The series in which this volume is published, Manchester Medieval Studies, avowedly aims 'to combine scholarship traditionally associated with medieval studies with an awareness of more recent issues and approaches in a form accessible to the non-specialist reader'. *Chaucer in Context* performs this service admirably, offering an informed survey of current approaches to Chaucer's works within a framework which stresses their historicity and points to the pitfalls which may await the interpreter who lacks any sense of the alterity of medieval texts. Understanding the needs of the non-specialist reader as essentially those of the undergraduate or adventurous A-level student, it offers a good deal of information; a concise introduction to the development of Chaucer studies, through consideration largely of certain well known *Canterbury Tales*; and an extensive bibliography of Chaucer criticism.

Its author's training is in history rather than in literary scholarship, and in drawing attention to this at the start he perhaps arouses expectations that the book's focus will be some aspect of the social or political meaning of Chaucer's poetry, and hence the 'context' in which he is to be read a very specific one relating to later fourteenth-century history. This is in most respects not the case. Apart from a little discussion of Chaucer's biography at the start, what we have here might be defined in much more general terms as a sense of history, an urging towards historically informed reading which will enable those bewildered by the multiplicity of available interpretations of Chaucer's writing to discriminate between them and to evaluate the plausibility of their claims.

The four substantial chapters begin with a discussion of 'real-life', moving from the circumstances in which Chaucer was writing to an investigation of various of the conventions which may have influenced his constructions of what is often perceived as social reality — here, in relation to the General Prologue, the
different categories of stereotype which may be claimed to lie behind the
descriptions of the pilgrims. The following chapter moves discussion forward to
the tales themselves, and weighs against each other critical arguments about 'The
Knight's Tale' informed by Bakhtin's distinctions between monologic and dialogic
discourse. Does the tale question a dominant ideology through the construction of
heterodox voices, or conversely does it offer monologic support for a conservative,
hierarchical view of society? To illustrate monologic discourse, Rigby follows Paul
Strohm in pointing to the writings of Gower, perhaps overlooking the way that
Gower's experiments with linguistic hierarchies and the possibilities offered by
manuscript glossing and layout open his works to multiple interpretation.

Chapter three reviews the competing positions of allegorical and humanist
critics, countering Augustinian readings of 'The Nun's Priest's Tale' with
ostensibly more liberal interpretations. The approaches of both D.W. Robertson
and E.T. Donaldson, leading proponents of these opposing schools of criticism, are
here viewed as 'popular ... cogent ... amply supported', and in answer to the
difficulty that 'both of them cannot be correct', Rigby offers a deft accommodation
of dramatic within allegorical reading. Finally comes a discussion of opposing
views about issues of gender in Chaucer's writings, introduced by a summary of
medieval beliefs about male and female characteristics, and the traditional
arguments advanced by misogynist writers. Chaucer's apparently multiple views
on marriage and gender roles are demonstrated with close reference to 'The Wife
of Bath's Prologue' and 'The Franklin's Tale', and while concluding that the
former is 'unmistakeably anti-feminist' in its thrust, Rigby points out that further
instances in the Tales — notably in 'Melibee' and 'The Parson's Tale' —
demonstrate that the image of woman can convey different messages according to
different generic or rhetorical contexts. The four central chapters are rounded off
with a conclusion designed to offer hope for those dazed by the array of
interpretations which have been canvassed: hope which is to be derived from
'seeing Chaucer in the context of the political issues, social values, generic
conventions and literary theory of his own day'.

This is a carefully articulated and lucid book which sets out its premises
clearly and recapitulates for its readers a staggering array of Chaucer criticism: the
workable author-date system of references is keyed into a bibliography of some
seven hundred items. It is user-friendly and generally well produced, apart from
some proof-reading oversights (incomplete cross-references, for example, on pp.
70 and 101), and a tendency to omit the precise source of quotations from
secondary criticism — an inevitable hazard when so much of the argument
depends on quotation and summary. In reading Chaucer it reads primarily the
Chaucer of The Canterbury Tales, with only glancing reference to other of his
works, and some of its generalizations seem occasionally too sweeping. The
strictures on Chaucer’s presentation of courtly love as either ‘dangerous and ineffective posturing’ or as ‘an affectation and a sham’, for example, seem open to qualification from parts of *Troilus and Criseyde*. Within the *Tales*, too, those chosen for close study are the unsurprising ones most calculated to match the outlines of an A-level or undergraduate syllabus.

Contemplation of another discussion of misogyny and feminism in ‘the Wife of Bath’s Prologue’ can make the heart sink, but Rigby contrives (both here and elsewhere) a series of neat and objective overviews which are both provocative and capable of accommodating fresh perceptions. The individual chapters will offer readers ideal starting points for further discussion. While there is in a sense a preliminary air about the whole book, in that the detailed work of contextualizing which Rigby recommends is something that can best be effected by further perusal of appropriate sources and documents whose nature he can indicate only briefly (if at all), there is a lot to be welcomed in a discussion which fulfils its aims with such vigour and clarity.

JULIA BOFFEY


C.L. Kingsford’s classic edition of the *Stonor Letters and Papers* was originally published in three volumes of the Royal Historical Society’s Camden Third Series between 1919 and 1924. This new edition reproduces almost all the original text including Kingsford’s introduction, notes and appendices, to which Dr Carpenter has added her own introduction (pp. 1-31) and a summary list of material in the Public Record Office, not mentioned by Kingsford (pp. 514-19).

Dr Carpenter remarks that Kingsford did his work so thoroughly that she has little to add to his account of the Stonor family, although she does provide additional notes both to his introduction and to the edited text (again Kingsford’s transcripts were so accurate as to require little amendment). Her introduction places the Stonors in the general context of gentry families in later medieval England.

The Stonor letters and papers are one of only three surviving archives of gentry correspondence for this period. Their survival is probably the result of the family papers being confiscated on the attainder of Sir William Stonor in 1483 for participating in Buckingham’s rebellion. The other two gentry archives are the Paston Letters and the Plumpton Correspondence.
The Stonor family was established at Stonor in Oxfordshire near Henley, by the early years of Edward I. The real founder of the family fortunes was, however, a lawyer, Sir John de Stonor who was Chief Justice of the Common Pleas for most of the period between 1329 and 1354, skillfully surviving the political upheavals of the time. Sir John amassed great wealth acquiring estates in nine counties as well as two houses, with land, in London. His successors lived the life of typical country gentry, conserving their estates, serving as JPs and sheriffs and representing Oxfordshire in Parliament.

It was not until 1473, when William Stonor succeeded his father Thomas, that the family again became closely involved in national events. Sir William’s three marriages, firstly to Elizabeth Ryche, widow of a wealthy mercer, secondly to Agnes Wydesdale, a great heiress with large estates in Devon and Cornwall and thirdly to Anne Neville, eldest daughter of John, Marquis of Montagu, brother of the Kingmaker and a cousin of the royal house, brought him both wealth and influence in the highest circles.

More than four-fifths of the published papers relate to the period from the 1460s to the 1480s. A few of these refer to high politics, especially two letters from Simon Stallworth to Sir William describing events in London in June 1483 (nos 330-1); one in particular (no. 331), which mentions the execution of Lord Hastings, has occasioned much debate both in this and other historical journals (p. 15, n. 60).

Editing the Stonor Letters greatly influenced Kingsford’s views when, four years later, he wrote Prejudice and Promise in XVth Century England. In this he replaced the accepted picture of fifteenth-century society as one torn by intrigue, manipulation of the law and violence (vide the Pastons) with one in which most people went about their daily business undisturbed by the political upheavals of the time. Dr Carpenter largely accepts this view, saying that the Stonor Letters offer a picture of ‘mundane and, on the whole, peaceful lives ... right in the middle of “the Wars of the Roses”’ (p. 11). She does, however, concede that the Thames Valley, where the core of the Stonor estates lay was, politically speaking, unusual in that it was a region where the king was the greatest local landowner and therefore not an area of dispute between rival magnates.

Kingsford rightly emphasised the importance of the Stonor papers for the social and economic history of the period, with inventories, household accounts, tradesmen’s bills and especially correspondence, illuminating such matters as local office holding, estate management, legal business, trade, social and domestic life, marriage and dealings with neighbours and kinsmen. Dr Carpenter believes that the papers have been very much under-used by social and economic historians, one notable exception being studies of the partnership of Sir William Stonor and the London merchant, Thomas Betson in the wool trade in Eileen Power’s Medieval People and Alison Hanham’s The Celys and their World.
Above all, the vivid picture which the letters give of late fifteenth-century life is probably the most striking feature of the collection. Kingsford remarked that, in general, the country squires of Oxfordshire, their women folk and the wealthier merchants of London could write with ease and fluency, the worst writers and spellers being the inferior clergy, lesser merchants and the nobility, some of whom could do little more than write their name (pp. 74-75). A curiously modern note is struck in many chance phrases such as Jane Stonor’s famous complaint c. 1470 that ‘servantes be not so delygent as thei were wont to bee’ (no. 106). Whilst a London mercer in selling Dame Elizabeth Stonor 38 yards of green sarsenet, assures her that it is ‘very fyne... and shall last your lyff and your chyldes after you... for a lytill more cost, me thinketh most wisdom to take of the best’ (no. 252).

It is to be regretted that Kingsford’s Glossary of English and Latin words is not reprinted in this edition, since the fifteenth-century vocabulary may deter some would-be readers. Nevertheless, this reissue of Kingsford’s edition is greatly to be welcomed and one hopes with Dr Carpenter, that it will stimulate greater use of this important source for the study of the gentry in late-medieval England.

HARRY COBB


This book is part of a series on the history of urban society in Europe. The aim of the series as a whole is a challenging one. It is to investigate ‘the variety, functions and character of the cities of Europe, and the changing lifestyles of their inhabitants ...’ Strong in outline and rich in detail, each volume will synthesise the present state of scholarship on the often controversial issues involved; and each will offer interpretations based on the author’s own research’. As the editor’s preface explains, even this is not all that the series aims to achieve. Authors are invited to include some of the less familiar and remote cities of Europe, and to make comparisons with non-European cities. Although the series arose out of a concern to provide students, in particular, with a means of getting to grips with the mass of material generated by an increasing interest in European urban history, the books were not simply to be textbooks: ‘[they] will be necessary reading for students of urban and social history, and enjoyable and informative for non-specialists as well’.

Professor Nicholas approaches his task by providing a summary of his
previous work on cities from late antiquity to the beginning of the fourteenth century, a necessary background. Thereafter his main themes are the real or perceived crises which struck later medieval cities as a result of demographic and economic changes during the period; the relationships between cities and their hinterlands; government and conflict; public administration; urban elites; other urban 'classes'; 'legal marginals', in which he includes women, children and non-Christians; education, culture, law-and-order and the fostering of a sense of community; and the physical urban environment. This selection fairly reflects the main focuses of recent research. The 'urban decline' debate, which has been lively among English scholars over the past twenty years, is treated both generally and with a special section for English towns. Similarly, the question of the extent and nature of urban oligarchy is treated at considerable length. The summaries of these established themes provide both considerable detail and straightforward overviews.

On the other hand, neither 'church' nor 'religion' find a place in the index, reflecting the very slight treatment of an aspect of life which was, for the medieval city-dweller, rather important (the index is generally slight — Spain is not even mentioned). It is an inevitable consequence of a book which attempts to summarise and synthesise recent research that it is biased by its secondary sources. The author's own views will not necessarily remedy this: indeed, the probability is that they will reinforce the bias, because authors are themselves likely to be chosen because they are in the mainstream of current interest. The other difficulty inevitably, or almost inevitably, associated with a work which has so many aims and such a very broad canvas is that the quality of the result is heavily dependent on the author's ability to judge the quality of his authorities. This is apparent when one turns to the discussion of London (not Professor Nicholas' strongest suit, I would guess). It was unwise to rely quite so heavily, when summarising provisions for London orphans, on a work in which that august law officer, the city's common serjeant, is described as 'usually the youngest attorney in the Mayor's Court'. Unfortunately, unless one already knows enough to recognise the improbability of this statement, the warning bell will go unrung.

Judged in terms of the overall aims of the series, The Later Medieval City is least successful in its attempt to provide a textbook which is 'strong in outline'. The sections at the beginnings and ends of the main chapters are sometimes excellent summaries, sometimes linking or introductory passages, sometimes, as at the beginning and end of Chapter Six, so sparse and obvious as to serve no useful purpose. Partly because of this absence of a consistent overview, the book is not really an enjoyable read: one has to work quite hard to see the wood for the trees. There are some unresolved contradictions, too: one wonders how it was that women enjoyed educational levels 'at least as high' as those of men (p. 288), when, according to the subsequent discussion, fewer girls spent less time in education at
lower levels than was the case with boys. I also remain to be convinced that the blood feud or vendetta was as much a characteristic of medieval English cities as of some continental ones. Political and revenge murders certainly did occur, particularly in the thirteenth century, but the whole point about the story of the brutal killing of a man who had attacked a London alderman is that the murderers were put on trial and, unless they could plead benefit of clergy, were hanged (p. 315).

On the positive side, The Later Medieval City is as much a sourcebook as a textbook. It provides a wealth of detail and the opportunity for readers to make comparisons for themselves across a wide range of cities and regions. It invites them to raise their eyes from the particular experience of one country and to observe the often quite different experiences of contemporary cities elsewhere. Readers are even given a glimpse — it is no more than this — of aspects of life in Muslim cities. The coverage is thus quite as broad as the aims of the series suggest. Moreover, the very factors which make for a good deal of unevenness means that The Later Medieval City can be used in different ways. Chapters on the well-established themes can be read by students and non-specialists with little if any guidance or background knowledge. Other chapters, or specific themes such as the different ways in which successful urban societies dominated their economic hinterland or the surprisingly varied governmental structures which developed, raise questions which would make a good basis for tutorial discussion. Finally, one of the presumably unintended but nonetheless potentially valuable consequences of the attempt to synthesise research over a wide area is that it highlights those fields in which too little work has been done recently. It may therefore serve to stimulate investigation just where it is needed most.

PENNY TUCKER

THE OXFORD ILLUSTRATED HISTORY OF MEDIEVAL ENGLAND.

This is indeed an ‘illustrated history’, beginning on the cover with a knight in shining armour depicted in stained glass, who conjures up images of chivalry, the piety inherent in medieval life and a culture very different from our own. These topics are all touched on but the subject-matter is far more wide ranging.

In the introductory chapter Nigel Saul gives a concise account of the emergence of the English, as opposed to the Anglo-Saxons, and their sense of Englishness. In doing so he defines the ‘England’ of the title, but unfortunately does not go on to define ‘medieval’. In fact the book covers the whole period from
500 A.D. to c. 1500, which, according to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, is a now rarely used definition of the Middle Ages, the more usual being the five hundred years after 1000 A.D.

The chapters on political history introduce the reader to recent scholarship on the various ‘periods’ within the ‘Middle Ages’ as (not) defined in the book. Helpfully family trees of the ruling dynasties have been provided, together with a chronology; unhelpfully there are no footnotes/endnotes, (particularly frustrating when detailed information is given or other historians’ theses are questioned). Janet Nelson summarises earlier histories of the Anglo-Saxon period and then provides her own version, using visual as well as written sources. The latter includes one of the forty-four Anglo-Saxon wills which have survived. In ‘Conquered England, 1066-1215’ George Garnett reassesses several key issues, including William the Conqueror’s claim to the throne, which was such that he completely changed the nature of society: as the country had been willed to him by Edward the Confessor everything in it belonged to him and hence in the Domesday survey all land was now ‘held of the king’. The circumstances of Henry I’s coronation and the validity of his coronation charter are examined; the arguments presented are somewhat tortuous but the fact remains that he was the crowned king. The Magna Carta is shown to be a confirmation of the rights of the barons, rights which had already been granted to lesser free men. The discussion of later medieval politics by Chris Given-Wilson stresses the continuity and development of political institutions during the period: the English polity, or political nation, had broadened following the increased role of the commons in parliament and of the gentry in the shires. The treatment of Richard III is somewhat cursory, but, since the book spans a thousand years, a two-year reign does not warrant much coverage.

The social history of the whole period is briefly, yet concisely, outlined by Christopher Dyer. Interesting snippets of information emerge contradicting traditional views of medieval life; for example, during the thirteenth century peasants purchased manufactured goods, particularly clothing and utensils, and their houses, based on stone foundations, were built by specialist carpenters. The effects of the Black Death on the fabric of society are examined in detail: survivors were in a position to insist on higher wages, to work from day-to-day rather than on annual contracts and to take time off once they had earned enough. Other effects included greater participation by women in economic matters and the development of community organisation as demonstrated by the volume of locally issued regulations and the provision of care for the local poor.

In the narration of the development of Christianity in England, Henrietta Leyser shows that history, at least as written by historians, does repeat itself: just as the medieval church is often compared unfavourably with that after the Reformation, so was the Anglo-Saxon church with that following the Norman
Conquest. She outlines the implications of the existence and beliefs of the Lollards, which foreshadowed those held by many sixteenth-century English Protestants. It is somewhat ironic that although the Lateran Council had urged the provision of vernacular Bibles to educate the laity, in England such Bibles were outlawed by the authorities because they were advocated by the Lollards and so were considered to encourage heresy. In two instances Leyser draws on examples from the Salisbury diocese: the description of the medieval parishioners of Wimborne Minster at Sunday mass is particularly evocative.

The two chapters 'the Visual Arts' (Nicola Coldstream) and 'Language and Literature' (Derek Pearsall) focus the reader on aspects of medieval life which are less well-known. Certainly very few examples of the former survive and it is only with recourse to such documents as wills that we become aware of the vast amount of plate, jewellery, pictures (both sacred and secular), textiles and books that must have been in existence. The reader’s attention is drawn to ‘micro-architecture’, that is, architectural features reproduced in miniature on such artefacts as tombs and Easter Sepulchres, and to the fact that medieval craftsmen frequently substituted cheap materials for expensive ones, utilising such methods as gilding base metals and painting plaster to resemble stone. Pearsall traces the various stages in the development of the English language; for example, as a direct result of the Norman Conquest English had ceased to be written, consequently when Middle English eventually emerged as a written language, because it had evolved from a spoken language, its construction was based on all-important word order, unlike Latin. With regard to fifteenth-century literature and literacy, he mentions the rapid expansion in the commercial production of literary manuscripts apparently to cater for the demand of the ‘vastly increased number of readers of English, of all classes’. Frustratingly we are not told how this is known or why it happened.

The volume is indeed true to its title, beautifully illustrated both in colour and black and white. All pictures have explanatory captions but, whilst the black and white ones are placed next to relevant text, the colour ones are simply placed at regular intervals. As they are all referred to elsewhere in the text it would have been more user-friendly if they had been placed in a block in the centre of the book: this might have spoilt the overall appearance but it would have helped the reader’s concentration, especially in the chapter on the visual arts as the pictures referred to are dispersed throughout the whole book. It is difficult to ascertain the exact expected readership profile: the stunning presentation and the vast amount of research carried out by the various contributors provides the reader with much fascinating background information to the extended medieval period, but the lack of specific references to recent scholarship renders the book far less useful to researchers than it might have been.

HEATHER FALVEY
Howell T. Evans’s *Wales and the Wars of the Roses* was first published by Cambridge University Press in 1915. In the whole field of British history, there can be few other instances when an eighty-year old text book has been reprinted because it is still the only comprehensive guide to its subject. In a short but valuable introduction, Professor Ralph Griffiths sketches the background to the book — which originates in a Cambridge MA thesis supervised by J.R. Tanner — and tells us something of the author, who published his work whilst he was a schoolmaster in Cardiff.

The chief purpose of Evans’s book was to show the essential place occupied by Wales and the Marches in the Wars of the Roses. The success of his ‘primary endeavour...to show that Wales and the border counties exercised a more formidable and decisive influence than is generally believed upon the course of the struggle between Lancaster and York’ should now be unquestioned. Evans achieved this objective by carefully sketching the early fifteenth-century background in Wales, for instance in showing the residual effects of Owen Glyndwr’s rising in leaving English rulers uneasy about, and often unable to control, disaffected areas, in generating long-lasting feuds between Welsh magnates, and in the penal laws against the Welsh. The strong Welsh sense of national identity is nowhere more clear than in the poets’ diatribes against ‘Saxon’ invaders and English legislation. The poets may have detested their patrons’ opponents, but the Battle of Banbury, in which so many of the southern Welsh aristocracy were slaughtered and after which Lord Herbert and his brother were put to death, was seen not as a reverse suffered by one magnate group but as a national calamity (p. 108).

Sometimes the language in which Evans expressed himself reminds us forcibly that this work is eighty years old: ‘The Marches were deluged by all the barbarous evils of a degenerate feudalism, countless in number and variety. Scientific atrocity had almost become an axiom of life’ (p. 19). However, it is worth wading through this because there is much in Evans’s work which is of enduring value: he rightly stresses, for instance, that much of Wales suffered from sustained lawlessness and local conflicts; he was the first to deploy critically a wide range of contemporary Welsh poetry as historical sources (though his sceptical attitude to Henry Rice’s *Life of Sir Rhys* impugned its veracity as a source until it was reassessed and edited by Professor Griffiths); and he showed the place of Welsh soldiers in the disastrous reverses in France.

The bulk of the book is taken up with a chronological account of events in Wales and how they affected and were influenced by the larger struggles, liberally
interspersed with asides sorting out some of the very complex genealogical problems which face students of Welsh history in this period. In key areas — such as the role of the Herbert or Rhys families in the conflicts — much recent work has taken place. In other areas, such as the background to Bosworth, Evans is unreliable. But though a good deal of research has also taken place on Welsh fifteenth-century poets, they still have not, according to Professor Griffiths, been effectively re-evaluated as sources for social and political attitudes.

Alan Sutton, the publishers, deserve a good deal of praise for the quality of this reprinting of Evans’s text. I found few misprints and the quality of the new illustrations is sometimes good. However, it is irritating to find that these new illustrations, which are liberally scattered throughout the text, are hardly ever evaluated as evidence at all. Thus on pp. 42-3, we find reproductions of a Victorian stained glass portrait of Jasper Tudor, a rubbing of the replacement memorial brass of Edmund Tudor, the recently restored head of the wooden core of Henry V’s tomb effigy and the head of Catherine of Valois’ funeral effigy. As a collection of illustrations, this is worthy of a short paper in itself! What the book really needed, though, was a much extended introduction by Professor Griffiths, or detailed annotations to the text in additional notes, because otherwise the uninitiated will not realise that Evans’s text has often been outdated by the very research which his book did so much to stimulate.

PHILLIP LINDLEY


Much has been written about the struggle between Louis XI, King of France (1461-83) and Charles, Duke of Burgundy (1467-77) — as the author freely admits — and that may be why this study tends to assume too much knowledge on the reader’s part. Generally speaking Cauchies discusses and comments; misled by his own familiarity with the facts, and perhaps out of a fear to repeat what ‘everybody’ knows, he omits to describe events properly and make things clear to the uninitiated.

This study is concerned with princes not with their peoples. It commences with a discussion of the situation in Europe in the decades preceding the meeting of Charles and Louis at Péronne in October 1468, of the early life and political career
of the two men and their previous relations. What was actually decided at the
dramatic meeting is partly missing, partly hard to extricate from the rhetorical
questions, ornate phrases and innumerable quotations which dominate the text
here, as they do throughout the book. Chapter Two covers the years 1470-71,
including Warwick’s struggle with Edward IV, the latter’s exile and the campaign
of Charles and Louis in Picardy, which allowed them both to realise their own
military weaknesses and strengths. This section is a little more generous with
factual information and relatively easy to follow.

A central part of the book is concerned with Charles’ royal and imperial
ambitions — which according to Cauchies were more important to him than his
role in France — and the meeting of Charles and the Emperor Frederick III at Trier
in the autumn of 1473. It includes a section on the efforts of Charles’ father in the
same direction, a valuation of the character and achievements of Frederick, and the
meaning of Charles’ acquisition of Gueldres in the larger context of his imperial
hopes. Cauchies denies Louis XI any part in the drama enacted at Trier and in
Charles’ missed opportunity to gain a crown, and he does the same for Charles’
unsuccessful and disastrous siege of Neuss — which tarnished his military
reputation for ever, even if it inspired fear into his neighbours about what he might
do next. The author regards the duke’s refusal to give up the siege of Neuss and
execute the joint plan of campaign decided on with Edward IV not as wrong-
headed stubbornness, but as an inability to relinquish his ‘German’ ambitions and a
willingness to leave France in the hands of his brother-in-law. Cauchies also
suspects that from the start Edward’s aim was a non-military solution; Charles’
attitude made it easier for Louis of France to obtain peace, both with England and
with Burgundy.

One purpose of this study is to modify the great reputation of Louis, ‘the
universal spider’, for intrigue, cleverness and having a finger in every pie, the other
is to ‘free’ Charles of Burgundy from the persistent and incorrect epithet ‘Rash’
(Téméraire). Even during his final years, it is claimed, incurring one military
defeat after another, his line of action was that of a gouvernant lucide et
responsable. Though he made strategic errors, refused to listen to his advisers and
was obstinate until the day of his death, there is no reason to condemn his entire
rule and all his campaigns.

This is not a book for beginners, nor does it offer much that is entirely new to
scholars; it is a personal meditation, inspired and supported by profound
knowledge of, and fascination with, the period and the subject. A disinclination to
use clear, direct, unembellished language and straightforward statements obscures
its details and makes it a less rewarding book than it could have been, particularly
to readers to whom French is not their first language.

LIVIA VISSER-FUCHS
In the now familiar but, for all that, no less valuable series of volumes of collected articles of eminent historians, the Hambledon Press has put together a selection of Maurice Keen’s essays. Of all the great themes of the Middle Ages none is surely more complex or more demanding of the historian seeking to understand the beliefs and motives of aristocratic society than chivalry? Many have misunderstood it; yet others have grappled with but one or two of its strands; few besides Maurice Keen have mastered the threads which make it up into something comprehensive and comprehensible in such humane and scholarly wise. No serious collection of books on medieval history is without M. Keen Chivalry (1984) and this volume of essays written over a period of thirty years between 1962 and 1993 is its perfect complement.

The cult of chivalry having been a life long interest, the fourteen essays in this collection — one on ‘Medieval Kings and the Tournament’ written jointly with Keen’s pupil Juliet Barker — not only serve, as other volumes in the series have done, to make accessible articles which have appeared in some inaccessible journals and other publications, but they come together as an especially coherent whole. This has been enhanced firstly by a sensible management of the essays by theme rather than by order of appearance. Thus the reader may begin with the culture of chivalry before moving to chapters broadly on the laws of chivalry. Particularly satisfactory is the placing in sequence of two essays on contemporary ideas about nobility separated in terms of publication by some eight years but clearly the result of study of a single and very important area of interest. Beyond the arrangement of the chapters coherence emerges through themes and ideas which have recurred and been developed over the years. There is for instance the fundamental belief which separates Keen’s work from that of the great historian Huizinga, namely, that chivalry was a reality in aristocratic and indeed non-aristocratic, lives, not merely a tinsel gloss. Nowhere is this more convincingly shown than — and perhaps it is hardest of all to accept in this sphere — in the consideration of the link between courtly love and chivalry. The case for reality appears again in the article on ‘Brotherhood in Arms’ and in ‘Chivalry, Heralds and History’, as well as in others. Another strong thread running through the volume is the author’s fusion of the contemporary literature of chivalry and the historical evidence. Virtually all the essays invoke the former in ways which strengthen the latter. Keen has long been sensitive to the value of literature and the light which it can shed upon society but is ever conscious of its limitations. No
argument hangs upon the literature alone but rarely is the literature absent and nowhere is this more apparent than in the essay on 'Chaucer's Knight' where ideals, realities and literature are all applied to an assessment of the crusade and its place in knightly lives at the end of the fourteenth century. A further feature of the essays is the recurring examination of a concern common to any late medieval historian, that is continuities and changes in society. Scholarship and sound judgment result in carefully nuanced assessments of both. Thus Keen emphasises the continuities in ideas about nobility in the period and indeed well beyond the fifteenth century while yet taking account of the impact of humanism. In such diverse subjects as the armorial dispute between Reginald Lord Grey of Ruthin and Sir Edward Hastings; the career of the knight errant, Gadifer de la Salle; and the end of the Hundred Years War, however, the author points up clear signs of precursors of the modern era, changing experiences and changing attitudes.

Unsurprisingly, the volume has warfare ever at its core. In a memorable phrase in the 1984 monograph Keen, never an apologist for the violence and bellicosity of his knights, declared that 'chivalry had always been aware that it was at war with a distorted image of itself' (p. 234). The horrors of war naturally seep through these separate essays in reminders about the violence of the freebooters (cap. 1); the actual performance of deeds of arms (caps 2, 4); the hazards of ransoms (cap. 3); the tournament as martial training ground (cap. 5); the war records of individuals (caps 7, 10); the violence of summary trials in time of open war under the constable (cap. 9); and the endurance of the military raison d’être of true nobility (caps 11, 12). Two final chapters round off this theme through studies of the closing stages of the Hundred Years War — important articles on Henry V and on the collapse of Lancastrian France. No doubt difficult decisions had to be made in selecting which essays to include but the present reviewer regrets the exclusion of Keen’s article, jointly written with M. Daniel, on 'English Diplomacy and the Sack of Fougères in 1449'. Never mind — it is easily available in History, volume 9 (1974) so readers can simply make a copy and keep it with this splendid collection.

ROWENA E. ARCHER


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Although Joan Kirby acknowledges that Thomas Stapleton’s 1839 Camden Society publication of the Plumpton correspondence was 'remarkable for its date' (as
indeed it was), and makes considerable use of it herself, this new edition of the only surviving later medieval collection of northern letters is very much to be welcomed. Regrettably, like Stapleton, Kirby has had to rely on early seventeenth-century transcripts since the original letters and papers have disappeared (but, as she demonstrates, there is every reason to be confident of their veracity). Sir Edward Plumpton’s *Letter Book* (compiled between 1612 and 1626), even in its now damaged condition, contains about 250 letters, and they provide unique insight into northern society in the later fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries. Sadly, the first twenty-six pages — containing, as they probably did, letters from kings and Percy earls of Northumberland — are missing: had they survived, they might have significantly enhanced the collection’s value for both national and local politics. Fortunately, however, Sir Edward Plumpton also put together a *Coucher Book* (or cartulary) containing more than a thousand items such as charters, deeds, bonds, records of legal proceedings and even a few further letters.

Most of the surviving letters are addressed to, and almost all the papers concern, members of a well-established Yorkshire knightly family, seated at Plumpton near Knaresborough in the West Riding, particularly two successive heads of the clan: Sir William Plumpton (1404-1480) and his son Sir Robert (1453-1525). In a helpful introduction, the editor discusses the manuscripts themselves, provides (perhaps unduly) succinct biographies of both Sir William and his son, analyses the complex disputes concerning Plumpton estates (first erupting in the later 1470s and lasting for many years thereafter) and their disastrous consequences for the family, and comments on the political and social world in which the Plumptons moved. All the surviving letters are reproduced in full, with valuable explanatory footnotes; a few of the papers are similarly given in their entirety (including valors of Sir William Plumpton’s principal estates in 1479) and many more are calendared in considerable detail; and the volume concludes with a series of well-researched biographies of aristocrats, knights and gentlemen with whom the Plumptons had connections and dealings.

For the social historian there is certainly a wealth of material here which, if frequently uninspiring (the letters are hardly noteworthy for their literary quality!), is nevertheless mightily instructive. For the prevalence of litigation in gentry circles, the ingenuity of lawyers and the manifold shortcomings of the law the Plumpton archive is invaluable: perhaps even more than most northern gentry, Sir William Plumpton had an insatiable taste for litigation and, judging by the bewildering variety of writs and legal terms mentioned in the relatively few surviving letters to him, he must have had a considerable knowledge of the law; his son Sir Robert, too, frequently resorted to the law courts as plaintiff or was, perforce, there as defendant (particularly once his legal right to the family estates had been challenged by Henry VII’s notorious financial agent Sir Richard
Empson). There is much insight into gentry marriage practices, albeit largely from the male perspective (although there are also a few indications at least of the roles wives might be called upon to perform). Problems of estate management surface occasionally, too, as do pointers to northern religious predilections. Moreover, a real sense of community does seem to have existed among West Riding gentry or, even more narrowly, gentry domiciled within the honour of Knaresborough: Plumpton marriages, for instance, tended to be contracted most frequently with neighbouring landowners, while trustees and witnesses of Plumpton deeds often turn out to be members of local families as well.

The Plumpton letters and papers cannot compare in richness with the Paston Letters as a source for political history but, as retainers of successive Percy earls of Northumberland, both Sir William and Sir Robert Plumpton did get involved in politics and civil war. Indeed, such was the loyalty of Sir William to his Percy patrons in the 1440s and 1450s that he seems to have been drawn more firmly into the Lancastrian orbit than most northern knights: he probably fought for Henry VI at Towton in 1461; the early years of Edward IV proved very difficult for him; and, eventually, he had no alternative (since the fourth Percy earl of Northumberland was incarcerated in the Tower for much of the 1460s) but to make his peace with the now all-powerful Nevilles. Significantly, the only surviving letter from Richard of Gloucester to Sir William Plumpton probably dates from October 1472 when Gloucester and Northumberland were jockeying for position in the north (p. 46); by November 1476 (rather than 1477, Kirby’s tentative date), however, Plumpton was being advised not ‘to labor to my lord of Gloucester or to the king’ in order to ‘moue my lord of Northumberland’ on his behalf, and warned of the dangers of ‘medling betwixt lords’ (pp. 51-53); and, when Sir William’s preferred disposition of his lands was challenged at the end of the decade, Northumberland and Gloucester jointly agreed to arrange a settlement through the good offices of their respective councils (p. 267). Eventually it was Richard III who, in September 1483, delivered a judgement, and his settlement (which lasted until challenged by Empson in the later 1490s) was notably fairer than the final arbitration award of 1515 (pp. 273-74, 289-90). Sir Robert Plumpton, no less loyal a Percy man than his father, probably received his knighthood in Scotland in 1482 while campaigning under Northumberland’s banner; perhaps significantly, he received no political favours from Richard III and may, indeed, have been in Henry Percy’s non-participating force at Bosworth; and, once his patron received wide powers and responsibilities in the north from Henry VII, Plumpton proved an active supporter of the new Tudor regime: indeed, he played prominent roles in suppressing rebellions in Yorkshire in 1489 and 1492 and, on both occasions, received personal letters of thanks from the king (pp. 87, 106-7). Unfortunately, again like his father, Sir Robert proved both unscrupulous and lacking in judgement when pursuing his
own perceived self-interest, especially when confronted by such implacable opponents as Sir Richard Empson: as a result, he bequeathed a gloomy legacy to his heir.

KEITH DOCKRAY


The Wars of the Roses have become something of a boom industry in recent years, with a rush of works of highly variable quality. This present volume, one of the Problems in Focus series, must rank as one of the best. It consists of eight articles by established scholars, considering the wars from a variety of perspectives, ranging from ideological to economic, a guide to the sources and an excellent introduction. It is clearly written, lively and contains much of value. At times idiosyncratic and controversial, it never fails to engage the reader. The late Charles Ross, to whom the book is dedicated, would have been delighted.

In a well-crafted introduction, Tony Pollard surveys the wars as a whole. He reminds us of the difficulty in selecting any one particular ‘start date’ for the conflict (a problem considered further by Keith Dockray in his piece on the origins of the civil war) but is prepared to delineate two separate sets of wars, ‘one between Lancaster and York, which ended in 1471, and a second between York and Tudor, which began in 1483’. If one of the features of the period is a resistance to being categorised, here is an interesting case in point. Certainly Tudor apologists, headed by Polydore Vergil, chose to portray the rebellion against Richard III in 1483 in such terms but contemporary evidence is less clear. An alternative possibility, that Buckingham himself may have claimed the throne, is hinted at in the next contribution, that of Michael Hicks. In his survey of the sources, he notes an indictment of early November 1483 concerning ‘the recognition of a new (unnamed) king’ at Bodmin in Cornwall. Hicks’ stress on ‘unnamed’ is a reminder of the ambiguity of this proclamation, usually assumed to have been made in favour of Henry Tudor. It took place on 3 November, only a day after Buckingham’s execution at Salisbury. One cannot entirely rule out the possibility that some of the duke’s supporters, unaware of his death, were making a last stand on his behalf. Hicks writes well on the range of sources available, the use of both chronicle and document evidence, and has a salutary section on the hazards of battle reconstruction.
Richard Britnell's excellent review of the economic context of the wars provides a cogent analysis of the topic. Importantly, he reminds us of the difficulties faced by Henry VI that were not of his own making. The recession in international trade had led to a sharp drop in crown income, and far less was available to Henry from the wool subsidy than had been available to his father and grandfather. There is a welcome freshness in the re-appraisal of the king's controversial sale of Chirk and Chirklands in 1439 and also on how the abuse of purveyance (a direct consequence of the king's inability to pay his way) contributed to criticism of the royal household. Britnell concludes by warning us of the dangers in seeing the events leading up to the wars as 'a self-contained political narrative', adding 'something is lost in ascribing all the political problems of the 1440s and 1450s to Henry's inanity'.

Nevertheless it is to the king's inanity that we return in Keith Dockray's piece on the origins of the wars. This is very much a traditional interpretation, and its clarity and sureness of organisation make it a valuable reference point for the interested student or general reader. It is largely a work of synthesis but is given shape and form by Dockray's own belief that the problems of the period, whether court faction or escalating local feuds, inescapably led back to the person of the king himself. It is right to call to account Henry VI's own personal rule, but the verdict on the king's majority is an unremitting one, and at times the judgement seems overly harsh. We are informed that Henry’s ‘pursuit of peace at any price in the 1440s eventually brought the end of the Lancastrian empire in France’ but no allowance is made for the crippling expense of the war effort that was draining royal finances. It is also worth remembering that if Thomas Gascoigne (somewhat misleadingly described as ‘a convinced Yorkist partisan’) chose to portray Henry VI as a ‘gullible figure liable to blatant manipulation by his advisers’ he had made remarkably similar criticisms of Richard Duke of York.

Rosemary Horrox writes thoughtfully on personalities and politics, and the notions of allegiance and service that underlay an individual’s actions. The need for study of character and motivation is given a timely re-iteration: ‘a personal relationship, even in a society as hierarchical as that of the middle ages, can never be entirely governed by a formal set of rules’. She makes the important point that York’s death at Wakefield allowed his son Edward to present himself as the man to unite the shattered political community, although her corollary, that ‘it was not a role which could plausibly have been filled by his father. In the eyes of contemporaries, York had been the begetter of faction …’ deserves greater amplification, particularly since the only surviving contemporary chronicle critical of York’s motives comes to an abrupt end before the first battle of St Albans.

The next contributor, John Watts, moves behind the range of personalities to the world of ideas, considering what were often articulate and well-established
perceptions of the ‘common weal’, the good of the community, in mid-fifteenth century England. Crucially for Watts, the issue here is not sincerity but rather contemporary relevance, in short: ‘politicians do not have to be personally committed to the principles they propound in order for their political behaviour to be influenced by them’. Such a thesis is undeniably provocative, and Watts pushes his argument hard in portraying the ‘trial’ of Suffolk on board the Nicholas of the Tower (usually seen as the ad hoc and rather macabre working of a kangaroo court) as a declaration of constitutional principle. But his key point, that the political tract known as the Somnium Vigilantis, drawn up at the time of the Coventry parliament in 1459, may have provoked York’s claim to the throne, is an original and valuable one.

If Watts emphasises the currency of ideas, Richard Davies, in a vigorous survey of the church during the wars, downgrades them, seeing a complete ‘lack of an intellectual response by the clergy to the dynastic crisis’. Drawing on a wide range of bishops’ registers and a wealth of other sources, Davies focuses on three key themes: episcopal mediation in the wars, the issue of sanctuary and the role of the papacy. On the last of these he is particularly interesting. His view is that the papacy ‘had no developed preference for either Lancaster or York. It never threw its weight spectacularly behind one or other dynasty’. He thus offers a recasting of the mission of the papal legate Coppini in 1460, seen less as ‘a little man too eager to seize his big chance’, more of a victim to realpolitik diplomacy, ‘an easy scapegoat for a ruthless, time-hardened papacy’. Davies prefers to underplay the significance of England in papal designs preoccupied by ‘the snake-pit of Italian politics’. This is a stimulating appraisal, although one would add a proviso, that within the different context of rallying support for a crusade Pius II had good reason to throw his weight behind the Yorkists (and the opportunity for lobbying on a matter so close to the papal heart was ably exploited by George Neville). It is on the subject of George Neville, and his ambitions for the cardinal’s red hat (which went instead to Bourgchier, described with brutal frankness as a ‘plodder’) that Davies offers an arresting insight into the atmosphere of the Yorkist court in the late 1460s: ‘Edward IV’s effortless capacity to give unintentional offence lured him into sending on the pope’s bull in favour of Bourgchier for personal delivery’ to Neville. Apparently he thought this a hilarious jest: others did not, and the incident was remembered’.

The international theme is maintained by Cliff Davies, who assesses the wars in their European context. This is an informed overview that is alert in its questioning of comfortably-held assumptions. Davies is particularly good value on Edward IV, Warwick and the Burgundian alliance. He reminds us of the difficulties in Anglo-Burgundian relations in the early 1460s and the tough negotiations between the two sides in 1465-7. This provides a fresh perspective on
the parallel negotiations with Louis XI, seen, at least in Warwick's eyes, as 'a real policy option and not just a blind to get better terms from the Burgundians'. Warwick emerges, rightly I think, as a more influential figure and the question of his break with Edward becomes more complex. Davies stresses that as late as 1468 Warwick was still sufficiently influential to embroil England in a war with the Hanseatic League, 'which helped deter Edward from the invasion of France which he had promised Charles [the Bold].'] He is also thought-provoking on the size of Henry Tudor's landing force on the Bosworth campaign, and here the material, largely buried in a footnote, is important enough to be in the main text.

The last offering by Colin Richmond, on the visual culture of fifteenth century England, appraises the international but focuses on the insular. English cultural life is depicted as vigorous but undemanding and often shallow; the explanation of why Englishmen so often went abroad for their art is found in the poor quality of so many of the home products. Richmond is appropriately tough on many of the examples of English manuscript illumination and panel-painting, and sensitive and more sympathetic on some aspects of church architecture and fittings. His opinion of the 'royal mausolea', in particular (and loosely, in view of the terminology) of King's College, Cambridge, will undoubtedly be contentious. Here there is a conscious turning towards 'the little people', men such as the trader John Bishop of Southwold, whose records tell us much about his fishing business but little of any 'vision of a better England'. (His will was drawn up in 1456, a year after St Albans). It is a worthwhile re-emphasis. However, the survey is flawed by giving only fleeting attention to areas where English culture was highly regarded overseas, particularly alabaster work and polyphonic music and with its focus on the John Bishops of fifteenth-century England there is loss as well as gain. Drama, music, poetry and painting were harnessed most effectively by the Lancastrian government in putting across their political agenda through tableau and pageantry, and arguably the visual impact of genealogy and pedigree lay at the heart of Yorkist dynastic identity. Here the frontispiece of the Luton Guild Book, discussed by Richmond with insight and sympathy in terms of artistic patronage and guild society, could be viewed in a different light, the self-image propagated by the House of York in the mid-1470s. It is perhaps ultimately a question of emphasis, and there is no doubt that Richmond confronts us with the crucial question, how much the wars really affected the broader arena of English society, which is a telling way to end the volume.

This is a book on the Wars of the Roses that does not pull its punches. Its contributors often disagree with each other, but this is largely a strength rather than a weakness. It does not aim to be comprehensive (perhaps the most noticeable omission, although it is touched on in a number of essays, is an assessment of the role of Margaret of Anjou) but it has a great deal to offer to anyone interested in
the subject. It is stimulating and entertaining, and does credit to the series of which it forms a welcome part.

MICHAEL K. JONES

CONRAD VON SOEST: PAINTER AMONG MERCHANT PRINCES.

Although not mentioned in the new edition of Baedeker’s Germany, Bad Wildungen is well worth a detour from Marburg in order to see the altarpiece in the Stadtkirche of Niederwildungen, the key work in the oeuvre of Conrad von Soest. Dortmund does not spring to mind as a German cultural centre, but as the leading member of the Hanseatic League until 1417 it was a convenient location for artists seeking mercantile patronage. Conrad, who is documented there between 1394 and 1422, possibly came from a family of painters settled in Dortmund since 1331. Brigitte Corley’s monograph, the first devoted to the artist since 1946, reasserts his position as an influential practitioner of International Gothic. In his work the rich decorative forms of this style are suffused with realistic touches such as St Peter’s spectacles in the Niederwildungen Death of the Virgin or the curling pages of the open book in the Dortmund Annunciation. Using stylistic and iconographic evidence, Corley suggests that Conrad received training in Paris in the 1380s. Some further consideration of the role of model-books in the diffusion of stylistic and iconographic innovations during this period would have been useful. Corley provides a thorough analysis of the iconographic components of Conrad’s works. However, her suggestion that Conrad initiated the feature of Herod and other rulers standing under the cross cannot be supported. This motif can be found, for example, in late fourteenth-century Lombard illumination and in Andrea di Bonaiuto’s Crucifixion in S. Maria Novella, Florence. It should also be noted that the text on St Odilia’s book is not from the Lauretan Litany (which was only devised in the sixteenth century), but is part of a standard Marian versicle and response, most familiar at the end of the Salve Regina.

Corley makes good use of detailed technical analysis to define Conrad’s oeuvre and separate it from that of his contemporaries and followers. Firm attributions are reduced to a core of three: the Niederwildungen Altarpiece of 1403, the mutilated Dortmund Altarpiece, and two panels, now in Münster, from the Augustinian convent of St Walpurgis at Soest. Also probably by the artist is a panel in the Alte Pinakothek, Munich, depicting SS Paul and Reinold of Dortmund. Pace Corley, the object in Reinold’s left hand is a shield, as stated in earlier
literature, of the pavise type. One close follower, here named the Fröndenberg Painter, was perhaps a workshop assistant, and the paintings assigned to him can be viewed as if they were Conrad's. Corley presents a well-argued case for rooting the Veronica Master's style in Conrad's milieu, and also detects Conrad's influence in the work of North German painters such as Master Francke; in short, he is identified as one of the main disseminators of the International Courtly Style in northern Europe.

One of the most intriguing aspects of Conrad's influence is the possibility, explored by Corley, that his work was known in England. The Last Supper in the windows at Great Malvern is a mirror-image copy of the composition in the Niederwildungen Altarpiece. Corley also notes echoes of Westphalian painting in the work of John Siferwas. However, her surmise that the name of Siferwas indicates a German origin is without foundation. When referring to foreign influence on English medieval art it is generally France, Flanders or Italy which come to mind. Yet there is also abundant evidence of the impact of German artists in English late medieval art. In Westminster Abbey chapter house are wall-paintings by a close follower of the north German artist Master Bertram. A painter from Thorn became a freeman of York in 1371-72. Henry of Derby imported a panel-painting for his chapel from Danzig in 1392. There are frequently hints of German influence in Norwich painting of the early fifteenth century. The Crucifixion sold at Sotheby's on 3 July 1997 may be another example of German influence on English painting in the 1390s, although I am unconvinced by the arguments for an English origin. Later we have Christian Colborne, an 'Almain' painter working in London from the 1450s to the 1480s, whose career has been reconstructed by Anne Sutton. None of his documented work survives (indeed much of it was ephemeral in nature), and this is a reminder that our understanding of the relations between English and continental painting can never be perfect because of the enormous loss of material evidence.

The illustrations are generally of the high quality one associates with Harvey Miller, but the same cannot be said of the standard of proof-reading. We have mistakes such as 'Depostition' (p. 81), 'Laurentan' (p. 117), the impossible date of c. 139 for the Netze Altarpiece (p. 120), and the transposition of the captions to plates 108 and 109. Even the dust-jacket has the mis-spellings 'vigourous' and 'Styefan'. However, such quibbles should not distract the reader from enjoying a book which provides an excellent understanding of the significance of Conrad von Soest.

NICHOLAS ROGERS
This is Dr Scott’s acknowledged ‘own’ subject, largely created by her over the last twenty-five years during which she has constantly maintained the inherent interest and value of fifteenth-century English painting when it was usual to say that after a brief ‘good’ period in its early years it had failed. To select 140 from nearly 1000 illustrated manuscripts to create a representative survey of English production in this under-appreciated period must have been a daunting task. The anxieties of choice are not immediately visible to the reader, but the many cross references and innumerable items adduced for comparison in the descriptions of the individual manuscripts in volume II are reminders of the hard labour of analysis which supports this book.

The introduction is short but ‘compendious’, as Caxton would have commented, but without Caxtonian doublets and prolixity. It covers everything including use, language, subject, format and page design, the expansion of ownership in this period, the ‘retrenchment of border and marginal elaboration’, aesthetics and the general move towards a relatively emptier, ‘clean’ page. Patronage is tabulated by gender, class, etc. — Edward IV receives considerable credit and perhaps Henry VII receives a little too much: for example, one doubts that he ‘created’ the office of king’s printer in 1504. The books chosen for inclusion range from the rare monastery-produced works at the beginning of the century (the Sherbourne Missal) to the more common, commercially produced items of the 1480s (the statute books) — though by 1400 commercially produced books were already the norm and London was the greatest producer.

Dr Scott is convinced that Lollard opposition to images and stated hostility to limners had a great effect on fifteenth-century English book illustration — an aesthetic reaction against a period of exuberant decoration was supported by this religious thinking at a time when more realistic techniques were coming in from the continent. The English artist responded by preferring sign-like, unseductive illustrations. It was this mood rather than lack of talent, says Dr Scott, which explains the patent differences between English work and that produced abroad (pp. 43-47).

Iconography and the effect of the guild system and living in one area is interestingly discussed (pp. 52-55) as a means of passing on images — but this is not wholly ‘a better account for this general phenomenon of similar miniatures than a friendly sharing of scenes, acquisition of a dead entrepreneur’s shop, or sneaking a look over the shoulder of a fellow worker’, it is surely part and parcel of the same communal life?
In the reiteration of how little evidence survives and the constant supply of snippets of just that elusive evidence culled by Dr Scott and so many others — who get generous mention — there is conveyed that curiosity and enthusiasm for the search which drives all historians and perhaps the historian of the book above all: the unknown painter’s name which demands a work be attached to it, the book which demands that its lost owners, scribe and limner be recovered. And there are the charms of an unexpected picture, such as the realistic tinted drawing which ends the preface: an open book lying on its chemise, with seven strings to mark important passages, its ruled pages curled with use, all part of the elaborate effort of the scribe to insert a passage he had omitted from the text in an attractive way.

Volume II contains the Catalogue, that is the actual descriptions of the 140 plus manuscripts — several entries include more than one manuscript — and their illumination. Each section has a discussion of the miniatures, the historiated initials and other text decoration, the artist’s style and comparative work, the provenance (ownership) of the manuscript, and ends with a sometimes very extensive survey of the relevant literature, listing every known source. In these little bibliographies and elsewhere in her text Dr Scott scrupulously refers to every single scholar from whose work or advice she has benefited. At the end of the book are included a glossary, several tables of the pictorial schemes of English psalters, missals and books of hours; a chronological table of London limners, and indices of types of text, book design and production, places of origin, patrons, manuscripts, iconographical subjects, as well as a general one.

For the Yorkist period, of course, the book is also a goldmine and provides a welcome change from the usual emphasis on the Flemish books acquired by Edward IV. There is detailed information on older, ‘secondhand’ manuscripts owned by members of the house of York and their courtiers, such as Richard III’s book of hours, the hours of Elizabeth of York, and the Bedford hours and psalter, later owned by William Catesby. Among manuscripts produced in Edward IV’s and Richard III’s time there are several genealogical chronicles, either codices or rolls, many important literary texts — Lydgate, Gower, the Dicts and Sayings of the Philosophers — as well as liturgical and legal works, above all the statute books with their attractive but standard decoration.

Of particular interest is, for example, the authoritative discussion and comparison of the work of the ‘Three Kings’ Master’, represented by Harley 326 (the romance of the Three Kings’ Sons), Lambeth Palace 265, and perhaps Bodleian Ashmole 764, all made c. 1475-85. To famous works like the Skinners Book, the Beauchamp Pageant and the Rous Roll Dr Scott applies her latest knowledge, her experienced eye and her ability to compare the work of many artists in many manuscripts.

Factual errors and omissions are rare and we will mention only two, because
they are of Ricardian relevance. We spent many months and a whole chapter of our book, The Hours of Richard III, on proving that the special text Richard had added to his book of hours was not dedicated to the patron saint of travellers and innkeepers — let alone to the protector of murderers — and it is therefore sad to read again, six years later, that this devotion was 'a long prayer to St Julian' (p. 162). Secondly it is not clear why Pietro Carmeliano's manuscript dedicated to Henry VII is mentioned, while the (simply) illustrated copies of his Life of St Katherine, dedicated to members of Richard III's court, are not. Otherwise nothing but praise for this magnificent study, which is a monument to the achievement of the often undervalued and forgotten English illuminators of the fifteenth century.

It is rare that an expensive book is worth its price these days — the over-pricing of the publisher is usually only too evident — but in this case £140 is not a bad price for the privilege of owning 560 English fifteenth-century pictures, not counting the 17 colour plates. The present reviewers have enjoyed revisiting many old friends in these pictures.

ANNE F. SUTTON and LIVIA VISSER-FUCHS


This is a book that would not have been written a few years ago. It is not about anything and nothing happens. ...my goal was to write neither demography nor biography...no overall survey of medieval views about old age, or of the stages of life, or of the life of the elderly will be attempted. There is no precise conclusion to these essays.

The opening sentence of the introduction, and the beginning of the concluding chapter hardly inspire the feeling that this will be or has been a book worth reading. What is more, the author is entirely accurate. There is no attempt at an overview of old age in medieval England. Indeed, it is sometimes difficult to see what the purpose of the study is, or to establish a connecting link between the various chapters or ‘essays’. Professor Rosenthal also makes it quite clear that he is only studying 'the longest-lived fraction of the population at the top of the demographic pyramid', feudal tenants-in-chief and some knights and esquires along with their wives and children, and some senior clergy. In part this is because he has drawn much of his information about age from a very limited and difficult range of sources, the Inquisitiones post mortem, the proofs of age of heirs, and the depositions in the Scrope-Grosvenor case begun in the Court of Chivalry in 1386.
To be fair, Professor Rosenthal is only too aware of the limitations of his sources. He makes no extravagant claims for the accuracy of the evidence. That might not seem to be the case, given the plethora of tables, all part of the current rush to quantify at all costs. But he is looking not for precise ages but perceptions of age, how men and women conceptualised the issue of survival in precise terms. Having established this, he then goes on to discuss attitudes to old age, the links between young and old, between grandparents and children, sons and their fathers, widowed mothers and their children, the survival rates among and the ages of peers and bishops, those who were active in their old age, those who were in their dotage like one citizen of London excused from holding office ‘suffering from sciatica and other infirmities’.

Given these reservations and a somewhat opaque style that makes it difficult to follow the argument, and the fact that some of the material will be familiar to readers of Professor Rosenthal’s earlier articles, is it worth persevering with this study of old age? Undoubtedly, yes. The real value here is that although he deals with only a limited section of society, Professor Rosenthal convincingly rebuts the still widely-held view that there were no old people in medieval England. Some were not quite as old as they thought they were. Sir John Chideok, a deponent in the Scrope-Grosvenor case, stated that he was now 100: other evidence suggests he was but 82 when he died in 1388. That makes one wonder whether his fellow deponent, Sir John Sully, really was 105, as he claimed, but no matter. They, and others, were old, they saw themselves and were seen as being old, and by the use of this and other evidence we are introduced effectively to arguments about how old age was both perceived and respected. If there were those who were active in their old age, like John Talbot, Earl of Shrewsbury, killed fighting at the battle of Castillon in 1453 at the age of 69, there were others who looked for honourable retirement and sought, like Lord Dacre, a release from their duties because of ‘myne age, debilitee, disease of the goute, and my leg which troubleth me very sore’. Retirement was in the main for those who could afford it: for the majority it seems to have been financially perilous and not lightly considered.

When all is said and done, however, this remains a book about a very limited sector of society. Those who had power and patronage were likely to command respect, be they young or old. They could hold their place in society because their resources and patronage networks made it possible for them to do so, be they twenty or sixty or eighty. To be rich and old is one thing, to be poor and old quite another, and perhaps this might be stressed more. Yet, as long as one accepts these limitations, and overlooks some unforced errors — Earl Rivers was emphatically not executed by Edward IV after the battle of Edgecote, but on Warwick’s orders — then there is much to be learnt from Professor Rosenthal’s study.

J.L. BOLTON
Notes on Contributors

Rowena E. Archer wrote a thesis on the Mowbray dukes of Norfolk and has published several articles on Medieval women. She is currently teaching mature students at Harris Manchester College, Oxford.

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J.L. Bolton was a Senior Lecturer in the History Department at Queen Mary and Westfield College from 1965 to 1994 and is now Senior Research Fellow in the Centre of Medieval and Renaissance Studies there.


Heather Falvey has recently updated the Society’s booklet A Beginner’s Guide to Research. She is currently researching the finances of St Albans Abbey just prior to its dissolution.

Alison Hanham retired as Associate Professor of History at Massey University, New Zealand, in 1993.

Michael K. Jones. Research Consultant at the History of Parliament and co-author of a biography of Lady Margaret Beaufort, The King’s Mother.

Piotr Radzikowski, historian, politologist, lawyer and translator. Dr. habil., PhD, MA, ML, Professor of History at the Pedagogical University in Kielce, Poland. Author of the Polish edition of *Reisebeschreibung Niclas von Popplau*.

Nicholas Rogers, the Archivist of Sidney Sussex College, Cambridge, is the author of numerous articles on various aspects of medieval culture, and Editor of the *Transactions of the Monumental Brass Society*.

Penny Tucker has recently completed the medieval (1247-1633!) section of *The History of Bethlem Hospital*, a celebration of the Hospital’s 750th anniversary in October 1997. Currently she is working on London’s lawcourts.

Livia Visser-Fuchs is working on the literary background and propaganda of Anglo-Burgundian relations of the Yorkist period.

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