

REVIEWS

EXCAVATIONS AT GREAT LINFORD. D. C. Mynard & R. J. Zeepvat. 394pp., 30 plates (6 in colour), 194 figs., 101 tables, 11 overlays 292 × 206mm. Buckinghamshire Archaeological Society Monograph Series No 3, 1992. ISBN 0 949003 01 (£30.00 from Oxbow Books, Parkend, Oxford OX1 1HN).

The post-war new town, the city of Milton Keynes, was designated in 1967 covering an area of 82 square kilometres. Between 1971 and 1991, archaeological excavation, fieldwork and documentary research were carried out, in advance of development, by the Milton Keynes Archaeology Unit, set up and funded by the Milton Keynes Development Corporation, with the support of the Ministry of Public Building and Works. The scale of the development provided an unprecedented opportunity for the study of the total landscape, and sites of all periods have been examined in detail. The results of this work are being published through the Buckinghamshire Archaeological Society in a series of monographs. This is the first major medieval volume; the first two were on Roman subjects.

Extensive excavations were carried out between 1974 and 1977 on the surviving earthworks of the shruken village of Great Linford and, in 1980, limited work took place at the church and the manor house. Great Linford is situated on the rolling Boulder Clay uplands which were used for mixed farming in the middle ages but were largely pastoral in recent years. The excavation of 11 crofts, and other research in the parish, has enabled a comprehensive picture to be built up of the development and partial desertion of the village. Excavations between 1979 and 1981 at Pennyland, south-east of the village, revealed a dispersed group of Middle Saxon structures overlying an Iron Age settlement.

The 1970s excavations at Great Linford suggested a 12th century start for the nucleated settlement, but the 1980 work at the church demonstrated that there was another Middle Saxon focus there. Great Linford village seems to have grown out from this

centre with a main street running south to a rectangular green which was settled with a regular series of crofts, taken out of open fields, in the 12th century. Most of the parish was under ridge and furrow in the Medieval period and the plan of this was determined from fieldwork and aerial photography. Most striking, though not referred to in the volume, is the fact that a large part of the southern part of the medieval field system (Middle Field) comprises long regular strips laid out at right angles to a Roman road. Other parts have the more usual Midland patchwork layout. These long strips, first recognised in the north, are now increasingly being recognised further south. Middle Field overlies the Middle Saxon Pennyland settlement so was presumably laid out before the 12th century planned village extension as this overlies the same block of regular ridge and furrow.

After the introduction, and a survey of the surviving layout of the village and its earthworks, a documentary study puts the village in its historical context. The excavations are then described croft by croft, the most important being the complete excavations of four crofts (B-E) along the southern side of the green. They were laid out in the 12th century with unusually large widths of about 40m. They were abandoned after the enclosure of 1658 when the area around the green seems to have been deserted and settlement concentrated on the main street between the green and the church and manor house.

The buildings in these crofts were constructed of limestone rubble dwarf walls placed directly on the ground with presumably timber and wattle and daub above. John Smith, in his commentary on the buildings, very sensibly suggests that it is not wise to attempt roof constructions: with the nature of the actual walls so uncertain it would be pushing interpretation too far. On other sites much confusion has been caused by over enthusiastic suggested roof structures based on very slight evidence. I have myself been responsible for this on several occasions. Many of the buildings, including the manor house,

seem to have started as long-houses which were then adapted with additions and ancillary buildings. This is a most useful extension to information about the widespread distribution of the long-house, with humans and animals under the same roof, in Lowland Medieval England. Many of the crofts also had inhabited structures in them. John Smith suggests that these were part of the Unit System in which there were two more or less contemporary houses of land-owning people in the same complex. I am always unhappy about this theory for it is not possible to say, on the archaeological evidence, that these houses were exactly contemporary. Much more likely is the practise of the parents moving into alternative accommodation when the son takes over. The variations in the use of buildings for living and farm purposes also shows the possibilities of constant change of function over the years with houses being converted to farm use and then perhaps back again.

The large section on the finds is usefully divided by function rather than material, a growing trend which adds greatly to our understanding of life in the village. The household objects are fully described and illustrated with comments and parallels. Particularly striking is the prosperity of the later medieval peasant, as illustrated by the high status of many of the finds, like jet chessmen and pilgrim souvenirs. This is a common occurrence on village sites which requires more study over the country.

As rubbish pits are rare on DMVs, with everything spread on the field as manure, both the animal bones and the pottery found in the crofts were the result of casual loss rather than intentional deposition. What was found was also poorly stratified due to the thinness of the levels. The animal bones were therefore grouped into three main phases. There was little difference between the various crofts but there was a trend from equal sheep/goat and cattle in the Medieval period to more sheep/goat in the Post-Medieval period. The pottery also showed little functional difference from croft to croft and was fairly uniform. There were no extra examples of special types to suggest that there might have been an emphasis on dairying or brewing in any one croft. This is important as more differences might have been expected in adjoining crofts.

There was a great deal of residual pottery which

did not help the dating but it was possible to define 51 groups of pottery representing different phases of activity. One of the best of these assemblages (50) came from the general destruction levels dating to the third quarter of the 17th century with a wide range of local wares but also 3% of imports: quite high for a rural settlement. These were mainly Rhenish stoneware *Bartmänner* but there were single sherds of North Holland and German *Werra Ware* trailed slipware. Of considerable interest were fragments from 14 North French *Martincamp* type flasks spread over many of the crofts. These flasks were ubiquitous over most of Britain but this is a large number for a rural settlement. Nevertheless it could be argued, as Charles Thomas has done for Dark Age Mediterranean imports, that they could all have been purchased from the same pedlar on one occasion. They were imported empty and the Great Linford finds support suggestions that these *Martincamp*-type flasks were used as costrels for liquid refreshment in the fields.

Although the volume has taken over ten years to produce it makes an impressive start to the proposed series of other volumes on medieval Milton Keynes. The excavation of the 11 crofts, being combined with work on the church, manor house and a post-mill, greatly increases the value of the research, as it enables many aspects of the village to be studied, unlike other excavations limited perforce to individual crofts. The extensive nature of the excavations has enabled the development of the village to be suggested. If the work had not been possible at the church the original core of the village would not have been found and a 12th century start might have been put forward. So the study of the morphology of the village, the various structures and the associated finds, enables a very rounded picture to be presented. When the proposed volumes on the landscape and other medieval settlements have been published this should provide the most comprehensive picture of a medieval rural area yet to be attempted in this country. The volume is well produced with a clear layout. Particularly useful are the 11 overlays which enable various aspects of the settlement to be compared.

John G. Hurst

Mr Hurst will be known to many readers as the excavator of Wharram Percy

GREAT MARLOW: PARISH AND PEOPLE IN THE 19TH CENTURY by 'Marten', ed. Jean Cook ('Marten', c/o Dr R. Brown, High Rews Farm, Marlow, SL7 3DD, 1991). No price quoted. ISBN 0 9518312 0 8

Do not expect 'history' in this book, in the sense of a narrative account of the past. It is a 'snapshot' of the town of Marlow at a particular point in time, and this makes it an historical study of a most valid and valuable kind.

'Marten' is the pen name of a group of ten Marlow people who met in a series of Evening Classes under the aegis of Oxford University Department for Continuing Education, with Jean Cook as tutor. The result is a readable and vivid recreation of the town as it was before the railway brought population growth and an end to self-sufficiency.

A number of streets in the centre of the town have been re-peopled as fully as records permit, and for these streets we know who did what, who were their dependants, for whom they worked, and whether they owned their own homes. (It is a fact observable in other towns too that owner-occupation conferred no status and was indeed uncommon; the well-to-do lived in rented houses like everyone else, and did so even if they had houses of their own). There are chapters on the River, the Inns and Ale Houses, Politics and Agriculture. Church and Vestry, the Poor Law and Education.

That Marlow was a truly urban community, in the main stream of economic development, is shown by comparing the percentage of agriculture workers with that in the country as a whole: In Bucks as a whole 33% earned their living from the land; in Marlow only 9%. There were many specialist crafts and trades, and the number of these, of providers of services, and professional people is a lively contrast with the picture, provided by Dr Broad, of the stagnant condition of Buckingham fifty years earlier (see his paper in the present volume of Records).

The political domination of the local élite is very clearly brought out by an analysis of the voting patterns before the Reform Acts and the introduction of the secret ballot: a man could, and sometimes did lose his, home and his livelihood by voting against the wishes of his landlord or employer.

It is a flaw in the book that there is no overall map to enable a reader to see where the various streets lay in relation to each other. Such a map would add to one of the book's strengths: that it is so firmly rooted in the Marlow one can see today. Relating the past to the present is one of the ways in which it can be brought to life. Another strength is the pleasant and straightforward style, with its concentration on the specific and the concrete. Editor and compilers are to be warmly congratulated.

J.C.T.