St Peter-on-the-Wall: Landscape and Heritage on the Essex Coast. Edited by Johanna Dale. 16 x 24 cm. xx + 389 pp, 81 colour and b&w pls and figs, 8 tables. London: UCL Press, 2023. ISBN 978-1-80008-436-0; epub: 978-1-80008-438-4. Price: £35.00 pb. Open access download available: https://www.uclpress.co.uk/products/211163

The cover of this volume immediately grabs the reader with an evocative aerial (drone?) view looking from coastal mudflats towards a flat, farmed landscape with intermittent hedge-lines, preceded by grazing-marsh and with a wooden observation tower for viewing local birdlife. On the margin between natural and farmed stands an isolated structure, namely the chapel of St Peter, whose construction dates back to the seventh century in the context of the progressive expansion of Christianity in Anglo-Saxon England. Key in this was the establishment of a set of churches as beacons of the faith in diverse former Roman sites, starting in Canterbury at the time of the Augustinian mission (promoted by Rome), and then with a notable installation of churches and monks in abandoned forts belonging to the late Roman 'Saxon Shore' network, which extended from Portchester in the south to Brancaster in Norfolk, and encompassing sites like Richborough and Reculver in Kent, and Walton Castle in Suffolk. St Peter's Chapel was inserted over a gatehouse at the 'central' fort of *Orthona* (called by Bede when writing in the 730s the *civitas* of *Ythancæstir*), near modern Bradwell-on-Sea in Essex, sited in the Dengie parish and facing the Blackwater Estuary. Bede relates, however, that the *Ythancæstir* foundation was led by St Cedd in 654 as part of a Northumbrian mission to the East Saxons; Cedd subsequently transferred, with 30 monks, to a northern base at Lastingham in Yorkshire. One argument holds that the extant chapel is in fact a 'second-generation church founded after 669, when Archbishop Theodore of Canterbury brought the kingdom of Essex under the influence of the Roman church emanating from Kent' (p.136). While the available archaeology is not sufficient to solve this argument, a seventh-century origin is not in doubt.

This remarkable building is both the focus and the launchpad for this publication which is far more than a contextualising of the early medieval monument; rather it seeks to highlight the place of the chapel and site in the modern world, the threats faced by it and its coastal setting, and local and wider engagements with this structure. Major marks of the modern in this seemingly tranquil part of Essex are the diverse, but often failed or semi-failed efforts at progress: mid-nineteenth-century plans at major land reclamation; a light-railway with piered supports proposed in 1901–02; plans drawn up in the 1960s for an airport-seaport at Foulness (with 18,000 acres of land required), but cancelled in 1974; and the selection of the Bradwell zone in the 1950s for a nuclear power station, which only ceased generating electricity early this century and is now 'a redundant hulk encased in aluminium, a state in which it must remain until at least 2083' (p.11). Alongside all this is the area's long-term military usage, from firing range to airfield and weapons-research facilities. A new threat has arisen: the proposed 'Bradwell B' (BRB) nuclear power plant, whose development site would extend to within 150 m of the ancient chapel. As editor and local resident Johanna Dale states, 'this book is a response to the public consultation launched by BRB in early 2020… [and] aims to establish an academic baseline around the [church] monument and the landscape surrounding it and to inform debate and policy around Bradwell B… [and] to be the catalyst for subsequent research leading to a more comprehensive understanding and appreciation…' (pp. xix, 2. The introduction provides full coverage of this 'contested landscape').

Dale has expertly marshalled a series of expert contributors (all working to produce during the rigours of the Covid pandemic) to what is an attractive, wide-ranging and hugely informative volume, divided into two main parts, each with seven papers/chapters. Part I considers 'St Peter's Chapel and its pre-modern contexts' and Part II the modern contexts. The latter kicks off with James Bettley recounting the chapel's rediscovery or rather recognition of it as an ancient place of worship behind its adapted use as a barn since the late seventeenth century; visits by members of the Essex Archaeological Society from 1864 onwards prompted speculation and then pride in identifying here St Cedd's foundation, and led to its careful restoration in 1919–20 (the paper has some great archive photographs). The chapel's saintly connections have led to diverse modern appreciations – from the creation in 1946 of the Orthona Community, an open Christian retreat and sanctuary, exploiting wartime Nissen huts and now sleeping yurts (Ch. 9 by Ken Worpole), to a modern pilgrim and heritage walk, St Peter's Way, started in the 1970s, now extended to commence from the famous wooden church of St Andrew at Greensted (Ch. 11 by Dale). Modern art and architecture are also linked to local landscape, space and memory in Chapters 12–14, whereas Gillian Darley (Ch. 10) explores the context of and diverse voices at the public inquiry for establishing Bradwell A nuclear power station in the mid-1950s.

Part I by contrast centres on the early medieval site and context: Andrew Pearson tidily discusses our understanding of the late Roman fort of *Othona* in terms of plan, construction, extramural activity and burials (Ch. 2); in Chapter 5, Richard Hoggett looks to *Othona* and other Saxon Shore forts that saw 'religious afterlives' and efforts to exploit the Romanised built landscape in the processes of Anglo-Saxon conversion; and in Chapter 6, David Petts extends discussion of early medieval monastic North Sea coastal colonisation to the value of contemporary seascapes. Barbara Yorke lucidly brings the figure of Cedd – and his brothers – into closer focus in the context of Northumbrian, Mercian and East Saxon religious politics and conflict, while highlighting Irish links too (Ch. 4). Of value is Stephen Rippon's careful reconstruction of the landscape setting of early medieval *Ythancæstir*, specifically the folk territory or *regio* of *Deningei*, using historic maps, place-names, parish boundaries, charters and archaeology (Ch. 3), while I very much appreciated the careful reading of the standing archaeology – plan, materials, architecture – of St Peter's Chapel itself by David Andrews in Chapter 1, reproducing the excellent stone-by-stone elevation drawings made by Jane Wadham in 1978.

Andrews notes (p.37) how St Peter's was superseded in the Middle Ages by St Thomas' church at Bradwell

village and likely lost both chancel and apse as a consequence, leaving the chapel to become an isolated building; striking then is its ongoing survival, aided much later by its agricultural conversion. The chapter by Kevin Bruce and Christopher Thornton (Ch. 7) does a thorough job in charting the missing medieval centuries, exploring evolving lands, owners, farms and fisheries, to which St Peter-on-the-Wall will have been a quiet, neglected witness.

NEIL CHRISTIE
School of Archaeology & Ancient History
University of Leicester

***Surveying the Domesday Book*.** By Simon Keith. 19 x 25 cm. xiv +153 pp, 7 b&w figures, 32 tables. Oxford & Philadelphia: Windgather Press, 2022. ISBN 978-1-91442-710-7; epub: 978-1-91442-711-4. Price: £34.99 pb.

The data-rich Domesday Book has been explored in many ways, from the detail of each entry to its meaning and intention. In this new publication, Simon Keith, a retired Chartered Surveyor, aims to study the timeframe for the creation and compilation of the Domesday Book (DB) from the viewpoint of someone who has first-hand experience of valuing land. Keith sets out at the start how he views the DB as a 'fiscal failure', since he sees the purpose as fiscal in nature, particularly looking at arable land. Although he acknowledges there would be secondary value in the information recorded, taxation was its key focus. As it was never used directly to gather the taxation, he therefore deems DB a failure.

This book is very much a personal journey, using the professional experience of a lifetime as a surveyor to seek to travel back into the mindset of the compilers of the DB. The structure follows the journey of setting forth on such an endeavour, looking at why it might have been undertaken, what it records, the method of valuation and the logistics of the survey. It reflects that the task of compiling the finished copy of the DB would have taken at least three years (against the more usual estimated time of a year). And these three years would have been for a re-evaluation of a current system – not starting from scratch, which supports the notion that Domesday was based on an already recorded system.

Some interpretations arise more from reflections on modern perspectives than from historical evidence. While discussing the purpose of the survey and how some scholars have dismissed it as a tax document, Keith notes 'I am that taxman… the survey provides me with exactly the three essential items of information that I would require for each manor' (p.22). Keith also notes that the lack of recording of buildings seems to have been a massive omission compared to modern taxation methods.

Although this provides a fresh approach to the DB by reflecting on current practice, transposing this back to eleventh-century England does not come without issues. The lack of a full understanding of various elements of medieval settlement and landscape makes some of Keith's assertions not as fully developed as they could be. While noting that much has been written on the DB, he does not consider all this much in detail, acknowledging that this would increase the length of his own publication considerably. However, without some of this material properly considered, the contested nature of the DB record cannot be appreciated. Thus, although often convincing in tone and experience, this book is certainly not the final word on – nor a wholly watertight reading of – the DB's compilation.

HELEN FENWICK
Department of History
University of Hull
Hull HU6 7RX

***A Vanishing Landscape. Archaeological Investigations at Blakeney Eye, Norfolk*.** By Naomi Field. 21 x 29 cm. ix + 226 pp, 109 colour and b&w pls and figs, 71 tables. Oxford: Archaeopress Publishing, 2021. ISBN 978-1-78969-840-4; epub: 978-1-78969-841-1. Price: £45.00 pb.

This well-illustrated volume reports on a series of archaeological excavations undertaken at Blakeney, north Norfolk, on behalf of the Environment Agency in advance of a policy of managed retreat along this stretch of coast. Within this area a notable feature was an extant building constructed of flint pebbles and known locally as 'Blakeney Chapel'; this formed the main target of later excavations.

Following the decision to allow coastal erosion to progress in this area, a programme of archaeological evaluation (comprising geophysical survey, 56 trial trenches and a borehole survey) was undertaken in 2002 –03. These surveys established that, in addition to the later medieval and post-medieval building activity on the Eye, Neolithic activity was evident. A stunning find during trial trenching – sadly a stray find, even if associated with a buried soil horizon (p.19) – was an early Anglo-Saxon bracteate, which adds to a gently growing corpus of these enigmatic finds, with possibly Kentish or Jutish links, from Norfolk (see A. Rogerson and S. Ashley 2023: 'A selection of finds recorded in Norfolk in 2022 and earlier', in *Norfolk Archaeology*, Second Series, Vol 1, pp.239–48, at p.255).

Subsequent excavation in 2004–05 targeted two areas: to the south, Area 1 identified Neolithic and Bronze-Age pottery, associated with several pits and postholes, indicative of settlement activity of an uncertain character; additional (probably residual) worked flints were recovered in Area 2 to the north, in association with an early land surface. The borehole surveys demonstrated that the early prehistoric coastal landscape comprised a ridge separated from the higher ground south of the saltmarsh by a freshwater channel, which later became tidal (p.208).

The main chunk of the fieldwork and artefact reports concern the results from the Area 2 excavation. Here, investigation around the noted extant flint building revealed an intriguing sequence, comprising fragmentary remains of a thirteenth- to fourteenth-century possible farmstead which was then replaced by the two-celled building of 'Blakeney Chapel' in the later sixteenth century. This structure, viewed by the excavators as most likely a secular structure, was occupied until the seventeenth century; at this point a