

REVIEWS

Aldbury People: 1885-1945. Jean Davis, pp. 96. Aldbury Archive Collection, 1988 ISBN 0 9512688 1 3. £4.95 from the compiler, Little Barley End, Aldbury, Herts HP23 5RZ.

This is a lovely book. The text consists almost entirely of reminiscences by older inhabitants of Aldbury, and these are lavishly illustrated by a remarkable collection of photographs, spanning the sixty years that began with the coming of the motor car and ended with the atomic bomb. If any justification is needed for reviewing it in these pages, it is that Aldbury is part of Hertfordshire only by an historical accident; it is essentially a Chiltern village.

The arrangement is thematic rather than chronological, and this makes for greater coherence, although it inevitably fragments the contributions of individuals.

Happiness is the predominant impression: 'so much happiness'. The expression 'It was lovely!' recurs again and again. The landscape,

the games, the home-made entertainments, so wholeheartedly undertaken and enjoyed, were all 'lovely'. Little girls in white pinafores dance in a ring on Church Meadow—an image of piercing innocence—the village band poses with its drums and fifes, Charles Delderfield, born in 1843, sits in the sun outside his cottage. A school group of 1911 prompts the question, 'How many of these little boys survived after 1918?'

The darker side is not ignored. 'Fear of the wealthy was ingrained in the older people . . . I remember feeling rebellious for them . . . it was a pity, the understanding of each side took so long in coming, but come it did, and so much happiness resulted'. Much of English social history is summed up in these words. Yet it is clear that these unassuming lives were not embittered, and the reader is left in an elegiac mood; shall we ever again derive such pure keen leasure from simple things?

J.C.T.

House History: a Short Guide to Sources. Buckinghamshire Record Office, 1987. pp. 26 ISBN 0 860459 428 9, paper.

Very good 'starter pack' for anyone interested in tracing the history of their house. Answers comprehensively the question, 'Where do I start?', and guides the enquirer through the various classes of document that may (or may not!) illuminate moments in the history of particular houses. A valuable bibliography lists all the published material for Bucks, and points to the general works most likely to help beginners to understand the unpublished sources they are much more likely to be using; in several of these, readers will find signposts to more advanced works. It is, as the introduction points out, an excellent way of introducing yourself to local history.

Roman Milton Keynes. Excavations and Fieldwork 1971–82. Ed. D. C. Mynard, pp. xiii+198. Buckinghamshire Archaeological Society Monograph Series 1, 1987. ISBN 0 949003 018.

The excavations and fieldwork undertaken during the development of Milton Keynes have added greatly to our knowledge of north Bucks in the Iron Age and Roman period, and it is good to at last have the definitive report on our desks. This volume provides a comprehensive coverage of all RB discoveries, both by fieldwork and excavation, made between 1971 and 1982, and it is good to see that earlier work by local archaeologists is also included.

The main sections of the book are a gazetteer of sites, reports on minor excavations, reports on the six major excavations, and a report on the finds (building materials, other finds, and environmental material). All of this is wisely prefaced (rather than followed) by a chapter which attempts to summarize the results of all this work and set them into a wider context.

This arrangement, and the recognition that excavated and surveyed sites are part of a much wider landscape and need to be placed in context, is to be applauded. This discussion chapter also recognises several of the important themes currently under discussion in RB archaeology—

changes in the landscape, the size and shape of estates, the relationships between the different types of rural settlement, the density of population—and attempts to address them within the limits imposed by the available evidence from Milton Keynes. The extent of landscape changes within the late IA and RB periods is not yet clear in this area, but phased maps of late IA and RB occupation would have been useful in this discussion, although they would have to be used with care. It would also have been useful for quick reference to have had a map on which at least the major sites were named rather than numbered. The historical pattern of settlement is not unlike that noted further south in the Chilterns, with late first/early second-century development followed by later third-century recession, and a fourth-century revival.

Attempts to calculate population figures are notoriously dangerous, but approved of by this reviewer. The suggested figures for the small towns of Lactodorum (Towcester) and Magiovinium (Dropshort) may well be about right at the lower end of the estimates (around 1500 and 1000 respectively), but populations of rural sites are surely overestimated at between 25 and 50. Most are family farmsteads, which even with extended families would rarely have reached populations of more than 20.

There are useful discussions of the industrial and trading environment for the rural settlements and a valuable discussion of another difficult topic, estate boundaries. This raises the interesting possibility that the RB estates in the Milton Keynes area occupied broadly similar territories to the later parishes.

How these estates were farmed is obviously a key question, and it is here that the results from Milton Keynes are most disappointing. The faunal samples are generally too small to be useful, and where larger ones occur they are published as single large groups with no reference to the contexts from which they came. All recent faunal research suggests that such groups are virtually meaningless. The seed and plant remains are few in number, and there is no environmental evidence in the normal sense of the term at all. One would love to know more

about the walled garden(?) and what it might have grown, for example.

This volume then contains a lot of useful information, derived from a lot of hard work, about Roman occupation of an area about which we knew very little previously. It presents the information clearly and in a well-ordered manner, and it attempts to set the results of the work into a wider context. But economic

aspects of the settlements are not well represented in the report, and this must be a disappointment in a report almost entirely concerned with farming establishments of one kind or another. Perhaps future work in the area can seek to fill some of these gaps.

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