



The Stargazer of Hardwicke (The life and work of Thomas William Webb)

by Janet & Mark Robinson (eds.)

Gracewing Publishing (2 Southern Ave., Leominster, Hereford. HR6 0QF), 2006. ISBN 0-85244-666-7. Pp xxiv + 260, £14.99 (hbk).

This book is not just a biography of someone whose name should be familiar to all amateur astronomers – the carefully chosen snapshots from Webb's diary and those of his contemporaries also paint a partial picture of the times in which he lived. Indeed reading some of the extracts reminded me of my schooldays and my poor attempts at translating the letters of Pliny the Younger, which did so much to make the Romans seem alive and well to me as a child.

Many readers of this *Journal* will not be aware that Webb had many other interests beside his astronomy, and sections of the book cover such diverse science as the observation of earthquakes – yes, England does have quakes discernable even to those with no instrumentation whatever – to descriptions of long barrows and earthworks.

Thirteen contributors have added their research to this book and the manner in which the subject matter is divided is logical enough. The principle chapters cover Webb's life in chronological fashion, with later sections summarising his work on earthquakes, on his telescopes, and various categories of astronomical objects which he observed. Slight diversions from the main subject include chapters by Dr Allan Chapman on Clerical Astronomers and an appendix giving a very abbreviated history of the Society which now proudly bears his name.

This approach has both advantages and dis-

advantages. Each author has undoubtedly been chosen for their expertise in their field, and there is no quarrelling with their erudition or the man-

ner in which they have committed their work to paper. As a book however, it does make attempting to put together the story of Webb's life a little awkward at first reading. Indeed it is perhaps best to treat this tome as a series of separate papers and not to try, as I did, to start at page one and finish at the end. If you

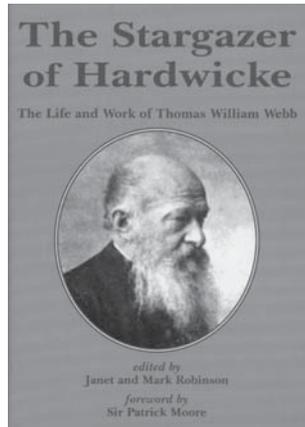
like to dip into a book it would certainly do no harm to pick at the sections as you fancy. To make a more coherent whole, a simple tabular chronology of Webb's life, occupying just one or two pages, would have been useful.

One big disappointment is the illustrations, the reproduction of which leaves something to be desired, even including modern additions like the maps near the start of the book. Better quality scans, perhaps reproduced on art paper, would have added much.

Nonetheless I have no hesitation in recommending the book which will sit happily on my shelf alongside Gilbert White's *Selbourne*, a volume recently purchased and one I had been meaning to acquire for some time. This book and Thomas William Webb deserve company such as this.

Don Miles

Don is Circulars Editor of the BAA and a long-time committee member of The Webb Society.



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