

REVIEWS

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

Alan Crossley (ed.), *The Victoria History of the Counties of England. Oxfordshire, Volume 13, Bampton Hundred (Part One), including the town of Bampton*. Oxford University Press for the University of London Institute of Historical Research, 1996. Pp. xxiv + 234, 20 pages of plates, 23 text illustrations. £70.00.

This book, the latest in the familiar majestic series of red volumes with gold lettering, covers ten townships in Bampton hundred and prompts a reflection on the nature of history. This has been characterised as "one damned thing after another", "nothing but biography for that is life without theory". Henry Ford allegedly summed it up in one word, "Bunk"; others "that great dust-heap, history". To Croce is attributed the dictum "Every generation must rewrite its own history". Volume xiii of the VCH is all these. As the series slowly wends its way across the remoter areas of the upper Thames valley its learned compilers give the impression of writing more and more about less and less.

It is certainly an inexhaustible quarry for future researchers of accurately ascertained facts which are arranged along the familiar themes of topography, manorial descent, economic history, church and non-conformity, education and charity. Whether these are the themes which will interest readers in the 21st century is more debatable. An admirable attempt, however, is made throughout the volume to integrate the latest findings of archaeology. In this area the large scale excavations of the Oxford Archaeological Unit in the gravel pits have revolutionised our understanding of the Bronze, Pre-Roman and Roman Iron Ages. The book yet still reeks of the library. Documents dominate. Field observation is minimal. Take mills and weirs, a vital issue in the Thames and Windrush valleys. Little attempt by studying air photographs before walking the ground is made to locate, let alone make sense of the considerable earthworks and leats of this important element of the medieval and early modern landscape (e.g. Chimney, p. 85). Again, whereas the main historic houses, particularly those with medieval fabric, have been visited (e.g. Standlake Rectory, Yelford Manor) and occasionally planned, in general the considerable stock of vernacular housing, and particularly farm buildings, is given short shrift. Again, the treatment of churches smacks of the 19th rather than the late 20th century. Warwick Rodwell's seminal work at Rivenhall, Hadstock and Barton-on-Humber in which, using archaeological and topographical methods, he sees the church as an integral part of the landscape, its location and churchyard shape locking into the road and field pattern, is ignored. The churches are viewed here as an ecclesiastical entity, not as a vital element in the evolving landscape. Even the plans (of Bampton and Standlake churches) confine themselves to the standing structures; they do not include the locations of proved masonry from destroyed features. Hence they portray truncated remnants rather than the total plans of all phases. In general then the landscape, that primary source of visual evidence opened up to us by William Hoskins, is hardly tapped.

So what significant findings emerge from the welter of facts? One is obviously the supreme importance of boundaries to peoples in the past. Crossley in a marvellously intricate and masterly study disentangles the complexities of the parish and estate bounds of Ducklington (pp. 111-13). Assarting by freemen was rampant in the late 13th century at

Standlake. Breach place names indicate incursions being made into woodland and waste at this time (p. 187). The Black Death is not seen as catastrophic in this part of Oxfordshire; although farming communities were in difficulties in the early part of the 14th century, they had recovered before 1349 (p. 188). Drainage of the upper Thames region was a continuing problem never really solved even in the 20th century but, in general, rich pastures on the flood plain and profitable arable on the gravel terraces ensured above average taxable communities. I do not accept that moated sites were motivated by hopes of drainage (pp. 206, 211). Unless there is a substantial upcast within a moated area and a facility for drawing water away, other reasons must be sought; prestige, fishing, security all suggest themselves.

Turning from the landscape in general to the influence of the church in particular. All through the volume it is apparent that the *parochia* of Bampton was dominant from the 10th century onwards; who controlled Bampton exercised a mighty power over the lives of the townspeople and villages of the region through advowsons, tithes, rents, and burials. The profound researches of Dr. Blair above and below ground are amply drawn on by the VCH compilers. The connection of Bampton with the Dean and Chapter of Exeter cathedral is given due emphasis. Is it surprising that families with Devon names are found in Bampton? These litigious academics from the West Country had a reputation for being bad payers (p. 51). Bampton, from being the second richest royal estate in Oxfordshire in the 14th century, declined in the 16th century to being an insignificant market centre in county terms (p. 35). Poor communications were certainly one factor: it was not for nothing that Bampton was referred to as 'in the Bush'. It had astronomically high poor rates in 1803 when 20% of the population – 64 adults and 150 children – were existing on outdoor relief; this problem elsewhere led the vestry to cease supplying beer at paupers' funerals in Standlake, and relief was denied in 1825 to anyone keeping a dog! (p. 197)

It might be considered presumptuous to suggest how the VCH could be improved. I find some of the referencing conventions annoying. Footnotes telling one to look 'above introduction', or 'below church' are vague and obviously need page referencing, probably after the pagination has occurred. It is a formidable read because there is no glossary explaining recondite terms such as pleas of withernam (p. 43), bedrips and hained (p. 70), paedobaptists (p. 77), shovenets (p. 107), saunce (p. 203), ramsons (p. 154), and chaloner (p. 192). Only some of the plates have emerged from a grey fog which obfuscates the rest. Perhaps the most telling comment arises from the remarks made by the Editor in the windy tent at Yelford when the volume was launched. It is my view that the business of the historians employed by the VCH is to write history, not to raise funds: to research rather than to conduct a backs-to-the-wall rearguard defence of the service they so admirably have supplied to the county over the last 75 years. If they were not so encumbered their great task would be more speedily completed.

JOHN STEANE

Ann Natalie Hansen, *Oxford Goldsmiths before 1800*. At the Sign of the Cock, Columbus, Ohio, 1996. Pp. ix + 164. £35.00.

Writing on Oxford silver has been limited to catalogues of select examples from college and corporation collections. Interest in Oxford and Cambridge silver stemmed from a loan exhibition of silver held in Cambridge in 1895, which resulted in an illustrated catalogue compiled by J.E. Foster and T.D. Atkinson. Harold Charles Moffatt's *Old Oxford Plate*, published in 1906, remains the most comprehensive survey of its type. If one takes a look at the silver in these publications, alongside those of E. Alfred Jones in the 1930s and 1940s, one gains the impression that the colleges restricted their patronage to London goldsmiths.

The object evidence in the form of the marks which the silver bears related to a firmly established metropolitan trade.

Ann Hansen has turned her attention to the archival evidence which tells a dramatically different story. Through a tenacious hunting down of apprenticeship registers, parish records, wills and inventories she has discovered a whole network of Oxford based goldsmiths. Like Moffatt before her, Hansen found the most fruitful evidence within the colleges themselves, not in their plate but in their annual accounts which often list, when they survive, every last purchase and repair. Her work thus combines the records of town and gown to reveal a succession of wealthy and influential goldsmiths who operated in Oxford from the Middle Ages to the beginning of the nineteenth century.

Hansen has structured her book around the biographies of these goldsmiths. The layout, although simple, is refreshingly clear. The clarity and depth of her reconstruction belie many years work painstakingly connecting often very small, and sometimes seemingly contradictory, snippets of evidence. It is clear that Hansen's interests and talents lie in genealogy. The result is a walk through time, revealing an ever expanding city, whose social and economic sophistication increased over the centuries. As successive mayors and money lenders, Oxford goldsmithing dynasties, like those of the Porters, Dubbers, Wilkins, Locks and Wrights, were very much at the centre of affairs, linking the world of the University to the dynamics of local business. It is significant that Hansen has found only a few pieces of silver that relate to their local originators. Oxford goldsmiths appear to have done a great deal of altering, repairing and converting plate, but less actual making. They acted more as agents between college authorities and the London trade, providing an important axis point between the two.

Oxford Goldsmiths before 1800 provides a firm foundation for future research, for the local and family historian, for those interested in the economic and cultural development of Oxford, for those studying town and gown relationships, and not least for historians of silver. Hansen has drawn upon rich resources that deserve to be more deeply mined, and more creatively and widely interpreted.

HELEN CLIFFORD

D.M. Barratt, Joan Howard-Drake, and Mark Priddey (eds.), *Index to the Probate Records of the Courts of the Bishop and Archdeacon of Oxford 1733–1857 and of the Oxfordshire Peculiars 1547–1856*. British Record Society, vol. 109 and Oxfordshire Record Society, vol. 61, 1997. Pp. xxvi + 390. B.R.S. casebound, £19.50 + £2.50 p&p, from the Hon. Treasurer, Stone Barn Farm, Sutherland Road, Longsdon, Staffs., ST9 9QD; O.R.S. card-covered, £15.00 + £2.00 p&p, from the Hon. Secretary, c/o Bodleian Library, Oxford, OX1 3BG.

This volume completes the magnum opus commenced by Dr. Molly Barratt in the two volume index to the *Probate Records of the ... Bishop and Archdeacon, 1516–1732*, published by the B.R.S. in 1981 and 1985. Those volumes omitted the Peculiars, hence their inclusion here for the complete period (in the main superseding the index to the Banbury Peculiar published in O.R.S. vol. 40 and Banbury Historical Society no. 1). Thus all the probate records held at Oxfordshire Archives now have modern published indexes, meticulously edited. The only other locally held probate records are those of the Court of the Chancellor of the University of Oxford, in the University Archives, for which an index was published in 1862. For the sake of completeness it is sad that this small collection could not be included here. Of course researchers still need to check the Prerogative Court of Canterbury (P.C.C.) records, for which there are now published indexes to 1800 and for 1851–58. Nevertheless Oxfordshire historians now have an outstanding finding tool to one of their most important sources.

Whereas the earlier two volumes were based on the excellent nineteenth-century indexes of Ernest Cheyne, for this later period (peculiars apart) the only indexes available were much less satisfactory. This was remedied by the late Leslie Wood and Dr. Jean Andrews, who between them prepared the slips for the comprehensive index on which this volume is based.

The earlier volumes were reviewed by Kate Tiller in *Oxoniensia* vol. L (1985). Her remarks then are equally relevant to this book and need no expansion here. However, it is worth reiterating her tribute to Molly Barratt, whose scholarship and knowledge of these records have once again been made available to all; to which should be added our thanks to her co-editors Joan Howard-Drake (who did the typing) and Mark Priddey of Oxfordshire Archives (who did the checking).

JEREMY GIBSON

G.H. Martin and J.R.L. Highfield, *A History of Merton College*, Oxford University Press, 1997. Pp. xxii + 436. £45.00.

Writing a good history of an ancient college is no easy matter. New histories of old colleges are expected to satisfy the demands of serious historical scholarship as well as the pious curiosity of old members, and the two are not always readily reconciled. Merton College, England's oldest university college, has already been the subject of much historical attention and has been able to call on two distinguished Mertonian scholars for this new history: Geoffrey Martin, formerly keeper of the public records, and Roger Highfield, modestly described in the third person on p. 363 as a fellow and tutor of 40 years' standing, who was for many years librarian and archivist of the college. Both however are medievalists, and the division of labour between them is intriguing. Martin has covered the period up to the reign of Elizabeth and has written a chapter specifically on the 17th-century antiquary Anthony Wood; Highfield, who is a leading authority on the college's earliest years but also has a longstanding interest in its later history, has written the chapters on the Elizabethan and later periods. The nature of the text varies between chapters in ways that seem to reflect not only dual authorship but also perhaps some uncertainty about the likely readership of the volume. Both authors write clearly and do not allow their affection for the college to impair their objectivity. Martin's text has a characteristic tongue-in-cheek humour which in his chapter on Anthony Wood begins to assume some of Wood's own waspishness: noting that Wood did not admire the appearance of Warden Clayton's wife, Martin adds that 'marriage to Sir Thomas Clayton cannot have done much for her inner radiance'. The first chapter naturally discusses the foundation of the college, with particular reference to the founder's three successive sets of statutes, and places it in a European, English and Oxford context. The second chapter provides a description of the early buildings which is extremely thorough; it is not however an easy read and would certainly have benefited by the provision of a more detailed plan. The physical development of the college is one of the strongest themes to run through the entire volume; building in each period is well related to the functional needs of the community, to its financial resources and to the aspirations of the warden and fellows. Members of the Oxford Architectural and Historical Society will be pleased to read that in 1861 the society was prominent in the movement that blocked the warden's proposal to demolish part of Mob Quad, including the old library, to make way for a quadrangle by Butterfield.

The 14th century, when Merton contained a quite remarkable concentration of outstanding scholars, might well be called its golden age, though Martin and Highfield forbear to do so. In order to draw out the significance of these early Mertonians Martin

provides the reader with a clear path through the intellectual landscape of the period. Indeed it is a feature of the authors' treatment of all periods that they have the scholarly assurance to place the college firmly in its contemporary setting. There is much else of interest in the sequence of short chapters dealing with the medieval college, for example on the college's books and library, the establishment of Wylot's scholars (the 'postmasters' of later centuries), the role of the warden, the college's record-keeping and collective self-consciousness, the links of some fellows with lollardy in the late 14th century, the study of theology in the 15th and the college's religious conservatism before (and after) the reformation. Various sensible observations are made on the remarkable notes made at college meetings in 1338-9, but as this is the only such record to survive from the medieval college it would surely have warranted fuller analysis. The bitter exchanges it records are not random but reveal a feud between Warden Robert Tring and one fellow on the one side and three other named senior fellows ranged against them; revealingly one of these fellows was said to have behaved disrespectfully by calling the warden simply Robert in the presence of all. Many of the problems thrown up in 1338-9 were to recur in almost uncannily similar details in later centuries, notably in the visitations of 1638-40 and 1738 which are examined to good effect later in the volume.

There were indeed many remarkable early Mertonians, but the structuring of much of the text as a narrative of the reigns of successive wardens from the 15th century to the end of the 17th, combined with an increasingly biographical but not quite prosopographical treatment, reduces the impact of the middle chapters of the volume. It is of course to be expected that the account of the period between about 1563 and 1622 should be dominated by 'the college's two most famous men', Thomas Bodley and Henry Savile, both of whom were accomplished scholars whose public careers took them away from the university. The conflicting assertions of Savile and the fellows about the desirability of having such a figure as the head of a college may be seen as part of an argument which has yet to be definitively settled. The late medieval and early modern chapters certainly contain perceptive passages on such matters as the internal administration of the college or the management of the estates, but they are treated somewhat incidentally and without quite the extended examination they deserve. By contrast the chapter on the 18th century, generally reckoned the least interesting and distinguished period in the university's history, introduces a very welcome thematic approach. Various basic matters, including the different categories of undergraduate and the role of the college officers, are here clearly explained in a way that would have been helpful earlier in the volume. The chapters on the 19th and 20th centuries benefit greatly from this thematic treatment; they are also enlivened by a good deal of personal reminiscence, some of it presenting contradictory views. Highfield gives careful attention to such questions as the college staff and its estates and finances. He also offers a thoughtful consideration of changes in the educational and social recruitment of fellows and undergraduates, and of relations between them. If there was 'an impossible gulf' in the 19th century, by the 1940s there was in Merton as in other colleges a schoolmasterly involvement of dons in the social and sporting activities of the undergraduates, which in the 1960s gave way to the more strictly tutorial relationship of recent decades. Most striking is the story of the transformation of the college once again into a place of academic excellence. G.C. Brodrick, warden 1881-1903, described his predecessor as 'a kindly and courteous old gentleman, more familiar with country life than with academical studies' and observed that fellows of the mid 19th century had regarded the college 'not exactly as a place of education, but rather as a pleasant resort in which the sons of the landed gentry might profitably spend three years ... and which fellows might use as a country house in vacations'. Despite the eminence of its philosophy fellows and the importation of the disciplinarian E.A. Knox from Corpus, attempts in Brodrick's time to turn Merton into a 'reading' college were not entirely successful, and he in turn was remembered as a kindly old gentleman whose

'gifts were more social than academic'. But by 1928, thanks to the efforts of a small group of tutors, the majority of the college's undergraduates took honours rather than pass degrees, and in the 1930s they achieved a high level of academic distinction; the institution of LEA awards in 1962 further changed admissions and raised academic standards, and in recent decades Merton undergraduates have performed exceptionally well in examinations. The increase in the number of undergraduates and fellows, the accommodation of science from the later 19th century onward (a gratifying recolonization of territory so notably occupied by 14th-century Mertonians) and the acceptance of graduate students and research fellows in the later 20th century are well described. The new subjects for which tutorial provision was made included modern languages, which Warden Mure (1947-63) believed 'any gentleman could get up for himself'. The volume has been handsomely produced by the OUP, with a generous provision of plates and a substantial bibliography. It offers a sometimes uneasy compromise between the needs of the academic historian, the general reader and the loyal Mertonian, but each will find in it much to appreciate.

RALPH EVANS

R.K. Gilkes (ed.), *The 'Bawdy Court' of Banbury: the act book of the Peculiar Court of Banbury, Oxfordshire and Northamptonshire, 1625-1638*, Banbury Historical Society, vol. 26, 1997. Pp. 256.

This is a well-edited and annotated edition of an interesting and distinctive church court Act Book, one that includes more verbatim evidence than most as (presumably) a peculiar court covering only a few parishes on the Oxfordshire-Northamptonshire border did not need a separate deposition book. This certainly has advantages for the reader, concentrating all available information on the cases covered in the same place. There is a good reason for the book's title, apart from a generic reproach used against ecclesiastical courts: one Matthew Allsoppe was presented 'for calling this court a bawdy court' but was dismissed after explaining that he did not mean 'any contempt or disgrace of this court' (p. 75). Purely as a description, it was quite reasonable; bawdy matters certainly provided most business after testamentary.

There were other distinctive features of the court's business which might have merited more comment in the introduction. True to Banbury's 'precise' reputation, churchwardens were fairly active at presenting failures in observation of the Sabbath and swearing, probably more so than they would have been in an earlier period. I would especially have welcomed some explanation for the very small number of 'instance' cases (between parties) as against those pursued 'from the mere office of judge'. Where had all the tithe and defamation cases gone? There may have been greater possibility of taking them to the diocesan court, though in principle the peculiar court would have jurisdiction over them too, and there are just enough in the Act Book to show that it did not ignore such business. But the contrast with the activity of 16th-century church courts is very striking. Perhaps the Caroline Banbury population were contented tithe payers and prudent and peaceable in speech; but the first would be virtually unprecedented, and the second seems contradicted by the number of sexual 'office' cases deriving from accusations bandied about in quarrels, which could easily have provided grounds for concurrent defamation suits. Interaction with other jurisdictions is an issue on which Gilkes barely touches in the introduction, first describing Banbury's peculiar status and then mentioning that the Commissary of Banbury and the Official of the Archdeacon of Banbury were in fact the same man (Giles Sweit) in this period. At least he could presumably avoid jurisdictional conflicts with himself.

The introduction is generally helpful, though at times generalises rather hazardingly. Having said that 'bastardy ... was seen as an offence against God's law and man's law' (p. 27), it is perhaps unfortunate to continue that subsequent marriage 'accorded legitimacy to the child', when this (in England) was true only in canon, not common, law. Some generalisations are questioned even by the edited text itself. If the obligation to accept compurgation was absolute (p. 20) what is to be made of the appearance of 'information ... against the purgation of Frances Higgins', after admission of five compurgators (rather than the usual four) on her behalf (pp. 78, 76).

As regards the translation, I cannot help thinking that 'admonish' would be a more fluent (and perfectly appropriate) translation for 'monere' than 'monish'. The gloss (on p. 34 and subsequently in the introduction) 'notorious [ie. disgraceful]', is surely simply wrong, since 'notorious' - generally in 16th- and early 17th-century usage, and specifically so in a latinate legal context - means well-known, not requiring an allegation specific as to time and place.

Ultimately, however, these are relatively minor detractions from what is fundamentally a good edition of an interesting court. It seems to be a case in which considerable church court activity did not lead to conflict with - indeed, was perhaps abetted by - those of a 'Puritan' tendency (pp. 50-1), thanks (presumably) to Banbury's peculiar status and a vicar, William Wheatley, disinclined to make trouble over such issues as failure to kneel for communion. But Gilkes also makes a good case for the limited efficacy of the court's activities, and the text gives an impression of the Banbury area's infestation by those 'standing excommunicate' (it would be interesting, but difficult, to work out how this compared proportionately with those in the courts in a wider sphere of activity). The churchwardens seemed indifferent, telling the court in 1623, 'divores persones stand excommunycatt whose names you knowe better than we doe' (quoted p. 46).

JULIAN LOCK

J. Broad and R. Hoyle (eds.), *Bernwood: the life and afterlife of a forest*, Harris Papers 2, University of Central Lancashire, 1997. Pp. xvi + 126, 8 plates, 9 tables, 9 maps. Available from the publishers, £9.95 incl. p&p.

Bernwood was disafforested in 1632. Although its title hinges on this single act of legal extinction the book's approach is much wider. The disafforestation was visited on Bernwood from the outside, reflecting the need of the Crown, in a period of financial difficulty, to realise its assets. The strength of this volume is to root its assessment of the life of the forest in a much longer time span, and to relate it to the landscape, economy, society and ecology of this borderland area of Oxfordshire and Buckinghamshire, and particularly of the forest townships of Brill, Boarstall and Oakley.

The account is principally taken up with a chronological sequence of historically-based chapters. Isobel Harvey begins with Bernwood in the Middle Ages, linking back to Brill, with its Celtic place-name element, at the hub of a Saxon, and possibly earlier, multiple estate. This estate began to break up in the mid 9th century and, by the end of the Saxon period, Bernwood was a royal hunting forest, part of a band of forests running from Northamptonshire and Huntingdonshire through to Buckinghamshire and Oxfordshire. Dr. Harvey provides a clear account of the functions of this royal forest - power, profit and prestige. She discusses boundaries and perambulations, the administration of the forest, and the importance of Brill as a royal residence, market centre, Hundredal manor, and home of a pottery industry of regional significance. The relationship of the surrounding, purlieu villages to the forest area emerges. Assarting was taking place from the early 13th century, as pressure for local use of the forest area, woodland, pasture and arable alike,

grew. Above all Dr. Harvey stresses the shift from the maximum extent of forest law and royal influence in the 12th and 13th centuries to, by the later Middle Ages, a landscape in which the Crown was less assertively present, and a 'middling, land-owning, and official group' had emerged, to establish their own interests. This generated a tension between those seeking to exploit private landed interests in the forest area and those, both in the forest townships and the purlieu villages, who had common rights there.

This tension is a continuing theme throughout the following chapters by Richard Hoyle and John Broad, which take the story on in to the 19th century. Richard Hoyle pictures the Crown by the 1580s as essentially an arbiter of disputes between landowners and commoners from within and around the forest. Demands on the landscape had intensified, with the extension of arable, and the need for the separation of deer from coppiced woodland. Hoyle interestingly argues the origins of Boarstall ('perhaps one of the best known (though little researched) medieval English villages'), as a new, late 12th-century settlement in the forest area, originating from the merging of several separate grants of hides. He explains anomalies between the famous 1444 map of Boarstall and the landscape on the ground by a need on the part of the 15th-century artist to provide a satisfactory backdrop to his cartulary illustration.

The longest chapter in the book deals with the shortest period, 1546–1632, when Bernwood came under the dominant influence of the Dynham family. With the Crown taking only an 'intermittent interest in defining its rights', the Dynhams sought to control the landscape, protecting the deer and enclosing areas to prevent over-cutting and over-grazing. Once again the tensions between land owners and commoners were to the fore, culminating in the Privy Council hearing in 1577. In Richard Hoyle's words 'the forest was one great free for all'. By 1590 only Oakley, one of the three forest townships, still had open fields. The move to pasture and enclosure was well under way. In this context the disafforestation of 1632 is seen as the culmination of a much longer process of change, although the immediate occasion was the 'government-sponsored asset stripping' of Charles I.

John Broad deals with the post-1632 life of the forest and its communities. Freeholders were awarded ten acres for every hundred acres, ancient cottagers three acres, and other cottagers with rights of common pasture a share in the Poor Folks Pasture. They were operating in a landscape of coppiced woodland, rough pasture, improved pasture and extensive arable. By the end of the 17th century most of the remaining woodland within Bernwood had disappeared, local agriculture was organised in large units, and mixed farming predominated with cattle and dairying playing an increasingly important part, under the influence of the London market. The three forest townships each had very distinct characters, the largest, Brill, an open settlement with numerous smallholders and cottagers, whilst Boarstall was an estate village, and Oakley somewhere between the two. Broad argues that the physical sense of the forest, and the use of its name, rapidly dwindled. The Poor Folks Pasture, allocated in 1632 as alternative grazing for the cottagers who had lost common rights at disafforestation, was in the 1680s transformed into an enclosed farm, with the rental income applied by trustees to the aid of designated local poor. Thus was any sense of actual access to the use of the land lost to Bernwood cottagers. In a local economy where structural unemployment and poverty were endemic from the late 17th century charity and poor relief were increasingly restrictively applied, 'the lifestyles of the respectable poor had become the moral property of the gentry and clergy, and part of the general structure of law and order'.

Broad contends that Bernwood defies the stereotypes of forest areas – scattered settlement, squatters, religious dissent, political radicalism and independence of spirit – to which Joan Thirsk refers in her Foreword. It would be interesting to see the Bernwood evidence discussed more fully, as does Michael Freeman in the case of another Oxfordshire forest, Wychwood (*Social History*, 21, 1996), where the relationship of litigation, fence

breaking and forest crimes like deer-stealing to either the battle for customary rights or conflict between landowners is debated.

Rachel Thomas in her final chapter on traditional woodland management, whilst going back over much historical ground, stresses its relevance for present day nature conservation. This lies not in one ideally, ecologically balanced pattern of management recoverable from the past. Rather, within certain variables, historical management has altered from period to period. It is in the understanding to be gained from historical research of how different regimes have advantaged or disadvantaged certain species that she sees the important pointers to future management emerging.

As an exercise in relating history and ecology this book is not wholly satisfactory, certainly when set alongside Victor Skipp's work on the Forest of Arden or Michael Freeman's discussion of the environmental history, the social and natural ecologies of Wychwood Forest. References to ecology in the historical sections are relatively passing and Rachel Thomas's chapter is rather tagged on. The book lacks an index. However, this remains an interesting collection of essays to set alongside other studies of forest areas. It will also add valuably to our knowledge of the histories of Brill, Boarstall and Oakley.

KATE TILLER

Geoffrey Tyack, *Oxford: An Architectural Guide*. Oxford University Press, 1998. Pp. xii + 370, over 200 photographs, maps and plans. £15.00 paperback.

Geoffrey Tyack's guide is a welcome and well designed handbook to the architectural history of Oxford, from the early medieval tower at St. Michael at the Northgate to the most recently completed college quadrangles. The publisher has served the author well, producing a good looking, robust feeling paperback, at an affordable price. With its strikingly designed covers and full illustrations, it is a far more attractive book than, for example, the recently issued Oxford Archaeological Guides, from the same local source. As a comprehensive new guide, Tyack's will appeal especially to the subscriber to *Oxoniensia* who does not have ready access to Sherwood and Pevsner's *Oxfordshire* (1974), the two VCH volumes on the City and University, or *The Encyclopaedia of Oxford* (1985 and amazingly out of print). Unlike these library resources Tyack's guide describes the architectural history and growth of Oxford as a trading and university town chronologically, and therefore the book can be read right through as well as consulted. Thus its style and appearance will commend it for use in teaching. The book is set out in eight chapters, putting the grand or vernacular buildings of a collegiate university and its surrounding town into their social and political contexts. The author's well-informed style, driven by enthusiasm, wide reading and love of the city, reflects his role as a successful tutor. We do not just find names, descriptions and dates, but plenty of robust opinion on the local and national contexts, with visual appraisals which would probably surprise those who originally designed or paid for the building of the evolving city. It is of course our privilege to look back at what others achieved or failed to achieve.

It is noteworthy that Tyack has very usefully devoted two of his eight chapters to 20th-century Oxford. These will prove valuable to many readers, for the background and more detailed data for the recent past is often difficult to locate, being scattered in journals or unpublished records. Tyack is particularly trenchant in his treatment of the modern architecture of the mid 20th century, and to this reviewer he over-succumbs to the fashionable criticism of the serious attempts to provide new accommodation for the post-war world, where history was unfashionable as an architectural resource, traditional designers ridiculed, and the concept of conservation restricted to a minority. Rightly, we

find Baker's Rhodes House and Lutyens's Campion Hall given due prominence as the creations of remarkable minds for respectful clients. Worthington, Giles Gilbert Scott and the more budget-conscious Local Authority responses to society's requirement for economy, and a wish to be modern using new methods and materials, must be judged in the context of the society that required them. To suggest that the Westgate car park is a strong contender for the title of Oxford's ugliest building misses the point, when as an example of a new building type it might be one of the best-looking around in its time.

The reader will find the selection of photographs and prints a positive enlargement of the text, as are the plans and maps. Both illustrate how Oxford constantly changes in details and it would therefore have helped for all of them to be dated. Those who wish to read further are provided with an excellent selection of bibliographical references which will lead the reader forward in the library. Finally four walks are suggested on period grounds and set out on four maps. A gremlin has got into the list for the medieval one. I also wish to observe that the oldest university building surviving in Europe, the two-storey building attached to St. Mary the Virgin Church, is the Congregation House (not Convocation as the coffee house misleadingly calls it), and that Douglas Murray, the post-war City Architect and Planning Officer whose buildings are so disliked by Tyack, is not the same Murray who practised with Robert Maguire and built at Trinity College. It should also be noted that the 'terracotta' detailing of North Oxford is carved natural limestone.

Geoffrey Tyack ends his rounded description of the architecture of this major historic city by sensing that Oxford is now standing at a crossroads, with architects and patrons having lost any common sense of purpose. I am not altogether convinced that this is a new position, and it overlooks the importance of commercialism and the perceived choice of builders who do not employ architects or keep them under tight control. Yet it is also true that Oxford is now a world historic city, subject to international cultural influences, where an architectural practice may not be local but originate in Europe, North America or the Eastern Mediterranean. When an Islamic centre can be designed in the 1990s with facades imitating the shaped 17th-century gables of Oriel College, more than patrons are confused. Reading this readily available architectural guide will assist anyone's understanding of the special nature of Oxford, but those who commission buildings must not use it as a source book but as a lesson in continuity. In Oxford it deserves a place on the shelf next to J.S. Curl's *The Erosion of Oxford* (1977) and Thomas Sharp's *Oxford Replanned* (1948) to sum up the changing attitudes of the last half-century to Oxford's built environment.

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