

backland areas. Few deserted medieval villages have been identified and none excavated, in contrast with neighbouring counties. In the absence of any concerted research on medieval settlement, much useful information can nonetheless be found in the Victoria County History, which with the staunch support of a Committee and volunteers continues to produce regular red books.

This volume should be considered with *Part 1: St. Osyth, Great and Little Clacton, Frinton, Great and Little Holland*, published in 2020. Together they cover the southern half of the Tendring Hundred in the north-east of the county. In landscape terms, this is the Tendring Plain, a London Clay plateau overlain with fertile loams, and a long seaboard characterised by extensive marshland and creeks and low cliffs, much subject to coastal erosion. This was the part of the county most subject to Viking control and influence, as evidenced by place-names such as Kirby and Thorpe. From some remote time before 1066, these parishes had been vested in the Bishop of London and the Dean and Chapter of St. Paul's. The Bishop held the St. Osyth and the Clacton area where he made his mark by re-founding a Saxon religious house as an Augustinian priory at St. Osyth. He also built a distinctive Norman church at Clacton, and in an area once very wooded in contrast with today, he held extensive parkland. The priory, later abbey, became one of the wealthiest houses in the county and led to the establishment of a small market town and port. The marshlands supported extensive grazing, for the management of which there exists documentary evidence.

This *Part 2* publication covers the area known as the Sokens, originally the estate of *Eadulvesness*, run from a manorial centre at Walton Hall on the Naze, described in surveys of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries in the *Domesday of St. Paul's*. This centre was run by an unfree labour force, an inland, with outlying areas where there were freer peasantry known as hidesmen. These may originally have held farms of one hide in extent; landholdings of fractions of a hide recur consistently in later documents. As is not infrequent in the county, there is evidence for the early existence of a common field system. The early organisation of Kirby and Thorpe into hides for tax and landholding could be seen as supporting this. From the one estate in 1086 there developed the three discrete vills and parishes. The hidesmen eventually became copyholders, a process impossible to trace because of the loss of manorial records. What remained unchanged were the remarkable jurisdictional privileges with many legal and ecclesiastical rights which made the Sokens a distinctive area until as late as the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.

Sections for each parish carefully and expertly describe settlement, landholding and the agricultural economy. Combined, the books present a valuable picture of an area which John Hunter, the county's well-known landscape historian, described as 'virtually unstudied'.

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Stratton, Biggleswade: 1,300 Years of Village Life in Eastern Bedfordshire from the 5th Century AD. By Drew Shotliff & David Ingham. 21 x 29 cm. xiv + 234 pp, 91 colour and b&w pls and figs, 85 tables. Oxford: Archaeopress Publishing, 2022. ISBN 978-1-80327-074-6; epub: 978-1-80327-075-3. Price: £45.00 pb.

We must be grateful to Drew Shotliff and David Ingham, with support from English Heritage/Historic England, for the publication of this major report after a long delay. It appears in print (with digital appendices) thirty years after the excavation. Stratton became a housing estate on the edge of Biggleswade in the 1990s, but, according to documents, it had been a settlement of at least 30 households in the High Middle Ages. The excavation was remarkable because it managed to explore a high proportion of the settlement, revealing that the site was continuously occupied from the fifth until the eighteenth century.

The long story begins with a small group of sunken-featured buildings in the fifth and sixth centuries AD. The settlement gained in size and coherence in the Middle Anglo-Saxon period, with a regular rectilinear layout of small fields and some post-hole buildings alongside sunken-featured buildings. A small cemetery was also in use. Around AD 800 the field boundaries were remodelled, and at a period not closely defined, but probably in the eleventh or twelfth century, more boundary adjustments and house building changed 'a loose network of small farmsteads to a more recognisable village'. The settlement seems to have continued after 1349 unscathed, and buildings which had previously remained in the post-hole tradition were increasingly being given stone foundations. The excavated settlement seems to have been reduced in size later in the Middle Ages, and became depopulated in the eighteenth century.

A consistent theme throughout was the low level of Stratton's material culture and apparent standard of living, with the persistence of earth-fast timber houses, and small finds of low quality and small quantity. The botanical evidence shows that local woodland was not plentiful, with fuel coming from hedgerows and small copses, while the agrarian economy predictably depended on wheat, barley and oats, and with a preponderance of cattle among the livestock.

Readers cannot complain of a lack of information, but the mass of details seems only partly digested, and its presentation lacks clarity. For example, a single map of the village and its locality has no key, and does not locate the town of Biggleswade nor identify the Roman road which gave Stratton its name. The numerous detailed maps of the site depicting different phases show every ditch, pit and post-hole, but readers would have been much helped by a few interpretative plans. Such a plan of a late Saxon phase of Stratton was published in 1993, showing buildings and significant boundaries, but such illustrations to make the data more easily intelligible are not included here. Every building is catalogued in detail, but no reconstruction has been attempted; and we are not directly told how many houses were built and occupied in successive periods.

The authors have chosen an unusual vocabulary, so that 'longhouse' means a building c. 20 m long, not a structure housing people and animals under the same roof; 'farmstead' is frequently used to describe village

or peasant houses. They seem to avoid the term 'nucleation', and they prefer circumlocutions such as 'the overall form crystallised by the eleventh and twelfth centuries'. Their misunderstanding of the term 'drage' leads them into an unnecessary speculation about the villagers' use of barley.

This report marks a useful interim stage in our understanding of Stratton. Now the accumulated data can be used to devise a clear picture of the settlement's development with plans of each period which select the most important features. Such a study ought to give equal attention to all periods and not focus on the period before 1100.

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St Gregory's Minster, Kirkdale, North Yorkshire: Archaeological Investigations and Historical Context. By Philip Rahtz[†] & Lorna Watts. 21 x 29 cm. x + 327 pp, 33 colour plates, 140 b&w pls and figs, 34 tables. Oxford: Archaeopress, 2021. ISBN 978-1-78969-482-6; epub: 978-1-78969-483-3. Price: £48.00 pb.

The isolated church of Kirkdale, in a stream-valley at the heart of Ryedale, is of national importance as regards two stages in its existence: in the eighth century, and then in the mid-eleventh. A project there during 1994–2014 was the culmination of Philip Rahtz's brilliant career as an excavator and interpreter of early medieval sites. While the excavations were on a small scale, they yielded some very significant results. We owe their publication now to the hard and devoted work of his widow, Lorna Watts, who completed the project in sometimes very difficult circumstances, and has made a splendid job of it.

Kirkdale was clearly an important minster during the Northumbrian golden age. It could be the place that Bede calls *Cornu Vallis*, but is otherwise undocumented before the 1050s, and so assessment of its early status depends on the material evidence. Small trenches in fields north and south of the church offered tantalising hints of a precinct, containing structures, which extended along the stream-valley. Fragments of earlier footings under the standing church walls could represent a seventh- to eighth-century church (with tenuous evidence for some kind of late Roman presence in the background). More conclusive is the spectacular pair of eighth-century carved grave-slabs from shrine-type monuments of outstanding quality and importance. The excavations now add a fragment of a reticella glass rod and a lead plate with an Old English inscription that perhaps includes the word 'bone-box'. These are all very exceptional items, and the authors reasonably argue that eighth-century Kirkdale had a strong role in memorialising the special dead. Whatever it was, it was an international and metropolitan place in the pre-Viking period and anything but 'remote' in a cultural sense. That point bears emphasis, since its location at the interface between the North Yorkshire Moors and the Vale of Pickering is comparable to that of the better-documented minster at Lastingham, whose eremitical remoteness is emphasised by Bede. In that cosmopolitan world, 'seclusion' was more symbolic than literal.

A stone church of the ninth or tenth century, perhaps with an eastern apse, was apparently rebuilt once and then destroyed by fire. It was probably after this disaster that Orm Gamalsson 'had it newly built from the ground for Christ and St Gregory' during 1055–65, as he famously boasts in the sundial inscription over the south door. Orm's church – a key building for immediately pre-Conquest English Romanesque – can now be more confidently defined as the nave with west and south doorways, the chancel arch and chancel, a north-east porticus and (just possibly) a north aisle.

The yield of significant data from this unfunded project, sustained by the enthusiasm of the excavators and local residents, exceeds that from many much larger ones. The report is straightforward, easily used, and provides all the necessary evidence. It passes the acid test for excavation reports in setting out the facts in an objective and non-dogmatic fashion and in suggesting interpretations while leaving the door open for different ones.

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Garranes. An Early Medieval Royal Site in South-West Ireland. By William O'Brien & Nick Hogan. 21 x 30 cm. x + 386 pp, 379 colour and b&w pls, figs and tables. Oxford: Archaeopress Archaeology, 2021. ISBN 978-1-78969-919-7; e-pdf: 978-1-78969-920-3. Price: £45.00 hb. Open Access.

The name Garranes (properly Lisnacaheragh, the place-name of the site itself) will be familiar to every student of early medieval Ireland. Rare among ringforts in possessing a documented history of sorts relating to the period between the sixth and tenth centuries AD, it can be provisionally identified as the *caput* of the Eóganacht Raithlenn, a branch of the Munster Eóganacht dynasty. The large multivallate site was first investigated by Ó'Riordáin in the 1930s, when its 'royal' status was archaeologically affirmed by both the complexity of the defences and the artefacts recovered; these revealed the substantial scale and range of industrial activity, especially skilled bronze-working. This impressive tome combines the results of field research in 1990–92 and 2011–18 with a reappraisal of the earlier work, plus other studies setting the site archaeology in a broader historical and landscape context. The volume includes different types of research outputs, moving from discussions of dynasties to more conventional excavation reports, where the results are published in some detail – rather more than is necessary perhaps, though it was good to see the full colour finds illustrations.

In archaeological terms, the site narrative at Lisnacaheragh is not greatly changed. Ó'Riordáin excavated a fairly narrow N–S transect across the site and the entrance, as well as a substantial part of the north-east quadrant. There was no direct evidence for housing, but part of a roundhouse inside the north-western quadrant was identified in O'Donnell's work in 1990–92, which also produced the first radiocarbon dates, indicating occupancy during the fifth and sixth centuries. The rest of this structure was revealed in 2017