Proceedings of the Cambridge Antiquarian Society

(incorporating the Cambs and Hunts Archaeological Society)

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Editor Dr. Evelyn Lord
Associate Editor (Archaeology) Professor Stephen Upex

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A Village on the Nene, Stamford
Alan G. Clark 2007
Spiegel Press, 440 pp., 146 illus b/w & colour, £24.95

Alan Clark's enormous book is a treasure trove for the local and regional historian, whether amateur or professional. It is stuffed to the gunnels with transcriptions from an astonishing range of original documents which combine to encapsulate the social and economic history of Elton in Huntingdonshire, especially, (but not exclusively) in the post-medieval period; manorial accounts, inventories, wills, letters, reminiscences, note-books, photographs from family albums and so on. Engagingly written, the book provides a vivid history of a community that might otherwise be unremarked and is a testament to Mr Clark's diligence in gathering information over the past thirty years.

There are twenty chapters altogether, each one meticulously referenced. While two deal with the medieval period (the Ramsey manor, and the history of the church), the remaining eighteen discuss a wide-ranging set of topics from demography to Parliamentary enclosure, the Poor law, the introduction of the railways, and industry amongst other topics, interspersed with the personal histories - some tragic - of some of Elton's inhabitants over the past two to three hundred years. Each chapter contains much original source material, and is often well illustrated with old photographs of the village and its people.

I have only two points of issue with the book. The first is that there is no clear map of the village in which the relationship between the different parts of the village is properly laid out, with some indication of how it has changed over time. The second is the disservice done to the author in the printing of the maps. They have clearly been printed from electronic files that are too small, and they are therefore fuzzy and difficult to read. The photographs, by contrast, are generally good.

This is not a scholarly local history, nor does it aim to be one. It is, in the best sense a 'local' history. It is beautifully written and accessible, and will, I am sure, be an inspiration to other local historians both inside and outside Cambridgeshire and Huntingdonshire, demonstrating what is possible when sources are carefully organised and interpreted. For this reader, at least, a visit to Elton is imminent.

Susan Oosthuizen

Books received:

Farming on the Edge: Archaeological Evidence from the Clay Uplands West of Cambridge
Joe Abrams and David Ingham 2008
EAA 123, Albion Archaeology
ISBN 978 0 9556546 0 2, £25.00
A series of excavations along the A428 to the west of Cambridge has provided an insight into the changing use of the ridgeway.

Saints In the Landscape
Graham Jones 2007
Tempus ISBN 978 0 7524 4108 5, £16.99, Every church has a dedication – but what is the significance of this dedication? This book will enable you to find out.

The Sheriffs of Cambridgeshire and Huntingdonshire
A brief history
Elizabeth Stazicker 2007
Cambridgeshire County Council
ISBN 978 19044 52201, £11.95
The office of county sheriff is the oldest office in England. Using a chronological structure this book discusses the private and public lives of our sheriffs.

Books to watch for:

The Romans in the East of England Settlement and Landscape in the Lower Nene Valley
Stephen Upex 2008

The Witches of Warboys An Extraordinary Story of Sorcery, Sadism and Satanic Possession
Philip C. Almond 2008