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Ambler's "Churches, Chapels and the Parish Communities of Lincolnshire 1660-1900" - Book Review

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holidays. Simon Jenkins's popular *England's Thousand Best Churches* (London: Allen Lane, 2000) is an ornament for the coffee table with high-quality colour illustrations and a readable text. The Pevsner series is encyclopaedic but spares no more than a few words for any one building. Denominational monographs include Kenneth Southall's *Our Quaker Heritage* (London: Quaker Home Service, 1974), Graham and Judy Hague's *The Unitarian Heritage* (Sheffield: Unitarian Heritage, 1986) and the recent two-volume labour of love by David M. Butler, *The Quaker Meeting Houses of Britain* (London: Friends Historical Society, 1999).

R.W. Ambler's contribution to the literature is a history rather more than a gazetteer. What matters more in the series *A History of Lincolnshire*, of which this is volume IX, is the story behind or within these monuments. It is a familiar narrative told from local evidence.

In the eighteenth century Lincolnshire was not spared the malaise and disarray that affected the established Church elsewhere. In 1757 it took effectively a quadruple negative for the churchwardens of Winteringham to enter a caveat to their report at the archdeacon's visitation: 'we don't say that there are no persons who do not neglect coming to church to hear divine service'. They further conceded, 'nor do we say there are no common drunkards or swearers in our parish—nor any who do not follow their ordinary vocations or labour on the Lord's day—neither have the late churchwardens given up their accounts nor is our schoolmaster housed'.

Although the title of the book settles on established religion, its organizing categories and official opposition, it does not in the event omit meeting houses and those who worshipped in them. Indeed the Quaker tradition in Lincolnshire is the subject of an extensive sympathetic account. In the late seventeenth century there was steady traffic between Lincolnshire Quarterly Meeting and Lincoln Castle where they were incarcerated 80 at a time. Even before Fox's visit in 1667 Quakers were being stoned for protesting about swearing and imprisoned for menacing prophecies about the future of the monarchy. Roman Catholics were more cautious in their testimony: it is said that the member of parliament for Grimsby Sir Philip Tyrwhitt was so coy about his religion that not even his bride could discern it.

The adequate documentation of Quaker testimony and charity is doubtless afforded by the literate habits of early Friends, providing the local historian with a source not necessarily found among contemporary religionists who devoted their energies to personal testimonies of divine providence and redemption rather than collective record.

When it comes to the nineteenth century, however, the author does not write with the same feeling about ritualism ('see Church of England', says the index). Ritualism is explained in terms of a list of indicative liturgical habits and we are given statistics of the numbers of churches that practise them. It is not studied in its context as an element of a nationwide mission to engage the dispossessed; there is no account of the charitable works for which the Oxford Movement has elsewhere been given credit.

In other ways too the book's preoccupation with local activity, however, precludes an interest in exogenous initiatives and their impact on religion in the county. An index of 19 pages has no entry under *mission* or *Salvation Army*. And the Church Building Act of 1818, a late panic response to the French Revolution in which one million pounds was granted for the building of churches, passes without notice.

Maps and tables are used to good effect: in particular the county map showing the distribution of Wesleyan chapels makes its point powerfully. At other times the reader feels the

R.W. Ambler, *Churches, Chapels and the Parish Communities of Lincolnshire 1660–1900* (Lincoln: History of Lincolnshire Committee, 2000), pp. xii + 274. Paperback. £12.95. ISBN 0-90266-818-8.

In recent years the hunting of church and chapels has become a national hobby and there is a burgeoning literature to occupy enthusiasts on winter evenings or help them plan their

want of more graphic presentations: we could do, for example, with a denominational breakdown of the 1851 Religious Census without having to collect statistics that are embedded in the text. Nor is much use made of line drawings: of course, old photographs evoke the spirit of the age in the way that architects' drawings do not, but if the budget does not extend to high-quality reprographics, there is much to be said for going to early issues of *The Builder* and the denominational yearbooks.

Disappointed though I was with the portrayal of ritual, this is a book to treasure. Its illustrations lure the reader to Centenary Wesleyan Methodist chapel at Boston and even to its church hall; to the Wesleyan chapel at Gainsborough; to St Peter's Church at Markby, described in a word that for church and chapel hunters is an accolade indeed, 'unrestored'. With one exception these are not the places that Simon Jenkins lists, being honoured not for their curiosity but for their testimony in two and more centuries of conscientious proclamation and protest and for the selfless truth to principles of those who bequeathed them.

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