

REVIEWS

AYLESBURY A PICTORIAL HISTORY. Hugh Hanley & Julian Hunt. (*Phillimore, 1993*) ISBN 0 85033 873 5, £11.95

The authors of this pictorial history, as most readers will know, are respectively County Archivist and Local Studies Librarian at Aylesbury. They are to be warmly congratulated on producing a work that manages to be not only readable but reliable.

A judicious introduction provides a background to the pictures, and eschews speculation – for example on the disputed A.S. Chronicle entry for AD 571 – concentrating on what is certainly known. The rest of the book consists of 131 well chosen and well captioned photographs and engravings, arranged thematically. They cover manors, markets and mills, the development of the street plan and the local economy, turnpikes, canals and railways, and the inns that served them, churches and schools, law enforcement and civil administration. Readers may be disappointed that not all the photographs are dated, but if so they have no idea of what is involved in dating photographs from internal evidence alone; it calls for a width and depth of knowledge to which only those with the authors' experience can aspire. They have worked miracles in assembling as much information as they have.

It is a serious criticism – and one that had also to be levelled at the same publisher's similar work on High Wycombe – that there is no map of modern Aylesbury to help readers relate the pictures to the present-day scene. But residents of Aylesbury can supply this want from their own knowledge, and others will appreciate this vivid recreation of Aylesbury's past. It is also a painful reminder of the devastation that commercial greed and insensitive planning can effect.

J.C.T

THE CHILTERNs. Leslie W. Hepple & Alison M. Doggett (*Phillimore, 1992*) ISBN 0 85033 833 6 £19.95

Current local history depends less on parish chronologies and manorial descent than on themes such as landscape, industrial archaeology and population change. It is natural then that a new standard work on the Chilterns should be written not by an historian, but by two geographers, Leslie Hepple, a lecturer in geography at Bristol University and Alison Doggett, a geography teacher at Berhampstead School for Girls. Their achievement is to summarise the latest and most authoritative views on the development of the Chiltern landscape and to present the result in a readable and beautifully illustrated form.

The Chilterns is a substantial book comprising 272 pages, lavishly illustrated with 171 maps, diagrams and black and white and colour photographs. Every aspect of the Chiltern landscape is covered, from geology and natural history to roads, canals and railways and no difficult issue is evaded. Rather than endless drawings of potsherds and axeheads, the reader is treated to an informed discussion of likely land uses and economic organisation in prehistoric times. The pace of Saxon colonisation of the Chilterns is assessed and the issue of field patterns and common arable is dealt with thoroughly. Particular attention is paid to the Chiltern woodland with a clear explanation of its preservation and management since the medieval period. The book is brought up to date with a discussion of metroland and the impact of modern farming methods. The bibliography and chapter notes are meticulous and provide a comprehensive reading list for the serious student of the Chilterns. The joy of the book is the crisp maps and diagrams which explain complex issues with admirable clarity. Location plans, sections of strata, distribution maps, field diagrams, flow charts and isometric drawings punctuate the text on nearly

every page. The illustrations, many in full colour, help the authors make specific points and are not included simply to make the book attractive. Some of the images are particularly apt, for instance, the representation in an illuminated manuscript of King Offa founding St. Albans, the Abbey shown in the palm of his hand and in the decorated gothic style in vogue at the time the document was transcribed. Several estate maps are accurately reproduced, with the lettering in the keys readable and the colour conveying the mapmaker's exact purpose. Alison Doggett's own colour photographs greatly enhance the book and are most useful when showing landscape and crop features.

Few books published in recent years can have made such a valuable contribution to our understanding of a distinct region of England. The first edition of *The Chilterns*, published by Phillimore in late 1992, is already out of print and a revised edition is in preparation. It is gratifying that such a worthwhile book has also been a financial success. The authors are to be heartily congratulated.

Julian Hunt

EXCAVATIONS ON MEDIEVAL SITES IN MILTON KEYNES. Dennis C. Mynard, 194 pp. 98 figs, 40 tables, A4, card covers. (*Buckinghamshire Archaeology Society, 1994*), ISBN 0 949003 15 8, £28. From Oxbow Books, Oxford.

The title of this anthology, for such it is, is not immediately appealing; on the title page, admittedly, the words 'and later' are added to 'medieval'. This is presumably because one of the churches investigated, St Martin's, Fenny Stratford is an eighteenth-century foundation, formerly thought, wrongly it seems, to have been built on the site of a medieval chantry chapel.

The author presents the results of seven excavations and five watching briefs at medieval sites in the Milton Keynes area. The fact that all the work was development-led rather than research-led means that the reports vary considerably in their scope and (almost literally) depth. It also means that the reader is left with no overall idea of the pattern of medieval settlement in the area as a whole.

This volume is, however, only one of the excellent Milton Keynes Monographs now being published by the Buckinghamshire Archaeological Society. Medieval occupation in Great Linford and other villages is being treated in separate volumes. A synthetic volume must surely follow one day. The volume under review will, like the others, provide a valuable source for the historians and archaeologists of the future.

One wonders, however, whether it would not have been preferable, as some would argue, to publish (if precise reference to archives was thought insufficient) the details of pottery, tiles and other artefacts on microfiche only. In the first, and longest, section of the book, thirty out of forty pages are devoted to the finds. This is at Bradwell Bury, where the excavation of the substantial stone-built manor house has thrown a little light on the history of the manor. It seems to have been without a capital message for over three centuries, since 'the excavation produced little evidence of activity on the site from the later fourteenth to the late eighteenth century'.

Holy Trinity, Little Woolstone, is given different treatment. Mynard's summary of the excavation, a mere fourteen pages, is based on the site archive and includes short reports on the artefacts, some illustrated, but presents a more digestible entry for the general reader.

The watching briefs (with subsequent intervention where possible) at churches in Milton Keynes, Bletchley, Simpson, Fenny Stratford and Willan, provide a salutary lesson for other parts of the country where there is not – or has not been – an alert and energetic archaeological unit. The church floors all contributed a little to the sum of knowledge about church archaeology. The present transmigration of Anglican churches seems unstoppable and who knows how many research opportunities are being missed. There cannot be many areas which have been as intensively studied as Milton Keynes has; very properly publication follows excavation. The place for this scholarly but weighty A4 volume is however on the desk and not the bedside table.

J.P.A.F.