

and the value of rendering it generally accessible once more, the interest of the reprint lies in its being a primary historical source of itself, both in the aspirations of its compilers and their use of oral testimony.

Chris Day has supplied a powerful eight-page new introduction emphasising the state of local history study in the 1930s to which, in a brief six months' exercise, Mrs Turner, mother of Muriel Jones, the first local WI president, could turn. No County Record Office, and no recourse to personal census details beyond 1841, yet there was access to a private diary of William Risley, extracts of which are given without comment in an appendix, and presumably access to the mass of local ephemera collected by "lawyer Coggins" of the Hermitage. It is clear that time would not have allowed extensive use of either of the two last mentioned sources, but clarity, and sometimes contradiction, of the oral testimony is available there. For instance, the platefuls of meat relished by centenarian William Hiron in his youth relate, one would guess, to an eight year-old at the ox-roasting occasion in 1840 recorded in Risley's diary, though not quoted in the selection in the appendix. Also, the story of the Pavilion in the Castle Grounds is adorned with fascinating unacknowledged detail which ties in very well with William Risley's extensive accounts which lie in *Mid-Victorian Squarson*, the second and as yet unpublished [but forthcoming] volume of his diaries.

It is significant that research was required to familiarise readers with Mary Vane Turner after 75 years, for the feel of the book is in turn that many characters of the mid-nineteenth century are similarly little-known to the writer. Crucially, the centenarian had witnessed the shrinking of the town from over 2,000 to only 1,234, which is a great deal of outward migration and decline. The WI was in a sense an attempt to compensate for declining institutions, and its seventy members represented perhaps a quarter of the female adult population of the town (the same proportion that Risley considered "respectable" in the 1850s). Would those in the 1930s having to go to Banbury, rather than the eleven miles to Woodstock, to gain relief feel that their "cruel" situation was "somewhat mitigated" or might they have put it more strongly? It would depend upon one's perspective, and the WI account is in a sense a subjective one.

Perhaps it too led to respecting the adage *de mortuis nisi bonum* in that lawyer Lamb's absence from the 1852 Gazetteer is noted, but not explained by his flight to America (like lawyer Henry Churchill later) to escape his debts, leaving a wife to take in lodgers to promote her children's welfare. Printer Hiron is mentioned, but not that he was driven out of business and out of town when scarcely forty. Chapel is lightly mentioned, whereas both Wesleyan Reformers and Congregationalists played a major role in discordant times before Thomas Boniface's incumbency. Further social history of the town depends on a wider canvass being explored. There is every evidence of this being done in the wider activities of the Deddington & District History Society: the "Story" was work-in-progress at a certain time, not a bible of local fact to be taken whole.

Geoffrey Smedley-Stevenson