

Reviews

It must be understood that all statements and opinions in reviews are those of the respective authors, not of the Society or of the Editor.

C.F.C. Beeson, *Clockmaking in Oxfordshire 1400-1850*, with a new introduction and index by A.V. Simcock. Museum of the History of Science, Oxford, 1989.
Pp. viii, 212; map, plates. Price £20.

From Tony Simcock's introduction we learn that 'Scroggs' Beeson was a friend of T.E. Lawrence at the City of Oxford High School for Boys and that they avidly explored the history and archaeology of the Oxford area in their teens. These local antiquarian interests had to remain dormant during Beeson's distinguished scientific career as a forest entomologist in India but they found a satisfying outlet in horology during what must have been a very active retirement.

Beeson's interest in clocks seems to have arisen accidentally when his first antique clock proved too noisy and the purchase of a quieter one led on to further acquisitions, including a 1735 turret clock by Edward Hemins which he rescued from a scrap metal dealer's yard in Bicester. In 1966 he generously donated his collection of Oxfordshire clocks to the Museum of the History of Science. Not satisfied with collecting alone, he also embarked upon a serious study of Oxfordshire clocks and clockmakers, examining clocks in churches, museums and private houses and seeking to classify them according to their stylistic features. To this scientific approach he added detailed research into such sources as churchwarden's accounts, apprenticeship registers, College and University archives and local directories. Beeson's pioneering work on English provincial clockmaking was published as *Clockmaking in Oxfordshire 1400-1850* in 1962 and was reprinted with a supplement in 1967. This latest edition was published by the Museum of the History of Science to mark the centenary of his birth in 1889 and is primarily a reprint of the 1967 edition with the addition of an index and an introduction about the author, the value of his work and his collection of clocks. The absence of an index probably seemed unimportant to users of the earlier editions because the material was arranged by place-name and surname. It was, however, easy to miss additions and corrections in the 1967 supplement and Tony Simcock's index also brings together other scattered references like the two entries for Thomas William Field of Bicester, one of which appears under his name and the other under John Stone of Aylesbury. The editor has also used the index to clarify, correct and update information especially about the identities of clockmakers and related craftsmen. Beeson, for instance, recorded John Prujean of Oxford as flourishing from 1676 to 1689; the index shows that he is now known to have been apprenticed in 1646 and to have died in 1706. Where such discrepancies between Beeson's reprinted text and the index occur it would perhaps have been helpful if the original entry had been flagged to draw the reader's attention to the index which now forms the essential approach to the volume. The editor boldly asserts that any discrepancies between the index and the text are deliberate corrections or clarifications but dating may still be inconclusive; in the case of John Kalabergo, the Banbury clockmaker who was murdered in 1852, Beeson suggests the dates 1812-1852 and Simcock gives 1832-1852. Pigot's Directory indicates that he was in business, described as a jeweller, by 1823/4.

Simcock's introduction is brief and to the point, helpfully listing the Beeson and other Oxfordshire clocks in the Museum of the History of Science and combining praise for Beeson's scholarship with warnings that, in some respects, the book is no longer the final word. He mentions, for example, the discovery of other Oxfordshire clocks, Beeson's conflation of namesakes and the pitfalls of terminology. More local clockmakers are now easily identified in Eileen Davies' *Synopsis and Index to Jackson's Oxford Journal, 1753-1790*, and others appear in the *Calendar of Oxford*

City Apprentices, 1697–1800. It is also worth pointing out, perhaps, that the book covers pre-1974 Oxfordshire and therefore omits most North Berkshire clockmakers. These caveats in no way detract from the continuing validity of Beeson's work and it is very appropriate that Simcock has included the biographical note which has already been quoted. In India, he is apparently commemorated as a forest entomologist by a street named Beeson Road near his former home; in England, and especially in Oxfordshire, this book will form a lasting memorial.

MALCOLM GRAHAM

Anne Collingham and Hilary Fisher, *Henley on Thames, A Pictorial History*. Phillimore, 1990. Pp. x, 176 plates. Price £9.95

As the title suggests this book is simply a pictorial record of Henley based upon early photographs and a few additional illustrations. There is a four page introduction and 176 illustrations drawn mainly from the late Victorian period until the end of the First World War. The pictures depict various aspects of Henley life during this Indian Summer of the British Empire. The main focus is on townscapes, shops, inns, crafts, trades, and special events such as floods, troops passing through the town, the celebration of the coronation in 1911, and the end of the war in 1919. In addition there is a section concentrating upon the royal regatta. All the illustrations are informatively captioned, and, in addition, some have anecdotal accounts associated with the subject being depicted. The book is well produced and presented, and pleasantly written. It would have been helpful if the introduction had been longer and focused on the period covered by the illustrations. Another cause of irritation is the arrangement of the illustrations. Apart from those concerned with the regatta they do not appear to be arranged in any particular order. A more thematic grouping with greater attention to chronology would have given the collection a stronger impact. However, the authors are to be congratulated on creating an evocative glimpse of Henley at the end of an era, which will give pleasure to the town's residents and visitors alike.

NIGEL HEARD

W.J.H. and M.J.H. Liversidge, *Abingdon Essays: Studies in Local History*. Privately published, 1989. Pp. 137, illustrations. £6 plus p + p from W. Liversidge, 5 Wharf Close, Abingdon OX14 5HJ.

Abingdon's good fortune in being home to local historians of ability is continuing, to judge by the quality of the essays in this latest addition to the town's historiography. Moreover the reader gets two for the price of one; William (Bill) Liversidge, a graduate historian, is joined by his son, Michael, who chose to specialise, and now lectures in, art history. Together they make a formidable team whose researches range from the middle ages almost to the present day.

Michael's contributions are two essays, the first on Alexander of Abingdon, 'le Ymagor' or sculptor, being the one with the most tenuous claims to being local history. Alexander is known as 'of Abingdon' in a single reference. His major importance was national, as an artist of the Westminster School whose work on the Eleanor Crosses and other monuments in the late 13th and early 14th centuries had a major influence on the development of English sculpture. By contrast the second is the result of skilful piecing together of information from many sources to reconstruct much of the history of one of the glories of Abingdon's medieval architecture, its 'right goodly crosse of stone'. Despite its destruction by Parliamentary troops in 1644, enough documentary evidence has survived to allow its overall shape and many of its details to be verbally recreated here.

The major part of the book is the work of the elder Mr Liversidge. Two of his six essays concern buildings, once important but now disappeared. The early medieval chapel complex dedicated to Abingdon's only saint by his namesake, Edmund, Earl of Cornwall is, *inter alia*, interesting for its 15th-century accounts indicating that it was roofed with tiles from Nettlebed, and for its fair which lasted till 1975, though the chapel had gone before 1554. The records of the White Hart Inn begin in that year. Intimate knowledge of the borough leases and a detailed acquaintance with the local topography have enabled the author to compile a history of the building, its lessees and occupants

over three centuries, until its destruction in 1805 to make way for 'this bastille of Berkshire' which was the Gaol.

A second pair of essays portrays the town at two specific periods. One uses a single documentary source, the Chamberlains' (financial) Accounts of the borough to illustrate some of the features of Elizabethan Abingdon. Most of these mirror the experience of other early modern country towns – the visits of travelling players and Assize Judges, the unwelcome visitations of plague, the upkeep of town property. The student of building methods and materials will find the minute detail of repairs to public and private buildings of more than usual interest, while anyone interested in urban government will find valuable material in this and its fellow essay which deals with Abingdon during the half century centred on the reign of Queen Anne. Here a range of borough and parish records is used to describe aspects of life in the town. Many of the buildings which give Abingdon its elegance date from this period, when thatch finally gave way to tile and slate and firefighting was a major preoccupation. Sudden disasters such as the storm of 1703 were of less significance to most people, one imagines, than the general recurring danger of smallpox and the permanent pockets of poverty which the borough's great charities, impressive almshouses and substantial poor rate could relieve but not eliminate.

This focus on a single subject or period has produced a series of interesting studies which might have been given more point by being arranged chronologically, or in groups. It was difficult to account for a choice of sequence which took the reader across several centuries and back more than once, and from studies of single buildings to those of whole communities. Inevitably in such a series there is an absence of discussion of continuity and change. Had the wages of craftsmen increased sufficiently to take account of inflation between the repairs to St. Edmund's Chapel in 1422 and those to the town's market hall in the 1560s? Were the same trades dominant in the urban hierarchy in 1700 as in Elizabeth's reign? Did Abingdon's economic base change to enable it to be called 'the Chiefe Towne of our County of Berks' in 1686 when it was so obviously less wealthy and populous than other urban communities in the county a century before? Such questions are frequently raised by this book.

That they are not always answered does not detract from the value and intrinsic interest of the essays. The chief author's aim is 'to fill some of the small gaps in Abingdon's history'. He and his son have done much more than that. His modest claim for the borough's records that they 'rarely . . . refer to matters of other than local interest' is in danger of underestimating their value. It is precisely these local concerns, which he has so elegantly and meticulously described from an impressive knowledge of the sources, that are of immense importance to urban historians who will be eager to quarry his findings.

The last essay in the collection is primarily a tribute to Mr Arthur Preston (1852–1942), alderman, Mayor, and accomplished historian of his native town. As a later Mayor, and Master of Christ's Hospital, Mr William Liversidge is his worthy successor, not least in his contribution to the historiography of Abingdon.

JOAN A. DILS