

Reviews

The Victoria History of the County of Oxford. Volume XI. Wootton Hundred (Northern Part). Edited by Alan Crossley. Oxford University Press. 1983. Pp xx, 328. £60.

With the publication of this volume the Oxfordshire Victoria County History staff return to the topography and history of rural parishes having completed their work on Oxford. For the first time they are dealing with a hundred too large to be contained in a single volume so we have here just the northern part of Wootton hundred, that is nineteen parishes north of Oxford and immediately west of the river Cherwell. The area is bounded by Deddington, Barford St. Michael and South Newington on the north and by Tackley, Wootton and Stonesfield on the south, and comprises in addition Glympton, Heythrop, Rousham, Sandford St. Martin, the Astons, the Bartons, the Wortons and the three Tews. It is largely an area of nucleated villages surrounded by open fields until the period of parliamentary enclosure, peopled by agricultural communities. Slate mining at Stonesfield and gloving, a home industry for the women in villages near Woodstock, did not develop until the seventeenth century. Deddington had a market and fairs and, until the sixteenth century, burgage tenure, but it too was predominantly an agricultural community, and its forms of government were no different from those of the surrounding villages.

Work on the volume was begun in the 1960s, notably by Mr. Howard Colvin whose contribution on Deddington was the basis of his little history of the town published in 1963, and by Mr. A. Tomkinson working on the Tews, the Wortons and Barford St. Michael. Earlier drafts of parts of the histories of Rousham, Sandford and Wootton by Andrew Butcher, Miss R.M. Marshall and the late Sir Charles Ponsonby respectively are also acknowledged. Much the largest part of the research and writing and all the revision of these earlier drafts is however the work of the present County Editor, Mr. Alan Crossley, and the assistant editors, Dr. Janet Cooper and Chris Day, with, throughout, the sections on nonconformity and poor relief, and charities again prepared by Mrs. Christina Colvin and Nesta Selwyn, and architectural descriptions by Mr. A.P. Baggs. In this and the previous volume the particular member of staff responsible for each individual article is named in the list of contents, a very desirable innovation.

The volume of course follows the familiar V.C.H. pattern, with the central core of the history of each parish still a detailed account of the descent of the manors, now including the history of the manor house and particulars of tenants where there were no resident lords of the manor. But this volume also has particularly good measure of all the newer features which have so much widened the interest and usefulness of the more recent topographical volumes, both for historians and for local residents. We have here a wealth of significant detail about the physical development of each settlement, its boundaries, changing population and communications in lengthy introductions, usually illustrated by good sketch maps which make these sections easy to follow. We also have a wealth of detail about the organisation of open fields, the progress of enclosure, forms of land tenure and farming methods in the 'Economic history' sections, and here again the maps are useful. Many details are given of the descent of lesser estates than manors and where possible the histories of the houses attached to them are traced, subjects of interest both to family

historians and to anyone living in an old house of modest size in the area. Many particulars of manorial and parish administration are now given under 'Local Government', and descriptions of endowments of benefices, the history of the parsonage house and accounts of church life can all be found under 'Church'. The illustrations are also more varied than in earlier volumes, and include plenty of human interest. The index is a good guide to the contents of the volume. There is the usual sensible breakdown by subjects within each parish entry, and also some useful general subject entries such as 'emigration' and 'epidemics'. All the interesting references to 'crops, less common' and 'industries, trades and professions' are brought together by those cross-references.

The quantity and variety of sources with which contributors now need to be familiar in order to cover this range of subjects exhaustively is very formidable. Evidence from local and national archives, archaeological investigations, printed material of many kinds, maps, photographs and fieldwork is all skilfully brought together and evaluated. Anyone who is accustomed to turn first to documents, like the reviewer, should note how valuable a source the County Museum's Sites and Monuments Record has now become for Oxfordshire parish historians; it is cited here for subjects ranging from Romano-British settlement to nonconformist chapels. Some subjects, of course, can only occasionally be examined because some types of record were only made or have only survived for a few places. Just for Wootton we can read all about the farming of the demesne in the 13th century because we have detailed accounts of its direct management by the Crown at that period. Similarly it is only at South Newington that one can trace how and when the various Tudor and Stuart religious changes affected the parish church; there early churchwardens' accounts not only survive but have been published. What appears to be a misinterpretation of these accounts by their editor is, though, repeated here, and gives new authority to the unlikely suggestion that a country parish re-introduced the surplice in 1658, during the Commonwealth. Trustees' minutes for the Oxford to Banbury turnpike road which ran through this area were seen by Howard Colvin in the 1950s but cannot now be traced.

Perhaps partly because it concerns an almost wholly rural area most of the material seems to fall quite happily into the standard V.C.H. sections in this volume. The reviewer rarely felt that the narrative was being 'diverted into artificial channels', a criticism made of earlier volumes in this journal, and much of it is easy and enjoyable reading. It is just the short sections on the history of mills for which there does not yet seem to be a satisfactory place in the narrative. There were many watermills in this area, and a paragraph about them sometimes beginning with 1086 and extending to the 20th century is not a suitable end to the long 'Economic history' section. Without it this section would often finish much more aptly with the arrival of 20th century commuters. It is good to see that minor variations of arrangements are now allowed, as these help to avoid repetition and awkward cross-referencing. Thus at Rousham where the parish has been dominated by the Dormers' famous house and grounds since the 17th century, and where the whole of the village lies within the park, the house and gardens are described in the introductory section rather than under 'Manors'. Even parish as well as subject divisions can now occasionally be set aside. The lands of Middle Barton, much the most populous part of Steeple Barton parish, were intermixed with those of Westcott Barton in a single field system until their enclosure in 1796, and the two settlements are now contiguous. Very sensibly, therefore, the economic histories of these two parishes are dealt with together under Steeple Barton.

Only a few of the more notable and unusual features of the area recorded in the volume can be mentioned here, and only a few of the more important additions to and corrections of earlier work. There is a higher incidence of depopulation in Wootton hundred than anywhere else in the county, and details are given here of three further deserted settlements which have been identified since the publication of *The Deserted Villages of Oxfordshire* in

1966, that is Nethercote (in Steeple Aston), Slade (in Glympton) and an unnamed site in Duns Tew. One example of the lands of two townships lying intermixed in a single field system has already been mentioned; the lands of Barford St. Michael were similarly intermixed in this unusual way with those of Hempton in Deddington until their enclosure in 1807. Another unusual open field feature of the area was the existence within a single township of two separate sets of fields known as ends or sides, found at Deddington, Duns Tew and South Newington. Duns Tew had two separate pounds, one at each end of the village, and both there and at Deddington two separate sets of officials were appointed to manage the two sets of fields. It is interesting, but less surprising, to read of variations in ways of conducting parish business. In Steeple Aston regulations for managing the open fields were made by the parish vestry, not by a manorial court; in Wootton the overseer of the poor was a paid official between 1772 and 1825; Nether Worton had no churchwardens in 1854, and at Over Worton church rates continued to be levied by yardlands until 1825 although the open fields had been enclosed by 1642. Another unusual feature of the area might have been looked at more closely, for it must have had important consequences for village life. No less than four of the eight vicarages (Barford St. Michael, Deddington, South Newington and Great Tew) were endowed with a fixed stipend, not with the usual glebe and small tithes, a much higher proportion than in the county or the country as a whole. These vicarages became the poorest of all livings when inflation drastically reduced the real value of the stipends in the sixteenth century. Moreover these vicars did not share with their parishioners that close connection with the land which the great majority of the country clergy had until the nineteenth century, even if they were only leasing out their glebe and tithe. The two vicars of South Newington who are known to have been active farmers between 1578 and 1636 must have owned or rented some land of their own.

One of the most important pieces of re-writing concerns the physical development of Great Tew, an estate village much in the public eye. There is no good evidence to support the suggestion that Great Tew was first planned and rebuilt by Lord Falkland as lord of the manor in the early 17th century, rather than rebuilt around that time by individual householders in the usual manner. The consciously 'picturesque' rebuilding of the early 19th century is much better documented. It is now shown to be very unlikely that this was influenced by the Scottish agriculturalist, John Claudius Loudon. Loudon laid out just one unsuccessful model farm in Great Tew in 1808-11 before work began on the cottages. The rebuilding of the village was undertaken by a new landlord, Matthew Robinson Boulton (son of the famous Birmingham industrialist) from 1819 onwards employing as his first architect Thomas Rickman. The architectural history of Tackley church is also rewritten with the assistance of Dr. John Blair, illustrated by a measured and dated plan. Tackley is the only parish in the area where, as is now shown, architectural evidence of a pre-Conquest church has survived.¹

The volume maintains the usual high standards of accuracy of the whole series. It is only because the slips or misprints which have been noticed are so very few for a work of this size and detail that it is possible to list them here. The full shelfmark of the Dunkin MSS. deposited in the Bodleian Library is Dep.d. 71-82 (the d. is omitted on p. xvii). The impossible reference MS. Wills Oxon. 102/46 given in note 53 on p. 189 is a mystery as it is not a slip for either 102, p. 46 or 10/2/46. The Compton Census is dated 1675 on p. 224 though correctly given as 1676 everywhere else. Francis Smith, the builder of Heythrop

¹ EDITOR'S NOTE: Excavation (in August 1984) has since shown that the nave at Tackley is indeed pre-Conquest, but that the blocked arcade in the north wall was pierced through it when an aisle was added in the early 12th century.

House is curiously described as of Tettenhall (Staffs.), his birth-place, rather than given his usual title 'of Warwick'. The modern form of the name of the parish of Easington (Waws.) is Lower Ettington. Because it has not been identified thus on page 258, a reference there to tithes is not brought together in the index with a reference to a vicar of the parish occurring on page 73. It would however be very misleading to end on this pedantic note. Rather, the editor, the authors and the University Press can be very warmly congratulated on producing yet another important volume quite as good as any in our splendid Oxfordshire series. We now very much look forward to the publication of their next work on the southern part of this hundred which will include two more market towns, Woodstock and Eynsham.

D. M. BARRATT

Ian Scargill and Alan Crosby, *Oxford and Its Countryside*. Oxford Books, 21 Pitts Road, Headington, 1982. Pp. 92; 19 plates, 12 maps, 7 drawings. Price £3.95.

This is the latest volume which sets out to analyse Oxford and its setting. The big difference is that this study deliberately avoids discussing the University of Oxford and the ancient city core. The book discusses how the suburbs, waterways, parks and larger open spaces have developed, the role they play now and the pressures under which they operate, such as tourism, recreation, traffic flow, vandalism, commercialism and so on. It is concerned largely with suburban Oxford and the chapters, a series of separate essays, illustrate the tone of the book: 'Victorian Suburb', 'The Walls of Jericho', 'By River and Canal', 'Villages within the City', 'Oxford's Open Spaces', 'The Countryside and its Protection', 'Otmoor', 'Some Oxfordshire Villages', and a final section on 'Oxford 2000'.

The authors are unashamedly conservationist in their approach to the fabric of Oxford and its suburbs. They applaud conscious efforts at conservation such as those few houses in North Oxford where the householders have been able to retain or restore their front garden railings, and condemn what they see as particularly insensitive intrusions into the Oxford scene such as the garage at the end of the Cumnor Hill bypass, described as 'surely one of the ugliest in the country'. Many of the arguments and observations in this volume have appeared elsewhere, notably in James Stevens Curl's book *The Erosion of Oxford*, but this book brings together a wide range of different strands in a pleasing and economically written manner. The authors are deeply concerned about the less well known suburban treasures of Oxford such as the little medieval hamlet of Bartelmas that survives incongruously and delightfully at the junction of the Cowley and Magdalen Roads. Originally a leper hospital and the site of St. Bartholemew's chapel, it is preserved as a medieval cameo in Oxford's eastern suburbs because it was the property of Oriel College.

The authors rightly stress the need to see Oxford within the context of its surrounding countryside and point out that the survival of many of the most pleasant aspects of Oxford has only been made possible by transferring pressures onto surrounding villages and countryside. However, it is in the treatment of the countryside that the book over-reaches itself. In such a short space inevitably the authors have found it impossible to give the same level of coverage to the surrounding villages and places such as Otmoor, which is at this moment very much under threat from the M40 proposal. Other points which should be made about a book that is essentially intended as an introduction to the topic is the absence of either an index or a bibliography; the latter would have been particularly valuable. The plans are clearly drawn but somewhat sketchy; some succeed and others do not. This is also the case with the photographs, which are a mixed bunch. The old photographs of Oxford

are by far the most evocative while others such as the interior of Iffley Church illuminate little and tend only to emphasize the problems sometimes encountered when reproducing photographs by the off-set litho process. The other unusual and original features of the book are the line drawings by Laura Potter. These are composite creations which have been skilfully done and echo the concerns and topics of each chapter; for instance 'By River and Canal' has punts, barges, racing boats and cruisers together with wild flowers and insects.

The book comes to rather an abrupt end with a two page section on 'Oxford 2000' which consists principally of a list of some eight requirements which the authors feel necessary to preserve Oxford's character. These are inevitably dry compared to the lively and compassionate style of the remainder of the book. However, the authors do end by reminding us that Oxford has a habit of surviving change and that some aspects of conservation at least are a matter of contemporary taste; they remind us of William Tuckwell who, writing of Oxford in the year 1900, berated the intrusive quality of the tramlines on Magdalen Bridge and compared the city as it was then with the 'sweet city of the 1830s'.

TREVOR ROWLEY

Beryl Schumer, *The Evolution of Wychwood to 1400: Pioneers, Frontiers and Forests*. University of Leicester Department of English Local History Occasional Papers, 3rd series, no. 6, 1984. Pp. 72. Price £5.95.

Wychwood Forest has been the subject of several historical studies, notably Vernon Watney's lavishly-produced volume on Cornbury Park and the custodianship of the Forest (1910), John Kibble's collection of local antiquarian curiosities (1928) and the largely unpublished work of the late Mrs Violet Wickham Steed. Compiled generally by members of well-connected and prominent local families with an intimate and long-standing knowledge of their region, these works were the products of a more leisured age, and they reflect the concerns of their time.

Beryl Schumer's paper has been written under very different circumstances. Born and raised in Australia, her interest in the Wychwood area was first kindled by tracing a branch of her own family who had been yeoman farmers in North Leigh. Despite the demands of a full-time career as a biochemist in London, she studied for the local history diploma of the University of London Extra-Mural Department (a version of her diploma dissertation on a sixteenth-century North Leigh estate book was published in the 1975 issue of *Oxoniensia*), and then went on to undertake an M.Phil thesis for the University of Leicester on 'The Woodland Landscape of the Wychwood Region in the centuries before AD 1400'. Her present paper is essentially a summary of that thesis.

The primary task which she sets herself, the reconstruction of the physical extent of woodland within the Forest between the 11th and 14th centuries, is both more limited and more difficult than those of her predecessors, yet it illuminates a range of subsidiary themes of great interest. During the last quarter-century, landscape historians' views on woodland have undergone some fundamental changes. The initial clearance of the primeval woodland, once assumed to be largely the work of Anglo-Saxon settlers, is now attributed to Neolithic and Bronze Age populations many times larger than was once thought. Within the very heart of Wychwood there are long barrows, round barrows, prehistoric settlements and the extensive though still enigmatic earthworks of Grim's Ditch, the forest is bisected by a major Roman road, and it includes a considerable concentration of wealthy Roman villas. Much of the woodland known to have existed in the Middle Ages is now understood

to be secondary regrowth over land which had once been cleared, settled and cultivated. In Wychwood evidence of early Saxon settlement is minimal, and the distribution of *-leah* place-names indicates that the area was dominated by woodland by the time that the names were given; in contrast to the traditional model of early Saxon expansion, Wychwood was then undergoing a period of settlement contraction or withdrawal, with land falling back out of cultivation.

The Domesday survey provides the earliest specific record of woodland extents. Its interpretation is fraught with difficulties, not the least of which is that manors up to ten miles distant possessed detached woodlands in Wychwood which are entered under the name of the vill to which they belonged rather than under the locality where they were situated. Despite the reservations which some historians have expressed about the validity of using the survey for topographical studies, Miss Schumer demonstrates convincingly that it is often possible to determine the location and extent of the Domesday woodland with considerable accuracy. Here it formed a fairly compact block between the Glyme and Windrush, with several isolated outlying woods and internal clearings, and its bounds appear remarkably similar to those described in James I's Survey of 1609.

Far from being merely a negative area, 'an unwanted remnant of primeval "wild-wood", useful only when cleared', medieval woodland is now recognised as a jealously-conserved and carefully-managed resource in its own right. Wychwood in the middle ages was not an indeterminate and featureless wilderness, but had clearly-defined and stable boundaries and considerable internal landscape variety, with areas of 'open forest', wood-pasture, lawns and wastes separating enclosed coppices and parks. Rights to hunt, to cut timber and underwood and to graze livestock are documented in detail only from a later date, but Miss Schumer argues that they were all well-established by 1086. She provides some especially interesting material on the common pasture rights shared by the tenants of many manors in both royal and private woods, rights which in some cases lasted well into the nineteenth century; it is remarkable how the pattern of intercommoning separates the forest into two parts, the divide coinciding almost exactly with the line of Grim's Ditch.

The traditional view of 'new villages' like Leafield, Ramsden, Hailey and Crawley being carved out of the wilderness after the late 11th century is effectively challenged; their failure to appear in Domesday Book reflects their subsidiary status within larger manors, not their late foundation, and, with the possible exception of Langley, it is now difficult to produce evidence for any completely new settlements within the woodland. A parallel and equally time-honoured assumption which comes under fire is the view that assarting was rife until the Assize of Woodstock in 1184 reinforced the Forest Law. In Wychwood post-Conquest assarting was far less extensive than once believed, and was not a widespread, uniform onslaught but was restricted to limited areas in specific periods. Moreover, it took three distinctly different forms. Separate farms carved out by free tenants under licence from the lord, a familiar phenomenon in the Forest of Arden, are limited mainly to the northern side of Wychwood. Small individually-held closes pushed out from the margins of the old arable occur in the Leafield area. The most characteristic form of assarting in Wychwood, however, resulted in new furlongs of strips being incorporated into an irregular open-field system, so that assart land disconcertingly becomes almost indistinguishable from old arable fields. Here the holder of assart land was normally the villein tenant, not the individual freeman, and the preponderance of holdings of half a virgate or less suggests that they combined arable farming with other (usually unrecorded) crafts or trades. By the mid 14th century, when assarting ceased, the woodland had been broken up into three separate blocks; but outside the limited areas affected by assarting, the overriding impression of Wychwood in the Middle Ages is of remarkable stability, and in some parts of the forest there was hardly any significant alteration to the extent of the

woodland between the Norman Conquest and the 18th century.

If one was looking for points at which to make adverse criticisms, there are somewhat deterministic undertones to the introductory discussion of settlement and land use in the first chapter; the discussion of the vexed question of Wychwood's origins, to which the author returns in her final chapter, is a little inconclusive and perhaps fails to probe all the possibilities; and one or two misprints have escaped the notice of the proof-reader, e.g. 'afer' for 'after' (p. 7) and 'Stanlake' for 'Standlake' (p. 52). It would be grossly unfair, however, to end on a carping note. Taken as a whole, Beryl Schumer's paper contains much of great value and interest. It is a tribute to her abilities and powers of perseverance that, without the advantages of ample free time and long-term local residence, she has nonetheless been able to produce a study of such high quality which makes a real contribution to our understanding of the medieval forest landscape.

C.J. BOND

M.L. Clarke, *A History of Cholsey Church*. Cholsey, the Friends of Cholsey Parish Church, 1982. Pp. 32. Price 90p.

Cholsey parish church is probably the successor of a small monastery founded by Æthelred II in the early 990s. There are references to a community under an abbot during the first two decades of the 11th century, but by the time of Domesday Book the house had lapsed into a non-regular state. Granted to Reading Abbey in the 1120s, it soon settled into the ranks of larger parish churches. Cholsey thus typifies what seems to have been the fate of very many small monasteries and clerical ministers: the community faded away, but the church remained grander and more valuable, and commanded a bigger parish, than its neighbours of humbler origin.

The need for a high-quality short history and guide is almost, if not wholly, answered by the present work. After a brief introduction on the early monastery, the central chapters describe the fabric and fittings. Architecturally the most impressive phase is of the mid 12th century: a sumptuous remodelling as a cruciform church, almost certainly by Reading Abbey masons. The block-plan is better than nothing, though a properly phased plan would have been much more useful. A valuable section, illustrated by watercolours and old photographs, describes 18th- and 19th-century changes, providing information of a kind often hard to obtain. Later chapters discuss the advowson and incumbents and Cholsey's link with Reading Abbey; the famous rectorial barn, 303 feet long, is illustrated from an engraving of 1816.

The account of Cholsey's most important period, the late 10th and 11th centuries, could be better. It is very unfortunate that the author does not refer to Richard Gem's paper in D. Hill (ed.), *Æthelred the Unready* (British Archaeological Reports lix), 105-9. This makes a good case for thinking that the outer shell of the tower, with its long-and-short quoins, is pre-Conquest and very likely part of Æthelred's church; if so, 'it would make Cholsey of some importance as the only monastic church of new foundation associated with the 10th-century reform of which any considerable portion is recognised as surviving standing'. More could also be drawn from the Domesday entry, where the church with its hide of land is listed separately in the hands of a Norman monastery. This is a strong hint of residual minster status, as is the reference to two priests with an interest in the church and tithe. It is more likely that these were survivors from a community than that (as suggested here, p. 20) they served separate churches at Cholsey and Moulsoford.

A History of Cholsey Church is well written and produced, and compares very favourably

with most church guides. Doubtless it will see further editions in which minor improvements can be made.

JOHN BLAIR

Mordechai Feingold, *The Mathematicians' Apprenticeship. Science, Universities and Society in England, 1560-1640*. Cambridge University Press, 1984. Pp. viii, 240. Price £22.50.

Historians concerned with the history of early modern scientific thought in England, whether they be 'internists', advocates of the esoteric or of the close links between Puritanism and science, agree about at least one thing, the failure of Oxford and Cambridge to have made any significant contribution to the genesis of modern science. As Dr. Feingold notices in his introductory review of the subject, Mark Curtis's challenge to this conviction has been generally displaced by the rejoinders of Christopher Hill and Charles Webster, Nicholas Tyacke alone having adhered to a re-evaluation of university science along the lines indicated by Curtis. The starting point of his own investigation, originally an Oxford D.Phil. thesis now revised as a book, was Feingold's dissatisfaction with historiography designed to build bridges between 'the milestones in progressive science' and a corresponding resolve to adopt a less anachronistic approach, examining the 'unenlightened' science in the period before 1640 on its own terms. In such a perspective the scientific enterprise in the universities is more imposing and may be seen, in the author's opinion, as the native environment even of the achievements of the more famous figures. His book has the added merit of attempting to appreciate an intellectual culture for what it meant to contemporaries, even if it does not come to grips with the problem of the exceptional.

This is the first comprehensive study of the scientific culture of the Tudor and early Stuart universities, inevitably and openly indebted to the work against which it reacts, but more consistently focussed on the archival evidence than anything that preceded it. Feingold begins once again with the statutes, claiming that the M.A. curriculum has been neglected and its significance misunderstood. He holds that the well-known omission of mathematics from the Cambridge Statutes of 1558 and 1570, and the abridgement of the same provision in the Elizabethan *Nova statuta* at Oxford, was a tactical move designed to meet the preferences of the gentry. He argues convincingly that despite these reticences, the teaching of mathematics to undergraduates went on, a view that is strongly supported by the evidence of surviving notebooks. Feingold also perceives correctly that college statutes are no more decisive in their description of teaching than are those of the university, and has looked into college accounts, as well as notebooks, to find a more reliable guide to what was actually presented. The conclusion drawn from evidence assembled here, in my opinion quite correctly, is that in both universities undergraduates were normally expected to be acquainted with both arithmetic and geometry before they went on to natural philosophy and astronomy, a pedagogical approach that explains the failure of the universities 'to introduce every freshman to Copernicus or Galileo'.

Feingold then proceeds to examine systematically 'the teaching community', 'the student community', the scientific community outside the universities and its connections with Oxford and Cambridge, Gresham College and its part in the genesis of 'London' science, and finally the influence of patronage. He sees in the eclectic Aristotelianism of the later Tudor period a fertile seedbed of scientific enterprise, judging that it was 'only as a result of the continuous exchange of world views - both old and new - during the period 1560-1640' that the later scientific ferment of the mid 17th-century was made possible. He

is successful in showing that, even if science was not a high priority of the standard curriculum (why should it have been?), there were individuals at work in both universities throughout the century who could supply such teaching on demand, and who were often prominent in the affairs of the university as heads of colleges or professors. They were not necessarily hostile toward the new scientific texts, although some of them were so, and the best among them were in close communication with the scientific community outside the universities themselves. The account here of such as Camden, Savile, Harriot, Henry Briggs, John Bainbridge, Thomas Lydiat, Selden and Thomas Allen shows the solidity of this community and corrects the opinion that, despite the prominence of a few isolated individuals, the scientific advocates in the Elizabethan universities were scattered and eccentric. This is an important study, valuable not only for its contribution to one of the prominent historical debates of the day, but also for its sensitivity to the intellectual perceptions of men obscured by cruder methodologies, but who were as much a part of the common enterprise as were the more luminous figures who have tended to absorb entirely the interest of historians.

JAMES McCONICA

Malcolm Rogers, *William Dobson 1611-46*, London, National Portrait Gallery, 1983. Pp. 92; 71 plates. No price.

William Dobson, described by John Aubrey as 'the most excellent painter that England hath yet bred', produced most of his surviving works in Oxford during the Civil War. Van Dyck had died a year before the Civil War broke out and by 1643 Dobson, following the court to Oxford, began to fill the gap left by Van Dyck, as the portrait painter patronised by King, courtiers and Royalist soldiers. He died, back in London, only months after the surrender of Oxford in 1646. Most of his surviving portraits date from these years and constitute a gallery of the major figures surrounding the King. Only one portrait of Charles himself still exists, though others are recorded, and he probably commissioned the portraits of his sons, the Prince of Wales and the Duke of York, the former perhaps to celebrate the Prince's participation in the battle of Edgehill. He is depicted as a twelve-year-old military leader, a child-adult, in one hand the baton of authority and the other hand resting on his helmet which is carried by a page. To one side a Medusa head stares from beneath a pile of colours and weapons while in the distance a cavalry skirmish takes place beneath a stormy sky. Such symbols and allusions are recurring features of the portraits and reflect the taste of the Caroline court, and traditions of court portraiture established by Van Dyck. But Dobson was not merely 'the happy Imitator', nor did he possess those skills which enabled Van Dyck to invest his sitters with a refinement they may not always have possessed. His heads are strongly characterised. Compositions and poses are vigorous, as is the paintwork – perhaps, as Malcolm Rogers suggests, Dobson's way of coping with the limited time his sitters had to spare between campaigns to visit his studio in the High. Be that as it may, the portraits do suggest much of urgency and drama, and constitute a vivid record of that short period in Oxford's history.

The catalogue of the Exhibition includes reproductions of all 46 paintings exhibited, some in colour, and there is much illustration of comparative and associated material. There are full and informative entries for each item and an Introduction which includes the most recent research on the life and career of this undeservedly ignored painter. He is of considerable importance both for the quality of his work and for the historical importance of his sitters.

CLARE TILBURY

Barrie Trinder, *Victorian Banbury*, Banbury Historical Society, Vol. xix, 1982. Pp. 235, 33 plates, 19 maps and textual figs. Price £11.95.

This study of Banbury in the half-century following 1830 is notable for the depth and range of its scholarship. The author has brooded over his theme for some twenty years, remorselessly building the minutiae of prolonged research into a composite picture whose balance and integrity is in marked contrast to the hasty summaries which so often litter the local historical field. When Trinder began his work on the Victorian town the theme, and particularly the manner of its treatment, were unusual if not unique. Urban studies have progressed greatly since then, but in basing his investigation of a complex society on such foundations as the minute biographical details of its principal members the author was something of a pioneer. Over the years his biographical cards must have become unwieldy, as his range extended from central sources such as council records, directories, censuses, and poll books, to the records of chapels, voluntary societies, and banks. However slow and painful that process, it has given the author an impressive sureness of foot through the difficult terrain of Banbury's social, economic, political, and religious life.

The subject is an important one, for Banbury was no ordinary small town but one of the largest market centres in the Midlands. As Trinder argues, it was both 'typical and exceptional', exemplifying in most ways the familiar Victorian market town of literature, the Casterbridge or the Middlemarch, but exceptional perhaps in its vigour, inventiveness, and independence of outside influence or control. The author shows how such qualities emerged at the time of Reform and faded in the 1870s, though perhaps in that respect Banbury was more typical than is argued in this book.

The anatomy and physiology of a peculiarly well-documented town are examined in massive detail, ranging from the central issues (where the author's analysis of Banbury's complex religious structure is specially praiseworthy) to lesser, but interesting, topics such as Samuelson's paternalistic factory, the Freehold Land Society, or the financing and architecture of working-class housing. The major and minor themes are brought together in a well-argued synthesis that does not neglect the unifying influences among all the disruptive forces that made Victorian Banbury a lively and controversial place. At times, perhaps, the detail becomes a little dense, the quotations wordy, but rarely does the author lose his way, and his judgements show the perception derived from long years of thought.

The book is well printed, footnoted, and indexed, and superbly illustrated with photographs, maps, figures, and tables. It is also well written, though I disliked the repeated use of 'all of' where 'all' would suffice. In sum, the book is a brilliant all-round achievement – not merely a work of intense local historical interest but a solid contribution to the study of Victorian England.

ALAN CROSSLEY

R.T. Rivington, *Punting: Its History and Techniques*. Oxford, R.T. Rivington, 36 Park End Street, 1983. Pp. 233; 64 plates, 4 maps, 6 drawings. Price £10.95.

This is the first major work on punting for over fifty years and makes stimulating reading for the enthusiast and interested layman alike. Rivington provides excellent advice for the beginner: 'avoid swollen streams, swim to the boat not the bank should you fall in, and don't drink too much'; whilst quoting earlier opinions like that of Winstanley (1922): 'learn swimming before punting', and the inevitable 'if it sticks in the mud, let go!'. Indeed, Rivington's references to past works, like Barbara Burke's view of punting for ladies in the

Oxford of 1907, are perhaps the most fascinating aspect of the book.

The geography of punting is fascinating too. Who would have guessed that these flat-bottomed, square-ended crafts so characteristic of the Thames not only have relations on the Norfolk Broads but also in Tübingen in Germany, and Overijssel in Holland, as well as in Canada, America, Mexico, Africa, India and even Japan? Even 'Dongola' racing, that recently revived sport for six (four men and two women paddling Canadian-style), had its origins in Wolseley's Nile Campaign of 1884.

His chapters on Oxford are particularly interesting and provide a real insight into the historical development of the pastime. One learns why the hirers (quite a few characters here) don't rent boats for May morning or for racing, and one gets an insight into strange University traditions. Perhaps this is Rivington at his best as he describes the University's Charon Club (whose motto was *Ecce excidit puppi in undas* (*Aeneid* VI) 'Look he has fallen off the stern into the waves') seeking to dispel transistor radios and undesirable characters from the Cherwell whilst using women as 'batons' in the traditional challenges against Cambridge. That place, incidentally, that not only punts bow first but also failed to get its first pleasure punts until the 20th century, still gets a short but appreciative chapter from this Oxford author.

Rivington provides a new insight into the local history of the lower Thames, that great leisure centre for Londoners particularly as a result of railway developments in the late 19th century. The area around Maidenhead and Staines remained particularly significant for punting, despite unfortunate dredging errors which destroyed the river bed, and key decisions like those of the Head of Eton, who banned the sport not for the occasional mishap but 'because of the facilities it afforded for smoking and drinking in the Thames backwaters'.

It was in this area too that the annual punting competitions were held. Lord Desborough (formerly W.H. Grenfell) was amateur champion between 1888 and 1890, and along with other City stockbrokers was a mainstay of the Thames Punting Club, whilst the professional watermen who trained the amateurs came from just a handful of traditional riverside families.

The decline of punting really came in the 1960s, thanks to the ubiquitous nature of the speedy motor car, yet the pace and the peace provided by punting is today seeing its return to favour. Rivington pins his faith on canals in the future (due to pressure from motor vessels on the mainstream) but surely other Thames tributaries could operate as effectively as the Cherwell with a little encouragement.

The author's over-enthusiastic style, which can be repetitious, detracts from a scholarly study which certainly provides a contemporary view for those interested in this time-honoured tradition. In places Rivington's chapter contents are badly organised and could at least do with concluding paragraphs. A glossary of terms for those unfamiliar with the watermen's language (best and best punts, ryepecks, etc.) would have been useful, whilst the comprehensive chapter on techniques, which contains some interesting advice, provides somewhat dull reading for those practitioners desperate to experience the Cherwell or the Isis once summer has arrived.

MIKE BREAKELL