

Reviews

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

Catherine Murray, *Exploring England's Heritage: Oxfordshire to Buckinghamshire*, HMSO in association with English Heritage, 1994. Pp. x, 126, numerous illustrations. Price £10.95

Exploring England's Heritage is a series in eleven volumes, of which this is the fifth published. The publishers describe them as gazetteer guides to the best architectural and archaeological sites in the country, and present them as 'a perfect holiday planner, historical reference book or day-trip companion.'

In the forward to this volume Barry Cunliffe paints the familiar picture of Oxford in summer, packed with tourists, often sampling England's heritage via the London-Oxford-Stratford triangle. In contrast to the superficial experience this guide is presented as what 'the discerning traveller' needs. Few overseas tourists seem likely to abandon their open-topped buses in favour of the insights offered by this book, but historically-minded residents of the area and holiday-makers with a week or two to explore it will find it very valuable.

What is the area? Covering England in eleven volumes inevitably means grouping counties, which may cause problems with titles. This volume seems a case in point. *Oxfordshire to Buckinghamshire* does not seem the clearest way of identifying a work which also covers Berkshire and Northamptonshire. Berkshire to Northamptonshire would at least have more linear logic, if all four counties could not be named.

A short Introduction deals with landscape types, building materials and (very briefly) the region's socio-economic development. It is followed by an initial chronologically-based chapter on Prehistoric and Roman Sites, and then eight further chapters devoted to different themes—Towns and Villages, Small Houses, Country Houses and Castles, Churches and Chapels, Educational and Charitable Institutions, Living off the Land, Travel and Transport, and Monuments. It concludes with a short bibliography, an index and a map showing the location of all 97 sites discussed in the text (where grid references and basic road directions are also included).

The standard for the whole book is well set in the first chapter. The reader is usefully warned that the focus on visible evidence will give a rather distorted picture as types of historical evidence and sites have survived unevenly. A brief general discussion refers to other regional examples. Six sites, in this chapter all well-known ones such as the Rollright Stones and Uffington Castle, are then discussed in turn. The text offers a useful description of the main features, accompanied by clear photographs or plans. Despite the inevitable brevity, space is found to indicate the uncertainties of interpretation and the impact of ongoing research, for example at the White Horse.

This general pattern, and consistent clarity of exposition and illustration, is continued through the thematic chapters. For example in Towns and Villages the reader is offered the functional hierarchy of major administrative centres, market towns and agricultural villages as a structure. The case studies are well varied: villages discussed include Great Tew ('charmingly pretty'), Marsh Gibbon ('modest') and Blisworth ('not . . . pretty'). Variety also includes places outside the basic hierarchy such as the estate cottages (1900) at Medmenham and the railway workers' houses (1850s) at New Bradwell, Bucks.

This volume is to be welcomed. It is written with clarity and on the basis of obvious expertise (especially on architectural matters). It is, as claimed, very well illustrated and it is sensibly priced. It will serve 'the discerning traveller' very well.

JOHN BROOKS

Oxfordshire and North Berkshire Protestation Returns and Tax Assessments 1641-2, ed. Jeremy Gibson. Oxfordshire Record Society, vol. 59, and Banbury Historical Society, vol. 24, 1994. Pp. xxiv + 296. Price £15 to non-members, plus p. & p.

Students of Oxfordshire demography, recusancy, or genealogy will be familiar with the original edition of the *Oxfordshire Protestation Returns*, produced for the Oxfordshire Record Society by Christopher Dobson in 1955, but regrettably long out of print. For this reissue the opportunity has been taken of producing an entirely new and expanded version, meticulously edited by Jeremy Gibson, and incorporating contemporary (and complementary) tax assessments for 1642. The original edition, for financial reasons, lacked an index, and the new edition includes a greatly expanded version of the index to the Protestation returns published by the Family History Society in 1993.

As Mr Gibson explains in his useful introduction, the Protestation had its origins in the unrest engendered in Parliament during the passage of the bill for Strafford's attainder. In May 1641 the obligation of signing a Protestation 'to defend . . . the Reformed Protestant Religion . . . His Majesty's Royal Person . . . [and] the lawful Rights and Liberties of the subjects' was imposed on all Englishmen, and the following January the Protestation was sent to sheriffs with instructions to convene all householders over the age of eighteen, and to record the names of those taking or refusing the oath. The resulting lists were sent to Westminster in March. Though returns survive for only seven out of the fourteen Oxfordshire hundreds (and returns for some parishes in those hundreds are missing), nevertheless they provide incomparable lists of resident male adults (and sometimes of women also), of parish officers and ministers, and of recusants, conveniently arranged by hundred and parish. No returns survive for Oxford city, but returns for the University name over 2,000 members and some college servants, many of them otherwise unrecorded. (Over a quarter were marked 'ill' or 'absent', suggesting, as the editor drily remarks, that 'not everyone in the University was completely in favour of the Protestation'.) In deference to post-1974 boundaries the new edition includes surviving returns for three hundreds in the Vale of White Horse, as well as those for the parish of Caversfield (formerly Bucks.), and lost returns for Caversham parish (in Binfield hundred) have been reconstructed from a copy in the parish register. All readings have been checked against the manuscripts, and several problematic entries have been newly identified or corrected.

The taxation assessment of 1642 was prompted by the need to finance the king's disastrous Scottish Wars. Its advantage, as an historical source, is that although exemption limits were set the net was cast far more widely than in earlier subsidies (which sometimes list only half a dozen taxpayers for an average parish), and far more names were thus recorded. Again, returns survive for only four Oxfordshire hundreds and for one north Berkshire hundred, but as the editor points out they often complement the Protestation evidence by confirming dubious readings, and on occasion they replace it, as in the case of Banbury where the Protestation return has been lost. Taken together, they provide a means (albeit a problematic one) of comparing the assessed wealth both of individuals and of communities. Often they contain useful additional information: it is interesting, for instance, in the entries for Bampton parish to find Henry Medhopp (of Aston) paying 2s. for sheep pastured on Lew heath, while Sir Edward Yate of Buckland was, as a recusant, required to pay 'surplusage' for his lands in Lower Haddon.

The new edition is on the whole commendably clear, despite an insistence on retaining the minutest vagaries of 17th-century spelling even in the standard preambles to parish entries. That there are so few remaining blanks or queries in the taxation assessments is itself a tribute to the editor's skill and tenacity, as those who have spent long hours pouring over damp-stained, dog-eared, and near-illegible documents will know all too well. I have only two minor quibbles. The topographical illustrations scattered liberally throughout the book are of greatly varying quality and relevance, and if they had to be included it might have been helpful to identify them on the page instead of in an obscure appendix at the back. More seriously, the index, though apparently full and accurate, is clumsily arranged and frustrating to use, since it leads not to a page number but to a list of abbreviated place names – though in fairness, the editor explains that the format was imposed by the necessity of adapting the Family History Society's index rather than working *ab initio*. Neither quibble detracts from the usefulness of this fine new edition, which is to be warmly welcomed.

SIMON TOWNLEY

D.G.T. Eddershaw with E. Roberts, *The Civil War in Oxfordshire*. Alan Sutton Publishing, 1995. Price £12.99.

David Eddershaw, for many years on the staff of the Oxfordshire County Museum at Woodstock, has written a fine piece of narrative history of great interest to local historians. His easy and at times languid style belies his mastery of the sources of this troubled episode in Oxfordshire's history. The book starts with a survey of society in the early 17th-century county. After a chapter analyzing the local issues which led to war he pursues the events of 1642-6 with great understanding. Eleanor Roberts has contributed an outstandingly detailed and perceptive analysis of the divided city of Oxford. Eddershaw's lifetime of reading accounts for the admirably clear exposition of complex issues; he is never simplistic, however.

The less than satisfactory aspects of the book are the captions to the photographs, the lack of maps, and the inadequate referencing. The captions give no clue as to the source of the photographs; nor are the photographs tied in with the text. It is as if illustrations have been sought separately and as a duty. Again, it is impossible to tell the detailed sources used in the text. Some brief notes are left to the end of the volume. In general, the book has the marks of being written in the library rather than in the field. Although the archaeology of the civil war is elusive it is increasingly coming to light: Tim Allen's recovery of a civil war cemetery at Abingdon, Julian Munby's find of a pass issued by Fairfax allowing safe conduct through the lines. Finally, the title of the book is a misnomer; it covers only the period of the first civil war and stops abruptly in 1646.

JOHN STEANE

Publication received:

Nan Clifton, *Shenington: A Pictorial Record*. Privately published, 1995. Pp. 45, principally photographs. Price £2.50 + 50p. p. & p.