, IV, p 334
28. ibid, p 335
29. CSPD, 1634-5, pp 371, 514; ibid, 1635, p 43
30. Nichols, op cit, III, pp 876, 873-4
was ransomed for £3,000, paid out of the profits of land seized by the
government from his father, a catholic recusant; CSPD, 1625-6,
pp 425, 448; Calendar of the Committee for Compounding. II, p 1081
32. CSPD, 1633-4, p 503; ibid, 1634-5, pp 17, 30, 128, 202, 514, 522;
ibid, 1635, pp 115-6; HMC, MSS Various Collections, VII, p 412
33. Ibid, MSS of the Duke of Portland, IX, p 78
34. CSPD, 1638-9, pp 81-2
35. Ibid, 1623-5, pp 329-31
36. HMC, Hastings MSS, IV, p 331
38. Ibid
39. Nichols, op cit, III, pp 637-8
40. Leicestershire Record Office (LRO), Probate Inventory of Peter
Bingley, 1637, PR/I/39/203
41. CSPD, 1637-8, p 63
42. LRO, Gretton (Sherard) MSS, DG,40/490; ibid, Probate Inventory of
William Waldrom, 1627, PR/I/32B/140
43. HMC, Hastings MSS, I, pp 389-90
44. William Burton, The Description of Leicestershire — Containing
Matters of Antiquity, History, Armoury and Genealogy, 2nd ed, 1777,
pp 44-1 (sic), 67-8
45. Ibid, passim; Nichols, op cit, III, pp 520-1
46. Ibid, III, pp 161-2
47. LRO, Probate Inventory of Samuel Hartoppe, 1636, PR/I/40/197
48. HMC, Hastings MSS, II, pp 70-1, letter from the fifth Earl of
Huntingdon to his son Henry, January 23, 1627
In the first decade of the twentieth century Leicester had a multitude of amusements, and I can clearly recall the four roller skating rinks, eight coffee houses—places designed to attract people away from the ‘evil’ public house—and the Opera House, the Theatre Royal, the Temperance Hall, the Palace, the Pavilion, the Empire, the Floral Hall and the Secular Hall. There were, later, some twenty ‘picture houses’ in and around the city, and they had very good followings, in their locations. They were in Silver Street, High Street, Granby Street, Rutland Street, the Market Place, Melbourne Road, East Park Road, Overton Road, Uppingham Road, Gipsy Lane, Green Lane Road, Mere Road, Woodgate, Belgrave Gate, Belgrave Road, Melton Road, Fosse Road, Grace Road, Narborough Road and Welford Road. Most cinemas showed two different programmes per week starting with a matinee on Monday afternoon and then two continuous performances Monday, Tuesday and Wednesday, a complete change for the Thursday matinee and the two continuous performances Thursday, Friday and Saturday nights. Saturday afternoons were reserved for children’s shows and the seats were reduced in price. Cinemas did not open on Sundays until the late 1940’s.

The Leicester Palace was a most beautiful building, with a crown surmounting it, which revolved. It was owned by Sir Oswald Stoll. The seating arrangement, downwards, from the ‘Gods’, which was also called the ‘Chicken-run’ because it had a wire-netting guard in front, went next to the gallery, then to the circle and finally the ground-floor, known as the ‘Pit’. At the front of the pit were the fauteuils, better seats with an excellent view of the stage. There were I believe, four boxes in all, and the price per chair was 2/6d. The other prices were:

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<td>Gods</td>
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The Palace opened first, I think, in 1900, and the ‘Top of the Bill’ then was a German called Sandow, billed as ‘The Strongest Man in the World’. He ran a very popular body-building course which was taken up by many men, and he had a brand of cocoa called after him. The language used by the performers in those days was listened to very closely by the theatre.
management and the only 'bad' word allowed was 'Damn', and this only once in any performance.

The Temperance Hall was built for the Band of Hope, who were strongly opposed to the 'evils of drink' and May Festivals were held there every year. In the winter months, before it ultimately became the Cinema de Luxe, lantern-slide shows were given there, the lantern being concealed within a canvas 'box' in the centre aisle in the Hall. 'Live-shows' were also given by Catlin's Pierrots and a Juvenile Troupe led by Madam L Spencer. Madam L Spencer's sister Marie Vesta ran another Juvenile Troupe in the Corn Exchange.

The Granby Halls were originally known locally as the Junior Training Hall, the De Montfort Halls being called the Leicester Public Hall.

There were also four boat-houses in Leicester, hiring rowing boats and punts. These were at Aylestone, Thurcaston Road, from a public house on Frog Island, and the Loughborough Road. This latter site was where the new 'A' shaped Outdoor Pursuits Centre operates; it was also where the Belgrave Tram Terminus was. You could row to the White Horse at Birstall and put your boat into the lower part of the Soar over the legendary Birstall Rollers, the metal fixings of which are still there.

Swimming was also in vogue and there were baths at Vestry Street, Cossington Street, Spence Street, Bath Street and Aylestone. The council also had two open air baths, one at Abbey Meadows and one in Upperton Road— the Bede House, which is the present headquarters of the Leicester Rowing Club.

On Sundays it was the custom for young couples to rendezvous at the Clock Tower and walk to the end of Victoria Park and back, using both sides of the London Road. It was a social 'happening' and there was never any vandalism or trouble.

Families used also to walk to Bradgate Park and back from Leicester and apart from a day-trip to Skegness by train, this was probably the extent of their summer holidays.

On the commercial side, in the early 1900's there were three 'Penny Bazaars', High Street, London Road, and a third in Humberstone Gate.
Leicester was, of course, a market town, and the stalls were lit by paraffin flares. After closing down on Saturday night the stalls were taken down and the area hosed down. Remember that most vehicles were horse-drawn.

Horse trams ran up to the end of 1904, when the electric tramcar replaced them. At that too, the fair held in Humberstone Gate was closed, or moved to various, and presumably, less popular sites.

As this was the age of the horse, there were boys employed around our famous central feature, the Clock Tower. They carried a metal container slung on a strap over one shoulder, and a hand brush, and they spent their day brushing up the offending material lying around. Do remember that the ladies always wore their skirts and coats trailing on the ground well into the middle of the 1914-18 War.

Also to be seen in the same vicinity, a hot potato salesman in High Street, and a character who sold muffins in Cheapside, known to all as 'Muggy' Measures.

Hillcrest, the workhouse, was a fearful place and was known by a slang name, 'the Bassy', a corruption of the Bastille. The discipline was so strict there that tramps would sooner be locked up in the Town Gaol than end up in the Bassy. Incidentally, near the Bassy was the famous Swain Street Bridge, the girders of which could be climbed on, swung on, hung on, slid down and drawn on. Seeing a 'Bobby' approaching, the youthful climbers would scatter quicker than even they thought they could disappear.

At one time the Market Place had only two main entrances, Cheapside and Hotel Street. Then around two hundred years ago an entrance was made into Horsefair Street. Most of the shops had their own private thoroughfares for the use of their clients into both the market area and the streets behind their premises. All the public houses had two, sometimes three. The Arcades were notable, and the Silver Arcade, Morley's Arcade, Victoria Parade and Tea Lane are still in use to-day. Where the Cinema stands was a large shop selling ladies gowns, called, I think, Tyler's or Taylor's. The name was spelled out in huge gilt letters on the roof. It closed in 1911 or 1912 and was then turned into a most wonderful Delicatessen by a gentleman who came from Germany. During the Great War he was interned, and the shop closed down, to be opened up as the
Labour Exchange after the War. On my return from the Royal Flying Corps, the out-of-work man could get his twenty-nine shillings a week dole money there.

Opposite stands the Corn Exchange, and my father always maintained that the architect forgot to draw in the stairs and added them on outside after the building was completed.

Meanwhile, back to the Clock Tower, and a famous heavyweight PC Bobby Stevens who was 23 or 24 stones, and had the knack of moving loiterers on with this merry quip:-
‘Do you play draughts, young man?’
‘Yes, Constable.’

‘Well then, it’s your Move!’

He was greatly respected and well liked in the town.

FAMOUS NAMES IN LEICESTER

Many famous music hall and stage acts visited Leicester, and I have listed those I remember:--

VESTA TILLEY HETTY KING G H ELLIOTT R A ROBERTS
FRED KARNO J BOGANNY O WILLIAMS MASKELYNE AND
DEVANT THE GREAT CARMA GROCK LAFAYETTE
NONI AND HORACE WILL FYFFE HARRY LAUDER
NELLIE WALLACE B WILLIAMS F BARNES LAYTON AND
JOHNSTON SCOTT AND WHALEY THE TWO LESLIES
CLARICE MAIN AND THAT DICK TURPIN SANDY POWELL
CHUNG LUNG SUE DAISEY DORMER ERNIE LOTINGA
DU CALLION WISART RENO AND HIS BAND SAMSON (a
Russian strong man) The 7'4" RUSSIAN GIANT MADAME de MILO
ELLA RETFORD ALFREDO GEORGE FORMBY SENIOR
HARRY TATE MARK SHERIDAN HAPPY DAYS REVIEWS
ALBERT WHELAN TOM FOY J LEARMOUTH ALBERT SANDLER
ELLIOTT SAVONAS W BEANLAND besides numerous bears, sea-lions,
tigers, lions and dogs.
Here is a bird’s eye view in type, of Humberstone Gate, as it was seventy years ago, going Eastwards from the Clock Tower:-

Clock

Tower

Allen’s pub
Oyster Bar
The Board pub
Oyster Bar
Cafe

Salmon and Gluckstein tobacco
Ushers jeweller
Cohen’s Penny Bazaar
Tower Vaults
Stag & Pheasant
Healys Shirt Shop
Clarkes - chemists
The Nelson - pub
The Plough - pub
Westbys - cutlers
Tram Offices and Tram sheds
Craven Arms - pub
Bell Hotel
Leas - outfitters

FOX LANE

The Fox pub
Benson - fish & chips
Hamshaws - coachbuilder
Cigar Factory
Corn merchants
Clothiers

CHARLES STREET

Butchers
Printers
Insurance Company
Public House
Secular Hall
Clulow & Orton coachbuilder
The Vestry

CHARLES STREET

Coach & Horses
Illstons cab proprietors
Challis & Allen mineral waters
City Boys’ School
The Fountain pub
Frisby shoemaker
Harrisons - furniture
Sweet shop
Cafe
Vickmill Stationers
Three Cranes - pub

VESTRY STREET

Goodmans cigar factory
Butlers chemists
Shoe factory

RUTLAND STREET

Uppingham

WHARF STREET

21
The hills of Charnwood on the horizon are still as notable a feature of the Leicestershire landscape as they were when the improving agriculturists of the late eighteenth century deplored the uncultivated 'Waste' of Charnwood Forest. The modern landscape of Charnwood is largely the creation of the last century and this account is concerned with the Forest proper, the area defined in the Inclosure Act of 1808, rather than the modern and wider use of the word to cover much of north-west Leicestershire. Bradgate, for many people, symbolizes Charnwood; so though, technically speaking, it has long been beyond the Forest boundaries, it is included here.

In the Domesday Survey only one settlement, Charley, is mentioned in Charnwood, and that as 'waste'. The whole of north-west Leicestershire was at this time thinly populated but, in contrast to the rest of the county, woodland features in the accounts of all the settlements from Groby to Belton and from Hugglescote to Barrow. The whole Forest was the 'waste' of the four large manors of Groby, Barrow, Shepshed and Whitwick. In the mediaeval period land was given to monastic settlements in the actual Forest at Charley, Ulverscroft and Grace Dieu, and at Garendon on its edge. New settlements grew up and a whole fabric of customary rights in the waste evolved for the inhabitants of settlements over the Forest boundaries. The mediaeval, Tudor and Stuart love of the Chase led to the creation of a whole series of 'parks', enclosures for the better preservation of the deer, of which Groby was one of the first and Bradgate and Beaumanor perhaps the best known. For the later public use of the Forest it is important to remember that common and customary rights do not mean common or public ownership and that every bit of land in the Forest had an owner.

The first contemporary account of the Forest is the description by the Tudor antiquarian John Leland, who rode through England in search of antiquities between 1536 and 1543. Even though his work was not printed until 1710, it was well known to his contemporaries and to the later historians William Camden and William Burton. None of these historians were interested in the romantic scenery, but all noted that it was 'well wooded'; for timber was highly valued in Tudor and Stuart England. How well wooded the Forest was has been a subject of conjecture. Michael Drayton
wrote enthusiastically of the Forest beauties in early seventeenth cen­tury verse. More concrete evidence of well established woodland is the sale in 1673 by the then Sir William Herrick and his son of Beaumanor of over six thousand trees of oak and ash to the Birmingham iron master Hugh Jennens, to feed his forges at Whitwick on the northern edge of the Forest. The alder, crab and holly trees were to be left standing.

The most detailed account of the Forest and its surrounding settlements up to the end of the eighteenth century is to be found in the volumes of Nichols and some of this material was later collected together into one volume by T R Potter. These descriptions, together with the ones in Throsby and the agricultural surveys of John Monk and William Pitt, help to build up an idea of the appearance of the Forest, the uses made of it and also the part it was beginning to play as a place of popular recrea­tion. Nichols and Throsby, writing in the 1790's could talk to people who had known the Forest when it had more wood, at a time when its main use was as sheep pasture. It was also a source of minor yet im­portant additions to country living, such as verjuice from crab apples, gorse for bread ovens and ash from the burnt fern harvest (bracken harvest), made into balls and used for soap-making.

In 1749 there were riots on the Forest, when the freeholders tore down squatters' buildings and forcibly protested against the rabbit warrens, since they held that the rabbits spoiled the herbage on which they pas­tured their animals. It is said that after the disturbances no rabbits were left. In 1750 William Hutton, while walking from Birmingham to Swithin to visit an aunt, was lost on the Forest. 'It began to rain; it was dark; I was in no road, nor was any dwelling near. I was among hills, rocks and precipices, and so bewildered I could not retreat. I considered my situation as desperate, and I must confess I lost the fortitude of a man . . .' When he at last found shelter, it was in a two roomed cottage, whose outbuildings had been pulled down by the rioters. There was no food except watery pease porridge, and no candles, but only a page torn from a book to light the family of five and their guest to bed, in one room with the whole family, on a bed with no bed clothes, and the guest making do with the wife's petticoat. Breakfast, a piece of a loaf and skimmed milk, was begged from a neighbour, and Hutton felt bound to comment 'I had seen poverty in various shapes; but this was the most complete'. This poverty was also seen later in the century by Throsby.

The three main roads which skirted the Forest, Leicester to Ashby,
Loughborough to Ashby and Leicester to Loughborough, were not improved until after the setting up of the Turnpike Trusts in 1753 and 1754. The lack of roads across the Forest proper is very plainly shewn on the map drawn by Samuel Wild in 1754 for the Herricks, on which only the toll road to Ashby is shewn as continuous, with the other lanes ending blind at the Forest edge.

Nichols and Throsby both give excellent views of the Forest and those in Nichols are especially valuable, as most are dated. Though Nichols says that the 'Forest was put to very good use' and that the sheep provided 'large quantities of fine wool', John Monk regards them as a distinct and inferior breed, similar to the moorland sheep in his native Devon. In the 1790's most of the surrounding villages were enclosed, and in every case the awards were without prejudice to their customary rights on Charnwood Forest. It is not surprising that a tract of some sixteen to eighteen thousand acres, unenclosed and unimproved, was regarded with disfavour by the largest proprietors, the Earl of Stamford (Bradgate and Groby), the Herricks of Beaumanor, the Earl of Moira (Barrow, Loughborough and Whitwick) and Thomas March Phillips of Garendon and also by smaller gentlemen owners of land on the waste.

In the 1790's also appreciation was being shewn of the scenic qualities of the Forest. Bardon Hill, with its far reaching views, Beacon Hill, a favourite outing from Loughborough and Old John, looking down on the remains of the past glories of Bradgate House in the sheltered valley, were perhaps the most popular beauty spots. Whilst the Forest was little more than a sheep walk the proprietors seldom interfered with visitors to any part of the open waste. William Gardiner, writing of country outings from Leicester as a young man in the 1790's, describes visits to Bardon Hill and its summer house and a notable picnic by Old John, when music was made and 'pieces of ordnance fired off' to attract neighbouring villagers. A favourite picnic place for visitors was the grove of walnut trees by the ruins.

Nichols, in the second part of his fourth volume, refers very briefly to the end of the Forest 'in its wild and uncultivated state' and continues 'in a few fleeting years the face of the country will be wholly changed . . . good roads are forming over the whole in every convenient direction. A spacious Chapel is also erecting . . . where the mild and benevolent principles of Christianity will be properly inculcated on the descendants of many who have been nearly brought up in a state of nature'.
Nichols printed this in 1811 and the account of claims following the Act of Inclosure was not signed until 1812; but it seems that the larger proprietors had already begun to create the roads which were one of the first steps towards improvement. Potter reported '"That Act," it has been said, "increased the value of some land thirty, some sixty, some a hundred fold."' The largest claims, the Earl of Stamford's for more than six thousand acres and Mr March Phillips for over five thousand, give some idea of the amount of land involved, whilst some small allotments could be as little as one sixth of a perch, roughly five square yards, some indication of the problems involved in relating old rights to modern usage.

Potter, writing in the 1840's, before the movement to retain some former common land for public use and enjoyment, could comment, 'One of the hardships committed by the inclosure will strike every visitor to the Forest—the absence of foot-paths. That in a district affording means of support to many hundreds of humble cottagers—means of recreation to thousands—not one yard of foot-path, not one acre of open ground should have been reserved, was at least a hardship. The poor, however, had perhaps an equivalent in the new field which was opened for their labour: and the public, in the improved roads which run in every direction, intersecting the hitherto almost impassable region.'

If the improvers had little regard for material welfare, the spiritual needs of the poor were to be improved by the provision made, both in the allotments and by charitable donations, for the building of new churches. Four were originally thought to be needed. Oaks in Charnwood was consecrated in 1815 and Copt Oak and Woodhouse Chapels were erected in 1837 after 'the elegant designs of Mr Railton'. The effects of the enclosure were that so much of the Forest was sold in large lots and so many claims of smaller proprietors were bought by wealthy individuals that farms were of large size. Besides, no manufacture was introduced, so that in the end three rather than four new chapels or churches were thought sufficient to meet the needs of the area.

The first printed account of Leicestershire to mention the new state of the Forest was published in 1831 by the Rev John Curtis of Ashby-de-la-Zouch. His map shews the new roads, the line of the already deserted Forest Canal and railway and the Forest Church. He describes both Bradgate Park and Bardon Hill as places frequently visited in the
Mr. Samuel Wild's plan of Charnwood Forest, drawn in 1754, as reproduced by Nichols.

The positions of the rabbit warrens are marked by the numbers in circles as follows:

1. Gracedieu Park
2. Tin Meadow
3. Black Brook and Fenny Hill
4. Cliffe-hill
5. Goathouse-hill and Nan Pantain's
6. Green-hill, &c. near Ulvescroft
7. Hunter's hill and Bentcliffe-hills
8. Nan-hill, &c. near Maplewell
summer months by 'parties of pleasure'. Potter's book, published in 1842, not only collects much of Nichols' earlier information into one complete volume but also adds information on the post enclosure development of the Forest, with appendices on its geology, botany and ornithology. It is illustrated with a number of black and white engravings and some highly romantic sepia lithographs, most from drawings by F F Palmer. Both Potter's text and illustrations were often 'adapted' for use in later popular guides to Charnwood.

Whilst the 'spa movement' was still popular and extending its range to attract the increasing middle class, Ashby-de-la-Zouch sought to become a spa and to attract 'genteel residents'. The local printers Hextall and Co published in 1852 an attractive and informative guide to the town, which included Charnwood Forest among suitable excursions for its visitors. Here 'the lover of the picturesque cannot fail but be charmed, as he climbs the bold and primitive rocks of Charnwood'. The excursions included Mount St Bernard Abbey, Bradgate Park and Bardon Hill, by a foot path, with the proviso that this was opened to the public twice a week: 'the days may be ascertained by reference to the Leicester papers.' Though Potter mentions the foundation of Mount St Bernard Abbey and gives an illustration of the first set of buildings, this seems to be the earliest guide to mention the Abbey as a desirable excursion. Unlike some of the new proprietors of Forest land the monks welcomed visitors, though women were excluded from the monastic buildings. Restricted public access to Bradgate undoubtedly became easier, and more acceptable to the Earls of Stamford, since the family no longer lived there permanently and only used Stewards Hay as a shooting box in the autumn and winter months.

Perhaps the best guide is the one by F T Mott. The third and most available edition was published in 1868, though the author in his text refers to the fact that it was first published 'some eight years ago.' Compact in format and very nicely produced, it is a perfect period piece, possibly financed by the list of country lodgings in the neighbourhood, nearly all of which boasted stabling and offered one, two or three rooms for the use of visitors.

Mott describes with feeling the disadvantages of towns where 'the great Sanitary Problem stands pre-eminent'—a polite reference to Leicester's poor sanitation, the tedious and expensive journey from Leicester to the sea and the great value of the pure air of Charnwood so close at hand. 'Certainly there is not in the Midland Counties, perhaps not in all
England, a more health-restoring region than these ancient hills of Charnwood: nor one more thoroughly adapted for the enjoyment of children.

The guide is very thorough in its instructions to the visitors, giving view points, the best being from the east of the Soar, at Loughborough and Thrumpton; and picnic places, Bardon and Beacon Hill. In a chapter headed 'Notes Architectural' he delights in the new style of building, such as Beaumanor Hall, designed by William Railton, and 'The Miss Ellis's cottage on the Brande Hill, . . . a pretty example of the Swiss Gothic style, and an ornament to the Forest.' He notes with approval that 'Mapplewell has lately risen from a farm-house to the dignity of a Forest Mansion', but scathingly dismisses buildings such as Swithland Hall and Coleorton Hall as 'packing cases' made of brick or stone.

This guide shews just how much the district was becoming a residential area for the well-to-do and the preserve of large estates. To take Beaumanor as an example, 'Mr Herrick has gradually gathered up into his own hands the smaller holdings of the district, so that his Charnwood estate comprises now probably one-fourth of the whole forest, and a crow might fly from Bardon Station to Woodthorpe, seven good miles, and never flap his wings over anybody else’s trees.'

Mott makes very plain the problems involved in the public use of the Forest. 'Thirty years ago when the Forest was only half cultivated and had no wide-spread fame, the owners of the land took little heed of trespassers. Pic-nic parties from the neighbouring towns and villages went there occasionally, and found themselves pretty much at liberty to pitch their camps wherever they pleased . . . The town of Leicester has doubled its population since that time, and sends out its pic-nic parties on a giant scale. When a large factory gives its hands a summer holiday "the Forest" is the favorite place, and five hundred people in a train of thirty char-a-bancs, with flags and music, leave the town and settle somewhere on the hills.'

Allen's of Nottingham and Leicester, who were involved in publishing both Potter and Mott, produced a most attractive guide of their own in 1857, abridged from Potter, 'revised by a recent tourist', with the map and some of the engravings, reduced in size, all for twopence on railway bookstalls. Readers are warned that the visitor to Charnwood
Forest is always on sufferance, except on footpaths. The immense popularity of Bradgate is shown by the regular series of J and T Spencer, printers of Leicester, whose guide reached at least five editions. The fifth, published in 1888, is very similar to Mott, but shorter, lacking the guide to lodgings and the illustrations. Elliott Roscoe wrote a very romantic 'History of Bradgate Park' in his guide, but the description of the scenery and the impression of the popularity of Bradgate are remarkable. So was his own enthusiasm. 'No need to ask whither, where does Leicester spend its holiday but at Bradgate Park ... I will go there also, I will see a Leicester Holiday, I will go to Bradgate on a public day and tell of the doings there.' Go he did, and he explains how he walked from Leicester, through fields and lanes, in a setting unbelievably rural by today's standards. These guides were supplemented by even cheaper productions, such as 'Picnic parties from Leicester' Penny Guide to Bradgate a little guide with no date, but probably about 1882.

The second half of the century brought a new element, the artificial lakes at Thornton on the western edges of the Forest in 1853, at Cropston in 1866 and at Swithland in 1894. These three reservoirs, though designed to help Leicester's water supply, added a new attraction to the landscape. Quarrying on a small scale for slate, stone and, in some places, for brick earth was a traditional forest activity, but the increased demand for roadstone did little to add to the charms of the area.

Though all these guides give a fair impression of the atmosphere of their times, perhaps the full part played by the changing uses of the Forest in the nineteenth century could best be appreciated by a careful study of the local press. It seems appropriate, therefore, to end this account of the literature of Charnwood by mentioning a broadsheet printed by J and T Spencer and headed 'Extracts from Opinions of the Press, July, 1887'. The reports describe a fête organized by Mr Henry Nicholson in Bradgate Park, with a concert by the Prince Albert's Own Leicestershire Yeomanry Cavalry Band. The weather was kind and no doubt the 'immense numbers enjoyed their music as much as William Gardiner and his group of friends had enjoyed their music-making nearly a hundred years before. On this occasion, however, though people went in char-a-bancs, in private traps and on foot, a new vehicle had come on the scene: for there were also 'Bicyclists and tricyclists ... a-wheel in large numbers.' This was a new factor which would enable many folk of modest means but strong limbs to enjoy at leisure the forest lanes and forest scenes.
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The journals of local societies that undertake to publish both archaeological and historical material demonstrate the contrasting requirements of the two disciplines. No one would expect historical articles to consist almost entirely of reports of research undertaken and transcripts of documents. Indeed many counties, not including our own, are blessed with a separate record society which undertakes the systematic publication of documentary sources. The greater bulk of archaeological articles, on the other hand, is taken up with descriptions and illustrations of excavations and excavated materials. This often leaves the writer with little space, or indeed little inclination, to offer any historical interpretation. It is unfortunate that much of the burden of publishing such reports falls on the local societies; for endless details of fragments of pottery are really of interest not to the local historian so much as to the professional archaeologist.

In view of this it is encouraging to find that in these two volumes of the Transactions of our county Archaeological and Historical Society, although all but one of the illustrations are of archaeological subjects, over half of the pages of text are occupied by articles of a historical nature. It is worth examining these pages in more detail from the point of view of a local historian to assess how much they contribute to the history of the county.

'Fortified Manor Houses' by the editor, Daniel Williams, deals with a type of house new to the later middle ages, something which was less substantial than the castles of the nobility had been and which was associated particularly with an emerging middle class of new gentry.

The article is based on an impressive list of references to national archives. The royal prerogative of controlling fortifications meant that
anyone wishing to build such a house had to obtain a licence. Although many of the examples cited concern Leicestershire, the whole subject is approached from the point of view of the central government and not of local society. We are even given the impression that one of these new gentry might be personally responsible for the building of one of these 'more fashionable residences', as if all he had to do was to order one 'in modest imitation of his social superiors'. 'The prosperity of the times', we are told, 'was implanted upon the English landscape by a middle class which, like other middle classes before or since, sought to emulate the life style of those above them.' There is not a word about the local communities of people that had to build, maintain, service and provision these establishments.

For this reason the conclusion that the fundamental reason for this development was defence must remain a superficial interpretation. Of course the author can cite incidents to illustrate the violence of the mediaeval countryside; but he has not come to grips with the problem of identifying the foundations of the new class with its new type of manor house. This is history written from the top downwards and the fact that Leicestershire examples are cited, whilst making the article more interesting to a local reader, contributes nothing to the author's argument. It seems strange too that no reference is made to any attempt to co-ordinate his research with the fieldwork of the Archaeological Fieldwork Group, whose report in the same issue includes a provisional list of the county's moated sites.

The next article, 'The Electoral Influence of the Earls of Huntingdon, 1603-1640', by J K Gruenfelder, also uses a local example to test the validity of a general theory. The theory in question is Professor Lawrence Stone's argument that the electoral influence of the peerage in this period and the local example is the Hastings family, the Earls of Huntingdon. The author's method is to identify the connexions of each member of parliament who sat for the county or borough and to classify them as either Earl's men or not. He finds that from back in the sixteenth century until the collapse of their county role in 1640, the family dominated the county elections. The town, on the other hand, managed to return independent members until 1614, when it 'traded its electoral independence for help from its patrons for the new charter' for its almshouse. He concludes that the record of the family 'stands as a significant challenge to the suggestion that aristocratic electoral influence declined'.
It is doubtful whether the counting of successful candidates can be a sufficient basis for judging the political influence of such a family. While counting, moreover, the author also carefully records instances long before 1640 of the family's candidature being openly challenged both in town and county. In 1621, for instance, the Earl nominated kinsmen for both county seats. They were duly elected, whereupon the sheriff, relying on a legal but unprecedented technicality, refused to make the return. In the same year the town turned down both the Earl's candidates and more or less the same thing happened in the next election there. Such instances seriously undermine the article's main contention.

The author does allude to other factors, such as the family's rivalry with the Duchy of Lancaster for influence in the town and its eventual defeat at the hands of the Grey family, its great rival in the county. On the whole, however, he treats the family in isolation. Yet in order to judge its achievement a wider picture shewing the political background right across the county community is needed.

The third and final historical article in this volume, also by the editor, 'William Burton's 1642 revised edition of The Description of Leicestershire', draws attention to one of the county's important but possibly hitherto neglected sources of historical information. The editor includes a note on Burton's life and traces the stages of Burton's revision of his original publication of 1622. He makes it fairly clear that the survival of the three manuscripts now on deposit in the Stafford Record Office means that we should be in a position to assess what was involved.

What local historians need to know is whether John Nichols, who knew of the revision and made use of it, systematically incorporated all the additional material into his History and Antiquities of the County of Leicester. The editor at least makes a comparison of the introductions and this enables him to quote a delightful paragraph about sport in the county. But what about the treatment of individual towns and villages? The impression gained from this article and a brief examination of the manuscripts is that the additions were mainly to the armorial and genealogical treatment, while many of the fascinating topographical observations and descriptions were reduced or omitted. To check this will, of course, need a detailed and exhaustive comparison; but if this is generally the case there is perhaps no need for the publication of a 'Complete Burton'.
The first article in the next volume, 'John Brinsley and his Friends' by Vivian Salmon, is a good example of the way the life of a man of wider significance can be illuminated by setting it in its local context. Brinsley was a schoolmaster who published several religious and educational works in the early seventeenth century. He is best known for his comprehensive course on language teaching, but he also pioneered the teaching of the vernacular in grammar schools. He went to Cambridge University and on graduating became a schoolmaster, first at Kegworth and later at Ashby-de-la-Zouch, Leicestershire very likely being his native county. As the article's title and its subtitle, 'Scholarship in seventeenth-century Leicestershire', imply, the author has sought out details of the men Brinsley came into contact with in the county: but he has also done the same for Brinsley's contemporaries at university during his formative years in the 1580's, when he came under Puritan influence. These associations are shewn to have been significant in forming his career and his non-conformity led to troubles concerning his clerical duties at Ashby.

The author concludes by summing up Brinsley's achievement as a writer. It is interesting that, although apparently a severe teacher, Brinsley acknowledged the importance of the happiness of his pupils. His course includes this exhortation: 'Let the school be made unto them a place of play: and the children drawn on by that pleasant delight which ought to be, it can then no more hinder their growth than their play doth, but rather further it, when they sit at their ease'. Since it is set in its wider context, this study of the life of one man helps to throw light on the intellectual and religious life of the county.

The other historical article is principally a narrative account of the first forty years of the City and County Police Forces of Leicester. The author, Clifford R Stanley, goes some way towards stating, but not explaining, the need for the local forces and the tasks for which they were created. His information is drawn mainly from police records, but evidently also from other sources, which are not always identified. He concentrates on the career of the first Chief Constable. Indeed, instead of assessing this man's contribution, this article is more in the form of a eulogy to him, like the newspaper obituary notice quoted at the beginning. Although it contains much interesting information, therefore, it is perhaps appropriately titled: 'A Centenary Tribute to Frederick Goodyer, Leicester's first Chief Constable 1836-1876'. One fifth of this article is, incidentally, taken word for word from the
An innovation in this volume is the inclusion of short articles under the heading "Historical Notes and Documents". The first of these that is relevant here is 'The hastily drawn up Will of William Catesby, Esquire, 25 August 1485' again by the editor. The swift rise of Catesby from minor Northamptonshire gentry to a position of almost supreme power under Richard III is set out in considerable detail, followed by his execution, after the king's defeat at Bosworth Field. The will is printed in full and its various provisions explained, some of them concerning estates acquired by less than fair negotiations. The editor is too modest in not classifying this as a full article, although it is doubtful how much relevance Catesby has to the history of the county beyond the fact that some of his lands were in Leicestershire and that he lost his head in the county town.

Bernard Elliott's note 'Mount St Bernard's Reformatory, Leicestershire', is a brief but colourful summary of his research into the eventful history of the reformatory for boys run by Leicestershire's Cistercian monks. This opened in 1856 and, after many vicissitudes, finally closed in 1885.

Finally, 'James Thompson, Historian of Leicester' by Malcolm Elliott, is a very useful and clear note. No doubt the vast majority of Thompson's writings lie in the files of his newspapers, especially the Leicester Chronicle. Not surprisingly most of the information here is drawn from this source. Thompson was a great campaigner on behalf of the city, sometimes for the preservation of historical buildings. He edited the Midland Counties Historical Collector, was a founder member of the Leicestershire Archaeological and Historical Society and an active member of other societies. His historical books, mainly on Leicester, came out in the thirty years starting in 1846.

Of the eight pieces noted here five are worth considering as serious contributions to history. Of these, however, three appear to have been written under the assumption that subjects of county history are only respectable in so far as they can be related to national history, even at the risk of ignoring their context in the local communities. This is
essentially an old fashioned, antiquarian attitude to local history; since, however, two of these three were written by the editor himself, this may well reflect editorial policy. Let us hope that the editor is receiving articles of more relevance and will consider publishing them.

These Transactions have been issued since 1862 and have always been produced to a high standard. The last change in presentation was in 1955, accompanied by the start of the blue covers. The change was intended as an economy, to save space; but if anything it improved the appearance. We are now promised another change with the next volume. Let us hope that this involves no reduction in standards and no change just for the sake of change.

CONTINUITY, FIELDS AND FISSION: THE MAKING OF A MIDLAND PARISH
C Phythian-Adams Leicester University Department of English Local History 1978 £3.95

In 1955 Leicester’s Department of English Local History published Professor Finberg’s pioneering essay on ‘Roman and Saxon Withington’. With its sub-title ‘A Study in Continuity’ it set a cat among the pigeons by questioning, in the case of one Gloucestershire village, the generally accepted view that ‘the towns and manors of late Saxon England can claim no demonstrable connexion with the Roman past.’ Now, a quarter of a century later, the Department has published, also as one of its Occasional Papers, Mr Phythian-Adams’s work on the complex Leicestershire parish of Claybrook. He not only deals with the question of continuity but also breaks new ground in seeking to answer the fundamental question of the origin of the various settlements in the area.

One of the parish’s townships is in Warwickshire and when other associated Warwickshire places are added too, there emerge the outlines of an estate centred on the Roman settlement at High Cross. The development of the townships in medieval times is examined in detail and all kinds of evidence are adduced to carry us back beyond the barriers of recorded history.
The paper runs to fifty odd pages, including five helpful maps and an appendix on Leicestershire's only Anglo-Saxon charter, which refers to Claybrook. It is not an 'easy read'; but then it is not just a parish history, but a considerable and original addition to the field of local history.

The Department's series of Occasional Papers was long noted for its handsome printing and presentation. It was also reasonably priced: the paper by Professor Finberg mentioned above, for instance, cost six shillings and others were generally a pound each until 1976. At that time the Leicester University Press changed the format and the typography, so that the present paper is altogether inferior in appearance: yet it sells at nearly four pounds.

J G

A BIBLIOGRAPHY OF LEICESTERSHIRE CHURCHES
Part 1: The Periodical Sources
edited by D Parsons
Leicester University Department of Adult Education and Leicestershire Libraries and Information Service
1978 £1.50

This is a most useful guide for local historians compiled by a group of students under the direction of the editor and it will be appreciated by anyone seeking printed references to the history of their parish church. Whilst most local historians would automatically look for information in the publications of local archaeological and historical societies, not everyone would think to search the files of The Builder or of the more specialized journals produced by societies such as the Master Glass Painters which have been searched for this bibliography. The decision not to go back beyond 1850 has meant the exclusion of the Gentleman's Magazine; but county topographical indices to that were published at the end of the last century.

This bibliography is clearly printed and the gazetteer arrangement, which includes Rutland churches, is very easy to follow, although it is surprising to find the City of Leicester churches taken out of sequence and grouped together at the end. The inclusion of the Victorian churches, many now respectable antiquities past their centenaries, is most welcome.

G K L

40
This very attractive and well illustrated volume gives the history of these services based on such records as survive and is even more dependent on the memories of the people and the families of those who served in them. It is very largely the story of the growth of these services in the last hundred years and shows, particularly in the case of the fire service, how much the community owes to the services of the volunteer.

Of all the services described perhaps the volunteer soldiers, both the artillery, infantry—the common foot-soldier, and the more glamorous voluntary cavalry and yeomanry, have the longest and most colourful history.

Few books can more vividly bring back to older people the extent of the changes they have seen in the present century and this very attractive volume is an example for other local societies of what may be done by the work of the amateur historian in the field of social history.

G K L

LEICESTERSHIRE WATER-MILLS
N Ashton  Sycamore Press Wymondham  1976  £3.70

The second part of this book starts with a brief historical account of Leicestershire water-mills, mainly based on a comparison between the distribution of mills as recorded in the Domesday Survey and as recorded on John Prior’s county map of 1779. Not surprisingly the conclusion is that the change in the greater density of mills from eastern to the western half of the county reflected the change in the density of population over the same period. Unfortunately the two distribution maps, which do not name the mills, are printed back to back, so that a direct comparison is not possible. The decline in the numbers of mills since 1779 is demonstrated by counting the mills mentioned in trade directories.
The author's major contribution is the following chapter, a personal account of all the surviving mill buildings in the county. Each entry is a brief description accompanied by at least one photograph. The descriptions would perhaps have benefitted from fuller technical details of the sites and machinery.

The next section, a list of vanished water-mills, is not so thorough, but at least provides a framework on which to hang a few historical notes and various illustrations, such as old photographs, drawings and prints. The sources of these illustrations, however, the author seldom troubles to disclose.

The first part of the book is a simplified general history of water-mills. The text of this is not tied in with the body of the book and the schematic diagrams of the different types of mill are wasteful in space and not very informative. It would have been more to the point to include detailed drawings of the workings of a few Leicestershire mills to illustrate the different types and to explain differences by comparing actual examples with which the author is familiar.

There is no index and no location map, which would have been a help as the entries in the main sections are in alphabetical order of the name of the mill, and not of the location.

The author is to be congratulated for the considerable work he has put into visiting and photographing over forty sites to compile this book and it is gratifying to note that such a handsome little volume is the product of a local printing press.

J G

THE LEICESTER GAS UNDERTAKING
1821–1921
D E Roberts  East Midlands Gas 1978  50p

This is a condensed, illustrated and very well produced account of the first hundred years of one of Leicestershire’s most important industries. Gas production preceded the railways, and the Leicester Gas-Light and Coke Company was established by a private parliamentary act in 1821, eleven years later than the first London Company and two years after the Nottingham Company. When the gas lamps in Belgrave and Gallowtree
Gates were lit for the first time on 21st October 1821 a new era of public convenience and safety had begun.

The Company prospered, successfully maintaining its monopoly position, and its original works in Belgrave Gate were in 1821 far enough from the town centre to allay public fears of the risk of explosions. This site being adjacent to the canal helped to cut cartage costs. As the Company grew, it expanded its plant on the Belgrave site to keep pace with the growing demands for extensions of the supply, and further parliamentary acts in 1838, 1860 and 1873 enabled it to raise more capital to finance its growth. By 1877 the limit of expansion had been reached at the Belgrave works, and the company sought a new site for expansion with better access to a railway. The site chosen was an area of corporation land in Aylestone Road, and both the necessary funds and purchase were made easier by the transfer of the Company — with the separate water undertaking — to Corporation control by the Act of 1878.

From 1821 to 1879, when the last member of the Robinson family retired, this family had managed and developed the undertaking — and the equally profitable gas fitting business as their own concern — on behalf of the Company. Another able successor, Arthur Colson, managed the development and constant modernization of the Aylestone Road plant. He died in office in 1910, when he was succeeded by Hubert Pooley, who nursed the concern through the difficult years of the 1914-18 war and the post-war fuel shortages.

Not only did the Gas Company supply light and energy, but it met the competition of the more efficient electric street lighting, by pioneering new equipment, such as the domestic gas cooker, which released so many women from the drudgery of the coal range. It had a good after-sales service, and the office in Market Street was acquired as early as 1890. It received a substantial revenue from the sale of the chemical by-products of gas manufacture, and introduced welfare and social facilities for the workers on the Aylestone Road site. The Aylestone Road works was a large one by any standards, with its own railway engines, as well as the indispensable horse.

It is also on the Aylestone Road site that East Midlands Gas has opened a new regional museum, the John Doran Museum. We wish it well and look forward to other interesting booklets on the development of Emgas and its historic role in the East Midlands.  

G K L
THE HORSESHOES OF OAKHAM CASTLE
T H McK Clough Leicestershire Museums, Art Galleries and
Records Service 1978 40p

The unique Oakham Castle collection of horseshoes levied from peers of
the realm has for centuries been a noted curiosity. John Speed published
a list of fourteen of them in 1610; but this latest treatment of them, by
the keeper of the Rutland County Museum, is undoubtedly the most
thorough and carefully prepared.

The author's account of the custom includes many quotations from earlier
writers and also a general account of the various donors and of the
changing types of horseshoe surrendered through the centuries. He is
cautious in dealing with the origins of the practice, but points out that
the tradition that one of the giant shoes was put up at the command of
Edward IV is recorded as early as 1521, and that this shoe may well
commemorate the King's victory at Empingham in 1470.

Half of the book is taken up with a list of the 238 recorded shoes, the
donors of all but eight of which can be identified, right back to the mid
sixteenth century at least. The actual inscriptions are not given, nor is
there any indication of the dimensions, which might have been helpful to
visitors. Sixteen of the shoes listed are missing: it is to be hoped that
the number that went for scrap in the second World War were all unin-
scribed.

This booklet is authoritatively written, clearly printed and, with 44 pages
and a dozen plates, excellent value.

J G

BYGONE MARKET HARBOROUGH
J Anderson the author
29 The Fairway Blaby 1978 £1.20

This is a pleasantly presented collection of three dozen old photographs
and half a dozen prints of Harborough. The town is fortunate in that an
early plan of it, dating back to the mid eighteenth century, was published.
The author rightly includes this plan early on so as to help locate many
of the buildings shewn in the illustrations.
The town formerly consisted of little more than one long market place, marked The Great Street on the plan. It is not surprising, therefore, that over twenty of the pictures feature parts of this street. Some of them also shew these spaces in full use on market or fair days.

J G

OAKHAM IN RUTLAND  Part 2
Compiled by A R Traylen  Rutland Local History Society  1977  50p

The first part of this booklet was reviewed in Vol 2 No 6 of the Historian. It contained old photographs arranged as a walk round the town. In this part the photographs are in a fairly jumbled order and are all, with the exception of the two handsome pictures on the covers, reproduced small, so that little detail is visible. What is visible, unfortunately, is the paste-up of the numbers and captions in a grey area between them on the page. The previous part drew on reminiscences by local people. This one has nine pages of text 'presented in the form of a pot pourri.' This means a rag-bag of facts and irrelevant anecdotes, mostly unascribed and of the type 'The vicar was visiting an old lady . . . .' Compared with the first part this is a disappointment, but still represents good value at fifty pence.

J G

THE TOWN GATES AND BRIDGES OF MEDIAEVAL LEICESTER
J Wilshere  Leicester Research section of Chamberlain Music and Books  1978  60p

This neatly printed booklet of nearly thirty pages is not written in the form of a history and comes to no conclusions. The final paragraph reads 'Two bridges over the old town ditch . . . . need not detain us further.' It is rather a compilation of facts, including a dozen old illustrations, taken from various published records and histories. No detailed references to the sources are given, but a brief bibliography is included.

J G
These twelve pages of villainously laid out typesetting form 'a bi-centenary assessment' of one of Leicestershire's most colourful characters, the rector who projected grandiose charitable trusts to be founded on profits from tree-planting and choral festivals. His ambitions for charity were not confined to the usual distributions to the poor, but extended to a library, a picture gallery, a printing office and schooling that would have amounted to a village university. The Professor of Antiquity, for instance, was to set about compiling the History and Antiquities of England county by county, to be published by the printing office. The church at Church Langton was to be rebuilt as a stately minster of cathedral proportions and there was even a scheme for a great choral college at Oxford.

Hanbury's schemes did not all fail completely and the parish derived some benefit from the Hanbury schools and from various of his welfare provisions. This is dwarfed, however, alongside the vast benefits costing thousands of pounds which he envisaged. There is a parallel here in comparing this little booklet, which ends limply 'The more recent educational history need not detain us', with the fulsome and lavish biography which the ghost of Hanbury demands should be published.

Foxton locks are an obvious tribute to the skills of the engineers and navvies who built the canals; but the impressive works and the ingenious working of the inclined plane are not so easily recaptured by the visitor to the site to-day. Designed to save water and to save time for the boats waiting to ascend and descend the locks (and to save money on their repair), the in-
clined plane lifted two boats at a time floating in sealed tanks, in both
directions, so that four boats could be moved together. The tanks moved
on tracks hauled by cables, and a steam engine provided the power to
rotate the drums. The lift was formally opened in July 1900, and the
decision taken to close the lift in October 1910. The works on the in-
clined plane were gradually dismantled during the 1920’s and the site
soon became overgrown with weeds and shrubs. The boats meanwhile
reverted to using the refurbished locks from late 1910 or early 1911.

This account gives a very clear account in the text, diagrams and contem-
porary photographs of the design, construction and operation of the in-
clined plane. It gives a picture of the dismantling of the engine house
and concludes with an account of the economics of the canals in the early
years of this century.

The site is now an historic monument, thus ensuring the preservation of
what remains, and here helpers are always welcome to prevent the cleared
area once more becoming overgrown with weeds and shrubs.

G K L

AS I REMEMBER THEM
V Wright Frisby-on-the-Wreake Historical Society 1977 50p

All praise to this excellently written and neatly produced booklet, the
second in a series of village memories collected as a project for the
Historical Society by Margaret Marston. It has 22 pages, including
nine old photographs, and a double spread cover photograph which is a
delight.

The writer was born in 1907 and she has recorded her personal recollec-
tions of home and school life in the village and of various relatives and
village characters, all up to the early 1920’s, when she became a pupil
teacher at her own village school.

The writing style is very relaxed and a model of clarity. Many such
memoirs have been written, but of course each is unique. The people of
Frisby are fortunate in having this picture of their own village.

J G
This little pamphlet, consisting of eight pages of text and eight old photographs, includes some interesting recollections by a native of the town, such as his view of the street traffic from the house where he was born (he does not say when) in the town centre. It is difficult, however, to extricate his own knowledge from the jumble of other odd facts that he has gleaned from books and elsewhere and thrown together. A choice paragraph reads 'It is reputed that there were many passages beneath Melton leading to the Church from various buildings in the town'.

The author 'hopes that it will be of interest to people of Melton Mowbray or people who have come to live and are interested in our dear town and its past history (of which there is much more) and have no (?) record of it.' His hope might be better justified if he had a clearer idea of what he intended to offer, it is certainly not history of the town.

J G

THE ANSTEY ENCLOSURES

T H Worth 183 Cropston Road Anstey £1.00

The author's sub-title, 'A study of Anstey based on a close scrutiny of the 1761 Acts of Enclosure, and a lifetime spent in walking over the fields of Anstey', draws attention to the principal contribution he makes to the history of his village, namely a comparison of the enclosure award and map with the roads (and footpaths) in the parish as he has known them. He has included several photographs taken around the parish, but his sketch maps are not sufficient to locate them and the other features mentioned.

The printing of this study has unfortunately provided the opportunity for the author to write another of those all too familiar village histories notable mainly for their diffuseness and superficiality. He ranges from Romans to road-widening, citing on the way no sources for his information,
apart from the inevitable ‘In some old writings . . .’. The section on ‘Early Times’, covering Roman Britian to the Battle of Hastings, is not the only one based on dubious place-name etymology and irrelevant anecdotes. There is even speculation that Anstey Lane was part of the Via Devana, which, however, was a spurious Roman road of eighteenth century creation, long since discredited. After the Battle of Hastings, apparently, nothing at all happened at Anstey until the 1745 Rebellion, when a Scots foraging party is reputed to have penetrated this far south.

More serious, however, is the fact that the author completely misunderstands the nature of the village community before the enclosure and of the farming of its open fields which was the principal activity of the villagers. In the first place he jumps to the conclusion that when the three enclosure commissioners laid out the boundaries of the roadways through the parish they were actually creating the roads to the village which until then, he asserts, had been ‘without one single road to link it with any other village, or with the world outside.’ He credits these three gentlemen with foresight in doing this but also with unaccountable blindness in that, according to him, ‘they had absolutely no road traffic to think about, nor had they seen any’.

In the second place, ignoring the village farmers and their annual labour of cropping their strips all over the open fields, he mistakenly asserts that the fields consisted of nothing but ‘open pasture land’ or ‘a great open park land’ and were ‘common land . . . over which the general public held undisputed right . . . to graze their animals’. Starting from this incorrect assumption he reasons that enclosure must have been a form of legalized land-grab. We are expected to believe that in 1761 George III decided, on his own initiative, to enclose the fields of Anstey and that the enclosure commissioners, ‘armed with the legal commands of their monarch’, set about dividing the fields into shares to be granted to local landowners. The author follows up this nonsense with the claim that ‘some historians have said that only a lunatic dare have suggested such an infringement of the people’s rights.’ He cannot specify which historians, but merely provides an anecdote to demonstrate the king’s insanity. This is historical dabbling at its worst.

Finally the ‘great Land Enclosures Act of 1761’ in the author’s first sentence turns out to be nothing more than the enclosure Act of his own village, hailed as ‘what was perhaps the most momentous yet played down piece of legislation ever passed by any British government’.
This study has incidentally provided a framework on which to hang various amusing anecdotes and fascinating reminiscences about the village. It is a pity that the author did not confine himself to this approach, perhaps expanding his treatment of the eighteenth century features of which he has personal or local knowledge. As he writes that he has 'reams of interesting anecdotal material on Anstey, which would perhaps prove more easily readable to the average reader', we can look forward to his future publications. The present work is a neatly printed booklet of fifty odd pages, including the maps and photographs and with a drawing by the author on the card cover.

J G
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