

## Reviews

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

*Early Settlement in Berkshire: Mesolithic-Roman Occupation in the Thames and Kennet Valleys*, by I. Barnes, W.A. Boismier, R.M.J. Cleal, A.P. Fitzpatrick and M.R. Roberts (Wessex Archaeology Monograph No. 6; ISBN 1-874350-12-4). Paperback.

This Wessex Archaeology monograph is somewhat unusual in two major respects. Firstly, it takes the earlier archaeology of the (modern) county of Berkshire as its theme by describing the results of four distinct projects (at Weir Bank Farm, Bray; Maidenhead Thicket; Dunston Park, Thatcham; and Park Farm, Binfield) rather than reporting on a single major project. This is normally the role of county archaeological journals, although the *East Anglian Archaeology* series publishes multi-project volumes on a fairly regular basis to provide a precedent for this volume. Secondly, it represents a substantial publishing collaboration between two of the biggest competitors in today's world of contract archaeology. This in itself must be significant, in that it demonstrates the common interest that all professional archaeologists should share: the rapid dissemination of the results of our work into the public arena.

The structure of the monograph is fairly standard, in that the sites are ranked in order of date starting with the (mainly) Bronze Age site at Bray and culminating in the (mainly) late Iron Age-Roman site at Binfield. There is a substantial anomaly here, however, in that Binfield also has a major Mesolithic component recovered mostly from fieldwalking, but this is treated as an appendix to the Iron Age-Roman site report at the very end of the publication. The Mesolithic site is a separate entity in most senses, however, and is treated as such in the text. This element could have been uncoupled and placed at the beginning of the monograph with a minimum of textual duplication; it seems to me that this would have maximised the impact of the periodic structure of the report as a whole.

The four sites are described and discussed in considerable detail. The Maidenhead Thicket site and the Mesolithic component at Binfield were only studied by collection of material from the plough zone (i.e. fieldwalking and manual test-pitting), but the remaining sites represent excavations on a significant scale, in each case following an earlier evaluation by the same organisation. Each report includes a brief summary of the project's history, and especially to the planning background to the work (all the projects were developer-funded). The relationship between the evaluation stage and the full excavation is made clear for Bray, Dunston Park and Binfield. The situation is less clear at Maidenhead Thicket, where the fieldwalking evaluation does not appear to have been followed up by further excavation; at least, there is no mention of excavation in the report, and the site appears to be confined to flintwork within the plough horizon. Each report displays a refreshing degree of honesty over the problems encountered during excavation, including the weather, soil conditions, and the often-critical conjunction between the two.

The descriptive sections are generally clear and coherent. The two Wessex Archaeology excavation reports (Bray and Dunston Park) rely on the finds and ceramic phasing to distinguish divisions between periods of activity on-site. The situation is usually quite clear, in that the periods are reasonably distinct and separated chronologically (e.g. the separation into Mesolithic, earlier Neolithic and Middle Bronze Age at Bray, or the division between discrete early Iron Age features and a medieval ditch system at Dunston Park). This allows for a considerable degree of clarity in the description of these two sites. The Binfield site is more problematic in that the ceramic phases are more closely related (essentially late Iron Age to early-mid Roman) and do not correlate especially well either with such stratigraphic information as there is or with some of the interpretations of buildings. The site description therefore relies on a more geographic and structural approach, and this lacks some clarity compared to the Wessex sites.

This is especially noticeable where there is a clear stratigraphic phased sequence between House 1, ditch 1004, and House 2, but this is not reflected in the structure of the descriptive text.

The discussions are comprehensive, especially in the context of developer-funded work where it can be difficult to raise the client's eyes beyond the strict analysis of the site itself. The discussion of the Bray site within the regional middle Bronze Age is particularly effective, as is the consideration of the early Iron Age roundhouse at Dunston Park. The distribution of finds within and around the latter allows for more substantive and credible discussion of the social aspects of contemporary life than is usually possible. The Maidenhead Thicket report is perhaps the least impressive of the four, largely because of the interpretative limitations of ploughsoil data; even here, however, the author builds an impressive case for the recognition of specific activity types and areas within apparently diverse scatters of flint by using statistical methods of analysis.

All three of the excavation reports provide some cause for concern in the sampling rates adopted during the excavations, especially with respect to linear features such as ditches, and this concern carries through into the reliability of the excavated data for interpretation. Both Wessex and Oxford adopted a relatively low-level approach to the excavation of ditches, reflecting the current fashion among county archaeologists and their equivalents to stipulate excavation sampling-levels of around 10% of ditches etc. This is perhaps clearest in the Binfield plans, where the actual excavated segments of all features are clearly distinguished (the equivalent drawings of the Wessex sites are not so clear in this respect). One is entitled to question some of the interpretative constructs placed upon the data by the authors, when they have to rely on limited samples. This applies to the part of the Bray discussion which attempts to show that a roundhouse and the enclosure it ostensibly sits within are not of the same date/phase. To be fair the limitations of the data are acknowledged in the discussion, and the conclusion may well be correct, but one cannot help but be worried by the sample base.

Despite these concerns, the monograph as a whole is an extremely useful and in many respects important addition to our knowledge of Berkshire's archaeology, and all its authors are to be congratulated for the cogency and clarity of their reports. The very fact of the publication, however, should give local archaeological societies such as our own pause for thought. There is no doubt that all of the reports in this monograph would normally have found their way into the *Berkshire Archaeological Journal*. Unfortunately the appearance of that journal has been somewhat fitful in recent years, yet professional organisations such as Wessex Archaeology and the Oxford Archaeological Unit must publish the results of their work rapidly to maintain academic credibility. Such units now have the means to produce these reports quickly and efficiently. We in Oxfordshire are fortunate in having not only an active and lively society, but also one which is to be commended for the annual regularity and invariably high quality of its journal, *Oxoniensia*. We should consider ourselves most fortunate in having a succession of excellent editors of this journal, including the outgoing editor, Dr. Simon Townley. All readers will, I am sure, wish to thank Dr. Townley for his sterling efforts and offer their best wishes to his successor.

GRAHAM KEEVILL

Christine Peters, *The Lord Lieutenants and High Sheriffs of Oxfordshire*, Oxford, The Perpetua Press, 1995 (ISBN 1-870882-12-1). Pp. viii, 264. Price £25.

The starting point for this useful and timely book was J.M. Davenport's *Lords Lieutenant, High Sheriffs, and Members of Parliament*, published in 1868 and revised by his son Thomas in 1888. Both editions have long been standard reference works for anyone interested in Oxfordshire gentry, government, and politics from the Middle Ages to the 19th century, though over the years the omissions and inaccuracies have become increasingly evident, and both versions have in any case been long unavailable. The present volume, based on the Davenports' work but essentially a new book rather than a new edition, fills the gap, and will no doubt become the standard source for many years to come. That it appeared in 1995, precisely 1,000 years after the charter recording Oxfordshire's first known sheriff, is presumably no coincidence.

The book is prefaced by two lucid and useful essays on the history of the offices: that on Lord Lieutenants by Hugo Brunner, the present office-holder (also responsible for the book's publication), and that

on High Sheriffs by Christine Peters. The meat of the book, however, is in the detailed lists of office-holders and the accompanying biographies. According to the jacket Dr. Peters 'records the lives of well over a hundred Lord Lieutenants and High Sheriffs for the first time', and while I have not actually counted, the volume's bulk bears witness to its greater completeness: the 1888 edition dealt with Lord Lieutenants and High Sheriffs in 104 pages, while the present volume is more than twice that length, a fact not solely attributable to more generous page lay-out. Several names, particularly from the earlier period, were omitted from Davenport altogether, for instance 2 out of the 5 sheriffs now identified for Henry I's reign, and whereas Davenport began in 1066 we now have two probable pre-Conquest sheriffs — one of them Wynsige, the sheriff (if such he was) of 995. Both lists are also brought up to the present day.

Davenport's biographies were sporadic and often sketchy, frequently comprising little more than a monumental inscription. Many of the biographies in the new book are far more detailed, drawing on the work of the *Victoria County History* and of numerous local and family historians. William Blake of Cogges (sheriff 1689–91), a mere name in 1888, now receives 2 pages, while Sir Michael Dormer of Ascot (1609–10) has 2½ pages instead of a brief paragraph, and this is typical. Nor does the information consist solely of dry lineages and potted careers, useful though that is. We learn that Sir Thomas Spencer of Yarnton (1616–17), builder of Yarnton manor house, was a major sheep farmer with a flock of some 1,500 in 1622, while the entry for Thomas Moyle of Caversfield (1611–12) relates the amusing and cautionary tale of his relations with his profligate son John, who 'dealt so lewedly with me . . . [and] also married a wife against my will'. Another sheriff, Richard Baker (1620–1), died destitute in the Fleet prison in 1645. Sir James Dashwood (1738–9), an innovative farmer and a patron of Capability Brown, was allegedly 'tainted with Jacobitism' though he was not 'irreclaimable', and at Kirtlington built himself (in Walpole's words) 'a vast new house situated so high that it seems to stand for the county as well as himself'. Not all the biographies are so full, and it is in the nature of such enterprises that new material will constantly come to light. Two lists of Addenda (11/95 and 3/96), issued with the review copy, add biographies of over 40 office-holders, and it is to be hoped that in due course such additions can be issued in a bound supplement.

The book is clearly arranged reign by reign, the chronological lists of office-holders being followed by fuller biographies where available. The index is excellent, usefully distinguishing between main entries (in bold) and secondary allusions. It seems almost churlish to point out a few minor blemishes; there is, however, an incomplete cross reference on p. 28 (actually to p. 19), and the ISBN has been wrongly printed (but has been corrected). Much more serious is the fact that the biographies are not referenced, making it impossible to trace the source of the information given, whether to check it or to follow it up. Presumably this was a decision dictated by cost and space, the reason also, one assumes, for omitting the undersheriffs included in Davenport.

The book is attractively illustrated with line drawings by Sarah Blair, depicting monuments and buildings associated with particular Sheriffs and Lord Lieutenants.

SIMON TOWNLEY

Nicholas Allen, *Adderbury: A Thousand Years of History*, Phillimore, 1995. ISBN 0 85033 994 4. Pp. xvi, 144, numerous illustrations. Price £17.50.

This is an attractively produced volume, well-printed with many and varied illustrations. The list of over 300 subscribers gives some indication of the character of the present Adderbury community and explains the lavishness of a publication which will be the envy of many less well-funded local historical groups. The author brings together much research and effort by the Adderbury History Association, presenting it thematically in chapters treating schools, village administration, farming, pubs and clubs, and so on; there is a particularly full account of the quite outstanding parish church. Adderbury is a large, well-documented place and had many notable inhabitants whose stories make interesting reading; much, too, has been gained from the memories of more recent residents, and the information from the late 19th century onwards is much the most valuable part of this book. The subscribers and others who know Adderbury well should find much which will relate to surviving people and places.

For the outsider, however, the text exemplifies many of the characteristic failings of this kind of

intensely parochial history. Apparently regarding the past as largely quaint, the author treats everything as equally interesting, setting down a jumble of names and 'facts', often without connection, explanation, or clear chronology, and with no attempt to distinguish the commonplace or trivial from the distinctly unusual. Attempts to provide historical background include such risible statements as 'the thirteenth century, which was perhaps the greatest century of all in medieval history', while the recurrent vagueness, confusion, and misinformation is not restricted to such admittedly tricky subjects as manors, tithes, and field names. It would surely have been wiser for the author to have expanded his areas of strength rather than to fall painfully short of his avowed aim of a 'comprehensive history'. Fortunately the blurb's claim that this is the first history of the parish since that of Henry Gepp (d. 1913) is culpably false: this book incorporates (unacknowledged) large, verbatim chunks of the Adderbury article in the *Victoria History of Oxfordshire*, Vol. IX (1969), which in turn owed much to a notable Oxford thesis on medieval Adderbury by Patricia Hyde. At least the puzzled reader of this book has somewhere to turn for clarification. Meanwhile we who are concerned to encourage local history, including Phillimore, who take pride in their contributions in that field, must surely strive for the highest standards, especially in published work; otherwise we will merit the contempt so memorably expressed as long ago as 1914 by the American scholar Morley Hemmeon (*Burgage Tenure*), dismissing most local histories as 'so much dead weight on library shelves; vexatious to the student because of their disorderliness and wordiness; lacking most of what histories should contain; and containing much that histories should omit'.

ALAN CROSSLEY