

REVIEWS

PREHISTORIC AND LATER SETTLEMENT AND LANDSCAPE FROM CHILTERN SCARP TO AYLESBURY VALE; THE ARCHAEOLOGY OF THE ASTON CLINTON BYPASS, BUCKINGHAMSHIRE

Robert Masefield

British Archaeological Report Series 473 (2008),
Hadrian Books Ltd, Oxford. (Price £40, available
from Archaeopress, 276, Banbury Road, Oxford
OX2 7ED).

viii and 234 pages including illustrations
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Eight years before work commenced on building the Aston Clinton bypass the archaeological implications of its route were evaluated by the County Museum Archaeological Service. Just prior to construction, trial trenches were excavated by RPS Group Plc with funding from the Highways Agency, subject to a brief provided by the County Archaeological Service. This led to the detailed examination of several areas. The course of the route can be seen as a random line cut through a piece of Buckinghamshire countryside with varied underlying geology; random apart from the fact of course that it obviously was designed to avoid the existing settlements of Buckland, Drayton Beauchamp and Aston Clinton, all of which potentially have early origins. This book describes and interprets the interesting results, some of which were unexpected.

The author has gone to some trouble to interpret the implications of the discoveries for Buckinghamshire, setting them in their context, and concludes his report with two wide-ranging discussion chapters worth reading in their own right. This makes a pleasant change, since some reports on work by commercial archaeological organisations cut corners, presenting the excavated evidence adequately but largely ignoring the wider implications. The study has also obviously benefited from an intelligent dialogue with the local experts, the County Archaeological Service. That it has been published promptly also contrasts with the absence

of publication by another organisation who worked on the Hertfordshire stretch of the adjoining A41 over fifteen years ago.

Excavation focussed on three areas: Site A, now the Aston Clinton (Woodlands) roundabout; Site B, now a cutting where the A41 passes beneath the Lower Icknield Way, and Site D, now a cutting on the crest of Tring Hill on the Bucks/Herts border. The principal results in summary are as follows.

The Aston Clinton roundabout site produced evidence for settlement including a ring gully, pits and probable four-post structures, loosely dated by ceramic evidence to the late Bronze Age to mid Iron Age. A piece of human skull from one pit produced a radiocarbon date of mid-Bronze Age date, but there were no other certain features of this early date. Another pit (8371) contained a possible 'ritual' deposit of very unusual pots locally paralleled at Bancroft, Milton Keynes, possibly of late Bronze Age date. Unfortunately in the absence of good radiocarbon dated groups, close dating of later prehistoric ceramic in mid-Bucks is at present rarely possible. The course of Roman Akeman Street passed through the site, and evidence for gravel pits adjacent to its course was found.

The Lower Icknield site produced four mid Bronze Age cremations, one radiocarbon dated, and hints of settlement. Again, there were problems with ceramic dating. By the early Iron Age a rectangular enclosure had been constructed, with an external round house and several four-post structures and pits. Sometime in the late Iron Age to early Roman period the enclosure was fitted within a major newly laid-out ditched trackway system, which was to develop into a holloway and was recorded for at least 300m, running SE-NW at almost right angles without interruption across the line of the Lower Icknield Way towards higher ground. This underwent several periods of resurfacing. Although there was quite a bit of Roman material from the site, certain Roman activity included a few cremations, evidence for iron-working, and some late Roman wells and water-holes, from the upper fills of which came early

Saxon pottery. The latter period was represented also by pits.

There were two features of particular interest at the Tring Hill end of the work (Site D), a Saxon cemetery of the late sixth to seventh centuries and a medieval windmill site. The discovery of the cemetery was unpredicted, although the dominant position of the hill would be a natural site for it. The cemetery contained eighteen inhumations, a few with grave goods, and adds to the increasing number of early cemeteries discovered in the county in recent years. There is evidence that, as at Dinton, some of the burials respected an existing boundary.

The reviewer would not be doing his job if he failed to point out some small problems. One in particular is that the reader has to presume, but is not explicitly told, that all the finds described between pages 110–133 come from Site B. Here also lies some difficulty with the catalogue of finds generally in that it is hard work to relate objects described in the catalogue to figures, as in the catalogue the fact that an object is illustrated is only indicated by an asterisk not a figure number, and the figure captions themselves give no information. One has to be able to identify for example, Fig. 60.99 as a quern before you can hunt a likely match in the catalogue. It would be helpful to know whether the analysed charred plant remains all came from site B, without having to check each context number. Lurking within the catalogue also are a few curiosities such as *hypercaust* (p.119) and *sarcen* (p.126). It would be interesting to know whether any use was made of metal detector survey in the recovery of material from Site B.

The results of the investigations as a whole are of much interest. Evidence for Bronze Age activity in the Vale is slight, and only gradually is a picture of early to middle Iron Age occupation emerging. The laying out of a trackway system which largely ignores the supposedly ‘ancient’ Lower Icknield is interesting, and must call into question the relevance of this ‘routeway’ in the prehistoric period. The alignment of the track reflects the parish boundary between Buckland and Drayton Beauchamp, and also shows functional links between the Chilterns and surrounding lowlands that Sandy Kidd and others have discussed elsewhere. The Saxon cemetery in its prominent position would also potentially be not far from the uphill end of such a track.

The author has done well to integrate the findings of a number of specialists into his valuable account. The report raises a number of issues which will need to be addressed by other workers in future, and the whole exercise can be judged a success. It demonstrates once again that even superficially bland pieces of Buckinghamshire landscape can be full of importance for an understanding of the county’s early history.

Michael Farley

THE CULTURAL HERITAGE OF CHILTERN WOODS; AN ILLUSTRATED GUIDE TO ARCHAEOLOGICAL FEATURES

John Morris

Publisher John J Morris, the Chiltern Woodlands Project (2009), The Lodge, 90 Station Road, Chinnor, Oxon OX 39 4HA, from whom available £11.44 incl. p&p.

60pages (A4)

ISBN 978-0-9535773-1-6

There is much to commend this booklet. It makes accessible the wealth of experience gathered by John Morris as director of the charity, the Chiltern Woodlands Project Ltd, and will open the eyes of many to the value and diversity of features preserved in woodland. Its coverage is rather more comprehensive than its title implies, since as well as describing archaeological features it also addresses policy issues and recording techniques. It is well illustrated with many good photographs, maps and drawings, and is generally a good buy. Its layout can on occasion, however, give the reader some hard work. For example, on page 25 there is a main chapter heading ‘Historic Features’, a second-tier heading ‘Historic features found in Chiltern Woods’ a third-tier heading ‘linear features’, and then three further fourth-tier headings including ‘banks and ditches’. Although multiple headings can be useful, the system falls apart on the next page, where the previous fourth-tier heading ‘Banks and ditches’ becomes a second-tier heading and on the next page a survey of Pigotts Wood is inserted (not included in the contents list), which confusingly uses the same heading-style but which actually interrupts the chapter that continues on the subsequent page.

Perhaps the reviewer is unduly sensitive on the

topic of acknowledgment and reference to previous studies, but there is so much useful published work on earthworks in the woodland of the Chilterns, particularly in *Records of Bucks*, that it is a pity none of it receives direct citation in the text or bibliography. Page 46–47, for example, illustrates a ‘homestead’ in Park Wood Bradenham, but there is no reference to its initial discovery and description in *Recs* 21. In recent volumes of *Records* can also be found comprehensive accounts of several Chiltern earthworks at, for example, Stokenchurch, Cippenham, Fillington Wood, Frith Hill and Brays Wood (*Recs* vols 20 (x2), 33, 38, 45) and there is a useful discussion by Pike (1995), ‘Earthwork enclosures in the Buckinghamshire Chilterns’ in Holgate R *Chiltern Archaeology; recent work* (The Book Castle, Dunstable, 118–123), none of which are cited. This informative booklet will be of much interest to the general public, but perhaps a future edition will address some of these slight anomalies.

Michael Farley

LEIGHTON BUZZARD AND LINSLADE:
A HISTORY

Paul Brown

Phillimore & Co. Ltd, 2008

xii + 132 pp, 167 b&w illustrations, hardback
£16.99

ISBN 978-1-86077-485-9

Paul Brown, a widely published author on environmental topics, has here turned his pen to writing a history of his local town, Leighton Buzzard and Linslade. The dominant historical partner in this urban entity, which was created in 1965, is Leighton Buzzard in Bedfordshire: but the history of the two places has been intimately linked since the early 19th century – with the arrival first of the canal and then of the railway, which led to the creation of the new town of Linslade in Buckinghamshire. But, for centuries before this, the river Ouzel (or Lovat, to give it its older name), running between the two places, created not just a boundary between two counties but also a natural corridor linking settlement along either bank. This book is of real interest, therefore, to those concerned with the history of Buckinghamshire as well as of Bedfordshire.

The author writes largely from an historical

perspective (as his title indicates), creating a very readable narrative of the story of the twin town and its setting. In each of the periods covered by the ten chapters, from ancient times on through the middle ages and up to the present, he links local themes to a broader picture, setting the history of the particular place into a national context. This method is particularly successful for developments from the early modern period onwards, when written sources for local history become fairly abundant and, also, when the wider national picture is comparatively familiar.

The surviving material evidence is also well deployed by the author to illustrate his narrative, and this again becomes a special strength for the later periods, from which significant numbers of historic buildings survive, and for which there are contemporary photographs. These provide a carefully chosen and fascinating series of illustrations – including many poignant ones of key historic buildings demolished in the ‘bad old days’ of the 1950s and ’60s (and with attrition continuing thereafter). There is an especially good account of the commercial and industrial development of the town from the mid 19th century onwards, together with the changes that accompanied it in society, education, religion and other spheres. The reviewer, though not unfamiliar with the town, certainly benefited from the author’s perceptive overall picture of these processes.

Paul Brown’s book is to be commended as providing a coherent, well-researched and enjoyable narrative of the history of Leighton Buzzard and Linslade: one that is self-contained, while at the same time setting the context for those who wish to look further into particular aspects. The publishers are the prestigious local-history specialists, Phillimore Press, and the book is correspondingly well produced.

Richard Gem

JOHN PIPER, MYFANWY PIPER, LIVES IN
ART

Frances Spalding

Oxford University Press 2009

xxvi + 598pp with 84 colour plates and 98 black and white illustrations, notes, select bibliography, index.

ISBN 978-0-19-956761-4 £25

Shall we firstly confirm that John Piper is a Buckinghamshire artist, and Myfanwy Piper a Buckinghamshire writer? Quite how much importance should attach to this, other than for topographical exactitude, I'm not entirely certain. Neither was born in the county, but residence of around sixty years from 1935 to the 1990s should qualify them. I have occasionally defended the Pipers from those who would claim them for Oxfordshire – misled, I think, by the postal address of the Piper home, Fawley Bottom Farmhouse, Henley on Thames, Oxon, and perhaps by John Piper's authorship of the *Shell Guide to Oxfordshire* (1938 and 1953). It's true the house is dangerously close to the border with that foreign county in the south-west toe of Buckinghamshire where Chiltern dips down to Thames. However, Fawley Bottom Farmhouse is firmly within Bucks and, I would opine, always has been. Of course, the Berks/Bucks/Oxon boundaries have been tinkered with on occasion, but not, I believe, in this area. If any reader can tell me otherwise, I shall be grateful.

This double biography, the latest in a distinguished line of works on art history by Frances Spalding, is a considerable achievement, a tour de force. Several books have been written on John Piper and his place as a leading British artist of the twentieth century, but this is the first I have found that gives a full account of Myfanwy's writings. Her *oeuvre* is less extensive than John's (few could match his output), but here we have detailed her work as art critic, literary critic, editor, anthologist, and, perhaps most particularly, as librettist for the operas of Benjamin Britten and Alun Hoddinott. All this in addition to running a home, for several years without what most of us would consider the essential mod cons of electricity and mains water, bringing up four children and entertaining a seemingly endless stream of visitors (including Queen Mum offering to do the washing up: it's uncertain if Her Majesty's bluff was called) – not a bad score.

Spalding strikes just the right balance of the lives and the works, giving us a delightful combination of the scholarly and domestic. I am grateful that, as the author notes, critical analysis of the art is kept to a minimum – I like my art with only the slightest introduction – in order to keep the book a manageable size, though still almost six hundred pages. John Piper was a versatile artist working in many media: most well known are his Neo Romantic depictions of buildings in the landscape.

On this theme there is one place in Bucks of major importance – Stowe. He visited that outstanding landscape garden in the north of the county over many years, making many paintings. In the foreword he wrote to his book on Stowe (Hurtwood Press/Tate Gallery 1983), he states that at the time of his early visits "I also changed in my whole attitude to architecture, not to mention my attitude to painting.... Though I was not at school there, Stowe has been a great education to me." As this was about the time he was emerging from his abstract period, we must be grateful to Stowe for its contribution to the development of his mature style. I believe his lasting achievement will be his addition, his grafting, of modernism to the British tradition in topographical recording and stained glass. With Myfanwy, her critical writings remain good reading, her most lasting work will be her librettos. We are given a good selection of colour plates and some nice old photos (in proper black and white). Those with an interest in British arts and culture through a good slice of the twentieth century will find themselves at home. I had one disappointment, not from the author but the publisher; the early printings had too many literals, which marred an otherwise handsome production, printed on acid-free paper and at a reasonable price. I understand the printing errors were corrected in subsequent reprints.

I met the Pipers a few times around 1960: I hasten to add it was only in a service capacity. I was an assistant in the art shop Reading Fine Art Gallery in Cross Street, Reading and they came occasionally for materials. They were immediately friendly to a gauche teenager and kind, on one occasion giving me a lift to the station with a heavy parcel. This was in their Citroen DS, an exciting trip for a boy in that futuristic motor.

Readers will have noticed that this is not an academic review. I think of it rather as an appreciation, but I hope I have conveyed my enthusiasm for a fine book, widely researched and detailed, an absorbing and informing record of two remarkable individuals, a remarkable partnership. A partnership, I must not omit to mention, always liberally spiced with humour, duly recorded here. It will surely remain the definitive record of John Betjeman's Mr Pahper and Goldilegz. I give the last word to a quote from each: from John about to marry Myfanwy, "I'm afraid I never take a holiday. Do you mind?" From Myfanwy in her preface for

To John Piper on His Eightieth Birthday (1983), "I have lived with John for well over half his eighty years and think I can say that I have enjoyed every other minute of it".

Bruce Lewington
February 2010

BUCKINGHAMSHIRE'S FAVOURITE CHURCHES

Julian Hunt

RJL Smith & Associates, Much Wenlock, Shropshire, in association with The Buckinghamshire Historic Churches Trust

xii + 136 pages including 155 illustrations

Hardback: ISBN 978-0-9552580-3-9, £20.00

Softback: ISBN 978-0-9552580-2-2, £14.95

This book was published in June 2007 to celebrate the Golden Jubilee of the Buckinghamshire Historic Churches Trust. It is dedicated to the memory of Elliott Viney, the last surviving BHCT founder trustee, who died in 2002. Elliott was Chairman of the Trust's Inspection Committee for many years, making good use of his vast knowledge of Buckinghamshire's churches.

Books that select particular churches as 'favourites' are always open to the objection that the selection has been wrong. The problem is compounded if authors go further and attempt to rank their favourites. Thus, Simon Jenkins's *England's Thousand Best Churches* (1999), which gave 'star ratings' to the churches described, encountered a good deal of criticism. In fairness to Jenkins, however, it is striking that all of the 24 Buckinghamshire churches he described are now included in the total of 55 covered in *Buckinghamshire's Favourite Churches*.

Having decided to produce the book for its Golden Jubilee, the BHCT established a committee to oversee the project, and to choose the churches. It was clearly important to cover all periods and to find representative churches from all parts of the historic county. The committee chose Julian Hunt to write the book and RJL Smith as the publisher. The firm has produced many excellent guides to churches. Julian has been a well-known author in Buckinghamshire for many years, although I think he would be the first to admit that churches and their architecture have never been his primary

interest. However Julian has again shown his versatility, using his research and writing skills to produce a book that is informative, accurate, and readable.

Buckinghamshire's Favourite Churches has been well received and the choice of churches generally approved of. It must be said, however, that this sort of book presents authors with some difficult choices. There are different ways of presenting churches; all have their advantages and disadvantages. The overriding need, of course, is to make information easily available: this is best achieved through an appropriate series of indices. The structure adopted in *Buckinghamshire's Favourite Churches* is to focus chapters on particular architectural styles – in other words, roughly by date. Many churches do have a dominant style, and some are wonderful survivals from single building operations. The problem is that the majority of churches bring together different styles and are the work of many centuries. In many cases, there is still uncertainty as to the sequence of events. Such mysteries often add to the joy of visiting churches and the detailed study of an individual building can become a lifetime's work for some enthusiasts.

Buckinghamshire's Favourite Churches begins with a chapter on 'Saxon and Norman Churches', which, quite rightly, starts with Wing, Stewkley and Fingest. However, it also includes Dinton and Twyford (which only have Norman south doorways) and Lillingstone Dayrell (which only has a Norman chancel arch). In many ways, it seems strange that these churches are found in the first chapter at all. There may some logic for the inclusion of Hanslope because of its wonderful Norman Chancel, yet the most distinctive feature of the church is surely its magnificent Perpendicular style tower and spire. The absence of cross-referencing or indexing means that readers of the 'Saxon and Norman' chapter have no means of 'picking up' on these splendid 15th century features at Hanslope.

The subsequent chapters deal with churches in the Gothic Styles of Early English, Decorated, and Perpendicular. Post reformation churches are grouped into Classical, Gothic Revival, and 20th century, with the final chapter reserved for Non-Conformist and Catholic Churches. In all fifty Anglican churches are described. The first paragraph about each church describes the location of the parish, together with its size and present day population, and then goes on to provide some basic

facts about the foundation of the church and its early history. The descriptions are comprehensive; important features and monuments are covered and any usual items mentioned. Many churchwardens seem to have been very pleased with the accuracy of the entries on ‘their’ churches, surely the finest tribute.

There are good descriptions of the way that changing tastes have resulted in major alterations – such as the adaptation or rebuilding of the three ‘preaching hall’ churches at Buckingham, Marlow and Slough. It is good that some unusual churches – certainly not everyone’s favourites – have been included. Examples include St James’s, Gerrards Cross, with its extraordinarily eccentric exterior, and St Francis at Terriers (High Wycombe), a work of Giles Gilbert Scott, opened in 1930. Julian Hunt shows that St Francis is a masterpiece of lighting control. Apparently it was even better before the false floor was added in the tower, obstructing the its ‘lantern tower’ effect. This is one of very few important facts that Mr Hunt has missed.

The last chapter quite rightly includes Pugin’s Catholic Church of St Peter in Marlow. It also includes four important non-conformist buildings: the Quaker Meeting House at Jordans; the Baptist Meeting House at Winslow; Chenies Baptist Church; and Newport Pagnell Methodist Church. Given the importance of non-conformity in the history of the county, it is understandable that author should regret that it was not possible to include more chapels – but he does list another 15 which are worth seeking out.

All 55 churches have at least two illustrations, mainly modern photographs. Many photographers are represented, but the vast majority – 106 of the 155 – have been specially taken by R.J.L. Smith, the

book’s publisher. Smith’s are renowned for good church photography, and they have certainly lived up to their reputation in *Buckinghamshire’s Favourite Churches*. The most surprising photographs are two of the interior of the Bedford Chapel at Chenies. Permission is not often granted to take such photographs; until this book appeared the most recent I had seen appeared in books published in 1901 and 1912 and on a postcard posted in 1909. Some might question whether the Bedford Chapel, a very private chapel with extremely limited access, should be included in the book at all.

Over the last 50 years, the Buckinghamshire Historic Churches Trust has made grants of £894,000 to 240 churches and chapels in the county (including 36 non-conformist buildings). In the past, I have found it a little difficult to find out about the BHCT. It has now launched a group called “Friends of Buckinghamshire Historic Churches”, which together with *Buckinghamshire’s Favourite Churches*, should raise awareness of the BHCT, and its good work.

One important fact that – not in the book – is that 22 Anglican churches have closed in Buckinghamshire since the BHCT was founded 50 years ago, and a vast number of non-conformist chapels have also closed for a variety of reasons, not always through lack of congregations. Perhaps this book should have looked ahead a little more and considered the ever increasing pressures likely to threaten survival of our churches in the future. At very least, it is essential that, in another fifty years, all of the ‘favourites’ covered in this book should still be there to enjoy.

Michael G Hardy