

Bristol & Gloucestershire Archaeological Society

Nicholas Orme, *Schools, Readers and Writers in Medieval Bristol* Avon Local History & Archaeology Books 27 (Bristol, ALHA 2018). 42 pp., 8 ill., 1 map. Cardcovers, £3.50

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Nicholas Orme is the doyen of medieval schools, education and children. For years he has specialized in these thematic areas, and particularly, in geographical terms, in Bristol and the West Country. As such, he is the natural choice for this booklet, and he doesn't disappoint. As he says in the preface, this is, in part, a version of parts of *Education in the West of England*, published in 1976, but it goes beyond what was then possible. He does this, in part, by adding on to his thoughts on education and schools in (largely, inevitably, given the available evidence) later medieval Bristol sections on later medieval (largely of the 15th and early 16th centuries) literacy and literature in the town. The earlier sections, on 'The Schools of Medieval Bristol', 'Robert Londe and his School', and 'Further Education', are the best, because they represent the current scholarship on these areas most fully. In particular, the use of Schort's notes of Latin exercises, to illustrate something of the lives of 'ordinary' Bristolians, is exceptional. However, in discussing the Lollards, who were also noted English-language readers, Orme is dependent (for Bristolians) on Hudson and Thomson, writing in the 1980s and 1960s respectively, rather than Burgess, in *The Fifteenth Century* (2003), who introduces a note of controversy to this otherwise cosy consensus. The subsequent sections, on 'Readers', and 'Writers', are perhaps less good, but are still very fine. Orme points out, in the section on Bristol readers, that this can only be covered in outline, because it is such a huge subject. In the 'Writers' section he deals with the poet of the early 15th-century poem *Mum and the Sothsegger*, but he doesn't deal with the same poet's (see Helen Barr - not cited here - in the *Yearbook of Langland Studies*, (1990)) *Richard the Redeless*. Also, I am personally convinced by Barr's attribution of *Richard* to 1400, and *Mum* to, or soon after, 1409 (H. Barr, *Notes and Queries*, 1990 - again, not cited here), so Orme's dating is, by my reckoning, a little out. He goes on, in this section, to deal with, among others, Ricart's *The Maire of Bristowe is Kalendar*, William Worcester (*sic.* Orme seems to eschew the more usual, now, spelling of his name - Worcester), John Free, and Thomas Norton, who were all born and brought up in Bristol in the 15th century. He finishes with *The Childe of Bristowe*, which tells the story of an apprentice who prefers Bristol merchants to his father's intended Churchmen and lawyers. The tale is given here in a 19th-century German edition, and Orme seems unacquainted with Barbara Hanawalt's chapter in her (with David Wallace) *Bodies and Disciplines: Intersections of Literature and History in Fifteenth-Century England* (1996). Anyway, this section does indicate how 15th-century Bristol was,

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per capita, in the same league as London, when it came to authors of works of a secular nature. This is, overall, a very fine booklet, and deserves a place on everyone's bookshelf who is interested in education, and/or Bristol in the Middle Ages.

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