

Colesbourne: a Gloucestershire Village History. Henry Elwes. Hobnob Press 2021. 233 pp., numerous b & w and colour illustrations. Paperback £12.50. [ISBN 978-1-914407-03-1].

Sir Henry Elwes, a former Lord Lieutenant of Gloucestershire, took charge of the Colesbourne estate in 1956, the 7th generation of family owners since 1789. He is largely responsible for the snowdrop display for which the gardens are now known, but in this book he reveals the rich background of the estate. His stated aim is to present the 'story of Colesbourne', rather than an academic history. He draws on the private Elwes family library and archives, and ten notebooks of material from public Gloucestershire and Worcestershire archives, compiled by the late George Walshaw, a Colesbourne resident. Other residents and family also contributed. This is a village history, not a parish one, as the estate spread into other parishes and did not always include the whole parish of Colesbourne. The book is laid out as chapters on general aspects, each containing a series of short pieces on particular topics or people, mainly chronological, clearly headed and where possible illustrated with photographs or documents. It looks attractive and is easy to read or dip into.

After some Iron Age and Roman occupation, an estate called Colesbourne was granted into monastic hands in 799 AD by King Coenwulf of Mercia, and later came to the Bishop of Worcester. It is listed with another manor in Colesbourne in the Domesday Book of 1086. Their descent is complex, but Llanthony Secunda Priory, founded in Gloucester in 1136, held at least one of them. After the dissolution of the monasteries, the two manors were united in 1602. John Elwes bought the estate in 1789 and expanded it with properties in neighbouring parishes. The church is fully described, then the manor houses, running from a Tudor house near the church, remodelled in the 18th century, to a grand mansion completed in 1854 and demolished by 1958, then to the present more modest house. Other estate buildings and schemes add to the picture. Inns, farmhouses, cottages and farm and commercial buildings are listed, but without much indication of location. The community seems to have contained on average about 50 houses, with a population of up to about 250 in the 18th and 19th centuries, since reduced to perhaps 150. All aspects of the village's physical structure and social life from the 19th century onwards are looked at, ranging from waterways, roads and environment to Elwes family journeys, and ending with the logbooks of the school, which closed in 1965. The influence of the Elwes family in both directing and supporting community life is evident throughout.

Local employment is assumed to have been mainly agricultural in medieval times. Depression in the 19th century was eased by work building the new mansion for John Henry Elwes in 1854, and was confronted by his son Henry John Elwes, who refused to sell up under economic pressure. He inherited in 1891, and until his death in 1922 provided almost all the available employment on the estate. This changed in the 20th century, with the mechanisation of farming and many people working off the estate, although it still provides about 40 jobs in the village. A series of portraits and photographs of male outdoor estate staff, with brief biographies, is followed by a list of

businesses up to the present day, again demonstrating the influence of the Elwes family.

A long chapter on farming, forestry and the garden continues the story of Henry John Elwes. He was a renowned naturalist and traveller, who did not spend a complete year in England between 1863 and 1921 but poured the results of his worldwide travels into Colesbourne. He introduced many new plant species into Britain, including *Galanthus elwesii*, the giant snowdrop, and his 7-volume work *The Trees of Great Britain and Ireland*, privately published 1906-13, is still in print as a reference source. Perhaps because most tenancies had come back 'in hand' by 1881, he was able to launch experiments, first commercial sheep farming, then a campaign to restore the Cotswold Lion breed of sheep, and other diversifications. He turned much of the vacant arable land over to forest, which had been lacking on the estate. Almost all the woods now seen were planted in 1890-1910, including the arboretum of rare tree species. His huge collection of bulbous plants was mainly sold off at his death, but enough remained to start the later snowdrop gardens. His successors kept diversification going through the depression of the 1930s, including breeding Gloucestershire Old Spot pigs, until wartime food demands brought recovery.

The book then turns to other people, both residents of Colesbourne and others connected to the estate or the Elwes family. Military careers ranged widely, but local soldiers who were lost or served in different wars are honoured. 'A few connected stories and notable residents' are followed by a chapter on the Elwes family, which provides a useful base line for the many scattered family references throughout the book. The last chapter describes 'a sustainable community', Colesbourne as it is today, claimed to be more viable, sustainable and eco-friendly than other communities of similar size in the Cotswolds.

There is a deliberate policy of not giving references to the underlying archives, whether private or researched by George Walshaw, but there is a list of books consulted, and a full general index. This helps to overcome an effect of the structure, by which several references to the same person, property or event can be scattered among different small sections. The Ordnance Survey map at the beginning provides context, but the historical maps shown are not easy to reconcile with each other. The book would have been enhanced by a 'walking tour' map, locating the buildings, old roads and other features mentioned, and relating the boundaries of estates, farms and parishes to each other. Nevertheless, it succeeds admirably in its stated aim, to tell the 'story of Colesbourne' in an informative yet accessible manner.

JANET HUDSON

Stonehouse