

## BOOK REVIEWS

*From Wool to Cloth: The Triumph of the Suffolk Clothier.* By Nicholas R. Amor. xx + 282pp., figures, plates, glossary, bibliography, index. Bungay: RefineCatch Ltd, 2016. ISBN 978 09955085 0 7. Price: £20 hb.

Everybody knows that that late medieval Suffolk was prosperous, after all visible proof is displayed in its splendid ‘wool churches’. In this meticulously researched book Nicholas Amor discusses the reasons for that prosperity and, of course, emphasises that it was woollen cloth, rather than wool *per se*, that financed those memorials built in stone.

Surviving medieval sources are varied rather than numerous, so historians need to devise ways to tease out information from the available documents. Supplemented by the ‘usual’ records for the medieval woollen industry – wills, taxation lists, alnage accounts, borough and manor records – the main sources used here are the plea rolls of the Court of Common Pleas at Westminster, which record private litigation: 70–80 per cent of pleas were debt actions for sums ranging from 40s to thousands of pounds. Since pleas stated names, places of residence and occupation of the defendants and of most complainants, analysis of the rolls provides details of cloth-workers and clothiers in medieval England and Wales.

Although the book focusses on the intensively industrialised hundreds of Babergh and Cosford, the late medieval industry there is contextualised by considering the English medieval cloth industry and influential factors such as physical geography, weather, technology, trade and society. One striking change over time was the decline of urban industry in the face of competitors in the countryside. The reasons for this ‘tortuous translocation’ (p. 52) have been much debated, and are outlined here. In an aside, using details from his plea rolls database, Amor debunks the gloomy picture of late medieval Coventry as a ‘desolate city’ (pp. 28–30). Whether Flemish weavers were present and thus influenced the cloth trade has also been discussed much. Amor explains the debate in terms of ‘where and when you look’: in the fifteenth century most Suffolk aliens gravitated to the coast, where there was only limited cloth-making (pp. 85–87). Summarising chapters 1 and 2, Amor considers why the Suffolk clothier ‘triumphed’. He concludes that although Suffolk enjoyed all of the general factors encouraging production – such as agricultural workers needing to supplement their incomes, established textile centres able to pass on skills, lords supportive of the development of textile industries on their manors – these were not exclusive to the county. It was the burgeoning overseas demand for the product; an unusually dense network of markets; relatively fast transport links by river, sea and land; good credit links with London merchants (as indicated in the plea rolls); and ‘the local presence of just enough Flemish weavers and other overseas cloth-workers to help them keep tabs on the latest continental fashions’ (p. 88).

Having established the superiority of the Suffolk cloth trade, the author discusses material aspects of the Suffolk cloth business: wool and the wool trade, cloth production, cloth finishing and the clothier’s role. Two types of cloth were produced: those involving ‘wet’ treatment of the wool (broadcloths, kerseys and straits) and ‘dry’ draperies (worsted). Different processes necessary for producing the two types of cloth are explained lucidly and in detail, drawing on a wide range of sources, and illustrated using contemporary artefacts, miniatures in manuscripts (a spinning wheel; and a narrow loom) and even a misericord (a woman carding wool, in St Andrew’s church, Norton). Amor brings the industry’s success story to life by examining the lives of the workforce, drawing out stories from litigation in the plea rolls and from surviving wills. Most Suffolk cloth-making was carried out in the river valleys, since water was of particular importance in fulling and dyeing, and the rivers provided

access to east coast ports (p. 136); but there was one important textile town without riverine access to those ports: Bury St Edmunds. In 1477 Bury's weavers were granted new ordinances by the abbot; their principal products were bedding and coverlets, which required a broader than usual loom and a ready supply of worsted yarn (p. 140). Amor calculates the number of weavers and fullers active in Suffolk recorded in the plea rolls in 20-year periods (Fig. 4:2); when compared with the figures in Appendix B, the prominence of Suffolk is clear. These medieval rural industries were very labour intensive, and those involved in cloth-making processes worked long and hard: 'The spinster walked many miles to turn her spinning wheel. The weaver endured long hours in the back-breaking tasks of throwing the shuttle and beating the weft. The fuller spent his day wading up to his waist in noxious liquids' (p. 165).

Woven cloth needed to be finished: chapter 5 outlines the processes of dyeing and shearing, and includes details of the various dyes available and how different shades were achieved. The work of the shearer napping the cloth was critical – and it could take five days to shear each side three or four times with four to seven nappings per shearing (p. 185). Evidence from the plea rolls indicates that there were far fewer dyers and shearers in Babergh and Cosford: Amor argues that this indicates that many Suffolk cloths were exported, or sent to London, unfinished. Although the 'Suffolk clothier' of the title was 'a new beast in the commercial jungle' (p. 217), there was a variety of 'clothiers', with a range of activities and wealth, the richest having much contact with London. And they were not 'capitalists' in the sense of investing heavily in technology – they relied on outworkers to produce yarn, to weave cloth, full, dye and shear it – but they did buy the wool, organise and pay a small army of workers and dispose of the cloth produced.

And the reason for the boom in Suffolk textiles? Bad weather had 'increased the demand for warm, heavy broadcloths' (p. 59). Every cloud ...

HEATHER FALVEY

*Medieval Lowestoft: The Origins and Growth of a Suffolk Coastal Community.*

By David Butcher. xvii + 370pp., maps, plates, glossary, bibliography,

index. Woodbridge: The Boydell Press, 2016. ISBN 978 1 78327 149 8. Price: £50 hb.

Together with Bob Malster, David Butcher has carried the flag for Lowestoft heritage for several decades. As scholar and extra-mural tutor he has made an impressive contribution to the town during a difficult period in which its economic fortunes have waned. His volume on early modern Lowestoft was well received and helped establish him as an authority on that period.

His latest offering contains much of interest to those wanting to know more about the local history of the town. Beginning with the Anglo-Saxons he takes the story through to the late sixteenth century with chapters on the settlement's roots, post-Domesday developments, the relocation of the township, fishing and associated activities, misdemeanour and mishap in Kirkley Roads, St Margaret's parish church and the early to mid sixteenth-century community.

This volume is full of golden nuggets of information. Butcher makes use of the late thirteenth-century Hundred Rolls which fortuitously survive for Lothingland in which Lowestoft is situated. The surnames of tenants provide valuable clues to the topography of the old settlement before it moved to its present cliff-top location. Roger of the Bridge supervised the crossing of the causeway at the meeting point of Lake Lothing and Oulton's mere. Margaret of the Stonegate probably lived close to Steyngate Way, which had once been a Roman road. Richard of the Woodhouse may have been custodian of the scarce manorial

woodland. The later relocation of town was crucial to its future development as a fishing and maritime centre. Possible reasons for this relocation are addressed in detail and include the grant of a market and fair, rising sea levels and tidal surges, and the need for more space to accommodate a growing population.

Butcher traces the long-standing commercial rivalry between Lowestoft and Great Yarmouth and examines the pinch points, such as the extent of the latter's 'liberty of water'; whether herring was a staple product or merely a form of victual; and the true definition of the term 'league' – was it one mile or two? He also assembles the entries in the published medieval calendars relating to Kirkley Roads to give an impression of the ships and cargoes that ventured across this treacherous stretch of water. Butcher is at his best when discussing Lowestoft's fishing industry, a subject clearly close to his heart. He provides a fascinating explanation as to why cod were called 'stockfish'. In Iceland, which became a popular destination for deep-sea fishermen of various nationalities, it was customary to tie split cod by the tail and leave them to dry on poles. The Dutch word for pole was 'stok' and the name soon stuck.

His chapter on the parish church and its benefactors is illuminating. Katherine Wylton, a successful shopkeeper, was prominent among them. Her testamentary generosity extended to pregnant poor women who were to receive bequests of bed linen. The role of religious guilds in the life of the church is also examined. A banner stave locker in the north-west corner of the nave stored the rods that they used to carry their ceremonial banners in procession.

Unfortunately, for serious students of the fortunes of medieval towns, this volume has two major flaws to which Butcher candidly admits in his preface. The first is that 'the necessary variety of documentary sources with which to create a rich and complex reconstruction of life at the time does not exist' – a phrase that he repeats in a similar form more than once. The fourteenth- and fifteenth-century sources for Lowestoft are extremely limited. The National Archives' Manorial Documents Register for the town includes just one pre-1500 document and even that is not solely concerned with Lowestoft, nor does it figure in the bibliography. Butcher tries, sometimes half apologetically, to explore what might have happened in the medieval period by extrapolating back from the early modern, an exercise fraught with danger. A lot changed after 1500. The second flaw is that Butcher is not a medievalist. Had he been so, he would have been familiar with the small library of secondary publications on the medieval subsidy lists that would have enabled him to make better use of them. For instance, he is puzzled by the reason why, in 1327, Lowestoft paid a modest subsidy compared with its less commercially developed neighbours. 'What it was is not known and it is unlikely ever to manifest itself'. The answer, in fact, is that lay subsidies were assessed chiefly on crops and animals and exempted cash and book debts that would have comprised a significant proportion of the wealth of the residents of a growing town.

On account of these flaws, this volume is unlikely to feature prominently in the reading list of university medieval history courses. Nevertheless, it deserves to sell well locally as it has much to offer.

NICHOLAS R. AMOR

*The Mildenhall Treasure: Late Roman Silver Plate from East Anglia.* (British Museum Research Publication 200). By Richard Hobbs, with contributions from Janet Lang, Michael J. Hughes, Roger Tomlin and Jude Plouviez.. v + 318pp., plates, bibliography, index. London: The British Museum, 2016. ISBN 978 086159 200 5. Price: £40 hb.

This book provides the reader with an elegantly presented and comprehensive study of arguably the most famous hoard known from Roman Britain. It is one of two outstanding late Roman hoards found in Suffolk, the other being Hoxne, discovered in 1992, also published by the British Museum (Peter Guest, *The late Roman Gold and Silver Coins from the Hoxne Treasure* (2005), and Catherine Johns, *The Hoxne Late Roman Treasure: Gold Jewellery and Silver Plate* (2010)).

The book begins with a succinct account of the initial discovery of the hoard in 1942/3 by Gordon Butcher in or around West Row in the parish of Mildenhall. Chapter one sympathetically reveals the characters, such as Sydney Ford who kept it in his house for three years, who were involved in the events leading up to the treasure becoming part of the national collection in 1946. There is also a brief history of its display and publication to date.

Chapters 2–11 form the heart of the book and present a thorough re-cataloguing of each piece. The hoard is presented as 28 pieces comprising 15 platters and bowls and 13 spoons, broadly arranged by function. The descriptions are very detailed whilst being clear and precise. The catalogued pieces are not presented in isolation but placed in the wider context of silver plate in the later Roman period. Each piece has an in-depth discussion of its iconography and parallels are sought from elsewhere; this allows the unusual elements of the iconographic compositions of the Mildenhall Treasure to be revealed. The most detailed discussion is inevitably of the ‘Great Dish’, here more accurately described as the Bacchic platter.

The manufacture and technical elements of each object are also presented and later expanded upon by Janet Lang and Michael Hughes in Chapter 13. Chapter 12, by Roger Tomlin, adds further detail to the catalogue by concisely bringing together all examples of graffiti and inscriptions on the objects.

These core chapters do both rely on and assume a level of prior knowledge of, for example, Roman iconography and other plate silver hoards. However, the remaining chapters 14–18 provide additional information and are less technical in nature. They discuss the wider late Roman context of the treasure, covering themes such as its relationship with other hoards of late Roman silver, its production, its use within the context of late Roman dining, how it was assembled and who could have owned it.

Chapter 17 was particularly enjoyable and explores specifically how, why, and when the hoard was buried. Its burial and local archaeological context are examined and various scenarios for the motivations, such as safekeeping or religion, behind its deposition are presented.

This book is amazingly good value and extremely well written and presented. It is exquisitely and generously illustrated with many close-ups highlighting the incredible craftsmanship of the decorative details as well as technical aspects of production. The comprehensive catalogue will no doubt be returned to repeatedly by its more specialist readers, and the associated wider discussion brings to life the greatest collection of Roman silver tableware ever found in this country.

*A Late Iron Age and Romano-British Farmstead at Cedars Park, Stowmarket, Suffolk.* (East Anglian Archaeology Report No. 160). By Kate Nicholson and Tom Woolhouse. xii + 237pp., figures, tables, plates, bibliography, index. Bury St Edmunds: Archaeological Solutions Ltd. and ALGOA East, 2016. ISBN 978 09932477 1 2. Price: £20.

*Medieval Dispersed Settlement on the Mid Suffolk Clay at Cedars Park, Stowmarket.* (East Anglian Archaeology Report No. 161). By Tom Woolhouse. x + 148pp., figures, tables, plates, bibliography, index. Bury St Edmunds: Archaeological Solutions Ltd. and ALGOA East, 2016. ISBN 978 09932477 2 9. Price: £15.

Two monographs present the results of excavations conducted between 1999 and 2012 by Archaeological Solutions Ltd in advance of the redevelopment of a large area of clayland to the east of Stowmarket and formerly in the parish of Stowupland. The pair are welcome as the full publication of a developer-funded project, at a time when most work financed in this way remains without full interpretation and analysis at the ‘client report’ or ‘grey publication’ stage. Neither work contains startlingly different or sensational findings, but both are important contributions to regional studies, against a background in which there are so few published reports of comparable sites within East Anglia. This scarcity is especially marked in the case of medieval dispersed settlement.

Firm evidence for an enclosed agricultural settlement begins in the first century BC, though there was small-scale Late Bronze Age / Early Iron Age activity in one area (unpublished) and there were hints of a Middle Iron Age presence. There was no great disruption after the Roman conquest, and indeed continuity seems to have prevailed. Matters were at their busiest in the period between *c.* 150 and *c.* 250 AD, with the use of flint and mortar in the construction of a dwelling and two small bath-houses. Activity ceased in the middle of the fourth century. The Saxon period is represented by nineteen pot sherds recovered from five excavation areas. All were residual in post-Saxon contexts, but the explanation that they ‘could have been introduced ... from other locations through later manuring’ seems overly convenient and unlikely. The re-establishment of settlement within two areas took place in the eleventh to twelfth century, but whether this commenced before the Norman Conquest is unclear. Thereafter a rapid expansion of roadside settlement occurred within three areas before a marked decline in the fourteenth century.

Unfortunately the two reports do not chime together as closely as they might. For example, excavation areas F and C in the Iron Age / Roman volume become E and F in the medieval, while areas E, D and B in the first are neither ascribed letters nor described in the second. All section drawings in the medieval volume are given heights above Ordnance Datum while all those in the Iron Age / Roman are not. This omission renders interpretation of the drawings more problematic. Were section drawings accompanied by measured levels, then the interpretation of the Roman masonry structures, for example, would have been clearer, and an explanation for incompleteness of the large number of annular gullies surrounding circular buildings might have been forthcoming.

The descriptions of excavation, the interpretation and the phasing are for the most part quite clear, despite a somewhat cumbersome numbering system. The plans are also straightforward and helpful, though the hachures are stylised and make no effort to portray the real shape of cut features, as comparisons with section drawings make clear. This shortfall probably relates to computer recording techniques, and the same criticism may be levelled at many other recent excavation plans.

A full series of specialist reports, all of a high standard and well related to the excavation

narrative, is to be found in both volumes. The finds reports (but not those of worked flints and pottery) are divided into two, a summary and an appendix with details. For example, the two elements of Nina Crummy's excellent work on the small finds in the Iron Age / Roman volume are separated by eighty-six pages. These arrangements have not saved space and may well inconvenience the reader.

Both volumes begin by setting the local scene and summarising the present state of knowledge of the immediate surrounds, and both conclude with useful discussion chapters that pull together what has gone before and set the results within the local and regional contexts. A section summarising the documentary sources by Antony M. Breen near the beginning of the medieval report is particularly useful. The tenorial history of one excavated tenement is taken back to the 1320s and of another to the 1350s.

As we have come to expect from the *East Anglian Archaeology* series, which is now well into its fifth decade of publication, both these books have been edited and produced to exacting standards, and are offered at very reasonable prices.

ANDREW ROGERSON

*Catholic East Anglia: A History of the Catholic Faith in Norfolk, Suffolk, Cambridgeshire and Peterborough.* Edited by Francis Young. 315pp., bibliography, index. Leominster: Gracewing, 2016. ISBN 978 085244 887 8. Price: £14.99 pb.

The difficulty of producing a history of any organisation is that the footprints left behind inevitably favour the higher ranks of society, who left behind written records and whose biographical notes are better documented than those of the general populace. This may be partially true of the later Middle Ages and the eighteenth century. Unless, of course, there were issues where ordinary folk bumped against the boundaries. If an organisation's history is recorded by a group of eminent individuals, it can be difficult to find a common voice. Acting as volumes editor for the Catholic Record Society, Young has produced a reasonable and readable account despite these obstacles, in this fairly brief volume of 315 pages.

The collection of seven essays chronologically covers the whole history from the Act of Uniformity in 1559, which outlawed the Mass, right up to the beginning of 2016. Each roughly covers a century, with two covering the nineteenth century. We learn that the Roman Catholic Church flourished largely due to the influence and support of key families, who were wealthy enough to support mission and individual priests, and were also of sufficient standing in their local communities to avoid undue persecution. Chapter one, co-written by Joy Rowe and Francis Young, starts the collection of essays with a vivid picture of the life of recusants in the sixteenth century and the fines imposed on those who openly rebelled. The list of Catholic priests ordained before 1603 suggests that, at least in some parts of the county, the pre-Reformation faith of the populace was still strong, and persisted, latterly with some help from French immigrant priests. Eighteenth- and nineteenth-century church growth was maintained by missions from the Jesuits and other orders, again financially supported in part by well-to-do local families who somehow recovered their position and influence in local society after the Rookwood family's part in quartermastering the Gunpowder Plot.

I anticipate that most antiquarian readers will switch off by the end of chapter five, which details the impact of the railways on the development of nineteenth-century missions within the county and beyond. A significant administrative step forward came in carving out a separate diocese from the diocese of Northampton as late as 1976, with the establishment of a local diocese covering Essex, Norfolk and Suffolk, giving the church its own bishop and

governance. The later chapters covering the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, which inevitably revel in more domestic detail, will be of greater interest to members of the Roman Catholic Church.

The book has a wide-ranging bibliography indicating Young's Phd research, on which it draws heavily; a very useful index; and equally useful pocket biographical notes on eighty of the prominent movers and shakers throughout the time period covered in the text. In may be a first history of the subject, but I doubt if it will be the final word.

TONY REDMAN

*The Abbey of Bury St Edmunds: History, Legacy and Discovery.* By Francis Young.  
xiv + 205 pp., figures, bibliography, index. Norwich: Lasse Press, 2016.  
ISBN 978 09933069 4 5. Price: £19.99 pb.

A wit once told me that a reference quoted more than four times is regarded as fact, regardless of its basis for truth. Francis Young has attempted in his book on the Abbey of Bury St Edmunds to create a compound history of the Abbey from most of the main written sources. This includes a few facts which, having been quoted so often in different sources, are probably becoming regarded as truth by most people, regardless of their bases in fact. This book is more of a general overview of the life of the Abbey than the definitive history that it purports to be, and at a mere 171 pages of descriptive text, including 42 illustrations, plus two appendices, 9 pages of bibliography and an 8-page index, it can only skip over the details of monastic life and influence without examining them in anything like the academic depth of some of the texts referred to in the bibliography. I did think to myself before starting to read it, '*not another history of the Abbey*', but what it does achieve, probably uniquely, is a brief and succinct historical overview of the Abbey from its inception to Dissolution and beyond, in a popular and accessible format. In doing so Young relies fairly heavily on his sources, paramount among which are Antonia Gransden's numerous books and academic articles on Abbey life, which he draws specific attention to in his introduction. Within the text he does cast a slightly justified doubt (in my opinion) over the part the Abbey played in the Barons' meeting to swear an oath for the Magna Carta. The events of 1214/15 have become such an intrinsic part of the story of the town that to cast doubt as to whether it ever took place, as Abbot Wensum's account suggests, is probably tantamount to heresy. The impact of the fire that led to the collapse of the tower and damage to the shrine in 1465, and the subsequent impact on income from the loss of pilgrims visiting the shrine, is perhaps understated. In the chapter on the legacy of the Dissolution, Young does not mention in any detail the development of the chapels of St James, St Mary and St Margaret, nor does he refer to the more interesting recent discoveries in probate records by Margaret Statham, which suggest that at least two communities were probably worshipping in the ruins of the Abbey after the ransacking of the main Abbey church. The suggestion that John Wastell's career came to an end as a result of the Dissolution is unfortunate when most commentators now think he died at least ten years before, and the springboard his time as assistant stonemason under Simon Clerk gave him, leading to major commissions in Cambridge, Canterbury, Lambeth and elsewhere, is also ignored. I suspect that very little new research was undertaken from the Cathedral archives or elsewhere, sticking instead to the wealth of detailed, if chronologically partial, published sources on which Young's text relies so heavily.

A good general, and probably the first published, attempt at an overall history, with good data on the abbots, priors and precentors and their dates, a brief conducted tour of the ruins

in Appendix 2, and a double cliffhanger ending: where is St Edmund's body now?; and why does Historic England tarry in undertaking a complete investigation of what was at one time the most influential Benedictine abbey in England. As Young intimates, the Abbey ruins remain probably the least explored and recorded ruin of a Benedictine monastery of its size in the UK. It is written in an academic style which is not always that easy to read, but a very reasonable general historical overview nevertheless.

TONY REDMAN

