

## REVIEWS

**EAST SHEFFORD CHURCH:** IVOR BULMER-THOMAS; *Redundant Churches Fund*; 1978; 33 pp. 16 plates; £1.00.

This modest-sized redundant church has received a lot of care and attention, not least the tribute paid to it in this present study. It has been more fortunate than many for, although it ceased to be used for regular worship in 1870, considerable maintenance was done which ensured its survival to 1958, when the newly-founded Friends of Friendless Churches foiled serious proposals for its demolition. And since 1972 major works have been carried out by the Redundant Churches Fund. The church itself is an aisleless building consisting of an eleventh–twelfth century nave, a thirteenth century chancel and a sixteenth century south chapel. Possibly there was a church here in Saxon times for there is much evidence of occupation. But the very limited excavation of the mid-1970s gave no further information, a useful reminder that limited work is rarely much use in church archaeology. The church, then, is worth preserving as a good example of an unelaborated parish church, while the interior includes some sixteenth century glass, a few medieval floor-tiles, the mid-fifteenth century Fettiplace tomb with its excellent alabaster figures and, most important, the decorative fresco into which a Norman window has been inserted; there is other painting over the chancel arch which predates its fifteenth century widening. A major object in the church was the very rare *salade* (helmet) of 1480, but for safety's sake the original is on loan in the Tower of London, although a good fibre-glass replica is in the church.

All these points and others are elaborated in the very clear text and excellent photographs. The first part of the work is a selective history of the church and its contents; the second, under the guise of Architectural Notes, is a very informative guide. There is also a short Appendix that includes Presentation, Rectors,

Records, Church Plate and Benefactions. Such things are done in many other church guides, though rarely as well as here. But what does mark this out is the scholarly foot-noting and the full bibliography, neither of which impinges on the general reader but is unobtrusively there for those who wish to know more. Production standards are high and the only slight misprint is Walford for Welford (p. 29). Historians frequently publish documents they rescue, but it is very rare for anyone to play a key part in saving a church as a prelude to writing about it. On both counts Mr Bulmer-Thomas gains high praise, and Berkshire gains a distinguished addition to its church literature.

C. F. SLADE

**HISTORIC TOWNS IN BERKSHIRE:** An archaeological appraisal; Berkshire Archaeological Committee Publication No. 2; GRENVILLE G. ASTILL; Reading; 1978; 113 pp.; £2.50.

This work was produced by Dr Astill while he was director of the Berkshire Archaeological Unit at the request of the Department of the Environment. Other surveys in the series are concerned with river gravels, plateau gravels and the Berkshire Downs (reviewed below), the reason for them all being an attempt to investigate archaeological possibilities in advance of development and, given limited excavation resources, to decide as far as possible where priorities should lie. The fact that this is a policy document accounts for its layout, with each town being uniformly looked at under the headings of History; Documentary Potential; Medieval Topography; Planning Proposals; Development; Archaeological Potential; Archaeological Policy. Each town has two plans—medieval features; redevelopment—all to the same scale and admirably clear. Twelve boroughs are discussed—Aldermaston, Cookham, Hungerford, Lambourn, Maidenhead, Newbury, New

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Windsor, Old Windsor, Reading, Thatcham, Wargrave, Wokingham—all, in fact, that remain within the “new” Berkshire. It is a little sad that government policy has removed other boroughs deeply involved in Berkshire’s history—even the former county town, Wallingford, has gone—but the present work is concerned with Berkshire as it is. The identification of these twelve as boroughs is fully and clearly explained in the Introductory Section. This section also has brief general remarks for the county on Saxon and medieval towns, Planning Recommendations, Archaeological Recommendations and, for good measure, mention of a few settlements with markets that failed to become boroughs.

So there are two ways this work can be judged. The first is as showing archaeological possibilities and indicating an archaeological programme, and here the well-made cases and clarity of presentation could, if anything could, evoke archaeological sympathies in even the most non-archaeological planner or developer. Local archaeologists will also find it an embracive blue-print for action. But the second way, and one that much concerns a society such as this, is on its archaeological and historical content. The accounts of the towns are, as Dr Astill himself says, based entirely on secondary work. That much of this work, even where it exists, is half a century or more old is a reflection on the patchy state of serious local history in Berkshire. But the presentation of this in clear coherent and digested form is very welcome. Even more welcome is the possibility of easy comparing of town with town now that the material is assembled under one cover. Reading, with ten pages, has the longest account, New Windsor has eight pages, Aldermaston with four pages, has the briefest. This sort of length has the great advantage of enabling Dr Astill to correct general errors from his knowledge of modern work on medieval English Boroughs and yet to avoid being enmeshed in detail that can only be elucidated from original evidence. It is interesting to speculate at what point a work becomes original: here, for example, secondary sources are used, but the clarity, presentation

and concept make it much more than a sum of its parts. There is also a selective but interesting general bibliography and another for the individual towns. Altogether this very readable and well-produced volume puts Berkshire in a strong position among counties where similar projects are being carried out.

C. F. SLADE

THE ARCHAEOLOGY OF THE BERKSHIRE DOWNS: AN INTRODUCTORY SURVEY; Berkshire Archaeological Committee Publication No. 3; JULIAN RICHARDS; 1978; 94 pp., 35 figs, 9 tables, 6 plates; £2.50.

This is the third survey published by the Berkshire Archaeological Unit and the first substantial study of the archaeology of the Berkshire chalklands. A work of this type has been long overdue and it is gratifying to discover how closely the results of fieldwork in Berkshire now correspond to those from neighbouring counties. This is clearly a region of very great archaeological potential but has seen little extended work since the pioneering study of Rhodes published over 25 years ago.

Richards’ useful survey is based on three main sources, none of which has previously been exploited on a sufficient scale. The Berkshire Unit has now assembled an efficient and informative Sites and Monuments Record from the rather scattered information which was available before it came into being. It has undertaken full and thorough analysis of the available air cover, in particular a number of very informative surveys commissioned by the County Planning Department; and finally the author has carried out quite extensive fieldwork on the ground, not only on sites discovered by other means, but also to check the apparent gaps in the distribution of sites and finds.

The presentation of the evidence is clear, comprehensive and accurate. The illustrations are of particularly high quality and a great amount of thought and effort has gone into the design and production of this attractive study. Its scope is wide and it ranges from the Stone Age to the Medieval period. A balance is carefully maintained between different

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specialist interests and the author's proposals for future research are well judged and sensible. He places a proper emphasis on the evolution of the landscape as a whole, rather than the piecemeal digging of individual sites. He also lays a correct emphasis on the role of surface survey. Among the more useful results of this work have been a recovery of a variety of early prehistoric occupation areas; an updated distribution of Berkshire barrows; the mapping of a number of very extensive field systems and the recognition of a major Roman rural site near Lambourn. Equally interesting is the apparent lack of post-Roman material from the chalk.

This paper deserves a wide audience. Still more, its proposals should be implemented.

RICHARD BRADLEY

THE MAKING OF THE MIDDLE THAMES:  
DAVID GORDON WILSON; Spurbooks; 1977;  
159 pp.; £3.95.

It is not an easy subject that Mr Wilson has chosen, and it must be said that title and contents do not entirely match: the title is embracive and causal; the contents are essentially descriptive, and would better suit a title like "aspects of the past of the middle Thames". Within these limits, however, the author has collected and organised considerable information both written and pictorial. There are 73 illustrations, many from old photographs; and although reproduction at times leaves something to be desired their interest and appositeness are a pleasure. To find and select these was a considerable task and for this readers are very much in the author's debt. Local history is not easy to write for the question that is bound to occur is how far does the part reflect the whole? How, in fact, did activity here compare with that on other parts of the Thames or, even more, with that elsewhere? Did the area "make" itself as a pioneer and innovator; or did it keep pace with other areas; or did it lag in the application of ideas and techniques developed elsewhere? These questions are bound to arise from the interesting information the author has

collected. Most of this information is directly related to the river, but in Chapter I, "The People of the Valley", the people seem to have been written about just because they happened to be there. This chapter also contains some doubtful points of general history including that of the virtual absence of rural change between the coming of the Saxons and the nineteenth century (pp. 18, 36), a contradiction of all modern and not so modern research. In fact this chapter could well have been replaced by something more directly concerned with the river. The book is designed for the non-expert, but studies in local history, essentially the field for the interested amateur, should contain brief references and suggestions for further reading. The same goes for the Index which, for local history, must be full and accurate. In the present one many persons and places have no mention while other references are selected on some arbitrary principle—Reading, for example, is mentioned fifteen times but only two of these appear in the Index. But these blemishes do not mar the main part of the text and the illustrations, and this book should give much pleasure to those who live on or near the middle Thames.

C. F. SLADE

THE EXCAVATION OF AN IRON AGE SETTLEMENT, BRONZE AGE RING-DITCHES AND ROMAN FEATURES AT ASHVILLE TRADING ESTATE, ABINGDON (OXFORDSHIRE) 1974-76; MICHAEL PARRINGTON; Oxfordshire Archaeological Unit and the Council for British Archaeology; 1978; 139 pp. £8.00.

This well-produced but expensive volume is the first excavation monograph from the Oxfordshire Archaeological Unit and augurs well for the future. It is well written, lucidly assembled, intelligently thought out and beautifully illustrated.

It is concerned with part of an important and very productive unenclosed Iron Age settlement, which also saw some occupation in the Roman period. Underlying it were two Bronze Age ring ditches. The settlement resembles a number of others in the Thames

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Valley, and the merit of this report lies, not in the novelty of the Ashville site, but in the intelligence with which it was approached. There were, it is true, some strokes of good fortune: the informative Bronze Age burials, the discovery of a wooden ard share, the finding of a Roman cemetery. But the main features of this report are the remarkable skill of the excavator in resolving the daunting palimpsest of different features, and the initiative and originality of his specialist contributors. The pottery report by Dee De Roche is the first quantified account of Iron Age material from the Upper Thames and does much to unlock the site's chronology, at the same time providing reliable criteria by which to judge earlier and less disciplined work. Chris Balkwill offers a splendid account of the finds from the two ring ditches and shows them to be of real typological and chronological significance. Too often finds from the gravels have been neglected in favour of those from the chalk, the precise reverse of Bronze Age priorities! The bone report by Bob Wilson and his collaborators is perhaps the best such study for any Iron Age site in Britain. It is wide ranging, enquiring and well documented, and reveals illuminating contrasts between the Ashville site and its neighbours. Unusually it takes account of the processes of site formation. If I single out Martin Jones' account of the botanical remains as the main achievement of this volume, this is no reflection on the other contributors: rather, this paper is the first thorough analysis of the plant remains from a British Iron Age site and sets a very high standard. It is very well documented and formidably intelligent. Jones has been able to release an astonishing range of information from his samples, relating in the main to the site's economy, environment and productivity. Still more, he is the one botanist who has produced satisfactory evidence of the location and arrangement of crop processing from a British prehistoric site. His use of quantitative methods is an object lesson in elegant procedure.

All these contributions are neatly synthesised in the excavator's discussion,

which is a model of its kind. Without such thoughtful work in the field, none of the specialist reports would have been worthwhile. This is essentially a collaboration and should be welcomed as such. It is exactly the kind of work we need: fewer dramatic sorties into sites which seem to be unique, and more truly enquiring studies of those which seem to be commonplace.

RICHARD BRADLEY

AN ILLUSTRATED HISTORY OF FARMING: PETER WILKES; Spurbooks Limited; 1978; 159 pp. £5.00.

This book is rather like a country stroll—short, entertaining, mentally untiring and thoroughly enjoyable. Despite its title it makes no pretensions to be comprehensive and its scope is really an outline of the fundamental changes that took place in British agriculture in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries with emphasis on changing equipment. It is designed for the interested non-specialist, and so presents general conclusions avoiding all complexities and technicalities in its essentially narrative account. The subject is potentially an interesting one, but what makes a major contribution to the realisation of this and to the enjoyment of the book is the author's style, clear, unobtrusive, balanced, with well-chosen phraseology and with that most elusive of all qualities, the ability to hold the reader's interest. All the 75 illustrations are from photographs and illustrate most of the things mentioned in the text. They will certainly provoke nostalgia in older readers and it is pleasant to have so varied a selection in one accessible volume. A book of this quality can easily cause its readers to want more, so it is a pity that there could not have been some indication of further reading—half a page would have been ample. The major weakness of the book is its index which is selective and illogical and certainly does not do justice to the text. But the index is not of the first importance in a short, general book and most readers will not even notice it. And it is a book

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that deserves many readers, not least in providing a context for local developments.

C. F. SLADE

**THE BOOK OF MAIDENHEAD: TOM MIDDLETON;** Barracuda Books, Chesham; 1975; 148 pp. £6.75.

**THE BOOK OF SONNING: ANGELA PERKINS;** Barracuda Books, Chesham; 1977; 168 pp. £8.95.

When I first heard that Barracuda Books were bringing out this new series I was a little doubtful, as I thought they might turn out to be yet another history of the chosen towns, at an expensive purchase price. As it was I need not have worried because the upsurge of interest in local history had provided a guaranteed market and the printed list of subscribers prior to publication confirmed this.

*The Book of Maidenhead* and *The Book of Sonning* are no exception to the rule. Where they score over the earlier histories of the area written by Victorians and later authors is in their precision. All the facts are there to make interesting reading for the layman and historian alike, without being cluttered with irrelevancies as had been previous practice. Both books have been generously illustrated with photographs and documents carefully selected and undoubtedly difficult to assemble. Barracuda Books have done well to choose local experts to write the series who have the knowledge or know where to find it.

In the case of the Maidenhead book, who better to choose than Tom Middleton as the chronicler, with thirty years experience as editor of the *Maidenhead Advertiser*. In his own inimitable journalistic style, the account of the town's history is both fascinating and amusing.

Angela Perkins is a Sonning Parish Councillor and an officer of the Berkshire Local History Association. In some ways her task was greater, as the records of Sonning were more widespread, but the result is a very readable book on a village with an interesting Saxon foundation. All credit to this author,

who like Mr. Middleton clearly shows a love for her community.

I will not attempt to criticise the contents of the two books. It is sufficient to say that both accounts are fully comprehensive, and look forward to reading Tom Middleton's account of "Royal Berkshire" and perhaps another offering from Angela Perkins in the future.

L. J. OVER

**VICTORIAN AND EDWARDIAN WINDMILLS AND WATERMILLS FROM OLD PHOTOGRAPHS: J. KENNETH MAJOR and MARTIN WATTS;** Batsford; 1977; hardback £3.95.

Our vice-president, Mr Major, continues his pursuit of mills. He is an authority in this field and his publications on the subject are numerous. This is shown in the present work where effective selection results from a real knowledge of the subject. The book consists of a very brief introduction, a glossary of technical terms and 137 photographs arranged in six sections. The publication of "pictorial" books, consisting of little other than illustrations and notes is an aspect of modern emphasis on visual aids, so it is on its illustrations that the book is mainly judged. These are from photographs, none later than 1910, and so are interesting in the history of photography. A number of these are of high standard, others not so good; so that in some cases clarity is sacrificed to authenticity. But it is the authenticity that is important for setting these mills in the context of the period. The comments are interesting, so much so that they invite the criticism of being too brief. No illustration comes from Berkshire, but, given the large time and space, selection had to be rigorous. But let it not be forgotten that Berkshire had some very worthy mills.

C. F. SLADE

**THE UNIVERSITY OF READING: the first fifty years: J. C. HOLT;** Reading; 1977; 372 pp. 47 pls; £5.50.

Reading University has twice been written up. The first study, *The Making of a*

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*University*, by William Childs, ended in 1926 with the University Charter; this second one takes the story of the University to 1976. The two volumes differ greatly in size but even more in concept. The first was written by the Principal of the College (1903–1926) who became first vice-chancellor of the University, although his connection with the college actually began in 1893 when he was appointed lecturer in history. He was thus intimately involved with the developments he describes and the autobiographical element in his book is very strong. Professor Holt was likewise in the History Department, being appointed Professor of History in 1966, and he acted as dean of his Faculty from 1972 to 1976. So for the last decade of the relevant half-century he was very much involved in affairs, although not in the ostensible seat of power. Autobiography could thus have comparatively little place and Professor Holt has entirely excluded it—there is not a single first-person pronoun. So we have that much more difficult thing, a work of history; and that even more difficult thing, a work of near-contemporary history. But whether historical work be concerned with the near present or the remote past it must be judged on the same criteria—the quantity and quality of material

used, the deductions from that material, the synthesising of those deductions. And on all these counts this book is an excellent piece of historical writing. It is also a very readable bit of historical writing, an important consideration, for technical excellence and readability do not always go together. Obviously there can be other interpretations for certain happenings—inevitable where causation is involved—but all interpretations in this book follow fairly from the evidence. Those involved with Reading University, of course, will have the added interest that comes from detailed knowledge of persons and places mentioned. Inevitably much detail had to be omitted, but omission seems to have been fairly shared among all organisations, and the resulting gain in clarity has been made without sacrifice of accuracy. Possibly an Appendix tabulating numbers—staff, students, non-academic staff etc.—could have been added with no great increase in length. But this is only a minor point. This volume is a very satisfactory piece of writing, very well produced, and can be equally enjoyed by whatever reader, from national professional to local amateur.

C. F. SLADE