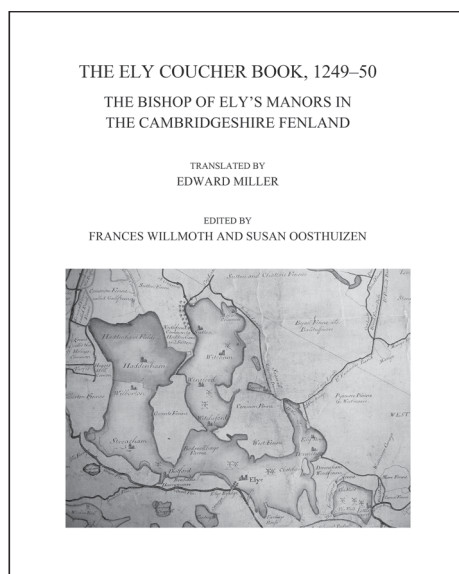


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## Book Reviews:

*The Ely Coucher Book, 1249–50. The Bishop of Ely's Manors in the Cambridgeshire Fenland*, by Susan Kilby  
*Catholic East Anglia: A History of the Catholic Faith in Norfolk, Suffolk, Cambridgeshire and Peterborough*, by Nicholas Rogers

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*The Ely Coucher Book, 1249–50. The Bishop of Ely's Manors in the Cambridgeshire Fenland.* (Cambridgeshire Records Society Volume 22). Translated by Edward Miller, edited by Frances Willmoth and Susan Oosthuizen. x + 252 pp, 26 colour and black & white plates and figures. Cambridge, Cambridgeshire Records Society, 2015. ISBN 978-0-904323-24-5. (£37.50 paperback).

This new work from Frances Willmoth and Susan Oosthuizen is the twenty-second volume in the Cambridgeshire Records Society series, and features the Cambridgeshire sections of the Ely Coucher Book of 1249–50, which were translated by Professor Edward Miller before his death in 2000. The text consists of seventeen manorial extents – a type of medieval survey – focusing on the Cambridgeshire (and some Huntingdonshire) manors held by the Bishop of Ely. The editors are at pains to point out that this is not intended to be a 'full scholarly edition of the text', but rather a means of allowing Professor Miller's work to be disseminated, particularly as the Ely Coucher Book is such an important medieval text. As such, there are a number of editorial caveats outlined by the authors.

The volume is broadly divided into three key sections: an editorial introduction, an introduction to the text, and the translated text itself. The editorial intro-

duction focuses largely on Professor Miller's translations, and outlines how these have been considered and edited by the authors. There is a helpful discussion on the dating of the document, and a useful list of the editorial conventions that have been employed. The introduction to the text focuses briefly on the manuscript sources, before turning to a very comprehensive overview of the landscape of the medieval fenland and its economy, which sets the ensuing translation of the extents into context. In this excellent summary, the authors have clearly undertaken detailed analysis on some aspects of the medieval surveys, and this exploration is interwoven with expert scholarship on the lives of medieval fenland dwellers.

The main focus of the book is quite rightly on the translation of the extents, and these are thoroughly fascinating, bringing the Cambridgeshire fenland to life in vivid detail. There will be much of interest here, for both serious scholars of the medieval manor, and readers wishing to learn more about life in the Cambridgeshire fens in the thirteenth century. Whilst the extents reveal the detail typical of surveys of this period – for example, the acreage and value of arable, pasture, meadow and fen, and the value of other resources, such as mills, tenants and livestock – they do so in great detail, particularly when it comes to the labour services and customary dues owed to the lord by the tenants. It is possible to learn a great deal about the fenland economy, and there is much here on economic activity beyond the fields, focusing on important resources such as the fens, fisheries, and the management of reedbeds. In addition, there are interesting insights into the lives of the medieval peasants, from detailed accounts of what they ate at the great harvesting boonworks, through to the results of negotiations with the lord concerning reductions in services owed in the event of illness. The extents are accompanied by colour plates and photographs showing a range of early maps, aerial photography and landscape scenes. There are also useful glossaries explaining a number of Middle English terms.

Overall, this is a delightful book that will no doubt find a place on the shelves of many readers interested in Cambridgeshire in this period. Nevertheless, there are some issues that should be pointed out. Notwithstanding the editors' assertion that they elect-

ed not to produce a full scholarly text, this reader felt that there was far too little focus on outlining the medieval text in the introduction. There are four extant copies of the Ely Coucher Book, and it would have been useful to have understood their relationship to one another. On page viii we learn that the British Library Cotton Tiberius B.ii version is 'substantially different' to the two versions of the text used by Professor Miller. It is unclear how these differences might change the outlook that we now see through the translations of the two versions that were selected by Professor Miller. Clearly, the editors' intentions were to make this work available quickly, and they should perhaps not be held to account to explain why Professor Miller elected not to use Cotton Tiberius B.ii. Nevertheless, an explanatory note would have been welcome in light of the considerable differences between the texts. Additionally, the introduction might have made it clearer that the Cambridgeshire and Huntingdonshire extents form just one part of the Ely Coucher Book: again, this would have helped to provide a more solid context. Nonetheless, it will no doubt be to the advantage of medieval scholarship that a version of this important text has been made available for wider study.

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*Catholic East Anglia: A History of the Catholic Faith in Norfolk, Suffolk, Cambridgeshire and Peterborough*, ed. Francis Young (Leominster: Gracewing, 2016). ISBN 978-0-852448-87-8 (£14.99 paperback)

'Why are there so few Roman Catholics in East Anglia? Because it's so flat.' Irish immigrant industrial workers, such as the navvies alluded to in this quip by Edward Welbourne, Master of Emmanuel, may have been few in number, but this book, produced to mark the fortieth anniversary of the diocese of East Anglia, documents surprisingly rich veins of both urban and rural Catholicism in what is normally thought of as an early stronghold of radical Protestantism. That presence was uneven, and always stronger in Suffolk and Norfolk than Cambridgeshire. A census taken by the government in 1767 reveals that only one Catholic was known to be in Cambridge, a gardener's wife living in the parish of St Benedict, whereas there were well over a hundred Catholics in both Norwich and Bury St Edmunds. Much depended on the support of local nobility and gentry. Apart from the Huddlestons at Sawston and the Paryses at Linton, until they died out in 1672, Cambridgeshire had no nuclei around which recusant populations could gather. The institutional Anglicanism of the University was an additional factor in the slow development of a Catholic presence in

Cambridge itself.

The railway traveller to Cambridge, once he has passed the *plutopolis* of Station Road, is greeted by the spire of the church of Our Lady and the English Martyrs, completed in time to be decked out for Queen Victoria's Diamond Jubilee. But for much of the period covered by this book the Catholic presence had of necessity to be more discreet, even hidden. The construction of the previous church in Cambridge, on Union Road, was threatened by undergraduate rowdiness. Only the presence of a strong force of Irish navvies and civic officials prevented them from digging up the foundations on Guy Fawkes Night 1842. Prior to the building of this church, dedicated to St Andrew, any Cambridge Catholics had to travel out to Sawston. There the secret house chapel, with its attendant priest-hole, had been superseded by a chapel on the ground floor of the south range of Sawston Hall, with attached accommodation for a resident priest, constructed after the Second Catholic Relief Act of 1791. The growth in Catholic population after the Second World War necessitated the construction of a new parish church on land given by the Huddlestons. Its architectural quality is signified by its omission from the latest edition of the 'Buildings of England' volume for Cambridgeshire. Nothing survives of Wisbech Castle, which served as a notorious internment camp for Elizabethan recusants. However, in a fascinating article in *Recusant History*, Francis Young has looked at how the Bishop's Palace at Ely was used as a prison for lay recusants, such as Sir Thomas Tresham, and made the interesting suggestion that the *Tabula Eliensis* in the south transept of the cathedral, and the similar painting at Coughton Court, were products of recusant culture. (Francis Young, 'The Bishop's Palace at Ely as a Prison for Recusants, 1577-1597', *Recusant History*, 32, no. 2 (2014), pp. 195-218.)

The most interesting essays in this volume are those covering the period before Emancipation. Their authors, Joy Rowe, Francis Young and John Morrill, skilfully set the experiences of Catholics in their wider political and religious context. Among the many insights is an appreciation of the contribution of exiled French clergy to the development of missions in East Anglia. The later chapters perhaps concentrate overmuch on the politics of the establishment of the diocese of East Anglia. It is curious that there is so little on the contribution of the religious orders in the region in the post-1850 period, apart from an account of the development of the Benedictine mission at Bungay. The Austin Friars on their medieval site at Clare are not mentioned, and the Dominicans are but a pageless heading in the index. Appendices give details of sites of Catholic interest in East Anglia, including lost buildings such as Cheveley Hall, and biographies of eighty notable East Anglian Catholics. This useful collection will, I hope, serve as a spur to further research in this field.

Nicholas Rogers