

Reviews

A MILL ON THE SOAR. A personal and Company narrative, by Shirley Ellis. Privately printed and published (1978). 147 pp. Illustrated. Available from the Midland Educational Company Limited. £3-00.

Many business histories have, unfortunately, in the past suffered by being hurriedly compiled to celebrate a company's centenary or some other anniversary, often relying more on personal anecdotes and tradition than history. It is, therefore, refreshing to find an important exception to the general quality of private business histories. This handsomely produced volume is rather more than a history of Friars Mill, the oldest industrial building in Leicester still used for manufacturing, or of the firm now occupying the site. Mr. Ellis has written not only about the involvement of the Donisthorpe and Ellis families in the business, but also of their private and social life, including the houses they lived in and those they built. The first three chapters set the historical background and recount the involvement of the two families in woolstapling and worsted spinning up to 1889, when the author's father became the first Ellis to work at Donisthorpe's. The author also prints an interesting account by Kenneth Ellis of the work of a nineteenth-century woolstapler, as well as briefly mentioning the important contribution made by George Edmund Donisthorpe to mechanised woolcombing. It is unfortunate that, despite Mr. Ellis's efforts, the origins of both the present factory building at Friars Mill and the early partnership of Messrs. Donisthorpes remain obscure. The second half of the book concerns events within the author's own memory or from the recollections of his father. He provides an important account of the post-war changes at one firm of spinners, and illustrates how Donisthorpe's made the transition from worsted spinning to the manufacture of sewing thread, and more recently, the Company's successful introduction of synthetics. These changes in manufacture help to explain Donisthorpe's success, unlike so many other Leicester spinners who have either disappeared or lost their independence. Perhaps the most important contribution made by Mr. Ellis, to the historian's overall knowledge of the industrial history of Leicester, is his illustration of the role of individual families in the creation and management of businesses and firms, a feature which played a major part in the city's economic life until the early 1960s, the period when many of the largest of these independent firms became part of national conglomerates. Mr. Ellis has also given a fascinating description of his childhood at Quorn and his social life before the last War, which will doubtless prove of interest to future social historians. The author in the first

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chapter, where he describes the early history of the Friar Mills site, occasionally allows speculation to replace the historical content of the narrative, but this is only a minor criticism compared with the overall narrative which Mr. Ellis tells so well. The high quality of the illustrations should also be mentioned; particularly the publication of a drawing of 'Mr. Donisthorpe's house in the Newarke' by John Flower and a water-colour of a framework-knitter's shop by Albert Findley, both previously unpublished, as well as the splendid colour reproduction of G. M. Henton's water-colour painting of Friars Mill which forms the book's frontispiece. Though clearly written for personal pleasure and for the interest of his friends and colleagues, Mr. Ellis's book is of considerable interest to historians. The author is to be congratulated for providing this important contribution to the industrial history of Leicester; it is now up to other businessmen to provide similar pictures of their own firms and to the historian to provide the overall picture for the city.

D. L. WYKES

THE PARISH CLERGY UNDER THE LATER STUARTS. *The Leicestershire experience*, by *John H. Pruett*. The University of Illinois Press, 1978, 203 pp., £7.50.

Dr. Pruett, of the University of Illinois, has taken as his subject the condition and character of the parochial clergy between the Restoration and the Hanoverian Succession. As he points out, since Macaulay published his famous description of the country parson of the period, no historian has really attempted to substitute a statistical method for his brilliant impressionism. Such a method, on a national scale, presents great difficulties. As an alternative, Dr. Pruett offers an intensive investigation of the clergy in a single county and chooses Leicestershire as a typical example. Considering features such as situation, size, economy and distribution of population, he makes a good case for regarding it as 'a fairly average English county' of the period. How far generalisations derived from the East Midlands can hold good for, say, the West Country or the Northern counties might be disputed; but from our local viewpoint we have good reason to applaud his choice.

After a lucid introduction, in which he explains the ecclesiastical organisation of Leicester Archdeaconry (almost exactly coincident with the county) and reminds us that, at any one time, it provided for some 200 clergy occupying 170 livings, Dr. Pruett devotes his first chapter to the Civil War and Restoration. He suggests that perhaps a quarter of the Leicestershire clergy had been firm Church and King men at the beginning of the Civil War, but rightly finds it difficult to determine what proportion of the rest can be regarded as convinced Puritans. The important point he makes is that between 1642 and 1659 there had been a large turnover of clergy and four out of five livings had changed hands, so that the Restoration was bound to cause dislocation, however moderately it was conducted.

The second chapter examines the geographic and social origins of the clergy, their intellectual attainments, the process by which they were appointed and promoted, and the career prospects of the different social groups among them. Its conclusions rest on an exemplary examination of a wide range of sources that are by no means easy to interpret, the most important being the diocesan and archdeaconry records in Lincoln and Leicester, and the Wake MSS. in Oxford. Its method is distinguished by the use of a number of statistical samples; for instance, a comparison is made between all incumbents holding livings at three widely-separated dates and between two different generations of new ordinands. In spite of the drawback that the evidence is more abundant for the later than the earlier years Dr. Pruett on the whole succeeds in establishing the firm statistical base at which he aims.

Dr. Pruett's third chapter, on the wealth of the clergy is perhaps the most important of the book and also the most controversial, because in it he takes issue with authorities like Mr. Christopher Hill on the question of the movement of clerical incomes in the period following the Reformation. He concludes that the economic hardships of the clergy were exaggerated by contemporaries. He maintains that in terms of real values the clergy in general had become progressively better-off since the Reformation, to the extent that Leicestershire rectories appreciated up to the end of the seventeenth century by some 80 per cent and vicarages by 45 per cent. Although this improvement was offset after 1690 by the increased weight of the land tax, which might take as much as a fifth of a parson's income, the balance remained to the clergy's advantage. This argument is well supported by the evidence of terriers, inventories, and the invaluable returns compiled at the instance of Bishop Wake; but one needs to bear in mind that much depends on the validity one attaches, for example, to the *Valor Ecclesiasticus*, the Commonwealth surveys, and to the Phelps Brown-Hopkins index of prices. One reason for the relative prosperity of the clergy is to be found in the large part that tithe continued to hold in clerical incomes. If rectories increased proportionately more in value than vicarages it was because they enjoyed the greater tithe; and if town livings were among the poorest it was because their tithe had long since been commuted into trifling money payments. However, Dr. Pruett's detailed examination shows that tithing practice was too complex to admit of easy generalisation.

Because of improved farming, the parson's glebe, which was his other most important source of income, also helped to account for his advantageous position. The amount varied considerably. It might consist merely of a plot round the parsonage or extend to a 280-acre farm as at Market Bosworth. The average glebe in Leicestershire seems to have been of the order of thirty or forty acres. Its value was sometimes enhanced by the consolidation that could accompany enclosure. Enclosure could also enhance the value of tithe; and Dr. Pruett concludes that, at least in the short run, enclosure generally favoured the parson.

The chapters on the parson in his parish and at home give on the whole a favourable picture of their standard of culture and devotion to duty. The

decline in week-day services and catechizing seems to have been the fault of parishioners and the law. The most common vice of the parson was a propensity to perform clandestine marriages, which commanded a higher fee than others. Between 1662 and 1714 only one parson in fifty was charged with a moral offence. Dr. Pruett can discover only two really scandalous clergy in the whole county, Thomas Parsons of Swinford and the egregious Edward Vernon of Redmile. His account of the latter, whose flagrant misbehaviour so provoked the Duke of Rutland, might have gained in piquancy if he had pointed out that, as his name suggests, he was of the Duke's kin.

The political activities of the clergy inspire a lively chapter, which, however, suffers from the limitation that most of the evidence belongs to the years after the Glorious Revolution. On the preceding period it is a pity that Dr. Pruett did not note John Gery's part in the machinations for the surrender of the borough charters, for this would have enabled him to explain more convincingly Gery's failure to advance his career after 1689. For the rest it is useful to learn that in Anne's reign the local clergy were Tory by a majority of three to one. Yet they were moderate in their Toryism. The county produced only nine Non-Jurors and one active Jacobite—the unfortunate William Paul of Orton-on-the-Hill, who went off to join the Old Pretender and paid the penalty.

It should be clear that Dr. Pruett has made a most valuable contribution to our local history. It is a work of exacting scholarship and careful judgment. It is also very readable and rich in illustrative detail. More general readers should not be deterred by the emphasis on statistical method, for this has been combined with some lively accounts of individual parsons and a humane and sympathetic treatment of the clergy as a whole. It should be added that the University of Illinois Press has made this an attractive publication. One or two small errors have crept in. Newbold Verdon appears in the form Verdun; and Armesby on *p.* 137 must surely be Arnesby. The publishers themselves draw attention to a more serious error on *p.* 145: here the author's graph has been drawn incorrectly and the lines should be shifted a full unit to the right, in order to coincide with the figures given in the table on *p.* 144.

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