

Reviews

Swinford Bridge 1769-1969. By E. de Villiers. Eynsham History Group, The White House, Eynsham, 1969. Pp. 32, 4 plates, 7 figs, and 2 maps.

Among the myriad motorists who use Swinford Bridge, resenting a momentary check for payment of a grudging 5d. toll towards its upkeep, few, understandably, care a jot for its history. But it is surprising that the many discerning admirers of this splendid example of 18th-century architecture, which spans the upper Thames within six miles of Oxford, should so long have been content to be fobbed off with folk-lore in lieu of facts. Now, in the bi-centenary year of the completion of the bridge, the initiative of Lady de Villiers and the enterprise of the Eynsham History Group have combined to produce a worthy record of it, thereby revealing what a fascinating piece of local history has been to seek.

Not that the story is one of merely local interest, as Lady de Villiers in her scholarly booklet makes clear. Before the erection of the bridge a ferry was the only means of crossing the river at this spot for riders coming from South Wales and Gloucester to Oxford. Wheeled traffic had to make a considerable detour to the north. The ferry trip was fraught with danger, and there were other drawbacks to the route: the steep climb over Wytham Hill and the deplorable state of Botley causeway as Oxford was approached. The causeway, precursor of the modern Botley Road, known within living memory as 'The Seven Bridges Road', was impracticable for wagons, let alone coaches.

If a mid-18th-century scheme for converting this more direct route to Oxford into an adequate carriage road was to be effected, the turnpike trustees must substitute a bridge for the ferry and reconstruct the causeway. A *deus ex machina* appeared in the person of the famous jurist Sir William Blackstone of All Souls. It was Blackstone who, as legal adviser to the trustees of the young fourth Earl of Abingdon, was behind the project which culminated in the Earl securing authority to build a bridge at the Berkshire hamlet of Swinford following the necessary purchase of land on both sides of the river. It was Blackstone, too, who promoted the remodelling of Botley causeway. In August 1769 both bridge and causeway were opened to coach traffic.

In return for Lord Abingdon's munificence, Swinford Bridge was vested in him and his heirs 'for ever'. The Dowager Lady Abingdon is the present proprietress.

The 'superb craftsmanship' of the bridge suggests that the architect may have been Sir Robert Taylor. The mason was a local man, James Lord of Eynsham, whose estimate for work on the bridge, now belonging to his descendant Mr. James Wastie of Eynsham, is printed by Lady de Villiers.

The excellent photographs contained in *Swinford Bridge* include one of the board showing the former scale of charges, which deluded a 20th-century passenger into thinking himself back in the reign of George III. Except for the microscopic figures for the references and an occasional misprint (the apostrophe after All Souls on p. 10 would have pained Blackstone), the booklet is extremely well produced. Eynsham History Group is to be congratulated on what may prove to be a twice timely piece of work since unhappily the fate of the notable monument commemorated hangs in the balance.

MARGARET TOYNBEE.

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A Victorian M.P. and his constituents : the Correspondence of H. W. Tancred, 1841-1859, edited by B. S. Trinder, B.A., with a Foreword by the Rt. Hon. Richard Crossman, M.P. Banbury Historical Society, Volume 8, 1967.

Henry William Tancred was M.P. for Banbury from 1832 until 1859 ; his political affiliations were summed up in the description 'a Whig and something more'. He supported most of the radical causes of these years, but his career as a politician was quite undistinguished. Mr. Trinder has given us here a most interesting group of letters relating to Tancred's constituency and its management, but the interest goes beyond this local significance, for Tancred's comments in his letters on the contemporary political scene give a valuable insight into back bench opinions. In the summer of 1846, for example, we find this illuminating comment on Peel—'Robin, Bobby or by whatever name that worthy is to be called was far too clever a man for my liking.' Though Tancred was a political opponent of Peel, this doubt would certainly have been echoed willingly by many Conservative back benchers, even before the final Corn Law crisis. Tancred also reports accurately the calamitous decline in Russell's standing during the Crimean War ; 'obviously, the demoralisation which precedes destruction has befallen him. Twice in six months to have committed such maximus errors, as the merest novice in his craft would be ashamed of, is too much.' The opinions of Banbury's M.P. in these years are not notable as the pronouncements of a man who himself held commanding influence, but more as the expression of opinions which were very widely held by men of middling importance in the political world. On visiting the Great Exhibition he thought it 'without exception the most beautiful, & reflects more credit upon those who suggested it & have brought it to bear, of any I ever saw. Young & old, rich & poor ought to see it.' A few years later, in October 1857, his thoughts had a darker cast, again very typical of his fellow countrymen at that time ; 'I hope they will proceed most vigorously in extinguishing this horrid insurrection in India. I never give way to mawkish sensibility ; & think we owe it to common humanity & civilisation to prevent the repetition of such beastly cruelty . . .' Another expression of Tancred's opinion might usefully be quoted ; in July 1846 this unimportant liberal M.P. thought the main priority was to 'labour heart & hand to improve the material condition of the lower classes.'

This collection of letters well merited publication. There are a very few venial errors—at p. 89 and 91 Buller and Bulmer appear instead of Bulwer, for instance—but in general the task of editing the collection has been very well done, and Mr. Trinder's detailed knowledge of Banbury in this period has enabled him to elucidate local references expertly.

NORMAN McCORD.

Baptism and Burial Register of Banbury, Oxfordshire, part two, 1653-1723, transcribed by Mrs. J. Pain, edited by J. S. W. Gibson. Banbury Historical Society, Vol. 9, 1968. Price £2.50.

Of the nine volumes published by the Banbury Historical Society this is the fifth to be devoted to the parish registers of St. Mary's. Baptisms and burials are now transcribed to 1723 and marriages to 1837. Like its predecessors this volume is presented in a hard cover and in photo-litho print. It contains a 12-page introduction (with two maps and an illustration of the Bluecoat School), 208 pages of transcription, 2 appendices and 56 pages of indexes covering surnames, trades and places.

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The introduction gives useful background information from other printed sources on the parish, its vicars and parish clerks, with notes on its schools and non-conformists; it also draws out some pertinent points from the cold facts of births and deaths which the register itself records. Sometimes the obscurities of other authorities are repeated with no attempt at clarification: on p. ix, for instance, the place name given as Hoson(?) must surely be Horley or Hornton, and most people know Burthorpe, Glos. as Eastleach Martin. But this introduction sets the register in its context and is therefore a help to any user of it.

Banbury, at least from 1677 onwards, was well served by its parish clerks: not only did they write a good hand but they also recorded many details about the trades and professions of those for whom they were making entries in the record. These details, which are drawn together in one of the indexes, now provide for the non-genealogist one of the register's greatest interests. Alongside the staple traders such as bakers, butchers, weavers and shoemakers, pig-pokers jostle with sieve-weavers, locksmiths and higglers and gunsmiths with bodice-makers; though the 'bonkas seler' which has baffled the editor is merely a misreading of 'bonlas (i.e. bone lace) seler' in the bishop's transcripts.

As in the previous volumes the parish register has been compared with the rough or paper register and defects supplied, while additional or variant details are also given from the bishop's transcripts and the Quaker registers. It is unfortunate that we are nowhere told where these Quaker registers are, nor that the original parish registers are now deposited in the Bodleian Library. Further, it is not sufficiently emphasized (for those who do not read running titles) that the entries in the baptism register prior to March 29th 1661 are of births and not of baptisms, a fact which makes sense of, for instance, 'an unnamed son of John Jeffs' on February 14th 1653/4. In the burial register references are supplied to testamentary documents where these are known to exist in the records of the Peculiar jurisdiction of Banbury or in those of the Prerogative Court of Canterbury; and a list is given in an appendix of known testamentary documents of Banbury people who do not figure in the register. All these additions to the basic text increase the value of this edition.

Parish registers are, of course, used mainly by genealogists, and what a genealogist requires in an edition is accuracy and completeness. He will not always find them in this one. The introduction admits that its indexes may not always be absolutely accurate because of the difficulty of old- and new-style dating; and, again, that (for a reason that this reviewer cannot follow) 'accuracy is not . . . guaranteed' in the references to probate material. A spot check revealed that it is not noted, for instance, that 'Old Richard Gibbertt, from ye White Horse' who was buried on May 4th 1718 left a will which, with the probate inventory, is in the Peculiar court series and which should have been included as PCB 40/2/1. There are also some errors of substance in the text itself: on the first page, for example, John Noble, the father of Ann, was from Chipping Warden not Chipping Norton—a slip which could send a pedigree-hunter off on completely the wrong scent.

The indexes are the work of R. C. Couzens and are again very good. The personal name index may appear a trifle complicated at first sight, and the user must heed the editor's *caveat* in the introduction; but in general they are well thought out and, like all good indexes, they double the usefulness of the volume.

D. G. VAISEY.