

The essay about the poor in Brailes is an excellent attempt to flesh out the lives and situation of the landless poor in the 17th century. I call it an ‘attempt’ as Alan Tennant has very little evidence to go on: there were no regular Poor Law records in Brailes until 1710, though he extracts all possible information from a chance record in the Quarter Sessions of 1639. The poor are seldom recorded, or having been recorded once, disappear without trace. In setting the scene, he ranges over the contemporary anxiety about enclosure and depopulation, probable population growth (though this is one of the hardest things to calculate accurately), the poor harvests of the time, the Midlands protests against enclosing landlords, and much else besides. It is not helpful to use population figures from a parish such as St. Mary’s Warwick as an analogy: at this period most town populations were growing very fast, much faster than their indigenous birth rates could supply; they must have been absorbing some of the surplus population from rural areas.

It would have been good to have a map: he describes the enclosures at Barcheston, and the reduction of Chelmscote to a single building – but does not say where they are. It would have been helpful also to have a fuller explanation of the settlement Law and how this affected the provision of Poor Relief: it is not made clear how vital a person’s settlement was.

Philip Tennant’s essay about the Crisis of 1569 concentrates on the measures taken to deal with the revolt of the Irish in Munster and the northern earls in England, and how these impinged upon the local people. Without a standing army, in a crisis the Monarch’s Lord Lieutenants were expected to summon the local militia and make sure it was equipped and ready. Philip Tennant has made excellent use of the mass of papers relating to the building-up of this army, and it is all fascinating stuff, down to the transcript of the actual muster roll for Brailes: ‘*able men above the age of 16 years*’, all 49 of them. The second half of the essay is about the northern rebellion and very little of it is really ‘local’ history, though there is a fair amount about the Warwickshire gentry. There is an admirable map showing the movements of the two armies and the confusing presence of Mary Queen of Scots.

There are minor quibbles (A.T.’s use of exclamation marks reminds me of teenage girls, and P.T.’s paragraphs are much too long), but the booklet is an admirable example of the way that the best local historical research illuminates the national scene, and in reverse, how the best sort of local history is itself illuminated by being set in a wider context.

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The latest issue includes a scholarly but very readable article by Margaret Martins on ‘John Stanbridge (1463-1510): Early Tudor Teacher and Grammarian of Oxford and Banbury’. Stanbridge was the founding headmaster of what was effectively Banbury’s first grammar school. Strongly recommended.