

REVIEWS

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

Martin Henig and Paul Booth, *Roman Oxfordshire*, Sutton Press, 2000. Hb., pp. 244, 103 illustrations. £25.

This companion volume to John Blair's *Anglo-Saxon Oxfordshire* represents an important milestone in Romano-British regional studies. The county of Oxfordshire did not come into being until the late Saxon period and only assumed its present geographical limits in 1974. In Roman terms therefore Oxfordshire had no administrative or cultural significance and probably lay divided between the provinces of Britannia Prima based on Cirencester and Maxima Caesariensis based on London. Nevertheless, the county occupies an important geographical transect across southern central England, incorporating sections of the Cotswolds, the Thames Valley, and the Chilterns. It is an area which, partly because of the presence of Oxford University and partly due to the scrutiny of the Oxford Archaeological Unit and others over the last quarter of a century, has received a considerable amount of archaeological attention. In particular, our knowledge of Iron Age, Romano-British and Anglo-Saxon Oxfordshire has increased greatly as a consequence of archaeological investigation ahead of new development.

The county contains no major Roman towns and was essentially agricultural, apart from the major pottery industry located between Dorchester-on-Thames and Oxford. It is, however, just this very ordinary character of Romano-British occupation in the region that makes the study such an important one. The absence of major urban centres or dramatic artefactual finds means that the authors concentrate on the everyday character of rural settlement and economy, of local trade, and the environment. The result is that, for the first time, we are given a detailed narrative of a basic regional rural economy.

The first chapter, by Tim Allen, demonstrates how in the late Iron Age the region, along with the rest of south-east England, saw significant changes brought about by the influence of the spread of the Roman world. Though artefactually the record is patchy, in the century before the Roman conquest of Britain, Oxfordshire was in contact with the Continent through regional trade. This led to new and larger settlements appearing, and the disappearance of the round-house as the basic unit of occupation as well as the abandonment of storage pits for grain and changes in the combinations of crops grown and animals kept. Gradually, coinage was introduced as well as the new wheel-turned pottery. It even appears possible that taxation, often quoted as the acid test of Romanisation, was in place before the Roman legionaries arrived. Subsequent chapters deal with the place of Oxfordshire in the Roman Empire, the pattern of major settlements, rural settlement and the environment, the people of Roman Oxfordshire, the economy of the county, and a final chapter on the history of the investigation into Oxfordshire's Romano-British past. In the latter one story, which illustrates an Oxford conceit, relates how it was believed that there had been Greek scholars at Cricklade (GreekLade) and Latin scholars at Lechlade (LatinLade) who supposedly transferred to Oxford to establish the university.

For the first time the book provides a credible account of Roman activity in the region, making the most of the scarce evidence in a number of contexts, but continually aware that the story is still far from complete. The authors stress their strong belief that the inhabitants of Roman Oxfordshire were native Britons who underwent varying degrees of

Romanisation. There is nothing in the evidence to suggest that the Romans of Oxfordshire were anything more than 'native Britons, whose forbears had enthusiastically adopted Roman ways'. Romanisation introduced greater social and economic mobility, as well as the use of a far wider range of artefacts. It is suggested that Romanisation proceeded faster and further in the relatively prosperous Cotswold uplands, with their scatter of wealthy villas, than in the lower status farms and hamlets of the Thames Valley which remained largely Iron Age in character. There is evidence to point to a radical landscape re-planning in the 2nd century, which represented a break-up of early Iron Age structures in the context of a more capital-intensive system involving a much more complex 'social and political infrastructure'. There is, throughout the county, irrefutable evidence of an expansion of arable, and ploughing efficiency was improved with the introduction of the mould board plough. Also, hay cropping seems to have been developed. Although there are relatively few high status artefacts from Roman Oxfordshire, Martin Henig's erudition ensures that the maximum information is extracted from the fragments that have been recovered, but he admits that many aspects of social life have to be deduced through analogy with finds from other locations.

The end of Roman Oxfordshire is marked not by any cataclysmic event but by a decline in the use of Roman coins, and the gradual disappearance of Roman artefacts from the archaeological record. There is no evidence of a catastrophe, and the authors observe that the number of incoming Saxons would have been insufficient to oust the indigenous Romano-British population. In one intriguing area, that of religion, the authors point to possible continuity of the Romano-Celtic Christianity on some sites, and this idea is emphasised by the importance of Dorchester, a centre of early Saxon habitation, and its subsequent emergence as a bishopric in the early 7th century.

The book clearly displays the value of rescue excavation over the last four decades. In particular, this work has provided the information to understand the nature of rural settlement and environment in the Thames Valley. The frequency of references to the site at Yarnton, however, underlines the need for large-scale, intensive excavation. The large number of references to the sites excavated along the Ridgeway, in particular to Alfred's Castle, to the village of Shakenoak, and to the recent excavations outside the walled area of Alchester also indicate the need for a research programme alongside the rescue work if a full understanding of the region is to proceed logically. The numerous references to the temple site of Woodeaton also strongly suggest that this would be a prime candidate for a research programme of investigation.

Some of the plans and photographs in this well-illustrated volume are a little fuzzy and colour photographs could have been usefully applied for some of the finer artefacts and mosaic pavements. These minor reservations aside, Suttons, along with the authors, are to be congratulated on producing a high quality academic book that is also accessible to the general reader.

TREVOR ROWLEY

Kate Tiller (ed.), *Benson: A Village through its History*, Pie Powder Press for the Bensington Society, 1999. Pb., pp. 216, numerous maps and illustrations.

This comprehensive study of Benson, including the outlying settlements of Roke, Rokemarsh, Fifield, and Preston Crowmarsh, had its origins in extramural classes taught there by the editor, and comprises chronologically arranged chapters by five contributors: Christine Holmes on Anglo-Saxon and early medieval Benson, David Loades and Kate Tiller on the post-medieval period, Alison Reid on the 20th century, and Catherine Murray on

architecture. The reliance on locally-connected specialists, familiar with the sources and capable of placing Benson's development into a broad context, means that the book has happily avoided the parochialism and misconceptions which so easily mar 'village histories' attempting to do too much. The style is nevertheless accessible and readable, marred only by the occasional teeth-jarring colloquialism ('bang up to date' and 'things were looking up' are two particularly horrible examples), while in the medieval sections difficult or obscure terms such as 'soke' or 'hide' are explained clearly and unobtrusively. Reasonably full citations, sensibly gathered at the end of each chapter, are provided for those who need them, thus avoiding that other scourge of local historical writing, the unreferenced assertion.

While the book as a whole will undoubtedly appeal to residents and others familiar with the area, some parts are of more than purely local significance, notably Holmes's excellent in-depth study of early Benson (abstracted from an Oxford University extramural dissertation), and Murray's survey of Benson's architecture. The latter begins with brief analyses of St. Helen's church and of the hidden medieval core of Fifield Manor before moving on to a chronological account of the chief survivals from later periods, skilfully combining architectural analysis with documents where available, and placing local developments in the context both of changing national styles and of Benson's particular history. Post-medieval buildings predominate, perhaps reflecting Benson's improving economic fortunes from the 16th century, though it appears above all to have been the development of coaching in the 17th and 18th centuries – a central factor which recurs again and again in different contexts – which opened the village to new London-influenced styles in brick and flint, creating a 'grand coaching-inn style' manifested in such buildings as the former Red Lion, the Crown, and the Castle. Small-scale vernacular architecture is not neglected, with sections on labourers' (and possibly squatters') cottages, important farmhouses, and agricultural buildings, and there is a full account of 20th-century building, the whole well illustrated with photographs and, for earlier buildings, a few reconstructions. At the opposite end of the book (both literally and chronologically) Holmes, following a brief survey of prehistoric evidence, plunges into the difficult world of Anglo-Saxon and early medieval settlement and estate organization with commendable clarity and common sense, convincingly tracing Benson's emergence as an important royal vill with a large dependent territory as early as the 8th century. That it failed subsequently to develop into the capital of a new shire or even into a market town is tentatively attributed to the adoption of nearby Dorchester (rather than the royal vill itself) as the seat of Birinus's new bishopric in 635, to the military arrangements of the 870s which favoured fortification of Oxford and Wallingford rather than Benson, and to Oxford's consequent centrality within the new 11th-century shire, which completed Benson's eclipse: thereafter it became essentially a village, 'albeit one with unusually wide administrative and jurisdictional powers'. Parallels with the fate of Bampton in west Oxfordshire, a royal centre second in wealth only to Benson in 1086, are striking, and, as at Bampton, the gradual break-up of Benson's territorial unity from the 10th or 11th century created unusual complexity in the parish's interlocking field systems and titheable units, a theme mentioned both here and elsewhere in the book. Documentary, place-name, and archaeological evidence, including the recent Rivers Nightclub excavation, are all given their due, and the bounds of an estate 'in Bynsingtun land' granted in 996 are fully discussed, though sadly the boundary clauses, unlike the Domesday entry, are not translated.

The rest of the book is inevitably somewhat anticlimactic, precisely because, as the authors point out perhaps a shade too often, post-medieval Benson was such an unexceptional, predominantly agricultural community. More unusual features, such as the coaching industry and its consequences or the protracted struggle over inclosure, are given appropriate weight, however: in the case of inclosure Tiller gives a fascinatingly detailed

account, based on Home Office papers as well as local sources, of the conflict between the dominant modernizing farmer Thomas Newton and his opponents, who ranged from local smallholders and Swing rioters to the Ewelme solicitor George Eyre. Only in 1852 was an Inclosure Act finally obtained, 45 years after Newton's initial attempt. Complex patterns of landholding in the early modern period are described if not wholly explained (the three 16th-century 'manors' of Turner's Court, Preston Crowmarsh, and Fifield look like reputed manors derived from medieval freeholds, though we are not told), and a fairly detailed account is given of the Stampe family's 16th- and 17th-century leasehold centred on Fifield Manor, incorporating a transcript and analysis of a room-by-room probate inventory of 1611/12. Demography, church life, nonconformity, and education are all addressed, and the chronological narrative finishes with Reid's account of the 20th-century village, distilling a good deal of oral history, and including interesting information on farming, on Benson during wartime, on the airfield, and on recent development.

On the debit side the adoption of a chronological rather than a thematic approach, while undoubtedly bestowing some advantages, necessitates some repetition and makes it difficult to pursue particular topics, while certain periods (notably the later Middle Ages) are rather skated over, presumably due to lack of evidence. Treatment of outlying settlements, too, is sporadic and uneven. More seriously, there is little sense, after the early medieval chapters, of the general evolution of the landscape or of changing settlement patterns within it, and one cannot help feeling that an additional short chapter by a landscape historian in the Hoskins mould could have added an important dimension, something perhaps to consider should the book ever be reissued in a second edition. Though generally attractively produced, and illustrated with numerous well-chosen photographs of which most have a point to make, the book is nevertheless spoiled by some very sketchy maps, making parts of the text difficult to follow without an O.S. map to hand, while a list of maps and illustrations would have been useful. (Conversely, is a conversion chart of pre- and post-decimal currency really necessary even in this day and age?) The index is serviceable if basic. None of the drawbacks prevent the book from being a welcome and valuable addition to the county's historiography, however, one which deserves much more than a purely local readership, and which could certainly form a model for similar ventures in the future.

SIMON TOWNLEY

Mark Spurrell (ed.), *The Brightwell Parish Diaries*, Oxfordshire Record Society, vol. 62, 1998.

Students of ecclesiastical and local history will be all too familiar with the situation described by the Revd. Mark Spurrell in his preface to this volume. Barring the inevitable accidents of history, legally required records of parish life have survived copiously, and the whole genealogical industry would have foundered without them. For more informative records about the life of parish and people, however, we are dependent on the whims and industry of individual clergymen whose view of what should be preserved and transmitted to posterity has varied greatly. It is therefore helpful to have Mr. Spurrell's survey of the surprisingly large list of parish diaries for Oxfordshire (27) and Berkshire (40) in the preface.

This volume in itself illustrates this variety, containing the diaries of three rectors over a period of more than a century, between 1774 and 1892. The first, that of Dr. Thomas Wintle, is concerned with the temporalities of the parish, whilst the Victorian ones deal with the pastoral and spiritual side of the rector's work. Wintle is very much the gentleman, landlord and farmer, protecting the revenues and rights of his benefice; Stewart and Cunningham are

seeking to retain their grip over the parishioners amidst threats from both secular and religious influences, and operate within a parochial system which the reviewer, like the editor, remembers as the pattern for which both of us were trained, before the return of Hanoverian pluralism in more recent times.

An edition of three very different documents makes this a rather puzzling volume for the general reader and means that he needs to readjust his expectations as each one begins. Even the pagination of the three diaries differs, giving the editor some difficulty in seeking to reproduce their varied formats. Brightwell in 1774 lay in the county of Berkshire and hence in the diocese of Salisbury; its patron was the bishop of Winchester; subsequently, the parish was relocated within Oxfordshire, and when Berkshire was incorporated in the diocese of Oxford in 1837 it formed part of the enlarged diocese. In 1869 the patronage was transferred to the see of Oxford. Mercifully the Oxfordshire Record Society has not allowed these ambiguities to deter it from publishing this excellent set of parish records.

Thomas Wintle had been a domestic chaplain to Archbishop Secker, and had held livings in Kent and in Wallingford before his appointment to Brightwell. He resided there for nearly 40 years, continuing his scholarly activities, publishing the Bampton Lectures in the 1790s and two volumes on Christian Ethics in 1812. Though the diary contains no hint of this side of his life, neither do his spiritual ministrations receive much attention. His intellectual powers are shown in his intricate concern for the rights, duties and endowments of his benefice. Without Mr. Spurrell's admirable preface, it would be difficult for the modern reader to enter into this arcane world of tithes and tenancies. The 19th-century Ecclesiastical Commission was to relieve incumbents of most of the burdens involved in temporalities, but a Hanoverian parson had to ensure that the boundaries of his parish and of his own lands were well established, that the money payments in lieu of tithes were revised and collected, that tenants paid proper rents, and that the rectory house and church were kept in good repair. With a mere 500 souls in his charge, and an income calculated as never less than £500 a year (probably at least £50,000 in our terms), it is not surprising that Wintle devoted so much care to the maintenance of the income which enabled him to look after the parishioners; but it would be a mistake to assume, on the basis of these diaries, that the income was his only concern.

The fact that his income was something assured him by law, and not dependent on the approval of his ministry by the parishioners, is probably the main difference between Wintle and his successors. One feels that one is dealing with a person of independent mind, sure of his social and ecclesiastical status, and hence ready to go into the minutiae of his temporal duties. There is material here for students of tithes and land ownership, and some treatment of enclosures. There are also interesting enquiries from the bishops on behalf of the government about the price and scarcity of commodities in the period of the French wars, obviously with an eye to dangers of civil unrest. Wintle does not appear to have been amongst the clergy who were as much magistrates as priests. More conventional concerns about the state of the rectory and the collapse of the church tower are also to be found amidst the wealth of detail on the business side of the benefice and parish. The diary thus contains much material of general as well as local application, though students of local topography will no doubt be delighted by the detailed records they will find. They will no doubt have access to suitably detailed maps; the general reader might also have been helped by something more detailed than Plate 4, a copy of the Brightwell Farm map of 1800.

The two later diarists faced a more difficult task. Though still relatively wealthy as the golden age of farming drew to its end, and hence accustomed both to opening and to completing subscription lists for good causes such as the enlargement of the parish school, they had much more difficulty in sustaining and developing the more active pastoral role expected of Victorian priests. James Haldane Stewart, appointed by Bishop Sumner in 1866,

claimed to have been much helped by Wintle's notebooks, and continued to record a variety of parish events, including the need to provide a healthier supply of water for the rectory, which had been visited by typhoid in 1858, because the well was situated between two cesspits. The detailed accounts for the enlargement of the school and the extensive parish charities show the rector as social worker as well as incumbent; though the records for each year are brief they offer a vivid picture of developments in village amenities. After Stewart's sudden death in 1879, the living passed to an experienced if rather dogmatic priest of Anglo-Catholic tendencies, Francis Macaulay Cunningham, rector and rural dean of Witney. He began by rebuilding the rectory, the inadequacy of water supplies being still a problem, one which became acute for the whole village in the long drought of 1891. His ministry was marked by efforts to raise the numbers of Easter communicants, which rose from 48 in 1880 to 129 in 1884 and then fell back to around 100 in a parish of about 500 people, many of whom were dissenters. A dissenting chapel and a mission hall of uncertain denominational loyalty were built during his incumbency. There is a delightful record of resistance to the introduction of *Hymns Ancient and Modern*, resolved only when a special selection from it was printed for local use. Prominent amongst his papers is a systematic enumeration of the parishioners, obviously in an effort to secure a grip on the religious situation, since apart from names, ages and occupations, comments are made on who is and is not baptised, who are Easter communicants, and which dissenters like strong drink. During Cunningham's time a new church was built at Sotwell; kneelers were provided for both churches; lectures were given in Lent, and lantern lectures on Good Friday.

There are a few unimportant typographical slips, and use of the word processor has not been entirely successful in reproducing the layout of the list of inhabitants on pp. 121 ff. The arrangement of the first part of Wintle's diary is not at first clear, but the effort to reproduce the original layout eventually justifies itself. This worthy addition to the Record Society's volumes repays study at several levels and has clearly been illuminated as well as motivated by the editor's insight as a more recent rector of Brightwell.

RONALD PUGH

Peter M. Wheeler (ed.), *Beckley Reflects*, 1999. Pb., pp. 238. Available from Grove Farmhouse, Beckley, Oxon., OX3 9US. £10.95 (all proceeds to benefit local causes).

Beckley is a place that inspires poetry, and no less than ten poems by local authors are printed in this new book of village memoirs, drawing heavily on the 1965 *Portrait of the Village* compiled by the Beckley Women's Institute from their prize-winning Jubilee scrapbook, which in turn followed D. Gresswell's booklet *An English Village, Beckley* in 1955. All three figure the well-known summary of Otmoor villages which begins, 'I went to Noke, but nobody spoke...' and ends with the refrain, 'But I went to Beckley and they spoke directly'. More nationally noted literary figures associated with Beckley are John Buchan, whose novel *Midwinter* is set in the village, and R.D. Blackmore, whose character Cripps (*Cripps the Carrier*) is remembered in Cripps Cottage in Otmoor Lane, Beckley. More recently, Auberon Waugh used the village, and in particular the Abingdon Arms – courtesy his Beckley great-uncle, Mr. Cooke – as a refuge from the pressures of (light) academic work in Oxford. Several pages of his diary are here, recording somewhat Brideshead-like feasts and drinking sessions with local and university friends.

Far more central to the book, and what it specifically sets out to do, is to record Beckley village people today 'greeting the Millennium by remembering their past'. In sixteen chapters edited by Peter Wheeler, a retired engineer who has lived in Beckley all his life, he

and more than a dozen other contributors intersperse their own memories, and memories of what parents and grandparents told them, with accounts of Beckley and Otmoor history, architecture, flora and fauna. The history beyond living memory has an obligatory feel about it ('it has been necessary to include some historical details and facts... well supplemented by articles, reflections and memories') and occupies but a few pages at the beginning of the book. While this is a pity – Beckley was the site of a Roman villa connected with the Roman road across Otmoor, and a medieval palace frequently visited by Norman kings, as well as the hunting lodge which still survives in the form of a Tudor house called Beckley Park – these are dealt with fully, for the interested, in the *Victoria County History*, vol. V. It appears in Domesday as a six-hide manor of the large Oxfordshire landholder, Roger d'Ivry. Nineteenth-century Enclosure Acts, and the subsequent drainage and fencing of marshy Otmoor sparked off notable local resistance, and occasional riots, which festered from 1801 until well into the 1830s, producing local drama when Oxford citizens supported Otmoor protesters being marched under arrest from Beckley to prison through St. Giles's Fair, and attacked the soldiers to set the moormen free. The continuing protection of Otmoor in the 20th century is covered thoroughly in the book, with descriptions of the army firing range on its eastern edge, the struggle over the siting of the M40 motorway, and the recent establishment of a large Nature Reserve, including the re-creation of wetland and reed beds – requiring, ironically, the reversal of all the pumping which has dried Otmoor out to its present state. Beckley's church, dedicated, unusually, to the Assumption of the Blessed Virgin Mary, contains sections of an early 14th-century cruciform church with a lantern tower, as well as two panels of stained early medieval glass, a 14th-century parish chest, and a Jacobean pulpit. It is well and extensively described.

But at the heart of the book are the many items, large and small, including photos, which cover subjects like wartime evacuees in the village, shops and the post office, the school, local families and local characters (the organist, the gravedigger, the baker, the carrier), the cricket team, the winter of 1962-3 when the village was cut off for several days, the coming of the telephone, electricity and mains water, and the Women's Institute. The contrast between the list of local occupations given in the latter's 1965 booklet, when work on the land was still the commonest occupation, and the home and desk-based jobs of today, is instructive. The heading given to the paragraphs on the three founding pupils of the playgroup, in 1976, 'From little acorns do mighty oak trees grow' is more apt than could have been dreamt – one of them was Martha Lane-Fox, now a partner of one of the biggest net companies in the world – lastminute.com.

A list of contents would have made it much easier to steer through the multitude of items in this book, which also lacks a map. But perhaps for the local residents, who know Beckley well, and who will be the most assiduous readers of this Millennium book, it would be unnecessary. The Beckley authors are to be commended for putting together a valuable collection of local memoirs, strands of the tapestry of which local history is made.

CHRISTINE HOLMES

REVIEW ARTICLE: MARKING THE MILLENNIUM

Hook Norton 2000 AD: *The Millennium Book*, 2000. Pp. 76, illustrated.

Alison Gomm (ed.), *Drayton St. Leonard: Our Village*, 2000. Pp. 240, illustrated. £9.95.

Peter Keene (ed.), *The Parish of Hinton Waldrist: a Sense of Place*, 2000. Pp. 56, illus. £2.95.

Gerald Howat, *A History of North Moreton*, 2000. Pp. xii + 207, illustrated.

Wychwoods Local History Society, *That's How It Was: Women in the Wychwoods during World War Two*, 2000. Pp. 60, illustrated. £5.50.

Ann Chisholm (ed.), *Glimpses of an Oxfordshire Village: Ewelme, 1900-2000*, 2000. Pp. 106, illustrated. £5.00.

The Berrick and Roke Millennium Book: Through the Eyes of the Villagers. An Account of the Villages of Berrick Prior, Berrick Salome, Roke and Rokemarsch at the Dawn of 2000 AD, 1999. Pp. 92, illustrated.

The year 2000 has provoked a fit of historical self-consciousness now being marked by an upsurge of local historical publications of many kinds. Such spurts of activity are not unknown. Anniversaries have always provided occasions for recording and reflection. However, this has been an anniversary on the grandest scale, the end of both a century and a millennium, the first such in the period of extensive written record.

The nearest comparisons can perhaps be made with earlier nationally and internationally significant anniversaries, such as the bicentennials of the United States and of Australia, and the effects these had on historians and on collective perceptions of the past. Australia's Bicentennial provoked reflections on national identity and on links to European and native Australian cultures, a desire to record past and present and to preserve that information, and debates on how the past should be presented in the present, and about collective identities and aspirations for the future. Broad as these themes are they are clearly paralleled in many millennial projects, and in the Oxfordshire history publications now emerging from them.

Graeme Davison, in *Australian Historical Studies*, 23, no. 91 (1988), prompted by the Bicentennial, identified three types of historical approach, broadly characterised as monumental history (the past used as a source of moral inspiration and example), antiquarian history (valuing the past for its own sake, backward looking, conservative), and critical history (history as an explanation of current circumstances, pointing to future action often involving a rejection of the past). He noted the large scale popularisation of history, given added momentum by events such as the Bicentennial, and argued that it could bring a new antiquarianism and a resurgent parochialism, 'collecting old stuff' in large quantities, and seeking 'not to transcend the past, but to re-enter it, and if necessary recreate it'. This was the stuff of heritage centres, of 'historical voyeurism' and escapism, and of informal and unreflective uses of history. Davison challenged Australian historians to recognise the widespread infusion of historical awareness lent by such a major anniversary, and to use it to foster as widely shared and critical understanding of the past as possible. It is interesting to review the widely varying millennial Oxfordshire publications with such considerations in mind.

Hook Norton 2000 AD: The Millennium Book has no single author. Formal history is confined to two prefatory pages, zipping from prehistory to the present day. The concept of change, so often seemingly uncomfortable to local historians, is down played in favour of continuity. ('We've changed, but we remain the same'). The main content is a fine set of photographs, largely contemporary, celebrating the village as it is in 2000, with a lively and impressive range of people and activities, summed up in one image of present-day workers bearing the

tools of the 'in' trades from laptop computers to paint rollers. This is a celebration of village life, created primarily for internal consumption, but providing a vivid record and a valuable source for future historians.

The possessive pronoun in the title of *Drayton St Leonard: Our Village* reveals a similar motivation. This too is a team effort, with 20 villagers involved in the researching, writing and illustration of a volume aimed to coincide with the millennium celebrations of June 2000, and to feed into the creation of a village archive of photos and documents. There is a strong forward reference, a concern with future as well as past, and no claim to be definitive. This is a mix of chapters of varying lengths, with a tendency to miscellany but a wide range of contents (including the church, 20th-century housing, churchwardens' accounts, bell-ringing, and individual reminiscences). The volume has obviously been a positive vehicle for shared concerns. As Alison Gomm writes in her editorial introduction, 'There are plenty of activities in today's village... who is to say whether they mean less to the villagers than the old feasts and festivals did, when there was not so much commercial entertainment to be had'. Issues like campaigning to keep open the village shop and pub are unashamedly raised, and easy assumptions about the 'old days' are questioned. The context has changed and local historians' judgements of functions and significance must take this into account. This is a handsomely designed book, with references and an index.

The Parish of Hinton Waldrist is a glossy, 56 page booklet which nails its colours to the mast in its sub-title – 'a sense of place'. Again aimed at 'the appreciation of the inhabitants' and 'not a history book in the accepted sense', it is a mixture of trail, guide and history. The main focus is what it was and is like to live in the parish. It is an affectionate and crowded portrait, framed within a guided walk, with many illustrations and reminiscences, and occasional thematic excursions, for example into building materials and geology. Particularly interesting are recent insights – 'cars have redefined village life', the impact of BSE, and the questionnaire of today's under-17s. These will be rich quarry for future historians.

Only one of this batch of Oxfordshire publications takes the form of a traditional history. Gerald Howat's *History of North Moreton* is the work of a long-term resident, a solid catalogue of local material, arranged in 15 chronological chapters. It has that common feature of this genre of local historical writing, very little space spent on the early periods (18 of 200 pages on 1000-1500 AD), and much (76 pages on 1914-2000) on the recent past. The presentation too is traditional, with continuous texts, two gatherings of photographs, no separate references and no index.

For some Oxfordshire historians, 2000 has meant recollecting the preceding century rather than the millennium. The Wychwoods Local History Society has one of the most distinguished records of publication of any group in the county, and its contribution in this special year maintains that high standard. *That's How It Was* is an account of women in the Wychwoods during the Second World War. It is firmly rooted in the locality, but deliberately focused on clear priorities, recording a period whilst access to direct testimony is still possible, and identifying women's work on the home front. The oral history methodology used is careful, quotes draw on exact transcripts, but are thematically edited. The sheer intensity of wartime involvement comes over, but so too does a matter of fact attitude that 'we just had to get on with things'. This undramatic approach makes it all the more important to hear the specifics – of rationing, uncertainty, bereavement, bureaucracy and a countryside scattered with airfields and military institutions – at first hand. The high quality design, illustration and production of this publication is exemplary.

Two neighbouring south Oxfordshire communities have also concentrated on the recent past in order to mark the millennium. *Glimpses of an Oxfordshire Village* is a distillation of the Ewelme Society's project to compare Ewelme in 1900 and 2000. Seven researchers and two

editors have written on the church, almshouses, school, RAF station, local industry, farming, celebration and tragedies, and notable residents.

A striking feature of all but one of the publications is their participatory character. Perhaps the most democratic of all is *The Berrick and Roke Millennium Book: Through the Eyes of the Villagers*. There is a short village history, descriptions of community activities and wildlife, but the volume is chiefly made up of photographs and descriptions of each house in the villages, its occupants (age, occupation) and their reflections on what it is like to live there in 2000. 110 of 125 households took part. Copies of the book went to all households, and were buried in paper and CD ROM form in a time capsule.

Clearly local history activity in Oxfordshire is alive and well in the year 2000, given fresh impetus by the millennium. Equally clearly much of that activity needs to be judged not only in terms of its contribution to conventionally defined published literature but to other functions, self-declared or implicit, which it is fulfilling. These include creating new records for the present and the future, and articulating, or possibly seeking to create, contemporary community identity. Historians will gain much from these dimensions; for example, anyone wanting evidence of shared preoccupations in rural Oxfordshire in 2000 will find the need for affordable housing for locally-born people, and to band together in defence of key institutions – school, pub, post office and shop – mentioned again and again.

Many of these publications, of value individually and collectively, are in danger of going unrecorded except for their immediate local audience. I would end with two questions. How can we ensure that copies of all Oxfordshire's millennium histories are gathered together in one place? So far no town or urban neighbourhood studies have come to notice. Are there examples out there? I hope so, and that they will add to the varied and instructive array of new work triggered by the millennium.

KATE TILLER

Other Publications Received:

Tony Kelly, *St. Nicholas Church, Old Marston, Oxford: a History*, 2000. Pb., pp. vi + 55, 30 illustrations. A well-illustrated short history and guide to the church.

Wolvercote Papers, no. 3, 2000. Pb., pp. 52, numerous illustrations. A special millennium issue of the series published by the Wolvercote Local History Society.

Wychwoods History, no.15, 2000. Pb., pp. 76, numerous illustrations, maps and drawings. A special edition of the journal published by the Wychwoods Local History Society.

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