

**RATLEY: The Story of a Warwickshire Parish** (including the Rev. A. Child's Visiting List 1881-1882 known as the 'Black Book'), John Ashby and Dan Batchelor (card covers, A4, x, 204 pp., lavishly illustrated), Keystone (The Town Hall, Ratley, Banbury OX15 6DS). 2006. £11.95 + £4.00 UK p&p.

It is ironic that two important books relating to adjacent Warwickshire villages bordering Oxfordshire have been published within months of each other. Members will already have received the flyer extolling *The Diaries of Sanderson Miller of Radway* edited by William Hawkes for the Dugdale Society, and this will be reviewed in detail in our next issue. That is a painstaking and fully footnoted analysis of just two years, 1749-50 and 1756-57, with all the scholarly apparatus one expects of its editor and publisher.

In contrast, this account of Ratley is firmly in the estimable genre of local histories by local inhabitants, with local knowledge allied to full awareness of relevant records in Warwickshire Record Office. It is a pity that neither book can refer to the other, but in fact there are only passing references in Miller's diaries to Ratley and Ratley Grange, though of course much about what are now known as the Castle Inn and Egge Cottage at Edgehill. These, in the different context of the Ratley history, get considerable mention in text and illustrations, though technically outside the Ratley parish boundary.

Of the six chapters, the first, 'A Brief History...' is the shortest, for the good reason, as explained in the Preface, that the sharp focus is concentrated on the second half of the nineteenth century. In fact the bulk of the book is in Chapter 2, of over a hundred pages, 'A Walk Through Ratley Parish – Then and Now'. As implied, this is a road-by-road, house-by-house, survey, with plenty of divergences to discuss, for instance, the village school (its log books and group photos – many with individuals identified), the church, the Working Men's Club, the Temperance Tea House. Although the local stately home, Upton House, gets its mention, it is clear that it is no more important, in this book, than the humblest cottage and its inhabitants. This information is enhanced by careful use of census returns and the 1881-82 'Black Book' or 'visiting list' compiled by the vicar, with additional notes in 1889. This includes revealing comments on the families listed. The full transcript of this, prefaced by the 1663 Hearth Tax Return and identification of the houses still remaining in 2005 (with clear maps of the village in 1881, and an aerial 1963 view), are a major contribution of specific record as against the many entertaining anecdotes.

This short review cannot hope to do more than whet the reader's appetite for what the Preface claims, with reason, to be in line of succession to Ronald Blythe's classic *Akenfield*.

My one criticism, which I have made often before, is that there is no index. There are masses of personal names in this book, and plenty of place names and subjects that deserve identification. Some, we hope many, may *read* local histories, but for any who are active as local or family historians, they want to *refer*. This book deserved indexes.

**J.S.W.G.**