

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

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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.

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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

the editorship of Simon Townley; published in February 2022, following Volume XVIII (Ewelme Hundred) in 2016 and Volume XVI Henley and environs in 2011, it does not disappoint. Richly illustrated with 23 maps and plans, plus numerous photographs and drawings ranging across landscapes and a range of buildings ancient and modern (some no longer standing), as well as a wealth of original documents, it reveals what is distinctive about these still predominantly rural parishes and how they fit into the mosaic of surrounding parishes covered in other volumes. With the accounts of Shiplake, Eye and Dunsden and Caversham, it completes the account of Binfield Hundred begun in the noted Henley volume, thereby rounding off the account of an area of the pre-1974 south of the county situated in a large loop of the Thames, then the boundary with Berkshire, and straddling the south-west end of the Chiltern hills. With the exception of Caversham, now a populous suburb of Reading, Berkshire, most of the area covered lies within the Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. In the mid-nineteenth century it consisted of twelve, mostly long, thin 'strip' parishes, apart from rectangular Mapledurham, all of which bordered the Thames; for the most part, the parish churches lie near the Thames. All share the characteristics of nucleated riverside parish centres with hinterlands of scattered settlements in the wooded uplands of the hills, of predominantly agricultural economies, but with a significant role in woodland and associated crafts, while local industry included small-scale brickmaking and quarrying. With the advent of the railway from 1840, various of the pretty riverside villages attracted wealthy newcomers and associated building programmes in a gradual process of gentrification, most notably in Caversham, where ease of access to Reading via the Thames bridge saw incomers of a wider social range and a marked population increase.

Considerable boundary changes resulted in the early twentieth century, with some small parishes absorbed into larger ones (Newnham Murren, Mongewell and North Stoke are now part of Crowmarsh) and others splitting apart (Kidmore End and Caversham, Binfield Heath and Shiplake). The tale of these two halves is well-illustrated by the maps on pp.2 and 3, which contrast the twelve original strip parishes and their topography with the current seventeen civil parishes and their relative population densities. Caversham, with 12,894 households in 2011 far outstrips Goring at 1,375 households, and dwarfs Mapledurham's 317. Mapledurham is mapped on p.270; it was described as still a 'feudal' parish in the 1970s, having been held by the descendants of Sir Michael Blount since his purchase of the manor and most of the village in 1582; his son Sir Richard (d. 1628) completed the present Mapledurham House (Plate 5) – one of many fine buildings found within these parishes. Sir Richard's descendant Edward Eyston is the current owner. This line was one of a number of recusant Catholic families in south Oxfordshire, with others being the Moleyns of Mongewell, the Hildesleys of Crowmarsh, and the Stonors of North Stoke. Crowmarsh was one of the larger settlements, boosted by proximity to Wallingford and its bridge on the Berkshire side, the honour of which owned five of the twelve parishes, including Newnham Murren. The latter originated as part of a large estate granted to a tenth-century queen from the

royal manor of Benson, much of which was absorbed by the honour at one time or another. It was associated with quarrying and lime-burning from 1233 (when it probably supplied material for repairs to Wallingford Castle) until the 1920s; much gravel is still quarried in the area. It was also the home of the Wilder iron foundry, established on the site of a former farmstead by the church and based there until the start of this century. Today, the nearby Howbery Park estate, a nineteenth-century creation, is home to the UK Centre for Ecology and Hydrology and its very twenty-first-century concerns. Altogether, this volume is a fascinating and very welcome addition to the VCH stable.

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A History of Rowley-Wittenham. Deserted Medieval Village and Lost Parish. (Bradford-on-Avon Museum Monographs No 6). By Robert Arkell. 17 x 25 cm. 96 pp, 76 colour and b&w pls and figs, 10 tables. Bradford-on-Avon: Bradford-on-Avon Museum, 2022. ISBN 9781912020102. Price: £8.00 pb.

Overwhelmingly concerned with documentary sources, this lavishly illustrated small book leaves the presentation of the archaeological evidence for the deserted village of Rowley-Wittenham until page 73. Both understanding and interpreting the historical record are rendered more difficult by a boundary which shifts between Wiltshire and Somerset, the mutability of the place-names, the confusion of manorial tenures and the transference of the parish from Salisbury diocese to Bath and Wells in 1428. Problems are compounded by parts of the book's text which jerk from one historical topic to another, often losing the narrative thread in the process and voyaging along more than one tangential cul-de-sac. Despite many references to primary and secondary sources in the form of end-notes, it is sometimes unclear on what evidence a given statement is based. Similarly, some maps are inadequately captioned, and some boundaries they show are questionable.

An earthwork survey of the village site, conducted for a Bristol University MA dissertation in 1997, is reproduced along with LiDAR images, plots from two areas of resistivity survey and a photograph of a test-pit. Unfortunately, the relative positions of these are not correlated. More than one test-pit was excavated though none is located or described. By whom and for whom they (and the geophysical survey) were carried out is not stated. Beyond the plotting of rivers and streams on several maps, there is sadly little in the way of topographical description, while geology and soil types are not mentioned.

It would be quite mean-spirited not to suggest that this work is worth reading. Produced with great enthusiasm and touching on a huge variety of local subjects, it contains much that will interest students of medieval rural settlement in Wiltshire, Somerset and further afield.

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