

A comprehensive guide to later life

AMONG my extensive collection of books on ageing is found "A Survival Guide to Later Life" which was kindly presented to me in 2004 by Marion Shoard. It has been much cherished and referred to since then. That her new book, **How To Handle Later Life** (Amaranth Books, £22.99), comprises 1,143 pages, almost twice as many as the previous one, is testimony to the changes in social care and so much else for older people over the intervening 13 years.

The scene is so complex and bewildering that we do need a reliable and comprehensive guide which this book certainly is. The cover describes the contents as covering "money, housing, diet, companionship, care, transport, health and happiness". The book is arranged in 12 parts comprising 41 chapters

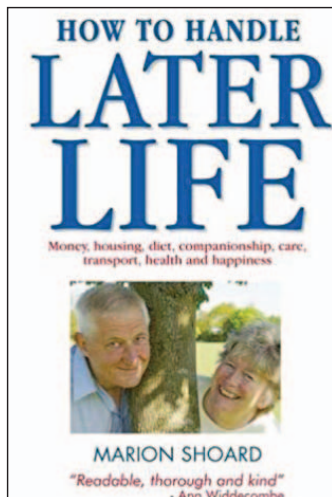
Valuable

Prior to all this there is a valuable introduction on "How this book works", which advises against ploughing through it at length rather than using the clear index, in which the key passages on any subject are indicated in bold-face, and to dip into it as required, though she does suggest that readers will benefit from taking time to read part one, some 80 pages in length, on "Growing older". Now aged 80, I endorse this as it paints a helpful background of the physical and psychological aspects of ageing.

As an experiment, I began

Book review

by Albert Jewell



by looking up the references to a random cross-section of subjects, including vitamin D deficiency, macular disease, Parkinson's, universal credit and Lars Tornstam, the proponent of gerotranscendence. I was not disappointed! As my wife and I have recently struggled to remake our wills and set up powers of attorney, I can especially commend the clear advice the author gives on these matters.

Shoard addresses in a thorough-going and balanced manner the biggest concerns and decisions people face as they grow older. Where shall I live? How shall I manage financially? How will I be cared for when the need arises? What about end-of-life issues? The plethora of information and guidance offered is unequalled in any other publication I know. The detail is impressive, extending to the availability of all manner of gadgetry and equip-

ment and the valuable contribution that personal computers and having a pet can make to an older person's well-being.

As someone who has been involved in dementia care and research over the years, I find the author's chapter on this subject particularly impressive. Its 25 pages are essential reading not just for individuals and families for whom dementia is something they live with, but also for churches seeking to respond to the challenge of becoming more dementia-aware and dementia-friendly, as demonstrated by the example of St Stephen's church in Chatham in the case study found on page 237.

In a book produced for the general public one cannot expect too much emphasis upon specifically Christian matters. However, the valuable contribution of faith groups is recognised and the broad spiritual needs of older people in regard to being loved and valued, feeling secure and finding ongoing purpose in life are affirmed throughout.

As I see it, the one drawback of such a book is that inevitably the information, for example on pensions and benefits, social care and NHS provision, will change as time passes, sometimes quite rapidly. Hence the book is prefaced with a publisher's note advising readers that its contents are not a substitute for expert and up-to-date advice that readers should seek from qualified professional sources. As and when pub-

lishing becomes more digitised than it is at present, updating should become easier to make, as I doubt whether Marion Shoard would want to face writing yet another book of such a scale in a few years' time.

For those who are interested, details of the immense research involved in writing this book are given in the Notes section at the end of the book where there is also an appendix of "useful contacts".

Mainstream

As it stands, this book will be of great value to middle-aged and elderly individuals as well as to family carers of older relatives. As a great reference book it should be found in every public library. And since the age profile in mainstream churches, not least Methodist churches, is much higher than in the community at large, ministers' staff meetings, circuit resource centres (where they exist) and local church book-stalls would be well advised to possess a copy. It may cost almost £23, but at 2p a page it is well worth it. Don't be put off by its length and detail; it is truly "gentle and kind", in the words of Ann Widdecombe who commends it.

Now I must get on and read at greater depth those many pages that I have needed to skim over in preparing this review!

The Rev Dr Albert Jewell is a supernumerary minister in the Leeds South and West circuit and a former pastoral director of MHA.

The 'beauty and passion' of historic churches

THE National Churches Trust (NCT) does valuable work in looking after and championing churches and chapels in the UK. Matthew Byrne's **English Parish Churches and Chapels: Architecture,**

Book review

by Keith Sellick



Sefton Park, Liverpool.

The book includes some rarities and oddities such as St Mary at West Walton in Norfolk with its separate bell tower, the church of St Lawrence at Mereworth, Kent

tached stable for worshippers' horses.

This book is in no way a history of church architecture, there are too few in number to cover more than 1,000 years of buildings and some re-