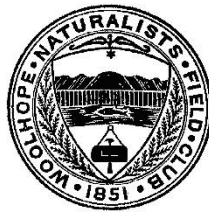


# Book Reviews



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# Book reviews, 2019

By

HENRY CONNOR AND DAVID WHITEHEAD.

***Henry Matthews, Viscount Llandaff: The Unknown Home Secretary, Roger Ward, (2017, Fonthill Media Limited, 96pp., £16.99)***

Henry Matthews, Viscount Llandaff (1826-1913) was the grandson of Colonel John Matthews of Belmont in Clehonger.<sup>1</sup> His father, also Henry Matthews, was a *puisne* judge (a judge of a superior court inferior in rank to chief justices) in Ceylon, where Henry junior was born. His mother Emma was the daughter of William Blount of Orleton and descended from an old Catholic family. After the death of his father, when Henry was only two, Emma took her three children to Paris where they were brought up in the Catholic faith. Henry took a degree at the Sorbonne and then moved to University College London (debarred from Oxford and Cambridge by his religion), before being called to the Bar at Lincoln's Inn.

At the end of his life Henry was buried, by permission of the parish priest, with full Catholic rites in the Anglican family grave at All Saints' Church, Clehonger. He also has a memorial plaque in Hereford Cathedral. However there is no mention in this book of any other connection with the county. He died unmarried and the Viscounty lapsed.

Roger Ward gives a good account of Matthews' very successful career as a barrister. He gives an even better description of his political career, both in Birmingham where he had to contend with the divisive Joseph Chamberlain and especially following his unexpected promotion to Home Secretary in Salisbury's government, for which office he had been recommended by Lord Randolph Churchill. It was one which made him the first Catholic since the reign of James II to hold office as a Minister of the Crown. Ward is sympathetic to the difficulties faced by Matthews as Home Secretary. Churchill's fall from grace so soon after Matthews' appointment left him in a difficult position as a liberal Conservative in Salisbury's much more robustly Conservative Cabinet. The eloquence which had characterised Matthews' success at the Bar did not translate to the floor of the House where he faced prejudice as a French-educated Catholic, especially as he was a staunch supporter of Catholic rights throughout his career.

Moreover he held office at a time of Fenian unrest, the unsuccessful attempts to catch the Ripper murderer and great social unrest including the Trafalgar Square Riots of 1887; times when it would have needed the Wisdom of Solomon not to have upset one faction or another. Perhaps Salisbury kept him on as a useful whipping-boy because, in the face of much criticism, Matthews survived as Home Secretary for six years, a record matched only by Chuter Ede and Theresa May.

Clarification is needed on two points relating to Belmont in this book. It was not Wegg-Prosser's father but his great-uncle who bought Belmont from the Matthews family. Secondly there is no evidence that Henry Matthews senior owned extensive lands in the county as debts had forced the sale of virtually all of the family estate soon after the death of John Matthews in 1826.

There is a dearth of place names in the Index and, by some quirk, all the page numbers in the Index are two numbers higher than the pages to which they relate. Otherwise the book is very well written and is 'a good read'.

Henry Connor

<sup>1</sup> Connor H, 'John Matthews of Belmont (1755-1826),' *TWNFC* 66 (2018): pp.98-108.

***The Rare Plants of Herefordshire* by Les Smith, Peter Garner and Mark Jannink (Trollius Publications, 2019), vi +187pp, many colour plates & figures. ISBN 978-0-953971-89-3. £25.50.**

Among the many interests that the Woolhope Club has lost (or delegated) to other organisations is botany or more simply, plant hunting. I have in front of me, bound in a familiar dark green, *A Flora of Herefordshire* (1889), by William Henry Purchas and Augustine Ley. The cover is embossed with the Club badge, which rather ironically reflects its geological interests. Today the emphasis of the Club is upon archaeology and antiquarianism albeit there are sectional recorders for botany, mycology and ornithology. Nevertheless, no self-respecting member of the Club would deny at least a passing—and in some a passionate—interest in the flora of the county. On field days there is often a splinter group whose concentration fades when an over-enthusiastic specialist waxes eloquently about medieval mouldings or squints, and they are often found admiring an interesting plant growing on an adjoining wall. Specialism, except in small doses, is the enemy of the Woolhope Club since most of us aspire to imitate those well-educated amateurs of the late 19th century, like Dr. Bull and the amazing Edwin Lees. There was a time when the Club hosted a flower show and men like Bull and his close friend, the architect Thomas Blashill, would exhibit for the Club a collection of floral rarities from their neighbourhood. Often Club meetings would be diverted from the main item on the agenda by the appearance of a strange plant, perhaps dredged by Sir George Cornwall from a pond at Moccas. Clearly, this would not be tolerated today when even the publication of rarities—birds, flowers and butterflies—is frowned upon if the location is mentioned. This is a debate which is pertinent for this excellent volume, where there appears to be few reservations about the naming of sites, albeit without precise locations.

*The Rare Plants of Herefordshire* is an A4 volume with a stunning photograph of *Epipactis palustris*, Marsh Helleborine, on its cover. The entry for this plant is on page 54 and is very succinct: 'An orchid of neutral to basic fens and other damp ground. Vulnerable to improvements in drainage and dense vegetation encroachment'. It is regarded as a native and first noticed in the county by the polymath, the Revd John Duncumb, in the introductory volume of his *History and Antiquities of Herefordshire*. Ironically, Duncumb was a local delegate of the Board of Agriculture and the promoter of agricultural improvement, which within two centuries would limit the Marsh Helleborine to a few stations in the county. On the other hand, as the brief entry suggests, that neglect was equally dangerous and the colonisation by native woodland would be equally detrimental to its survival. By implication only a pre-industrial society would provide the conditions for the Marsh Helleborine's survival. This would be a community that cropped its osier and willow rods regularly and sparingly grazed the wetland with cattle. Those young people urgently requiring us to limit global warming would find much ammunition in this book.

Again these issues are briefly covered in the introduction to the book, the authors making explicit in a few brief paragraphs what we all know and fear. However, whereas most of us wring our hands and turn our back on the obvious, the authors of this volume have provided

another yardstick. They have brought together 280 rarities, which at some point in the past have been seen in the county, sometimes in abundance. Remarkably, only seven of these may no longer be present. This might be read as an optimistic sign but above all else it reflects the enthusiasm of hundreds of observers who have registered their findings in one way or another, and which eventually end up on a record card at the Herefordshire Biological Record Centre at HARC, Rotherwas. The four closely-typed pages giving the names of the recorders is a measure of the enthusiasm for Herefordshire's flora, sustained over two centuries. As the authors pointed out, they trod a tedious and lonely path in analysing this data but it was built on the shoulders of individuals who took the trouble to report what they saw in their gardens and on their walks in the countryside.

You may think that you are not interested in the botanical rarities of the countryside but this is an attractive book to have on the proverbial coffee table. The quality of modern colour printing has advanced in leaps and bounds in recent years and is wonderfully exploited here. Not all varieties are illustrated but after every few pages, you are treated to a cluster of beautiful images, reproduced at a reasonable size. This is a book you might return to over and over again, even after the most mundane walk. Who would have expected to find *Acroptilon repens* Russian Knapweed on the weedy margins of Hereford railway station or *Adiantum capillus-veneris* Maidenhair Fern growing on a disused railway bridge at Ledbury? Of course, you will also regret that you did not buy a copy of the *Atlas of Vascular Plants of Herefordshire* (2001), which provided the distribution maps. When social isolation ends I am off on a walk along the Sapey Brook—one of the cradles of the Picturesque in Herefordshire—to see the 'plentiful' Marsh Helleborines.

A fuller and sharper review of the book can be found in *The Flycatcher* 85 (March, 2020, pp.62-4) written by Stuart Hedley who has taken over as plant recorder for Herefordshire.

David Whitehead

***Heritage Apples*, Caroline Ball, (Bodleian Library, Oxford, 2019), 250pp. £25.**

Caroline Ball informs us that less than 2% of surviving English apples are grown in commercial quantities, notwithstanding that the national Fruit Collection at Brogdale, Kent has 2000 living varieties. This, in itself, is only a small sample of many more that have disappeared. Commercial cultivation is based upon high yield and shelf-life, not taste. Consequently, transitory delights only survive in cottage gardens and the walled gardens of country houses.

The reading of Bull's *Herefordshire Pomona* (1876-85) marked the author's 'road to Damascus'. She ascribes its gestation to the enthusiasm of the Woolhope Club and wryly notes that even in Bull's time, few of the apples described were available in the shops of Hereford. On the other hand, the apple enthusiasts in the Woolhope Club were spurred on in their enthusiasm for local apples by the appearance in local shops of new commercial apples grown in the United State, Canada and France. She is very complimentary about the 'sheer beauty of the *Pomona*' and its tastefully rendered watercolours, by Edith Bull. Her new book is a 'medley of the *Pomona* apples still worth growing today', with an appendix of new apples not noticed by Bull. Therefore, if you have never been fortunate enough to inherit a first edition of the *Pomona* (or even its recent reprint), this in an inexpensive way of acquiring a local classic.

There are nearly 100 pages of plates, accompanied by a page of text, detailing history and the modern state of cultivation and availability. Part of the present reviewer's misspent youth took place at a public house called the Wyken Pippin, located in the suburbs of

Coventry. I now know that it was named after a ‘pip’, brought from the Netherlands in the early 18th century and sown in his garden by Admiral Thomas Craven. It’s a tip-bearer and apparently needs careful pruning. The last section of the book provides useful information on choosing your trees, cultivation, storing, pests and diseases and ‘where to see, taste and buy heritage apples’. There is a list of modern growers—but not one in Herefordshire—but a glowing tribute to the Marcher Apple Network and ‘one particular organisation in the Marches’—the Woolhope Club.

David Whitehead

***The Scudamores of Kentchurch and Holme Lacy* by Heather Hurley (Logaston Press, 2019), i-viii + 231pp illustrated ISBN978-1-910839-38-6. £12.95.**

Heather Hurley set herself an ambitious task. Anyone with even a passing interest in the history of Herefordshire will have encountered the Scudamores of Holme Lacy, especially in the Early Modern period, the age of the Reformation and the Civil War. Indeed, the first Viscount, John, has at least four biographies devoted to him, all of which are acknowledged at various times in this book. For these writers the attraction of John Scudamore is the part he played in the reign of Charles I and the subsequent Civil War. Judiciously, the author of this book avoids the great debates relating to the politics of the period. The clue to her approach is found in the second line of her title ‘of Kentchurch and Holme Lacy’. There is obviously a niche for a local author, with a local market in mind, if her personalities are firmly rooted in their houses and surrounding estates, as well as local politics.

The Kentchurch Scudamores are the senior branch of the family, and yet far less attention has been paid to them by national and local historians. Like many families in West Herefordshire, the Harleys, for example, they were a Marcher family with interests, both dynastic and political, on both sides of a fluctuating frontier. With the help of the American family historian Warren Skidmore, the author charts a clear path from Ralph (born c.1040 in Normandy), a knight of Alfred de Marlborough of Eywas, who probably settled at Corras on the Monnow soon after the Conquest and flourished thereafter. They were a freebooting family, plundering the monks of Dore, involved with Glyndŵr and the Lollards but wrong-footed by the Wars of the Roses, supporting the Welsh Lancastrians when the future for most of the Herefordshire gentry lay with the Yorkists, and by default, the Tudors. Although they held from the 15th century one of the borough seats of the city of Hereford in Parliament, they never found enrichment via the Tudors albeit the park at Kentchurch came from the crown after the dissolution of the preceptory of the Knights of St John at Garway. Property disputes and recusancy until c.1600 restrained their involvement in public life. The family kept a low profile during the Civil War, but in 1649 John Scudamore was serving as a Parliamentary Sequestration Officer, a rare moment of collaboration with the government albeit the women of the family retained their recusant sympathies. Like their Holme Lacy cousins, in the 17th century they became interested in iron production, using the neighbouring swift-flowing rivers and the timber resources from their estate.

The family suffered a severe set-back in 1736 when William Scudamore was declared a lunatic and the estate was placed in trusteeship. He did not die until 1741 and had no direct heirs so the line switched to one of the Rowlestone Scudamores—a minor of 14 years called John. He died in 1796 and his son, another John, went to war in 1793 and although he returned in 1796 and implemented grandiose plans for both the estate and the Court, the services of the architect John Nash were employed. He died suddenly in 1805, leaving another under-age heir,

John Lucy Scudamore. Trusteeship once again became necessary, which had one advantage for the author, creating a paper trail of correspondence and surveys, produced by the trustees and used extensively for this study. From the mid 19th century the story has an Irish dimension as a result of John Lucy's heir marrying into the Dacre Lucas family of Castle Shane, Co. Monaghan, whereupon Kentchurch was tenanted until February 1919 when Castle Shane was destroyed by an accidental fire. The family returned and the story ends with the great flood of 1959, which inundated the Court.

Where the story of Kentchurch is mostly local and domestic, Holme Lacy is set on a much broader canvas albeit the origins of this branch of the family is more obscure and later than their cousins at Kentchurch. Again it's a story set in Welsh Herefordshire since in the Middle Ages the large parish of Holme Lacy was divided between a Welshry to the west, where Philip and Richard Scudamore are found in the 15th century, and an Englishry, owned by the cathedral at Hereford in the east. As is well-known the family fortune was made by Sir John Scudamore (d.1571) who hitched himself on Thomas Cromwell's wagon and became the chief instrument of the new Protestant Tudor monarchy in the Welsh Border. There were no traces of recusancy in this branch of the family and John ousted the church from the Englishry and built a prodigy house on the original site of the de Lacy manor. He married his son to one of the leading families of Worcestershire, the Pakingtons of Hampton Lovett. Thereafter, the Scudamores of Holme Lacy were at the epicentre of English social and political life and regularly courted by the monarch. The family history from here on is well known but also well told, acknowledging where necessary the published works but also dipping into the archives, mainly found in national repositories. There are useful vignettes of the Scudamore ironworks and their abiding interest in the river Wye, cattle breeding and cider. The first Viscount's hesitant involvement in the Civil War is referred to but without analysis. He paid his fines to the Commonwealth and in 1671 with his income and status only slightly diminished his grandson John succeeded him, his standing in local society hardly diminished it seems by the experience of the Civil War. He married into the top rank of the English aristocracy—the Cecils—and rebuilt Holme Lacy House as a 'French chateau'.

Throughout, there are occasional sorties into the household accounts that survive from this period but, as a rule, the focus remains upon social life, which becomes most interesting and fraught when the last viscount was killed in a riding accident in 1716, leaving an infant daughter, Frances (1711-50). She was in turn succeeded by another infant Frances (1750-1820) who tried to repair the dynastic fortunes of the family by marrying Charles Howard, later the 11th duke of Norfolk but died without heirs after a long period of insanity. The two women—Frances and Frances—held the estate for 103 years. It's a sad story of exploitation and decline, told well with vignettes delving into the estate, the house and its enrichments. As a postscript the final chapter is on the 19th century Stanhope Scudamores who were always slightly detached from Herefordshire social life. Like their namesakes at Kentchurch they had substantial interests elsewhere and suffered from declining agricultural interests in the late 19th century. There is a lot more in this book but as a story of two families and their houses, this is a very good read and will probably never be bettered by a local author.

David Whitehead