

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.

Eberhard W. Sauer (with contrib.), *Linear Earthwork, Tribal Boundary and Ritual Beheading: Aves Ditch from the Iron Age to the Early Middle Ages*, 2005. Pb., pp. 105, 43 figures. B.A.R. British Series 402, Archaeopress, Oxford.

Within the archaeological profession in Britain there is a distinction between those that study earthworks, pits and post-holes and those who prefer walls, towns and, to some extent, historical documents. This division between prehistoric and – for want of a better term – historical archaeology underlines the focus of research either within one field or the other. At the end of Prehistory lies the Iron Age – cut off in England in AD 43 with the successful invasion of the Romans – a period which appears to bridge this division. It has the first development of town systems and the first writing, identified on the earliest coinage in this country. We also see for the first time potential visible boundaries in the archaeological record (through, for example, coinage distribution) often supported by physical earthworks still extant in the landscape.

Aves Ditch is one such possible Late Iron Age barrier that survives as an earthwork in the north Oxfordshire landscape just east of the River Cherwell. It potentially sits at the western edge of the tribe identified as the Catuvellauni and indeed may have been constructed deliberately as a boundary. It has nevertheless remained somewhat enigmatic to antiquarians and archaeologists alike who have speculated in the past why it was constructed, by whom and for what purpose.

With this in mind, the author set about trying to answer these questions by undertaking a small excavation across the bank and ditch of Aves Ditch over two seasons in 1997 and 1998. These were briefly reported elsewhere but here the results are discussed fully with the specialists' reports taking up the last 40 pages of this monograph. The excavation in itself is not enough to support a full monograph (only three trenches were dug) but Sauer manages to extract a great deal of information regarding both the excavated material and clues in the surrounding landscape.

This report also manages – perhaps more subtly – to tell us whether the author is a 'prehistorian' or a 'Romanist'. The focus on certain aspects of research leads us away from the Iron Age origins of this earthwork and onto the 'safer' ground of the historical period. Whilst the ditch itself is dated through (among other things) the ceramic evidence to the Late Iron Age, the author is more at home discussing and investigating linear earthwork monuments from the Roman period, perhaps more so than other Iron Age earthworks in Oxfordshire landscape such as the North Oxfordshire Grim's Ditch (or NOGD for brevity). This is not to say this is a bad report because of its tendency towards the later periods, in fact, those aspects that the author does research are researched thoroughly.

The earthwork was also excavated by the Oxford University Archaeology Society in the 1930s and the archives are revisited here – with figures redrawn – to glean as much information as possible from them as well as any information that can be taken from the old OS maps from the 19th Century. Aspects of tribal boundaries that existed in Europe and beyond are discussed in great detail and – finally – the occurrence of a later Anglo-Saxon beheaded skeleton within the

ditch draws numerous comparative (and relevant) examples from the Thames valley. This also offers the opportunity to look at the re-use of earlier monuments in the Saxon period and the development of parish limits along possible earlier boundaries.

We are also treated to numerous maps, photographs and illustrations of the excavation, the surrounding area and similar sites or earthworks which still survive. Whilst some of the excavation plans and sections can be a little confusing to look at, this is only a minor complaint. The monograph is clearly and concisely written with no mistakes in the text and only a couple noted in the illustration captions. The specialist reports are detailed and informative without losing their thread.

However, whilst this is an excellent book that is clearly written and thoroughly researched, one cannot help thinking that the author has missed a trick or two. The focus on the Roman and later periods leaves little opportunity of exploring the Iron Age period of the region, which remains less studied by scholars. At the beginning of the report, the author briefly refers to the 'banjo' enclosures observed in the vicinity of Aves Ditch. A number of these have been identified across the north Oxfordshire landscape in the 1990s through aerial survey (and generally attributed to the Middle or Late Iron Age periods) that includes some relatively close to, or possibly associated with, the NOGD. There is, however, no mention of this in the Aves ditch monograph, and there may well be more than coincidence that both earthworks are built close to this type of enclosure. With a part of the excavation uncovering a Middle Iron Age enclosure ditch underneath Aves Ditch surely this is worth a bit of further investigation and discussion compared to what the author affords it?

The Late Iron Age period in Oxfordshire is also one of great interest. This is more fully discussed by the author, especially Aves Ditch and the South Oxfordshire Grim's Ditch [SOGD] acting as territorial boundaries for the Catuvellauni. But there is no discussion of the broadly similar earthworks outside the Iron Age 'town' of Camuldonum (Colchester). A clearer discussion of the development of the later Iron Age in the County and a map showing the sites that are discussed in the text such as Dyke Hills, Cassington as well as Abingdon and even the NOGD would have helped the reader to understand the dramatic changes to the landscape that took place during this period.

Overall, this book is well written, illustrated and researched. It is somewhat confined in investigating particular subjects and there are other areas which could have had more attention drawn on them. However, the author has remained focused on this report as just an excavation report rather than an opportunity to look at the development of the Oxfordshire landscape in the Late Iron Age and Early Roman periods. In its own right therefore, it is a good book and I would recommend it as a good addition to studies in Prehistoric Oxfordshire but (and there almost always seems to be a but) my main problem with this book is its price. Its publication as a British Archaeological Report (in this case by the publisher Archaeopress) means that it will be distributed widely within the academic community (through libraries), however, at £28 and just over 100 pages long, it is unlikely that many people will purchase this book independently. One can't help feeling that the readership may have been higher if it had appeared as a site report in the journal, rather than as a book in its own right.

ALEX LANG

Kate Tiller (ed.), *Dorchester Abbey: church and people, 635 – 2005*, 2005. Dorchester Abbey Preservation Trust and the Stonesfield Press. 124 pp, illustrated throughout. £15.00

No cartulary, chronicle or account rolls survive from Dorchester Abbey, and its first printed history was made in 1845. Nonetheless, it is one of the key places in England for the arrival and spread of Christianity. Somewhere near the old Roman town of Dorchester, the missionary Birinus baptised the Saxon King, Cynegils, in 635, and was, in all probability, given the territory of the West Saxon kingdom as his see. Present at the occasion was the Christian monarch of Northumberland, Oswald, aiding an alliance with the Saxons against Mercia.

King Cynegils may have lived nearby, in the royal 'tun' of Benson, which would fit a recognisable pattern of the twinning of new minster with royal vill, during the early centuries of Christian expansion in southern England. Whatever the reason for the general area of the religious conversion, Birinus chose Dorchester for the building of his church. The minster has become, in turn, a cathedral, a medieval abbey, and a parish church, albeit on a grand scale. It has suffered neglect and revival, and several major building and restoration phases, and all have been entwined with the life of the town around it. Now Kate Tiller has edited this book, subtitled, appropriately 'Church and people' – appropriate because its eight chapters alternate between describing the physical body of the church, its survival over centuries of changing religious circumstances, and the religious life of its town.

It proceeds along a chronological line, beginning with a generous nod towards Dorchester before Birinus and ending with the on-going work of restoration funded by the Dorchester Abbey Trust, its major and splendid results well visible by 2005. Imbalances are inevitable from the uneven evidence available for over thirteen centuries of Christianity – leading, for example, to one chapter for 634–1536, one for 1920–2005. But they are handled well enough for the book simultaneously to be a fine history of Dorchester and yet also a practical guide which can be taken in hand for a walk around the church. The charts, maps and architectural diagrams are exceptionally clear and helpful. They range from the chronology and ground-plan in Kate Tiller's introduction, through geophysical and archaeological plans of the site and the church at varying dates, maps showing Dorchester's waxing and waning as an episcopal see (the biggest in England in 1066) to a step-by-step tour of the present church.

Graham Keevil first looks at the archaeology, drawing our attention instantly to one of the critical things about the founding of the church: it was built in a landscape long covered with signs of occupation, from the Neolithic 'ritual complex' nearby (including the famous Cursus) to Bronze Age burial mounds, Iron Age fort and settlement, and the walled Roman town. He raises questions about how much of the Saxon church might remain, and the interesting – if unanswerable – possibility that the unusual positioning of the medieval cloister, to the north, rather than the south, of the monastic church, suggests that some Saxon structures, perhaps a graveyard, were still in use and influencing the layout.

Kate Tiller and James Bond write the chapter covering the seven centuries from Birinus's foundation to the Dissolution. Dorchester was a cathedral in three different incarnations, first Saxon, until the new Wessex See was created in Winchester (and Birinus's bones moved there) and twice Mercian. The second Mercian See gave it its greatest territorial stretch, when the diocese reached from the Thames to the Humber. The first Norman bishop of this large diocese was Remigius, responsible for the rebuild of the old church which lay out much of the present ground-plan. This cathedral church was to become a monastery of the Arrouaisian branch of the Augustinian order, in which the local monks in Dorchester were famously lax by the Dissolution in 1536. As well as major enlarging and rebuilding in the fourteenth century, some of the church's finest objects belong to this period, such as the famous sculpture of the knight, Richard de Valance, who died in 1282.

It was Dorchester's good fortune – despite the maintenance burden on the parish ever since – that one of its citizens, Richard Beauforest, bought the chancel of the Abbey for £140 after the Dissolution, and left the whole monastic church to fellow-parishioners in his will. He has what Kate Tiller calls a 'modest brass' in an unobtrusive place, for so key a figure in the church's history.

Nicholas Doggett takes the Abbey's story from then until 1800, detailing some of the losses, among them the shrine of St Birinus (he had been restored to the Abbey from Winchester and brought in useful pilgrimage income) the medieval rood loft, the tower, and eventually the north transept. There were frequent disputes over the costs of repairing such depredations, and the layout became both dilapidated and confusing. Stukely, in 1736, wrote that 'the whole cathedral seems to consist of two churches at least, join'd together.' More remodelling and repairs took place, some financed by the Fettiplaces, who owned the tithes, and a number of antiquaries began to make enthusiastic investigations of the church, describing its age and decaying treasures, and drawing detailed interior views. Calls for more wholesale restoration grew.

Geoffrey Tyack's authoritative chapter brings the Abbey's physical fabric from 1800–1920, and details the arrival of OAHS after the revival of church activity with the Oxford Movement. The Abbey was a Peculiar until 1837, and funding for conservation had always been a problem. Church rates covered essentials only, and the Abbey was served by non-resident clergy or their poorly-paid deputies. The OAHS commissioned Robert Cranston to report on the fabric in 1844. The society planned to raise funds in support of a 'model restoration' (in a major medieval church not far from Oxford) which could set standards for further work elsewhere. The chapter then outlines the work carried out over many years of the nineteenth century, by Cranston himself, the builder John Castle, and later by Butterfield, Scott and several other notable architects, builders and artists. The arrival to the living in 1856 of a new, resident, and wealthy incumbent, William MacFarlane – a staunch supporter of High Church doctrines – carried the work forward with energy, and he built his own handsome vicarage. 'The Victorians', Tyack says, 'not only rescued [many ancient buildings] from neglect and decrepitude, but also enhanced their beauty. Such was the case at Dorchester Abbey.'

Kate Tiller covers the wavering fortunes of the town around the Abbey over the nineteenth century – a not untypical story of commercial decline after the coaching trade dwindled (without the compensating fortune of a railway link) and agriculture under stress around the time of late parliamentary enclosure in 1861. Public education was in a 'torpor' until after the 1850s. One striking local theme is that of persistent religious dissent, coupled with reasonable toleration and co-existence. The name of the recusant Davey family recurs over the centuries, leaders in a group of local yeoman and tenant families who sustained Catholicism from the Reformation onwards – with a domestic chapel in their own house at Overy – until the building of their own new church of St Birinus in 1849, paid for by John Davey. (A 'Phanatic brood' of seventeenth-century, Protestant Dissenters, too, was reported worshipping in a barn in the same hamlet of Overy.) And yet the Daveys bought the tithes of the Abbey from the Fettiplaces, and paid for nineteenth century repairs to the chancel, and John Davey's funeral made national news when, a leading Catholic, he was nonetheless buried in the Abbey graveyard in 1863, after a funeral service at which his relatives may, or may not (Reverend MacFarlane thought not) have behaved disrespectfully to Anglicans.

The chapter by Dorchester surgeon and recorder of community life, Nicholas Dudley, is called 'Dorchester and its Abbey Recollected'. Not all vicars, nor their styles of very High Church service and ritual, nor even their behaviour with village ladies, are remembered with equal pleasure. With the arrival in 1957 of Harold Best, the first of a series of young and energetic clergymen, services in the Abbey became more accessible, and relations with

community were enhanced and warmed. Best, a man of 'heavenly...humour, patience and tolerance' managed to perfection a relationship with the energetic American, Edith Stedman, who in turn translated her love of the Abbey into fruitful fund-raising in America, to help building and renovations in the Abbey and its garden, the restoration of the great East window in memory of Sir Winston Churchill, an annual festival, and the transformation of the old guest house into the Museum of today with a shop beneath. One of the shop's best sellers is the Abbey Guest House Cook Book, another inspiration of Edith Stedman's – suitably, in light of recusant history in Dorchester, a joint project with the Roman Catholic church of St Birinus. Her delightful portrait corbel is near the west door.

Finally, one can walk Kate Tiller's route around the exterior and interior features of the Abbey. The windows inspire universal awe, the beautiful lead font is a rare monastic survival, and some of us might identify with the inscription to poor Sarah Fletcher who 'could not bear the Rude Shakes and Jostlings' of the world, and died in 1799 'a Martyr to Excessive Sensibility'. One feature I miss is the grotesque stone head in the south chancel aisle. Is he, as a verger once told me, a Green Man? Such small mysteries lie among the other pleasures of a church which began its life amidst Roman ruins, in a country still largely, otherwise, pagan.

The publisher, Simon Haviland, designed and produced this handsomely printed book as his own contribution to the Dorchester Abbey Conservation Trust, and all proceeds from its sale go to the same excellent cause.

CHRISTINE HOLMES

Giles Brindley, *Oxford: Crime, Death & Debauchery*, Sutton Publishing, Oxfordshire Books 2006. £14.99

This is a breezily-written miscellany of murder, riot, robbery, fraud, suicide, fatal accidents and other sensational events in and around Oxford, from the thirteenth to the nineteenth centuries but concentrating on the years between 1630 and 1850. The stories, some only a line or two long and others several pages, have been culled from Assize, Quarter Session and University Court records and *Jackson's Oxford Journal*.

This is not intended to be a serious or academic book and, apart from the bibliography, no sources have been given for any of the events described. The author has told each story in his own words, so no useable first-hand documents or extracts have been included. No attempt has been made to offer any kind of commentary or narrative on the subjects of crime, punishment, disorder, town-gown conflict or any of the other topics covered. There is no suggestion of change or development over the years. From the historian's point of view this is a pity, considering the years spent by the author in the archives, as it renders the book less useful. Some general readers, however, will find it a racy and entertaining read.

JAMES NASH

Tim Jordan, *Cotswold Barns*. Tempus, 2006. Pp. 159 and illustrations throughout. £17.99

As agriculture is undergoing yet further change and traditional farm buildings are being converted to domestic use at an increasing rate, a book devoted to the Cotswold barn is welcome and timely. The author is enthusiastic about his subject and the aim as stated on the rear cover is worthwhile – ‘a systematic look at the design, construction method, materials and changing use of the Cotswold barn and its place in the rural economy and landscape’.

The book begins with an introduction to the geography and geology of the Cotswolds, including the author's rationale for the boundaries of his chosen area and the place of barns in the landscape. He then discusses regional characteristics, mainly related to the sources and historical use of oolitic limestone, including as roofing slate. Chapter 3 considers construction methods including timber-framing of the box and cruck traditions, with a section on dating methods and a diversion into pigeon and owl-holes. Early medieval barns are then discussed using examples at Middle Littleton, Stanway, Bredon, Ashleworth, Frocester, Bradford-on-Avon, Siddington, Coxwell and Swalcliffe, with a few paragraphs on Oxford colleges as landlords.

Chapter 5 describes agricultural change and its consequences for farm buildings from the Roman period to the present day, with more on owl-holes and illustrations of marks scratched on stonework. A miscellany chapter discusses porches, stairs, decoration, dovecotes, and conversions. The final chapter looks at various new uses which have been found for redundant barns. There is a glossary of terms, a bibliography, and an index. The book is profusely illustrated with maps, drawings of construction details and a considerable number of photographs, including 16 pages in colour.

Cotswold Barns supplies a mine of useful information which will enhance understanding of these buildings and so enrich and enliven a walk or tour in the area. It should also be essential reading for anyone living in a barn conversion or contemplating converting a farm building into a house: the wealth of features and detail, particularly tally and apotropaic marks, can so easily be lost if they are not noticed, interpreted and conserved.

For the reader who might wish to go further than this, the study is less satisfactory. There are very few published regional studies of agricultural buildings – Edward Peters' 1969 study in Staffordshire was pioneering but there was a gap of 13 years until Eurwyn Wiliam's volume on north-east Wales appeared. To this reviewer's knowledge, no further regional studies have been published apart from local area surveys and the selective and wider report on farmsteads in five areas of England, published in 1997 by the Royal Commission. How wonderful it would have been if the Cotswold barn had been given the systematic and analytical treatment of these publications, but that study has yet to be written.

The essence of a regional vernacular study is to identify the local building traditions in a coherent area as they developed over time in response to various influences. So, firstly, is the area well defined? It is not be easy to pin down exactly what one means by the Cotswolds, but the author's argument for extending the Cotswolds to include Bredon, Ashleworth and Great Coxwell on the grounds that these barns were built with local stone and were key buildings in their communities is not specific to this area, and on the same basis he should have included Lacock, of all the medieval barns perhaps the one most integrated into its community. On the other hand, it could be argued that Great Coxwell is also anomalous in that its internal timber frame has a closer relationship to the other Cisterian barns at Beaulieu St Leonard's and Ter Doest (near Bruges) than to other Cotswold barns.

A definition based on geology is probably the most appropriate for a regional study of vernacular buildings, as only in exceptional cases would building materials have been carried long distances. The geology will also have influenced the type of agriculture and hence the need for particular types of building. However, if one is going to consider regional

building characteristics, it is necessary to go beyond the simple truism that the early barns were built with local materials and try to determine the boundaries beyond which differences – due to agricultural patterns or building traditions – begin to appear. Thus, as one moves away from the Cotswolds towards Oxford, one may see, even in stone barns, roof structures more typical of the timber-framing traditions south of the Thames. Some possible local features are not mentioned: this reviewer would love to know the geographical spread of a distinctive slit window with a diamond-shaped opening above, forming a candle-flame shape. It appears in some barns in the Barrington – Burford area, but is it very local or does it have a wider distribution?

Despite the title, there is more in this book than a study of barns, indeed the author's use of the term can be confusing. He shows a 'group of barns' at Duntisbourne Leer (p.15), yet the identifiable buildings in his photograph seem like cartsheds, stables and granaries. Elsewhere, he digresses into dovecotes, granaries and other agricultural buildings. While this shows that in many cases barns formed part of a group of structures, there is little discussion of the connections between them and the layout of the working farmstead. There is no discussion of the Victorian model farm and the work of Arthur Young (referred to as a 'journalist' rather than as Secretary to the Board of Agriculture) in the Cotswold counties is hardly mentioned. The barn is also considered to be a rural building type, but barns in towns are a feature of a number of Cotswold towns, not only at Lacock, but also in Burford and Chipping Campden.

The author shows that the building we recognise as a barn may have been used for a number of different purposes since it was built, but this reviewer was left confused by statements such as 'the abbot of Gloucester was shearing over 10,000 sheep and at around 1300 built the great barn at Frocester', which implies some connection between barns and medieval wool production, but this needs investigating: were some 'barns' in fact wool stores?

It is not easy to write about the construction, use and development history of a building type because invariably many aspects, materials, roof coverings, doors, windows, fixtures and fittings and uses of space will have changed over time, responding to economics, agricultural change, fashions and so on in an interactive way. However one chooses to divide up the subject there will be some repetition, but some of this could have been removed by sensitive editing. Then there is the matter of time frame. Apart from the well-known high status medieval barns, the author does not offer much guidance as to the dates of the buildings he refers to. He can be cavalier about timescales – what are we to make of, 'The barn ... next to the Norman church was most likely to have been built before the church. It is believed to ... date from the thirteenth century. The stonework ... has a number of details which are characteristic of the Anglo-Saxon period.' (p.80)? And again on p.53, 'crownposts were a somewhat later phenomenon' with no indication of a date range for this roof type. However, perhaps more to the point, the author does not show us a barn with a crownpost roof, and indeed if such a building survives, this reviewer would be very interested indeed to learn about it.

Sadly, the lack of an editorial pencil has allowed a number of such inconsistencies and ambiguities to slip through. There are many statements for which a reference would have been helpful – the 'recent research' on Bredon barn (p.73), for example. There are also unsubstantiated assertions such as, 'there would have been scores of peasant barns' [in the Middle Ages] (p.93) and there are books referred to in the text which do not appear in the bibliography (Fowler, 1982, and Sturge Gretton, 1914, for example).

The book ends somewhat abruptly. A concluding chapter would have been helpful, to pull together his conclusions, outline the scope for further research, and perhaps to suggest what

we should be doing now to capture the collective memory of the working farmstead through recording its buildings and the ways in which they were being used in the later 20th century.

Despite these criticisms, Cotswold Barns is a valuable addition to the bookshelf, and if it stimulates others to take more interest in barns and their conservation, and to develop his work into a soundly based regional study it will have more than served its purpose.

DAVID CLARK

William Hawkes (ed.), *The Diaries of Sanderson Miller of Radway*. Publications of the Dugdale Society, volume XLI, 2005. 448 pp, 46 black and white illustrations.

The book consists of the Preface, Introduction, the fully annotated text of the Diary of 1749–50, that of Diary of 1756–7, a Memoir of James Menteath, Sources and References, Appendix A: Catalogue of Miller's architectural work and landscaping work, Appendix B: Further manuscripts of Sanderson Miller 1750 and 1756.

Miller (1716–80), was the Squire of Radway, a small parish in south Warwickshire, not far from the Oxfordshire border. His biographer describes him as an 'Amateur gentleman architect and enthusiastic practitioner of the early Georgian Gothic Revival.' The adjective 'amateur' is important as any payment accepted for services rendered would have demoted such a practitioner from the status of gentleman to that of someone 'in trade' and as such tainted with the 'stain' of 'gain'.

It is not obvious at first glance why this volume should be of interest to Oxfordshire historians but closer investigation reveals several reasons, not the least of which is the fact that many of the sources used by the Editor are in the Bodleian Library, the Oxfordshire Record Office or the Centre for Oxfordshire Studies.

Miller's works in Oxfordshire fall into several categories: those which have since been demolished, those attributed to him or described as 'less certain but possible' and those in which he was involved in an advisory capacity only. They include: Ambrosden House and church, Broughton Castle, Mongewell vicarage Wroxton Abbey and church, the Little Manor at Adderbury, the garden of Bucknell Manor House, Middleton Stoney Park, Shelswell Park, Swadcliffe Park, Swerford Park and All Souls College where in 1750 the old library was remodelled as rooms.

Illustrations of Oxfordshire sites associated with Miller included in the book are a watercolour of Ambrosden House c 1760, the exterior of the chapel of Wroxton Abbey as it was in 1963, its interior in 1983 and the temple on the Mount in 1781, the interior of the old library at All Souls College in 1928 and the ceiling of the great hall of Broughton Castle in 1970.

Outside Oxfordshire Miller was involved in work at Hagley Hall, Worcestershire, Stowe, Shugborough, Durham Castle, Bishop Auckland Palace, The Leaseowes, Halesowen, for fellow Oxonian William Shenstone, his own home Radway Grange and many other places in Warwickshire.

Miller matriculated as a Gentleman Commoner in 1734 at St Mary Hall (later absorbed by Oriel College), but proved to be another of those Oxford men who did not proceed to a degree. Nevertheless 'Oxford was to provide many of his friendships and to influence the rest of his life.' Indeed, for a man of Miller's social status in the eighteenth century, the idea of coming to Oxford was to make contacts with others of a similar background rather than to benefit from any academic training. This is exactly what he seems to have done, for he was good at what would now be termed networking. His observations on University life at that period are amusing and informative and it was at Oxford that he met his great friend, James Menteith whose Memoir accompanies the Diaries.

Many letters sent to Miller were recovered in 1950 from his descendants in Canada and are now in the Warwickshire County Record Office. Because his work was not done for commercial gain there are of course no records of payment. When the family memorabilia was dispersed by being thrown away or put up for sale, the diaries came to light. The first, covering the period from October 1749 to September 1750, gives details of estate management, architectural design and the economic and social life of its writer and his circle. The second, which runs from April 1756 to January 1757 opens with death of his mother and much of its content records his own declining health and increasing ability to cope with the demanding life of a country squire. Despite that Miller was a friend of Pitt the Elder and the struggle to get the Inclosure Act for Radway Field through Parliament was 'critical to his financial stability and survival'. This was, however, the period of two of his leading commissions, the Shire Hall at Warwick and the great hall of Lacock Abbey.

The texts of the Diaries themselves take up some 275 pages. Miller's shorthand entries are given in italics and below them is an expanded version supplied by the editor. The diary section of the book would prove heavy going for those without considerable knowledge of and interest in this period and part of the country. But there are some hidden gems which entertain or instruct in the fields of gardening, health, food and drink, expenses, music, social life, leisure and of course architectural ideas and developments.

Miller suffered from indigestion and in later life from serious depression which resulted in bouts of insanity. The 55-page Memoir of James Menteath which was written while he was confined in a private and humane asylum in Lincolnshire shows evidence of Miller's disturbed mental condition. It nevertheless provides an inside into Oxford student life in the 1730s and there are frequent references – not all of them flattering – to people and places mainly in the Banbury area but also as far south as Thame and Long Crendon.

Although the entire work is a valuable contribution to eighteenth-century studies, it is the 43-page introduction which will probably be the most interesting and useful part of the book to the general reader for its summarizing of the activities of a country gentleman.

MARILYN YURDAN