

REVIEWS

PRINCES RISBOROUGH PAST.
Macfarlane, Sandy and Kingham, Chris.
*West Sussex, Phillimore on behalf of Princes
Risborough Area Heritage Society, 1997.*
ISBN 1 86077 047 9, price £14.99

The Princes Risborough Heritage Society (an affiliated member of the Bucks Archaeological Society) was formed in 1987 to promote an interest in the history of the town and to help to preserve its past and protect its future. This book has been produced by two founder members of that Society.

In the modest words of the authors in acknowledging the help of the many people of Princes Risborough... 'the Society hopes to have repaid it in some measure by providing a sufficiently interesting and reliable foundation for further study'. This extremely readable book has more than justified their hopes.

Well researched and presented the book provides just the right balance of scholarship. It traces the development of the town from its earliest times through to the present day by a series of themes covering, amongst others, enclosure, law and order, plague and pestilence, church, and industry all of which are well illustrated by pictures and documents previously little known. This book will take its place amongst the authoritative histories of small towns.

Diana Gulland

AYLESBURY GRAMMAR SCHOOL 1598–
1998. W. R. Mead
The Peterhouse Press, Brill, Aylesbury,
Buckinghamshire, ISBN 0946312 96 0

If it could be shown that Aylesbury Grammar School existed before the traditional date of the first recorded donation in 1598 it would be powerful support for the view that the school was in fact one of the numerous charitable works of the chantry of the Blessed Virgin Mary, founded in

Aylesbury in about 1450, and dissolved in 1545. If so it would not be the only school to have had its endowments seized by Henry VIII, and then been refounded with much self-congratulation by that king's successor or one of the beneficiaries of the dissolution. All that can be said is that the known facts do not rule it out. The school certainly existed before 1598; (the first donation was 'subsequent' to the foundation); and the school was held in what was evidently a chantry chapel, the Lady Chapel of the parish church.

What follows is a lively account of the growth of the school, but it could have been made more lively if Professor Mead had consulted the records of charities in the Buckinghamshire Record Office, from which he could have learned of the unedifying quarrels that followed the transformation of the school by the will of Henry Phillips of London in 1714. These were resolved by pensioning off the elderly schoolmaster, and appointing a new set of trustees.

The new rules of the school decreed that 230 boys were to be taught, and numbers had not grown significantly in 1907, when the school became a mixed one. The narrative describes the ructions following the dissatisfaction of parents in the mid nineteenth century, which culminated in a public enquiry, and takes us through the expansion of the syllabus, as well as the growth in numbers. It also considers the causes for the school's stagnation in the closing years of the last century, and notes the irony of the Phillips endowment being invested in land on the only side of the town where there was to be no development.

The conversion of the school to a mixed one is passed over with little comment. When Mr George Furneaux took over as headmaster in 1927 there were 145 boys and 98 girls. In 1959 it reverted to boys only – again there is little comment. Today it is equipped with all that is needed to fit young people for the modern world, and the last photograph in the book is of the computer room.

The author rightly notes that pride in the past of the school is matched by pride in all that is being achieved in the present. The very thorough treatment of the recent past makes this book particularly satisfactory for Old Aylesburians, to whom it is wholeheartedly recommended.

J.C.T.

THE ROTHSCHILD GARDENS

Miriam Rothschild, Kate Garton, Lionel de Rothschild, *Gala Books* 1996, Price £25

A glance at Miriam Rothschild's Preface told me what to expect in this book: deliberately, no attempt was made to compile a 'Catalogue of the Rothschild gardens', instead the authors selected a few of the gardens and parks they knew best, and liked most, and 'wandered around them' in words and pictures. The gardens covered were largely created between 1850 and 1914, and range from England (the majority of those in the book) to France (Villa Isle de France), Austria (Langau), Switzerland (Pregny) and Israel (Ramat Hanadiv). Dr Rothschild's intimate knowledge of the gardens means that she can bring the story of each up to date, including anecdotes about family members and their idiosyncrasies.

The opening section covers the genesis of the Rothschilds' passion for gardening, wound around their swift rise from the Frankfurt ghetto in the early nineteenth century to become a phenomenally wealthy, international banking dynasty. Their wealth was the key to the success of their nineteenth century gardens, allowing them to create flamboyant parks and gardens as status symbols in their own right. These gardens were not treated merely as a setting or adjunct to the magnificent houses and their contents, but as stand-alone set pieces. The family could also afford to make significant collections of plants, particularly tropical orchids and, in the twentieth century, rhododendrons. Thoughtfully a family tree is provided, in order to set the many family members in context with each other.

The body of the book, dealing with individual gardens, covers Glorious Gardens, Past Gardeners, and the Rothschild Parks. Andrew Lawson's excel-

lent and luscious (as ever) photographs of the gardens as they are today, are supplemented by archive photographs and drawings, my own favourite illustration (as a garden historian) being of a beautiful, coloured survey map (1719) of Tring Park and its eighteenth century formal gardens laid out by Charles Bridgeman, well before the Rothschilds bought the property in 1872. Some of the gardens covered are very well known today (Waddesdon, Exbury and Ascott); others will be largely unknown to many people, including Dr Rothschild's own Northamptonshire garden Ashton Wold. Tring Park, having lost its Rothschild owners some time ago, appears to be in a rather sad state, following abortive attempts by Dr Rothschild and others to prevent the A41 Tring bypass slicing across the formerly tranquil, Chiltern hillside parkland.

At first I was rather disappointed with the scope of this book, hoping before I saw it that it might be a scholarly work, covering at the least the seven or so Bucks/Herts Rothschild gardens of the mid- and late nineteenth century. But by the end of the book, I was no longer disappointed, instead uplifted at how well these gardens have generally survived, albeit sometimes in modified form to suit late-twentieth-century pockets, and at what is still being achieved in Rothschild gardens. Long may they flourish.

S Rutherford

BUCKINGHAMSHIRE PRIVIES A NOSTALGIC TRIP DOWN THE GARDEN PATH

Martin Andrew, 96 pp, 46 half tones, 3 line drawings, *Countryside Books, Newbury, Berks* ISBN 1 8530 503 X6. No price given.

The author is Historic Buildings Officer for Wycombe District, which is some assurance that the subject is treated seriously; but it is not puffed. It is written, light-heartedly, though with a proper awareness of the large part played by the privy in the lives of our forebears, and the ingenuity they exercised in ensuring that notwithstanding, it did not play a foreground role.

One sign of this is the number of euphemisms we have employed over the years: Mr Andrew lists 175, and we can be sure he has only scratched the surface. Some of them soon ceased to be euphe-

misms and we needed euphemisms for them. However, one of the earliest is one of the longest lived. 'Garderobe' is the Norman French equivalent of 'wardrobe', and meant a handy place for keeping clothes; so from an early stage convenience asserted itself as the most desirable quality, above, for example, freedom from smells. Probably the least offensive privies were those whose users did not rely on the 'Lavender Wagon', but recycled their sewage on their own gardens.

Mr Andrew notes that people were not shy and did not mind talking about this aspect of 'the old days' – indeed they were quite glad to. There was indeed a sort of pride that they had lived in such hardship. That was the nearest they came to nostal-

gia. For the most part they were glad to have put it behind them, and still remember their pride and joy at having running water and flushing indoor loos. 'How lucky we are now' commented one lady.

Although this is in no sense a gazetteer there is a list at the end of privies that can be seen from a road or a public footpath, but those that are in museums like the Chiltern Open Air Museum or Pitstone Green Farm Museum, are the only ones to which the public are admitted. They are also the only ones with their 'innards' complete

One quibble: the captions to the photographs on pps. 32 and 33 have surely been transposed.

JCT