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the substantial amount of work produced in recent years, much of it from his own pen, to provide a detailed study. This is far more than a description of the revolt itself; indeed, a chronological account of it between 1400 and 1409 takes up no more than one of the eleven chapters. What Davies has done has been to place the rebellion squarely in its context and to dissect it, examining every aspect in turn. He begins with a description of the country as it might have appeared at the end of the fourteenth century to a visiting English official and to a Welsh poet on his rounds, thereby underlining the presence of two nations in medieval Wales; this is followed by an analysis of late fourteenth-century society, an account of Owain himself and his background, the nature of his support, both within and outside Wales and the military dimension. In conclusion he considers the decline and ultimate failure of the revolt and the reasons for it and in an epilogue he looks at the ways in which perceptions of Owain have changed over the centuries. This is above all a study in *mentalités*; the aspirations and resentments of the *uchelwyr*, the leaders of the native community, are examined in detail, as is their part in the outbreak and their emergence from it relatively unscathed. The key role of churchmen, both men like the bishop of St Asaph, John Trefor, and Owain's chancellor, Gruffydd Young, and the lesser clergy, who faced severe economic hardship after the plague, comes under scrutiny: the resentment of educated Welsh clerics was fuelled by the exercise of royal patronage in the distribution of preferment. The impact of the revolt on two typical communities, the lordship of Dyffryn Clwyd in the north and the town of Kidwelly, is discussed. Some figures stand out, among them Henry Don of Kidwelly, one of the leaders who, after the revolt, had the temerity to fine some of his neighbours for their failure to take part, and Gwilym ap Gruffydd of Penrhyn in Caernarfonshire who made his peace at the most opportune moment and was able to profit substantially as a result. Such men dominated their localities and Davies's discussion of the network of family connections created by several generations of intermarriage among the native squires and its significance in the revolt is one of the most interesting and most important features of this excellent and enjoyable book. As the author says, he has 'scoured the archives' and in doing so he has written what must now be the definitive account, not only of the revolt but also of the social, political and cultural environment in which it occurred.

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The shaping of a community. The rise and reformation of the English parish c. 1400-1560.

By Beat Kümin. (St Andrews Studies in Reformation History.) Pp. xii + 362
incl. 3 maps, 9 tables and 15 figs. Aldershot: Scolar Press, 1996. £49.50.

1 85928 164 8

Churchwardens' accounts are fast threatening to oust wills from their position as the first port of call for historians seeking to recreate the religious and social experience of 'ordinary' English people in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. In a book brimming with graphs, tables and pie-charts, Beat Kümin demonstrates how a systematic analysis of the income and expenditure described in surviving churchwardens' accounts (in particular those for ten sample parishes) can be used to substantiate the now increasingly familiar emphasis on the vitality of late

medieval religious life. The seductive lore of these fascinating documents should not blind us to their limitations: little over 200 often incomplete sets survive from this period from nearly 9,000 parishes, and this book is understandably not able to tell us whether any principle more dependable than happenstance accounts for the pattern of survival. Why, for example, do Devon and Somerset between them provide 16 per cent of all surviving sets? None the less, in analysing these sources more rigorously than any previous commentator, Kümin paints a compelling picture of how churchwardens (here convincingly demonstrated to have been drawn overwhelmingly from the broad middle swathe of parish society) were able to extract from their communities, and apply to communal purposes, very substantial sums of money, usually considerably more than the crown was able to raise from the same communities in direct lay taxation.

As befits a former student of Peter Blickle, Kümin has little hesitation in conceptualising his findings as the 'communalisation' of late medieval society. In striving for greater control over local clergy and local parochial institutions, the people were expressing their desire for effective self-government, and in presenting his cause Kümin escapes from the (metaphorical) parochialism of most English commentators and provides many illuminating comparisons with continental developments. At times one feels the nature of the evidence employed may be leading inexorably to such a conclusion: does the understandable reluctance of gentry to serve as churchwardens really mean that their influence was largely absent from the parochial setting? A study of court records might, for example, reveal them quite regularly acting as arbitrators in parish disputes. Overall, however, Kümin's portrayal of the late medieval parish as the principal focus of the religious and social aspirations of most late medieval lay people is a convincing one, as is the contention (building on the work of Clive Burgess, Eamon Duffy and Gervase Rosser) that fraternities and chantries are best understood as 'sub-parochial' institutions. The author is aware that to talk so emphatically of 'the shaping of a community' is to beg a barrage of questions about what 'community' might actually mean, but while Kümin acknowledges the potential for conflicts of various sorts among late medieval parishioners it is hard to dissent from his common-sense perception that we do not need to 'deconstruct' the concept of community for an age 'where it had such obvious meaning' (p. 181).

Kümin's declared cut-off point for this study is 1560, on the grounds that after this date the parish was effectively reinvented as a unit of local government. None the less, in the last chapter he cannot resist continuing the story to elucidate some of the most significant developments of the later sixteenth century: an ever greater series of demands laid on local officials by central government, a growing degree of social differentiation within communities, a narrowing social base of parochial governance through the emergence of 'parish councils' and select vestries. One of the great virtues of this book is that these developments can now be seen as having clear pre-Reformation antecedents. Early sixteenth-century churchwardens were acquiring increasing responsibility for poor relief, tax collection and military organisation. In a sense, Kümin is suggesting, English parishes were the victims of their own success, and the seeds of future developments were particularly visible in those (usually urban) parishes which by the late Middle Ages had acquired considerable landed endowments from pious testators and thus the management of large amounts of rental property. In these places (which Kümin terms 'dead'-orientated regimes in contrast to the 'living'-

orientated regimes where parochial income came principally from fund-raising among the parishioners) the demands of administrative efficiency tended to produce increasingly oligarchic government which foreshadowed the institution of select vestries. In many ways it seems a pity that the book does not follow these suggestions systematically through to 1600 (though its author is now working on a general study of churchwardens which may do just that). With respect to the still hotly-debated subject of the reception of religious change, such a revised time-scale might seem particularly fruitful. Kümin hints at one point (p. 165n.) that lay supervision of urban chantry priests may have set the pattern for the later establishment of Protestant lectureships, and more generally he floats the idea that support for Reformation must have owed less to doctrinal dissatisfaction with the old Church than to the 'lay assertiveness and participation' characteristic of late medieval parishes (p. 182). These are important questions and worthy of further study, though, as the author himself accepts, they are also extremely problematic ones: 'communalisation' was neither the necessary nor inevitable precursor of Protestantism in continental countries, and, in England at least, the early Reformation can look more like a crisis within the ranks of the Catholic clergy than a radicalisation of lay demands for greater control over the resources and personnel of the Church.

To suggest that this study raises some as yet unanswered questions is not, however, to detract in any way from its very substantial achievements. Revisionist claims about the vigour of the late medieval parish are here put on a firmly empirical footing, and the reader is left with a much firmer sense not merely of how parishes were administered, but of what they may have meant to the people who lived in them and devoted so much time, and money, to their well-being.

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PETER MARSHALL

Creative women in medieval and early modern Italy. A religious and artistic renaissance.

Edited by E. Ann Matter and John Coakley. Pp. xiv + 357 incl. numerous ills. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1994. £34.95. 0 8122 3236 4

This collection of conference essays provides a novel and variegated account of the creativity of women within the restrictions of the roles allowed them by Italian society in the medieval and early modern period – on the one hand setting firmly to rest the idea that such women were 'dead' to the world, and on the other offering a critical assessment of how these constraints affected 'female voices as we hear them in our sources'. As one of the editors says, these constraints can be interpreted negatively or more positively – *alla* Carolyn Bynum, the dedicatee of the volume – as challenges to be overcome. Most of the women we meet here belong to the latter category, like the woman patron of the Jesuit order discussed by Valone in ch. vii, who retaliated successfully ('obstinate' is the word Jesuits used to describe her) against the failure to commemorate her patronage sufficiently, or like the women musicians and composers in Bologna and Milan who resourcefully circumvented vetoes on their music and harpsichords (Monson and Kendrick, chs xiii, xiv). Thus stimulated, cloistered nuns printed not only their own avant-garde music but also their own plays for lay audiences (Weaver, ch. xii), and they patronised and influenced the subject matter of paintings (Roberts, ch. vi). The question of how far the voices of women saints and mystics