

*Oxfordshire Friendly Societies, 1750-1918*, edited by Shaun Morley. Hardback. xiv + 508 pp. Oxfordshire Record Society, vol 68, 2011. (ISBN 978 0 902509 73 3). £25.00.

This is a compendium that all historians of eighteenth and nineteenth century Oxfordshire will find useful. Its core is a list of 755 friendly societies known to have functioned in the county. It is alphabetically arranged by township or settlement rather than by ancient parish, so that, for example, entries for Bodicote appear under that heading, not under Adderbury. The presentation of the list could have been improved by running headlines reminding the reader of the places to which entries refer. The list includes 44 entries for Banbury (Nos 42-86), the earliest the Friendly Society of Shag Weavers of 1774. The 26 pp introduction is a helpful guide for users, but it could have drawn rather more from secondary works on the activities of friendly societies in particular places. There are 12 pages of colour plates, including photographs of club day at Sibford Gower in 1905, of a banner and pole head from the same village, and of the *North Arms* friendly society at Wroxton.

There is a helpful glossary of terms and valuable appendices include a list of 188 court cases involving friendly societies, summarised from reports in *Jackson's Oxford Journal*, details of 266 bands, some of them military, that performed at club days or similar events between 1836 and 1914, a list of 392 societies formally registered with the Registrar of Friendly Societies, and digests of information about the lodges of the affiliated orders such as the Oddfellows. A list of nine surviving banners includes two kept at Holy Trinity, Sibford Gower.

This volume might be considered a work of reference, and certainly most local historians in Oxfordshire will find that the list provides them with all the immediately accessible facts about friendly societies in the towns and villages with which they are concerned, but it should perhaps be regarded as a book that poses questions rather than one that provides answers. It would be useful to investigate further the Banbury Amicable Society, mentioned in documentary sources only in 1794, which could be joined only by men above the age of 46 and was limited to 81 members, or the Beneficial Society which met at the *Cock*, and was said in 1840 to be the oldest-established club in Banbury, although there are records of it only between 1838 and 1843.

The newspaper extracts provide much fairly routine evidence about friendly societies, about refusals by officers to pay benefit, drunkenness