

Book Reviews

Flora Thompson's Country: The real villages and towns of 'Lark Rise to Candleford', David Watts and Christine Bloxham. Card covered, 7¼ x 9, 280pp., lavishly illustrated. Robert Boyd Publications (260 Colwell Drive, Witney OX28 5LW) (ISBN 978 1899536 96 2), £12.95.

This handsomely produced volume is the most recent publication in the Flora Thompson industry which has been stimulated by the BBC television adaptation first screened in 2008. The TV series was 'based on' Flora Thompson's autobiographical novels which were published in three parts between 1939 and 1943 before being re-issued as a trilogy. Thompson's memories are based on her childhood and young adulthood in the three adjacent settlements of Juniper Hill, Cottisford and Fringford in the border parishes between Oxfordshire, Northamptonshire and Buckinghamshire and under eight miles from Bicester, Brackley and Buckingham. This was deep country when Flora was born in 1876 and the three market towns had populations of only 2798, 2239, and 3849 respectively in 1871

David Watts and Christine Bloxham have drawn on a very wide range of sources to provide an illustrated guide to the wider district where Flora grew up. The many illustrations show us the villages and houses where the family and their connections lived and worked, as well as many other more general topographical and contextual photographs. While some of the photographs have their origin in postcards there are many others drawn from family and other collections. The authors have been able to draw on their detailed research and knowledge of Flora Thompson and the Bicester area to put the illustrations in context. The geographical scope of the book, bounded by Banbury, Buckingham and Brackley, is much wider than, say Martin Greenwood's *In Flora's footsteps: Daily Life in Lark Rise Country 1879-2006* (Charlbury, 2009) which confines itself to the ten Shelswell parishes but which looks in more detail at the issues of life and society at the end of the nineteenth century.

One of the strengths of this volume is the mapping which includes extracts from the early Ordnance Survey large scale mapping for many of the villages described. This shows very well how small most villages were before the end of the nineteenth-century. The front and back 'endpapers' which are extracts from the copper engraved one inch to the mile mapping are excellently reproduced. However, for those without grounding in the world of Lark Rise it would have been helpful to have had a small-scale map indicating the key places in the books.

It would be hard to fault the production of this book and the quality of the reproductions. There is a bibliography and index but unfortunately no guidance as to the source of the illustrations (other than those with specific acknowledgements).

Tom Forde