REVIEWS

TURNING THE PLOUGH: MIDLANDS OPEN FIELDS; LANDSCAPE CHARACTER AND PROPOSALS FOR MANAGEMENT
David Hall
72pp including figs and plates
English Heritage & Northamptonshire County Council 2001 (£5 from: Planning , Transport and the Environment, Northants County Council)
ISBN 0 947590 74 9 pb

Ridge and furrow is a well-known relic of the Midlands open-field system of agriculture. As long ago as 1954 Professor Mead, the Society's President, drew attention to its significance in Buckinghamshire. Since then the clear relationship between single ridges or 'lands' and one individual's ploughland has been demonstrated beyond question through maps and other evidence. Study of ridge and furrow, particularly from air photos, on which Turning the Plough is based, have shown its importance in understanding medieval utilisation of the landscape both in terms of agricultural practice and settlement pattern. Moreover, few who have at any time walked the ridges on the ground will have not in their imagination, have for a moment, found themselves following an ox team, so compelling is the visible record! Much of this understanding is due in good part to the continuing work of David Hall, author of this work and also of the excellent *The Open Fields of Northamptonshire* (1995).

Sadly, however, bumpy fields and large modern farm machinery are a bad match. This fascinating medieval picture-book is being destroyed at an alarming rate. Of approximately two thousand Midland townships studied, which formerly possessed large areas of ridge and furrow, only forty-three retain significant amounts today. Air photos show that much of the loss has taken place in recent decades; the same sad picture is reflected in the loss of ancient pasture and woodland, hedgerows and field walls elsewhere in the UK. Of particular relevance to members of this society is that, given the diminishing regional resource, eight of the forty best-preserved examples in the region are in the Vale of Aylesbury, including for instance Ludgershall, Ashendon, North Marston, Quainton and Thornborough. No doubt the Society will wholeheartedly throw its weight behind implementation of the range of actions proposed in this report to reduce the continuing attrition of this fine historic landscape feature.

Michael Farley

THE ROYAL LATIN SCHOOL, BUCKINGHAM
Paul Poornan.
Dusty Old Books Ltd, Marsh Gibbon, Buckinghamshire. 2001. £17.99 (plus £1.95 pp).
ISBN 0-9539926-0-8

Mr Poornan compares his work on the history of the Royal Latin School, Buckingham, to the task of assembling a huge jig-saw puzzle - a puzzle which, he believes, will never be fully completed. The comparison is apt. The story of one of the oldest educational institutions in Buckinghamshire is complex. Though abundant, the source material is somewhat patchy and often contradictory. In addition, the historian is faced with the challenge of a good deal of Medieval Latin written in far from accessible 'hands'. If Mr Poornan has not resolved all of the mysteries surrounding the early days of the school and its predecessors, he has certainly advanced our understanding very considerably.

The obvious question to ask about any institution is who started it and when? In the case of the Royal Latin School, these questions have given rise to controversy. For the most part, a foundation date of 1423 has been preferred and the founder identified as John Ruding, Prebendary of Sutton-cum Buckingham. Perhaps the greatest merit of Mr Poornan's book is that he shows that these questions are more or less futile. Depending upon one's point of view, there are at least a dozen plausible founders and a similar number of dates. In essence, the Royal Latin School 'emerged' from two chantry

schools, both founded or refounded by two brothers called John Barton. One was at Thornton and provided the 'Royal' title and the Master's salary. The other, at Buckingham, provided the premises - the Chapel of St John the Baptist and St Thomas of Acon, which dates from the twelfth century and is now the oldest building in Buckingham.

The most interesting parts of Mr Poornan's book actually deal with what could be called the 'pre-history' of the School, that is with the Chantry schools, their founders and benefactors. We now have a much better understanding of the roles of Matthew Stratton, Robert le hermit, the Knights of St Thomas of Acon, John Ruding, John Barton senior and junior, Isabel Barton, Richard Fowler and others. The biographical information provided for the Bartons - their links with the Hospital of St Thomas Acon, with the Mercers Company and with Henry Chichele, Archbishop of Canterbury - will be of great value to those interested in the fifteenth century. The book also contains reproductions, transcriptions and translations of such important documents as the *Inquistion ad quod damnum* of 1289/90 and chantry certificates for Buckingham and Thornton.

Almost half of the main text is devoted to the story prior to 1553, when according to Mr Poorman, the chantry school in Buckingham first became 'visible'. (p 44) The second half is devoted to a chronological investigation of the careers of the Masters from 1524 till the present - a total of 45 in all. Once more, very valuable biographical information is supplied. Yet there are drawbacks to this approach and it has to be said that the second half of the book is not quite as successful as the first. Of course, the lives of Masters and the history of their Schools overlap, but they are not quite identical. There is more to the story of an institution than the biographies of the most important individuals associated with it. Although there are interesting glimpses, there is not much of the 'feel' of the School prior to the 20th century. It would have been interesting to learn more about curricula, about punishments, about book purchases, about Inspectors' Reports, about the social backgrounds of pupils and their subsequent careers. No doubt there may be a shortage of documentary evidence, but a somewhat different structure might have made it easier to address these issues.

Although Mr Poornan provides a useful biography, it is a pity that he does not engage in some discussion on works on other grammar schools in the area - for example Eric Forrester's *A History of Magdalen College School, Brackley* (1952) or W R Mead's *Aylesbury Grammar School, 1598-1998.* Yet we must be grateful for *The Royal Latin School.* It is the product of painstaking scholarship and will be of immense value to future work on the history of education in Buckinghamshire.

John Clarke

FINGEST: STONY GROUND
John Holborow
324 pp., 20 figs. (9 maps, 4 plans), paperback
Minerva Press, 1999 (unpriced)
ISBN 0 75410 602 0

In style and content this book unashamedly takes its inspiration from an older, pre-Hoskins tradition of antiquarian writing. As a result there is a strong emphasis on matters ecclesiastical. Particular prominence is given to the parish incumbents throughout, and the words 'local community' are nowhere to be found. Instead, Professor Holborow, 'an innocent tyro in this field', sees his task as to give 'a running ... account of local matters ... showing, if I can, how memorable events in national history have left discernible imprints in on the unfolding ribbon of local history.' The principal sources used, apart from published material, are the manuscript notes of two antiquarians, Browne Willis and his contemporary Thomas Delafield, a former curate of Fingest. Relatively few original documents are cited and only the parish register is examined in any degree of depth.

Given this approach, it is no surprise that the book is strongest on the medieval period, which takes up almost two-thirds of the whole. Fingest's famous Norman church, with its distinctive tower, is meticulously described (chapter VIII) and its early architectural development is plausibly linked with the chequered history of the manor and rectory, which were associated first with the abbey of St Albans then, from the 1150s, with the bishops of Lincoln, ending up at the Reformation as part of the endowment of a prebend of Wells cathedral. Questions of parish boundaries and parish origins are also tackled, but this is not so much stony as boggy ground and the author is right to be tentative in attempting to interpret the available evidence. Certainly a late claim by the manorial tenants to

ancient demesne status, adduced by Delafield, is far from being a reliable guide to the pre-Conquest situation. Some reference to Hepple and Doggett's recent (1992) study of the historical geography of the Chilterns could reasonably have been expected here.

More accessible is the account of the connection between the bishops of Lincoln and their residence (one of many) at Fingest. The relationship deteriorated when in 1340 Bishop Burghersh appropriated 300 of the parish's 1300 acres for a park which, it seems, included the parish church within its bounds, though the suggestion made that this effectively deprived the parishioners of pastoral care is difficult to accept. Nevertheless the story of the successive bishops and their impact on the diocese in general and on the archdeaconry of Buckingham in particular is told with considerable verve and should interest the general reader.

From the seventeenth century the ribbon of local history seems disproportionately thin in comparison with the large dollops of national events supplied. Occasionally the two converge as when Charles II, on his way to open the Oxford parliament in 1681, found it necessary to put up for the night at the local inn in the adjoining parish of Stokenchurch. Local oral tradition, as recorded by Delafield, has it that Charles shared his apartment with one of his mistresses while his queen was accommodated in a tent pitched on the common!

There is no index and, more seriously, no list of contents or illustrations; Fig. 20, showing the (printed) Fingest entry in the 1535 *Valor Ecclesiasticus*, is too reduced to be legible. A few minor factual errors were noted: Mrs E. M. Elvey is confused with her husband, G. R. Elvey, p. 127; Sheahan is misspelt on p. 324; the mysterious Thomas Ardfert, p. 297, is not an elusive curate but the name and title of the ordaining bishop.

Hugh Hanley

TWELVE GENERATIONS: GLEANINGS FROM THE COALES FAMILY ARCHIVES.
Compiled by John Coales
Francis Coales Charitable Foundation, The Mount, Parsonage Hill, Somerton, Somerset TA11 7PF £50 + p&p £6.50

Ever since its foundation in 1847 the Society has included among its many objects the promotion and fostering of genealogy. This is reflected in its library, starting with Berry's *Pedigrees of Buckinghamshire Families* and including such important works as the rare two-volume history of the *Chesters of Chicheley* privately produced in 1878. Many more have been added in recent years, but none as comprehensive or as well researched as this book compiled by John Coales, one of our longer standing members, who formerly served on the council of the Society. Praise is also due to his father, John Leslie Coales, who, as I personally recall, diligently researched much of the Northamptonshire origins of the family at the old Record Office at Delapré Abbey.

Sadly, many family histories can be quite dull to the outsider. At first sight, this publication covering the years from 1546 onwards and running as it does for 579 pages, could seem somewhat daunting unless readers are related to the family or have a passion for genealogy. However, the author has thoughtfully given each section of his family their own chapter together with an associated chart. This, together with the comprehensive indexes of personal names, places and subjects does make it easy to navigate such a mass of information.

The book is also well illustrated with wide variety of illustrations, not only of persons but also documents, buildings and other associated objects. It is also quite outstanding for the attention given to maternal relationships and as a result there is much information on the Bull family who provided Independent Ministers and Solicitors at Newport Pagnell for many generations. Through that family there is a link to Hester Bateman and her children: Ann, Peter and William – names long revered in the antique trade for producing well-crafted London silver. Again this is clearly documented, as are the connections in Australasia and the Far East.

Much the same could be said of many family histories, but what makes this book especially interesting to Buckinghamshire readers are the digressions, such as the short history of Coales milling interests in Newport Pagnell, including a brief description of many former employees. Mr Coales also extends his theme to include a useful chapter on the Coales family of watchmakers, contemporaries in the town who were apparently unrelated. One of them may impinge on the story indirectly though. Alfred John Coales was for a

short time Deputy Registrar at Newport and may have provided the primary records for some of the events described in this book.

Unfortunately, the cost of producing such a high quality, well illustrated book is high and as a result it is unlikely that this volume will find its way on to very many members' bookshelves, but for those with an interest in the social history of North Buckinghamshire, and particularly Newport Pagnell, it would certainly be well worth consulting it in the library.

Edward Legg

VILLAGE, HAMLET AND FIELD: CHANGING MEDIAEVAL SETTLEMENTS IN CENTRAL ENGLAND
Carenza Lewis, Patrick Mitchell-Fox and Christopher Dyer
xi + 227 pp., 44 illustrations, (£17.99)
Windgatherer Press 2001
ISBN 0 953863 03 4

This welcome paperback edition of *Village, Hamlet and Field* which investigates the evolution of nucleated settlements and associated field systems, is the product of an extended project at the University of Birmingham. It focuses on the counties of Bedfordshire, Buckinghamshire, Northamptonshire and Leicestershire with Rutland. Its roots are to be found in field studies initiated by a group of landscape historians in the immediate postwar years. A map of the distribution in England of deserted mediaeval settlements as they had been identified in 1968 – no less than 2283 of them – provides a point of departure for a study in depth of the complex origins and changing fortunes of the rural settlement forms in the four counties. It is followed by a review of the state of background information – geological, topographical, archaeological, historical and topographical, critical for the investigation. Introductory maps present the distribution of rural settlement forms as they can be constructed from the earliest available large-scale cartographic sources. Six different symbols are employed to show large-scale nucleated clusters, nucleated, small nucleated, row nucleated, and dispersed settlements. Towns are also identified. Buckinghamshire readers will be interested to see how much of their county differs from the other counties – dispersed settlements dominating its wooded areas.

The development of the different settlement types is then cast in three time frames – from prehistory to the Norman Conquest (with the study area one of the most densely peopled in England at the time of the Domesday Inquest), from the eleventh to the thirteenth century (a period of active woodland colonisation and consolidation), from the thirteenth to the fifteenth century (a time of contraction and desertion save for the more flexible if less wealthy dispersed settlements).

Throughout, the text is enlivened with precise examples. Readers will enjoy the way in which new light is shed upon villages, hamlets and fields familiar to them. For the reviewer, it was a pleasurable experience to turn the page and find air photographs of the 'grill cluster settlements' at Crafton and the moated site (one of 800 listed in the research area) at Vaches in Aston Clinton.

In the last third of the book, the authors discuss the range of controversial issues generated by their project. They consider the value of systems theory, combined perhaps with ideas about evolution, for producing a model to explain how village societies have changed and adapted. They offer hypotheses on the effects of the competition between animal husbandry and the rise of arable farming, on the results of changing technologies for the development of the nucleated village form. In parallel, they emphasise the changing fortunes of villages and hamlets caused by the multiplication of manorial and ecclesiastical authorities. The rise of towns and their marketing systems also had its effects. Inevitably the Black Death enters the scene and, marginally, longer term climatic change. An appealing, new concept is also introduced – 'the village moment' – the critical point in time when a definitive change in the character of a settlement has taken place in response to the sudden impulse of some social force or even of the creative energies of a group of individuals.

This impressive study, balancing the empirical and theoretical – and not forgetting its thirty meticulously drawn maps, has stirred happy memories. They are of walking over lost village sites in Bucks with Maurice Beresford and of listening to anecdotes recounted by fieldworker friends fresh from another season's operations at Wharram Percy. It is exciting to reflect upon the early days of such landscape studies and then to cast an eye over the

book's twenty-three pages of references and notes. They are testimony to the volume and variety of research activity that has sprung out of the pioneering endeavours of fifty years ago. May we wish all strength to the new research programme which the authors have under way, which focuses on the Whittlewood area on the boundary of Buckinghamshire and Northamptonshire and which follows 'in the footsteps of the project, which created this book.'

W. R. Mead

THE WORLD'S BANKER:
THE HISTORY OF THE HOUSE OF ROTHSCHILD
xxvi +1309pp.,
Niall Ferguson
Weidenfeld & Nicholson, 1998 (£30.00)
ISBN 0 297 81539 3

[Also published in two separate volumes: The House of Rothschild – Money's Prophets 1798-1848 and The House of Rothschild - the World's Banker 1849-1998. Penguin Books, 2000 ISBN 0 14 028907 0 and 0 14 028908 9 (£12.99each). These two volumes first published in the USA in 1998 by Viking Penguin.]

Niall Ferguson holds the Chair of Political and Financial History at Oxford and is thus eminently suitable to be the author of a major study of the Rothschilds. His work was commissioned to mark the bicentenary of Nathan Mayer Rothschild's arrival in England in 1800 and might be thought to be a dry history of a bank. Residents of Buckinghamshire know that the activities of the Rothschilds were far from confined to the banking hall. In recognition of this, Ferguson notes many of the ways in which Rothschild activities have extended far beyond the confines of a bank. For instance, no fewer than 153 species of insect bear the name. While, from the viewpoint of Buckinghamshire, 'Rothschildshire' is perhaps the most interesting geographical expression of the importance of the family, the name of Rothschild is properly applied to an island in the Antarctic.

At the time of his death, thirty-six years after his arrival in England, Nathan Mayer was in a league of his own in terms of net wealth, far out-pacing leading aristocrats, including even those who had embraced the industrial revolution. Ferguson, by some ingenious calculation, suggests that, in relative terms, Nathan was richer than his present-day equivalent Bill Gates. He notes that Nathan's four sons were amongst the twenty-three of their contemporaries who left estates worth more than £1.8m. In absolute terms, it was only after 1900 that others came to match and surpass the family.

Ferguson succeeds in showing, in considerable detail, how this fortune had been amassed. He does this by drawing on over 20,000 letters written almost daily by members of the family, largely to each other. In this he breaks new ground. It has been appreciated for many years that there were two keys to the power of the family: the close ties between the various branches in different European countries, and the speed and comprehensiveness of their communication system. It has awaited an historian of Ferguson's ability to demonstrate how these two phenomena combined. He goes on to show how, in the late 1840s and early 1850s, the arrival of the telegraph and such communications specialists as Reuter eroded some of these advantages.

As an academic historian, Ferguson notes that his book has something to say as a business history on multi-national business development. He comments on how the conservatism of the later Rothschilds meant that they missed opportunities in North America. For economic historians, the book claims to throw light on the role of banks in the process of industrialisation. Financial historians may expect various insights from the book. What placed the Rothschilds apart, however, was the way in which they were financiers to governments, and therefore finance and diplomacy are closely linked in their story. The role of the family in the Napoleonic Wars, in the Schleswig-Holstein Question, the Suez Canal acquisition and many other of the key events of the nineteenth century is explained in a way that reveals new insights into the events themselves.

Social questions are also central to the book. It plots how a Jewish family was absorbed into the wealthy elite in Britain and contrasts this with events in Europe. In this, it does not neglect the Rothschild women who were often at least as capable at the men of the family. Buckinghamshire played an important role in this process. Probably after pressure from his wife, Nathan had first rented Tring Park in 1833. The story of how his widow, Hannah, and three of her four sons, followed by her three grandsons by the eldest son

Lionel and the daughters of the other two sons, Anthony and Mayer Amschel, acquired and developed land in Buckinghamshire and Tring, has been told many times. The work of Lionel's son in-law, and Hannah's husband's first-cousin, Ferdinand, and his sister Alice, at Waddesdon and Eythrope is important in this story. Ferguson's contribution to this story is to place it in a broad historical context. He notes that the initial impulse may well have been a maternal concern over the health of her sons and hence the encouragement of riding and stag hunting. However, this was quickly overtaken by the need for a political base and for houses in which the financiers could engage, in Ferguson's phrase, in 'corporate entertaining'. It appears that sometimes the latter was something to be endured. However, there is no mention of any English equivalent to the fourth of Hannah's sons Nat's, cry from France that '*here we have stinking balls night after night... you have no idea how sweaty the old French ladies smell after a long waltz*'.

Details of the acquisition of land in Buckinghamshire are not featured in the book. The role of Horwood and James, the family's Aylesbury land agents, who had advised for, political reasons, the concentration of purchases in one area, is mentioned. In writing a bankers' history, Ferguson stresses that the family was not buying rural land to symbolise any dilution of their capitalist spirit. He retells how Lionel's hard bargaining for Creslow in 1844, at a price which would give him a three per cent return, was apparently part of a broader vision: '*there are so many little places round it which might be made to pay a fair rate of interest*.' Later, in 1849, when the purchase of Aston Clinton was under consideration by Anthony, Lionel wrote to Mayer that, at £26,000, he had no objection. But this was on the understanding that '*we ought always to be able to rely on 3.5% clear of all charges, it is not like a fancy place, you must consider it entirely as an investment*'. Generally, in 1848 and 1849, the purchase of land from the Duke of Buckingham and Sir John Dashwood's estate are said to be typical Rothschild acquisitions 'bought at the bottom of the market'.

Unfortunately, Ferguson takes us little deeper into the arrival of the family in Buckinghamshire than previous studies. For instance, there is no account of how their foothold at Hastoe, on the edge of Tring Park, the rented kennels for staghounds, worked. Where and how often did the family stay? How was it that only five years after his first purchase of land at Mentmore, Mayer was appointed Sheriff of the county? This rapid elevation needs some explanation, particularly when Lord Carrington was initially so violently opposed to what he called the 'Red Sea', and Acton Tindal had sworn that he would never submit to the 'circumcision' of the Aylesbury Liberal party. It is to be hoped that, now Ferguson has begun the exploration of new documentary sources in the form of the letters mentioned above, his students will follow to fill in the detail of these, and other, events in Buckinghamshire. Was there any grand plan? Did Disraeli have any part to play as Kessler has suggested? Perhaps so knowledgeable a family as the Rothschilds had anticipated, well before 1848, that the Buckingham lands would come on to the market. The Duke's financial problems were clearly well known in the City. Finally were the purchases really so commercially astute as is claimed, whatever their political and social success?

The building of the great houses is treated with equally little detail but illuminating comment. In 1852, the Rothschild brothers withdrew £260,250 from the firm's capital, primarily to finance building projects. This was less than 3 per cent of the total capital. Quite where even this sum went is not made clear by Ferguson. He states that the quoted price for building, presumably the shell of Mentmore, was only £15,427. Myers, their builder, was paid £350,000 for all his work in the period 1853-1873. Elsewhere we have been told of a letter a letter from Paxton which seeks to justify a bill of £38,000 by saying that alterations which Mayer had wanted were expensive, a not unfamiliar story for those dealing with builders.

These are but local pleadings for a fuller story. Overall, Ferguson's achievement is considerable. The book is a serious history written by a heavyweight historian. It covers the whole history of the family, starting with early years in Frankfurt and finishing with their role in the financial changes of the last twenty years of the twentieth century. However, the period covered in greatest detail is the nineteenth century, precisely that when the Rothschilds were so important in the affairs of Buckinghamshire.

The volume weighs 2.5 kilos and may at first

sight seem daunting. There are 199 pages of footnotes and well over a thousand secondary sources are cited. The two-volume Penguin edition is a practical alternative. Overall, this is serious history and a very welcome antidote to some accounts of the Rothschilds. It is, moreover, written in a style that makes it difficult to put down. Ferguson states that he hopes the non-academic reader will forgive passages that betray his profession. This is something with which he has no need to be concerned. His tale, like most good history, is written in a way that makes one want to know what happened next. His subject, after all, has the ingredients that create all good blockbusters: power, money, family disputes and sex.

David Thorpe