

Reviews

The Oxford Region: a Scientific and Historical Survey, edited by A. F. Martin and R. W. Steel and published by the Oxford University Press for the British Association for the Advancement of Science, 1954. Pp. xii+202; 5 plates and 63 maps and diagrams. Price 21s.

At a time when geographers and economic historians are giving a new meaning to topographical studies it was an excellent idea to make the meeting of the British Association in Oxford an excuse for this 'scientific and historical survey' of the Oxford Region. To define that region in a way which will satisfy both the geographer and the historian is not an easy task, but it is skilfully attempted by Mr. Martin in his introductory chapter, and no member of the O.A.H.S. is likely to find fault with the scope of a book which deals so conveniently with the area which lies within coach-distance of the Ashmolean Museum. Inside its covers he will find twenty-one studies dealing with almost every aspect of the region known to the academic mind.

There can be few—and the reviewer is certainly not one of them—who are qualified to criticize more than a minority of the studies, and one of the most valuable features of this book is the opportunity which it gives the expert in one subject of finding out how the problems of a familiar terrain are approached by those who profess disciplines other than his own. For the local historian, in particular, it should be salutary to see his own locality through the eyes of those whose wider experience has temporarily been focused on the Oxford Region. And there are many curious and little-known facts to reward the careful reader: how many subscribers to *Oxoniensia* know that Hinksey is 'Hengist's island' (p. 97), that Lucy's ironworks were established as early as 1760 (pp. 125, 143), or that the railway from Princes Risborough to Banbury was not opened until 1910 (p. 150)?

Among so many admirable contributions it would be invidious to single out one or two for individual notice: it may, however, be permissible to draw the attention of readers of *Oxoniensia* to the authoritative surveys of the archaeology of the region by Mr. Case, Miss Taylor and Dr. Myres, and to refer them to the remarkable series of maps prepared by Dr. Hoskins and Mr. Jope to illustrate their joint chapter on the medieval period.

Admirable in its conception and in its component parts, *The Oxford Region* has one defect which is unfortunately common to the whole book: the lack of an index. Whether this was forced upon the editors by the circumstances of its production we are not told, but the omission is all the more regrettable in a book which in every other respect may be regarded as a model of its kind.

H. M. COLVIN.

Early Man in South Buckinghamshire. By J. F. Head. Pp. xx+176; 36 figs. (some in half-tone) and 8 maps. John Wright & Sons, Ltd., Bristol, 1955. Price 21s. Let it be said without cavil that this is an excellent handbook to the archaeology

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of South Buckinghamshire—which, in the author's definition, means the Chiltern escarpment and all of the county lying south of it.

Mr. Head writes with clarity and conciseness, as well as with authority. He has learnt to love the district of his choice through long familiarity, and this leads him to that appreciation of its geographical and ecological factors without which no study of its archaeology could hope to succeed. The book is a pleasure to read and it contains just enough information about British archaeology in general to explain the local finds without running the risk of swamping them in a mass of external detail.

That most of South Buckinghamshire was—so it seems—a backwater in antiquity Mr. Head readily admits. There was always traffic along the Icknield Way, and traffic up and down the Thames, from, at least, neolithic times onwards. But few of the travellers (to judge from extant remains) stayed to settle in the Chiltern hinterland away from these two through routes. The land (largely riverless, as Map I so clearly shows) was uninviting to early man and it is only in modern times with the aid of the facilities provided by modern civilization that settlers have been drawn to it in large numbers.

But though a backwater and sparsely populated—indeed because of this—the Chiltern hill country can provide its own archaeological interest, as Mr. Head is not slow to realize and emphasize. In recent years air-photography (Mr. Head publishes four fine air-photographs, three of them from the Allen collection, now the property of the Ashmolean) and other aids to field-work have made archaeological research in the Chilterns easier and more rewarding than it used to be. Mr. Head's chapter of 'suggestions' for future work should be carefully noted and, when opportunity offers, acted upon. It becomes clear from what he writes that the author himself has not been idle lately both as a field-worker and as an excavator [and, let the would-be archaeologist note, the terms are not synonymous: one can produce good archaeology without ever touching a spade]. We may draw particular attention to his work at Lodge Hill, Saunderton—a settlement-site of the Early Iron Age, which, as he is the first to recognize, merits much more attention than he has yet been able to give to it. But there is much else besides that this book tells of for the first time, and it is far from a mere compilation of facts, and of theories propounded by others.

The chapter on the County Archaeological Society and museums concerned with South Buckinghamshire antiquities, and the bibliography and detailed gazetteer which follow it give the student indispensable guidance. The eight distribution-maps complete the picture, though some will undoubtedly complain that Maps III-VII are far from clear, since the heaviness of the contour lines makes it difficult to see, let alone decipher, the find-symbols; stippled contours, such as are used in Map VIII (from Mr. Grimes's skilled pen) would have wholly obviated this. The printers, too, could have helped the reader by tipping in the maps to face towards, instead of away from, the chapters to which they relate.

But these are not major faults. The book fulfils its aim most adequately and will surely sell well enough for a second edition to be needed in the not too distant future. By that time all must hope that Mr. Head and his fellow archaeologists in Buckinghamshire will have discovered much more of interest to add to the story he has offered us today.

D. B. HARDEN.

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English Mediaeval Architects. A Biographical Dictionary down to 1550. By John Harvey, with contributions by Arthur Oswald. London, B. T. Batsford Ltd., 1954. Pp. xxiv+411. Price £3 15s.

By the time this review appears Mr. Harvey's *Dictionary* will already have become a standard work of reference well known to all students of medieval architecture. Its merits—and they are many, its faults—and they are few, have already been pointed out by other reviewers, and need not be discussed at length here. Among the former are its comprehensiveness, its systematic use of documentary sources, and its elaborate index of persons, places, buildings and dates, all of which make it one of the major achievements of English architectural scholarship. Among the latter are the occasional intrusion into an otherwise factual narrative of expressions of personal aesthetic prejudice; a tendency to attribute the *design* of a building to a particular man on what sometimes appear to be somewhat slender grounds; and a system of references which, however logical in itself, substitutes a new combination of letters for almost every accepted abbreviation, and consequently makes the verification of one of Mr. Harvey's statements into a kind of cross-word puzzle of the most irritating kind. The facts, however, are there: in 400 odd pages the reader has before him the names of more than 1,300 masons, carpenters, joiners and carvers documented with meticulous care and accuracy. Some of them, no doubt, were nonentities; and many of them bore names such as 'William the Carpenter' which reduce them almost to the level of those anonymous 'Masters of the X Psalter' whose ghosts haunt the pages of the *kunsthistorische*. But among those 1,300 names there are some which, thanks largely to the devoted labours of Mr. Harvey and of his collaborator Mr. Arthur Oswald, do now emerge as individuals with intelligible careers and a recognizable place in the development of English Gothic. That Gothic, no less than classical architecture, was the creation of men (not of monks, still less of anonymous peasant craftsmen working under the influence of a kind of mystical idealism) has long been known: but it has been left to Mr. Harvey to tell us who these men were, and to attempt the hazardous task of endowing them with artistic individuality. Only in half-a-dozen or so cases would he claim fully to have succeeded, but it is a measure of our advance since the days of Bond and Prior that we can now associate the name of Yevele with 'two of the finest Perpendicular interiors now existing', or that of Wastell with a particular type of fan vault. Having gone so far, can we call these men architects? Mr. Harvey believes that we can, and it is indeed difficult to find any other term which does not deny them their rightful status as the designers and directors of our great medieval buildings. The term, nevertheless, may be misleading if it is used (as it is on Mr. Harvey's title-page) to cover every kind of medieval craftsman who had a hand in determining the design of a building upon which he worked. For few medieval buildings bear the impress of a single mind in the way that one built in the classical tradition normally does: indeed everything that we know of medieval building organization suggests that the medieval master-craftsman was a *primus inter pares* rather than the sole author of the buildings he directed, and that it needed the new conceptions of the Renaissance to transform him into the architect as the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries knew him. Now, with the increasing elaboration of building techniques, and the widespread use of manufactured components, the self-sufficiency of the Victorian architect is already a thing of the past, and it may be that the architects of the twenty-first century will have more in

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common with their medieval predecessors than with the products of the age of individualism which lies in between.

H. M. COLVIN.

A Bibliography of the Printed Works relating to Oxfordshire (excluding the University and City of Oxford). By E. H. Cordeaux and D. H. Merry. (Oxf. Hist. Soc., new ser., 11.) Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1955. Also published simultaneously by the Bodleian Library. Pp. xvi+411. Price £2 2s.

Recent years have seen a growth in popular modern interest in local history and also in the attention which professional scholars devote to local studies. Both tendencies have drawn attention to the need for good county bibliographies. This work will not only help to meet the need locally but may serve as an example of the way in which the work should be undertaken in other counties. Oxfordshire may be proud of having set an example to the other counties for every county needs its 'Cordeaux & Merry'.

A bibliography which includes current literature is inevitably out of date before it is printed and this volume suffers a fault for which the compilers are not responsible, the fact that nearly four years elapsed between completion and publication. This defect, however, is obviated by the inclusion of addenda at the end, and at regular intervals supplements will appear in the *Bodleian Library Record*; this makes it unnecessary to list any errors or omissions here.

It is to be hoped that users of the bibliography will reward its compilers and the library in which they work by reporting any works which are not recorded in the bibliography with a note of their location if it is not possible to present a copy to the Bodleian.

From a financial point of view the volume represents an interesting method of facing rising costs, for the publication is a joint one of the Oxford Historical Society and of the Bodleian Library—the volume accordingly includes shelf marks which will save very much time for local users.

The compilers hope to produce a similar bibliography for the University and city. It would be valuable to have a catalogue of at least some of the manuscript sources for county history, for some of these are of the utmost value to local historians and the work of the Oxfordshire Record Society in transferring them into the category of 'printed works relating to Oxfordshire' is slow and must ever be incomplete.

W. O. HASSALL.