

A History of Lyonshall, From Prehistory to 1850. Sarah & John Zaluckyj, Logaston Press 2017, pp.310

Sarah and John Zaluckyjs' latest book on their own parish of Lyonshall is an in-depth historical study of the area. From the moated island with its castle ruin to the former railway station at Titley Junction, the village has a fascinating history.

There are some excellent photographs in the first part on Prehistoric and Roman Lyonshall accompanied by Geoff Gwatkin's maps. The flint tools and various excavations bring the text to life. A remembered visit by the Woolhope Club Archaeological Research Section to The Yeld moated site in 1970 is mentioned which is pleasing to those who were there.

The lordship of the castle was granted to Stephen Devereux and he began a major reconstruction of the castle; in 1228 he was granted weekly market and fair rights by the King. This was an attempt to develop a borough, enlarge the village and install a garrison to protect it. There was some settlement round the castle site but a new lower area to the south of the road to Kington was created with perhaps 40 burgage plots. This Kington road to the north of the church was diverted to a route south of the castle and church as it is today. Thus the authors answer the question that always puzzled: why are the castle and church cut off from the village? The borough failed by the early 15th century just as other Herefordshire villages declined from the high mortality rates of the Black Death and the threat from the Welsh Revolt of Owain Glyndŵr. There are no early houses standing from the earlier centuries. This explanation of the apparent migration to a new site for economic gain shows today in the centre of the present village.

The rise of the Devereux family is charted. Although based at Weobley and holding Lyonshall their influence became major. They played important parts in the Wars of the Roses and Walter Devereux evicted the Mayor of Hereford from office and hanged 6 citizens in 1456. A later Walter Devereux was created Viscount Hereford by Henry VIII; his son became Earl of Essex and Elizabeth's favourite, Robert, was the second Earl. The family played an important part in national events and reached giddy heights. By 1670 little of the castle remained according to Blount.

In the sections about Lyonshall people there is a clever use of primary sources. Wills and inventories provide much information about the inhabitants' lives and trades. The rural poor are under-represented but peoples' possessions do give a glimpse of how life was lived. They also list some of the crops grown which were mostly cereals, but also hemp and flax. Hops are valuable in 1699. The authors mention Jim Tonkin's work on 3,000 wills. Surely very impressive and useful.

Early enclosures contributed to the plight of the rural poor and there was not much Parliamentary enclosure, and what little they had in commons and waste was taken by the landowners. The system of enclosure and the open fields is fully explained.

The landscape with its watercourses, roads and pathways often needed access by bridges. Mills had changing uses and were used for fulling as well as milling grain. This use of the countryside for economic welfare is illustrated by examples.

The authors skilfully knit the local sources into the national fabric so that the local history becomes part of the narrative. Often local histories omit giving the reader a historical background which would illuminate the local scene. That they do this gives a particular clarity to the book and makes it more accessible for the general reader. The maps and photographs also provide excellent information. This is a model for other village histories.

Jean O'Donnell, 2018