

REVIEWS

'LATIMER.' Review by Professor Graham Webster

LATIMER, BELGIC, ROMAN DARK AGE AND EARLY MODERN FARM by Keith Branigan, 1971, published by the Chess Valley Archaeological and Historical Society, 201 pp; 48 Figs. 24 plates. Price £1.95.

This is an account of an excavation carried out between 1964 and 1970 and published with commendable promptitude. The site at Latimer Park Farm in the Chess Valley was not an easy one. It had been found and extensively excavated in the 19th C. and again in 1910-1912 and the work was further impeded by the presence of modern farm buildings and yards. It was thus only possible to excavate in detail part of the west wing of the Roman building and an area to the east on the site of a courtyard and a timber building. The absence of an overall plan of the excavation makes the report difficult to follow especially as the detailed plans have different orientations. The critical chapter is the one entitled 'Interpretation' (pp. 55-99) to which must be linked V on the Chronology (pp. 169-176). Sequences of post holes in alignment suggest a rectilinear building associated with pre-Roman pottery. What is defined as the first villa building (in stone) is on precisely the same alignment, but is dated by Antonine pottery. The incredible coincidence is accepted as the "best alignment obtainable on the site" and the gap of occupation is said to be proved by the presence of a tree thought to have been growing "inside" the timber building. But it could have been between buildings and there appears nothing against the idea that the tree was cut down for the timber phase. The crucial dating evidence for these phases is on Fig. 7, where Layer 8, which contained Antonine pottery overlies construction material for the walls. It is a build-up layer below the mortar floor and represents the domestic rubbish which was immediately available for this purpose. It cannot possibly date the stone phase occupation, but must have been derived from the pre-stone period i.e. the timber phases. The villa must, therefore, have started as a timber building at some time in the middle of the second century and the change to stone foundations at a later period, towards the close of the century. The Belgic pottery must belong to occupation which is in no way connected with the villa and which has left little structural trace.

The conclusion that there was a period of decline, squatter occupation and even abandonment is based partly on poor quality repairs but mainly on layers of black soil between floors. This has suggested that the doors and roof were no longer there to prevent growth of vegetation and appears to have been proved, for the open verandah, by soil analysis (pp. 105-6) but not conclusively for the internal areas. Where this black deposit was not present it is assumed that it was all removed in a clearing operation prior to rebuilding. Would it not be easier to assume that some rooms had earth floors and that occupation was continuous?

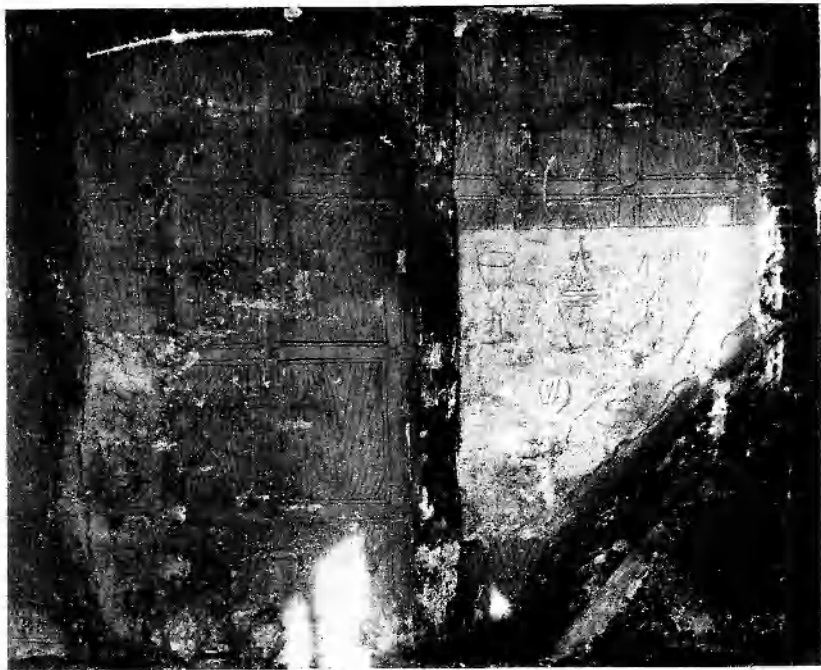


PLATE XII, HIGH WYCOMBE. The Old Chequers. First Floor 17th
Century Painting on Wattle and Daub Wall.

High Wycombe Society

It is admitted that "the amount of rebuilding . . . seems to have been relatively small" (p. 79). Plan 3 belongs to the fourth century and the lavish scale of villa buildings elsewhere in Britain is reflected at Latimer by the number of tessellated pavements and elaborate painted plaster. At the end of the fourth century a decline had set in. The baths were given up and the stoke hole used as a rubbish dump, but the oyster shells in it show that the inhabitants were not yet dependent on their own produce.

One of the most interesting discoveries was in the post-villa period. A timber building consisted of two parallel trenches seven feet apart with post-pits along their inner edges. This strange building is interpreted as "cruck" construction. It bears no apparent relationship to the later type of cruck which is normally part of a framed building resting on the ground. The posts were placed in stone-lined post-pits and the problem is the relationship of these post-pits to the two trenches. In only one case a post-pit appears to cut into a trench showing that the former is later. In all the other eight cases the evidence, as drawn, seems to show that the trench cuts the post-pits and in two cases appears actually to have removed the stone packing. (This shows quite clearly in the photograph Pl. XIII). It seems rather more likely that this structure was of two different periods, the trenches replacing the posts and that they both were foundations of some kind of racking or platform, possibly for a granary, like Building 2 (Fig. 22).

It is assumed, on very slight and inconclusive evidence, that these structures represent a phase after the villa had been abandoned and an actual date is postulated—c. 380-400. No datable objects were found to support this, although a figure-of-eight cauldron chain is suggested as a possibility. This however, is a type of chain which is very common in the Roman period (cf. an example from the hoard of ironwork from Brampton, Cumberland dated to the early 2nd century *Trans. Cumb. and West. Antiq. and Arch. Soc.*, 66 (1966), No. 18, pp. 20-21). There is little doubt that like most other Roman sites occupation continued well into the fifth century with a decline in standards. Perhaps, as is suggested, the wealthy landowner and his family moved into the nearest town, but people continued to live and work here and there is little point in attempting to argue for gaps in the occupation. Chapter VI is important in placing Latimer in its historical context. It is unfortunate that such important conclusions are based on evidence which is often insubstantial and open to alternative interpretation. Only a very modest area of what was clearly a large establishment was examined and even here parts had been previously disturbed by earlier excavations.

This is a very large report and one questions the need for parts of it such as pages 30-37 containing the detailed descriptions of all the levels which really belong to the field note book. There are some useful sections but one would welcome more and better plans. The pottery report is based on the system of dividing all the fabrics into types, a method of dubious merit and very difficult for the student to follow as one has constantly to refer back. Even central Gaulish-samian appears as TF40. The identification of some of the fabrics as Nene Valley and Rhenish are much open to question, as is some of the dating. For example the group 107-262 dated to 290-310 may well be later and the radiates associated with it residual, like much of the pottery itself. The photographs placed at the end of the book are well selected and the drawings of the small finds adequate, but a list of illustrations would have been helpful. Pl. XXII shows three large iron nails which are holdfasts for attaching vertical tiles to the wall. The report is well worth having as a prompt and very detailed account of an excavation carried out with meticulous care. One wonders however, if at times the trees so attentively studied

disguise the appearance of the wood. Whatever may be its shortcomings it is a great advance in our knowledge of the archaeology of the Chilterns and will be of great help and interest to all local antiquarians and historians.

GRAHAM WEBSTER

POLITICAL CHANGE AND CONTINUITY, 1760-1885. A Buckinghamshire Study by Richard W. Davis. David and Charles. 1972. £4.95.

This is a very good book. It is not easy reading, being choc-a-block with facts, all of which matter. However it is written in excellent English, which greatly helps the pilgrim on his way. The focal point is the first Reform Bill of 1832 and the book concerns itself mainly with the forty years directly following that. The secondary title describes the book, with absolute truth, as a Buckinghamshire study. It is all about Bucks and the mind of the reader boggles wholeheartedly at the amount of study that has gone into it.

The author's mind, however, has boggled not at all. He has wholly mastered his extremely complex subject. He recalls the reader's attention to the "Whig historians" of the past, their outlook and methods, and makes a contrast between them and certain modern historians, about whom he has some hard things to say. The Whigs saw the Reform Bill as a portentous event, inaugurating change. The voters escaped from the pockets of the great landowners and began to vote as they pleased. The moderns on the other hand, tired of their grandfathers' notions, maintain that there was really no change to speak of and that aristocratic coercion continued to rule the roost at election time. Not so, says Dr. Davis. The Whigs were not quite right, but the moderns are utterly wrong. Change, great change there was but the Reform Bill did not inaugurate it. Rather it was a convulsive symptom of a change that had been going on even since the 18th century, a change due to the steady growth of political conscience and sturdy self-confidence in the electors, an increasing determination not to be put upon rather than a sudden escape from anybody's pocket. That, as I understand it, is the author's case and it seems to me that he has entirely proved it.

How jolly politics were in the days of a limited franchise and how different from the present when voters vote merely for parties and hon. members are whipped through the lobbies almost literally like hounds. For long after the first Reform Bill anyone putting up for Parliament had to get to know, and *could* get to know, everyone who might or might not vote for him. Every Bucks voter was a "character": a farmer, a Quaker, a blacksmith or merely a "gentleman". You could not *of course* offer him money so late in English history, but you had to consider his special fads and fancies, and indeed his deep-seated convictions on matters of real import. Nobody could tell, until the poll was declared, how any election would go. Hence the crowded, still Rowlandsonian scene through which Dr. Davis threads his way with such perfect certainty. What capital fellows the electors were, one comes to feel, and what a splendidly idiosyncratic set of Members they sent to the House of Commons! Those were the days.

So systematic a huntsman as Dr. Davis is certain to start hares; which of course he does not allow hounds to chase. But others may wish to chase them. One such is that colourful character the Marquis of Chandos, later second Duke of Buckingham and Chandos. I had known Chandos hitherto as a farouche and extravagant person who finally provided the Upper Ten with the *cause célèbre* of the century by a ducal bankruptcy in 1848, closely followed by a ducal divorce. But Chandos emerges from Dr. Davis' pages as a very interesting character, an astute politician, a clever fellow and a very likeable fellow, having something of

the Powell charisma. Now I know more I feel very sorry about the bankruptcy, and deplore the few, cold words Greville employs to describe it in his diary. Chandos emerges as he does, one may say, quite by chance, as a result of Dr. Davis' methodical hunting of the country. His brilliant marshalling and elucidation of the facts leads the reader to the irresistible conclusion that the truth is being found out. Or if he doubts this then let him glance, and marvel, at the long list of sources given at the end of the book, and then begin hunting himself. He will surely start foxes and hares and when he does Dr. Davis, I feel sure, will be the first to be pleased.

M. J. Gibbon.

CHILTERN CHURCHES, by Graham Martin, 9 in. × 9 in. 106 pp. and many illustrations, Suprbooks Ltd., 1972. £2.95p.

There has been a positive flood of books about the Chilterns in recent years, like those by Kevin Fitzgerald, and the *Hilltop Villages* by David and Joan Hay, all covering slightly different areas, and all having a different object or approach and of very varying quality.

The area is, indeed, an extremely difficult one to define and consequently unsatisfactory from the point of view that everyone will have their own pet places and ideas and it is so easy to say (in dozens of cases) why was A included, and why was B left out. It is an area really without a common denominator.

Mr. Martin is at pains to point out in his preface that the book is primarily a visual survey and that he claims to be no authority. One must, therefore, accept the work in that spirit, as the impressions of one who has enjoyed and been interested in what he has seen.

That said, one must therefore accept many of the author's statements or inferences with extreme caution. One has only to look at the selection of works he quotes in the Bibliography (some of the titles of which are wrong) to see the largely superficial nature of his approach. The Royal Commission on Historical Monuments is not even mentioned; and study of this factual work would have prevented many errors of architectural dating and fact.

The inclusion of a number of church plans is an excellent idea—had they been accurate and reliable. There is no justification for the suggested development of Little Missenden for example. Many early Saxon churches did develop in this way: but without excavation one cannot possibly say this was the case at Missenden. The dating of Radnage is completely wrong, the main structure being of circa 1200. There are also discrepancies at Bledlow; and the hatching has been wrongly drawn for High Wycombe. This makes the whole set suspect.

The illustrations of Norman work include The Lee and Radnage, both of which are 13th century. I would have said that Bradenham and Princes Risborough were the least typical of Perpendicular. The photographs of doorways hardly do justice to the finest examples in the area. His selection of fonts is good and reflects their varied nature. The selection of monuments again is a matter of taste and choice, and I would have expected the exquisite Doyly memorial at Hambleton to have been included or the superb Scheermakers in High Wycombe.

The section on hatchments, while it is excellent that these vulnerable objects should be noted, does not really tell one much about them or where examples can be found in the area, except for two or three instances.

The usual error has been repeated over the pulpit 'soundingboard' at Edlesborough. It was, of course, originally the font cover, like Ewelme.

Mr. Martin lists a few screens, but calls the very important one in Chinnor c. 1250, where no feature in the Church itself can be dated before about 1320.

It is a pity that the particularly fine early 15th-century open timber roof at Penn is not mentioned or illustrated.

The section on wall paintings is surprisingly good and accurate.

At the end of the book is a detailed set of notes on all the Churches mentioned; these may presumably have been taken largely from Pevsner and the Collins Guide, and are therefore probably fairly reliable. In short, if you are not too particular as to architectural or antiquarian accuracy, this is quite a good visual introduction to the Churches of a limited area.

E.C.R.

CONSERVATION OF BUILDINGS, by John Harvey. 9 in. × 6 in., 240 pp. 51 illustrations. London, John Baker. 1972. £4.75p net.

This is an extremely valuable book, covering the whole field of building conservation all over the country. As one has come to expect from Mr. Harvey, the work is thorough, scholarly, practical and also aesthetic.

Although Buckinghamshire is not specifically mentioned, there are vital lessons to be learned that apply to our County as much as any other; and one hopes that the book will be found on the shelves of every County and Local Council's Architects Department Offices.

In particular one would draw attention to the need for recognition and understanding of old as well as more modern buildings, and of the possibilities of conservation in seemingly unrewarding cases—cases like the Merchants' Houses in Tewkesbury, or the seemingly unimpressive and semi-derelict Farm house and cottages, now Sweech House, in Leatherhead should be taken to heart. Or see what can be done in a house at Stroud.

Mr. Harvey considers conservation as it concerns the Town, the Village, the Church and Churchyard. And goes on to discuss Craftsmanship and materials, and the continuing necessary role of conservation.

I would like to see other Boroughs adopt the splendid scheme that has been operating in Faversham, Kent for some years, whereby the Local Council, with expert advice, buys up, restores and lets, or re-sells at a modest profit, important buildings in the town, so that now almost everything worth while is now safe.

Of Mr. Harvey's book I would say, read, mark, learn, inwardly digest—and put into practical operation.

E.C.R.

A HISTORY OF MILTON KEYNES AND DISTRICT Vol. I to 1830 by Sir Frank Markham. 8½ x 5½ 339 pp. White Crescent Press, Luton 1973. £2.50.

This is a valuable book written with infectious enthusiasm by the distinguished author who has lived in North Bucks all his life and which he represented in Parliament for 11 years. It is obviously written *con amore* in an admirably straightforward style, which we hope will make it required reading in all schools in the county and not only those in North Bucks.

I doubt the author chose his present title when he began to write his book in 1948 although it is undoubtedly the logical one to use today. But in no sense is it parochial and indeed its main virtue is the manner in which the author sets local events in their county or national setting. A great deal of political and social history can be learned from it.

The references show the width of Sir Frank's reading; he appears to have consulted every printed source available, as well as some unpublished ones, such as the vast deposit of the Radcliffe Trustees now in the Bodleian.

On page 223, he speculates on which was "the worst inn" in which the second Duke of Buckingham died, assuming that it was in Whaddon; this legend was first

propagated by Alexander Pope but is wrong, as it is well established that he died in one of his tenant's houses at Kirby Moorside in Yorkshire, after catching a chill whilst hunting.

The book is well printed and there are 31 excellent plates including some from Sir Philip Duncombe's collection which will be new to most readers.

Perhaps rather rashly Sir Frank dismisses Browne Willis as "a poor writer of history and antiquities. Dry as dust" He himself will never be so dismissed.

E. V.

COUNTRY LIKE THIS: *A book of the Vale of Aylesbury* ed. May Ellen Haig; preface by Sir Arthur Bryant. The Friends of the Vale of Aylesbury (from F. Weatherhead and Son Ltd.) 1972. Pp 160 £3 (paperback, £2.25).

Our French neighbours would call the Vale of Aylesbury a *pays*: a country with its own character, not better than the Chilterns or the limestone belt—comparisons are odious—but quite different. In 1970-71 it faced and defeated the menace of the Third London Airport. This book commemorates that victory. Our President writes of the Vale churches, the President and County Secretary of the Naturalists' Trust of its wildlife. There are brief biographies, recipes, snatches of folk-song; well-chosen extracts from George Eland on cottages and on the dialect, Walter Rose on ducks, Max Davies on needle-making, H. E. Bates on the hedges which Time has embroidered; passages from those who have known and loved the Vale from Gerard and Defoe down to Fowler and Harman, Massingham and Betjeman; notes on its steeplechases, windmills, witchert and witches. The book returns repeatedly to the Civil War and the great names of Hampden and Verney; the one south of the Vale, the other north (Leland's definition of the Vale would however embrace the Claydons; Lipscomb's would exclude them). The miscellany includes our senior member's moving recollections of Florence Nightingale; his son's splendid rejection of the arithmetic of Roskill and Sir Colin Buchanan's memorable Note of Dissent, mentioning the painting by Rex Whistler which silently influenced him day after day at the hearing (it is reproduced on the dust cover). The account of the Brill tramway, pp 111-2, is not from Gibbs' *Miscellany*, and in the last line of p.44 "County Council" should read "County Planning Committee" but one is not inclined to search for minor lapses in a book which is a song of thanksgiving.

Arnold H. J. Baines

THE NEW HISTORY OF WENDOVER 1972, ed. Richard Snow with a commentary by B. Pursell. John Goodchild, Wendover, 1972. £3.50.

This book contains many copies of old photographs and a reproduction of Sir Leonard West's valuable history of the town. Unfortunately no further historical research has been undertaken. There are also lists of events in the history of Wendover, poems and short articles.

ARCHAEOLOGY AND THE M.40 MOTORWAY. An interim report by the M.40 Archaeological Research Group, edited by Trevor Rowley and Max Davies. 40 pp. 128 mm × 210 mm. 5 plates, 2 maps, 11 line drawings. 25p. Or by post 30p from Oxford University, Dept. for External Studies, Rowley House, Wellington Square, Oxford OX1 2JA.

PORTRAIT OF BUCKINGHAMSHIRE, by John Camp. Robert Hale. 1972. £2.30.