

Recent research on the Medieval Archaeology of Leicestershire (Leicestershire Fieldworkers Monograph 3) edited by Kathleen E Elkin, 21 x 30cm. xi + 271pp, 152 b&w pls and figs, 7 tables. Leicester, Leicestershire Fieldworkers, 2015. ISBN 978-0-954820-02-2. Price: £20.00 pb (now reduced to £10 plus £3.50 p&p).

Review by Paul Stamper, Historic England, in: Medieval Settlement Research Group vol 31 (2016) published November 2016

Leicestershire's place in English local history and landscape studies is arguably unmatched, certainly for the study of the Middle Ages. To take but one example, it was to Leicestershire, to Hamilton, Ingarsby and Knaptoft that W. G. Hoskins brought a group of academics including M.W. Beresford, M.M. Postan and Graham Clark in 1948 to essentially validate an entirely new class of archaeological site – the deserted medieval village - and set in train the study of medieval settlement and landscapes using the evidence on and in the ground as a primary source alongside documents. This volume, assembled and published by Leicestershire Fieldworkers ("an active county archaeological society that helps individuals and small groups investigate the remains of past human activity by practical investigation, research and small-scale excavation' - p.v.), continues that proud tradition. At first sight it looks like something from the 1980s – a densely-packed A4 softback in black and white – but that notwithstanding, this compendium of 15 individually-authored papers is solid and extremely useful, with recent research underpinning what are generally subject overviews. It will no doubt be much referred to over the next 20 years or so.

With such collections, all a reviewer can do is flag some of the highlights. Nick Hill looks at secular buildings in the south-east of the county, where, on high-status sites such as manors, aisled halls fell out of favour in the thirteenth century in favour of ones with cruck or short principal roofs, which allowed a floor space free of thumping great posts. Houses of the ordinary type do not survive in any great numbers until around 1450, when, for a century or more, large numbers of substantial, cruck-framed (shall we say) yeoman's houses went up – a phenomenon noted in other parts of lowland England and indicative of late medieval prosperity for families of push and go. Castles and moats are catalogued by Richard Knox, with Leicester Castle being among the sites discussed in Richard Buckley's treatment of medieval Leicester. Several contributions assess the county's religious heritage: Graham Jones looks at territories and ecclesiastical origins, Peter Liddle at religious houses, Matthew Godfrey and Mike Hawkes at church archaeology, and Bob Trubshaw at 'Project Gargoyle'.

Some of the richest chapters treat the rural landscape. Anthony Squires gives an overview of the complex geography of Leicester Forest's woods and parks, whilst Robert F Hartley briskly summarises the evidence for the nationally significant coal mining remains in the north-west Leicestershire coalfield, with five scheduled areas of mine remains at Coleorton. In one of the volume's meatier papers, Tony Brown analyses a number of open field systems in parishes north-west of Market Harborough; this essay will serve as useful primer for anyone new to the complexities of medieval land allotment and management, as well as offering interesting contributions to ongoing debates about when, how and why open fields came about (something also touched on by Graham Jones who notes ecclesiastical boundaries 'zig-zagging' through open-field furlongs).

But among much that is of value and of interest and relevance beyond Leicestershire, it is Chris Dyer's introductory paper 'New thinking about medieval settlement, and its relevance

for Leicestershire' (pp.1-11) which stands out. Actually there is not much that is 'new' *per se*, but what this does provide is a concise and easily absorbed overview (the best available) of recent thinking about the chronologies, causes and effects of settlement change over almost a thousand years. Much, of course, of this new thinking has been by Dyer himself, and as well as looking back over the past 30 years or so he foregrounds (as they say in seminar rooms!) some more recent areas of study: peasant material culture; local identity; and the gendering of space. All very exciting, but let's not think for one moment (and in no way does Dyer suggest this), that we have solved all the old questions about village origins, planned villages, the peasant house, or settlement decay and desertion. Here too there still remain more questions than answers.

Review by David Stocker, University of Leeds, in: Medieval Archaeology July 2016, vol 60(1) p191.

Throughout the 1980s, a visit to Leicester's Jewry Wall Museum was incomplete without acquiring the latest of the indispensable, inexpensive, but professional booklets on Leicestershire's archaeology. City and county restructuring eventually terminated the series, but the archaeologists themselves (Liddle, Squires, Hartley and others) worked on, keeping us informed in other ways, and now this important new volume brings us up to date.

The volume reports on the considerable advances in the county's medieval archaeology since 1990 and, for that reason alone, would be welcome. But the quality of many of these new analyses make it doubly so. Particularly worthy of notice are papers by Jones (who attempts to set church distributions against competing theories of settlement and ownership); Hill (seeking broader patterns within vernacular building types); and Brown (offering an important study of ridge and furrow ploughing). Dyer's canny introduction traces the development of recent medieval settlement studies using Leicestershire examples, complementing the nicely judged foreword by Michael Wood. Squires offers an excellent account of the development of Leicester forest, based on mapping and documentation, while Hartley's outstanding contribution is a rare piece of medieval coal mining, based on extensive watching brief undertaken at Coleorton (1988-92). Buckley's summary of Leicester's urban archaeology since c 1990 is masterly in its synthesis of a myriad of results into a substantial narrative – this will now become the go-to overview account of medieval Leicester. Liddle helpfully reviews the county's monastic sites – with gazetteer – and Knox does the same for 'fortified sites'. We also have papers by Thomas (on settlement excavations); Scott (on a recent bracteate find); Godfrey and Hawkes and Trubshaw (on church archaeology); and Monckton offers a very accessible piece on archaeobotany and archaeozoology in Leicester, while Jacklin adds a well-considered piece on palaeopathology based on the population from St Peter's cemetery.

Many pages of the volume are devoted to bibliography – a good thing, of course – but surely much more room could have been made for further articles or images had the point-size for this been reduced (making it more attractive too)? Similarly reducing point-size might also have avoided so many blank pages! More frustrating is the lack of an index, which is desperately needed in such a valuable reference work. Yet, although it could have been better presented, this is an impressive and important volume, and not just to those interested in Leicestershire. Many of these papers deserve a wide readership.