

BOOK REVIEWS

Peter Hopkins and Keith Penny (eds), *A Priory Founded: Sheriff Gilbert at Merton*, Merton Historical Society, 2019. Softback, 44pp, five colour and b&w illus, ISBN 978 1 903899 78 6. Available from The Publications Secretary, 57 Templecombe Way, Morden, Surrey SM4 4JF; email: publications@mertonhistoricalsociety.org.uk, price £4; members £3.20, both + p&p (currently £1.35).

The 12th century was a period of great intellectual and artistic creativity – the ‘12th-century renaissance’ – and also of profound religious change. It was when purgatory was invented, when polyphony was invented, and when various new religious orders appeared, such as the Cistercians and Augustinians. The emergence of the Augustinians was gradual and their origins are still a little hazy, but they became one of the most important orders in the British Isles, and Merton Priory was one of their most important houses. Founded in 1114, and then again (at its permanent location) in 1117, Merton Priory became a centre of learning and, to an extent, royal administration. It is therefore perhaps curious that there is comparatively little published on its history since Alfred Heales transcribed the cartulary in the 1890s. Miller & Saxby’s *The Augustinian Priory of St Mary Merton: Excavations 1976–90* (MOLAS 2007) deals comprehensively with the archaeology. Lionel Green’s *A Priory Revealed* (Merton Historical Society 2005) is a good introduction – but only an introduction. Merton is still waiting for a comprehensive ‘biography’.

One crucial set of documents for the Merton historian are those concerning its founder, Gilbert. Indeed, this set is useful for any historian interested in 12th-century piety and religion, and its translation and publication by Merton Historical Society is of tremendous value. I have to declare a personal interest here. As a student of Merton Priory, I was in contact with one of the editors, Peter Hopkins, about these documents – about certain aspects of Gilbert’s life or about meanings and connotations of phrases, discussion of which attested to the detailed eye with which Hopkins and his colleagues approached both text and history.

Gilbert the Norman was one of Henry I’s sheriffs who, in addition to being an able administrator, was a man of piety. As such, he did what a 12th century pious aristocrat should do and founded a religious house. Gilbert staffed his house with Augustinian canons – men in holy orders (priests, deacons, and so on) who wished to live like the Apostles, in poverty, chastity and community. This was a new order – indeed, it was not quite established by the time of Merton’s foundation, and was still feeling its way in terms of rules, customs and practices – and very much in favour with the court of Henry I and his wife Matilda. In his introduction, Hopkins gives good account of Gilbert and his relationship with both the king and queen and the canons of St Mary, Huntingdon, some of whom became the canons of Merton. He also mentions the problematic nature of discussing the Augustinians: because the order ‘emerged’ rather than was ‘created’, and because it had within it a huge diversity of houses, the reasons why someone would found an Augustinian house, rather than a Benedictine monastery, or become an Augustinian canon, rather than a monk, are still rather nebulous. Hopkins quotes the eminent religious historian C N L Brooke, who wrote that often we cannot tell the difference between canon and monk (p 6). This discussion is one reason why the publication of these documents, perceptively translated, is important, for the first of the documents, ‘In Praise of Sheriff Gilbert’, contains some illuminating material. The flexible nature of the Augustinians means that, with certain exceptions, describing houses founded by canons of another house as ‘daughter houses’ is not quite accurate (p 8), but in so doing, Hopkins lays open the question of what Merton’s influence was on other houses and, indeed, on the Order as a whole: we know, for example, that several houses took on the customs of Merton, even though we are not quite sure what those customs were.

On the foundation of Merton Priory, Hopkins writes about the niceties of medieval landowning with a pleasing succinctness – managing to explain subinfeudation, royal grants and carucates without the reader’s eyes crossing. Similarly, he introduces the reader to literary criticism and how to read the documents. The highly exaggerated language describing Gilbert’s piety in all the documents must be seen in terms of 12th-century religious fashion, the hagiographies of the day, and literary sources, biblical and classical. The texts were edited by M L Colker in 1970, and he identified two dozen quotations from the Bible, as well as references to Augustine and Virgil; the Merton Historical Society team has added to these. The notes on the translations are amusing as well as instructive, and the translations themselves are more than ‘fairly accurate’, as described modestly by the translation editor (Keith Penny, p 11) – who clearly had fun with the verse translation of the Epitaph; perhaps almost as much fun as its author had with his original verse.

This is an excellent instance of local history providing primary sources, not just of interest to the local historian, but of considerable use to the general medievalist. It is to be hoped that this will be one of many such booklets, helping to unearth the history of this great priory.

KATIE HAWKS

John Hickman, Carole Roberts, John W Brown and Stephen Williams, *Evacustes Phipson: his life and utopian views and an introduction to the Croydon paintings*, Croydon Natural History and Scientific Society Ltd, 2020, price £12. Softback, 108 pp, many b&w and colour illus. ISBN 978 0 906047 347

The authors, CNHSS and everyone involved in the production of this book are to be commended for rescuing Evacustes Phipson (1854–1931) from near-oblivion. Even the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, with its 60,000 biographies, has nothing to say about this extraordinary man. Edward Arthur Phipson was born into a well-to-do, cultured, Nonconformist family of engineers and manufacturers in free-trade and free-thinking Birmingham. Perhaps Edward’s socialist thinking proved too free and incompatible with his family’s Protestant work ethic and in 1881, at the age of 27, he was paid off by his family to the extent of £16,000, presumably on the understanding that he would play no part in the family business or make any subsequent claim to its money. Whatever the circumstances, Edward was now released from restrictive family ties, was a man of means and free to express his views on any subject he chose; which he did, writing letters to newspapers and articles for magazines on politics, women, marriage, art, architecture, tariff and tax reform, simplified spelling and anything else that caught his interest at the time.

Foremost among Edward Phipson’s many interests was socialism and, in particular, the possibility of founding a utopian colony of like-minded individuals and families based on socialist principles. Such a colony, he believed, would prove so self-evidently superior to the prevailing capitalist system that it would replace it without the need for a revolution. Phipson’s search for suitable locations took him across the globe and to places as far apart as Mexico, Australia and Woodham Ferrers in Essex, spending much of his fortune in the process. Eventually, however, he reluctantly reached the conclusion that there was little appetite for the kind of communal living he had in mind and cast his lot with the Land Nationalisation Society, bringing him into contact with Ebenezer Howard and the Garden City movement.

Readers of this review may be wondering by this time why this book should have any particular interest to members of a society concerned with Surrey history and archaeology. The clue, of course, is in the title of the book and, at this point I must be more explicit about its contents. The book consists of seven principal sections. In the first, Carole Roberts brings together what must be almost everything that is known about Phipson’s life, practically every statement being scrupulously supported by references. The second section, by Stephen Williams, is titled ‘Evacustes A Phipson and his Communal Utopia’. This is a comprehensive

and similarly well-documented account of Phipson's philosophical ideas and his efforts to put them into practice. Both of these sections I have attempted to summarise above. The third section, by John Hickman, is an 'Introduction to the Croydon paintings', but the core of the book – for the Surrey historian – by John Hickman and Carole Roberts, concerns the 'Paintings of Croydon', and is a remarkable virtual tour of the town as seen through Phipson's eyes between about 1890 and 1927, illustrated with colour reproductions of some 60 of his watercolour paintings, their precise locations being marked on modern maps. The next section, by John W Brown, looks a little further afield, at paintings of Streatham, Tooting, Thornton Heath and Norbury and combines notes on the views from the perspective of the local historian with an appreciation of Phipson's work as an artist. The book concludes with what is rather modestly described as an appendix: a complete list of all 1512 of the known paintings, their dates where known and their present locations. These include some 270 paintings of Surrey views other than those of Croydon. It is possible that Phipson had some elementary training in architecture and drawing and when his money began to run out he supplemented his income by painting topographical and architectural views in watercolour, inviting commissions from museums up and down the country. The paintings are of particular value to local historians as they capture not only the 'popular' scenes but also many views otherwise unrecorded either by artist or photographer.

It remains to explain Phipson's adopted name of 'Evacustes'. One of his many interests was language and languages, including simplified spelling and Evacustes – Greek for 'ready listener' – was the name he used to sign letters, articles and paintings after its first appearance on a painting of Hertford dated 1880.

JOHN PILE

Lizzi Lewins and Ceri Falys, *Further Burials in the Guilddown Saxon Cemetery at Guildford, Surrey*, Thames Valley Archaeological Services, Occasional Paper 31, 2019, price £7. Softback, 46pp, 13 colour line drawings, 21 colour plates. ISBN 978 1 911228 32 5

This slim but significant volume reports the results of what in some respects was a routine piece of development-related archaeology: a small-scale excavation conducted in December 2016 prior to the construction of a new house on the western periphery of Guildford. The site in question lay immediately west of the portion of the Guilddown early medieval cemetery that was found and first excavated in 1929–30 and was the subject of a lengthy but imperfect article published in *Collections* volume 39 (Lowther 1931; also Bird 2017). What was discovered during this new fieldwork, and even more so in the post-excavation analyses, is remarkable on several counts – as is having full publication of results so soon after the excavation.

As per the usual structure of an archaeological excavation report, the opening sections detail the features and finds uncovered. This part of the publication is not lengthy, because only ten comparatively small features were found: six graves containing a total of ten sets of human remains; one possible empty grave; and three other cut features. Furthermore, none of the graves could be described as well furnished, although it must also be noted that every grave and possible grave yielded at least one artefact.

An adequate summary of the excavation results is provided, but a little more attention could and perhaps should have been paid to this section. Exemplifying this sense is the identification – or, at least, description – of the pair of brooches found in grave 3 as 'cruciform' on page 10, and indeed on page 38 they are referred to unequivocally as cruciform brooches. The current benchmark study of early medieval cruciform brooches (Martin 2015) confirms that, with one possible exception of insecure provenance (PAS: item no SUR-FFE542), they are unknown in Surrey. This would make the grave 3 pair of regional if not national significance, were it not for the fact that they lack the head-plate knobs typical of cruciform brooches. Instead they have greater affinity with brooches of the more widely-distributed small-long

class, albeit as unusually elaborate examples with stepped horns and angular lappets; two trefoil-headed examples were found with burial 78 in the 1929–30 excavations (Lowther 1931, 21; Briggs 2020, 3 – I am grateful to Dr Simon Maslin for discussing these brooches with me). Regrettably, the brooches are not discussed further here or anywhere else in the book, aside from briefly in terms of their possible significance as indicators of where in the female lifecycle the occupant of grave 3 was at death (page 38).

By contrast, more than half of the report is devoted to an in-depth analysis of the human remains written by Ceri Falys, beginning with accounts of body/bone positions of each of the excavated burials in its respective grave, before proceeding to a multi-faceted osteological analysis. The level of detail provided is notably and consistently high. Each set of human remains is the subject of a full-page ‘data sheet’, incorporating archaeological and osteological information, and accompanied by colour photographs and drawings. This lays bare the extraordinary natures of the burials in graves 5, 9 and 10, including the partial disarticulation of skeleton SK65 in grave 9 arising from it having decayed for a period of time prior to burial, and the indications of remains from four different individuals in grave 10. Thereafter, several indicators of health status are appraised, all at length and with supporting colour photographs where necessary. The specialist nature of this part of the report will be of greatest interest and meaning to osteoarchaeologists, but it still offers plenty for the non-specialist – for instance, that five out of the eight sets of remains that were capable of being the subject of full pathological assessment included fractured bones, all well healed.

Surely the most remarkable results of the post-excavation analysis are presented at the end of the section focused on the human remains: the results of radiocarbon dating of three of the burials revealing a broad date-range spanning the late 8th to early 11th centuries AD, together with stable isotope analysis of bones and dental enamel pointing to a common non-local area of origin – most likely Cornwall (page 37). The results of both analyses have profoundly altered previous binary views of Guilddown as an ‘early’ normative burial-place and ‘later’ execution cemetery (eg Reynolds 2009, 139–42). In addition, this is probably the first instance of stable isotope analysis being performed on early medieval human remains found in Surrey and demonstrates its ability to reveal things for which there would otherwise be no obvious indicator.

The implications of all the above-mentioned findings and more are considered in the final discussion. No clear-cut conclusions are reached as to why three men, all of very probably far south-western British origins, but who were not all alive at the same time, should be buried in Guildford in such a distinctive manner. The possibility that they were apprentices is mentioned on page 41 but is not explored in any real depth. Nor is the notion advanced on the same page that the manner of burial of those interred in graves 5, 9 and 10 was ‘traditional’ for the region from whence they came. The latter is especially disappointing because it is not for want of relevant data; if the deceased are most likely to have been born and raised in Cornwall in the 9th and 10th centuries, as indicated by stable isotope analysis, there is ample published evidence with which to have tested this line of interpretation (see for example Turner 2006, 139). The contrast with the much more thorough preceding discussion of the motives behind the secondary burial of skeleton SK65 in grave 9 is particularly marked.

While it is important to acknowledge that this publication represents the completion of a development-led piece of archaeology as opposed to a more lengthily-planned research project, including the post-excavation phase, it was clearly a considerable enterprise, during which certain themes were identified and investigated in depth. In common with the differing depths of analysis proffered in previous sections, the discussion would have benefited from greater contemplation of more questions and themes to round out the report, as well as to place some of its other conclusions in a better geographical and historical context. The number of inhumations and assemblages of associated small finds from the 2016 excavation is by no means large, but their modest sizes do not render them undeserving of further consideration. Cross-referencing with the much larger corpus of evidence from the 1929–30 excavations is sporadic throughout, and in the discussion is done primarily with regard to

the equation of Lowther's burials 223 and 224 with empty grave 8 and grave 10 of the new evaluation (with ultimately somewhat inconclusive results). Arguably, comparing the new data with those published by Lowther almost nine decades previously, to offer an up-to-date overview of the Guildown cemetery, would have been a more valuable exercise. Likewise, almost no attempt is made to place the results in a regional context, despite the considerable interest that would come, for example, from finding good analogues for the brooches from grave 3.

If there are reasons for sometimes feeling disappointed at where this paper stops short in its contemplation of aspects and implications of what was found, they are outweighed by the fact that Surrey now has another properly published report of an early medieval cemetery excavation situated within its historic boundaries (see also Munnery 2014; Porteus *et al* 2019). There is even more cause for celebration arising from the results obtained from radiocarbon dating and, more novelly, the stable isotope analysis of three of the sets of human remains. While it may be the osteoarchaeological analysis that dominates this publication and represents perhaps its most important contribution to present and future research objectives, its contents offer plenty of other points of interest that will serve to cement the status of Guildown as a site of crucial importance to discussions of early medieval funerary practices and culture in Surrey.

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ROB BRIGGS

Alan Bott, *A History of the Churches of Bramley and Grafham, and Wonersh and Blackheath*, Godalming, privately published, 2019, price £10. Softback, 116 pp, 77 colour illus. No ISBN. Available from the churches and Godalming Museum

To the already lengthy list of richly researched guide books that he has published to the churches of south-west Surrey, Alan Bott has now added a new volume: a guide to or, as he modestly calls it, 'a history' of the churches of Bramley, Grafham, Wonersh and Blackheath, all south of Guildford. The format is the same as in the earlier volumes: each church is considered in turn, its architectural development traced, with the impact of 18th–20th century restorations and rebuildings fully considered, and an account given of the furnishings, stained glass and monuments to be found within. The most rewarding of the four buildings is the church at Wonersh, in its present form a curious hotchpotch, but probably in origin a small two-cell structure of the kind once to be seen at Hascombe and Stoke d'Abernon. In the 13th century, a period when greater emphasis was placed on the decorous celebration of the Mass, the chancel was enlarged and rebuilt, and an arch of unusual span inserted between it and the nave; and a century-and-a-half after that, two side chapels were built at the east end, one on each side. The biggest transformation in the appearance of the church, however, was to occur in the 1790s, when the greater part of the south and west

sides of the fabric was rebuilt in brick, giving the structure from the south-western angle a wholly classical appearance; only on closer inspection is the discovery made that substantial parts of the medieval fabric were preserved. One interesting sidelight to which Mr Bott draws our attention is that the transformation could have been much bigger still. In 1767 Sir Fletcher Norton, a lawyer, the local lord and holder of the advowson, commissioned plans from none other than the Adam brothers, who were working for him at the manor house, for a completely new building. In the event, the plans were not proceeded with and when, nearly 30 years later, the church's condition finally did call for urgent attention, the work was undertaken entirely at the expense of the parish. The Nortons, later Lords Grantley, do not emerge from the episode with much credit. They are also politely rebuked by Mr Bott for appropriating large parts of the village green.

In addition to the two main churches of Bramley and Wonersh, Mr Bott's study includes a couple of smaller buildings that were late additions to the local ecclesiastical scene. These are the churches of Grafham and Blackheath, both little known, but both of far greater interest than might be supposed. Grafham was designed by Henry Woodyer, the Tractarian architect, whose country house lay in the parish and who wanted to honour the memory of his wife, who had died prematurely. Woodyer himself is buried in the churchyard, where in the 1890s a cross was raised to his memory. As Mr Bott's photographs show, the interior was once richly decorated, probably by the architect's friend, Thomas Gambier Parry, with the sort of scheme that can still be seen at the lavish Woodyer-Gambier Parry church of Highnam, near Gloucester. Disgracefully, the decoration was whitewashed over in the 1950s. What remains, however, is the magnificent screen, much ornamented with 'William Morris-inspired' flowers and foliage, and with scriptural inscriptions around the pillars.

In a quite different stylistic idiom is the remarkable little church at Blackwater, east of Wonersh, an 'Arts and Crafts' structure of the 1890s built in the style of an Italian hillside chapel by the little-known architect Charles Harrison Townsend for Sir William Roberts-Austen, Deputy Master of the Mint. Outwardly unprepossessing, inside, the building makes an overwhelming impression. Its main treasure is the series of wall paintings of scenes from the Life of Christ by Anna Lea Merritt (1844–1930), an American artist who studied in London and married her teacher, Henry Merritt. As Mr Bott tells us, quite apart from being vivid and colourful, they are of great technical interest for making use of a technique that evoked the effect of lime fresco, but which could survive in a cool damp climate.

The four churches described in this book are hardly ones that stand out either nationally or even locally, and none is included in Simon Jenkins's *England's Thousand Best Churches*. Mr Bott's achievement, however, is to show that each is a building of far greater interest than might be imagined. As in his previous volumes, a major strength of the book is found in the use made of reproductions of the many antiquarian views of the fabrics, which record the appearance of the buildings before 19th-century and later restorations. Those with an interest in 19th-century stained glass will appreciate the full inventories of the collections of such glass at Bramley and Wonersh. The monuments in the churches are of less interest than is often the case in Surrey, but a notable exception is the medieval-style figure brass at Wonersh from as late as 1947 to a vicar of the church, the Reverend Algernon Brown, whose tastes evidently inclined to the ecclesiastical.

NIGEL SAUL

Capel History Group, *Lonesome Lodge: A Lost Palladian Villa*, The Cockerel Press 2019, price £12. Softback, 118pp, 80 illustrations. ISBN 978 1 909871 16 8. Available from Dorking Museum.

The site of the house originally named Lonesome Lodge still retains some of the atmosphere of the 18th century Gothick sublime: penetrating dense woodland to view (preferably not while trespassing) an ivied ruined tower or mossy waterfall has long been an amusement of

Wotton locals ‘in the know’. However, not many were in the know, something that this new publication will change.

This well-designed and appealing book is the result of the collaboration of seven members of the Capel History Group. They have come together to write a very comprehensive history of the house, its builders and its owners. The authors’ varied skills and interests have resulted in chapters covering subjects ranging from architectural detective work, family history, the history of institutions, the lives of very different people, personal reminiscence, garden history – and I am sure this is not an exhaustive list. In short, there is something here for every taste. An enormous amount of work has evidently gone into the book: documents are cited from a great many repositories, both near and far. It is difficult to imagine that there is a single piece of paper anywhere that mentions Lonesome (or its later avatars as Filbrook Lodge and Tillingbourne Lodge) that the authors have failed to find. They have not only found but have thought about what they found, and they have produced well-expressed narratives to explain what the documents are telling them – and us. It is no doubt the result of different authors working independently that has resulted in occasional differences of opinion (and more rarely of fact) being found within the book. The same cause perhaps has led to the repetition found in some places between authors, but this may be deliberate, as each lies within an internally coherent argument.

The appendices, which are summaries of original documents, fill out the story, and are all welcome. I would have very much liked to have seen the 1767 sales particulars description included in a fuller form. This is an important basis of Beryl Higgins’ very able and convincing reconstructions. Sections are quoted, but I would have preferred more (and was fortunate to be able to have more, as Marion Herridge included it in her article in the 1991 – not 1981 as in the bibliography – edition of *Leaves*¹). Many readers, however, will be perfectly happy with what is included, and I am sure that careful thought went into the selection.

As always, one can find quibbles: can John Evelyn really be ‘considered the pioneer of forest management’? I would have thought that was someone in about 1000 BC at the latest. It would be easier to find illustrations referred to in the text if page numbers were included; but these niggles can easily be overlooked. This book is a considerable achievement and will, I hope, bring a house, landscape and people that had fallen into undeserved obscurity back into some sort of limelight.

As a footnote: I have wondered for many years if the marked similarities of the elevation of Matthew Pitts’ Abinger Hall (1773, unknown architect) to that of the Lonesome of that date is more than a generic coincidence of Palladian design (I suspect it is). I am now struck by other likenesses in the histories of the two houses: both had their original simple Palladian elegance ruined by rather ill-conceived additions; both were set a little above the Tillingbourne (Abinger a little over 2 miles downstream of Lonesome), with sophisticated use of the water; both suffered as a result of the divorce of its owners, and both had comparatively short lives (Lonesome 114, Abinger 99 years). A new house has now risen on the site of Abinger Hall, its design based on the 1773 house: is it also a reincarnation of Lonesome?

EMMA CORKE

¹ *Leaves*, the annual magazine of the Friends of Severells Copse (ed Shirley Corke), which contains articles on local history, was published from 1986 to 1992. The Surrey Archaeological Society library holds copies.