

The book reads so well; it's as if the authors take you, the reader, by the hand and walk you along the river's full length of sixteen miles describing minutely the flora and fauna found on the way with lots of explanations as to why things are the way they are.

This book is not only a sheer delight to hold in the hand but to read as well and to learn from. Largely written by professional botanist Walter Meagher, who lives in Deddington, and Peter Sheasby an amateur botanist who lives in Bloxham. It is Peter who has taken those gorgeous photographs already mentioned. This elegant book is designed by Wendy Meagher; she has so organized it that its contents are very easily accessed. Many more people have also contributed to this book, they are all acknowledged.

It is so well written that it will not only satisfy the serious botanist but the interested amateur and those who just wish to know more about the little rivers that abound locally (Adderbury's Sor Brook for instance!). I can also see it being used as a teaching aid and it is most certainly an exemplar to any budding author who would like to produce something like it for their own area.

N.J.A.

**The Second Railway King: The Life and Times of Sir Edward Watkin 1819-1901**, David Hodgkins (714 pp., illus.), Cardiff: Merton Priory Press, 2002. ISBN 1 898937 49 4. £40.00. Merton Priory Press Ltd, 67 Merthyr Road, Whitchurch, Cardiff, CF14 1DD.

This is a scholarly biography of one of the eminent Victorians who created Britain's railway system. After distinguishing himself in railway management, Edward Watkin became chairman of the Manchester, Sheffield & Lincoln, the South Eastern and the Metropolitan railways. He was closely involved with the Grand Trunk Railway in Canada, and an ardent proponent of the Channel Tunnel. He was a Member of Parliament and in his last years a friend of W.E.Gladstone. Watkin was concerned with railways in the Banbury region at several points in his long career.

When he was 30, in March 1849, Watkin was appointed secretary to the Buckinghamshire Railway whose line from Bletchley to Merton Street station in Banbury was opened in 1850. Several of Watkin's unrealised schemes for railway extensions in the middle phases of his career also concerned the Banbury region, when he projected junctions at such places as Fenny Compton and Moreton Pinckney. In the late 1870s and subsequently he was closely involved with William Mewburn, the railway stockbroker and prominent Wesleyan who lived at Wykham Park. Watkin secured his election to the board of the South Eastern Railway in 1879, and subsequently Mewburn was involved in the Channel Tunnel project, and in the tower at Wembley built in imitation of the Eiffel Tower. From February 1881 Watkin became an antagonist of Bernhard Samuelson. When Banbury's M.P. moved for a Select Committee to inquire into railway charges, Watkin was the principal spokesmen before the committee for the railway companies.