

REVIEWS

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

Simon Townley (ed.), *Victoria History of the Counties of England, Oxfordshire, volume XIV, Witney and the Townships, Bampton Hundred Part two*. Boydell & Brewer, for the London University Institute of Historical Research, 2004. Pp xiv + 287. 76 figures.

This volume covers the history of Witney, an important and rapidly expanding town in West Oxfordshire, together with its three adjoining townships, Curbridge, Crawley, and Hailey. In organisation volume XIV closely resembles those earlier in the series; it covers origins and development of the town and proceeds to describe in detail the Manor, Manor house, economic history, local government, parish church and church life, Roman Catholicism, Protestant Nonconformity, Education and Charities. It is clear, however, that more modern approaches have not been ignored. The authors have clearly soaked themselves in archaeology and consequently have cogent things to say about early settlement; they are particularly informative about boundaries, and skilfully analyse the historic landscape. The section on Anglo-Saxon charter bounds shows a familiarity with the topography, which must result from much field walking (and probable trespassing), and discussion arising therefrom. The volume moreover is user-friendly in that all the way through there is emphasis on people rather than institutions. The personalities such as the Wenmans and the Earlys stand out; Charles Jerram, rector of Witney in the mid 19th century, is given particular prominence. It is generously illustrated by comparison with earlier volumes; 76 illustrations compared with 39 in volume XIII and these include valuable aerial photographs.

Witney was a new town of the Middle Ages, the result of the entrepreneurial vision of the Bishops of Winchester, in whose hands the Manor had been since Edward the Confessor's reign. It was, however, set down in the landscape already long settled. Figure 2 makes this point but omits to show the Roman villas and other aspects of Romano British settlement; the Anglo-Saxons, in fact, already experienced a closely exploited land. The new town was laid out in one long curving street (with a cross street, Corn Street), which terminates at the long triangular church green dominated by the parish church of St Mary and bishop's manor (confusedly referred to in places as the palace) on the site of Mount House. On either side of the High Street stretched long burgage plots, which were only erased from the town map by the car parks, serving the supermarkets in the 1980s and 1990s. I well remember defending "the last burgage plot" in a public inquiry in which we demonstrated the age of the walls surrounding the plot by pointing to the lichen growth. Witney had about 300 houses and a population of about a thousand in the 13th century. Its good communications with London, its excellent water supply and abundance of pasture land made it particularly favourable to sheep farming, wool and cloth production. Rich merchants such as the Wenmans directed the cloth trade and the town became second in prosperity within the county after Oxford in the 1520s.

One of the many strengths of this volume is the emphasis given to vernacular houses. Building on the interest raised in the urban survey by Richard Foster and Daphne Aylwin in the 1970s, the authors have analysed house plans from 1550 onwards. Inventories enable them to furnish the houses described. The hall in Witney houses in the 17th century was still

being used for cooking but in the 18th century kitchens tended to be added. Again parlours had beds in them in the 17th century, but these were moved to upper chambers in the 18th century. The plans are rather nugatory; there is just one 16th-century house plan, that of 3-5 Church Street.

A second major strength is the emphasis given to the industrial buildings and history of the processes connected with them. Witney's prosperous cloth trade in the 16th century began to specialise in the making of blankets in the 17th and 18th centuries. Different sorts of blanket were made for the North American and African markets. The erection of the Blanket Hall symbolised the important corporate status of the blanket weavers in the life of the town. As much attention has been given to the evolution of industrial buildings, changing with each new industrial process, as former volumes of the VCH gave to the growth of the parish church. Two factors are singled out which explain the comparatively good labour relations within the industry. Managerial families like the Marriotts and the Earlys lived on the job in the centre of the town. This surely helps to account for the mutual regard that seems to have existed in the early 19th century between makers and men despite long hours, cramped and insanitary housing conditions, and the rigorous factory discipline. Another reason was the strength of Methodism in the town. John Wesley came frequently to preach and commented on the "plainness and artlessness of the congregation" and was impressed by "a prevailing spirit of seriousness", which made the Witney meeting "a pattern for England". It was said that from being a drunken profligate place, Witney became a little paradise. The town remained an important industrial centre in the 20th century, and in the 1980s was said to be the fastest growing place in Western Europe. Before World War II, it became well-known for the manufacture of machine tools, and during the war its factories repaired Spitfires and Hurricanes. The blanket industry collapsed in the 1970s, but Smith's Engineering became the largest local employer.

The political history was less noteworthy than the industrial. The town was dominated in the Middle Ages by the presence of the Bishop of Winchester, or his bailiff. It was never granted a charter and remained a seigneurial borough. It did, however, have a borough court, and gradually gained privileges such as a borough seal and the administration of its own market and fair. It remained governed by an elite of paternalistic mill owners and small family businesses. Its parliamentary history is obscure. It is not clear when Witney began to be represented by its own MPs. There was a mention of the town sending its own MP in the 14th century, but then the practice ceased.

Volume XIV ends by considering the three townships of Curbridge, Hailey and Crawley. Curbridge is particularly interesting, because it contains a moated manor house, Caswell House, surrounded by anciently enclosed field, marking the site of a now deserted hamlet. Crawley and Hailey were both scattered forest edge settlements, their peasant farmers busily assarting in the Royal forest, which surrounded them in the Middle Ages. With such a wealth of interesting material arrayed it might seem ungrateful to suggest improvements. There is one annoying feature, that of referring in the footnotes to another part of the book but simply saying "above" or "below", and not giving the page reference. Much time is wasted by following up these references. Another minor irritation is the use of jargon in the industrial processes, and not explaining terms such as "tenterring" and "willeying" (p98). Again, what is the difference between a fuller and a tucker? VCH Oxon has excelled itself in the past few volumes, publishing detailed accounts of important historic towns such as Woodstock and Witney. We will follow with great interest as it turns towards Henley-on-Thames, and Chipping Norton, both high on its agenda.

JOHN STEANE

A.R. Hands and Cotswold Archaeology. *The Romano-British Roadside Settlement at Wilcote, Oxfordshire III. Excavations 1997-2000*. British Archaeological Reports British Series 370, Oxford: Hadrian Books 2004. Pp. 360, figs 107. ISBN: 184171612X, Price: £35.00

Wilcote is one of nine Roman 'small towns' on Akeman Street between St Albans and Cirencester. Some, like Alchester, with walls, planned layout and public buildings, share common features with the major towns of the province. The unplanned layout and architectural simplicity of others, like Wilcote, make them difficult to differentiate from large farming settlements. Nevertheless for most Roman Britons such 'small towns' were of greater significance as central places and interfaces with the wider world than the few *civitas* capitals and colonies. In recent decades it has been a research priority to map the variation in such sites and to analyse their role. Over the last 15 years study of Wilcote and other Akeman Street sites, in particular Alchester and Asthall, has made a considerable contribution to this wider interest.

This third Wilcote volume (*I* and *II* are published as British Archaeological Reports nos. 232 and 265) contains the results of two projects. The first part of the volume publishes geophysical survey and research excavation (1997-2000) conducted by Dr Hands. The rest consists of two reports on geophysical survey and excavations in advance of pipe-laying in 2000 by Cotswold Archaeology and Dr Hands. The areas examined comprise primarily the line of Akeman Street and the eastern part of the settlement adjacent or near to earlier excavations. Small-scale excavation in the western part of the settlement is also published. Integration of these reports is imperfect, as Dr Hands acknowledges, but between them they significantly advance understanding of Wilcote's character and development.

The settlement began its history with the construction of Akeman Street in the middle decades of the first century AD. Dr Hands estimates the size of the site as approximately five hectares, comprising a strip up to 40 m. wide along 1500 m. of the road, predominantly to its south. However the pipeline excavation suggests that the inhabited area extended in some places up to 600 m. south of the road, although settlement features thin out considerably after 250 m. The most intensive occupation in the eastern part of the settlement is dated from the late 1st to late 2nd centuries AD but a later date range to the west, from the mid-2nd to early 3rd centuries AD, hints at a shift of the occupied area over time. Features and artefacts datable to the 3rd and 4th centuries are scarce and occupation seems to have ended by the mid-4th century AD. The quarry pit filled with early 4th-century ceramics reported in *Wilcote II* remains an isolated feature. Akeman Street at Wilcote in the fourth century AD was in poor repair, a hollow way rather than a metalled road, even though it linked two of Roman Britain's principal cities. The decline distinguishes Wilcote's history from that of most small towns, including its neighbours, which reach their most developed form in the final century of Roman rule.

The primary axis of development was Akeman Street, the geophysical survey establishing its precise route through the site. Evidence was also found for a trackway heading south through the settlement. Unlike other small towns there is no evidence for intensive occupation along the road-frontage by strip-buildings. Instead this zone is pocked with pits and scrapes opened to quarry material for road or houses and later filled with rubbish. Structures have proved difficult to identify, but to the handful of previously known instances this report adds a further timber building defined by postholes and a platform of limestone blocks of unknown purpose. On the basis of the small finds Crummy suggests the existence of a shrine. Her evidence includes votive objects, a model spear, knife and eye, and artefacts treated in a ritualised way (e.g. a pair of iron tongs of which the handles had been deliberately damaged). The general character of the finds assemblage, somewhat anomalous for a settlement context (i.e. the large number of toilet instruments, especially spoons), may

also support her argument. However the rituals of which these items may be the residue were perhaps conducted within living spaces rather than in a formal temple setting.

The accumulating evidence for architectural techniques and lifestyles makes Wilcote seem not dissimilar to an ordinary farming settlement. The few buildings detected are modest, timber-built structures although some finds, for example box-flue tiles related to heating systems and a fragment of Purbeck marble veneer suggest the existence of buildings of greater pretension. The ceramics are dominated by locally-produced coarse wares. More exotic items, such as amphorae, predominantly the olive-oil bearing Dressel 20, terra sigillata pottery and glass reveal the integration of the site in wider exchange networks but they occur in smaller quantities than at neighbouring 'small towns'. Here Timby's report on ceramics from the Cotswold Archaeology excavations proves the value of quantification, still eschewed by Dr Hands. The animal bones however hint at a more complex character. In those gathered from previous excavations sheep predominate, a characteristic of lower status rural sites, but in the assemblage excavated by Cotswold Archaeology cattle are more numerous, a typical pattern for cities or villas. Their high representation, as well as evidence of specialist butchery, may suggest that local cattle-rearing was intensified because of the site's roadside position, although the mortality profiles do not suggest specialisation in either meat or secondary products. Evidence for horn working also hints at a wider economic role.

The author acknowledges imperfections in the presentation of the volume because of illness. Nevertheless the publisher should have intervened to produce a more economically and consistently presented volume. The lack of a plan indicating the location of areas excavated in 1997-2000 and their relationship to previous years' fieldwork is frustrating, as is the lack of integration between the different reports: for example the postholes of the building described above straddled separate excavation areas (Cotswold Archaeology (Area A) and Dr Hands) but the different authors do not fully note relevant evidence in the other area. The two projects would arguably have been better served by publication in article form, with discussion of the site, its significance and context reserved for a separate article.

JOHN PEARCE

David Whittaker, *Cotswold Place-names: a Concise Dictionary*. Wavestone Press, 2005. 64pp. £6.99.

With the rapid growth of local history as a subject both for popular and academic research, the study of place-names has moved beyond the confines of the English Place-name Society's academic approach. From Ekwall's *Oxford Dictionary of English Place-names*, which was first published in 1936, and has long been a bible for those interested in the origin of such strangely named villages such as Souldrop (thorn-bush and thorp in a gully) or Inskip (island with osier baskets for catching fish), the work was moved into a more approachable form by, among others, Margaret Gelling. Gelling aimed to 'set out the place-name evidence in such a way that archaeologists and local historians will understand its strengths and weaknesses, and will be enabled to use it without catastrophic misunderstandings'. She took the raw material produced by the EPNS and Ekwall and looked first at place-names chronologically and thematically (in *Signposts to the past*, 1978). In *Place-names in the landscape* (1984), Gelling studied place-names topographically maintaining, in opposition to the commonly held theory of the day, that Saxon settlers were more likely to have named their farms and homesteads by features that were evident in the landscape. It was much more sensible, she argued, for someone travelling from A - B in an unknown country to navigate by the physical elements of the countryside than it was to constantly having to ask the way

to Offa's village or Bubba's farm. These topographical place-names were, therefore, likely to be much earlier names than those with personal name elements.

David Whittaker's little dictionary, which will be much handier for anyone on foot in the Cotswolds than any of the others mentioned above, is not designed to be an advance in scholarship. It does, however, confirm the importance of topographical elements. It is easy to imagine early English travellers making their way across open ridges, through marshy valleys, towards oak woodlands, recognising on the way the familiar tracks of badgers and deer or the shape of an over-flying kite.

Cotswold Place-names gives an outline map of the area covered by the book (from the most southern reaches of Gloucestershire near Bath right up to Mickleton almost into Warwickshire), and a useful glossary of place-name elements mentioned in the main body of the book. The dictionary itself gives the modern name of a settlement, its earliest known spellings, a meaning, and the Old English elements which combine to form the name. At the end are three useful appendices: one covering what could be called 'greater' Cotswold; the second dealing with river and stream names; and a third with road names, not all of which are Roman in spite of Gloucestershire's rich Roman heritage. Throughout are David's own photographs, and it is these which perhaps more than anything else, reveal not only the dry wit of the author but also the extraordinariness of the Cotswold landscape. A book to keep alongside whenever you venture westwards.

JUDITH CURTHOYS

Ralph Evans (ed.), *Lordship and Learning: Studies in Memory of Trevor Aston*. The Boydell Press, Woodbridge, 2004. x + 270pp. £50.

The late T. H. Aston (1925-85), Fellow of Corpus Christi, exemplifies a once familiar type of Oxbridge arts don: the intellectually able and learned man who started (but did not finish) a thesis and who published relatively little. Aston's personality, furthermore, was depressive, and made demands on others' goodwill. Yet Aston possessed a scholarly curiosity which transcended his difficult character, won the loyalty of colleagues and pupils, and stimulated historical endeavours. This memorial volume testifies to inspiration of unusual strength: the contributors include many leading medievalists, and most have presented an important statement in their field of study.

The book's fifteen chapters broadly reflect Aston's interests: they deal with medieval social and cultural change, rural society, religious images, university institutions and education, and the storage and use of college muniments. (The book's title rather underplays the collection's breadth and richness.) They abound with important insights, of which only a few can be mentioned for want of space. Professor T. M. Charles-Edwards, in a survey of shifting national identities in post-Roman Britain and Ireland, deduces that Germanic inhabitants of diverse Continental origins established a language 'norm' relatively quickly (the ancestor of Old English), which helped them to resist assimilation to the majority British culture. Dr. J. D. Howard-Johnston argues that behind Byzantium's apparently unchanging facade of state institutions, a new social order developed in the 7th to 10th centuries. Dr. P. A. Brand reveals, through a vivid case-study of a bully, that in the late 13th century English Common Law was sustained partly by local 'substructures' of minor landowners with legal expertise, who operated alongside the coterie of professional lawyers centred on the Westminster courts. Dr. Isobel Harvey demonstrates that England's infamous game laws originated in 1390 when Parliament banned the poor from hunting; consequently networks of poachers were created which sometimes became the basis for movements of political protest. Dr.

Margaret Aston shows how in later medieval Europe there was both an expansion in the functions of religious imagery and a growth in vernacular literacy, which resulted eventually in attacks on the use of images.

The collection includes a cluster of six essays on facets of English rural society in the 11th to 13th centuries, including one by Aston himself (written *c.* 1964). These are of outstanding significance. In recent years several writers on Anglo-Saxon history, effectively led by Professor J. Campbell of Worcester College, have elaborated the proposition that the early kingdom of England (mid 10th to mid 11th century) was held together by a sophisticated 'state' structure which penetrated deep into society. But the scholars involved have scarcely considered forms of rural social structure within the state and how the two were related. In the well-documented 13th and 14th centuries, agriculture and rural communities were organised largely within a framework of lords' 'private' manors (an aspect of so-called 'feudalism'). Had this situation existed before the Norman Conquest? Or had state agencies then played a more important role?

These essays suggest that both state agencies and 'lordship' had shaped pre-Conquest local life. T. A. R. Evans proposes that 13th-century manorial courts possibly originated as pre-Conquest local public courts, which were 'manorialised' by lords after the Conquest; while Professor P. D. A. Harvey deduces that before the 13th century reeves often acted for their local communities in relations with both state and lords. Lordship had, however, been both a presence and a force in pre-Conquest local society: Aston illustrates the development of small lordships mainly on ecclesiastical estates before the Conquest, while Dr. Rosamond Faith shows how various lordly strategies for the management and exploitation of estates can be detected through sensitive reading of Domesday Book entries.

Many readers of *Oxoniensia* will be particularly interested in the chapter about Oxford University, 'The Triumph of the Hall in Fifteenth-century Oxford' by Dr. J. I. Catto. This is a brilliant and truly seminal essay. Oxford's history in the 14th to 16th centuries has long been encapsulated as a tale of academic halls and colleges: decline of the former (from at least 123 in 1313 to only 8 in 1552), and rise of the latter. Dr. Catto has discerned that from the late 14th century a third kind of institution was created, which arguably developed the 'idea' of the hall and 'swamped' the original concept of the college (hence the 'Triumph'). Dr. Catto dubs it the 'superhall'. Each superhall consisted of several adjacent pre-existing halls, which were combined under the rule of a single master or a group of co-operating masters. Like earlier halls they provided accommodation and tuition for undergraduates; but with up to thirty or more members each, they developed a more corporate life. From the 1440s the organisation of life within the superhalls also reflected new educational ideals which emanated from Italy. The colleges, which had hitherto been mainly graduate institutions, developed in a similar direction, by bringing one or more undergraduate halls under their control. Eventually, in the 16th century, some of the superhalls were formally converted into colleges by grants of statutes and endowments (e.g., Brasenose and Jesus Colleges). The superhalls have previously remained obscure because a principal source about halls, landlords' rent-rolls, continue to list only constituent properties rather than agglomerated units (which in any case usually had several landlords). Dr. Catto's bold account calls for a far-reaching re-examination of Oxford's late medieval history, to test and elaborate his perceptions, and to reassess the University's changing component institutions and purposes. (Some attention may also be required at a younger institution near the Cam.)

Though only Dr. Catto's essay is concerned entirely with Oxford, the volume represents a half-century of study by a network of historians with Oxford connections: Aston began work in the early 1950s, and many contributors remained busy in 2005. (Aston's life is sketched in a balanced and sympathetic Introduction by the Editor, though the volume regrettably lacks detailed notes on contributors.) The book appeared at an interesting

moment for Oxford, just before the publication of a draft 'Academic Strategy' which considerably reconceptualised the University. The Strategy referred to the University's senior members mainly as 'staff', and to their non-teaching work mainly as 'research'. The University's chief purposes included 'the discovery and dissemination of knowledge' and 'disinterested inquiry' (p. 2). Aston's memorial volume, however, embodies an Oxford way of learning that has traditionally been called 'scholarship', a term that was notably absent from the Strategy. The scholarship evident here is based on combining thought at several levels: critical appraisal of relevant existing work; rigorous examination of sources in various languages, involving assessment of how they represent or misrepresent reality; and imaginative and logical questioning and thinking, particularly about processes of historical change. It is a development from disputations and tutorial teaching, and from Oxford's historical interest in theology, philosophy and humanistic studies. The aim is to achieve understanding (rather than simply knowledge), and the book treats largely with a world from which our own is derived (rather than epitomising disinterested inquiry). The scholarship deployed in Aston's honour is of the highest standard and has resulted in a collection of outstandingly good essays. The volume will serve as a stark reminder of what Oxford stands to lose if it allows its tradition of scholarship to dissipate.

R.B. PEBERDY

Mark D. Chapman, *God's Holy Hill. A History of Christianity in Cuddesdon*. The Wychwood Press. 2004. £10.99

Mark Chapman is well known as an historical theologian of the 19th and 20th centuries, and for the meticulous scholarly research that is evident in his writings. However in this publication we have a wide ranging, multi-faceted essay in local history spanning a thousand years. It offers a fascinating glimpse into the history of Christianity in an Oxfordshire village, where life has been inextricably tied up with national events.

This book is accessible at different levels. The non-historian will be able to enjoy the unfolding of events, the story of the building, enhancement and re-ordering of the Church from the 12th to the 20th century, and descriptions of the colourful characters who people its pages. The student of history will learn much interesting detail which will be related to interpretations of our national story, not least from the annotations.

From the 10th century, when Cuddesdon was a major source of income for the monks of the great Abbey of Abingdon, through the changes of the Reformations, the village eventually becoming the home of the Bishops of Oxford, Cuddesdon was a place where the good (and the not so good) flowed from the village to play their parts on the national stage.

In the 19th century the theological college was founded with the aim of 'forming character and moulding habits'. Chapman notes the approval of one Christopher Wordsworth, later to be Bishop of Lincoln who founded there his own college on the same model – one that was to change the Church of England, and influence its concept of Ministry in the latter part of the 19th and through much of the 20th century.

In describing the characters in his story, the author has a keen eye for clerical humour: Canon Scott-Holland approaching Cuddesdon one day, observed a flock of starlings. 'How like the Church of England', he remarked, 'nothing apparently keeping it together, yet getting along all the time' I suppose we don't need to know that Bishop Gore never wore gaiters at home – but I'm glad I do.

The book moves us rapidly through the centuries and we are conscious of the fragility of institutions. Following the Reformation Chapman remarks the future of the Church was 'far

from secure' and of the College today the future is also 'far from secure'. Yet the book is a witness to the remarkable capacity of the Church of England to re-invent itself in successive generations.

There are 203 pages, two appendices, a bibliography, index, and chapter annotations. From the Cuddesdon 'Bowl' and 'Bucket' to the final photograph of College Principal John Garton who left in 1996, the book is lavishly illustrated, including many architectural drawings and photographs of the church.

This is a well written and interesting local history which brings together a wealth of detailed research into a readable story.

VINCENT STRUDWICK

Clare Hopkins, *Trinity: 450 Years of a College Community*. OUP, 2005. Pp. xxii + 500 and illustrations throughout. £70.00

At a first glance of the contents page, Clare Hopkins' new history of Trinity College – the first since the end of the 19th century – may look like just another college history; a chronological march from the earliest days in the mid-16th century through to the beginnings of the 21st. The reader soon realises, though, that the author has taken a new approach. The preface points out, in no uncertain terms, that 'the lives of the great and good of Trinity's alumni are not chronicled in this book'. And therein lies the difference between this and many other college histories, both old and new (that of Wadham College, by Davies and Garnett, and of Somerville, by Pauline Adams, are exceptions). Although many of the chapters are given the names of significant Presidents, this book tells the story of Trinity College as a functioning community. Even the dust jacket reflects the content with a picture of the whole of the present day Trinity College community, including not only the President, Fellows, and students, but all the college staff too.

The book begins as one would expect, with an analysis of the foundation of the college, including a summary of the life of the founder, Thomas Pope, and his *raison d'être* for the creation of the new college, and a description of the early buildings and statutes. Throughout, the text is firmly rooted in the archives and other original sources. Trinity was the only Oxford college to be founded during the reign of Mary Tudor, and Pope's intentions were undoubtedly to assist the re-creation of Catholic England as well as to provide a place of education for poor scholars. By the late Spring of 1556, the college was up and running under its first President, Thomas Slythurst. Everything was provided by the Founder, from the endowment of land and livings to fund the daily expenses of an Oxford college, to plate and vestments for the chapel, to books and fittings for the library, down to the pots and pans in the kitchen. But Trinity was soon to feel the loss of its politically astute Founder; Thomas Pope, that loyal but pragmatic supporter of Mary Tudor, followed his Queen to the grave within just a few short months. Just four years in, the new Catholic college was very much alone in a Protestant country and a Protestant and humanist university. The Fellows found themselves at the mercy of two Elizabeths: their new monarch, and their Founder's widow. However, after a couple of decades of upheaval and change, similar to those of other colleges but perhaps more intense in the case of such a new foundation, Trinity settled down into the new Elizabethan age.

The book continues through the turmoil of the English Civil War, the academic depression of the 18th century prevalent across most of the university, through the reform years of 19th-century Oxford when President Percival, once great headmaster of Clifton College, tried to reform and modernise and, in the process, ran up against an recalcitrant Fellowship, into the 20th century and the fundamental changes and controversies which

occurred in those decades, not least the admission of women in 1979. In fact, it is in the very modern period that Hopkins' history differs even more significantly from others; she does not duck controversial or difficult issues such as perceived preference for public school candidates, and the charges of racism which dogged the college in the 1950s.

It is not, though, in the descriptions of university and national politics, fascinating though these are, that Hopkins's book excels. It is in the detail of college life, of the practicalities of running a constantly changing and yet static community of young men. The developments in the curriculum and methods of teaching, the rise and fall of numbers, the planning of gardens and the building of new accommodation, and so many other facets of college life; all are documented faithfully using archival records in an accurate, informative, and imaginative way. Naturally, the author draws heavily on the earlier history of the college by Blakiston, and on the immense and all-encompassing *History of the University of Oxford*, but the great strength of this book is that has been written by the college archivist, someone who knows the records of the college more intimately than anyone else, and who obviously takes great delight in drawing every fragment and tit-bit of evidence out of that rich resource.

Trinity: 450 years of a college community is another college history written by its archivist and this is trend greatly to be encouraged. At least one more is in the pipe-line (for University College) and another is taking full advantage of its archivist's expertise (Magdalen College), but there are so many more, particularly amongst the older colleges (Corpus Christi, Christ Church, St John's, Pembroke, Jesus, to name but a few) which desperately need new histories and equally desperately need to take advantage of the skills and knowledge hidden in the medieval archive tower or modern basement.

JUDITH CURTHOYS

Leo John De Freitas, *The Banbury Chapbooks*. Banbury Historical Society, vol. 28. 2004. 136pp. £12.00

Banbury cakes, Banbury Cross, and Banbury chapbooks: if one knows anything about Banbury at all then it is surely these three, and the last probably from Edwin Pearson's somewhat misleadingly titled *Banbury Chap Books and Nursery Toy Book Literature*, first published in 1890. But this is essentially a picture book, reproducing the woodcuts from many Banbury and other chapbooks. Dr de Freitas sets himself a much more interesting task in this admirable account of the popular booklets produced by Banbury's famous publishing houses, Cheney's and Rusher's: what in fact do the surviving items tell us about the consumption, both economic and cultural, of a chapbook for example? What can they tell us about the minds that engaged with them? How were they received? How critically were they assessed? What purpose did they fulfil? What value were they given?

During the course of this short study, which sets in context the invaluable bibliographical listing of all the extant examples constituting appendixes one and two, de Freitas addresses these important questions with lightly-worn scholarship, finding answers to some and concluding that others are not answerable from the information now available to us.

The study begins with a discussion of chapbooks in general and the chapmen (peddlers) who hawked them around the country. The association of this material with children is a fascinating and complex subject, first raised here, but not resolved until the later chapters' detailed accounts of the two major firms, each of which featured a father to son succession. John Cheney was keeper of the Unicorn Inn in the Market Place when, in 1767, he acquired a printing press and began a parallel business of printing and bookselling. He became famous for his ballad sheets and chapbooks (types of popular literature which were so often

produced in tandem, making use of a common stock of woodblocks for illustration), though no chapbook appears to survive from his Unicorn days. In 1788 he moved to Red Lion Street and all his chapbooks bear this address. This and the fact that during the proprietorship of him and his son Thomas (who ran the business from 1808–1820) the Cheney firm published only twenty-eight chapbooks, is surely evidence of a high level of disappearance without trace.

John Cheney printed the local schoolmaster's *Reading made most easy* in 1787. At the time, William Rusher combined bookselling with teaching, selling first in the Market Place then moving in 1785 to Red Lion Street. His educational and other books were sufficiently successful to enable him to give up his school duties in 1792 (though his trade taken shows he was a hatter as well at some stage). William's son John Golby Rusher was apprenticed to the Oxford printer Richard Slatter, from whom he returned to the family firm in 1808, a move possibly prompted by John Cheney's death that year. From then on he played a role in the Rusher printing, publishing, and bookselling enterprise. During his long life (he died in 1877) he published many more chapbooks than his father (assuming their survival rate is relatively constant), and further exploited the nursery market, both in the subject matter and the superior production: John Golby's woodcuts, for example, are of a better quality than those of many of his rivals, and he took full advantage of the improvements in printing technology. De Freitas also interestingly notes that these chapbooks were aimed not only at children and their parents, but also at 'the growing ranks of folklorists and antiquarians'.

In addition to the historical and cultural study and the comprehensive list of survivors, a fine selection of the chapbooks' illustrations is reproduced, and a useful list of reference works is appended. All in all this is a major contribution to research in popular literature and the Banbury Historical Society and its General Editor are to be congratulated on encouraging its writing and publication.

CLIVE HURST

Clare Sherriff, *The Oxford College Barges: their History and Architecture*. Unicorn Press. 2003. 114pp. £30.00

To those of my generation the Oxford college barges, moored in a line along the bank of the Isis by Christ Church Meadows, are a delightful memory, though by the 1960s it was only too clear that they were a doomed species, as more and more were replaced by boathouses. They deserve a monograph, and Clare Sherriff has provided an attractive and affectionate record.

When the Oxford University Boat Club was founded in 1839, a barge was hired for its use. In 1846, the club bought 'a large pleasure barge lately belonging to the Merchant Taylors' Company'. The City livery companies used barges for the Lord Mayor's Procession until 1856; they were elaborately decorated and had 'houses' at the stern. Sherriff publishes a photograph, dating from the 1870s, of the OUBC barge, which had been built in 1800.

Oxford college barges were not built to be rowed, but to serve as club houses and grandstands. In 1854 the OUBC commissioned a new barge, designed in a luxuriant Gothic style by the local architect E.G. Bruton, and this sets the pattern for the future. Sherriff writes (p.104) that 'the patronage of architects is an important element of the barges' history, and probably one that is not generally known to architectural historians'. Is it odd that, although she refers to the 20th-century volume of the *History of the University of Oxford*, published in 1994, she makes no reference to volume vii, part 2, on the 19th century, published in 2000, where the chapter on architecture gives the architects of six college

barges. It identified the designer of the Balliol barge as Alfred Waterhouse, and that of the 1888-9 Trinity barge as H.W. Moore (referred to, but not properly identified, as designer of the Pembroke barge at page 60) - both unknown to Sherriff. The architect of the 1930 Corpus Christi barge is given on page 69 as 'F. M. Harrison', but in all subsequent references he is correctly given as N.W. Harrison, who was a pupil of Moore, Sherriff might have mentioned that T. G. Jackson, who designed the Oriel (1892) and the first Corpus (1886) barges, was himself a notable oarsman, as recorded in his *Recollections*.

The book gives detailed accounts of the successive barges used by each college, and builds up a picture of the way they were used, including many amusing insights. The numerous illustrations are an invaluable asset, though sometimes they could be analysed more perceptively. Sherriff describes the pilasters on Jackson's Oriel barge as decorated with 'an umbrella-shaped classical ornament capped by the head of an axe'; they are, in fact, fasces. Photographs of the New College barges of 1879 and 1926 appear to show that the windows were reused.

It is a pity that the book is marred by so many errors. On page 11 a paragraph ends with a colon; one notices that the endnote references jump from 26 to 28, only to find 27 attached to the illustration on page 14. Names sometimes go wrong. In the account of the Corpus barges, there is a reference to 'Dr Charles Edward, a Jesus College professor': this is Dr Thomas Charles-Edwards, at the time referred to as a Fellow of Corpus, but now a Professor at Jesus. On page 23, the text refers to 'Stone's edited version of the *University in Society*' (an odd way of putting it), but a few lines on he becomes simply 'Lawrence'. On page 39 the illustration is captioned 'The Univ barge photographed with the VIII in 1864. This is the Red (Stationers') barge'. However, on the next page we are told that Univ only took the barge in 1873.

The tale of the financial pickle created by the new barge built for Exeter in 1873 is also told in the chapter on 'University and College Sport' in *HUO*, vii (p.530). Sherriff says that the problem was resolved when the Sub-Rector and a friend lent the amount needed 'magnanimously with interest'. *HUO* states that the loan was 'interest-free'.

Despite the errors (which vigilant editing would have cleared up), the book forms an invaluable record of an almost vanished part of the Oxford scene. It is very much a labour of love, Mrs Sherriff's husband having in 1987 bought the Univ barge, designed in 1878 by John Oldrid Scott.

PETER HOWELL

Len Woodley, *Oxfordshire Murders*, the Wychwood Press, 2005, £9.99. 114 pp, 36 black and white illustrations.

The author was a police officer for 30 years in the Buckinghamshire and Thames Valley Police forces, both in uniform and with the CID. He also served as coroner's officer in Milton Keynes and is therefore in an ideal position to write about murders and their investigation from an insider's point of view.

The front cover, which is red and blue with yellow and green writing, showing an axe murderer about to strike his unsuspecting victim, is lurid and might put off some serious readers. This is also true of the somewhat sensational blurb on the back cover, for instance 'Murders Committed for Lust in Witney and Cassington', or 'The Man who went Berserk in Blenheim Park and killed a Workmate'.

The list of acknowledgements, however, tells a different story with its impressive list of contacts and sources used. Not only has Woodley drawn upon his own specialist knowledge

and that of high-ranking police officers, he has also done research in libraries and visited scenes of crimes.

The book consists of accounts of twelve real-life murders dating from the early 18th century to the end of the 19th from all over the historic county of Oxfordshire. These are 'We are murdered!', a poaching tale from the Wychwoods in 1824; 'A poaching I will go', Wood Eaton 1835; 'The Widow's mite', Woodcote, 1839; 'Unrequited love', Witney 1871; 'Darling Polly ... Your affectionate Harry', Cassington 1877; 'Bad blood at Blenheim Park', Woodstock 1885; 'I think I've made a good job of it', Chipping Norton 1887; 'This gipsy was no gentleman', Headington 1887; 'The murderer who travelled in ladies' underwear', Oxford 1931; 'The red Mini murder', Rumerhedge Wood 1967; 'The murder of the Finnish Girl', Kingswood 1983; and 'Flagged down for murder', Hampton Poyle 1990.

It is unusual to find included in a book on murders such recent examples as that of the 'Finnish Girl' and 'Flagged down for murder', both of which remain unsolved. We are more used to coming across the Red Barn type of murder, still horrible but somehow to us remote and unreal. It is interesting to learn how real policemen conduct a murder investigation after becoming used to a television diet of Inspector Morse and Midsomer Murders, both series being set in Oxfordshire. Indeed, the murder of the Finnish Girl was too close to *The Way through the Woods* for good taste so that the screening of this particular episode had to be postponed.

Although this is by no means typical of the books reviewed in *Oxoniensia*, it is good example of its genre and recommended if your taste in reading material runs to murder and the macabre.

MARILYN YURDAN