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Reviews of books

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Nicholas Orme, *The Churches of Medieval Exeter*. Exeter: Impress Books, 2014. 210pp. 5 maps. 30 figures. Bibliography. £14.99 pbk.
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The prolific Nicholas Orme, professor emeritus of History at the University of Exeter, has authored or co-authored seven books and countless articles and book chapters on different aspects of the medieval church in Devon, focusing especially on Exeter cathedral and its clergy. Here, he applies his considerable knowledge to a study of the chapels, parish churches, religious houses, hospitals and almshouses in the city of Exeter and its surrounding area. The first half of the volume is divided into an introduction and 10 chapters that discuss the development of Exeter's churches from their foundation until the Reformation, with particular focus on the parish churches, their clergy and their relationship with the laity in the late Middle Ages. The second and longer half is a gazetteer of all the religious establishments and structures (such as crosses and holy wells) in Exeter from 400 to 1550. As befits a paperback volume aimed at a larger market, the book is well illustrated with maps, engravings and photographs, including 17 colour plates. But the volume is also well documented with footnotes, an extensive bibliography, index and abundant archival references in the gazetteer, all features that will appeal to scholars.

A Roman foundation, Exeter acquired a minster church around 670, became the seat of a bishopric in 1050 and by the late thirteenth century had eight monasteries (including one female house in the suburb of Polsloe), three hospitals (two were amalgamated early on) and Dominican and Franciscan friaries. None of the religious houses were especially large or wealthy, nor was Exeter a particularly populous town; its population in *c*. 1300 was probably around 5,000 and in the late fourteenth century, only a little more than 3,000, although Professor Orme claims (incorrectly in my view) that the post-plague population was considerably larger. Unlike most towns, Exeter experienced relative prosperity and growth in the fifteenth century, ranking as one of the six largest cities of England by 1525, with a population perhaps as high as 8,000. Although Exeter was not a pilgrimage site, it did possess, in addition to the cathedral, a total of 58 religious houses, churches and chapels, the majority founded in the eleventh and twelfth centuries. Some did not survive the thirteenth century, and more religious houses and chapels disappeared during the Reformation, but even today remnants of some of the medieval churches can be found in the city.

Although the book will be of greatest interest to historians of Devon and Exeter, the author often provides useful comparative material to contextualize his findings. We learn, for example, that because Exeter cathedral was technically the only parish church in Exeter, it retained an unusual degree of control over funerals and burials within the city and could more easily suppress or combine parishes when warranted. Medieval Exeter had 22 parishes, fewer than London, Norwich, Winchester, Lincoln and York, but more than Bristol, Cambridge and Oxford, and the same number as Canterbury. As in other towns, Exeter's parishes were sometimes dedicated to local saints, were small in size and provided sparse incomes to their clergy. One of its chapels was founded on the city's bridge, and others were associated with almshouses that proliferated in the later Middle Ages. Craft guilds developed late in Exeter, but they followed a similar trajectory to other urban guilds in adding chapels to their guildhalls or locating their fraternity worship in particular churches. Exeter also had the usual array of sacred sites, including oratories (private chapels located in the residences of the wealthy), holy wells and crosses, of which three survive. Excluding the cathedral, Professor Orme counts 56 religious cults in medieval Exeter, identified by church dedications, altars, images, guilds and liturgical celebrations. Religious guilds, however, were less common in Exeter and, indeed, in south-western England as a whole.

The individual entries in the gazetteer provide basic information about each church, as well as interesting details culled from archival sources about, for example, the suspension of mass in St Anne's chapel when the dean and chapter found out about a clandestine marriage performed there, or the presence of an anchoress named Alice Butte at the Hospital of St John in the 1530s. The author also weighs in on some local debates, including the complicated history of the prebend of Hayes (attached to the chapel at the castle), the dedication of the new Franciscan friary (to Mary and Francis, not John the Baptist) and the identity of the founder of Polsloe priory (probably the Exeter bishop, Robert of Chichester). Also welcome is the greater reliance on archaeological evidence than is usually seen in most such books. This perspective provides, for example, not only rich details about the sites, layout, functions and appearance of churches listed in the gazetteer, but also a fuller picture of the expansion in size (but contraction in numbers) of late medieval churches in Exeter. The author's careful scholarship and impressive array of sources – from episcopal registers, churchwardens' accounts, act books, martyrologies, obit accounts and wills to cartularies, deeds and court rolls – makes this volume a welcome contribution to our understanding of the religious life and material culture of one medieval town.

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Tim Reinke-Williams, *Women, Work and Sociability in Early Modern London*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014. viii + 225pp. £60.00 hbk.
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Over the last 20 years, our understanding of the experiences of the middling and poorer sorts of women in early modern England has been greatly enriched through the outpouring of scholarship on ecclesiastical court records. London