
Reviews

Alison Taylor and Tony Kirby

Durobrivae: a Roman town between fen and upland
Garrick Fincham 2004
Tempus Publishing 192 pp £17.99 pb

Durobrivae (Water Newton) was a town of considerable regional importance which, unusually, avoided development in later periods, as settlement moved across the river to Peterborough. Preservation is therefore excellent, and evidence from early excavations, aerial photography and (we have to admit it) metal-detecting is outstanding. Recent excavations and fieldwork outside the walled area, principally by the Nene Valley Research Committee and the Fenland Survey, have provided massive evidence for settlement, industry (notably the nationally important pottery industry), military and religious activity, burial, transport etc.

Starting as an extra-mural vicus outside a small fort, the town developed an irregular street pattern in the early 2nd century and was walled (why? Local pride really is not much an answer considering what we now know of Roman administration) in the late 2nd or 3rd century, then contracted and was perhaps abandoned in the 4th. Its principal importance to archaeologists must surely be its pottery industry, though iron production, its position as the centre of a mosaic school, and its high level administrative significance are all exceptional. The town itself is mostly a scheduled monument where excavation is avoided, so the book concentrates on its suburbs and the area around, especially the Fens. He dismisses (in my view, with little good evidence) the imperial estate and other modern interpretations of Roman political geography.

Unfortunately, rich archaeological evidence seems to be deliberately downgraded in favour of a landscape based approach that works well in some areas but is disappointing in this context. The area suffers from a lack of fully published excavation reports, though those that exist are under-used and could have reasonably been amplified by data from sites and monuments records, popular series, and the rashly-dismissed 'grey literature'. Where he suffers too is from a lack of illustrations of artefacts in museums, which may not be his fault. There is for example only one unrepresentative flask from the stunning Water Newton treasure

(the most important Christian hoard from Britain), a few sherds of Nene Valley pottery, and none of the important figurines and military equipment or mosaics are represented. Important resources of aerial photographs, not to mention excavations in progress, have also been omitted. It is disappointing to have a book of this nature produced that does so little justice to the wealth of evidence gathered by many scholars and field-workers who have studied the region

Alison Taylor

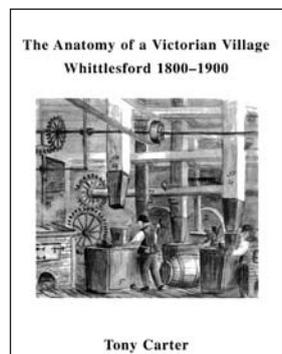
The Anatomy of a Victorian Village: Whittlesford 1800–1900.

Tony Carter 2004

Whittlesford Victorian Group, xi + 158 pp £15 (inc p & p) from Jack Sutcliffe, 34 Maynards, Whittlesford, Cambridge CB2 4PN

In spite of its proximity to the M11, the A505 and the Cambridge–Liverpool Street railway line, Whittlesford remains one of Cambridgeshire's most attractive villages. Thanks to Nathan Maynard (1806–63) and his son George Nathan (1829–1904) it is also one of its best documented. Nathan was a minor entrepreneur, owning shops in Whittlesford and Duxford and kept a detailed diary of local events and personalities. George Nathan continued and expanded this, collecting documents relating to Whittlesford and surrounding villages. He sold the shops in 1873 and, after a brief period in London and on the strength of an established reputation as an antiquarian, became curator of Saffron Walden Museum. He remained here for the rest of his life. In later years, his material was put into scrapbooks, most of which are in the Cambridgeshire CRO although some material remains in Saffron Walden.

George Nathan's methods would appal modern



archivists. He thought nothing of pasting documents into the scrapbooks: but without this and his careful transcriptions, much of Whittlesford's history would have been lost. It was from the scrapbooks, and other sources, that Tony Carter (a long-time Whittlesford resident and a geographer by profession) set out on this ambitious reconstruction of the topography, economy, society and mores of the community in the 19th century. Sadly, he died before seeing the fruits of his work, but thanks to Tony Cartwright, Jack Sutcliffe and Pat Carter, who undertook the necessary editorial work, we have a unique insight into the life of a Victorian village.

There are four sections. The first describes the landscape of Whittlesford down to Enclosure and helps explain why any walk from the centre of the village produces a variety of ecologies. The second looks at village life and social organisation. The strength of nonconformity is evident: half the population were Baptists in 1825 and in 1897 two-thirds were Dissenters. The poverty and deprivation that were the lot of most Victorian villagers are well described, together with the efforts the better-off could make when faced with a real crisis, such as the 1871/2 smallpox outbreak: thanks to a makeshift isolation hospital, there were no fatalities.

Part 3 looks at both the leading players on the village stage, the Hollick-Tickells, Raynors, Thurnalls and the Maynards themselves, and the cast of tradesmen and workers. Like most Victorian villages, Whittlesford was well supplied with local goods and services. It also had an agricultural engineering works, owned by another branch of the Maynard family, although many, especially women, were employed in the paper and leather works at nearby Sawston.

The final section is two guided tours of the village, in 1841 and 1881. Here we find out where families with whom we became familiar earlier in the book lived and worked: anyone who has ever tried to repopulate a 19th century village from census and directory material can only marvel at how well this has been achieved. The village was already changing in 1881: some old families had died out or emigrated, although the small settlement at Whittlesford Bridge had grown rapidly since the arrival of the railway in 1845. A walk around modern Whittlesford acquires a new dimension thanks to these chapters and accompanying maps.

Completing Tony Carter's work was 'a tribute to a man who did so much for the village he loved'. A fitting tribute indeed: the book deserves to become a classic of local history.

Tony Kirby

Stonea and the Roman Fens.

Tim Malim 2005

Tempus Publishing 272pp £19.99

This ambitious work is more broadly spread than the title offers, though long-overdue discussions of Stonea Camp (an Iron Age fort near March) and an update of

the extensive work undertaken (partly by the author) on the Roman Fens should provide a sufficient challenge. Tim Malim worked for the Fenland Survey and then for several years for the County Council, where he surveyed, excavated and organised management of many archaeological sites, especially those owned by the County, foremost of which was Stonea Camp.

The book begins with a round up of the background to studies of the Fens in the 19th and 20th centuries, followed by a review of the distinctive prehistoric evidence, including comparisons with other Iron Age forts. These comparisons extend into adjoining uplands, including discussion of Cambridgeshire's unusual circular forts, such as Wandlebury. This background to Iron Age tribal boundaries is necessary before we begin to understand this low-lying multi-phased fortification which, by 1980, was little more than white marks in the bare fen soil of autumn.

The centrepiece of the book is the author's excavation and management work on the fort itself, and the British Museum's extensive excavations of the Roman town that adjoins it. Discussions include how the town fits into a pattern of state intervention. Also included is Michael Green's (to my mind) convincing alternative explanation of the famous Stonea tower as a Roman-Celtic temple, with similarities for example at Godmanchester. The later history of Stonea saw its use in the Civil War, and there is a sad account of its fate due to the barbarous agricultural subsidy system of the 1960s.

Military metalwork from Stonea.



There is a useful round up of evidence for Roman roads in the Fens, incorporating (and illustrated by) much new evidence from excavations across the region. Ben Robinson's aerial photographs are an invaluable addition to this discussion, as to much of the book, and give a superb impression of the Fen landscape. Other discussions cover Durobrivae, seen as intricately connected with colonisation and exploitation of the fens, the economy (again drawing on much recently excavated material), and the first publication of some new evidence for Christianity in Cambridgeshire. The author then goes beyond his remit to discuss Anglo-Saxon settlements, dykes and cemeteries, all topics that were producing impressive new evidence in the years he was working in Cambridgeshire.

Alison Taylor