

medieval settlements and currently inhabited settlements, where lost gridded plans had been revealed by excavation. The early medieval ownership of settlements with evidence for grid-planning was explored and a selection of early medieval monasteries, *emporia* and *burhs* were also analysed to see if gridded plans can be recognised in these.

The authors list 117 medieval settlements they felt reasonably confident were laid out using a standardised perch-based grid. From excavation data, they conclude that grid-planning originated as a top-down process in the later seventh and early eighth centuries employed by monastic estates keen to emulate Roman practice; it went into abeyance when monasticism declined between c. AD 720–940; but saw a resurgence during the monastic revival from the later tenth century, during which time the grid method became more widely applied in non-ecclesiastical estates. A series of distribution maps show how the gridded settlements identified appear mostly restricted to central and eastern England, in an area defined as the Eastern Zone.

Of particular interest to readers of *Medieval Settlement Research* may be the authors' analysis of 'ordinary' (i.e. non-monastic) rural settlements in Chapter 6. This identifies grid-planning in a range of settlement types, including some which have characteristics of linear rows, as well as others where gridded rectilinearity is more persuasively apparent. Illustrations include composite plans showing excavated buildings and boundary ditches, property boundaries and streets within areas of nineteenth-century habitation and beyond these, lanes and field boundaries shown on maps, and aerial imagery (including LIDAR) – all overlain by grids. These allow readers to follow the authors' reasoning and make their own judgements. Some developmental models are offered, with one particularly interesting example (for this reviewer) proposing the way in which a loose cluster of farmsteads laid out using a pre-surveyed grid might develop into a linear row (pp. 175–7). The loosely gridded farmstead cluster arrangement is seen in many medieval village plans, including classic sites such as Gainsthorpe in Lincolnshire.

The appendices are not to be overlooked. They include Claire Barnes and Wilfrid Kendall's statistical analysis of excavated features, carried out to explore the potential of this approach for identifying and analysing regular alignments. This contribution acknowledges – but does not resolve – a key challenge in the volume's thesis: mismatches between mapped/excavated features and superimposed perch-based grids. One hopes, on beginning Barnes and Kendall's text, that it will offer a means to test Blair, Rippon and Smart's hypotheses by determining how close (or far) the correlation between actual features and the ideal model needs to be before use of the model can be accepted (or rejected). But, although they offer hope for the future, Barnes and Kendall do not achieve this here. This is important, because, as this volume's illustrations show, most of the identified matches are indeed partial and/or approximate. This is perhaps inevitable given the constraints of using a metrical model in a real-world situation followed by a millennium or more of adaptation, and Blair *et al.* make precisely this point. However, because their argument hinges on correlating reconstructed settlement layouts with mathematically

precise grids, the issue of mismatches is crucial: what is needed is a means of identifying whether variation from the precisely measured layout occurred because classical planning had to adapt to real-world conditions, or because rectilinearity was due to other factors, such as (for example) use of plots within pre-existing rectangular field systems or successive addition of back lanes onto linear settlements. Put simply, evaluation needs to know the acceptable margin of error beyond which the classical argument cannot be sustained. Probably, this judgement cannot be reduced to a statistical rule-of-thumb, but, in its absence, confirmation bias risks the Blair/Rippon/Smart hypothesis being accepted by those who want to believe in early medieval use of classically informed methods by ecclesiastical planners to lay out settlements, and rejected by those who do not.

Beyond the 'margin of error' question, there are other issues. Circular argument seems present in some instances, such as identifying post-built building alignments; features dating to different phases are rather inconsistently conflated or separated; and many readers will be able to think of settlements which seem to fit the grid pattern but are not listed. Nevertheless, overall, I would strongly recommend this book to everyone interested in medieval settlement: the arguments are clearly presented and generous inclusion of well-illustrated plans means that anyone can enjoy considering whether or not they agree with the inferences made. Grid-plans are an important part of the medieval settlement pattern which have not been well understood: the authors here offer a thesis which many readers may find compelling and will provide widespread inspiration to look at known sites in a new light. Blair, Rippon and Smart's theory is controversial, but, if correct, it will have a considerable impact on our understanding of aspects of medieval society, ranging from mentalities and the exchange of ideas to the processes driving settlement planning.

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***Medieval Rural Settlement. Britain and Ireland, AD 800–1600.*** Edited by Neil Christie & Paul Stamper. 19 x 25 cm. xiii + 369 pp, 113 colour and b&w pls and figs, 1 table. Oxford & Philadelphia: Windgather Press/Oxbow Books, 2021. ISBN 978-1-91118-867-4; epub: 978-1-905119-65-3. Price £25.00 pb.

Since this book was first published in hardback form in 2012, more has been written on the development of towns and fortifications and about the recognition and development of traditional landscapes, but the study of rural settlement remains controversial and very much to the fore.

After a lifetime surveying and researching rural settlements, with numerous post-retirement awards, Chris Taylor, at the time of publication the Vice-President of the Medieval Settlement Research Group, but who died recently, commented in the Foreword to the original edition that 'it will be out-of-date before it reaches the bookshop. But of course this is precisely

what should happen'. In fact, it is as relevant today as ever.

Chris himself continued to express opinions upon the date of settlement nucleation, at times arguing for little pre-tenth-century village development. This well-produced and wide-ranging book presents many different views on the character of the medieval countryside. Initial arguments for widespread nucleation, associated with open-field planning, as early as the eighth century in the East Midlands were indeed found unconvincing by many, and some settlements near boundaries certainly remained a feature in not a few early medieval West Midland charter-bounds. Nevertheless, a degree of nucleation on royal and ecclesiastical estates in the Roberts and Wrathmell 'Central Province' has not been disproved, its efficiency in centralising and decreasing the number of plough-teams necessary encouraging its adoption elsewhere. Others have been loath to accept that it might be the likelihood of continued settlement dispersion, associated with high plough-team numbers over much of Herefordshire and perhaps in other parts of the Borderland, which influenced the statistics recorded in Domesday Book. In Eastern England, however, where the use of early 'Anglo-Saxon' pottery remained common, the arguments for late nucleation appear to have been corroborated by more recent 'test-pitting' programmes. Thus, discussion of these problems and the evidence in some areas for a degree of settlement mobility or the effects of elite status remain as pertinent as ever and this book – and its publication now in paperback form – offers a timely stimulus to such discussion.

While there have been few opportunities for new, large-scale and extended 'open area' research excavations such as those carried out on a small number of deserted village sites, such as West Stow in Suffolk or West Heslerton in North Yorkshire, techniques have been developed which continue to provide valuable evidence. These include the use of LiDAR, which can reveal sites hidden below woodland, for instance; place-name terms continue to be investigated; air photographic analysis, among other analytical techniques, has continued; the influence of physical setting – recently, again, perhaps over-stated – has also been the basis of further discussion. The use of test-pitting via 1 x 1 metre holes within and around villages (and with some application even in lesser urban contexts) has seen growing application, with an especial effort at community engagement, but the value of such work often depends upon the numbers and spread of test pits and can be, as noted, limited in areas which were largely aceramic in the early medieval period. Evidence of subsequent re-planning, indicated by surviving plot boundaries, or changing road layouts and bridge building, have also seen new investigation.

The book is divided into three parts. The first looks at 'Contexts. Chronologies and Forms' showing how the study of medieval settlements has changed since the nineteenth century (paper by Christopher Dyer and Paul Everson), how new approaches guide in the study of sites and landscapes, plus coverage of, for example, Saxon to Scandinavian rural settlement (Gabor Thomas) and seigneurial and elite sites (Oliver Creighton and Terry Barry). Part II comprises a set of regional and national surveys by experts from across Britain

(including Audrey Horning on Ireland, Mark Gardiner on south-east England, and Edward Martin on 'Greater East Anglia'); papers offer case studies as well as boxed theme overviews (such as on the Raunds project, and on exploiting the Welsh uplands). These chapters form one of the notable strengths of this book, although, even at the time of the initial publication, it might be said that some omitted relevant references. Since then, a number of local and regional projects have been carried out, as in the Welsh Borderland, parts of Northern Ireland, south-western and eastern England, many reported on in the MSRG's annual journal. Part III, 'Research Methods', an Appendix, presents a practical guide to investigating medieval rural settlements. Written by Carenza Lewis, the current President of the Medieval Settlement Research Group, it covers desk-based assessment, including internet and documentary sources, and the use of historic maps and aerial photographs; field investigation involving earthwork and building surveys; and more intrusive field investigation by such means as field-walking and the collection of finds, metal detecting, even molehill surveys, shovel-pitting and garden-soil surveys. As such methods permanently change the sites examined, clearly all results must be fully reported and catalogued.

Work has obviously continued since the first publication of this book. For example, studies of elite and fortified sites of many different periods have included the development and purpose of hillforts, burh-sites, castles and moated sites; the evidence for the establishment and siting of new *burhs*, such as Rye in the late Anglo-Saxon period; and the influence of monasteries and the growth of medieval markets. However, none of these or those employing the new or developing techniques described above invalidate the content of the original edition, which still offers a valuable starting-point for recognising evidence and trends, and for pointing towards further discussion.

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***Ruralia XIII: Seasonal Settlement in the Medieval and Early Modern Countryside.*** Edited by Piers Dixon & Claudia Theune. 21 x 28 cm. 368 pp, 171 colour and b&w pls and figs, 5 tables. Leiden: Sidestone Press, 2021. ISBN 978-94-6427-009-9; epub: 978-94-6427-011-2 (ISSN 2565-8883). Price: £65.00 pb.

This volume collates the proceedings of the thirteenth Ruralia conference, hosted by the University of Stirling in 2019, on the once-neglected but increasingly popular theme of seasonal settlement. In keeping with Ruralia tradition, the contributions span the early medieval to modern periods across much of Europe (plus Qatar, surprisingly), and encompass several related disciplines: ethnography, history, archaeology, geography and palynology. It is commendable that so many of the papers integrate some or all of these different strands of evidence, although a recurring theme is that this is a subject which archaeology has often struggled to elucidate. Piers Dixon's introductory essay suggests, with particular regard to Scotland, that research is now in want of ideas more than evidence: 'The data exist; we now require the awakening of the imagination' – a