
Reviews

Malcolm Underwood, Paul Spoerry, Debby Banham

An Intimate History of the Parish of St Clement in Cambridge, 1250–1950

T. E. Faber 2006

Cambridge: Privately published, xxiv, 956pp.

Tom Faber's explorations of the history of his neighbourhood began with the unravelling of a mystery about his own house, thought from the seventeenth century to have been a house for chantry priests of St Clement's, and later called The Old Vicarage, both without firm historical evidence. His characteristically restless quest for the truth of its history led gradually to a consuming interest in the buildings and people of the whole parish, resulting in a fascinating panoramic study of the area which, with its appendixes, indexes, and plans of tenements, is nearly a thousand pages long. After an introductory tour of the parish as it was in 1886, the book moves on to examine its topography through the history of blocks of holdings in its various sectors: the Church and its surroundings, Quayside with its wharves and warehouses, the settlement around Thompson's Lane, and the commercial area of Bridge Street. A third section, the longest in the book, called 'People' tells the story of families of the parish as they appear in a wide range of published and unpublished sources.

The history's biographical emphasis reminds one of another great study of parish identity: Richard Gough's *History of Myddle*, written in 1700–01 but not published until 1834. Gough started from the named family pews in the parish church, a circuit of which was the cue for a wealth of anecdotal detail about their owners, and hence about sixteenth and seventeenth century village life. Tom's analysis, however, is far from anecdote, although it contains some highly entertaining personal stories. It reveals his tireless scientific bent for arriving at accurate detail, through comparing the terms of deeds of properties, rentals, surveys and tax lists found in a number of Cambridge colleges and in public collections. All of this was accompanied by attempts at systematic mapping of tenements, showing graphically how the balance of acquisition altered among the various families. Tom's sense of precision was often frustrated by a continual need to revise

layouts, based on the sometimes ambiguous evidence of boundaries in medieval and later deeds.

Indeed, ambiguity both in the realm of topographical data and in weaving strands of personal information into a satisfying whole presented Tom with his greatest difficulty. The research for an informative passage (p. 123) on the brewing trade that flourished in the neighbourhood of the present Thompson's Lane was complicated by uncertainty about the succession of tenants, and about the way in which businesses shared the land. Nevertheless we now know much more about who managed this trade and how the river water was piped and pumped to support it. Similarly, the reconstruction of families and careers, especially in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries, was subject to occasional conjecture due to lack of firm identification. Yet the accumulated details of these holders of land, messuages and civic offices, and of the alliances between their families, which emerge in such a prosopographical study, also provide valuable raw material for studying the economy and government of the town.

At Tom's death in 2004 the legacy of his unpublished materials, in an almost finalised state for a history of the parish, presented both an inspiration and a challenge. The situation was splendidly resolved by the initiative of his widow Elisabeth in pressing forward with publication, and by the work undertaken by Laura Naplin in order to realise that goal. It is an effort that will be enormously appreciated by anyone interested in the development of the town of Cambridge.

*Malcolm Underwood
St John's College, Cambridge*

Between Broad Street and the Great Ouse: Waterfront Archaeology in Ely

Craig Cessford, Mary Alexander and Alison Dickens 2006

Cambridge: Cambridge Archaeological Unit, East Anglian Archaeology volume 114. 118pp. £12.00
ISBN-10 0 9544824 3 3, ISBN-13 978 0 9544824 3 5.

This monograph is the second volume to appear in recent years describing developer-funded excavations carried out by the Cambridge Archaeological Unit in the city of Ely. The authors are to be congratulated on achieving publication quickly; this is a necessary addition to the bookshelf, being only the second publication to detail modern-style excavations in the lower town.

This volume is principally the publication of excavations at Jewson's Yard, which readers might be familiar with from the Time Team programme that detailed their progress over several months during 2000. It also describes a watching brief on large-scale development at the former Tesco's site and it reviews a number of smaller investigations, also between Broad Street and the river. This group of sites together form a sizeable part of the riverside zone of medieval Ely and there is much sense in bringing them together for consideration.

The sequence at Jewson's Yard is presented across five temporally-defined chapters that for the most part clearly elucidate the changing nature of activity on the site from the eighth to the seventeenth centuries. The exception to this is the first phase described in chapter 2. Editorial control fell away here and the difference in start date presented on the volume contents page (from mid-eighth century) when compared with that of the Chapter heading itself (ninth century) points to the uncertainties of dealing with only a tiny sample of the potential landscape of this period. Two trenches totalling perhaps 30 square metres revealed Middle to Late Saxon features of type and apparent density that could only be evidence for occupation. The authors rightly make this suggestion, based also on the important group of Ipswich ware sherds and the early ninth-century coin found here. The chapter is less than two pages long. This evidence is important, but it is depressing that only such a small window into this phase of activity was given. We are fortunate that the site for the most part now remains as parkland, as implicit in these findings is the potential for a much large survival of Middle Saxon occupation remains in this area of the waterfront. Chapter 2 thus can only hint at an opportunity that has yet to be taken.

Following a period of abandonment due, presumably, to worsening local environmental conditions, activity recommenced in earnest in the late twelfth century. Chapter 3 details the excavation of part of an aisled structure, unfortunately introduced as a 'hall' as it is later interpreted as most probably a 'barn'. This inconsistency betrays the limited extent of the structure observed through excavation but, nonetheless, the authors have done a good job in giving the context of this building, and some boundary/drainage

ditches to the south-east of it, in terms of an emerging picture of the lower town's plan development. A single large 'tank' probably represents the storage of live fish, something that is well attested in documents relating to the waterfront area. The most valuable contributions here are, however, the sections summarising material culture (principally pottery) and environment and economy, strangely also incorporated under the former heading. Here, for the first time in Ely, new assemblages, when added to previously published data, have started to map out differences and similarities across the town that offer real insight into animal husbandry and product processing, into utilisation of Fenland resources and into the supply and usage of pottery vessels.

Chapter 4 follows a similar pattern, charting the appearance of later buildings near the Broad Street frontage, which include an aisled hall of fourteenth-century date for which much ground preparation was made. The central part of the site witnessed a continuation of property/water-management boundaries and an increase in the number of 'fish tanks'. The riverside initially saw little activity beyond seasonal flooding, but by the end of the fourteenth century two channels had been dug perpendicular to the riverbank, which were created to allow small craft to be brought into these properties and loaded and unloaded safely and easily. This form of fenland 'hithe' and spur canal or lode has a number of regional parallels, which the authors draw attention to, and these are certainly the first excavated examples to be published properly. Again, ignoring oddly organised headings, environment, economy and material culture are well served by a substantial set of thoughtful syntheses.

The remains detailed in Chapter 5 bring together the themes of riverside, canals and craft activity in the description of a sixteenth-century pottery production site complete with kilns, puddling pits and workshops lying at the end of three channels, serviced by lifting gear. Part of an adjacent tannery was also excavated. We have known for decades that there was sixteenth- to seventeenth-century blackware or Cistercian-type ware production at Ely (known as Babylon ware), and the medieval products of local potters are now also becoming well understood. Nonetheless the gritty and fine redware, bichrome redware, whiteware and 'Babylon' products of this sixteenth-century site had not been entirely predicted. Now defined and described, these products can be recognised elsewhere and the authors rightly point to their presence in other published assemblages, including the previous definition of the bichrome redware as 'West Norfolk bichrome' at King's Lynn. Two phases of production during the sixteenth century were revealed and the authors have done an excellent job in defining and describing this important pottery producer, and placing it in the context of ceramic studies, relating it to available documents concerning the riverside properties in the post-medieval period, and to the wider industries and economy of Ely and the Isle.

A final temporally-defined chapter provides more insight into seventeenth-century and later phases of pottery production, including the detailing of a sizeable slipware waster group, alongside a comprehensive discussion of horn working and tanning remains.

The final chapter is unsurprisingly the 'meat' of the volume and here for the first time a model of the development of Ely's medieval and post-medieval waterfront is constructed from excavated archaeological evidence. Previously only landscape and documentary data have been available. The authors here stand squarely behind their assertion, first made in Chapter 3, that the canalisation of the Great Ouse must have occurred in the twelfth century, and not perhaps in the tenth century, which has previously been suggested. All the development and activity that the volume documents stems from this point, temporally, economically and in landscape terms. This is then fleshed out in their discussion, which is wide-ranging and substantial, in particular in its consideration of the evidence for trade and industry. Here, for the first time, we are given a real archaeologically-derived picture of this emerging settlement that eventually becomes a town, but which, in common with many fenland places, exhibits a confusing set of attributes, both rural and urban, throughout its evolution.

Overall, in this very worthwhile volume there is much that is useful to the specialist pottery researcher, student of medieval archaeology and also for those with an interest in the archaeology of Ely and the Fenland generally. It is most definitely a recommended read. A few editorial oddities aside, its only major weakness is that this strong thesis is derived from the set-piece excavation of one site only, all the other evidence being gleaned from a ragbag of observations and recording exercises in this part of town. Future researchers might therefore give those of this generation two cheers only for their efforts: finally we have quality excavated evidence in the lower town at Ely, but opportunities may well have been missed to achieve a more comprehensive view.

Paul Spoerry
CAM ARC

Lords and Communities in Early Medieval East Anglia

Andrew Wareham 2005

Woodbridge: The Boydell Press ISBN 1 84383 155 4, pp. xix, 185. £45

This book was written in response to the report by English Heritage *Power of Place: The Future of the Historic Environment*, and in particular to its call for regional case studies. To a great extent, it is a study of aristocratic families; and readers, even those familiar with the early Middle Ages, may be surprised to discover how much can be known about individuals and their relationships, both to other people and to the districts where they lived and held land, in the tenth and eleventh centuries. A central theme of the book, which might be deduced by astute readers from the period covered, but is not immediately obvious from the title, is the idea of a 'feudal transformation'. The scholarly context, largely continental, of this idea, is set out in the introduction; as Dr Wareham points out, scholars working on England have tended to associate the origins of feudalism with the Norman Conquest, and not to look further back for changes that might be relevant. A regional focus allows him to look at how such changes might have worked in practice, by examining how aristocratic families related to each other, to those above and below them in society and, crucially in East Anglia, to ecclesiastical institutions.

Readers from Cambridgeshire and Huntingdonshire will be pleased to know that both counties are included in Dr Wareham's East Anglia; he does not confine himself to the ancient kingdom of the East Angles. His book contains a good deal of interesting local information, and features some characters who will already be familiar to many readers. The very first chapter deals with the dynasty of Ealdorman Æthelwine and the foundation of Ramsey Abbey. Chapter 2 is a companion piece on the refoundation of Ely in the tenth century and the family of Wulfstan of Dalham, a useful corrective to the usual emphasis, based on the *Liber Eliensis*, on the role of Bishop Æthelwold. The next chapter is concerned with two more patrons of Ely, Ælflæd, the widow of Ealdorman Byrhtnoth, the tragic hero of the battle of Maldon, and her sister Æthelflæd, and the fourth with Byrhtnoth's own family and their donations to Ely. Benefactions to both Ely and Ramsey also feature in Chapter 5, in this case those of emerging 'gentry' class, people who were of thegnly rank, but whose interests did not extend beyond their home region. Later chapters focus mainly on other counties, but reveal for instance that the biggest landowners in Cambridgeshire and Huntingdonshire also held extensive estates in the other eastern counties (Chapter 8). This applies both to those who held lands all over the country and to those whose interests were purely regional. The importance of royal influence, frequently operating through patronage of the Church, also emerges clearly. Another interesting phenomenon is the development during this period of little 'central places', with both markets and churches adjacent to lords' residences.

It cannot be pretended, unfortunately, that this book is an easy read. It is in the nature of the case-study format that it is heavy with data, and, because the author uses each case study to test a particular hypothesis about the 'feudal transformation', it is heavy with theory as well. Nonetheless, the effort of grappling with the data, and even the theory, will reward readers with some fascinating insights into society in our counties at a crucial stage in its development. And writers of more popular works will find a good deal here that would be worth disseminating to a wider audience.

*Debby Banham
Department of History and Philosophy of Science,
University of Cambridge*