

Book Review

Hilltop & Valley: Stories from Chalford Parish & Eastcombe

Members of the Chalford Parish Local History Group, edited by Camilla Boon, Hilary Burgess, Roger Carnt and Peter Drover, pub. Chalford Parish Local History Group (2023), 376pp, many b/w. ill. Paperback, £10.00.

This substantial book comprises 37 articles by no fewer than 16 members of Chalford Parish Local History Group and also acknowledges the assistance of many others. The editors are to be congratulated on their work in co-ordinating the research by such a large number of authors into a coherent whole.

Articles are divided into broad topics including People, Houses, Churches, Schools, Landscape, Industry and Miscellaneous. Some include personal recollections and all are illustrated with photographs from the collections of local historians and Chalford residents. There are many quotations from the sources of information that the authors have consulted. Sources of information are collected in a section at the end of the book and, while these are useful, it would have been helpful to have had more detail as to which source was used for which aspect of the article. Some articles have no sources given although references are sometimes given in the text. There is no index, which could have been a useful addition.

The book is presumably aimed mainly at readers who live in Chalford or Eastcombe or perhaps used to live there. It will certainly appeal to anyone with a family connection. I would have appreciated some clearer maps to show where the places are or were.

It might be a book to dip into, but I read it from cover to cover and found it well-written and edited and very interesting both in finding out more about Chalford, and also the more general picture of development of the local area. The extreme poverty and suffering caused by the swift decline of the handloom weaving industry and the changing focus of local occupations was clearly drawn and reflected the experiences of other villages in the Stroud area. The story of how parishes gradually came to support the less fortunate and work together to improve the lives of the poor also came across well. I particularly enjoyed the school memories - being a child of the 1950s!

The "Shaping of the Hilltop" articles give a good picture of the development of the area from ancient times until today. There are some updates on the information given in previous publications by the Group, including the lives of Chalford people in the two World Wars, which make interesting reading in their own right. A lighter touch is added in the stories of entertainment and traditions in the villages.

This is an excellent record of the history of Chalford and nearby villages for future local historians, as well as giving a flavour of what it was like to live in the area in past times.

Vicki Walker 26th Jan 2024