

Book Reviews

The Diocese Books of Samuel Wilberforce, Bishop of Oxford, 1845-69, transcribed and edited by Ronald and Margaret Pugh. Oxfordshire Record Society vol. 66 and Berkshire Record Society vol. 13. 2008. xvi, 432 pp. £30.00 (incl UK p&p) from Gavin Hannah, O.R.S., c/o Summer Fields, Oxford OX2 7EN (email: <gwh@summerfields.oxon.sch.uk>).

This is the second primary source for Wilberforce's episcopate published in the Oxfordshire Record Society's series: The *Letterbooks* constituted volume 47 almost forty years ago. However, they have two things in common: first, the good fortune to have survived, perversely, by having fallen into the custody of the family rather than a Diocesan Archive (where there is much more primary evidence in the Oxfordshire Record Office), and secondly to have shared the editing hand of Ronald Pugh, whose doctoral thesis was on Wilberforce's episcopate, and who by virtue of long experience has a commanding knowledge of the bishop's awkward handwriting. They cover three counties – Oxfordshire, Buckinghamshire and Berkshire – and consist of two manuscript books, the first arising from Wilberforce's consultations with his first Rural Deans in 1846, the second parish by parish accounts of the strengths and weaknesses – “mad” and “drunk” abound – of incumbents, and of the bishop's visits, largely to confirmations, institutions of new incumbents or re-opening of restored churches.

What does it offer for a Banbury Historical Society member who chooses to dip into it? It confirms much in the diaries of one of his Rural Deans from 1845 to 1847, William Cotton Risley, though it includes little Deddington detail: it highlights some of his opponents such as Thomas Curme at Sandford, whose “countenance simply shocking from its arrogant self-righteous complacent inflation” annoyed him at a confirmation, but also includes many press cuttings by his critics.

Wilberforce tended to stay with the landed elite when travelling, such as the Foster Melliards at North Aston or the Rousbys (of *Lark Rise* connections) at Cottisford, which makes it a feather in Cotton Risley's cap that he stayed at Deddington House. There are useful references to many other clergy, such as Wilson and Forbes in Banbury, which repay using this volume, though the biographical appendix compiled from the Foster, Venn and Crockford authorities failed in a surprising number of cases [though it does include a reference to the forebear of Patsy Kensit of a “Who Do You Think You Are?” recent TV programme]. All in all, the volume is a useful addition to sources for this period, making us grateful for their survival.

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