

terms ‘open hall’, ‘cross-wing’, ‘crownpost roof’ and ‘demesne’.

NEIL CHRISTIE
School of Archaeology & Ancient History
University of Leicester

Burton Dassett Southend, Warwickshire. A Medieval Market Village. (The Society for Medieval Archaeology Monograph 44). By Nicholas Palmer and Jonathan Parkhouse. 21 x 30 cm. xii + 250 pp, 164 colour and b&w pls, figs and tables. Abingdon & New York: Routledge & The Society for Medieval Archaeology, 2021. ISBN 978-1-032-43001-0; ebook 978-1-003-36527-3 (ISSN 0583-9106). Price: £34.99 pb.

30 years’ delay preceded publication of this very significant volume, but it was worth the wait. Non-stop excavation between May 1986 and September 1988 took full advantage of an abundant workforce supplied by the Manpower Services Commission and the landowner’s generosity in permitting sufficient time before construction of the M40 Oxford-to-Birmingham motorway extension, with results more closely resembling those of a research rather than a rescue project.

Supplemented by earthwork survey and a fieldwalking programme, a sample (c. 5,400 m²) of a well-preserved medieval village in the Warwickshire Feldon district was subjected to open-area excavation either side of an E–W street which may have served as a marketplace. Ten tenements with plans of 25 houses, many of which went through phases of expansion and adaptation, were recorded in great detail made possible by shallow, but largely undisturbed, stratigraphy. Walls were both timber-framed on stone sills and of stone up to eaves level. Numerous outbuildings served a variety of functions including a possible dog kennel, and some were constructed with earth-fast posts, even in the fifteenth century.

One of five settlements within the present parish of Burton Dassett, Southend was most closely associated with a weekly market and annual fair granted by charter in 1267. It soon gained a reputation as a commercial centre, as shown by its place-name Chipping Dassett, in use by 1295. Occupation had begun in the twelfth century but a first phase of laying out plots based on modules of the perch occurred in the early thirteenth, some time before the charter. After further phases of planned expansion towards the end of the century, the settlement reached optimum prosperity in the early fourteenth when it would have closely resembled a town. Slow decline set in during the fifteenth century, but occupied properties remained healthy and in a quite wealthy state until a sudden extinction through enclosure in 1497, resulting from collusion between the manorial lord and the lessee of the demesne.

Part 1 contains highly informative introductory chapters on the project’s aims and origins and on the geological, archaeological, historical and toponymic backgrounds of Burton Dassett. In Part 2, the excavation sequence unfolds – with remarkable clarity given the complexity of deposits – over almost 100 pages, with the aid of numerous well-chosen illustrations, maps, plans and photographs, but strangely without the use of any section drawings. Many are illustrated in the very

full online archives hosted by the Archaeology Data Service, and it is regrettable that none appears in hard-copy where the provision of a few would have afforded the reader more appreciation of the site’s triple dimensionality, an aspect so lacking on most rural sites. It is also unfortunate that no excavation of the E–W street was possible. A chapel, founded in the late thirteenth century, stands to the east of the main excavation. Details of its excavation and architectural recording in 2003 before conversion to a house are included here.

There is much worth reading in Part 3, which firstly deals with spatial organisation: plot and building layout, boundaries, yards, drainage, forecourts, streets, rubbish disposal and the distribution of various categories of objects. Following discussions on many aspects of the buildings, this part concludes with a summary of the metalworking residues from the one property interpreted as a smithy – important because it ‘was the first medieval site which was systematically sampled for hammerscale in Europe’.

Part 4 is equally useful, examining many aspects of everyday life and the economy through animal and plant remains, artefacts, agriculture, craft activities, trade and commerce. There follow stimulating discussions on the status of Chipping Dassett as an urban settlement, on why its market failed and on how and why the settlement rose and fell. In the conclusion, Part 5, the project’s results are set in context against changes in research directions taken by medieval archaeology since the late 1980s, and judgements are made on the degree to which the original research aims have been met. The final paragraphs, on ‘cautionary tales’ and future directions, should not be missed.

ANDREW ROGERSON
Great Fransham, Norfolk

The Victoria History of the County of Oxford: Volume XX. The South Oxfordshire Chilterns: Cavesham, Goring and Area. Edited by Simon Townley. 21 x 31 cm. xx + 509 pp, 8 colour pls, 117 b&w pls and figs, 1 table. Woodbridge: Boydell and Brewer for the Institute of Historical Research, 2022. ISBN 978-1-904356-54-7. Price: £95.00 hb.

The Victoria County History project was founded in 1899 as a national project to write the history of every English county. Its stated aims are, according to the website of its host the Institute of Historical Research in London, to produce ‘authoritative, encyclopaedic histories of each county, from the earliest archaeological records to the present day, as well as topics such as topography, landscape and the built environment’. Over the course of more than a century, the iconic red volumes have continued to appear. The series was re-dedicated in 2012 to Elizabeth II, whose death was announced late on 8 September 2022, only hours after the publication of the most recent red book, the two-part volume XX of the Essex County History, was tweeted by the IHR team. Though with many volumes still to be completed, the series is an established national treasure, the starting-point for any local history research and a much-used *vade mecum* thereafter.

Volume XX in the Oxford series is the seventh under