

## Reviews

*A History of the County of Oxford.* Edited by A. Crossley. *Volume X. Banbury Hundred* (Victoria History of the Counties of England). Published for the Institute for Historical Research by the Oxford University Press, London, 1972. 287 pp. + xxiii + Plates. Price £14.

In our review of *V.C.H. Volume IX*, the authorship of almost the entire volume was credited to Dr. J. F. A. Mason, who had in fact written only a section, while the major part was the work of the V.C.H. staff. Dr. Mason is again a contributor to the tenth volume but many different writers have been welded together under the editorship of A. Crossley. It is one of the trade-marks of the V.C.H. that such disparate authorship can never be recognized in the text, just as the accuracy of that text is all but faultless. The reviewer is proud to have found a mistake on page 226; in foot-note 20, P. J. Fowler appears as P. S. Fowler.

Volume X deals with the Hundred of Banbury, a hundred of remarkable geographical constitution which is clearly outlined in the Introduction by Dr. Janet Cooper, and explained as the legacy of the estates of the Dorchester bishopric. It is a constitution that gives us two market towns in the one volume, Banbury and Charlbury, and we begin with the former, the capital city of Banburyshire, though such vulgarisms are not for the V.C.H. which refers chastely to the town as 'the centre of its region'. Not until the late 19th century did it become a 'centre of wealth', rather than the centre of a wealthy hinterland (p. 19). Its function until the 20th century was as a local market town, except that the Bishop of Lincoln, its onlie begetter, used it as the *caput* of his alliterative Barony of Banbury.

Banbury occupies almost precisely one-half of the text of this volume, and although of course this includes the descriptions of the agricultural holdings of the manors and the dependent hamlets, the town very rightly has pride of place. Banbury has been well-served by historians and folk-historians; Beesley is generously acknowledged (p. 18), there is George Herbert, and the Banbury Historical Society has been very active in recent years. A V.C.H. relies on primary sources, however, and the list of these is impressively long, including as it does the mouth-watering *Penitential of Pseudo-Egbert*. The list does not include the section on Banbury in the recently-published *Historic Towns Atlas*, written by P. D. A. Harvey, who is also the writer of the section on Medieval Banbury in the V.C.H. Inevitably the exciting new formula of the first detracts from the second, and one looks in vain for any map that is on a par with those in the *Atlas*—not that these are beyond reproach, but that is a different review. The only map is on page 22, and is so unrevealing as to be a waste of space. It is a great pity that the V.C.H. formula prevents historical reconstruction, and that it leads to so much duplication. Thus the information on page 18 about the earliest reference to the market is repeated but amplified on page 58, and the market crops up again on page 61. These follow the description of the agricultural part of the manor, not straight on from the town, making the urban history difficult and repetitive to piece together. The task must be done. Not until page 72, for instance, is there mention of the Piepowder court held in the 14th century, a piece of information about the fair that surely deserved an earlier appearance, on page 58, where the reference to the 16th century court could easily mislead a reader into thinking that this was then a novel institution. Similarly, information on street-names on page 58 repeats fuller information on page 20, without referring back. Under 'Trade' there is no reference to the discussion on page 57 about the role of sheep in the economy, although by the mid 15th century the wool trade can be seen emerging into a dominant place in the town's mercantile life, recovering from the set-back caused by the Black Death. The difficulty

of plotting the exact degree of recession that the late 14th century suffered is ubiquitous. It receives particularly judicious treatment here.

The map on page 22 is a pitiable contrast to the one of Thame in *V.C.H. Volume VII*, the other of the Bishop of Lincoln's town foundations in Oxfordshire—a reference to Thame on page 20 could have been usefully added to that to New Sleaford. The site of the vill and Bishop Alexander's castle, and the strong presumption that the borough was his creation, are well set out, although the archaeological evidence, described by P. J. Fasham elsewhere in this journal, is passed over. We are told that the town was at a route crossing, but why was the new town not precisely on the road axis? At Thame, the bishop diverted a road to take it through his market; why did he avoid the major road at Banbury? Why too did he not put his borough further south, on the saltway? Why also was the castle off the road? It is not as far away as at Deddington, but too far to supervise traffic. These questions raise doubts about the importance of roads as a site factor.

The site of the castle is known, and something of its layout, but the excavations reported elsewhere in this journal now augment this. It is a pity that the 1685 plan is not shown,<sup>1</sup> particularly since another writer's use of it is criticized in a footnote. This plan could have taken up the half-page of space that would have been saved by reducing the 1734 builder's house-plan on page 35, which is much larger than necessary. It would have been valuable to have had some scale drawings of the surviving buildings, as these are so thoroughly and competently described. The lack of Medieval buildings is sad, as it becomes impossible to compare the houses of the town with those in its hinterland, already in the Banbury region the subject of a good survey by Wood-Jones. The author attributes this lack to poor quality building having led to replacement (p. 29), perhaps unlikely in view of the prosperity of the merchants described earlier (p. 6, and again on p. 62). Such men could afford good housing, and there is no reason to suppose that good workmen were unobtainable in the district. The 16th and 17th century buildings are well dealt with, especially the interesting plaster-work, and there are useful combinations of architectural and documentary records for the Reindeer Inn, for instance. Welcome also is the excellent treatment given to 19th century buildings, industrial, bourgeois and artisan.

The usual sections on the various activities in the town are present, with its varying reputation for lying and Puritanism. The decline of the cheese trade is reported but not explained, underlining how much scope there is for research into national patterns of local industries of quite recent date. There was weaving, printing, choral music, racing and brass band playing—the panoply of a small town is carefully unfolded for us.

The V.C.H. presents us with the facts, but things that did not happen are beyond its focus. Why, for instance, was Banbury not represented at Medieval Parliaments, although its smaller neighbour Deddington sent members? This was not because the Bishop restrained the town, as the Abbot restrained Abingdon, for Thame was represented. The interplay of the market towns of the region is a fruitful field for speculation.

It is useful to have another, smaller market town in the same volume. The late Mrs. Hollings disarms criticism by the first foot-note, declaring a long association with her subject, Charlbury. Such strong local roots are a source of strength to the V.C.H., although perhaps local knowledge might have led to a mention of the standing stone, its purpose and origin unknown, that the R.D.C. removed from its sewage works in 1972. Like Banbury, Charlbury is conspicuously not sited on the nearby saltway. The topography of the town suggests a road diversion, however; Lee Place appears to have blocked the Fawler road in the 16th or 17th century, diverting it north through Hixet Wood, or south past the present Cornbury and Lee Place gates. This would mean that the present Park Street which runs up to the east side of the churchyard,

<sup>1</sup> *Cake and Cockhorse*, with its customary acumen, has now reproduced this plan as its cover for the issue of Summer, 1973.

and then turns sharp right to open into the wide market street, was a more important Medieval than modern route. Did it originally carry on in a straight line past the church-yard? It looks very much as though someone—presumably the Abbot of Eynsham—deliberately blocked the road at the church, to force traffic up through the market where he had laid out his burgage plots. The Bishop of Lincoln did this at Thame. My speculation led from looking at the V.C.H. map on page 130, a much more revealing plan than that in the Banbury section. Even so, it should have included names mentioned in the text, such as Stonyway and Baywell Gate.

That Charlbury takes its name from a personal name, 'the *burh* of *Ceorl*', may seem clear-cut, but Professor Finberg has recently shown how the numerous Charltons, Chorltons, etc., mean 'the *tun* of the *ceorls*', suggesting that they were distinctive settlements of the low-born. Charlbury is the only name of its kind in England, and differs from the Charltons in having an *-ing*-element in its original form, which usually implies a personal name. That a *ceorl* should have a fortified *burh* to inhabit is indeed a remote possibility, but *burh* need not mean more than an enclosure. The parish also contains a Walcot, which the *E.P.N.S. Oxon.* (but not the V.C.H.) gives as the *cote* of the *wealas*, i.e. Britons. 'Charlbury' does not occur in any early record. Should we be looking for a 7th century site for *Infeppingum*, to which the *ceorl's burh* and the *wealas' cote* were subsidiary, the focus of the parish shifting to its present site in the late Saxon period? At least a reference to the possibility of an early minster would have been justified on page 148 or 151.

The author takes us through the limited evidence given about the estate by the Eynsham Cartulary, and it is welcome to have details set out of an Eynsham property to compare with Lloyd's study of Brookend (*Oxoniensia* xxix/xxx). One notes an unusual sub-division of the peasantry, with 7 *cotterels* each with only a  $\frac{1}{4}$  yardland, in 1279. The township was never big, and did not take advantage of new opportunities in the 16th and 17th centuries, so that only recently has it grown significantly. Its gloving industry is succinctly charted. 'Trade and Industry' apparently began in 1709 (p. 144), although the activities of a Witney merchant in 1268 have been described earlier (p. 140). But unlike the Banbury entry information is not duplicated. Lack of information might have been a reassurance in the market description; absence of rentals, etc., could have been clearly stated, not left to inference. Later on there is surprisingly no mention of Vaisey's paper on a Charlbury mercer's shop (*Oxoniensia* xxxi).

The rest of the Hundred of Banbury is a scatter of villages and hamlets to which Dr. Mason is an admirable guide. He steers us through Cropredy and Clattercote, moieties and fees, Wardington and Swalcliffe, quitclaims and essoins, Shutford and the Sibfords, plush and paupers, small churches, small manor houses and small villages. With the local grandees at Broughton and Compton Wynyates outside the Hundred, the Swalcliffe tithe barn and church are the only outstanding buildings in an area that is delightfully rural even today.

This volume takes the V.C.H. of Oxfordshire a major step forward, and we now have detailed and excellent studies of nearly half the market towns. One may regret the decision to concentrate now on Oxford itself, already so thoroughly studied, while smaller places still wait neglected in the wings. Of these, Bampton in particular cries out for a good history.

DAVID A. HINTON.

*Oxford Life in Oxford Archives.* By W. A. Pantin. Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1972.

Pp. x+123. £2.00.

When Anthony Wood embarked upon his *History and Antiquities of the University of Oxford*, he 'knowing very well that such obscure knowledge could not be promoted without beating and tracing out obscure paths' succeeded in penetrating the University

archives, and 'there to my very great delight did I find incomparable treasures for my designe; but so long it was before I could fasten upon a method that my paines were treble before it could be obtained'. The problem of discerning the uses and the limitations of archives remains, but Dr. Pantin, in these elegant reconstructions of aspects of university life, has been able to extract from them very effective evidence of its changing texture from the 13th century to the 20th. Nine of the ten chapters are distilled from convivial addresses to the Delegates of Privileges which Dr. Pantin, as Keeper of the Archives, gave with illustrative exhibitions of some of the archives on the occasion of their annual visitation; some, like the masterly account of teaching at Oxford, combined several. The tenth, on the riot of St. Scholastica's day in 1355, originally accompanied the University's sescentenary olive-branch to the City, though it is not without a spirited defence of university rights over the town. The tone is light, but Dr. Pantin has a serious purpose: as Reform once again stalks the common rooms 'conscience-stricken intellectuals (unduly conscience-stricken, I think) have been asking themselves why they are here, what they are doing, and why they are doing it in the way that they are doing it'. The archives reveal not only the why and wherefore of current institutions, but also 'the mistakes of over-hasty or doctrinaire reformers', and above all, most precious heritage, the democratic organization of the University, which neither Heads of Houses, nor Professors, nor administrative officers have suppressed in its entirety. In this role the Keeper of the Archives is not only, like Twyne and Langbaine and Wallis, the guardian of university privileges: he is its corporate memory and its conscience; and as such Dr. Pantin gives an historical dimension, tactfully but firmly, to the preoccupations of modern academic government.

It may be wondered whether the archives can fulfil this task. When Congregation ordered, in 1449, that the records should be sifted, and only those worthy of registration being useful or convenient to the University should be preserved in the chest of records (the remainder being 'completely put out of it'), it laid down a principle of severe utility for its muniments. Fortunately, the natural curiosity of dons combined with natural inertia to moderate the consequent destruction. Besides the statutes and title deeds, there remains a wealth of documents illustrating the social history of Oxford: the Assize of Bread and Ale; the documents on Oxford tradesmen; the dispensations to live in lodgings, and the Proctors' manuals. Dr. Pantin's use of them throws a great deal of light on the university's ancient way of life, replete with curious detail; on the '15th-century Helen of Troy', expelled by the Chancellor in 1444 for causing 'litigations, fornications, fights and homicides'; on the witticisms of *Terrae Filius*, the occasional *Cherwell* of the 17th century; on the unfortunate state of Chemistry in 1817, whose professor was compelled to share his laboratory with the Keeper of the Ashmolean Museum's cook. Curiously, it is on the subject of teaching that the archives evidently have least to tell us. Dr. Pantin's long chapter on the subject depends largely on external sources; on the diaries and memoirs of Woodforde, Newman and Mark Pattison, and his own extensive knowledge of college archives. He emphasizes that the dual role in teaching of University and College, of lecturer and tutor, goes back to the beginning, and is not a 'college usurpation' of the 16th century. More might have been said about the use of books. But books, except as property, are not of much consequence in the archives.

This book ought to be required reading for members of university committees. But it is also addressed to a wider audience, and it may be a surprise to many to realize that it is the only scholarly account of Oxford's way of life before the 19th century in print, in spite of its restricted documentary basis. It will be one of the most valuable fruits of Dr. Pantin's reign as Keeper of the Archives.\*

JEREMY CATTO.

\* The sad news of the death of Dr. Pantin was received while this volume was in the press.

*Current Research in Romano British Coarse Pottery*, edited by Alec Detsicas (C.B.A. Research Report, no. 10), 1973. Pp. xviii+166; plates xvii. Price £4.00.

Readers of *Oxoniensia* have been aware of the significance of the Roman pottery industry around Oxford since Harden's paper on the Dorchester and Cowley kilns in the first volume of the journal in 1936; but not so the rest of the world. It is only in recent years that the Oxford region has emerged as a centre of one of the major pottery industries of Roman Britain. This volume, the outcome of the C.B.A. pottery conference at Oxford in 1972, includes three papers which serve to put the Oxford industry properly on the map.

In 'The Pottery Industry of the Oxford Region', Christopher Young surveys the kiln sites and their most familiar products. He sees the industry as a local one, producing a wide range of vessels from the 1st century onwards, and expanding as it reaps the benefits of the growing Roman road system and the increasing villa population nearby. Mortarium production began early in the 2nd century. Young links the expansion to national production with the introduction of red colour-coated table wares and parchment wares in the middle of the 3rd century; he sees this change as a sudden one and speculates on the financial investment needed to make it possible. From then on the Oxford industry prospered until the end.

In 'The Marketing and Distribution of Mortaria', Mrs. Hartley makes important comments on the Oxford industry. She credits the Oxford industries with 'major production and wide distribution of mortaria' from the late 2nd century onwards, which implies that the growth of the industry was more gradual and continuous than is suggested by Young's massive expansion in the middle of the 3rd century. A distribution map of Oxford and Mancetter-Hartshill mortaria effectively shows the trading areas of the rival factories. The Oxford market covers all of southern England, Wales and the south Midlands, with numerous outliers further north. During the second half of the 4th century the Mancetter-Hartshill workshops cease production leaving the Oxford workshops unchallenged as the province's major producers.

In 'The New Forest Industries', Mrs. Vivien Swann shows the comparative distribution of New Forest and Oxfordshire wares in Wiltshire. Her maps are of especial significance because both centres were producing the same types of ware, mortaria, red colour-coated vessels and parchment wares. With few exceptions the Oxford wares cover the whole of Wiltshire while the New Forest products are confined to the southern part of the county nearest to their centre of production. This is an effective demonstration of the marketing ability of the Oxfordshire industry.

The success of the Oxford industry is doubtless due to a number of causes, convenient access to markets, ready supply of raw materials, etc. One additional reason may be hidden in some comments of Christopher Young's. He notices that the northern group of Oxford kilns were using an iron-free clay from Shotover, and were making white mortaria, while the southern group were using an iron-bearing clay from the gravel terraces and were making colour-coated vessels. Thus the Oxford industry as a whole was producing two of the main sorts of pottery. This may well have been a critical factor in the economic war with its competitors which were producing only one variety. The Hartshill-Mancetter factories, for example, had to rely on mortaria alone. John Gillam's comments on the situation in the north are equally relevant to the Oxford industry. 'As time went on reliance was placed on a decreasing number of increasingly large factories'; but he goes on to add, 'when these closed, the people were thrown on their own inadequate resources'.

Why did the factories close? This intriguing question is barely touched on by the contributors to this volume. Yet the closure was total; Oxford, New Forest, Nene Valley—all ceased production, as it were, overnight. There is no reason to suppose that any one centre outlasted another by more than a few years. Christopher Young suggests that the destruction of the long distance trade routes might account for the collapse, and that the very early Saxon settlements in the Oxford area may also



have had something to do with it. This seems to be speculation on the right lines—certainly the inability to sell their products, whether because the trade routes failed, or because the market itself failed, would cripple the big firms and lead to bankruptcy. Production would cease and the workers would disperse to seek an alternative livelihood. The failure of all the big firms within a few years can only be a measure of the chaos throughout the country. What is remarkable is that no one with the technical know-how should have started pottery production on a small scale in the neighbourhood of some centre of population, such as a town like Cirencester or Gloucester. But it seems that there was no recovery from the chaos, nor even the beginning of a recovery.

It is difficult to see what effect the early Saxon settlement can have had on all this. The evidence from the continent, from the Franks in northern France and the Rhineland, and from the Goths on the Danube, is that the barbarians quickly took over the products of the Roman potteries, and so kept them going. It is reasonable to suppose that the same would have happened in England had there been any chance of it, for finds from both cemeteries and settlements show that the Saxons used Roman vessels whenever they could get their hands on them. The fact that the Roman industry in Britain failed to survive suggests that it had already collapsed before the Saxons arrived.

The remaining papers cover aspects of recent research into Romano British coarse pottery. Of particular interest are Kevin Green's paper on 1st century supplies, and the other parts of Mrs. Hartley's paper on mortaria—both deserve study, if only as examples of method. The C.B.A. and their editor have produced a useful book.

DAVID BROWN.

*Shoemaker's Window. Recollections of Banbury before the Railway Age, by George Herbert, 1814-1902.* Second edition with an introduction by Barrie S. Trinder. Phillimore & Co. Ltd., for the Banbury Historical Society, Records Vol. 10, 1971. Pp. xxiv, +144; 1 plan, 8 plates. £1.25p.

This is a book well-known to historians interested in the lives and surroundings of ordinary people in the 19th century. First published in 1948, these memoirs of an octogenarian shoemaker turned photographer have for some time been out of print; they are now reprinted with a new introduction by Barrie S. Trinder and in a soft-back form. For £1.25p the purchaser gets a fascinating digest of the memories, observations and experience of George Herbert, a man of many parts—shoemaker, photographer, amateur chemist, musician—who was born in 1814, lived most of his life in Banbury, and died in 1902 having written these memoirs in the form of letters to two friends some four years previously.

Like many old men, Herbert had a very clear memory for some episodes and there are lively descriptions, full of circumstantial details, of aspects of life so commonplace as not often to be deemed worthy of recording; badger-baiting, how the poorer classes cleaned their boots before the introduction of blacking, how one sewed the sovereigns inside one's pocket before setting out on a long journey, and (a graphic description, this) how the Banbury cess-pits—often situated under the houses—were emptied. The book also abounds in Banbury characters such as Fiddler Claridge and his son who played for dances during the winter and made straw beehives during the summer, or Joseph Heming, the carpenter, who was accustomed to drink neat gin followed by copious quantities of water to dilute it in his stomach. The pages are packed with such detail and people, and the whole book makes absorbing, informative and entertaining reading.

But old men, though possessing great clarity of memory for some things, can have great blind spots for others, and the reader could wish for more critical testing of much of what Herbert says and, perhaps, more explanation of what he doesn't say. This

raises a much larger question : is it the proper role for a local record society to join in reprinting a text published as a commercial venture less than 25 years ago and now reprinted as a commercial venture, without doing a good deal more than is done here towards providing additional information for the reader ? It is true that we have a new and valuable (though somewhat repetitious) introduction, a bibliography of works on 19th century Banbury, and some extra notes which mainly refer readers to articles in *Cake and Cockhorse* on persons or buildings ; but the text is still incomplete, since the omission of some material 'of purely topographical interest' in the first edition has not been remedied (and we are not told where the original manuscript now is so that we cannot remedy it for ourselves), the index has not been improved, and too few of the statements made or questions raised are clarified in a way one might expect from a local record society. Much of Herbert's narrative, as Mr. Trinder says, is gossip or tales heard and passed on which cannot be checked ; but it is not really enough to say that Herbert is 'rarely seriously wrong'.

For instance, one is left wanting to know more about the strike of shoemakers in Margate which Herbert experienced as a young man. Who were the two very interesting early daguerreotypers, Heeley and Thorpe, who failed in Banbury ? Do any of Herbert's own photographs survive, and if so, where ? Did he really go to Paris to purchase French calf to make Wellington boots ? This whole episode, which must have been a tremendous adventure for him, is written off in a few sentences. In topographical matters his memory is noticeably fallible, and in some personal matters, too, it is demonstrably at fault—in the case of Baroness de Poly, for instance, which the original editor corrected in an Appendix. In others the likelihood is that it was—Mr. Trinder accepts his story of the ability of his father to construct a Jacquard loom after a brief sight of one or two in Coventry, but it sounds more like a good story to pass on rather than the truth. It makes one wonder how much more of the book falls into this category.

D. G. VAISEY.

*The Wigginton Constables' Book, 1691-1836*, ed. F. D. Price (Banbury Hist. Soc., Vol. XI) ; published for the Society by Phillimore. Pp. xxix+144 ; 4 illus. Price £2.50.

Among the officers who ran the affairs of English parishes the constable must surely rank as the most interesting. For a number of reasons, particularly because he was accountable usually to a manor court rather than to the vestry, records of the constable's activities survive more rarely than those of churchwardens or overseers of the poor. When they do survive, however, they are of special interest to the historian because of the great range and variety of the constable's work ; for whilst remaining, as he had begun, an agent of the inward-looking local community supervising such affairs as the farming of the open fields in accordance with the 'custom of the manor' the constable became by stages the agent of greater powers in a wider world, the justices of the peace and the central government. What were probably very ancient duties in connexion with the keeping of the peace became much more extensive, and to them were added duties relating to national taxation, the county rate, the militia, the listing of freeholders, the relief of the travelling poor. It is evident that, even in Wigginton, which in 1801 numbered fewer than 200 persons, the office was onerous if not, as Defoe remarked, one of 'insupportable hardship' ; it is not surprising that in Wigginton it seems to have circulated among the more substantial villagers. The surviving accounts cover a considerable period and provide full and entertaining illustration of most aspects of the constable's work ; moreover, they preserve in a rare form the flavour of rural life in pre-industrial England. On one aspect of that life they afford important and rather surprising evidence ; for in a single year in the 1690s, no fewer than 336 poor travellers sought and received temporary succour in this out-of-the-way village in a fairly prosperous part of the country.

This is an extremely well-produced book. The accounts are clearly set out and sufficiently annotated ; there is a thorough and brief introduction, a good index, and even a map, although here perhaps something more useful might have been provided than a reproduction of part of Davis's quaint but rather disappointing map of Oxfordshire in 1797.

ALAN CROSSLEY.