

Reviews

Wheatley Records 956-1956. Edited with an introduction by W. O. Hassall. Oxfordshire Record Society, vol. xxxvii (1956). Pp. 199, including 101 plates.

If ever a book was a labour of love, this one is. In all its long history, Wheatley can never have had a more devoted inhabitant than Dr. Hassall, whose services to Oxfordshire studies in general are well known. His enthusiasm, moreover, has proved infectious, as witness the imposing list of benefactors mentioned in the acknowledgements. It is they who have made possible the printing of such an unusually large number of excellent plates—maps, facsimiles, portraits and topographical pictures—which, together with the accompanying full descriptions, form an extremely valuable feature of the work.

For his thousand years of local history, Dr. Hassall has cast his net wide. The forty documents chosen naturally vary greatly in importance and interest, ranging as they do from the Cuddesdon charter of 956 to the war memorial inscriptions of 1918 and 1945. But each one, carefully annotated, makes a definite contribution to some aspect of Wheatley's life: proper respect is paid to the quite recent past. Only about a quarter of these records are derived from printed sources, and, as one would expect, the Oxford Diocesan Papers and the contents of the parish chest have been freely used. In this connexion, it is gratifying to see that the biographical notes appended to No. 17, 'A Note of all Communicants in Whatele [1612/3]', have been compiled by a Wheatley W.E.A. local history class. This should be an inspiration to other Oxfordshire villagers to 'dig up' their forebears.

Indeed the main achievement of *Wheatley Records* is that it drives home so forcibly the worth-whileness of exploring the unspectacular. Dr. Hassall would be the first to admit that the history of his parish has few high-lights, though among minor excitements may be reckoned the capture of a 'genuine & splendid wild cat' in 1863, and the discovery by his son Mark in 1952 of a remarkable Romano-British pottery mould, already described in the pages of this journal. The story which the documents, illuminated by the editor's helpful introduction, unfold, is that of a sturdily independent, decidedly rough community of quarrymen and innkeepers, aloof until the present century from its famous neighbour, the University city, looking, surprisingly, instead to a once important main road from London to South Wales for its custom, and hard hit when by-passed by the turnpike of 1789. Wheatley can boast no ancient church, no important family of squires. But trade flourished, and the picture includes one industry, stone-quarrying, which acquired no little fame during the Middle Ages. On this topic Mr. E. M. Jope has contributed a useful paper entitled 'The Archaeology of Wheatley Stone'.

Where there is so much to praise, it may seem carping to point out that the proof-reading could have been more careful. Yet to find, for example, on one page (121) 'Puriton' and Mr. I. G. Philip's name wrongly spelled, is, to say the least, a pity.

M. R. TOYNBEE.

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Mapledurham Church and Village. By J. H. Baker, Camberley, F. & A. Small [1955]. Pp. 46; 12 plates and 1 map. Price 3s.

Whitchurch-on-Thames. By J. H. Baker, Reading, W. Smith & Son, 1956. Pp. 64; 23 plates and 1 map. Price 5s.

In 1953 the Vicar and Churchwardens of Mapledurham asked Mr. J. H. Baker to compile a short guide to the Church and parish for the benefit of parishioners and visitors. The present pamphlet of 46 pages, which includes a number of supplementary sections, the addition of which was made possible by a delay in publication, is the result of this suggestion.

The booklet is pleasantly illustrated by photographs of the Church and other buildings of interest, and has a sketch map of the River Thames from Mapledurham to Reading. The larger part of it is devoted to the history of the Church and Vicarage, with details of the monuments, brasses, windows, bells, plate, mass dial, and the Church Registers, together with a list of the incumbents since 1158. There is also a short account of the two Manors and the families of Blount and Eyston, a description of the village, and notes on the almshouses, charities, parish hall, and building developments since 1918.

The supplementary sections include, amongst other points of interest, an account of Alexander Pope's connection with the parish, a note on the Revd. Lord Augustus Fitz-Clarence, natural son of William IV, who was Vicar of Mapledurham from 1829 to 1854, and a brief account of Mapledurham House.

The 64-page pamphlet, *Whitchurch-on-Thames*, is more ambitious than the earlier book on Mapledurham, and is, as its author tells us in his Prefatory Note, intended to serve 'as a fresh presentation of the interesting story of the history of the parish'. It is well illustrated by photographs and line drawings, and has a map of Whitchurch and the surrounding district which adds greatly to its usefulness. In addition to an historical and descriptive account of the Church, Manor and village, it contains interesting sections on the toll-bridge, the lock, several notable houses, the local fauna, flora, and landmarks, and the principal occupations and social activities of the people. Social changes during the inter-war and post-war periods, and the transfer, by no means popular with all residents, of Whitchurch Hill to the new civil parish of Goring Heath, are also recorded.

Both these books suffer from some faults of arrangement which might be corrected with advantage in any future editions. A short index, especially in the Whitchurch volume, would be a decided improvement, even if it necessitated some curtailment in one or two sections. Some reference to the folklore traditions, and to past or present communal customs in the two parishes would have been very valuable, particularly as the folklore of this district has not yet been properly recorded. These are, however, minor faults in two informative and pleasantly-written pamphlets which will serve as useful introductions to the parishes concerned, and may well lead the historically-minded to delve deeper into their history and traditions.

C. HOLE.

Fifield Merrymouth. By E. Goshawk. Fifield Rectory, 1957. Pp. 41; 5 line drawings. Price 1s.

Skelton writing in 1823 said, 'I have in vain sought for information relating to the history of Fifield'. In 1955 Mrs. Goshawk helped to compile the 'History of Fifield Merrymouth' for the Oxfordshire Village Scrap-book competition and

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has now satisfactorily embodied most of the material then collected in this excellent booklet. Chapters are given on the Church (its architecture, history and clergy), the Manor (the lords, the families of Murimuth and Bray, and the court rolls) and on the Village and its activities. Notes on some of the local families, the enclosure and on field names are also included. The line drawings by the author include the notable shield of the arms of Zouch in stained glass in the church and one of the chalice dated 1576.

This useful and well-written little work should provide an example to others and encourage them to embark on recording the history of Oxfordshire parishes of which many unhappily remain unwritten.

P. S. SPOKES.