

REVIEWS

BEFORE DOMESDAY: HADDENHAM & CUDDINGTON

Bruce Alexander

Published by, and available from, Book House Books, 93 High Street, Thame, Oxon., OX9 3HJ
vi + 74 pages including 9 illustrations and 9 pages of glossary / index.

Partly because of the period it covers, this is no ordinary book of local history. The author begins with the physical stage on which the story will unfold and shows how land-forms and drainage patterns pre-destined Haddenham and Cuddington to look towards Aylesbury rather than to the nearer town of Thame. Then, starting with the first hunter-gatherers, he skilfully uses archaeology, climate history, place names, the imprint of vanished field systems, estate charters, parish boundaries, early political history and, finally, Domesday Book itself, to suggest the stages by which the two villages and their parishes came into being and acquired the form we see today. Several suggestions are based on the weighing up of finely-balanced fragmentary evidence from these sources; the author calls them "more-or-less informed conjecture". For these, he sets out his arguments in an easy, almost conversational, style giving the book the feel of a good detective story. Because site-specific evidence for this period is inevitably sparse, the narrative sometimes broadens into a general history of the western Vale of Aylesbury, or even beyond, in order to extract the story of Haddenham and Cuddington, but this does not distract. From all this unfolds the concept of Greater Haddenham, an early, large, and valuable Saxon estate whose principal settlement became surrounded on three sides by later satellite settlements; Cuddington was the last of these to be detached.

The maps vary between essential illustrations of the thesis and useful extra information but, unfortunately, their presentation lacks the finesse of the text. An extra map (of Church End, Haddenham), would have helped to illustrate the discussion on

page 53 of the probable Saxon minster church and the possible extent and layout of its precinct.

The excellent 9-page glossary / index is almost a chapter in its own right, and enables readers who have forgotten the meaning of "multiple estates" or "tithings" to refresh memories without putting the book down. Another reference feature is the series of grey-backed boxes within the text carrying additional material (sometimes at a national or regional level); these provide useful background but are not essential enough to be part of the main text. They cover, for example, Celtic place names, "double religious houses", and William the Conqueror's route to London.

This book is an intriguingly fresh way of looking at local history. Its interest lies in the author's deft use of a wide range of sources so that it will appeal to those interested in the process of local history study as much as those researching the history of Haddenham and Cuddington or the western Vale of Aylesbury. It is simply a very good read.

Peter Gulland

NO ORDINARY TOURIST: THE TRAVELS OF AN ERRANT DUKE

Jonathan Roberts and Gerard Morgan-Grenville
Bridport, Dorset, Milton Mill Publishing Limited,
2006

256 pages. £19.95
ISBN 0-9540570-1-5

The unpopularity of the Grenvilles of Stowe was so notorious that there was a special term for it: *Odium Grenvillium*. No one denied the Grenvilles' talent, energy and ambition, but few great families have behaved so haughtily or been so convinced of their own importance. Dislike of the Grenvilles went right to the top. During one of his bouts of madness, George III was heard to complain: 'I hate nobody. Why should anybody hate me?' Then the King corrected himself: 'I beg pardon, I do hate the Marquess of Buckingham'. Some thought the

Marquess's son, Richard Grenville, (1776-1839), styled Earl Temple in his father's lifetime, was even worse. In 1804, Revd Mr Powell commented: 'Lord Temple is not so agreeable as his father having great pride and a manner less pleasant.' But could it be that the Grenvilles were prisoners of their own lofty status? In England, and especially at Stowe, how could they be anything but haughty and almost regal?

One of the many merits of *No Ordinary Tourist* is that it provides an opportunity to observe a Grenville in foreign parts, free from some of the constraints surrounding the family in this country. On 4 August 1827, Richard Grenville, now first Duke of Buckingham and Chandos, joined his 'new and elegant yacht' (the *Anna Eliza*) at Southampton 'preparatory for his intended voyage to the Mediterranean'. He was to be away from England until 1829. During his extended tour, the Duke kept a Diary and made sketches of many of the places he visited. The Diary and the sketches form the core of this fascinating book, although the fact that the authors have followed in the Duke's footsteps enables them make telling 'now and then' comparisons. But while the book contains revealing accounts of the southern Italy and the islands of the Western Mediterranean, for Buckinghamshire readers, its real interest must lie in what it tells us about the Duke himself. Gerard Morgan-Grenville notes:

The Duke was a controversial character. He lived in circumstances that obliged him to lead a life that was probably untrue to his nature ... and it is possible that this voyage enabled him to be more in tune to his true nature than perhaps at any other time of his deeply troubled life.

Despite his grandeur, in 1827, the Duke of Buckingham was a sad figure. So many things had either gone wrong or failed to materialise. The Duke had served in the Ministry of All Talents in 1807 and, as colonel of the Buckinghamshire Militia, he had joined his men at Bordeaux in the closing stages of the war against Napoleon. In 1821 he had been created Duke of Buckingham and Chandos in return for committing the Grenville faction in Parliament to the Tories. But by 1827, his erratic politics had effectively destroyed the Grenville faction and no high office had come his way – only disappointed hopes of India or Ireland. Buck-

ingham's once happy marriage had deteriorated and relations with his heir, the Marquess of Chandos, were very strained. Although he had only just turned fifty, the Duke was in poor physical shape, a martyr to gout and grossly overweight. During his Mediterranean tour, he was often carried in chair. A guide to Vesuvius later told Charles Greville that his worst assignment had been when – with eleven other bearers – he had carried the Duke to the top: 'the weight was so enormous that his shoulder was afterwards swelled up nearly to his head'. But the biggest problem was debt. Despite a rent roll of some £60,000 a year (£6 million in modern money) the Duke simply could not live within his means. Whatever the other attractions of 'getting away from it all', it was the need to economise, to escape from the ever-more insistent demands for payment, that forced the hesitant Duke to leave Stowe. Although perhaps exaggerated, Hon Edward Fox's comment, 'His [the Duke's] affairs are now in such a state that he left England to avoid his creditors, and even at his departure they pursued his yacht down the river in order to seize it', may not be too wide of the mark.

But was the Duke in the Mediterranean any different from the Duke at Stowe? In many ways he was not. He clearly took a very relative view of economising and of reduced circumstances. Although he probably supposed that he was embarking on a Grand Tour, his journey could also be viewed in terms of a minor military expedition. The *Anna Eliza* was hardly a yacht in the normal sense of the word. She was really a small warship, similar in design to H M S *Beagle*, later famous for its association with Darwin. Her crew of forty-eight included a platoon of armed Marines and she had ten six-pounder and two nine-pounder guns. In the Duke's account, his arrival off small fishing villages was almost always greeted with joy, but one wonders if, at least initially, there was not an equal measure of fear. Significantly, the *Anna Eliza* was once mistaken for a pirate ship, intent on capturing Christians to sell as slaves in Barbary.

On land, the Duke's style could be decidedly high-handed. He often sailed away in pique if he judged his reception inadequate and, in an area still prone to a variety of epidemics, consistently demanded that quarantine regulations should not to apply to his ship. He was quick to accuse innkeepers and others of fraud and dismissed his courier, Giovanni Gandolfi, who had served him

faithfully and had probably saved his life, without a second thought. Nor was the Duke exactly displeased with the rumour current in Naples that he was really the King of England's brother travelling incognito. It all seems typically Grenville.

But there was a better side to the Duke. At least his sense of self-worth meant that he did not fawn to despots. He had no hesitation in extolling the principles of constitutional monarchy to King Francis I of Naples – who then wisely changed the subject to gout. There was also a genuine humanity about him. He was so disgusted by conditions in which political prisoners were held in the dungeons of Cueta that he even toyed with the idea of storming the prison with his marines to release the inmates. Later he was appalled by the total failure of the government of Naples to give any assistance to the victims of an earthquake that had recently struck the town of Casalmicciola on the island of Ischia. Equally, he was much impressed by the unexpectedly enlightened regime of the madhouse in Palermo. Although he came to Rome with all the usual Protestant prejudices, he much enjoyed his audience with Pope Leo XII and actually asked for his blessing – which was willingly given.

The Duke was certainly a sharp observer and his juxtaposition of splendour and misery – especially in Sicily – is wonderfully evocative. The sketches are actually remarkably good, usually slightly 'primitive' but occasionally strangely anticipatory of modern art. At first sight, it seems incredible that the extraordinary picture of Vesuvius in action could have been painted any earlier than the beginning of the twentieth century. Then there was the very real interest in archaeology and geology. Perhaps Richard Grenville would have been a greater man – and probably a happier one – if he had never been a Duke or even a Grenville.

But that was impossible. Even in Italy, the Dukedom and Stowe were ever present. On 27 September 1827, while the *Anna Eliza* was sailing towards Sicily, the Duke had a dream, a horrible glimpse of the future. He was back at Stowe, but 'not a soul appeared to receive me'. The family had gone and only his wife remained. Together, they went out at the north hall door, 'and all was solitude and desertion'. Mercifully, the Duke was dead before the dream came true in 1848. The first Duke was certainly 'no ordinary tourist' but, at least for a time, he was 'no ordinary Grenville'. This excellent book suggests that, while he had more than his fair

share of faults, the first Duke may deserve partial exemption from the *Odium Grenvillium*.

John Clarke
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MANSIONS AND MUD HOUSES

The story of the Penn and Tylers Green Conservation Area

Miles Green

Published by the Penn & Tylers Green Residents Society, 2007

ISBN 978-0-9555798

Available Mrs J. Collins, 25 New Road, Tylers Green, High Wycombe HP10 8DL

£3 incl p+p.

This is a beautifully presented book, with excellent coloured maps and numerous photographs. It reveals an enormous amount of research derived from a great fund of local knowledge. The five-page index indicates the wide range of people and places covered in the text, from local worthies, such as the Penns and the Curzons, to surprising household names, such as President Hoover, and Sir Arthur Whitten Brown, the first man to fly the Atlantic. What makes this book particularly fascinating is the way that buildings are shown, not just as inanimate objects, but as expressions of the lives of the people who have lived in the village over the centuries.

Miles Green will be well-known to readers of *Records* for his scholarly articles on "The Penn Doom", and "The Medieval tile industry at Penn", but this book shows his enthusiasm for the fabric and history of his village as a whole. His investigations appear to have been carried out over many years with the complete co-operation of everyone involved from the local authorities to the oldest inhabitant.

The boundary between Wycombe and Chiltern District Councils runs through the middle of the study area, and two conservation areas were designated in 1970. But this study combines both areas with its formal appraisal carried out by Jo Tiddy, the Heritage Officer of Wycombe District Council. The district boundary is not at all clear on the ground, but what is obvious is the long spine road, which runs from the common land areas of Tylers Green, with their scattered vernacular buildings, to

the ridge-top area of Penn, with its well-to-do houses and ancient church. A break between the two areas is the estate of Rayners, which is largely hidden behind a tall brick wall. The house was built in 1847 by Sir Philip Rose, who became the virtual squire of Tylers Green. He built many new buildings around its two commons, most notably the church of St. Margaret. This was designed by David Brandon in 1854, and in 1889 Arthur Vernon added a curious bell-tower to the north-east side.

The Rose estate at Rayners contributes nothing to the village scene, but the Rose family were generous benefactors to Tylers Green, with its much-encroached commons. Miles Green explains how these encroachments took place, particularly by snatch-holders serving the Wycombe chair industry in the early nineteenth century, with their "mud houses" later giving way to more substantial dwellings.

Tylers Green is on the northern fringe of the urban sprawl of High Wycombe, and the character of Penn changed with the opening of Beaconsfield Railway Station in 1906, less than two miles away, when it became a rural idyll for the wealthy within

easy commuting distance of central London. The proximity of High Wycombe and Beaconsfield is a very real threat to Penn and Tylers Green, and Miles Green has made a valuable contribution in raising awareness of the character and interest contained in the buildings of his charming village.

Inevitably one can quibble with the details of such an extensive work. The important section on Penn's medieval tiles is awkwardly placed in the general survey of present-day buildings. The relationship between text and photographs is difficult to follow in places, and the cost of Woodbine cigarettes (2d.) appears twice. In the bibliography it would be good to know the source of Betjeman quotations, and "Williamson E" was not the author of the 1912 RCHM Buckinghamshire volume.

Jo Tiddy's three maps are excellent, but another smaller scale map showing the village in relation to High Wycombe and Beaconsfield would have been helpful. The Penn and Tylers Green Residents Society are to be congratulated on this splendid publication, and with its low price, it is deservedly selling well.

Ian Toplis