

Cressing Temple in middle Essex is the former Templar manor – the earliest clearly dated of the Order’s rural possessions in England, acquired in 1137 – boasting two awesomely large and well-preserved timber-framed barns. The so-called Barley Barn dates, on robust dendrochronological evidence, to 1205x1230; the adjacent Wheat Barn to a half-century later. As has been said: ‘To those with an interest in timber-framed building, Cressing will always be a place of pilgrimage’. But, less narrowly, these buildings speak of the manor’s purpose in generating agricultural surplus and therefore income for the Order from the estate; they also speak of the skilled exploitation of local woodland to generate the raw materials for their construction (Oliver Rackham characterises the Barley Barn as, at the same time, representing ‘half a cathedral roof’ and both barns as marking the limit of what could be constructed using local oak trees without exceptional timber brought in). And, furthermore, they speak of design qualities paralleled on the contemporary continent and perhaps particularly characteristic of international monastic orders, like the Templars or Cistercians.

The site was bought by Essex County Council in 1987 to preserve these structures, but also – more ambitiously – to serve as a springboard for better understanding (and better conservation) of the buildings and landscape of the county. But, actually, we all have a stake, since enabling funding came from the National Heritage Memorial Fund, the European Commission and the state purse. Those ambitions were well served by a conference in 1992 and publication of its papers in 1993, which acted like a guidebook and a manifesto, and have been sustained by public access and educational use of the site. They are again well served by the present publication, which is appositely badged as a ‘2nd revised and enlarged edition’.

At first sight, this might seem something of a curate’s egg – containing re-published chapters from the original in monochrome alongside new and revised chapters, neatly typeset and with generous, informative colour illustrations. But, in practice, the reprinted original chapters by Pat Ryan, John Hunter, Tim Robey and the peerless Oliver Rackham are vital in setting out the basic documentation, the site’s archaeology, its place in the landscape and its management of resources. This edition’s centrepiece is a long, revised chapter that reports the results of new recording and new understanding of the two early Cressing barns, but in the helpful context of other examples locally in East Anglia and across southern England. Scrutiny of the early seventeenth-century building known as The Granary reveals it, at a primary level, to be a malting facility of considerable intrinsic interest. But also, importantly, it affords two other strands of insight: that in its recycling of timbers from a pre-existing late-medieval structure it may point to the nearby presence of the monastic manor house itself, plus that in its location and function it affords evidence about the post-Dissolution country house that is prominent in the documentary record of Cressing but doubtfully represented in its archaeology. Further oblique evidence about this ‘elephant in the room’ comes from carefully reported new work on both the farmstead’s latter-day farmhouse (shown to be a complex and accretive structure) and on the brick-walled

garden. Conjecturally, one might begin to apprehend a sequence whereby a medieval manor house was initially taken over as the residence of the new, well-to-do, secular owners, then substantially rebuilt. What, one wonders, would it look like if even the evidence now available were presented in the form of an account of the lost country house and gardens, as a discrete phase of the site’s archaeology?

Beyond the detail, the important and impressive thing here lies in the value of continuing, purposeful work over an extended period and in the context of careful conservation and sensitive site management – shades of the added value of the Group’s prolonged activity at Wharram Percy!

There is everything to admire about this publication, then, and about the sense of sustained purpose that lies behind it. For those interested in settlement and land-use, updating on new understanding of the parish and estate from the great deal of fieldwork that has no doubt taken place would be welcome. But perhaps that is for a ‘3rd revised and enlarged edition’!

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*The Victoria History of the Counties of England. A History of the County of Stafford: Volume XII. Tamworth and Drayton Bassett.* Edited by Nigel J. Tringham. 21 × 31 cm. xxiv + 275 pp, 182 b&w pls and figs, 4 tables. Woodbridge & Rochester NY: Boydell & Brewer for The Institute of Historical Research, 2021. ISBN 978-1-90435-652-3 (ISSN 1477-0709). Price: £95.00 hb.

What does the name Tamworth mean to a reader of this review? Perhaps not system-built maisonettes of pre-cast concrete for Birmingham overspill families, in estates that attracted the soubriquet ‘Colditz’ from their new inhabitants; nor a town once known as ‘Tetlograd’ after the influential planning consultant (John Tetlow) responsible for a range of the post-War developments there. Pevsner recalled that Daniel Defoe found Tamworth ‘a small but very handsome market town’ and commented, pithily, that ‘no one would say that now’; and when needing to lay out a perambulation he despaired: ‘which way is one to walk?’. Yet these large-scale developments completed the transformation of the small Midlands market town into a substantial conurbation, that was triggered essentially by the coming of the railways in the mid-nineteenth century. All this change is bread-and-butter to the latest VCH volume in its Staffordshire series: the expansion of the settlement is teased out and its phases illustrated by reference to buildings both surviving and lost; the political and practical and personal motivations that drove change forward are alluded to; and the administrative consequences detailed.

What then is there for those interested in medieval settlement here? The unusual fact, for one thing, that Tamworth – located topographically on the north bank of the point of confluence of the River Anker with the River Tame as it flows north into the Trent – was historically divided fairly precisely between the counties of Staffordshire and Warwickshire; and,

though it formed a pre-Conquest *burh* founded in 913 by Æthelflæd Lady of the Mercians, it was never a county town. Its large medieval church, dedicated to St Edith, lay (just) in the Staffordshire half and its castle with its liberty lay (just) in the Warwickshire half. Its citizens enjoyed burgage tenure in the later Middle Ages. Many of the surrounding townships in its large parish were named as ‘cotes’, thereby perhaps exhibiting a relationship and pattern of support to the town that fits a late pre-Conquest model which Chris Dyer has helpfully explored. Yet there is no Domesday Book entry for Tamworth – either as a single place or in two parts – to give an indication of whether it was truly urban by the 1080s. Its single church might suggest not, since the tenurial heterogeneity characteristic of mature urban development normally produced multiple ecclesiastical provision. Its castle was presumably the Conqueror’s; but, since it lacks any plausible bailey of a conventional sort, we might ask whether its bailey was initially the whole defended enclosure of the *burh*, as at Lincoln. We have very useful, well-informed accounts of both those buildings here; but such questions can tend to fall between the volume’s different sections as they concentrate on their own agenda.

The big question, moving backwards in time, must be ‘Why was Æthelflæd’s *burh* sited here?’ That might be formulated as ‘Did the burghal defences, as they have been encountered in excavation, follow and refurbish a distinctively earlier enclosure?’ or ‘Can we presume that the well-documented Mercian pre-Viking royal residence of *Tomtun* was the direct predecessor of Æthelflæd’s *burh*?’ The weight of previous opinion (i.e. Gould, Rahtz, Haslam, Bassett, Meeson) has answered both in the affirmative. This VCH account essentially confines itself to reporting views on this difficult question, but does properly acknowledge the doubts recently raised by Martin Carver, writing principally about nearby Stafford. Much information relevant to any fresh discussion of the issue can be found in these pages, although perhaps the volume’s thematic structure and organisation mean that such can be dissipated in various sections – on settlement, tenure, topography, etc. Confined to the town and one adjacent parish, too, the volume’s restricted scope may afford the wrong – i.e. too limited – framework for such a question.

This is volume XII in the VCH’s series on Staffordshire and the fifteenth published in the intended coverage. The enlightened interest and continuing sponsorship of Staffordshire County Council and Keele University that have brought the series so far place us greatly in their debt. But the notable landmark of this volume is its being the last of its diligent and resourceful editor, Nigel Tringham. It is a splendid end to a forty-year career.

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***A History of English Placenames and Where they Came from.*** By John Moss. 16 × 24 cm. xix + 388 pp, 10 b&w maps. Barnsley: Pen & Sword History, 2020. ISBN 978-1-52672-284-3. Price: £25.00 hb.

This is an excellent piece of work for anyone with more than a passing interest in English place-naming. It is of course not as comprehensive as the county publications of the English Place-name Society but is by no means lightweight. The primary audience will be those wishing to examine place-names more closely than simply in their local area.

It begins with a very useful glossary of terms – not a full dictionary but more than enough for the enthusiast or anyone with an academic interest – followed by a brief resumé of English history from prehistory to the Norman Conquest, the history and origin of place-names and their main elements. The last section of the Introduction covers land ownership and the social structures which gave rise to the naming conventions of each period.

Thereafter the country is dealt with in broad sections: North-east, North-west, West Midlands and so forth. Each section deals with a broad sample of name types, most of which are uncontroversial, though there were a couple of locations where I felt a slightly fuller explanation, if only a few extra sentences, would have added greatly. For example, the entry for Bawtry on the boundary of Yorkshire with Nottinghamshire, covers only one of the possible interpretations, whereas A.H. Smith (*The Place-names of the West Riding of Yorkshire, Part I: Lower & Upper Strafforth and Staincross Wapentakes*, Cambridge, 1961) details several. And Hagworthingham in Lincolnshire is considered to derive from a personal name *Hagubearde* but this interpretation is missing.

There are a few small issues which disappoint in the historical summary. The unquestioning acceptance of the idea of ‘invasion’ as an explanation of cultural change and the use of ‘Celt’ for the pre-Roman population may grate with some. Similarly, to suggest that Anglo-Saxon women ‘had few if any rights of land ownership’ is incorrect: in the will of *Leofflad*, wife of the *thegn* *Oswy*, she bequeathed land in her ownership to the church at Ely and *Wulfric Spott* left land to female relatives. That there are few examples is more likely a case of documentary survival: absence of evidence is does not constitute evidence of absence.

Although lacking a bibliography, happily the book has a comprehensive index – a rarity in many publications of late. Overall, my criticisms are minor issues which relate to only a few pages in a significant and otherwise well-researched piece of work: this is not a Gelling & Cole nor an Ekwall, nor is it intended to be, but it is a tidy detailing of place-names in England and their origins, both readable and generally quite comprehensive as a summary. I would recommend it to anyone with an interest in how we named our towns, villages and countryside.

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***Deer Parks of Suffolk, 1086–1602.*** By Rosemary Hoppitt. 18 × 25 cm. xvii + 331 pp, 128 colour and b&w pls, figs and tables. Needham Market: Suffolk Institute of Archaeology and History, 2020. ISBN 978-0-9521390-9-6. Price: £18.50 pb.