

BOOK REVIEWS

Edited by Neil Christie

***The Augustinian Priory of St Mary Merton, Surrey. Excavations 1976–90.* (MoLAS Monograph 34). By Pat Miller & David Saxby. 21 x 30 cm. xviii + 296pp, 230 colour and b&w pls and figs, 71 tables. London: Museum of London, 2007. ISBN 978-1-901992-70-0. Price: £ 27.95 pb.**

Merton Priory was among the earliest English Augustinian houses, founded in 1113–14 by Gilbert, sheriff of Surrey, and settled by canons from Huntingdon. In 1117 the community moved to a new location west of the River Wandle, where Gilbert provided a timber chapel. In the final year of his life he began the first stone church, making arrangements for his own burial there. Merton prospered under royal patronage, becoming a prestigious and influential establishment; in 1535 it was the second richest Augustinian house in England. The church was demolished immediately after the suppression, its stone reused in Henry VIII's Nonsuch Palace; other conventual buildings survived into the seventeenth century. After 1660 textile manufacturing began there and the river was diverted into a new channel west and north of the demolished abbey buildings. A railway was laid across the site of the church in the nineteenth century. A supermarket and other modern developments now occupy the precinct and the only fragments of the priory still visible are part of the eastern boundary wall and the excavated foundations of the chapter-house. This report describes archaeological investigations on the site since 1976, in particular the large-scale rescue excavations of 1986–90.

No trace of the timber buildings erected in 1117 was found, and only fragments of the first stone church. However, the excavations revealed valuable details of the development of the church and conventual buildings since 1170. An unusual feature of the plan was a wide yard between nave and cloister garth, a feature more characteristic of friaries. A notable feature of the report is the range of information from over 700 inhumations. A small number of women and children were interred north of the church, whereas the cemetery to the south-east seems to have been reserved for canons. Burials in the chapter house were mainly older males, presumably priors. Burials in the church included clothing items indicative of high status. Evidence for health care came both from burials and from the infirmary complex: various inhumations displayed healed fractures, mostly well-aligned and without evidence of infection; one burial had a metal knee support, another remnants of a device tentatively interpreted as a scrotal hernia belt.

Previous MoLAS monographs have provided exemplary reports on several monastic houses in and around London, and this latest publication again makes a major contribution, living up to the high standards set by earlier volumes in the series.

James Bond

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***Monastic Life in Anglo-Saxon England, c. 600–900.* By Sarah Foot. 20 x 26 cm. xv + 398pp, 15 b&w pls, 12 figs. Cambridge University Press: Cambridge & New York, 2006. ISBN 978-0-521-85946-2. Price: £ 50.00 hb.**

With the appearance in 2007 of the final excavation reports and analyses of the Jarrow monastery by Rosemary Cramp, and the fascinating synthesis of data for Anglo-Saxon Hartlepool by Robin Daniels, Sarah Foot's overview of monastic growth and evolution provides an excellent frame for discussion. The volume builds on her own research on Anglo-Saxon minsters, charters and Viking contact, and particularly develops her 1990 Cambridge PhD on minsters from AD 597–900; it also forms a lead-in to her detailed analysis of female religious communities (*Veiled Women*, 2000). Finally, as noted in her Preface (p. xii), this volume can be set alongside John Blair's equally stimulating book, *The Church in Anglo-Saxon Society* (2005), which, she acknowledges, 'offers a different reading of early English religion'.

Foot's monograph is divided into two main parts: 'Within the Walls' (comprising three chapters, 'The making of minsters', 'The minster community', 'Daily life within minsters'), and 'Without the Walls' (with Chapter 6 'Dependencies, affinities, clusters' and 7 'Minsters in the world'), although Chapters 1 and 2, introductions to the sources, timeframe, historiography, and to 'The ideal minster' provide over 70 pp of text prior to Part I; there is also a concluding Coda, Chapter 8 on 'Horizons', which ponders on how poor the state of monasticism and minsters was in the 9th century in the face of Viking raids and assaults and also from changes in aristocratic patronage. Her study is geared to a 'period when boundaries between action and contemplation were much more blurred' (p.10), and a period when labels for male and female religious varied; Foot offers a tidy summary of the vocabulary and emphasises how she uses 'minster' as the label for non-secular institutions – thus employing the term more broadly than other scholars who apply 'minster' to mother or collegiate churches with predominant pastoral functions (pp.5–10). Also valuable is Foot's analysis in Chapters 2 and 4 of the varied routes and rules pursued by the religiosi and minsters, and the modes of discipline therein; she is keen to stress a lack of uniformity, yet a diversity of distinctive Anglo-Saxon monasticisms, in part linked to lay influences (pp.20–25, noting Bede's efforts to seek a unity). It is a shame that Foot's historiographical review was so short – a fuller review of works by Blair especially would have been useful. She acknowledges how Blair lays 'greater stress on archaeological and topographical approaches'; indeed, it is noticeable how Foot's only section on the archaeological data – sites, materials, land, etc. (pp.96–118) – is useful as a summary but is rather rushed through, with little tie-in to the accompanying figures.

Foot's real strength is in exploring the textual sources, such as in discussing children in minsters and their

dedication/donation as oblates (but we also find reference to minsters acting as virtual child-care centres for noble infants!), and the entry of adult postulants and related rituals. Chapter 5 is very illuminating in detailing the daily rituals within and around the minster walls (from mass to weaving or wood collection), plus 'leisure' time (feasting, horse-riding and sex are covered here). To this reviewer, Chapter 6 was of greatest interest, considering the formal and mental bonds between monasteries/minsters (whether as mother-daughter units, as 'federations' or as 'clusters', or even as refuge bases); Foot particularly explores Medehamstede (Peterborough) and its colonies (notably Breedon and Brixworth) in the second half of the 7th century.

Well written, clearly organised and carefully researched, this volume offers much to anyone interested in the spread, nature and role of early medieval monasticism in England and beyond, and in the character of society in general in this complex period.

Neil Christie
University of Leicester

***Hidden Histories. Discovering the Heritage of Wales.* Edited by Peter Wakelin & Ralph A. Griffiths. 25 x 28 cm. 328 pp, 500 colour and b&w pls and figs. Aberystwyth: Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Wales. 2008. ISBN 978-1-871184-35-8. Price: £ 24.95 hb.**

This current volume was produced to accompany a TV series by BBC Wales. It draws upon the work of the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Wales to paint a popular history of the Welsh landscape and built environment from prehistoric to modern times. The book is in a long tradition, most recently dominated by French publishers, of producing books which combine fine illustrations with a pithy and popular, but still learned commentary that rises above the level of an average coffee-table book. The level of writing is of sufficient quality to appeal to the busy academic or professional wanting a short but intelligent overview outside their specific specialism.

After an introductory section examining the history of the Commission's work, the volume is divided into ten chronological sections. It is a sign of the changing nature of Welsh and British archaeology that the medieval and post-medieval periods are covered by six chapters in total, excluding the final section by the Commission's secretary, Peter Wakelin, entitled 'Into the Future'. Each chronological chapter has a general essay followed by short essays either on general topics such as Roman roads or on individual sites, for example, the Taff Merthyr Colliery or the Iron Age hillfort at Gaer Fawr. Some 58 authors including current and former staff of many Welsh institutions besides the Commission contribute to the volume. Each section is fulsomely illustrated by numerous photographs drawn from the Commission's archive, many in colour. Selected line drawings illustrate the changes from the penmanship of the early 20th-century to modern digital modelling.

The two chapters of most relevance to the MSRГ are those on the early and later Middle Ages. The first is fronted by a general essay by David Browne and Mark

Redknap and the latter by the Commission's chairman, Professor Ralph Griffiths. Topics covered in the first section include dykes (including the lesser known short dykes), standing stones, inscriptions, and carved crosses. Recent interpretations such as the identification of two distinct regional groupings of carved cross in Breconshire are highlighted. Individual sites discussed include the settlement on Gateholm Island, Pembrokeshire, with its excellent earthworks and the much modified Pillar of Eliseg in Denbighshire. Two important excavated sites are also highlighted: the 7th- to 10th-century defended site of Llanbedgoch on Anglesey and the royal crannog in Llangorse Lake, Breconshire. The later medieval section is more oriented to general topics than specific sites. Areas covered include: work and leisure, commemoration and the arts, castles and the *llys* or commotal court of independent Wales (such as that excavated at Rhosyr), monasteries, towns, housing and the rural landscape. The section entitled 'Sea and coast' includes mention of the recently excavated Newport boat, a sea-going vessel of the 15th century.

This is an up-to-date survey highlighting recent work by the Commission and others. If its coverage is sometimes uneven it reflects the fact that we still have a long way to go in recovering, for example, the archaeology of the rural Welsh peasant. The volume will hopefully not only appeal to those with strong Welsh connections but bring Welsh archaeology to the notice of English archaeologists and historians, who rarely have any grasp of the distinctive landscape history and material culture of their near neighbour.

Paul Courtney

***The Bull Ring Uncovered. Excavations at Edgbaston Street, Moor Street, Park Street and The Row, Birmingham, 1997–2001.* By Catherine Patrik & Stephanie Rátkai (edited by Stephanie Rátkai). 21 x 30 cm. xix + 402 pp, 56 colour pls and figs, 81 b&w pls and figs, 56 tables. Oxford: Oxbow Books, 2009. ISBN 978-1-84217-285-8. Price: £ 35.00 hb.**

Until recently Birmingham was the most neglected of historic towns as far as its archaeology was concerned. There was little material evidence to suggest that a thriving medieval market town prefigured the industrial development of later periods, as hinted at by documentary sources. This scanty picture has now been replaced by a much deeper understanding of the development of Birmingham from the 12th to 19th centuries, thanks to a series of excavations carried out by Birmingham Archaeology.

The results of three of the most important of those excavations are presented in this volume. Edgbaston Street, Park Street and Moor Street are all located within the central part of the city centre now occupied by the new Bullring retail centre. The decision to write up the excavations together was a good one. The sites at once complement and contrast with each other. Each excavation is given a chapter of its own, followed by chapters on the various categories of finds which synthesise the material from all the sites discussed. In the final chapter the editors are joined by Mike Hodder to discuss the wider implications of the excavation results.

This volume is well produced and amply illustrated; an especially good touch is the inclusion of colour photographs of certain finds and pictures of the excavation process itself.

A common theme running through the volume is the evidence for industrial activity, with a particular highlight being the account of the medieval and post-medieval tannery at Edgbaston Street. An important linkage between different sites is the town boundary ditch, which was encountered at both the Moor Street and Park Street excavations, as well as on The Row watching brief. What sets Birmingham apart from other towns, as the authors make clear, was the sheer wetness of the place. Although the principal watercourse, the River Rea, was relatively small, its sharp drop and fast flow provided both an energy source and plentiful water supply for industry to thrive. A spring line along the side of the ridge upon which St Martin's Church is situated also gave rise to numerous smaller streams, these utilised to fill town boundary ditches and high status moated sites, as well as to drive mills and service forges. Metal working, leather tanning, textile manufacture and pottery production were just some of the industries to thrive. Without its ready supply of water and the medieval industrial development that made use of it, Birmingham could never have turned into 'the city of a thousand trades' that became so famous in the post-medieval period.

Matt Edgeworth
University of Leicester

***Medieval Adaptation, Settlement and Economy of a Coastal Wetland. The Evidence from around Lydd, Romney Marsh, Kent.* By Luke Barber & Greg Priestly-Bell. 21 x 30cm. xvii + 317 pp, 20 colour pls & figs, 84 b&w pls & figs, 95 tables. Oxford: Oxbow Books/English Heritage, 2008. ISBN 978-1-84217-240-7. Price: £ 30.00 hb.**

This volume brings together the results of excavations in advance of gravel extraction near Lydd on Romney Marsh, an analysis of the documentary evidence for the area from the archives of large ecclesiastical landowners who had property on the marsh, and the work over many years of the Romney Marsh Research Trust. Archaeological work on a large scale began in the 1990s by the University College, London Field Archaeology Unit (now Archaeology South-East) and others. The volume presents separately the evidence from the documentary sources (by Sheila Sweetinburgh), the excavations, the finds and the environmental material, and in concluding chapters Luke Barber and Mark Gardiner lay out a narrative and propose a 'research agenda for the future'.

The Marsh has long been seen as an area full of possibilities, worth claiming rights in and the *Merswara*, the 'Romney Marsh people' were distinguished from the 'Kent people' in the eighth century (so probably long before). The large manor of Wye, one of Glanvill Jones' 'multiple estates', included land there which came at the Conquest to Battle Abbey. The Marsh could support cattle as well as sheep and for Alan Everitt it was essentially the site of transhumant pastoralism, serving prosperous communities based inland. This new material

modifies and enriches his view. It also prompts some new thoughts about livestock husbandry in an area where husbandmen needed to take into account several factors peculiar to marshland farming, intermittent flooding among them. (Here a broader and simpler description of the marshland vegetation would have been welcome to this non-specialist, as would a 'time-line', if such were possible, of major inundations.)

The overall narrative is strongly one of colonisation, begun perhaps in the eleventh century and strongly visible by the twelfth. Settlements were established on shingle ridges capped by stony soils accessed by tracks or causeways off which roughly linear systems of enclosures were laid, bounded by wet ditches which evolved into property boundaries. The enterprise is seen as 'an organised venture, probably by lords with the involvement of their peasants' (p. 282).

There were opportunities for off-farm income, particularly fishing. The excavation of the few and small settlement sites in the immediate area of Lydd suggest 'seasonal domestic occupation associated with livestock' and a very interesting reconstruction (fig 44) shows what a 13th-century example of this might look like: the farmstead site, surrounded by wet ditches, is internally divided into three compartments, themselves marked off by ditches and fenced; a nearby larger enclosure is grazed by sheep, but arable was also possible. The authors propose a shift in the farming regime from the twelfth century to more intensive grazing. 'Colonisation' is nearly always presumed to have been associated with extending the cultivated area, but another possibility might be that the enclosed 'innings' and the small farmstead enclosures were part of a more regulated system of close-folding, with sturdier and more permanent barriers than hurdles. We often fall back on 'paddocks' as an explanation of small-scale field systems near farmsteads. Perhaps permanent folds like the Scottish 'tathing yards' should come to mind, serving the dual purpose of providing an easily managed supply of manure and keeping the animals safe at night. Famously, the marshland shepherds were known as 'lookers', conventionally derived from the OE word for 'to look'; but OE also has a word *loca* which means fold, and folding was one of the shepherd's tasks, vital not simply for the safety of the flock but for the fertility of the soil.

Rosamond Faith
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***Wexford. A Town and its Landscape. (Irish Landscapes: Volume III).* By Billy Colfer. 24x30 cm. vi + 233 pp., 400 colour and b&w pls. and figs. Cork: Cork University Press, 2008. ISBN 9-78185918-429-5. Price £ 39.00, € 49,00 hb.**

This, the third volume in the Cork University Press series on the Irish landscape is, unlike the two earlier volumes, focussed upon a single town and its surrounding area. The author, Billy Colfer, who also wrote the second volume (*The Hook Peninsula, County Wexford*, 2004) is a Wexford man with a very detailed local knowledge as is evident in this book. Following an introductory consideration of geology, soils and natural environment (excellently illustrated) a chronological framework from

prehistory to modern is followed. The focus throughout is on urban history. There are chapters on the Vikings, the Anglo-Normans (Wexford was the first main settlement in Ireland to be taken over by the new invaders in 1171) and the medieval town. Not surprisingly, and with the increase in written evidence, there is considerable emphasis on the impact of the Cromwellians; the sacking of the town in 1649 is seen by Colfer as the lowest point in its history. Economic recovery in the eighteenth century was checked again by another wave of repression, this time following the town and county's heavy involvement in the rebellion of 1798. Colfer includes a blow-by-blow account of this conflict, crucial as it was to the demographic and economic history of the town.

Located at the mouth of the Slaney and with a very difficult, shallow estuary of shifting sands (remarkably well surveyed by Vallancey in 1776; his map is beautifully reproduced on p. 123) Wexford, which had dominated the medieval trade of the south-eastern corner of the county, was overtaken in importance in the nineteenth century by deep-water ports, notably Rosslare. In the twentieth, continued problems with the sand bar and the decline of traditional industries eventually led to the closure of the main port in the 1960s. However, with the extension of the waterfront in the 1990s a small fleet of purpose-built mussel dredgers now works the estuary and, along with EU membership and tourism have brought welcome prosperity to the area.

As we have now come to expect from Cork University Press this is beautifully produced book, profusely illustrated with maps, diagrams, aerial and ground photographs, most of them in colour. There is hardly a page without illustration but this is far from a 'coffee-table' book; the illustrations with detailed captions are used to support a well-researched and informative text. In its different way this urban history admirably complements the monographs of the Irish Historic Towns Atlas.

Robin Glasscock
St John's College, Cambridge

Raunds. The Origin and Growth of a Midland Village AD 450–1500. Excavations in North Raunds, Northamptonshire 1977–87. Edited by Michel Audouy & Andy Chapman. 21 x 30 cm. xvii + 148 pp and CD-Rom, 161 b&w pls and figs, 50 tables. Oxford: Oxbow Books, 2009. ISBN 978-1-84217-337-4. Price: £ 28.00 hb.

Extensive excavation and recording of the early Saxon and medieval settlement of Raunds, Northamptonshire, occurred between 1976 and 1987. Results are presented as a combination of traditional site report and discussion of the site in relation to other historical and landscape evidence. The Raunds Area Project centred on four sites: Furnells, an early Saxon settlement which became an Anglo-Scandinavian farm and late Saxon manor with church and churchyard, and a later medieval manor complex; Langham Road and Burystead, both early Saxon settlements, middle and late Saxon farms and medieval tenements; and Midland Road with late Saxon, medieval and post-medieval occupation traces.

Chronologies are split into early to middle Saxon settlement (AD 450–850), late Saxon village formation (850–1100), medieval manors and village (1100–1350/1400), late medieval decline (1350/1400–1500) and post-medieval relocation.

The book is in three parts: the first gives some background to Raunds, both historically and in terms of its development. Clearly written, this is a wide ranging synthesis of life in North Raunds within a working settlement, considering building types, agricultural economics, and industrial operations; comparison is made with settlement development with neighbouring West Cotton, other sites in the Nene valley and the midland region. Paul Courtney's contribution explores Domesday and later historical records to reconstruct lands held in Raunds, and considers Raunds' relationship to the parochial seat at Higham, while Hugh Richmond details the development of the parish church of St Peter from the 12th century. Part Two is the technical text of the excavations, archaeology and features of each site within the cited chronology. Part Three (the CD) comprises specialist reports on the extensive pottery finds, small finds, and environmental assemblages. Although separate from the main hard text, these specialist reports enable scope for further exploitation of the site data.

The first settlement at Raunds is one example of early to middle Saxon dispersed farmstead activity alongside others in the valley; in the later Saxon period, a smaller number of nucleated settlements within open field systems emerges. The volume successfully sets Raunds within a local social hierarchy, considering it alongside high status sites at Higham Ferrers and Irthlingborough, and smaller settlements at Ringstead, Mill Cotton, Mallows Cotton and West Cotton (the latter the subject of a forthcoming publication). The evidence produced indicates that the beginning of nucleation fell in the period of Anglo-Scandinavian settlement.

There is extensive illustrative support, including useful reconstructions. The limited bibliography, mostly focusing on work previously published as part of the Raunds Project, reflects the absence of a detailed discussion of how the economy and status of the settlement fit in with wider, regional and national trends. This would have been a helpful addition given the paucity of excavated rural Saxon sites. Nonetheless, this report goes some way towards adding to the extremely small body of available data particularly regarding earlier Saxon units, although the evidence did not permit a clear distinguishing between early and middle Saxon phases.

Matilda Holmes
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Beyond the Medieval Village. The Diversification of Landscape Character in Southern Britain. By Stephen Rippon. 18 x 25 cm. xi + 323 pp, 80 b&w pls and figs, 2 tables. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008. ISBN 978-0-19-920382-6. Price: £ 60.00 hb.

Rippon's latest contribution to the study of cultural landscape development takes a broader perspective across southern Britain than the focus on the south-west for which he is perhaps most known. In doing so, he continues to celebrate those areas which lie outside the

midlands counties; his is a study that unashamedly criticizes ‘midlands-centrism’ and, if the reader can forgive the pun, he is the ‘champion’ of the margins. This is an important volume, and Rippon is far from being a simple critic of older and more recent research. He comes to the table armed with a powerful array of integrated research, where archaeology is consistently shown as the discipline that delivers fresh insight and common sense results. Archaeological excavations, environmental studies, field-walking and geophysical surveys are being conducted in much greater numbers today than has been the case, and Rippon is able to draw on the results from the published and unpublished reports to clarify discrete questions associated with the origins of settlement form and land management within his study areas. It is not surprising that the first half of the book (Chaps 2–4) is concerned with the South West – it is where Rippon’s research has focused in recent years, and the reader is treated to a sequence of very interesting overviews of medieval settlement on the landscapes reclaimed from the sea in Somerset and elsewhere. Unlike the trend for local studies, Rippon’s book widens the enquiry by including East Anglia in his study (Ch 5), and south Wales (Ch 6). He is acutely aware of the criticism of environmental determinism, and his study areas are in locations of ‘muted relief and good soils that offered fewer constraints to medieval farmers’ (p. 250). In seeking the origins to the development of the medieval village he favours the ‘long eighth century’ (late 7th–early 9th centuries) as the period that saw significant change in landscape character across England, with a second period of change during the 9th to 11th centuries which resulted in more restructuring and the emergence of the ‘midlands system’ proper. Having considered what might have stimulated these changes, readers are left in little doubt of his conclusion that the character of the English countryside owes its origins to many factors, and not one primary cause. Inherited values in terms of antecedent landscapes; environmental influences; the power of lordship – both lay and ecclesiastical – in culturally continuous landscapes and on the marcher lands of south Wales; and the energy of lesser landowners and local communities all played their part. His case studies permit us to see the different emphases given to these various strands across space and time, and he concludes that ‘it was ultimately the different practices of local farming communities that shaped the way that the countryside was structured’ (p. 268). By focusing away from the midlands, Rippon has once again revealed the dynamism of those regions formerly considered as the backwaters. What this volume ultimately presents is a carefully constructed essay that firmly asserts the complexity of the countryside in medieval England. It challenges us to look more closely at the relationship between lords and their tenants and the wider communities, and it demonstrates the capability of archaeology to contribute fresh insight to discussions that have for far too long remained somewhat circular. Documentary-based scholars and historical geographers should find this a very welcome addition.

Niall Brady
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Where most Inclosures be. East Anglian Fields: History, Morphology and Management. (East Anglian Archaeology 124). By Edward Martin and Max Satchell. 21 x 30 cm. xviii + 268 pp, 116 colour and b&w pls and figs, 19 charts, 38 tables. Ipswich: Archaeological Service Suffolk County Council, 2008. ISBN 978-1-86055-160-7. Price £ 30.00 pb.

While historic landscape characterisation, that seemingly ubiquitous method of cultural heritage management, is occasionally invoked to play a role in landscape research, it is rather less common to encounter research initiated to inform the practice of landscape characterisation. Ostensibly, this was in part the thinking behind what was termed ‘The Historic Field Systems of East Anglia Project’ whose findings are described in prolific detail in this monograph.

A set of twelve case studies lie at the heart of the study, each of a parish (or in one instance a group of parishes), which provided the data for the characterisation of the types of landscape detected across that slightly elusive beast that is East Anglia, here envisaged as Norfolk, Suffolk, Essex, northern Hertfordshire and eastern Cambridgeshire. Parishes were initially assessed to reflect their representativeness of the different local regions within the framework of settlement provinces and sub-provinces proposed by Brian Roberts and Stuart Wrathmell in their English rural settlement mapping project. Case-study coverage, though, is far from even. The Wash sub-province is almost completely ignored with not a single case study from the western half of Norfolk, and the two that do fall in the province are remarkably close to its southern boundary. Instead, the studies are weighted heavily to the Anglian sub-province, with three in Suffolk, perhaps not surprisingly, and another two immediately beyond that county’s boundaries. Each case study is presented in considerable detail; together they constitute over 40% of the volume, and in densely written prose cover not only the field patterns but the past history of the settlements, the manorial descents and even, briefly, the prehistoric background. The individual texts are illuminated with maps both modern and of historic manuscript type. Any 19th-century chorographer would have been proud of these contributions, but whether quite so much detail was necessary in the context of this specific survey is a moot point.

The detailed analysis of these case study areas led to the classification of the landscape through specific land types. Eighteen are distinguished, ranging from common fields, meadows, heaths and woodlands to block demesnes where the manorial land formed a cohesive holding and non-manorial tenement blocks. Parish maps illustrate the extent of these various types as far as can be determined for a hypothetical stage late in the medieval period before the landscape underwent significant post-medieval changes. By comparing and contrasting the presence and prevalence of the various land types, a degree of patterning emerges across the region and this leads to a consideration of what is here termed ‘regionality in East Anglian field systems’. The writer extrapolates from the evidence in the case studies to the Roberts and Wrathmell sub-provinces (or local regions), utilising the findings of historic landscape

characterisation. However, as characterisation had been completed only for Suffolk when this volume was in preparation, less completely for Essex and Hertfordshire, and had barely started in Norfolk, there are inevitably limitations to what might be inferred at a wider, regional level.

By drawing on other sets of data – moats, green and even trends in vernacular architecture such as aisled barns – the so-called ‘Gipping divide’ is shown to have particular significance in the spread of land types. Unfortunately, then, for those of us less familiar with the topography of Suffolk than the author, there is no map to display and name the River Gipping itself. The patterns extend beyond Suffolk into neighbouring counties but without the support of the historic landscape characterisation, the arguments are less compelling. Notwithstanding the unevenness of these data, a new definition of the medieval farming systems of East Anglia is offered ‘as a vehicle for debate and further research’ (p. 211), regions being differentiated by the variant types of common fields and block holdings.

Two further chapters in the volume are well worth reading. An early chapter offers a useful commentary on medieval settlement and farming terms in the context of East Anglia, and incorporates a perceptive analysis of common fields, defining the various types that will emerge in later chapters. And one of the final chapters, under the subject heading of the Origins of fields in East Anglia examines both the concept of co-axial field systems, generating new ideas and also the links between the emergence of common fields and the Viking era.

There is, then, much that is of interest here, but two reservations have already been touched on. I am not convinced that twelve case studies do sufficient justice to a region that extends over three complete counties and parts of two others; secondly, however much may be extrapolated from the available data, it remains a fact that only one county had at the time of the completion of this report seen a full historic landscape characterisation. Arguably, a heavy edifice has been erected on rather a narrow base.

Bob Silvester

Clwyd-Powys Archaeological Trust

Monument, Memory, and Myth. Use and Re-use of Three Bronze Age Round Barrows at Cossington, Leicestershire. (Leicester Archaeology Monograph 14). By John Thomas. 21 x 30 cm. xvi + 144 pp, 19 colour pls, 91 b&w pls and figs, 21 tables. Leicester:

University of Leicester, 2008. ISBN 0-9538914-7-X. Price: £ 17.00 pb.

The excavation report covers the investigation of three Bronze Age round barrows at Cossington, Leicestershire, two in 1976, one as part of more extensive area-excavations in 1999 and 2001. Barrows 1 and 2 both had complex ‘life-histories’ within the early second millennium BC (Early Bronze Age) but barrow 3 produced intriguing evidence of possible ritual deposition in both the Iron Age and Romano-British periods. A small early Anglo-Saxon inhumation cemetery re-used barrow 3 and settlement evidence including an SFB was found close by. Two features of the site deserve further mention for medieval archaeologists: the evidence of possible feasting activities associated with the graves and the funerary re-use of the prehistoric mound. Two sub-rectangular pits containing charcoal and heat-affected cobbles were found. Like evidence found at Cleatham (North Lincolnshire) and Snape (Suffolk), these may be tentative indications of feasting practices associated with early Anglo-Saxon cemeteries.

Concerning monument re-use, this is the first conclusive example from Leicestershire. Given that the mound survived as a low earthwork to the time of excavation, the location of the early Anglo-Saxon graves is unlikely to be coincidence. The excavator suggests a motivation in terms of land-claims and myth-making. However, it remains unclear whether barrow 3 at Cossington is an instance of continued ritual practice through the Iron Age and Romano-British periods or a case of disconnected episodes of repeated monument re-use by unrelated communities. It also remains to be seen if further examples are found in Leicestershire and the East Midlands more widely. But for now, Cossington shows how modern open-area excavation is revealing more cases of this practice from valley locations. Our distribution map of the practice continues to be heavily biased by the activities of early barrow-diggers who found many early Anglo-Saxon graves inserted into earlier burial mounds in the Yorkshire Wolds, the Peak District and the downland of Kent, Sussex and Wiltshire. The Cossington report demonstrates how this practice has become established in the vocabulary of British field archaeology. Further detailed research in Leicestershire is surely required to explore whether Cossington is an exception or rule for early Anglo-Saxon burial locations.

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