

A LAST-MINUTE GIFT?

CHRISTMAS is just around the corner now, and no doubt some of you are frantically scratching your heads, thinking about what to buy the last person on your gift list. To help out, reporters **DANIELLE HARRISON** and **GARETH BUTTERFIELD** sit back with a mulled wine and take a look at some of the most interesting books to have been released in and around Ashbourne recently. All the books we look at in this special feature can be ordered in local book stores, or purchased from on-line retailers. To find out more call us on 01335 342847.

● Guide to Rural England: The Heart of England

HERITAGE and history of towns, villages and countryside across Middle England is explored within this glossy guidebook.

Ranging from Derbyshire, Nottinghamshire and Staffordshire to Herefordshire, Warwickshire and Northamptonshire, the book visits each county with a comprehensive guide on what to see, what to do, where to stay and where to eat, drink and buy.

It provides vivid descriptions of places of interest, churches, historic buildings and museums, complete with detailed directions and maps.

Guide to Rural England: The Heart of England costs £10.99

● Medieval Parks of Derbyshire

THE story of how the UK's landscape has been shaped over the years is fascinating, but very few of us ever look in to the politics, agreements, battles and developments that took place throughout history to determine what we see when we look out of our windows today.

In Derbyshire and, especially in Ashbourne, the story is no less remarkable — as this fascinating new book enthusiastically describes to its readers.

Medieval Parks of Derbyshire, written by Mary Wiltshire and Sue Woore, and published by Landmark Publishing, is the result of four years of field work looking in to how the county has been shaped throughout the years.

Ashbourne and its surrounding villages warrants more than just a passing mention, and the story of its status as a Medieval park dating back to the 13th Century is given close attention.

All in all, it's an absolute must-see for all history fans, or even just casual admirers of the Derbyshire Landscape.

A gazetteer with maps, illustrations and historical notes, priced £19.99

● Guide Stoops of Derbyshire

BEFORE the spread of turnpike roads in Derbyshire and the establishment of milestones, travellers had to rely on guide stoops to help point the way across bleak terrain.

There are 46 known remaining stoops in Derbyshire and this book endeavours to set them within their historical context.

Written by Howard Smith and published by Horizon Press at a cost of £9.99

● Derbyshire in the Age of Steam

IT'S no great secret that Ashbourne has enjoyed a long connection with the glorious steam age. The evidence is still dotted around the town in the shape of a former station still standing in Clifton Road, the railway tunnel that

links the Tissington Trail — itself a former railway — to the town centre, and more subtle echoes such as the "Station Hotel" and "Station Street".

A new book by Steve Huson tells the story of a wider picture of forgotten railways in his new book Derbyshire in the Age of Steam.

It's a fascinating run-down of what was once a romantic and thriving industry — and one of the few practical ways to travel out of the towns and villages lucky enough to be served by rail links.

Laced with stunning pictures, and containing some facts even the most clued-up railway buffs might find intriguing it's a

riveting, jargon-free look back at how the county used to rely on the power of steam.

Published by Countryside Books, priced £10.99

● Deborah Devonshire: Home to Roost and other peckings

THE unmistakable voice of Deborah Devonshire, the youngest of the Mitford sisters, rings out of this second volume of her occasional writings.

These memoirs recount her eventful life, including a ringside view of John F Kennedy's inauguration and funeral, the 1930 London season and Christmas at Chatsworth.

Introduction by famous English writer Alan Bennett, the book costs £10

● Chilling Tales from Derbyshire

THERE'S an altogether eerie feel about this book. It's certainly not one for bed-time reading, but if you're even slightly interested in the paranormal — or even like a spot of unusual local history — then this really is the book for you.

In Chilling Tales from Derbyshire, "Netty" has compiled a spooky collection of tales exactly as were told to her by people in Derbyshire and it makes for a riveting mix of the weird and wonderful.

The result is a collection that raises from stories that will leave the hairs on the back of your neck on full alert — to the down-right implausible and almost laughable.

But it's difficult not to find yourself absolutely hooked by this book. Each story is short and based in a particular corner of the county and Ashbourne appears regularly.

Published by Breedon Books, with a cover price of £12.99.

● Exploring History in and around Derbyshire by Richard Stone

THIS book aims to bring to life the bygone era of Derbyshire ranging from the misty Celtic twilight to hermits, secret forests and sundials.

This quirky and insightful work explores the infinite sculptures, symbols, carvings and structures found in our county, which are worthy of a much closer inspection.

Fascinating historic tales and surprising secrets are divulged in each chapter of this book and the reader is sure to be gripped with the unfolding of each chapter.

The hard-back illustrated edition costs £14.99.

● What is a Ghost?

Ashbourne's own celebrity ghost-hunter Richard Felix has just launched this, his latest book covering the often controversial question of just what we all mean when we refer to paranormal phenomenons as "ghosts".

It's a question you never really realised you needed to ask. We just accept ghost stories these days and, depending on our beliefs, we either laugh them off or they stick in our minds for ever more.

In his new book Richard attempts to tackle the complex subject, offering plausible and not-so-plausible explanations to some of history's best spooky stories.

Anyone can get on with this brilliantly written book, whether you're a believer or a non-believer. Richard carefully avoids blinding the reader with science, but adds just enough of the facts he has gleaned from a life spent researching the paranormal to keep you wondering if he might just be on to something.

Foreword by celebrity medium Derek Acorah, with a cover price of £9.99

