

REVIEWS

CHARLES BRIDGEMAN AND THE ENGLISH LANDSCAPE GARDEN.

Peter Willis

Newcastle-upon-Tyne, Elysium Press Publishers,
497 pages (247 plates),

£135.00 (BAS members special price £99.00, see end)

ISBN 0904712 04 4.

In a bold and enterprising step, the Elysium Press has reprinted and extended Peter Willis's virtually unobtainable book on the life and work of Charles Bridgeman and the English Landscape Garden. Although Bridgeman (d. 1738) could be considered the forgotten figure in the creation of the ideal of English landscape design, in reality he is crucial to its development. In his first edition, Willis brought together much of the then extant material and has now supplemented his earlier work with a new preface, new pictorial material and a short appendix.

It is easy to feel that that Bridgeman has been 'lost' to us. Perhaps this is because much of his work was altered by later developers of the English landscape ideal or because he was a much more complex character than we expect in a gardener. In 1822, J. C. Loudon could not obtain any information about him. Fortunately in 1977 Willis was able to flesh out Bridgeman's character somewhat. By looking at his family, his friends, colleagues and employers we can form a strong impression of the man.

In Buckinghamshire, we are fortunate. The 'Views of Stowe', commissioned by Bridgeman a few years before his death, catch for all time the fleeting images of his 'dream landscape' and depict the gardens which flowered under his inspired hand (these are still available from Stowe school). Willis sets Bridgeman's contribution in context, acknowledging the controlling hand of Cobham as ring-master. The combination of a period of peace, at least at home, agricultural 'improvements' and the move from deer to fox hunting all helped to create a favourable climate for a change in garden style. The change was further facilitated by John Evelyn's

campaign for more tree planting, both for timber and shade, as well as by the ever-increasing introduction of new plants from abroad. By the late 1720s, there was also a growing disenchantment with the dominance of the French garden style, exemplified in the works of London and Wise.

In the reign of Queen Anne, London and Wise had become Royal Gardeners in succession to the Duke of Portland (Bulstrode). Bridgeman replaced London as Wise's partner in 1726 and became sole Royal Gardener under George II and Queen Caroline until his death. Bridgeman was an innovator, taking the rigorous French style formal landscapes of London and Wise and breaking them down, adapting their rigour and, above all, adapting their monolithic symmetry to the landscapes he had to work with. Although not the inventor of the *haha*, Bridgeman's use of it brought the garden and park into one concept, one entity. It was Bridgeman, together with Sir John Vanbrugh, who brought the Roman *campagna* to England.

What of the man? He first appears at his marriage to Sarah Mist (d. 1743/4) in 1717. His father was probably a gardener at Wimpole, hers a paviour. But we are not talking here of mere tradesmen; these were men at the top of their crafts. Sarah's brother John (1690/1-1737) built the couple's house in Westminster (now 54 Broadwick Street) and was the Royal paviour in all but name. He supervised the laying out and maintenance of many fine London Squares and streets. Bridgeman and his brother-in-law were to collaborate at Wimpole, Cashalton, Down Hall and Briggens. The family had several houses, at Hampton Court, Kensington and even one at Stilton, to which Bridgeman may have intended to retire. Bridgeman was buried in St James, Westminster, though no memorial survives. But perhaps he overreached himself as the pathetic correspondence of his widow indicates. Her letters to the Treasury bore fruit but those to Sarah Churchill brought no tangible response. Bridgeman's life as an active member of several London clubs and as a royal servant cannot have been cheap.

Bridgeman was fortunate in his association with Vanbrugh. Although the details are unclear, Bridgeman probably collaborated with Vanbrugh at Blenheim; he certainly worked there later and until the time of his death. Although the Duchess of Marlborough considered Bridgeman expensive, she admired his work and stayed on good terms with him — in contrast to her acrimonious relations with her architects. Sadly, the relationship did not long survive Bridgeman's death and the correspondence in Appendix IV shows the Duchess's hard side.

In view of our recent visits to earthworks (with the Buckinghamshire Gardens Trust), members will be interested in the landscape at Eastbury, Dorset, the house notoriously blown up by Cobham on inheriting. Bridgeman's landscape is still clearly visible. Another key collaboration was at Claremont, where Bridgeman set off the wonderful belvedere above his bowling green. His amphitheatre above a circular pool survives, though the pool does not. Now restored, the amphitheatre survived both William Kent and 'Capability' Brown's later interventions. Another key collaborator was Henry Flitcroft at Chicheley and Woburn, as well as at Amesbury and Boughton. At Chicheley, Bridgeman was responsible for maintaining London and Wise's U-shaped canal and, at Woburn, for laying out the Pheasant Garden.

Bridgeman also worked for the Duchess of Marlborough at Wimbledon house, where he designed another extensive park for her. He was to work for several other people who emerged from the South Sea Bubble debacle in profit. There are even dark hints about the landscape at Studley, Yorks. He worked at Tring with James Gibbs, and with his rival, Colin Campbell, at Purley. His last great collaborator was Giacomo Leoni, with whom he worked at Shardeloes. Willis appears not to have seen the probable Bridgeman plan of this site — one for the next edition? Here it is still fairly easy to make out the Bridgeman plan in aerial photographs despite much later work.

William Kent was perhaps the most direct heir to Bridgeman. After some collaboration, Kent further developed the changes Bridgeman began. Although not proven, it also seems likely that Bridgeman worked at Chiswick. A similar overlaying of Bridgeman's work certainly took place at Rousham. Laying the two plans over one another and walking the garden today reveals an obvious debt to

Bridgeman. Bridgeman had certainly already been consulting 'the Genius of the place'.

Bridgeman's other major client was Edward Harley, 2nd Earl of Oxford. Bridgeman was a frequent visitor to Harley's famous library and Willis explores the group that formed around the Earl. The poets Matthew Prior and Alexander Pope, the painters James Thornhill and John Wootton as well as James Gibbs were all part of this circle. It was perhaps inevitable that Bridgeman would eventually fall out with Pope despite apparently having collaborated with Gibbs on his influential, if small, garden at Twickenham.

In his role as Royal Gardener, principally to Queen Caroline, Bridgeman seems to have been the ideal choice to transform the earlier great landscapes at Windsor and Hampton Court, while innovating at Kensington Gardens and Richmond, introducing productive fields and softening the rigid walks and rides, converting clumps into sweeps. He also oversaw the development of the Serpentine. He was a hands-on-boss, specifying the latest equipment, and living on site.

And so to Stowe. With Lord Cobham, Bridgeman was to develop this unprepossessing site into the foremost garden in Europe. Willis charts the growth and development of the garden over four key periods: the early scheme with Vanbrugh (1711–20); the later development with Gibbs in the 20s; the collaboration with Kent in the 30s and the final stages of development of this phase in the 40s and beyond. When reading the text, it is essential to consult the multiplicity of plans, pictures, engravings and diagrams to form an idea of the totality of Bridgeman's work.

Bridgeman was clearly a major figure. His work ranged from 'simply providing trees at Briggens and other places, to planning 'the whole' and having the direction and disposition of the gardens at Stowe'. He was careful and diligent, providing a supervisor to maintain his projects for at least a year after completion. Although fond of the traditional and tested Elm, he was not afraid to innovate with new and exotic species. By the 1720s it was already possible to transplant large trees and this Bridgeman certainly did.

Horace Walpole was the first to assess Bridgeman's career. Although Walpole regarded him as the heir to London and Wise, he also acknowledged Bridgeman's innovation in introducing the open field and more woodland-like

landscape to the garden. It is clear that he considered 'the genius of the place', could handle gardens of all shapes and sizes without working to a formula, and adapted his methods to different sites and clients. Bridgeman continued to treat water in a formal style and was famed, even lampooned, for using it on a vast scale. He also continued the use of temples, statues and urns in a broad way, though his innovative use of the ha-ha allowed their integration into the wider landscape. He broke away from the need for walls, gates and terminals to vistas. In short, he adapted the rigidity of London and Wise to a new age. His contemporary and sometime colleague Stephen Switzer was also exploring the junction between house and garden, park and landscape. It is clear that Kent was able to move these ideas even further, but it is interesting to note that each innovator was respectful of his predecessors. Even Brown was reluctant to change Hampton Court out of respect for Bridgeman. Walpole made the interesting point that it was the landscapes of Bridgeman and Kent, with their formal structures, that were parodied abroad as the *jardin anglais*. 'This new *anglomanie* will be literally be mad English' he was to write gleefully from Paris in 1771.

The appendices provide a genealogy of Bridgeman, his Royal Appointments, surviving correspondence, and the inventory and wills of both Bridgeman and his widow. Together with a very readable text, the 247 plates in this beautifully produced new edition make up a wonderful resource. Many of the pictures have not been previously published.

Both scholarly and readable, this work should be on all member's shelves. Peter Willis and the Elysium Press have kindly extended their offer of the discounted price of £99.00 to BAS members. Send cheques made out to the Elysium Press, 5 Fenwick Close, Jesmond, Newcastle-upon-Tyne NE2 2LE. Remember to tell them you are a member of The Buckinghamshire Archaeological Society.

Charles Boot

WADDESDON MANOR: THE HERITAGE OF A
ROTHSCHILD HOUSE,
Michael Hall

New York, 2001, Harry N Abrahams Inc. in
Association with Waddesdon Manor.
ISBN 0 8109 3239 3, \$65.

In their nineteenth-century heyday, the great Rothschild houses of Buckinghamshire, Hertfordshire and Bedfordshire provided an astonishing constellation of great art collections. Now only three survive with their contents intact: Waddesdon, Eythrope and Ascott; and, of the three, Waddesdon is unquestionably the grandest. To a certain extent this was always so. Eythrope, which as Lord Rothschild's private residence is not open to the public, was always subsidiary to Waddesdon, and Ascott, an overgrown *cottage ornée*, was never in Waddesdon's league architecturally or in terms of its collections. But Mentmore might have been a serious contender for the jewel in the crown, had it not fallen victim in 1976 to arguably the most significant and certainly the most unfortunate country house dispersal since the Second World War. A relatively modest house in terms of its architecture, Halton, now an RAF officer's mess, could have mounted a serious challenge in terms of the quality (if not the extent) of its contents. These included the exquisite Riesener mother of pearl commode made for Marie Antoinette's boudoir at Fontainebleau, and a collection of pictures unquestionably more distinguished and wide-ranging than that assembled at Waddesdon by Baron Ferdinand. With the notable exception of the great full-lengths by Reynolds and Gainsborough, the Baron seems to have regarded pictures as essentially a decorative adjunct to the furnishings. But Halton and Mentmore went under the hammer, Aston Clinton was demolished and Tring turned into a dance school. Yet Waddesdon survives, an astonishing Loire chateau transported to a Buckinghamshire hilltop with a collection of French decorative arts surpassed only by The Royal and the Wallace Collections, and a suite of French interiors with eighteenth-century boiseries and textiles unrivalled anywhere outside France.

The story of Waddesdon's survival is perhaps just as remarkable as the story of its creation, given the fact that neither Baron Ferdinand nor his sister Alice had any children, that James and Dorothy de Rothschild also died childless and that it was touch-and-go at one point whether the National Trust would accept the house at all. Both stories are brilliantly told by Michael Hall in this lavishly illustrated and impeccably researched new study. The book is particularly timely because for much of its history Waddesdon and the family who created it have been seen through a glass darkly.

For all the lavish catalogues produced a quarter of a century ago, the collections themselves have not been studied with quite the degree of rigour that their importance deserves. In part this is a reflection of traditional anti-gallic and anti-semitic prejudice. Despite the fact that Waddesdon receives more visitors than it can accommodate, there are still, one suspects, quite a few who secretly share the views of Lady Ottoline Morrell, who found "the terrible hard museum-like darkness of the house-with Jewish splendour and pomposity added on" "crushing". Even a figure as enlightened as James Lees-Milne, who was responsible for recommending the house for acceptance by the National Trust, thought the building "undeniably hideous", while acknowledging that the contents were superlative. While there is now a much wider appreciation of mainstream Victorian architecture in this country, it remains true that the French revivalism of which Waddesdon is such an interesting example, remains under studied and generally under appreciated. But part of the blame for the neglect of Waddesdon lies with the Rothschilds themselves. Dorothy de Rothschild not only kept the house well under wraps (and it is thanks to her care and that of Alice de Rothschild that the textiles are so remarkably well preserved) she also ensured that the history of the house remained shrouded in an aura of sanctity. The great catalogues were written without full access to archival material (scholars were told that all Baron Ferdinand's records had been destroyed) and critical scrutiny of both the authenticity and the provenance of the contents was discouraged. A bland but rather romantic portrait was painted by Dorothy de Rothschild in *The Rothschilds at Waddesdon Manor* of a grief-stricken Baron Ferdinand compensating for the loss of his wife and unborn child by throwing himself into art-collecting accompanied by his devoted sister Alice. It is thanks largely to the spirit of "glasnost" encouraged by the present Lord Rothschild that a more objective appraisal of both the family history and the great collections has become possible. And the results make for a very good read. Baron Ferdinand certainly could not rival the racy glamour of his cousin Alfred de Rothschild, who regularly entertained *demi-mondaines* at Halton, nor was he a match for the eccentricity of Walter Rothschild of Tring, who was rode on the back of a giant tortoise and harnessed zebras to his carriage.

But he emerges from these pages as a much more interesting and complicated figure than hitherto depicted. Following the death of his wife, his principal romantic feelings seem to have been directed towards his male cousin, Lord Rosebery. We get a vivid picture from Lilly Langtry's memoirs of a rather Proustian individual with an abhorrence of noise (he was astonishingly unsympathetic when the famous actress's maid set light to her night-dress and she screamed for help); a compulsive society host, who seems to have derived little pleasure from his own parties, "whenever he ate a meal a tray of medicine bottles appeared as an antidote"; a teetotaler who insisted on serving the finest wines to his guests; a nervous, feline individual who was yet capable of sustaining the friendship of so full-blooded a figure as Edward VII whose attempted sexexploit with a Waddesdon chambermaid (the King allegedly fell down stairs while in pursuit) is wryly dismissed as an improbable story on the grounds that it happened at 10 o'clock in the morning! No less vivid is the depiction of Miss Alice, a ferocious martinet who told the King not to touch the furniture and dismissed Baron Ferdinand's most loyal servant with astonishing callousness and yet was in her devotion to the house and its collections, one of the great heroines of the story. For those interested in the servicing of the country house, this book is packed with fascinating information and very detailed analysis of Rothschild finances (Waddesdon was always run at a loss). The architectural sources are also scrupulously investigated and Waddesdon is very well related to other Rothschild houses both in Britain and abroad. Though necessarily somewhat speculative in view of the paucity of records, there is an extremely illuminating chapter on the formation of the collections, though Blenheim seems a more likely role model than Stowe for Baron Ferdinand given that the Waddesdon estate was purchased from the Marlboroughs and the Stowe collections had been greatly depleted by the sale of 1848.

It is to be hoped that this will book encourage further research in this area and perhaps that the links between Blenheim and also between Waddesdon and the other Rothschild collections in the Vale of Aylesbury will be explored by other scholars. Though this book is handsome enough to grace any coffee-table, it is far more than just a coffee-table book. Like the Leon Bakst paintings of the Sleeping Beauty, which now grace one of the

upstairs rooms at Waddesdon, it tells the story of a reawakening and will do much to enhance our understanding and appreciation of the slumbering princess on her hilltop above the Vale of Aylesbury.

Jeremy Howard
University of Buckingham

**WINGS OVER WING: THE STORY OF A
WORLD WAR II BOMBER TRAINING UNIT**

Michael Warth

Dunstable, The Book Castle, 2001,

viii + 179 pp., 73 illustrations + 2 maps, £12.99.

ISBN 1 903747 05 8

RAF Wing opened in November 1941 to provide the site on which No.26 Operational Training Unit (or OTU) produced aircrews for Bomber Command. By the time that it closed in March 1946 it had received nearly 1000 airmen from basic training, formed them into aircrews, and turned them out ready to join operational squadrons. Throughout its existence the station's workhorse was the Wellington bomber and the skies around Wing reverberated night and day to the sound of Wellingtons taking off and landing.

The urgency to produce new aircrews in wartime led to a worryingly high rate of accidents. In May 1943 the station was suffering one fatality per ten flying hours. Indeed, Appendix 2 consists of nineteen pages listing 64 crashes by aircraft on training flights from RAF Wing between June 1942 and December 1945. It was a Wellington from RAF Wing that crashed on Winslow, killing 13 civilians as well as four of its crew during a practice night flight. There is an awful predictability in the catalogue of repeated mechanical failures on individual aircraft which ended in fatal crashes and the reader is left with the impression that, apart from the Winslow incident, the surrounding villages escaped relatively lightly from the mishaps which could have befallen them.

During the summer of 1942 the aircrews of No. 26 OTU had live training when Wing was required to contribute Wellingtons to the first of the controversial 1000 bomber raids (on Köln, Essen, Bremen and Dusseldorf); five Wing aircrews were lost in the course of these raids. Chapter 9 (which really should be an appendix) consists of 26 pages detailing each sortie by all 36 of the Wellingtons from Wing which took part in these four raids. In

the summer of 1943 Wing provided aircraft for attacks on German arms dumps in north-west France and chapter 12 devotes four pages to notes on the men and aircraft on these raids.

On a happier note, RAF Wing was one of the airfields which received the avalanche of returning prisoners of war in 1945. During April and May 1,269 aircraft delivered 32,822 men to Wing for processing and forwarding to reception centres. After this the airfield continued to be used as an OTU until 1946 and then was put to various military uses before being returned to agriculture in 1960.

Buckinghamshire is not rich in historic military sites, but, among those it has, the nine Second World War airfields easily take first place for scale of impact on the landscape. Field boundaries were removed and roads closed during construction; hangar sites subsequently formed the justification for otherwise-inexplicable groups of postwar business premises in the countryside. Today they form islands of distinctively open land surrounded by more historic field patterns and, before the memory of them as airfields recedes, it is valuable to have a record of what life was actually like on these "islands".

This book is drawn partly from RAF records and partly from interviews with former RAF personnel and some long-established local residents. It is about RAF Wing but it is probably illustrative of most of the nine RAF airfields in Buckinghamshire. (Details of bombing sorties, crashes, and types of aircraft form over one-third of the text). There is almost no mention of its Buckinghamshire surroundings beyond fleeting references to pub nights, local dances and journeys to and from Linslade railway station. Instead the author describes a self-contained community with its own bakery, dining rooms, hospital, dentist, church, shops and entertainments serving a scatter of eleven well-spaced "living areas" strung out along the road between Cublington and Wing. The facilities were so dispersed (as a protection against air attack) that bicycles were essential equipment for the 1000 or so personnel stationed there at any one time.

So this is local history with a difference. It tells the story of 4½ years in the development of a small corner of Buckinghamshire and includes a photographic record of a number of the former airfield buildings which still stand as mute reminders of this short but eventful period of history. But it tells

the story largely in isolation from the airfield's setting. For the reviewer the account would be more satisfying if the author had asked more about the relationship between RAF Wing and the surrounding farms, villages and towns, even if only to record that it was minimal.

Peter Gulland

BUCKINGHAM AT WAR

Pip Brimson

The Book Castle, Dunstable, Bedfordshire, 2001.
x + 150pp

ISBN 1 903747 04X. Price £12.99

It is now nearly sixty years since the end of the Second World War. Already, many of those involved, whether in the Armed Forces or on the Home Front, are passing from the scene. Mrs Brimson, herself a Buckingham resident between 1938 and 1941 (when she joined the WAAF) and again between 1946 and 1956, has chosen a good moment to produce a book that skilfully brings together her own memories and those of others. There is a host of fascinating stories and photographs that evoke what to many will seem like the day before yesterday but to others, younger perhaps, a completely different world. The theme is the way in which the people of Buckingham adapted to war. For such a short book, the range is astonishing – the A.R.P., gas masks, black out, the Home Guard, Land Girls and the changing role of women, rationing, the evacuees, fund raising efforts, knitting for the troops, salvage drives, POWs, even the occasional bomb and aircraft crash. The approach is essentially impressionistic rather than analytical, but readers with a little imagination will be able to re-live the various experiences, some tragic, some humorous, that made up the totality of life in wartime Buckingham.

This is not an academic book in the normal sense of the word, but it does contain much that will be of use to more academic writers. There are some abiding impressions. The Buckingham of 1939, even of the 'Phoney War' period, still presents a decidedly 'Victorian' face to the world, visually and in almost every other way. Changes between 1901 and 1939 may have transformed life in the big cities, but had not made much impact on villages and small towns like Buckingham. The war itself brought a remarkable sense of cohesiveness and solidarity – almost a 'collective consciousness' –

that seems far away today. Perhaps, most remarkable of all, even when the war was at its height, there was active discussion about the type of society that should be created once the war had been won – meetings to consider health, education and much more besides. Such attitudes could only spring from the underlying certainty of eventual victory.

Mrs Brimson does not shrink from mentioning little squabbles and jealousies, but her overall picture is kindly and affectionate – though in no sense patronising. There may be just the hint of rose-coloured spectacles. Significantly, there is one thing that she does not mention. She never refers to the wartime broadcasts of William Joyce, better known as Lord Haw-Haw. Joyce often claimed that his German masters knew everything that was happening in England, down to the last tiny detail. They even knew the time that Buckingham Town Hall clock had stopped the previous day. It often did and Joyce was usually right. We are bound to wonder whether any of the people described in *Buckingham at War* supplied the information.

John Clarke

GATHERING THE PEOPLE, SETTLING THE LAND; THE ARCHAEOLOGY OF A MIDDLE THAMES LANDSCAPE

Stuart Foreman, Jonathan Hiller and David Petts
Oxford Archaeology. Thames Valley Landscapes Monograph No 14. 2002.

xiii + 122pp and 42 figs with cd-rom

Hardback. Available Oxbow Books, Oxford, £9.95
ISBN 0 904220 31 1

This catchily-titled archaeological report which includes a cd-rom, describes in one well-illustrated slim volume some of the results of the extensive programme of archaeological work carried out in advance of construction of the Maidenhead-Windsor Flood Relief Scheme and the Eton Rowing Lake; both projects involved substantial pieces of earthmoving adjacent to the Thames. Although the word 'Buckinghamshire' is scarcely mentioned in the report, almost all of the work described took place in the county within the South Bucks District Council area.

The excavations were carried out by the Oxford Archaeological Unit. They were preceded by initial investigations by the Buckinghamshire County

Museum Archaeological Service, followed by negotiations with the Environment Agency (which led to their appointment of an in-house archaeologist), by an extensive programme of evaluation trenches on both the flood-relief channel and the rowing course site, and ultimately through attachment of archaeological planning conditions. The subsequent fieldwork on both projects was monitored by the County Archaeological Service. The work was funded by the Environment Agency and Eton College, both of whom who have sponsored this book.

By good fortune the Oxford Archaeological Unit was appointed to carry out the fieldwork on both projects, and with the encouragement of the County Service, this has resulted in a highly integrated and usable piece of work with considerable further research potential. This volume, the first of three describing the excavations, covers the Anglo Saxon period to the present; the subsequent volumes will cover the Mesolithic-Early Bronze Age, and Later Bronze Age to Roman period.

The monograph commences with an interesting essay by Julian Munby on the early medieval and later landscape. The most important of the site reports is on the discovery of an extensive middle-Saxon site (roughly seventh to ninth century AD) adjacent to Lake End Road, Dorney. Sites of this period are rare in the county and not common in southern England. The evidence for the 'site' (or perhaps two adjacent sites), consists entirely of large pits, of which there were about 123, commonly about 3 metres across by 1.5 metres deep. There was a striking absence of associated structures. On most middle Saxon sites some evidence for hall-like buildings would be anticipated. The authors, not surprisingly, spend much time debating the function of these pits which once dug subsequently infilled over a fairly long period. This is not the place to examine arguments for their use in detail, but whether dug as waterholes, as gravel sources, or for some other function, they contained refuse which would not be out of place in other middle-Saxon settlements; for example, animal bone (animals seem to have been butchered on site), quern fragments, pottery, weaving equipment – although, strangely, little evidence for spinning – and quite a large amount of iron smithing debris. There was also a considerable quantity of residual Roman material including tile, indicating the former presence of a substantial building in the

vicinity. The authors conclude that, lacking structures, the site must have been a substantial, but temporary, meeting place, possibly visited on a number of occasions. Curiously, however, there were no coins which one might expect to find at such a gathering. Although it is noted that there is numismatic evidence elsewhere, for a virtually coin-free period between circa 740–780, arguing from an absence of coinage to date the site to this period would be risky. It would have been helpful if the authors indicated whether a metal-detector topsoil search had been carried out prior to machine-stripping. If it were, it might have provided some additional evidence whether negative or positive. A single, rich grave of the seventh century is described, but this was found some distance from the pit groups.

The key sites in understanding this period are sites known by archaeologists as 'wics', of which Ipswich, Hamwic and Lundenwic are examples. All of these fairly large, semi-urban settlements have produced substantial amounts of artefactual material, characteristically including imported items such as pottery from northern France and the Rhineland and also glass. What makes this rural Dorney site distinctive is that it has also produced examples of these, albeit in small quantities (for example 22 sherds of imported pottery and one of glass). These 'exotics' might reflect its riverside location, but possibly also a connection with the mid-late Saxon royal site at Old Windsor – only a few kilometres downstream – where occupation probably commenced in the eighth century. The authors draw attention to the changing politics of this part of the mid-Thames, the subject of a power struggle between Mercia and Wessex.

A second site of interest, of later date, lay adjacent to a depression known locally as Lots Hole. This site clearly was a settlement, although apparently lacking any historical documentation for its existence. It consisted of a number of rectangular buildings, mainly built with earth-fast posts and occasionally beam-slots, and some associated boundary features, the principal of which was a curving boundary ditch. Close dating of this site was not easy due to the absence of a good pottery sequence in the locality, but it is suggested that it commenced in the late tenth /eleventh century and lasted into the first half of the thirteenth. It overlapped geographically, but apparently not chronologically, with part of the earlier Lake End Road

site which lay principally to the east. The plans of at least 13 buildings were recovered with dimensions ranging from 3x7m to c 15x 9m. They appear to have been very unsophisticated structures: only two can certainly be ascribed a domestic function and only two had internal divisions. The authors tentatively draw attention to the establishment of a stud farm at 'Le Parke' at Dorney in the fourteenth century but no firm link to the site can be established.

Finally, a series of enclosures of medieval and later date with some associated features, were identified, fronting Lake End Road on its east side.

This reasonably priced volume is much to be recommended. It is very readable, unlike most archaeological site reports, and further detail – in particular specialist reports – is available on the accompanying cd-rom. It is colourfully illustrated (including one fine reconstruction) and thoughtfully put together. A model of its kind, one can look forward to the remaining two volumes which will include reports on some exciting Neolithic discoveries and the preserved timber 'bridges of Late Bronze Age – Iron Age date. Eton College and the Environment Agency and to be congratulated on sponsoring the project and the Oxford Archaeological Unit on producing such an effective result. By chance, Tim Allen of the Oxford Unit, who directed work on the rowing lake project, was also responsible for the subsequent important excavations at Taplow Court which resulted in the discovery of a previously unknown hillfort adjacent to the well-known Saxon barrow; the whole overlooking the sites of the excavations described above. It is to be hoped that the report

on this work might also appear in an independent monograph before too long (if not in the *Records of Bucks*).

Michael Farley

The following work may be of interest:

THE ROMANESQUE FONTS OF NORTHERN EUROPE AND SCANDINAVIA

C.S. Drake

The Boydell Press, 2002 £90

ISBN 0 851158 54 4

'In Buckinghamshire is a group of fonts [the Aylesbury Group] which are probably the most elegant and beautifully executed to be found anywhere.'

Two classic county works are now available on cd-rom from the Buckinghamshire Genealogical Society; orders to Mrs E McLaughlin, Varneys, Rudds Lane, Haddenham HP17 8JP; cheques payable to Bucks Genealogical Society:

George Lipscomb 1847 *History and Antiquities of the County of Buckingham* (£29.95 + £1.00 p&p)

Browne Willis 1755 *History and Antiquities of the Town, Hundred and Deanery of Buckingham* (£14.99 + £1.00 p&p)