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## Reviews

Christopher Taylor, Christopher Brookes, Evelyn Lord and Sam Lucy

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### **Medieval Bourn a Cambridgeshire Village in the Late Middle Ages**

David Baxter 2008

Mission Computers, Cambridge, x + 190pp., 5 maps, 3 figs, 18 tables & 11 plates ISBN 1 902044 15 0, unpriced

At first sight this is a standard, old-fashioned history of a single village in the long tradition of English Local History. Except that it turns out to be non-standard, up-to-date and certainly not the history of just a village. The only point of similarity with many local histories is that there are not enough good maps. The author falls into the old trap of assuming that the reader knows the parish as well as he does. A situation made worse by the computer-generated maps that are both hard to read and an abomination of cartography. Even this reviewer, who has puzzled over Bourn since 1960, had to dig out his old 6-inch OS map to understand fully the text. In particular because much of the book is a *landscape* history of Bourn, the four parish maps are totally inadequate.

Despite this *Medieval Bourn* is very good indeed. This is because it is not a run of the mill local history. It does not begin with the discovery of a prehistoric axe, moving on to the traces of a Roman villa found in the eighteenth century, passing straight on to Domesday Book and filling most of the rest with a transcript of the Church Wardens' Accounts. The book is expressly the story of the last three centuries of the medieval period in Bourn and concentrates on what is the best-documented part of its history. This, of course, is helped by the fact that its late-medieval institutional lords, Barnwell Priory and Christ's College, made and *kept* very detailed accounts of the lives of the people of Bourn, providing a wealth of information not available at many other places. In Chapter 1 this fine documentary record is analysed carefully and set in its landscape context, using the author's local knowledge. This demonstrates how much most of us miss of the medieval landscape without the kind of documentary sources that Bourn has in such abundance.

The author correctly points out how different the morphology of the village, with its dispersed 'ends' and hamlets, is when compared with that of its near

neighbours and that of much of Midland England. However, it is not quite as unusual as he claims. Similar villages exist in the south-west of our county and survived at nearby Wimpole until the seventeenth century. Nor is his explanation for the layout of Bourn, its size and complex pattern of tenure really convincing. A better one would be that Bourn still retains remnants of its Anglo-Saxon pattern of dispersed settlement that other villages have subsequently lost. However, the book contains much more than a reconstruction and interpretation and of the late medieval landscape. Chapter 2 covers the life of the village and includes its social structure, changes in the status of its peasants, the impact of plague and famine and much else. Chapter 3 is a detailed account of the economy of Bourn, its crops, their yields, agricultural practices and trade. The book ends with a chapter on the remarkable iron-working industry, the remains of which were found as a result of excavation and fieldwork, but were more fully explained by the documentary record. A fine piece of work that should stand as an exemplar for future Cambridgeshire local historians.

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### **The Cartulary of the Hospital of St John the Evangelist, Cambridge**

Edited by Malcolm Underwood 2008

Cambridgeshire Records Society, Vol 18 Cambridge  
lv + 292 pp. 10 illustrations ISBN 090432320X £21.50

The Hospital of St John the Evangelist had a similar destiny to the convent of St Radegund's: just as the convent was converted into Jesus College shortly before AD 1500, so, soon after, the site, the archives and some of the buildings of the hospital passed into the hands of the college of St John the Evangelist. The buildings were swept away, apart from small fragments, in the 1860s; but the archives remain, and very fortunately they have been for many years now under the care of Malcolm Underwood, one of the most senior and

respected of Cambridge college archivists. These records, and especially the late thirteenth-century cartulary, formed the basis of Miri Rubin's notable study, *Charity and Community in Medieval Cambridge* (1987). Those of us who have seen the cartulary and know Rubin's work have long hoped that the transcript she made twenty years ago would be translated into an edition of this vital text for the study of medieval Cambridge. That Malcolm Underwood had undertaken this work himself was very welcome news, and he has given us an admirable edition. It comprises a calendar of the documents—with full texts for the most important and the least susceptible to summary—with ample notes and a fascinating introduction, sketching the history and endowment of the hospital, and analysing the cartulary.

Especially interesting are the indications the cartulary provides of the topography of this part of Cambridge, of the hospital's relation to the Jews and Jewry of the town, and to the scholarly communities growing up around and in it. The latest documents originally included in the cartulary were of c. 1280, though there are some later additions, and it is not too much to say that this is the richest source for our knowledge of the town and its folk in the thirteenth century.

The hospital was a characteristic product of its age. The late twelfth and early thirteenth centuries witnessed the foundation of many institutions for the sick and the old: they reflected a fashion in which the Christian charity of the founders mingled with the urgent needs of a period of growth in English towns, accompanied by a corresponding increase in the poor and the sick. Concern for the urban poor was part of the wider European scene: the hospital of St John was founded when St Francis was in his teens. It was founded by a charitable layman or a perhaps more correctly by a group of laymen; but as it was a religious house, with a chapel served by a small community of priests at its heart, it was also founded by ecclesiastical authority—by Eustace, bishop of Ely.

The cartulary in its present state is incomplete, and Underwood has supplemented it with Appendices giving us texts of other documents from this rich archive. They whet our appetite: we may hope that another volume will follow giving us more of the documents not in the cartulary. In one of the most interesting of the originals printed here Bishop Eustace makes a settlement between the hospital and the nuns of St Radegund; for the hospital was in the parish of All Saints, of which the nuns possessed the rectorial tithes. The bishop made the kind of arrangement common when a chantry was established within the boundaries of a parish: the nuns allowed services and sacraments to be performed in the hospital, and burials in the hospital cemetery; the parishioners of All Saints were forbidden to worship in the hospital; and three of the lay patrons of the hospital gave the nuns rents in recompense for any losses the nuns might incur (Appendix 3, no. I, 236). In view of this and other interventions, Bishop Eustace was reckoned by his successors to be the founder, but in the memory

of the townsfolk it was they who had founded the hospital. This not unnaturally led to friction and argument later on but immediately, it seems, a peaceful settlement was made; not for nothing was Eustace one of Richard I's foremost diplomats—and he served King John too until Pope Innocent III, in his quarrel with the king over the election of the archbishop of Canterbury, insisted that Eustace become one of the administrators of the Interdict laid on England from 1208 to 1214.

These events clouded Eustace's last years (he died early in 1215); the document we have been examining belongs to an earlier phase. Underwood dates it 1208 x c. 1210. The acta of Bishop Eustace are being edited by Dr Nicholas Karn for the series of *English Episcopal Acta of the Twelfth and Thirteenth Centuries*; and both he and I would be inclined to date it to the very beginning of the century. William of Devon became prior of Barnwell between 1198 and 1202, not in or after 1208, as Underwood suggests;<sup>1</sup> Hugh prior of Ely gives it a *terminus a quo* of 1200, and there seems no reason to date it later than c. 1200. It must take us to the very root of the foundation, for the hospital—even if it started in temporary shelter—could not have survived as a religious house for the sick and elderly without chapel and cemetery. It is witnessed by a mingling of local ecclesiastics, of leading members of the bishop's household (including John Grim, who was apparently one of those engaged a few years later in founding the university) and members of the town's lay patriciate. The hospital, it seems, started in a peaceful settlement between townsfolk and the religious institutions of Cambridge brokered by the diplomatic skills of Bishop Eustace.

The study of these documents, under Malcolm Underwood's skilled guidance, can take us, time and again, to the heart of thirteenth-century Cambridge. If I have strayed a little beyond his cautious account of its foundation, that is due to the clarity with which he has laid out the evidence. The book is a very notable addition to a splendid series.

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<sup>1</sup> See *Heads of Religious Houses, England and Wales, 1, 940–1216*, ed. D Knowles, C N L Brooke and V C M London, 2nd edn (Cambridge 2001), 151. The prior of Ely was Hugh, not 'Henrico' (cf. *ibid.* 46). I am very grateful to Nicholas Karn for showing me a draft of his edition of the acta of Eustace.

### **Index to the Contents of the Cole Manuscripts in the British Museum**

George J Gray with a preface by John Pickles 2003  
CUP facsimile reprint 170pp. with illustrations £5.00

### **William Cole of Milton**

W M Palmer with a foreword by John Pickles  
CUP facsimile reprint 178pp. with illustrations £16.50  
Both available from Dr J Pickles, 27 Cavendish Road,  
Cambridge, CB1 3AE

In *The Tyranny of the Discrete* John Marshall (1992) describes antiquarianism as 'negative, anti-human, escapist, killing curiosity as it romanticises the past', and antiquarians according to Marshall are 'uncritical, unselective, and lacking in conceptualisation' and today the term antiquarian is often used as an insult. Perhaps because of this opprobrium levelled against antiquarians, a recent book celebrating William Dugdale, the Warwickshire Antiquity, is careful to describe him throughout as a 'historian' (Dyer and Richardson 2009). However, W.G. Hoskins starts his definitive work, *Local History in England*, by discussing the work of antiquarians, who he sees as being at the root of academic local history. We could ask where would the local historians of today be without the descriptions, transcriptions and collections of the antiquarians of the past? Of particular relevance to Cambridgeshire was William Cole of Milton, whose biography was written in the 1930s by another antiquarian, Dr William Palmer M D.

Palmer starts by describing Cole's life, habits and his house, based on Cole's own manuscripts with referencing in detail. We see the antiquarian at work visiting every church in the county, copying monumental inscriptions and transcribing manuscripts in the University Library. Cole's interest was not confined to Cambridgeshire and in 1738 he travelled to Lisbon, Flanders, Normandy, Paris and Scotland. He was rightly celebrated in his time.

The book includes extracts from his diary for 1765–1770, and an account of his library, but perhaps his best known and most valuable contribution to the history of Cambridgeshire is his 'parochial antiquities', which are reproduced in this book. These consist of descriptions and drawings of the parish churches as he saw them in the eighteenth century, an invaluable record of Cambridgeshire parish churches at that time, which show Cole as an assiduous recorder of his time.

The index of the contents of his manuscripts shows the other side of the antiquarian, as a collector. The manuscripts, which are now in the British Library are an eclectic collection that not only contains a great deal of information about Cambridgeshire but also covers a wide range of antiquities from England, Scotland and abroad; and includes records of plays, surveys of cathedrals, pedigrees of noble families and much else besides. The entry for Dr Palmer's home town of Linton in Cambridgeshire, for example, includes arms and inscriptions; antiquities; extracts from the parish registers; notes on the estate map; accounts of priors,

rectors and vicars; notes and pedigrees on the Coney family and verses on Mrs Coney.

Cole and Palmer's work are evidence that antiquarians played a crucial role in the formation of local history as both an academic discipline and a popular pastime. Dr Pickles is to be congratulated on arranging for these reprints to be published, and for his scholarly preface and foreword to them.

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### **References**

- Dyer C and C Richardson (eds) 2009 *William Dugdale Historian, 1605–1686* Woodbridge: The Boydell Press.  
Hoskins, W G 1959 *Local History in England* Harlow: Longman.  
Marshall, J 1992 *The Tyranny of the Discrete* London: Scholar Press, 2.

### **Early Anglo-Saxon Communities in the Landscape of Norfolk**

Mary Chester-Kadwell 2009

BAR British Series 481 Archaeopress, Oxford xii + 235pp, illustrated throughout with figures, maps, plans, inc. 6 colour plates; ISBN 9781407304168 £50.00

This volume represents publication of Chester-Kadwell's recent PhD thesis, slightly slimmed down for a wider audience, and is a valuable contribution to the fields of early Anglo-Saxon landscape, settlement and burial research. Focusing her efforts on a defined geographical area, she employs a wide range of evidence in order to address topics as diverse as the inter-relationships of cemeteries and settlement, the interpretation of different forms of archaeological data, and the nature of Anglo-Saxon communities. Among the innovative aspects of the research is the considered use of the excellent metal-detector finds data for which Norfolk is renowned (built up over the course of the last thirty years through close communication with local detectorists; a pioneering approach now adopted nationwide through the Portable Antiquities Scheme). This data is critically treated, and given extra value through Chester-Kadwell's interviewing of Norfolk metal-detectorists, as she has attempted to determine where has and has not been detected (*i.e.* does a lack of known finds correspond with a lack of detection, or is it, in fact, a real pattern). A key finding is that metal-detector scatters have 'signatures': over 25 metal finds from a site very strongly suggests the presence of a cemetery, for example. This data is then combined with information on sites and monuments as recorded in the Norfolk HER through the medium of a geographic information system (GIS).

Before embarking on detailed analysis, a balanced and useful overview is given of early Anglo-Saxon archaeological evidence and its possible interpretations; this is followed by a 'case study' chapter that reviews a number of the major sites nationwide in terms of their

landscape context (including their relationship with prehistoric and Roman remains) and how cemeteries are placed in relation to settlements. This enables the formation of a number of research questions to be addressed analytically through the Norfolk data, with a theoretical approach that raises questions of communities: what they represent, and how they might have operated. This perspective is thus grounded in an approach that sees large-scale patterning as comprised of lots of small-scale decisions, and it is this local patterning that can be interrogated archaeologically. What follows is a detailed and nuanced interrogation of the data, which reaches a number of interesting conclusions. One pattern confirmed is the locational tendencies of early Anglo-Saxon settlements and cemeteries: the former have a strong tendency towards the slopes of river valleys, where they are best placed to exploit a range of environmental habitats, while the latter tend to lie further upslope (cremation cemeteries more so than inhumation). In each case, though, local considerations seem to have been at work, particularly in the relationship with previous sites and monuments. These general patterns are then explored through a series of more detailed localised studies, where the GIS mapping is employed to good effect. Editorially, the volume can barely be faulted, with attractive page-setting and excellent use of graphics.

This is certainly an approach that could be used elsewhere in Britain, and further afield; the national record is slowly catching up with the pioneering recording work encapsulated within the Norfolk HER, and such approaches are now becoming viable. Moreover, the rapid incorporation of developer-funded work into HERs means that regional studies such as this can proceed even before final publication of the sites in question, if the level of reporting through schemes such as OASIS is high enough. Chester-Kadwell is to be congratulated on a monograph that moves so seamlessly from detailed data analysis to nuanced interpretation.

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**Where most Inclosures be. East Anglian Fields: History, Morphology and Management**

Edward Martin and Max Satchell 2008  
 EAA vol 124 xviii + 270pp., 44 figs, 38 tables, 19 charts,  
 72 plates ISBN 978 1 86055 160 7, £30

The principal purpose of this book is yet one more attempt to solve the problem of the origins of medieval common fields. At its core is a survey of ten small areas, mostly single parishes in Norfolk, Suffolk and Essex, plus one each in Hertfordshire and in Cambridgeshire (Dullingham). Using archive maps, documentary sources and fieldwork, the authors divided each area into 'land types' based on physical

characteristics, field shapes and names, historic land use, tenure etc. The collated results are illustrated by superb colour fold-out maps on 1st edn OS 1:2500 map bases. The results are then applied and analysed in relation to the land of the rest of the region.

The conclusion is that 'block holdings', or land in individual ownership, were more common in the south than in the north, where common fields, usually farmed in strips and in multiple ownership and/or occupation, predominated. Such results are of considerable interest to all agricultural historians.

The book includes much else of value. It contains an analysis of the so-called co-axial field systems recognised in East Anglia and concludes that they are less extensive than previously claimed and are not necessarily pre-Saxon. It also has an extensive glossary of agricultural terms both ancient and modern. If the difference between Inland, Bordland and Warland is needed, or the exact definition of stetch ploughing is required, the answers are here. There is also a good bibliography.

In the end, however, the real value of the book must depend on its conclusions about the origin of common fields, and block holdings. And here doubts begin to emerge. The authors decide that while the southern block holdings are probably older and even may have originated in Roman times or earlier, the common fields of the north are likely to have been the result of social and tenurial reorganisation caused by the Viking invasions of the late ninth century, or possibly by the English re-conquest in the early tenth century.

Despite much supporting evidence being provided, your reviewer is unconvinced. The effect on the landscape of the Scandinavian settlement in East Anglia remains poorly understood. The actual numbers and cultural impact of the incomers are also uncertain. And the suggestion that the complete and very rapid re-organisation of inherently conservative farming methods were the result of political, social or tenurial changes is not easy to take on board.

Behind these worries is another that concerns the methodology. Many of the eighteen different 'land types' that were identified from a mere twelve case studies and then applied to the whole region are very subjective. Further, to a considerable extent they are based on the Historic Landscape Characterisation Scheme (HLC) developed by English Heritage for management purposes. The value of HLC for heritage management is not in question, as the excellent last chapter of the book shows. But its use as an academic tool has caused serious divisions amongst scholars. Some see it as a new and objective way of advancing landscape studies, others as merely a reworking of old-fashioned geographical determinism. The book does not attempt to address this disquiet, or to clarify the problem or to satisfy the doubters.

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