

WYMESWOLD (SK 617232)

Hector MacDonal reports a scatter of Roman pottery sherds including grey-ware, mortarium and calcite gritted ware. The last is probably 1st century in date. Coins are also reported.

Review

The Royal Commission on the Historical Monuments of England: **Leicestershire, Nottinghamshire & Rutland. Extracted from An Inventory of Nonconformist Chapels and Meeting-Houses in Central England.** Her Majesty's Stationery Office, 1986. 34pp. Price £1.95

The last ten years have witnessed a new appreciation of the historical and architectural value of nonconformist buildings. Now the Royal Commission, largely through the work of Christopher Stell, has published the first volume covering 13 counties in central England of what promises to become the authoritative survey of nonconformist chapels and meeting-houses in the country. The publication under review is one of the separately issued county sections. Handsomely produced, it has over 40 plates, drawings and plans for Leicestershire and Rutland alone. Most entries contain a brief account of the congregation's origins, a bibliography and a description of the building, its history and the more important fittings and monumental inscriptions. The small number of interior views are particularly interesting, for example the Strict Baptist Chapel at Evington, since they are less familiar than the exteriors and more vulnerable to alteration. The preface to the main volume makes clear that the emphasis is on pre-1800 buildings, though the survey is intended to include all the important buildings up to 1914 and a listing of the most notable examples demolished since 1940. Thus the coverage of the nineteenth century, the main period of chapel building, is selective. Moreover, only those buildings which have actually been visited are included. The results are therefore rather less than the first impression of a gazetteer, though probably only a few buildings of importance have been missed. But a survey on this scale does allow an assessment of the nonconformist buildings in the county. The erection of a building and its subsequent history are visible signs of the success or failure of a congregation, and the later changes in ownership offer a fascinating insight into the fortunes of individual congregations and denominations. Thus at Oakham the Friends meeting-house built in 1719 for £166, closed in 1837 and later leased to the Primitive Methodists, is now in Quaker use again, while the simple Presbyterian meeting-house built in 1727 and now part of Oakham School, was replaced in 1861 by a larger modern building erected for the congregation which had by then become Congregationalist. As in all counties Methodists are well represented, but the particular feature of Leicestershire is the strength of the General Baptists. The number of buildings they erected in the north-west of the county in the early nineteenth century is evident from the survey. The Unitarians, the smallest and traditionally the wealthiest denomination, have only two buildings listed, nonetheless they are among the seven buildings in the county considered by the Commissioners to be most worthy of preservation. If Leicestershire is not perhaps as well endowed as some counties, then it is clear it has not suffered the same level of losses. Redundant buildings have generally fared better

in Leicester than in other major cities. One notes the treatment of the 'Pork Pie' Chapel in Belvoir Street, now the City Adult Education Centre, compared with the former Baptist Chapel in George Street and the Wesleyan Chapel in Boot Street, both in Nottingham, though the Bond Street Congregational Church demolished in the 1960s should be mentioned. There are a number of slips in the Leicestershire section, such as the dating of the early nineteenth century Congregational Chapel at Lutterworth and the alterations to the Billesdon Baptist Chapel made in 1861. The most serious is the omission of Bardon Chapel said to date largely from 1694. Errors and omissions are inevitable in a work of this scale but they could perhaps have been reduced. The editor obtained assistance with the Staffordshire section, why not for Leicestershire and other counties? Reference to the new Pevsner volume would have highlighted some of the more questionable dates and drawn attention to Bardon Chapel. It would be wrong however not to point out the generally high standard of the work, and what a major contribution the survey is to the study of nonconformist buildings and to the overall history of dissent. The separate county sections are particularly good value and deserve a wide circulation.

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