

REVIEWS

THE NORTH MARSTON STORY: A HISTORY OF THE VILLAGE

Compiled and edited by Sue Chaplin and John Spargo

Published by North Marston History Club, 2014
ISBN 978-0-9929089-0-4. Price £20.

This history of North Marston has emerged from the combined efforts of members of the village's relatively recently established History Club, and includes both local history and a picture of village life in North Marston through the ages. It is particularly strong in dealing with the last two centuries, for which the editors have managed to discover a wealth of evidence relating to local events and of the village's inhabitants and how they lived their lives. It is less strong in its coverage of earlier periods, with some notable exceptions.

The early history concentrates upon the development of the church and on its clergy, particularly the famous Master John Schorne of the late 13th and early 14th centuries, who was venerated for his piety and for his supposed miracle of finding a source of water. Schorne's tomb in the chancel and later his reliquary became a celebrated destination for late medieval pilgrims, apparently the third most popular pilgrimage in the country after Canterbury and Walsingham. The Schorne cult was thus, for a period, of considerable financial advantage both to the church and also to the village, which benefited from providing hospitality to pilgrims, as the cult of St Rumbold had been of benefit to the church and town of Buckingham a few centuries earlier. The history shows how the church's buildings and its artefacts grew to reflect its exceptional late medieval wealth.

Subsequently the history concentrates on the village's farms and buildings and matters of local importance such as its early windmills and milling operations, its great fire in 1705 and the impact of the Inclosure Act of 1778, all significant in the life of the village. There is however no mention of the position around the time of the Domesday Survey to show how the ownership of land changed after

the Conquest or how the church came under the control of the Knights of St John. There is also little about the village's attitude towards or the impact of major national events such as the Reformation or the Civil War or of the impact on the village of its dispersed landownership structure. The village's land was owned at most times by a number of individuals and institutions rather than by one major landowner; this may have helped to develop the village's sense of independence and contributed to its support of Methodism, which by the 19th century, had become the predominant faith in the village, at the expense of the Anglican church.

This history is in essence a history of local life which succeeds through describing the village and how its inhabitants lived, worked and played. Until the 19th century this is partly based on general statements but for the later period is based on a great deal of local evidence and anecdotes about all aspects of the village, including its church, chapels, houses, farms, schools, shops, pubs, businesses, sports teams and above all how people's lives changed as local and national initiatives, such as a reliable water supply, improved the lives of village people. The reader learns how self sufficient, reliant on agriculture and relatively isolated the village was until well into the 20th century. This is exemplified by the village having had gates across the main Granborough Road, which had to be opened and then shut by traffic going to or coming from Winslow. They were a relic of the 1778 Enclosure and were not removed until 1888.

The history shows how, during the 19th century almost every type of service, shop and small business was available to cater for local custom. The decline of local services and the village's increased connections to the wider world are then traced as they occurred in the second half of the 20th century.

Jeremy Howarth

SOLENT – THAMES RESEARCH
 FRAMEWORK FOR THE HISTORIC
 ENVIRONMENT: RESEARCH ASSESSMENTS
 AND RESEARCH AGENDAS
 Edited by Gill Hey and Jill Hind
 Oxford-Wessex Monograph 6 (Oxford)
 Oxford Archaeology, 2014
 ISBN 978-0-9574672-1-7. Price £35.00

The western portion of the South-East region of England (a region whose current demarcation is as idiosyncratic and random as one could imagine) is composed of the areas of the four ancient counties of Berkshire, Buckinghamshire, Hampshire and Oxfordshire. It stretches from the Great Ouse in the north, enveloping a portion of the upper and middle Thames valley, southwards to the Solent and the Isle of Wight. It encompasses, in varying degrees of completeness, the eastern Cotswolds, the Oxford clay plain, Vale of Aylesbury, the western half of the Chiltern Hills, Berkshire Downs, Thames valley, Lambourn Downs, Hampshire Downs and Hampshire Basin. It also encompasses some twelve geological formations, six topographic zones such as chalkland, river valleys, clays and gravels, limestone, intertidal and marine areas and over twenty zones of environmental character.

The volume is 344 pages long and sub-divided into nineteen chapters comprising an introduction (1), geo-archaeology, palaeo-environmental and archaeological science (2); the remaining chapters follow a chronological sequence of eight periods (Lower/Middle Palaeolithic, Late Upper Palaeolithic & Mesolithic, Neolithic & Early Bronze Age, Late Bronze Age & Iron Age, Roman, Medieval, Later medieval and Post-medieval & modern). Each period 'resource assessment' is followed by a 'research agenda'. The former is supported by easily intelligible coloured illustrations (16), Tables (27) and appropriate and informative plates/images (123). Of the 247 pages of text some 85% is devoted to period overviews and c.15% relates to research agendas. As is pointed out by Wenban-Smith in chapter 3, the Palaeolithic in Britain spans a period of 600,000 years and therefore it no surprise this represents almost 25% of the descriptive text (referred to as 'assessments'). The later prehistoric period is represented by just over 25% of text; the Roman period (despite its brevity but not its data set) by 10%; the medieval period c.28% and the post-medieval & modern period

by 12% of the descriptive text. All the texts are produced, in part or in whole, by leading practitioners in their fields. The question is, are they any good? The short answer is emphatically 'yes' and will make essential reading for anyone involved in archaeological research, at least for the immediate future.

This volume has been well produced and is a credit to all those who have contributed to its production. Despite, or because of, the artificiality of this particular sub-region, the authors have managed the task of dealing with its diverse elements in a lucid and coherent way. There is much merit in Lambrick's observation that it is 'more realistic to think of the area as a transect across different geographical and cultural entities'. In this reviewer's opinion it would have been far preferable for English Heritage to have followed the regional designations of British Regional Geology rather than the cavalier simplicities of late 2nd millennium politics. One is not surprised at the production of this volume, given the calibre of its contributors, but that it was produced at all. This is no small achievement.

Given the nature of the funding of English archaeology, there is no surprise that landscape studies are relatively poorly represented. In addition, this reviewer would have liked to have seen some discussion relating to the various specialist disciplines (artefact studies, environmental, osteo and geo-archaeological studies etc) in how they co-operate, train and disseminate their results within their specialist fields and regions. These are the people on whom we depend for the quality of archaeological research for the present and, equally important, for the future.

Finally, the question must be asked – who is the volume aimed at? Clearly, given its title and price tag this must be practitioners (some wealthier ones), libraries (some) and professional organisations (at least those larger ones that have to justify their post-excavation budgets). While this may be inevitable, it is a pity since the quality of the writing deserves to be made known to the wider public. Perhaps the 'research agenda' chapters should have been assigned to an appendix and a different title might have helped to sell this volume. After all, these texts are available on English Heritage's web site for those professional archaeologists who will use this work. Nevertheless, this volume sets a new standard for the

production of all future 'research frameworks' in the British Isles (including Ireland).

Jonathan Hunn

THE LIFE & TIMES OF A CHARLBURY
QUAKER: THE JOURNALS OF WILLIAM
JONES, 1784–1818

Edited by Hannah Jones
published by Oxfordshire Records Society,
Volume 69
ISBN 978-0-902509-78-8. Price £25.00

The Religious Society of Friends or the Quakers had a long established community in Charlbury, Oxon. into which William Jones was born in 1760. George Fox, the founder of the Quakers, had set an example to his literate followers in keeping a journal in which the development of his spiritual life is recorded alongside the events of the contemporary world.

A weaver by trade, Jones followed this standard, known as 'journaling', by at first keeping notebooks from which he wrote up his journal. As his ministry developed and his confidence, authority and faith became more assured, he made direct entries. In so doing he created a historical document that pulls no punches about the world this good man found all about him as he struggled inwardly to order his 'feeble minde', whilst at the same time seeking 'to stir up the minds of people to wait upon God'.

Jones details his itinerary and his like-minded companions as he follows his ministry, making many journeys on foot throughout the Cotswolds and the surrounding countryside. He expresses his concern at the cold weather, the price of bread, addresses the Overseers of the Poor accordingly, and arranges collections to alleviate the suffering of the poor. He also experienced harassment when, for want of a meeting place in Dedington, he and another Friend, Hannah Smith, spoke under some 'wallnut' trees, and the owner of the glade sent a man up into the trees to prune them. Unafraid of confronting the dark side of life, Jones feels he spoke properly following the heart-breaking death and burial of a father and two of his sons from some unknown disease.

This is a record left by a decent man whose devotional mind-set may seem strange to many

today, but whose thoughts and acts were principled and largely respected by the many strangers he meets. It provides us with a glimpse as to how these dissenters saw the world as they found it, on the one hand remonstrating with a youth who having taken to drink wanted to become a soldier, whilst at another time remarking on how the 'level tendency of Ringing bells' causes a lightness of the mind.

At times it is a doleful read but it has its moments of illumination. In the last entry in the volume Jones remarks that he has written a letter to the Duchess of Beaufort as he felt her desirous of living a good religious life. When we contemplate the subsequent development of our civilisation we begin to understand that it was people like Jones who, in questioning themselves, set the standards by which we now judge ourselves. This volume is for the serious researcher into local, religious and social history.

Nigel Robert Wilson

BROUGHTON, MILTON KEYNES,
BUCKINGHAMSHIRE: THE EVOLUTION OF
A SOUTH MIDLANDS LANDSCAPE

Rob Atkins, Elizabeth Popescu, Gareth Rees and
Dan Stansbie
Oxford Archaeology Monograph 22
Oxford Archaeology, 2014
ISBN 978-1-907588-06-8. Hardback, 466pp.
Price £30

Following the demise, two decades ago, of Milton Keynes Archaeology Unit, archaeological fieldwork in advance of the continuing development of the new city has continued apace, with a range of archaeological contractors stepping into MKAU's shoes, and sampling the delights of excavation on the unforgiving clay soils of the area. The east flank of Milton Keynes, adjacent to the village of Broughton, has been one of the final areas to be developed: this publication describes excavation and fieldwork undertaken between 2006-8 at Broughton Manor Farm by CAM ARC, the Cambridgeshire County Council's field unit (now Oxford Archaeology East), and at neighbouring Brooklands, by Oxford Archaeology South.

Excavations at Broughton Manor Farm covered a total area of 6.3 hectares in a development area of

48ha, and revealed an extensive Iron Age and Roman settlement, and the largest Early Roman cremation cemetery yet discovered in Buckinghamshire. At Brooklands, ten separate locations were excavated following evaluation of the entire development area (155ha), revealing a continuation of the Manor Farm site as well as extensive evidence of human activity from the prehistoric to the medieval period.

Because of the extent of the area covered by these investigations, and the wide range of periods represented by the evidence recovered, this volume very sensibly takes the form of a landscape study, examining the evidence by period, bringing together material from different sites to build up a picture of the changing landscape, agriculture and settlement in this part of the new city, and relating it to the results of the work undertaken by MKAU and others. The volume comprises an introductory chapter, followed by five chapters covering earlier prehistoric; Middle Iron Age to Roman; late Iron Age and Early Roman cemeteries; Romano-British settlement, and Post-Roman settlement. Each chapter is self-contained, with descriptions of the excavations, finds and environmental evidence from the period covered, followed by a wide-ranging discussion. Four appendices follow, describing methodologies used for dealing with finds and environmental evidence, and containing coin catalogues. Finally there is an extensive bibliography and, most usefully, the volume has a detailed index.

As might be expected for a publication within an established monograph series, presentation of the evidence is up to OA's usual standards. The volume is well illustrated, intelligent use is made of colour in the frequent plans, and in all photographs. The frequent combination of drawings and photographs for both site details and finds is a technique that others would do well to follow. The text is well written and readable, and does not suffer from the 'technospeak', favoured by some professional archaeologists. Surprisingly the volume is a hardback, unusual for an excavation report of this size. Considering its size and quality, it is also very reasonably priced.

This volume is to be highly commended, particularly to anyone interested in the archaeology of Milton Keynes and north Buckinghamshire.

Bob Zeepvat

THE SECRETS OF Q CENTRAL: HOW LEIGHTON BUZZARD SHORTENED THE SECOND WORLD WAR

Edited by Paul Brown and Edwin Herbert
The History Press, 2014
ISBN 978 0 7509 6072 4. Price £14.99

Did you know that RAF Leighton Buzzard once housed what was claimed to be the largest telephone exchange in the world? This was known as Q Central, which functioned non-stop throughout the Second World War and after, maintaining the communications essential for the success of the war effort. Its initial function was to provide reliable communications for RAF Fighter Command and Bomber Command with the hundreds of radar stations across the country. Very quickly, due to exigencies of modern warfare, it became connected to the code-breakers at Bletchley Park, the Special Operations Executive, the Political Warfare Executive and many other units engaged in the fight. It was so secret that John Vickers, one of the local Post Office telegraph boys who used to deliver messages there every day, never knew what it was – for seventy years!

Not far away at Oxenden House RAF No 60 (Signals) Group of Fighter Command was the centre of radar operations and development throughout the countries of the former British Empire. It had started life as the Air Ministry Research Establishment at Bawdsey in Suffolk, but following a panic in the late summer of 1939 due to an apparent spying mission conducted from the huge Nazi airship the *Graf Zeppelin* all up the east coast of Britain, it was felt that Leighton Buzzard represented a location less susceptible to enemy air attack. Also, local airfields acted as facilitating sites for practical exercises in radar enhancements.

Both radar and telecommunications were new technologies at the outbreak of war, so these new methods of fighting, perceived and organised by exceptional individuals, evolved exponentially from what were relatively small organisations at the start of the conflict into the huge entities that persisted beyond victory and throughout the Cold War.

The secrecy surrounding Q Central and No 60 Group was such that the Department of Health was unaware of their existence when it organised the evacuation of around 7,000 children and vulnerable adults from London to Bedfordshire and Bucking-

hamshire through Leighton Buzzard railway station. So this relatively small, non-military, rural market town rapidly acquired a double identity: one public and the other very, very hush-hush.

The book goes on to develop a very public history. In Chapter 10, entitled 'A Sharp Intake' a very readable and humane accounting is presented of the billeting of urban evacuees onto a predominantly rural population. It does not hold back on the difficulties this presented to every party involved, including the voluntary helpers.

Whilst this book takes a fierce local proprietary pride in the superb achievements of Q Central and No 60 Group, it remains a record of all the people of Leighton Buzzard who endured the Second World War. It records who served and where too many sadly perished. It is the sort of book which in thirty years' time historians of the period, both local and national, will want to access for references as it is an objective, warts-and-all record, rich in detail.

If you are interested in the history of the RAF, fascinated by the Second World War, and a citizen of Leighton Buzzard and its environs, then you will have to read this book. Priced at £14.99 it represents excellent value.

Nigel Robert Wilson

BLOODY BRITISH HISTORY: BUCKINGHAMSHIRE

Eddy Brazil

The History Press, 2014

ISBN 978 0 7509 6023 6. Price £9.99

It is easy for the experienced historian to be annoyed by books of this sort which assert often uncertain sources and outdated scholarship as fact, because it makes colourful exciting copy. Yet there is a place for these books, as they open a door to history proper, hopefully whetting the public appetite for something more substantial.

At first, possibly for editorial reasons, this book adopts the broad sweep approach to history, with a chapter on the Romans which does not quote but owes a great deal to the methodology of the late Bishop Kennet, who in 1695 published some fanciful nonsense about the Roman conquest which was still being taught in Buckinghamshire schools up to sixty years ago. The following chapter on the Anglo-Saxon settlement is little better but once

we reach the Black Death things are definitely improving.

The remainder of the book is interesting. However, the description of the War of the Roses as a 'mafia' war is a tad silly. A reference to medieval war-lords would have been adequate. Yet the chapter on the Lollards is decently expressed and reasonably described.

The narrative on the Civil War entitled 'Skinheads v. Longhairs' is over-dependent on the Battle of Holman's Bridge, which readers of this magazine will already know from the energies of our dear friend, George Lamb, to be a grotesque exaggeration of the facts. Nevertheless, reference is made to a compliment expressed by Nehemiah Wharton, a sergeant in Denzil Holles' regiment and a notorious puritan bigot, that 'Buckinghamshire is the sweetest county I ever saw'. However, recent historical research has absolved the Dinton Hermit of executing Charles I, as it was the public executioner all along.

A violent assault upon a Quaker funeral in Amersham is reported, as is a very good record of the Masonite heresy in 1690 at Water Stratford. We are vigorously reminded of many local eccentrics and some truly awful acts of extreme violence which have taken place over the years. The biggest surprise for this reviewer was the recounting of the 1891 murder of two gamekeepers at Pitstone: one of the victims is a member of my own extended Chiltern family. The outcome of the police enquiry was just, if equally tragic.

This book is not for the serious historian, although it does highlight many local events and curiosities which readers may wish to study further. The price is good value for these days and it will cheerfully move off the shelves of any good bookshop that has survived to date.

Nigel Robert Wilson