

comparative comment, looking to Europe, Scandinavia and Iceland for parallels for the buildings and structures excavated. This includes a fascinating study of turf wall construction, which is extensively illustrated with plans, cross-sections and photographs of comparanda. The book is therefore essential reading for those interested not just in the field archaeology of upland landscapes, but also in early medieval rural building techniques and the uses of interior space.

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Peasant Perspectives on the Medieval Landscape. A Study of Three Communities. (Studies in Regional and Local History, Volume 17). By Susan Kilby. 17 × 25 cm. xvii + 238 pp, 40 b&w pls and figs, 34 tables. Hatfield: University of Hertfordshire Press, 2020. ISBN 9781-912260-21-8. Price: £18.99 pb.

Identifying and analysing evidence for peasant perspectives must be one of the most problematic endeavours in medieval settlement studies. This is not only because most of the data which can be brought to bear on this topic are indirect and ambiguous, but also because of the ever-present danger that our own perspectives will significantly distort our account of theirs. This latter pitfall is one which Susan Kilby skilfully avoids, as she explores the available data relating to three communities in the historic counties of Huntingdonshire, Northamptonshire and Suffolk: Elton, Castor and Lakenheath.

Kilby combines documentary sources relating to these communities – sources dating mainly to the late thirteenth and fourteenth centuries – with readings of the landscapes inhabited by them which draw not only on socio-economic data but also on a wide range of other evidence, notably topographical and onomastic analysis. She explores the social construction of settlements including, for example, apparent variations in the extent to which particular peasant households would have been visible from public spaces; she contrasts the officially approved routeways through the surrounding landscape with unapproved routes (ones that the peasants persisted in recreating), and she assembles evidence for the ‘hidden economies’ of the peasantry, notably fishing and sheep-farming.

Analysis of the ‘minor names’ in these manors, the topographically and culturally derived field-names, indicates variations among the three communities which may be associated with relative strengths of lordship. Indeed, a theme which runs through this study is the different experiences of various groups within the peasantry – free and unfree; communities under strong or weak lordship – which suggest not an all-embracing, single peasant perspective but a range of perspectives among groups that were differentiated socially and economically. At the same time, Kilby demonstrates that communities as a whole might preserve cultural memories in the names which they gave to specific elements in the landscapes they occupied.

A short review such as this cannot do justice to all the themes covered in this book, but two strands which stand out for this reviewer are the significance of the names that the peasants applied to the fields they worked and the ‘bynames’ by which peasants were themselves known (at least in documents). The names given to many fields not only demonstrate their character – stony, clayey and so on – but also, Kilby argues, subtly convey information about their requirements: how they should be treated in order to be managed successfully. The peasants’ bynames show marked differences between those of the servile and the free peasantry in places where lordship was strong. In those particular communities (though not necessarily in others under weaker lordship), servile tenants tended to be distinguished by topographical bynames (‘at the Green’, ‘in the Lane’ and so on), which, she argues, were used as much to imply status as for the purpose of identifying individuals. The free peasantry, on the other hand, often bore toponymic bynames which emphasised their spatial separation from the core of the settlement – ‘Aboveton’, for example.

Kilby’s aspiration for this book is set out in the introductory chapter: ‘to demonstrate that the recovery of peasant perspectives on the environments in which they lived and worked is a realistic and attainable goal’ (p. 6). It is one which she had unquestionably achieved.

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Faxton. Excavations in a Deserted Northamptonshire Village 1966–68. (The Society for Medieval Archaeology Monograph 42). By Lawrence Butler & Christopher Gerrard. 21 × 30 cm. xiii + 283 pp, 5 colour pls and figs. 196 b&w pls, figs and tables. London & New York: Routledge & The Society for Medieval Archaeology, 2021. ISBN 978-0-367-51771-7 (ISSN 0583-9106). Price: £34.99 pb.

Very much more than a ‘backlog’ report on a field project completed more than half a century ago, here is a milestone volume destined to find its place in the vanguard of medieval rural settlement studies. Backed by several scholarly contributors, Christopher Gerrard has brought to publication an important work which skilfully weaves his own substantial contributions with various drafts left by the excavator, the late Lawrence Butler.

Chapter 1 explains the circumstances in which Faxton was chosen for study and sets the excavation in the context of the then prevailing widespread destruction of earthwork monuments in the name of agricultural efficiency. The landscape context and the medieval, post-medieval and modern history are presented in Chapter 2, while Chapter 3 examines the village earthworks and the few standing buildings, including the twelfth-century church which was completely demolished in 1958–59. The three chapters in the volume’s central part each describe an area excavated in one of the three summer seasons. Unfortunately, the archive is incomplete and to plug gaps in the 1966 and 1967 records Gerrard had to rely on Butler’s interim reports to the Deserted