Book Reviews 2024

By Howard Tomlinson, Caroline Hillaby, Nicola Kearton, Keith Ray, and Terry Morgan.

***Three Choirs Festival in Ten Concerts,* by Simon Carpenter (Logaston Press, 2024, xi + 162 pp., paperback, illustrated). ISBN 978-1-910839-75-1, £12.50.**

The author's claim that his book is an 'accessible overview' of this renowned festival is a more than just self-review. And, as the Three Choirs archivist and a Gloucester Cathedral guide, Simon Carpenter is well-suited to putting together this unusual composition on the history of the world's oldest, if not quite continuous (thirteen years were lost to world wars and one to Covid-19) annual music festival. A convincing case has been mounted for taking its origins back to *c*.1715. If this is correct, then the Hereford festival of 2025 will mark the 297th meeting of the Three Choirs.

Carpenter does not try to compete with the authoritative *The Three Choirs Festival: A History* (Woodbridge, revised edition, 2017), by Anthony Bowden and Paul Hedley, where the assertion about its foundation date is made. Nevertheless, this reviewer at least, while recognising that the volume contains a useful bibliography as well as a select appendix, listing ninety-one biographies of some key festival figures, would also have liked to see references being cited for the interesting material that Carpenter has unearthed.

The narrative is framed around ten concerts, five of which were performed in Gloucester, three in Hereford, and two in Worcester. The overarching theme for all but two of the ten chapters relates to the debut festival works of composers, many of whose names eventually became synonymous with the festival itself. George Frideric Handel naturally takes first place since, from 16 September 1757, the *Messiah* was performed (or part-performed) at every Three Choirs (1875 apart) until the 1950s. The author's other seven chosen composers, with their generally short premiere pieces and performance dates, are: Hubert Parry (*Intermezzo Religioso*, 8 September 1868); Alice Mary Smith (*Ode to the Passions*, 12 September 1882, the first known festival performance of a work by a female composer); Edward Elgar (*Froissart Overture*, 9 September 1890); Ralph Vaughan Williams (*Fantasia on a Theme by Thomas Tallis*, 6 September 1910); Herbert Howells (*Sine Nomine*, 5 September 1922); Gustav Holst (*The Evening Watch*, 9 September 1925); and Gerald Finzi (*Clarinet Concerto*, 9 September 1949). Intriguingly, the two other chapters are concerned with two occurrences that were 'revolutionary' at the time but became standard practice: Hereford's move from the chancel to the nave, for the concert of 10 September 1834, so that (to quote Dean Merewether) 'all persons living around might participate in it'; and the first, full cathedral applause at a Three Choirs event, which occurred at Worcester, following the concert on 24 August 1969. Post-performance silences finally disappeared in 1972.

Such bare bones are only part of the book's complete skeleton, for Carpenter gives context to each of the first 'performances' at the festival by citing the (often-unfavourable) critical judgements of the contemporary music establishment; detailing the other music performed at each of the ten concerts by noted musicians of the day; and examining the associations of those chosen musicians with the Three Choirs. This approach sometimes give rise to repetition and awkward chronology, but it does enable the reader better to appreciate how the festival has developed over the centuries: from the mid-18th century, with a small cathedral choir of perhaps fifty members, and secular concerts (including *Messiah* initially) held in Gloucester's gloomy Boothall; from the first known cathedral organist who also conducted (Richard Clack of Hereford in 1759) to the organists' gaining control of the podium before that century had ended, often to

the critics' disapproval; from an essentially 'county' gathering until the coming of the railways to the three cities in 1844, 1850 and 1853 (to Gloucester, Worcester and Hereford respectively); from the recruitment of the chorus from the northern choral societies in the main to the development of local regional choirs; from the massively long concerts of the mid-19th century to the commissioning of new works ('novelties' as Brewer termed them) and modern programming; and from the first HMV wireless recordings of the mid-1920s to national broadcasting. These are some of the themes that emerge from the narrative.

Above all, the reader is made aware of the conservative attitudes of cathedral chapters through the centuries, a conservatism that was only slowly and reluctantly broken down. To take a few examples from modern times, and quite apart from the late recognition of applause: at the 1928 Gloucester Festival, the Dean required Dame Ethel Smyth to cover her head while conducting her *Mass in D*—during the performance, she jerked off the cap, which may have landed on the Dean's lap; Elgar's proposal to compose a new piece for the 1929 festival, based on a setting of Shelley's *The Demon* [*sic*] and *Adonais*, was rejected on the grounds that the latter poem was thought to be 'pagan'; and it was not until 1954 that audiences were allowed to face performers directly, thereby turning their backs on the altar, rather than each other across a central aisle. Three years later, David Willcocks was also given permission to programme Walton's *Belshazzar's Feast*, with its racy text, nearly thirty years after its first publication. As Carpenter concludes: 'So the Festival continues, constantly improving and reinventing itself, and now with a full-time professional office at its heart. It continues to adapt to the world around it and to innovate as it moves into its fourth century'. Nonetheless, to progressives over times past, the process of adaptation must sometimes have seemed exceedingly slow.

Finally, and as ever with Logaston Press, the book is attractively produced and set at a very reasonable price. Its many illustrations, from both private and public collections, add immeasurably to the text. Many are of cathedral performances and of composers and soloists in formal and informal poses. My favourite, however, is the extraordinary montage, from an issue of the *Illustrated London News* of October 1908, entitled: 'The Makers of British Music: Famous Living British Composers of the Old School and the New'. Of the eighteen men and one woman (Ethel Smyth) featured, the vast majority would have had a close connection with the Three Choirs Festival, a festival that Carpenter has vividly brought to life in this delightful volume.

Howard Tomlinson

***The Medieval Floortiles of Herefordshire*, by Julie Bowen (Archaeopress, 2022, 148 pp. 140 illustrations). £34 in paperback, free to download at: https://www.archaeopress.com/Archaeopress/download/9781803271880.**

Until now, the county's medieval tiles have been little studied, apart from Alan Vince's chapter in *A Definitive History of Dore Abbey* (1997) and Joe Hillaby's work at Ledbury and Leominster. Julie Bowen's excellent book is therefore most welcome.

Julie's interest in medieval floortiles was sparked by her taking part in the excavation of 2005 at Leominster, led by Bruce Watson, which unearthed 536 fragments of floortiles, of which 12% were decorated. This led to her unpublished BA dissertation, in 2007, on *The Medieval Floor Tiles from Leominster Priory*. Later, she contributed to Bruce Watson's article, 'An archaeological evaluation of the Old Priory buildings, Leominster: Saxon, medieval and later discoveries' in the 2015 *Transactions*.

What a find this book has been! The author describes it as 'a first step…a snapshot in time of the decorated medieval floortiles visible in the county of Herefordshire in 2013', plus a

few instances of tiles no longer extant but recorded. She has had to restrict herself to design but has a good eye for detecting patterns and likenesses that would otherwise have escaped me. Julie hopes others will continue her research; I doubt she anticipated its value to Herefordshire residents and visitors to our lovely churches.

Each floortile design is illustrated, and parallels from other sites are outlined. The photographs are excellent; where appropriate, drawings (hers and those taken by others) give a clearer image. Entries are fully referenced, and there is a useful bibliography as well as a map of the twenty-four sites covered, including Hereford Museum, whose collection can be seen by appointment (email: herefordshiremuseums@herefordshire.gov.uk.).

Few designs are unique to the county; the author tries to restrict her comparisons to locations within a 20-mile radius of Herefordshire, e.g., Worcester, Gloucester, and Great Malvern, from where Alan Vince believed that the tiles at Croft, Stretton Sugwas, and All Saints, Hereford might have been supplied. We are told that skilled, itinerant tilers probably had their own set of stamps.

Many of the sites, listed alphabetically, will be familiar, including St Katherine's Chapel, Ledbury, which boasts the largest collection, some 500 tiles of the Bristol Canynges Group (*c.*1485) in remarkably good condition. Westhide, on the other hand, has just a single slip tile.

Castle Frome is justly famous for its font, but Pevsner's terse 'mostly C14, within the oblong aumbry' does not compel the average visitor to look at its sixteen complete and four half tiles. Just one tile is clearly identifiable, of the Canynges Group; the rest are very unusual, with no parallel elsewhere. To Julie Bowen, Castle Frome 'remains the biggest puzzle'.

Several tiles appear to be unique to Leominster, with Laurence Keen, who made significant contributions to the book, confirming that he had not seen the design of BW 23-24 , shown on p.90, elsewhere. Pevsner's 'a few C14 tiles' at Dilwyn merit ten pages, including some very beautiful fragments, a tile linked to Meaux Abbey, a Cistercian foundation of 1151 near Beverley, in the East Riding of Yorkshire, and what is suggested to be the arms of Delabere, impaling those of Chabnor.

We are fortunate to have images of the tiles at Goodrich Castle. Unable to establish where they are curated, Julie Bowen deduced what they looked like from the written descriptions by Alan Vince and Ron Shoesmith, whose prime interest was with the origins of the ceramic material. RCHME (1931) refers only to 'a few fragments of slip tiles', and there is no mention in the guidebook or Pevsner.

These are just some of the nuggets to be found. For general information on tiles, The Churches Conservation Trust offers a useful blog—https://www.visitchurches.org.uk/what-we-do/blog/tiles-through-time—and Shire Publications its standard fare, H. Van Lemmen, *Medieval Tiles* (2000). Lynn Pearson's *A Guide to British Tile and Architectural Ceramics Locations* (2005), whilst excellent in many respects, ignores medieval tiles in favour of the Godwin ones.

Julie Bowen may have been frustrated in her ambition regarding the dating and distribution of the tiles and the links between the sites, but she has left us with a wonderfully illustrated and informative guide of which she should be proud.

Postscript

I encountered Julie Bowen and this invaluable book in the course of preparing Joe Hillaby's *Leominster Minster Priory and Borough* for its second edition, since his comment that none of the tiles found by Border Archaeology in 2002 'has yet been returned to the parish or made available for public inspection' clearly needed updating. Julie notes that:

> Border Archaeology carried out a watching brief, in the south-east corner at Leominster Old Priory, which recorded several [loose-laid] fragments of decorated medieval floor tile. No drawings were published, but written records give details of 'heraldic designs, flowery and fleur-de-lys decorations' and 'a chevron and line border surrounding worn yellow dots' plus a 'flower design within a double circle border'. There is also a description of an 'upright man raising the palm of his hand behind a lion', an image I am not aware of. I have been unable to track down the actual tiles.

Two documentary archives and ninety-two bags of finds were eventually located, and a few tiles were exhibited in the Priory as part of its 900th anniversary exhibition. The triple border and leaf pattern on one tile is very similar to others at Castle Frome (see p.23) and Limebrook Priory in Lingen; they may all have been made by the same group of travelling tile makers. One tile has the coat of arms of the second Walter de Clifford, lord of Tenbury and sheriff of Hereford in 1195 and 1205 respectively, a design also found at Abbeydore and illustrated on p.6. As Julie Bowen comments, he had land deals with the abbot of Reading Abbey (the mother church of the Priory) in 1203, so that the tile may have been made at that time. 'The most interesting' of these tile fragments shows a human figure and what looks like a lion. Julie Bowen comments that this 'MIGHT relate to the foundation myth. I've certainly not seen any other tile like that.'

The future location of these tiles is currently uncertain; at the time of writing, some are still on view in the Priory. There must be an argument for them to remain in context, in the Priory.

Caroline Hillaby

***Artisan Art: Vernacular wall paintings in the Welsh Marches, 1550-1650*, by Kathryn Davies, new edition (Logaston Press, 2024, 304 pp., paperback, illustrated including 200 colour photographs), revised and updated edition of a book originally published in 2008. ISBN 978-1910839706, £25.**

In this expanded and lavishly produced edition of her book on vernacular wall paintings, first published in 2008, Dr Kathryn Davies offers a fascinating analysis of an aspect of early modern visual culture that is relatively unknown. The full richness of the art of this late Tudor and early Stuart period in England and Wales has historically been underappreciated, perhaps because of a sense that the iconoclasm of the Reformation led to an uncertainty and loss of confidence about how to handle the visual image; what imagery was safe and what might arouse suspicion? Another reason could be that art historians have tended to focus on the easel paintings, portraiture, and sculpture commissioned by the royal court rather than the full range of decorative arts and material objects enjoyed throughout society. However, books aimed at the general public have been changing perceptions of the latter, including, very recently, Christina J. Faraday's *The Story of Tudor Art: A History of Tudor England Through its Art and Objects* (2025, Bloomsbury).

Welcome though this analysis is, it is Dr Davies's carefully focussed study, made over a number of years, which represents something remarkable and truly valuable. Most of the wall paintings that she describes have survived only as fragments, hidden away in private homes that are not generally accessible to the public. Her work as a heritage and planning consultant over the last thirty-five years has given Davies unique access to many of the buildings where these works are located and a deep understanding of the conservation issues involved. What she has

uncovered bears witness to a society that was highly literate in visual terms, one where ordinary people at all levels, apart from the very poor, had art painted onto the walls of their homes. The content and meaning of these decorations and the context in which they were made provide unique insights into social and cultural lives of the time.

Although, as the book points out, wall paintings were popular and widespread throughout the country, there seems to have been a proliferation in the Welsh Marches in the late 16th and early 17th centuries. This also coincided with a period of much building activity. Improvements in building technology led to the enclosure of the open hearth and the increased use of glazed windows, allowing interiors to be relatively free from soot and smoke and the walls of the house to be seen more clearly. It was also a time of relative prosperity, when wealth was permeating through a wider section of society. Many houses were being built, at the same time as others were being adapted and extended, and homeowners, who aspired to ascend the social ladder, were keen to demonstrate their individuality and standing through the design and decoration of their interiors as well as through the exteriors of their buildings. While Davies suggests that it is convenient to refer to those who might have commissioned painted decoration in their homes as 'the middling sort', she feels that this was not a term used at the time, and that defining status in the early modern period was far from straightforward.

The study of wall paintings can contribute to discussions on the emergence of this diverse social grouping, who had increasing wealth and some political power but were not of traditional noble or high-gentry status. In a private house, wall paintings were generally placed in principal rooms, where they could have been shown off to visitors, although they were also found in taverns and inns. Social distinctions were subtle and varied, but wall paintings that featured painted texts might suggest a level of literacy and a moral outlook, while those with classical motifs could point to higher levels of education. The use of fictive wooden panelling in popular decoration, along with painted imitation of the costly hangings found in aristocratic houses, created an illusion of opulence and status, but such skilled fakery might also delight the eye with its rich patterns and colours. Developments in literacy and print media made not only books but ballad sheets and broadsides widely available, providing a rich, visual resource for designing wall paintings. Even in the humblest of homes, illustrated 'Penny ballads' could be found, pasted onto walls as a form of instruction and decoration.

As an insight into the availability of print in a provincial town, Davies points to the example of Roger Ward, a Shrewsbury publisher, who had over 500 titles as well as over 600 ballads listed in an inventory when he was imprisoned for failure to pay a debt. In addition to print-based sources, traditional motifs, derived from textiles, church ornamentation, and heraldry, seem to have been the most popular, perhaps because local craftsmen could execute them without too much difficulty and also because they were a safe choice in subject matter. Given the latter imperative, the choice of imagery could, on occasion, be surprising to the modern eye, as demonstrated by the wall painting of Richard Ellis, gentleman, and his wife, Jane, of Althrey Hall, Bangor-on-Dee, which decorates a chamber of the house. Jane holds a crocus in her hand, possibly a symbol of fertility, while Richard displays his codpiece with a red ribbon. The family was one of ancient lineage, and Richard and Jane had produced nine sons and four daughters with which to secure its future. So, in a Tudor context, the painting could be a record of the couple's achievements.

One of the most intact examples of a highly decorative scheme of wall painting can be experienced in the building currently used as the Town Council offices, in Church Street, Ledbury. The main building dates from before 1500, with alterations made in 1575-1600. The

painted room here may have been used as a court room and is designed with a frieze, main panel, and dado, styled as fictive panelling. The painting, which covers all the walls in sections, features Biblical texts, emphasising moral rectitude, all held within elaborate strapwork borders. Good examples of figurative wall painting that are accessible to the public can be found in the Old House Museum in Hereford. Among these is a well-executed painting, originally sited at 3-4 Widemarsh Street, a wealthy merchant's house, which shows Joseph interpreting Pharoah's dream and presenting Jacob to Pharoah, a scene taken from a print by Virgil Solis. The Old Testament subject matter would have been considered 'safe'.

As Davies points out, 'few painters or designers in any field create works entirely out of their imagination', and this was especially true of the work of these uncredited, vernacular painters and craftsmen, who were not required to innovate, but to design schemes which met the requirements of the person who commissioned them. Much of the painting was done with a very limited range of colours, which cost only a few pence per pound, although colours such as indigo, vermilion, and orpiment were used in the wealthier houses. On the whole, these works were not expensive, and it appears that it was mainly local building craftsmen, particularly plasterers and glazers, who undertook painting work. Wall paintings, often made with simple techniques that utilised water-based paint, were fashionable in the Welsh Marches for a period of about fifty years; they did not last, and schemes tended to be painted over or gradually obscured by everyday dirt and dust. It also seems that more sober and restrained styles took over after 1625, when one might suspect that the strengthening hold of Puritanism began to renew anxiety about imagery and personal display. While Dr Davies does not make this assertion, she says that there is little evidence of wall paintings from this time onwards: 'The survival of vernacular buildings increases considerably in the 17th century, but there is no corresponding increase in survival of wall paintings.'

The book concludes with an extensively illustrated gazetteer, which surveys around 300 examples of wall paintings in a variety of settings, from artisans' cottages, farmhouses, taverns, and inns, to merchant houses and mansions. Along with notes on each building and its inhabitants, the author has indicated the quality of execution along with an estimated cost per yard. Since the first edition, many more examples of wall paintings have been discovered and many new illustrations included, making this volume a unique resource for researchers of one particular, but enlightening, aspect of early modern culture.

Nicola Kearton

***Stone Circles: A Field Guide,* by Colin Richards and Vicki Cummings (Yale University Press, 2024, 494 pp., paperback). ISBN 978-0-300-23598-2, £30.00.**

The production of this substantial prehistory guidebook, compiled by two of the UK's leading Neolithic-period specialists, is intended as an update to the late Aubrey Burl's celebrated *The Stone Circles of the British Isles* (Yale, 1975; updated by Burl as *The Stone Circles of Britain, Ireland, and Brittany*, Yale, 2000). In practice, although the book bears some resemblance to Burl's guidebooks, especially through its gazetteer format, it is written in a quite different style and makes more than a nod towards 'popular' guides to prehistoric sites, such as Andy Burnham's 'Megalithic Portal' book, *The Old Stones* (Watkins, 2018). Unlike Burl's books, the title assumes that the geographical scope of the volume is known to be Britain and Ireland. The book follows Burl in giving extended treatment to the most complex and well-studied circles: those of Orkney, the Boyne valley in Ireland, and Stonehenge and Avebury in southern Britain. As one would expect, the accounts of these sites included in the book provide the reader with

up-to-the-moment information and theories.

The book opens with the dramatic statement that 'Stone circles are the most visited prehistoric monuments in Britain and Ireland', but it could be objected that, apart from the major site complexes just listed, this is far from certain, since many circles lie in remote upland areas. The brief introductory chapter introduces themes that the authors themselves have highlighted in their recent studies and none more so than a focus upon the apparently deliberate selection of individual stones from specific sources, for their lithology and for their shape and size characteristics. The authors make sure that they include notes on the recording of stones and on celestial alignments and skyscapes.

Appropriately, given their antiquity, diversity, and prominence, the stone circles of Scotland are accorded pride of place. They are described across 180 pages accompanied by over sixty colour plates. There then follow chapters on the circles of north-east, north-west, and central England, in which latter section we learn that only three counties (Derbyshire, Wiltshire, and Dorset) possess more than two sites that merit an entry or visit, while eight counties (including Herefordshire) have none. In contrast, Dartmoor (Devon) alone has fourteen circles that are complete enough (though—unmentioned—largely reconstructed from a dilapidated state a century ago) to warrant entries, and Cornwall fifteen. The whole of Wales accounts for only thirty sites, and here we begin to encounter problems of definition. What, exactly, *is* a stone circle? Is a circle of upright stones, standing within the matrix of a stone mound, as part of a circular 'structured cairn' from the Early Bronze Age (essentially an elaborate burial cairn), properly to be described as a *stone circle* at all?

From a Herefordshire perspective, some circles briefly discussed in the book, especially those of Breconshire and to a degree also of Shropshire, must surely be of interest. The Early Bronze Age 'colonisation' of the uplands of the Brecon Beacons (for example), during the period from around 2100 to 1800BC, led to the creation of fascinating 'ceremonial complexes' that featured stone circles alongside rows of standing stones (e.g., sites 253 and 254 noted in the book) that are reminiscent of their contemporaries on Dartmoor and in the Peak District. This, and the confused referencing of ancient counties in one place and the modern 'Powys' in others, betray a limited knowledge of the geography and prehistory of Wales, by no means a rarity among British prehistorians.

Finally, the relevance of this book to Herefordshire in any other respects could perhaps be questioned, given that no stone circles in this county are included, even though one would ideally wish to see acknowledged the likelihood that the Queen Stone is the sole survivor of a major stone circle at Huntsham, nestled in the great loop of the Wye near Goodrich. To see an exactly similar stone, with deep grooves extending down to (but not below) ground level, go to the entry on the Duddo circle in Northumberland (Figure 62, p. 205). In fact, with the discovery of a levelled stone circle very close to Arthur's Stone in July 2024 (see the Archaeology Recorder's Report in this volume), we are just at the beginning of a voyage of discovery that may see some balance restored, and—who knows?—we may in time witness 'reconstructed' stone circles of our own as more 'lost' sites are uncovered.

Keith Ray

The Story of the Herefordshire Pomona **by Bill Laws (Logaston Press, 2025, 182 pp., hardback). ISBN 978-1-910839-78-2), £20.**

The Herefordshire Pomona of 1885 is the product of one of the greatest publishing ventures ever to have been undertaken in this county. Such was its importance that even Queen Victoria—

courtesy of Lady Emily Foley—possessed a copy. It is true that the Brussels firm of Severyns was given the responsibility of producing the 'chromolithographic portraits', the 441 watercolours of fruit, blossom, and foliage, as the complicated process of production was outside the scope of any local publishing house. Nevertheless, the finished product was put together in Hereford. Jakeman and Carvers of Widemarsh Street printed 600 copies of the text and line drawings in two volumes, combining the seven sections that had been issued annually from 1878, and bound them in Moroccan leather. It was a remarkable achievement for a small city bookseller and stationer.

It was also important that a local firm was used for the promotion of a local product, since its general editor, that extraordinary polymath, Dr Henry Bull, wished, by the means of this book, both to 'restore Herefordshire to its true fruit-growing supremacy' and 'to increase…the growth of the best varieties of table fruit'. Additionally, and intriguingly, Dr Bull's further personal aim was to edit a book, with the help of Dr Robert Hogg as technical expert, that would acknowledge the support that had been received from the county's landed proprietors in opening their estates 'to the researches of the [Woolhope] Club'. Only his final purpose was fully realised.

As Laws well describes, Bull's *Pomona* was not the first Herefordshire book of its type. John Beale, a Herefordshire-born clergyman, was the author of *Herefordshire Orchards: A Pattern for all England* (1656/7) and, more than 150 years later, the noted agriculturalist, Thomas Andrew Knight of Wormsley Grange and Downton Castle, persuaded the Herefordshire Agricultural Society to produce his *Pomona Herefordiensis*. It took ten years to complete and was eventually published in 1811, but with disastrous results in terms of its mistaken views on grafting. His anti-grafting idea damaged the county's orchards for much of the 19th century. Indeed, sixty years later, it was the Woolhope Club's pomological committee that tested the validity of Knight's contention, only to find that in fact its specimen grafts flourished, thereby saving some apple varieties from extinction.

Laws gives full regard to the origins of the Woolhope Naturalists' Field Club (WNFC) and, more relevantly, the initiatives undertaken by the WNFC in relation to the production of the 1885 *Pomona*. The Club's 1873 fungus foray through orchards, led another reverend gentleman—there are many in this story—to persuade the Royal Horticultural Society to distribute ninety-two fruit tree grafts to the Club. This resulted in its organisation of an annual fruit fare and, through the good offices of the Rector of Credenhill (Henry Bulmer), an invitation to Dr Hogg, one of the country's leading pomologists, to become involved in the Club's activities. A pomological committee was established and, in October 1876, two years after the opening of its club room and library in Broad Street, Dr Bull persuaded the WNFC to embark on the *Pomona* project. Over eighty percent of the eventual cost of £2,233 was funded by subscriptions and donations from Club members.

Above all, in terms of the book's production, it was Henry Bull who secured the services of the talented women who painted the fruit. They included a drawing from Fanny Stackhouse Acton, who remarkably had also worked on her father's *Pomona Herefordiensis*. But the main artistic contributors to Dr Bull's edition were those of his eldest daughter, Edith, and the professional artist, Alice Ellis. Together, having devoted (in Bull's words) 'all the sunshiny hours of eight autumnal seasons' to paint the watercolours, their endeavours eventually produced fifty-three and fifty-four plates respectively for the volume. Twenty of their plates are reproduced in Laws's book, with an additional one (of Foxwhelp apples) by George Worthington Smith. Smith also emerges in Laws's *Story* as a prominent Woolhopean illustrator, who was particularly engaged with the Club's fungus forays. His delicious 1873 cartoon of a foray for *The Graphic*

and a further one of a spoof menu for its annual Green Dragon dinner are reproduced here, together with his classic toadstool watercolour (the red-hatted Fly Agaric) of 1865 and his well-known drawing of the new Free Library's façade, which was published in the *Transactions* as well as *The Gardeners' World*.

A further strength of the book is the numerous other images it contains: of Nicholas Fouché's delightful *Fair Pomona* (*c*.1700); a portrait of the Matthews sisters around the turn of the following century (Eizabeth Matthews produced paintings for the Knight *Pomona*); and one of Fanny Stackhouse Acton, who spanned the seventy-four years between the Knight and Bull editions. There are photographs of a youthful Edith Bull at her easel, an elderly Lady Emma Foley, who played an important walk-on part in the story, and a smiling Winifred Leeds, the first female president of the Woolhope Club (in 1959). Other images capture Hereford landowners and their houses; country orchards through the ages; the Club's prize medals won at the prestigious Rouen Apple Congress in 1884; the title pages of Evelyn's *Sylva* and—of course—of the second volume of *The Herefordshire Pomona*, with the Club crest and legend proudly displayed. There are also insets that deal with such topics as the craft of cutting and grafting, the practice of 'apple howling', 'Norman' apples (the subject of the pomological committee's first investigation), the Club's fungus forays, and the fruitful lives of John Scudamore of Holme Lacy and Henry Bulmer and his sons. An appendix, based on the *Pomona*, describes thirty-five varieties of apple, and there is a useful fruit index.

The author has undertaken extensive research among local sources to put together the text, although more detail is needed in the end notes. Laws's text is not without blemish for his readers. For example: he mistakes Bull's age (p.7); Sir Roger Bodenham's dates (1545-1623) are needlessly repeated (p.19); it is implied (on p.71) that the free library had been 'newly opened' in October 1876, when the correct opening date was 8 October 1874; it was much of Hereford Cathedral's nave, rather than simply its 'west wing', that fell down in 1786 (on 17 April that year, p.62); it is St John's College, Oxford (not St Johns, pp.97-8); and the statement relating to Edward Palin's need to preserve his celibate status in order to remain at the College needs further clarification. Such errors detract from the book's quality, as do occasional infelicities of style, a penchant for anecdotes, and a tendency to follow diversions of marginal relevance.

Nonetheless, Laws's *Story of the Herefordshire Pomona* contains a wealth of fascinating and useful historical information, which will be of considerable interest to both the general reader and the local specialist. And, as may be expected from any book published under the Logaston imprint, this is a sumptuously illustrated and finely produced volume about a subject that continues to enrich the life and culture of Herefordshire and its people today.

Howard Tomlinson

***The Victoria County History of Herefordshire, Cradley,* by Anastasia Stylianouu and Fergus Eskola-Oakes (London University Press, 2025, 174 pp., paperback). ISBN 978-1-908590-88-6, £14.99.**

The volume on Cradley is the fourth parish history to be published under the auspices of the Herefordshire Victoria County History (VCH) Trust. Like those of Eastnor, Bosbury, and Colwall, it will eventually form part of a VCH 'red book' covering Ledbury and the parishes of the nearby Malvern Hills.

The Woolhope Club is proud to have assisted in the publication of the volume through a grant from the G. W. Smith Fund, as it did for the other three parish histories. Members have played a strong, collaborative role in supporting the scholarship of Dr Anastasia Stylianou and

Dr Fergus Eskola-Oakes, the historians responsible for most of the book. Prof. Keith Ray, Duncan James, and David Whitehead made specialist contributions, Dr Janet Cooper offered her advice and experience as well as selecting illustrations, and Jonathan Comber's 'tireless efforts' in archival research and publication processes are fully acknowledged.

In common with other volumes in the same series, the book summarises information about the parish and features major sections about land ownership; economic, social, and religious history; and local government. A picture emerges of a relatively large parish where the economy has been, and remains, substantially agricultural, but has nonetheless included quarrying and industrial activity, especially in the 19th century; of land ownership dominated by the bishops of Hereford and then by a series of families, once Cradley Manor had passed to the Crown in 1562; and of modern development, which has altered the rural feel of Cradley relatively little. In the late 19th century, the parish successfully resisted the coming of the railways and proposals to mine coal. This slowed economic and population growth, in marked contrast to developments in neighbouring parishes served by the railway lines. As illustrated by a number of photographs, Cradley has retained a particularly high density of historic houses and cottages as well as fine examples of agrarian architecture. Given the proximity of the parish to Worcestershire and its position on the edge of the Malvern Hills, Cradley's history has a different feel to that of parishes further west in Herefordshire, whose history is so bound up with the Marches and the border with Wales.

The quality and scope of documentary research is evident from the footnotes, glossary, and helpful notes on sources. Some 250 wills from the parish survive from the period 1500-1700, very largely dating from 1550 onwards. Economic analysis is supported by sample data from 100 of these wills and from the 117 that specifically indicate the testator's social status or occupation. In preparing the account of the 19th and 20th centuries, fifty sets of sales particulars have been examined for similar purposes. The wills and particulars consulted are listed in one of the appendices.

Although frequent readers of VCH publications will be familiar with this disciplined approach to research, it may be valuable to highlight that characteristic for new readers. Conclusions and clear explorations of change over time are brought together from the combination and interweaving of a great deal of evidence, briefly presented, thus creating volumes that are scholarly but remain engaging and approachable.

Of course, given the short format and the extent of material researched, there is little space to develop individual points or stories, but the reader is provided with every opportunity to identify matters of personal interest and follow them up, using the excellent references available. From the huge choice of possible topics, here are a few examples that particularly appealed to this reviewer.

First, the remains of prehistoric land divisions, probably dating from the middle to late Bronze Age, stir the imagination about the appearance of the ancient landscape and how control of land might have operated. Such earthworks run along the ridges in Halesend Wood and Whitman's Hill, whilst the bank that acts as a boundary between Cradley and Mathon runs for over 2.5 km and, in places, can still be seen as a lynchet over 4 metres high (p. 12). Secondly, the account of the architecture and development of St James's Church (pp. 117-25) is fascinating throughout, not least in the description of the Anglo-Saxon elements that survive and the shadowy possibility of an 8th-century 'family monastery', comparable with that at Acton Beauchamp (p. 119). Thirdly, the economic section addresses productive activity and forces that affected ordinary lives over the centuries; the story of glove-making in Cradley, made possible

by 18th-century legislation that encouraged import of kid and lamb skins and led to rapid growth of the industry in Worcester and parts of Herefordshire, is both instructive and poignant (p. 74). In 1851, there were 144 'gloveresses' in Cradley, declining to only twenty-nine in 1891 as import duties and restrictions on imported gloves were removed. Between 1818 and 1838, no less than thirty-seven illegitimate children were born to gloveresses, a point further addressed, on p. 84, in analysis of illegitimacy and social background. On the social and religious front, there are powerful reminders too of how community life in the past can seem startlingly unfamiliar; in 1587, a prosecution 'featured a man in Cradley on a cowlstaff, along with blowing of horns and throwing of grains. It seems to have been a charivari and may have been a Shrovetide observance.' Whatever the meaning of such an event, it belongs to a world very different to our own. In any event, the curate of the time complained that the noise had hindered worshippers from hearing prayers (p. 85). Finally, among interesting content about the religious history of the parish, the rise of non-conformity from the early 19th century, with apparently little evidence for it previously, is striking, and a fine image of Cradley chapel (one of the Countess of Huntingon Methodist chapels) is included as figure 31.

The volume is particularly well presented, with the usual clear approach to headings, even if the left alignment of the text—a feature of VCH house style—is unusual today and may initially feel disconcerting. The illustrations are well chosen, beautifully printed, and effective in supporting points made in the text. Personal favourites include: figure 5a, an image of Hawkhurst Cottage from 1930, showing incidentally how the exposure of timber frames is so often a result of modern restoration; figure 12, a photograph of hop pickers in *c*.1900, a scene familiar in many Herefordshire parishes until after the Second World War; and figure 28, a picture of the splendid chest at St James's Church, described in detail in Rachel Anna Sycamore's fine paper about the church chests of Herefordshire in the 2022 *Transactions* (pp. 112-35, and especially p. 118).

The Cradley volume will be of great interest to people with family or other connections to the parish; to historians wishing to investigate specific points about, or characteristics of, this part of Herefordshire; and to anyone looking to understand how Cradley has changed, from the Conquest to the 19th century, and how that history, together with more recent developments, has created the present-day parish.

It has been a pleasure to review a high-quality volume of local history, especially in the knowledge that it represents part of an ongoing programme across Herefordshire. New work is now scheduled to cover parishes in the north of the county.

Terry Morgan

***Neolithic Tombs of Wales* by George Nash (Logaston Press, 2024, 271 pp., paperback). ISBN 978-1-910839-72-0, £25.**

Given the proximity to Herefordshire of the series of Neolithic chambered tombs that were created in an arc around the north-western flanks of the Black Mountains, chiefly between Hay and Talgarth, this book may be of interest to readers of these *Transactions* whose interest in prehistory lies principally in adjacent Herefordshire. *Neolithic Tombs of Wales* is a revised edition of a book with a similar scope, published twenty years ago by the same publisher (G. Nash, *The Architecture of Death: The Chambered Tombs of Wales*, Logaston Press, 2006). It is fundamentally a field guide to around a hundred sites whose remains are broadly intelligible today, out of a known total of some 250. The author discusses these chambered tombs in nine regional groupings, identifying the five different types to which they are customarily assigned. A problem with such a typological approach to discussing Neolithic chambered tombs is that

many of them had complex developmental histories, so that elements from one phase may have influenced later permutations. Mutually exclusive attribution of any given site to one class of monument or another can thus conceal as much as it reveals about the relationships between different sites and their individual histories.

Notwithstanding this, Nash identifies Portal Dolmens, Cotswold-Severn long barrows, Passage Graves, Gallery Graves and 'earth-fast monuments' as his five main *types* of Neolithic tomb, most of which are 'Early Neolithic' in date, i.e., of approximately the period 3850-3650 BCE. 'Dolmens' comprise a ring of upright stones or 'monoliths' that were placed around the edges of a pit-like chamber to support a large capstone, the latter often weighing several tons. These capstones were deliberately raised well above ground in most cases and, contrary to earlier archaeological belief, were not covered over by earthen or stone mounds. In other words, they were designed to be seen—and prominently so.

Appropriately, given the continuing pace of discovery, the opportunity has been taken to include, for example, new dating evidence. Nonetheless, the revision is not always as thoroughgoing as one might have hoped. A general case in point is the well-documented study of the early development of some kinds of dolmen, where the wider implications of the work of Colin Richards and Vicki Cummings, following upon their excavations at Garn Turne in Pembrokeshire, have not been fully followed through in the discussion of pp. 215-7. Many capstones were dug out from pits, over which they were later raised, so that most (if not necessarily all) of the author's 'earth-fast' sites can be regarded as dolmens whose chamber capstones have simply been propped (or have slipped) rather than being fully raised.

Another example, closer to home in Herefordshire, is the discussion of Arthur's Stone and Dorstone Hill (at pp. 66-9 and p. 70 respectively), which repeats reports that pre-date the widely published results of the recent excavations that have transformed our understanding of these sites. This applies especially to the excavations of 2011-19 at Dorstone Hill. So , the 'bank' that Nash mentions there was not that of a causewayed enclosure but instead was produced by the firing of three very early Neolithic halls and the burial of their remains under turf mounds, which were then covered over by stone-and-earth long mounds. Meanwhile, a more conventional interrupted-ditch ('causewayed') enclosure was found by geophysical survey further up the hill to the south in 2013, and excavations of its ditches over the next three years produced some of the earliest dates yet obtained from such an enclosure in the west of England. Up-to-date assessment of the site and scientific evaluation of finds and dating evidence can be found in several papers published, in 2020-23, by the excavators and specialists, in *Neolithic Studies Group Seminar Papers* 17 and 18 (Oxbow Books), *The Cambridge Archaeological Journal,* and in *Antiquity* 97. Papers that appeared in the latter two journals can be accessed online at https://doi.org/10.1017/S0959774322000142 and at https://doi.org/10.15184/aqy.2023.93 respectively. Readers of these *Transactions* will also recall the article that appeared in Vol. 70 for 2022, on pp. 45-63.

The extent to which dolmens feature in five of the geographic groupings is remarkable, and this surely reflects Irish contacts and parallel developments. So too do the more complex (and later Neolithic) passage graves of Anglesey. The influence of the Severn region is evident in the Usk-Wye ('Black Mountains') group, featuring terminal, and sometimes transepted or side chambers; these are also found in tombs in 'coastal' south-east Wales, such as in the Gower peninsula. It is worth noting too the sparsity of sites in inland central Wales. This reinforces the idea that, although some river valleys were occupied early in the 4th millennium BC, the practice of building communal monuments did not take hold across a broad swathe of mid-central Wales,

the Cambrian Mountains, and the central borderlands. The reasons for this cannot easily be determined. It is unlikely to be a misunderstanding, arising because the relevant sites across the whole area have been lost, or the result of a near-total absence of settlement.

The book provides a wealth of information about the existing remains of the chambered tombs and some useful tips on how to find them on the ground. The author has revisited all the 100 sites selected for description. Mention should also be made of the quality of production of the volume as a whole, to the credit also of publishers, Richard and Su Wheeler of Logaston / Fircone Press, with good design integration of the many high-quality photographs. The book is produced in large format with a cover photo extracted from the photo of the Carreg Samson dolmen, near Mathry in Pembrokeshire, on p. 200. That such a large book can be produced in such quality and retailed at only £25 is nothing short of astonishing.

Keith Ray

Acky, Acky 1, 2, 3! *Playground games and rhymes in Herefordshire & Worcestershire, 1880–2010,* by John Turrell (Logaston Press, 2025, 288pp., paperback). ISBN 978-1-910839-81-2, £12.99.

We are sorry that we have been unable to provide a full review of this book in the current edition but will certainly do so in the *Transactions* for 2025. Nonetheless, we wanted to notify readers of publication.

According to the publisher: 'Based on more than 20 years of research into children's games and child-lore across Herefordshire and Worcestershire between 1880 and 2010, this book describes the games played, the songs sung and the rhymes that were chanted by children in the streets and in school playgrounds across the two counties…[and] offers an uncensored and comprehensive record of this often-overlooked aspect of social history.'

The impression is that the book is carefully researched, that much of the material which John Turrell has collected would probably have disappeared without his efforts, and that readers with an interest in the social history of the period will find a great deal of interest.