Book Reviews 2023

By KEITH RAY, MARK O'HANLON, JOHN C. EISEL, DAVID WHITEHEAD

Lost Realms: Histories of Britain from the Romans to the Vikings by Thomas Williams (William Collins, hbk: 2022; pbk: 2023) 413pp., ISBN (pbk) 978-0-00-817198-8, £10.99. This up-to-date introduction to a selection of the 'lesser' kingdoms of early medieval Britain was initially intended (according to the author's introductory essay, 'Little Kingdoms') as an account of 'how and why Britain changed between the end of functioning Roman government…and the turmoil of the ninth century when Viking armies irrevocably scrambled the political geography of the island' (p.14). However, the author found the idea of reiterating an Anglocentric 'top down' narrative, dominated by the four major kingdoms of Northumbria, Wessex, Mercia, and East Anglia, inherently less appealing (given how much their histories have dominated traditional narratives) than relating the history of those smaller realms 'whose struggles and failures…better represented early medieval Britain in all its diversity of place and experience' (p.23).

So, step forward into the limelight the early kingdoms of Elmet (modern county of West Yorkshire), Hwicce (Gloucestershire and Worcestershire), Lindsey (North Lincolnshire), Dumnonia (Devon and Cornwall), Essex (Essex and Middlesex), Rheged (Cumbria, Dumfries and Galloway), Powys (Montgomeryshire, Denbighshire, Flintshire, Cheshire, and Shropshire), Sussex (East Sussex, West Sussex) and Fortriu (Nairn, Moray, Banff, Buchan, Aberdeen, and northern Kincardine). As well as cultural, linguistic, and geographical contrasts, the historical trajectories of these nine kingdoms differed hugely, subject as they were to varying exposure to external influences.

Readers of these *Transactions* will inevitably be most interested in the chapters concerning the Hwicce and Powys, since the lands of both these historical polities bordered upon those of the people geographically placed between them. These latter included Bede's 'Westerna' (among whom were *possibly* the same people as the late-attested 'Magonsaete'), the Mercians, and the (undoubtedly British) people of the Kingdom of Ergyng, who together once inhabited the land area of what is now Herefordshire. Much of the rest of this review will therefore be devoted to some observations on those two chapters.

The Hwicce were the people of that part of the Severn valley encompassing Gloucester and Worcester, and of the Cotswolds. We read their history mostly through the lens of the West Saxons, who bordered them to the south. Williams puts forward a very plausible case that the propaganda embodied in both the Northumbrian cleric Bede's writing and the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle (a product of Wessex) probably included inventing the idea that there was a single battle (at Dyrham on the high Cotswold scarp north of Bath in 577AD) in which the (named) semi-mythic leaders of the West Saxons defeated the (named) British 'kings' of Cirencester, Gloucester, and Bath: a defeat that was said to have led immediately to the (Saxon) annexation of the relevant territories.

The author goes on to discuss the alternative likelihood, that the fundamentally British, Christianised, Hwicce people gradually absorbed Saxon migrants while maintaining the independent identity of their insular Christianity. This changed when the continental-inspired Synods of the church, culminating in Whitby in 664, extinguished several of the unorthodox (from the perspective of the Papacy at Rome) practices of the British church. The critical date in

the transformation of the Kingdom of the Hwicce into a political satellite of Mercia was not in fact 577, but rather 628AD, when Penda, then King of the Mercians, defeated the Gewisse (early West Saxon) leaders, Cynegils and Cwichelm, in battle joined at Cirencester (p. 90). From that point on, there is mention of Kings of the Hwicce (mostly witnessing Mercian charters) as Mercian under-kings until their gradual demotion led, by the time that Offa of Mercia reigned in the late 8th century, to further reduction, to the status merely of Mercian ealdormen.

Meanwhile, the Kingdom of Powys appears likely to have comprised what might best be termed a confederation of British peoples, whose lands may have once been focused upon the area of the Severn valley around *Viroconium Cornoviorum* (possibly meaning 'broad place of the Cornovii tribe'—see A.L.F. Rivet and C. Smith (1979), *The Place-Names of Roman Britain*, pp. 505-6—that is, Roman Wroxeter, south-east of Shrewsbury). Williams notes the well-known correlation between Wroxeter, the Wrekin, and the *Wreocansaete* (the latter identified as such in early Mercian tribal lists), while also remarking that 'what the Wreocansaete had to do with the Cornovii, however, and what either had to do with the Kingdom of Powys, is the central mystery at the heart of this region's history' (p.273).

Williams rehearses Alan Lane's (2014) debunking of the idea that there was a substantial sub-Roman centre at Wroxeter, built in the ruins of the baths-basilica complex (pp. 270-2), while suggesting that there was a more likely successor to the Roman regional capital in a sub-Roman royal centre, potentially a little to the west, higher up the valley near present-day Welshpool. Powys is not named as a kingdom until the early ninth century (p.255), and by that time its origins were also lost in mythmaking and rhetoric—in this case preserved in the (now-illegible) text inscribed in the late ninth century on a classical-style, columnar pillar, at Valle Crucis near Llangollen. This relates how the then King of Powys, Cyngen, set up the pillar in commemoration of his grandfather Eliseg's victory over the Anglo-Saxons, winning back lands previously appropriated by the English. But after campaigns by both Offa (d.796) and his successor Coenwulf (d. 821, at Holywell in Flintshire), it was Ceolwulf I (r.821-3) who defeated and reduced Powys to a Mercian dependency. And it was the defeat of the Mercians by the West Saxon king Ecgberht at the battle of Ellendun (near Swindon) in 825 that, ironically, was what enabled Powysian independence to resume, although it was soon to be absorbed into the more powerful Kingdom of Gwynedd to the west.

Despite the fascinating unpicking in this book of past, and frankly confusing, reconstructions of the trajectories of these two kingdoms which neighboured Herefordshire, we are nonetheless still left in doubt about the exact identity (and political development) of the people who inhabited the lands between the Black Mountains and the Malvern Hills. It is supposed that their territory extended across the area that, by the time of the Norman Conquest, stood within the Diocese of Hereford, but this is only hinted at rather than explored in this book. As David Whitehead pointed out in his 2022/3 Presidential Address, it is by no means a simple matter to establish a coherent picture, using the meagre documentary sources that throw any light whatsoever on the history of the period 400-700 (and even later) in Herefordshire.

There have been some attempts to focus upon this latter subject in book form in recent years (for example, Raymond Perry's *Anglo-Saxon Herefordshire*, 2002), but they tend only to have rehearsed accounts prepared in the later 20th century: for instance, the story that suggested that there was a simple and steady extinguishing of indigenous British communities by a westward-running tide of Anglo-Saxon settlement. So, we still await an in-depth, book-length study of the period using modern source-criticism (for the latter, see for example, Patrick Sims-Williams's textual evaluation, *The Book of Llandaf as a Historical Source*, 2019) that also draws

closely (and in an informed way) upon the archaeological evidence that has gradually accumulated over the past twenty-five years.

In conclusion, *Lost Realms* is representative of an important new trend within the writing of post-Roman/early medieval histories of Britain, whereby authors use the limited historical sources, augmented substantially by the findings of archaeology. The most incisive of such studies have so far been those of Robin Fleming, whose two works *Britain After Rome: the Fall and Rise 400 to 1070* (published in 2010) and her most recent, *The Material Fall of Roman Britain 300-525CE* (2021), constitute milestones in the process. These books have provided us with comprehensive insights as to how much light archaeological evidence can throw upon the complexities of political trajectories, provided that the well-worn/overworked documentary sources are not automatically seen as providing the narrative framework within which all other evidence is made to fit. While *Lost Realms* does not supply us with a coherent picture of pre-Norman Herefordshire, it nonetheless does provide clues as to how such a narrative may eventually emerge.

Keith Ray

Facsimile copy of *Pomona Herefordiensis* (1811), by Thomas Andrew Knight, published by Fines Mundi Verlag (2020), pp. 132, *c.*£50 plus p&p from Germany. Also, from the same German publisher (2020), facsimile copy of *The Herefordshire Pomona* (1876-1885), by Robert Hogg and Henry G. Bull, two volumes (pp. 800 in total), *c.*£200 plus p&p.

Members of the Woolhope Club will be familiar with Thomas Andrew Knight's *Pomona Herefordiensis* (1811), but I suspect few of us will have the good fortune of having an original on our bookshelves. That is to say, copies of the book are available, but today's price tag of circa £4,000 is likely to put it beyond the aspiration of most of us.

Having conducted extensive research into the often dubious quality of facsimile reprints, it is with great pleasure that I can share news of a high-quality, full-colour reproduction of the book, at an 'affordable' price—around £50 (plus p&p).

Published in Germany by Fines Mundi Verlag (2020), the hardback book is printed on high-quality paper, and includes all thirty full-page, full-colour *Pomona* plates and accompanying text. The publisher has even had the foresight to include a thin ribbon bookmark; an extra touch that speaks volumes about their attention to detail. Measuring 30.5cm x 23cm, it is similar in size to the original edition but with a 1.4cm spine. This is not a ropey Optical Character Recognition (OCR) reprint—the text and illustrations are clean and crisp, having no doubt been digitally scanned and cleaned with care prior to publication. The end result is a high-quality, faithful reproduction of the original book; an exemplary example of how facsimile printing should be done.

I was pleasantly surprised to find that the same publisher also stocks *The Herefordshire Pomona* (1876-1885), by Robert Hogg and Henry G. Bull. Although this title is more widely available, expect to pay £4,000 and upwards for a decent, original set. Members will also be aware of The Folio Society limited edition (2014), which sells today for around £600. In contrast, the two-volume facsimile set from Germany (2020) costs around £200 (plus p&p)—not cheap but certainly incredible value.

Like Knight's Pomona, this title is reproduced as a hardback book using high-quality, full-colour plates, complete with ribbon bookmark. The illustrations have been cleaned, so do not suffer from the foxing scars and discolouration commonly found in the original edition. What sets it apart though, is that the two-volume set measures 43cm x 31cm and so is actually slightly

larger than the original; each volume has a 4cm spine, and the combined weight exceeds 6kg. These books are huge, and one may struggle to find a bookshelf big enough to store them, but that is an enviable challenge!

The publisher specialises in facsimile reprints, using a simple but distinctive cover design template across the title range. Strangely, they annotate the spine with title and author printed from 'bottom to top', rather than from 'top to bottom', but this may be a European house-style. Other than the addition of a brief acknowledgement on the verso of the title page, the books appear to be faithful reproductions and certainly exceeded my expectations. For these reasons, I am pleased to recommend them.

The easiest way to purchase is via the publisher's eBay shop (prices convert from Euros) but expect to wait a few weeks for delivery from Germany. Use the book title as your eBay search criterion and check for the eBay account name: Antiquariat Nußbaum. Alternatively, they have their own website (www.fines-mundi.de) or can be contacted via email (info@fines-mundi.de).

Mark O'Hanlon

The Old Words of Herefordshire **edited by Richard Wheeler (Logaston Press 2024 ,192pp., ISBN: 978-1-910839-76-8), £12.99.**

The Great War of 1914-18 was a catalyst for change. Before that, the country was relatively stable, with little social mobility, but since there has been much change, not always for the better. Herefordshire villages, which changed little over the centuries and had a community of local families, have now changed out of all recognition. They are seen as desirable places to live. With the influx of new residents from elsewhere, children from local families cannot afford to live in the place of their birth. The sense of community and continuity is gradually being eroded.

Against this background, I find it surprising that regional accents or intonations are still well defined, if declining. What has mostly gone, however, is the use of words of mainly local origin. These are designated dialect words, although such a definition is fraught with difficulties.

This new book is a compilation of some 3,000 old words mostly lost from everyday use in Herefordshire and only a fraction of those formerly in use. The introduction outlines the history of collecting such words, which began with a relatively short glossary published by the Rev. John Duncumb in 1804. A much longer glossary was published in 1839 by George Cornewall Lewis; after he succeeded his father in the baronetcy, he became Chancellor of the Exchequer (his statue stands outside the Shire Hall in Hereford). Then, in 1887, the Rev F. T. Havergal, vicar of Upton Bishop, published a work entitled *Herefordshire Words and Phrases, Colloquial and Archaic*, to be followed the next year by a list of local bird names, collected by Dr H. G. Bull and appearing as an appendix in his posthumously published *Notes on the Birds of Herefordshire.* Major modern studies include those by Andrew Haggard (1972) and Mrs Winifred Leeds (1974), drawing on material from around Ledbury and Ross-on-Wye respectively.

This then is the material from which the compilation has been made. It is pointed out that words may have been collected from a restricted location but may have a wider usage, not necessarily limited by county boundaries. So, for instance, the use of the word 'ganzy' for a type of jersey, collected in Stoke Edith, is actually very widespread, was certainly current in Co. Durham (used by my mother, a native of the area) and is still used in Shetland.

Farming is, and always has been, the main industry in Herefordshire, and it is not surprising that about 600 words related to it are included. Since farming and rural life are

conservative, dialect words have probably survived longer in that context than in any other, so words such as 'yaffle', for the green woodpecker, are still used occasionally by the older generation. Yaffle is another word of much wider distribution. I have also heard the word 'shuff' used for 'sheaf' (not given in the compilation) but it is not clear whether this is a dialect word or merely a different pronunciation. Similarly, the word 'lezzer' (my spelling, I've never seen it written down), which is clearly derived from 'leasow' (pasture, which is given), is in the same category. This word was in use in Ullingswick in the 20th century

Some of the terms listed are actually standard usage, particularly those quoted relating to hop-picking. Although it is now archaic, I would argue that the unusual but widespread word 'higgler'—a pedlar of small items—in the 19th century was more standard usage than dialect. A search of the British Newspaper Archive finds this term used right across the country, not just in Herefordshire.

There is the odd word that I would query. So, for instance, the word 'fleam' is said to be an alternative to 'phlegm'. However, a fleam was a sharp instrument used in bloodletting, and how this other interpretation came about will need checking in the original compilation.

This is a book for reference, or dipping into, but it is worth reading the introduction in its entirety. It gives a window into a simpler past, and as a hardback book it will stand regular usage. On the front cover is a line engraving of an apple, with a dialect word ('crink', a type of small, sweet apple), while inside the covers there are line drawings of chain harrows. I will enjoy having it on my shelves.

John Eisel

The Mortimers of Wigmore 1066-1485: Dynasty of Destiny *edited by* Paul Dryburgh and Philip Hume (Logaston Press, 2023), xxv + 325 pp., illustrated, ISBN 978-1-910839-65-2.

This is a handsome hardback, published under the imprint of Fircone Books Ltd., copiously illustrated with vignettes of medieval manuscripts and modern views, especially of the Mortimer castles. It is the fifth in a series, published by the Mortimer History Society, which was inaugurated in 2000 with the publication of *The Mortimers: Lords of the March* by Charles Hopkinson and Martin Speight. Since that time, it seems that many medieval scholars have discovered that, within their specialism, there is a Mortimer lurking. Thus, several of the articles in the present publication examine the role of the family in the broader canvas of national history in the 14th and 15th centuries.

However, the eleven chapters are organised in a roughly chronological fashion, which implies that much of the local history occurs in the early chapters, i.e., before the execution of Roger, 1st Earl of March, in 1330. It is fitting, perhaps, that the first essay by Emma Cavell looks at the Mortimer women from *c*.1066 to 1282. In this chapter, wives are joined with sisters and daughters, all of whom extended Mortimer influence. Wives frequently brought land, but they were also expected to defend castles and frequently became involved in high politics. Perhaps the most significant marriage was that of Roger (d.1246) to Gwladus Ddu, the daughter of Llywelyn ab Iorwerth, King of Gwynedd. Through Gwladus the Mortimers claimed descent from King Arthur, which underpinned their imperial aspirations on the west side of the Welsh Border.

This issue is dealt with in David Stephenson's exploration of the Mortimer expansion into Maelienydd, to the west of Wigmore. Marriage also brought castles, a subject explored by John R. Kenyon. The three great castles were Wigmore, Ludlow, and Chirk. The highest density of castles built by Mortimer vassals, many of which are simply earthworks today, are to be found in Maelienyth, which was fought over for two centuries. It is well worth visiting Cefnllys, to the

east of Llandrindod and arguably the greatest Mortimer stronghold, sited in an Iron Age hillfort. In the imagination of contemporary bards, it was comparable to Roman Gloucester! More than Wigmore and Ludlow, it distills the over-weaning imperial aspirations of the Mortimers.

The Mortimer empire achieved its apogee in the early 14th century under the aegis of Roger, the 1st Earl of March (1287-1330). This is examined through a survey of his estates by Paul Dryburgh, which commences with an analysis of a recently found set of accounts, kept by the Mortimer bailiff for the year 1387-8. The original document can now be found in the Herefordshire Archive and Records Centre. Roger Mortimer (1287-1330) played a central role in the dangerous politics of the reign of Edward II. He was, of course, the lover of Edward's queen, Isabella of France. Two essays celebrate his notorious activities. Laura Tomkins examines in detail his escape from the Tower of London in 1323, and Barbara Wright discusses in detail his execution in 1330—he chose hanging rather than evisceration. Good pre-prandial reading!

This was a low point, which should have marked the end of the Mortimer story, but Andy King explores the revival of their fortunes when, in 1354, Edward III annulled the verdict of treason and restored the earldom of March to Roger, the 2nd Earl (1328-68), whose grandson, Edmund, was betrothed to Edward III's granddaughter, Philippa. The informal dynamics of Mortimer power are explored by Patrick McDonagh with reference to Ireland, where Edward Mortimer, 3rd Earl of March (1352-81) was Lord Lieutenant and depended upon an extensive 'affinity' of middling families who had benefitted from Mortimer patronage. Remarkably, these bonds of loyalty survived, notwithstanding the series of early deaths which stalked the Mortimer men in the 14th century.

This hiatus in mature Mortimer heirs is explored by Chris Given Wilson, who points out that between 1354 and 1425 the earldom of March was held in wardship for 38 years but, notwithstanding the efforts of Henry IV and Henry V, the Mortimer family maintained their claim to the throne. The Wars of the Roses, he believes, were not a struggle between York and Lancaster, but Mortimers and Lancastrians. Ian Mortimer takes up this theme, describing the career of the obscure Sir John Mortimer who, in 1424, was murdered by Shakespeare's 'golden boy', Henry V, because of his claim to the throne. Again, the implication of this rather random killing is that the Wars of the Roses have been misnamed. The Mortimers were frequently the 'fall-guys' for the Yorkists.

In the final chapter of the book, Joanna Laynesmith introduces Anne Mortimer (1390-1411), daughter of Roger, 4th Earl of March and wife of Richard, Earl of Cambridge, among whose sons was Richard Plantagenet (1411-60), Duke of York and the 6th Earl of March. His wealth came from his Mortimer ancestry, which, of course, was inherited by his sons, Edward IV and Richard III. This, together with their Mortimer claims to the throne, subsequently passed to Henry Tudor (VII) via his wife, Elizabeth of York.

For the residents of Herefordshire, this is a rare book. It explores, through several generations, the story of a local family at the centre of the political life of the nation. Clearly, its central theme is to pursue a local family whose success took them far from Herefordshire, but their possessions lay on the Welsh Border, and absenteeism produced copious documentation. For aspiring local historians, the extensive notes and bibliography open up new fields of research in local and distant repositories as well as flagging up expensive books, which are rarely found outside the walls of university libraries.

David Whitehead

Artisan Art: Vernacular wall paintings in the Welsh Marches, 1550–1650, by Kathryn Davies, new edition (Logaston Press, 2024), 304 pp., paperback, illustrated, £25. ISBN 978-1910839706. Advance notice pending review in the 2024 edition.

This is a revised and updated edition of a book originally published in 2008. It became available in August 2024, late in the cycle of preparing these *Transactions* for 2023; in view of this and because a likely reviewer became unwell, it has been necessary to delay a review until next year. However, advance notification is provided here because this is a substantial and beautifully illustrated book, including *c*.200 colour photographs, on a topic likely to interest many readers. For those wishing to find out more, details can be found via the Logaston Press website.

Life in Early Medieval Wales by Nancy Edwards (Oxford University Press, hbk: 2023), 511pp., ISBN 978-0-198-733-218, £100.00.

This attractively produced, medium-format book features just over seventy well-chosen figures (including many maps and plans), with twenty of the illustrations reproduced in colour. The task the author set herself was to consider, from *c*.AD300-1050, 'how people lived in late Roman and early Medieval Wales, and how their lives and communities changed over the course of this period'. Given the deficiencies and difficulties of the available evidence, both historical and archaeological, this represents a huge challenge, and the author is one of the few contemporary scholars who has the 'bandwidth' to have undertaken it. That she successfully navigates these difficult waters is much to her credit, and to the benefit of the scholarly community, to whom the book is largely, but not exclusively, addressed.

The book's two introductory chapters summarise first changing interpretive stances and the varied data sources; and then geographical and temporal parameters. The two following chapters review alternative narratives for the earlier, and then the later, phases of pre-Norman history. Three further chapters successively encompass settlements, farming, and 'craft, display and trade'. As one would expect of someone whose academic life's work has focused upon the archaeology of early Christian communities and their commemorative monuments in Wales, Edwards devotes four entire chapters of the book to these and related subjects. She surveys first the evidence for Christian structures and localities, next for 'conversion, commemoration and burial', then for sites and landscapes (with strong focus on churches, chapels, and monastic communities), and lastly for rituals and practices, including death and commemoration. A chapter immediately preceding the concluding one addresses the themes of power and authority.

Subjects such as élite importation of exotic and luxury items from the Mediterranean world (during the 5th to 7th centuries) are handled deftly, with up-to-the-minute information. The lack of definite identification of high-status residences, occupied *after* élite occupation (often, *re*occupation) of hillforts had ended, is correctly seen as a topic that remains to be addressed. Important advances in recent studies are nonetheless highlighted, such as new appreciation (from excavation) of the significance of corn-drying kilns to early Medieval crop-processing; and increasing awareness of the amount of metalworking taking place across the spectrum of settlement sites. The extent of content about Christian places, and especially about commemoration, substantially reflects the author's own research. Over more than four decades, she has investigated the forms and formulae of inscriptions on memorial stones that were such a feature of 'late Britonnic' Britain (taking in not only Wales, but also Scotland and south-west England).

Her concluding chapter reiterates long-standing awarenesses: that 'Romanisation'—especially of the rural population—only became embedded culturally with the rise of

Christianity; that fertile arable lands account for a relatively small proportion of the total land area and are isolated by often extensive tracts of uplands; and that immigration from Ireland was a significant factor in cultural change, as eventually was Scandinavian settlement in some areas. However, she also brings to the fore new appreciation of key historical episodes, such as the 'Late Antique Little Ice Age' and its negative impacts, both on population and on what we might term 'the spirit of the age'.

Cemeteries that have been extensively excavated in recent years (e.g., those at Llandough in Glamorgan and at St Patrick's Chapel near St Davids) illustrate the diversity of burial practices and of the burying communities. However, the author rightly acknowledges the difficulties in drawing wider conclusions from necessarily limited excavated samples. The number of potential sites to study is enormous, whilst the resources available for examining them are miniscule by comparison.

Among the delights of the book for this reviewer are those sections where the author relates rare documentary evidence (for example for estate boundaries) to her own close awareness of surviving—or recorded—commemorative monuments. So, for instance, bounds of lands at Ogmore, in west Glamorgan, that are specified in a grant by King Cadwgan of Gwent among the Llandaf charters, correlate directly with inscriptions on two stones found nearby, both of which reference the charter itself and use parallel terminology in doing so.

Some of the discussions inevitably dwell upon perennial problems of researching this period in Wales and much of the rest of western Britain. These include the difficulties of recognising, before excavation, early Medieval versus later prehistoric enclosures; frustrations caused by a 'dating plateau' that affects radiocarbon determinations for the crucial fifth century; and the fact that often hardly any material items survive on archaeological sites due to long-lasting cultural preferences; for instance, the use of organic containers rather than pottery ones. There is relatively little discussion of high-status lifestyles and connections compared with the amount devoted to religious lives and institutions, although this reflects the comparative lack of investigations of relevant élite residences.

New subjects for research are coming into focus, in some cases reflecting developments across Britain. One such is 'assembly sites'. The central location and purpose of these places has been studied intensively by Rhiannon Comeau in Dyfed but also by Reynolds and Langlands in southern England. These locations are now seen to be central to the organisation of communications, exchange, and governance regionally.

So, what is the most immediate relevance of this book and its wealth of synthesised Welsh data for Herefordshire? While Offa's Dyke and other linear works in the Marches are discussed in the penultimate chapter (including reference to the new studies that are showing the true extent of the Dyke across the county) the author still expresses much uncertainty about the status and function of Hereford as a frontier settlement.

In this context, however, the key importance of the book concerns the existence and role of Ergyng/Archenfield throughout the early Medieval period as a hybrid polity, existing, as it did, both beyond and then within the Mercian sphere of control, while retaining a large measure of autonomy and a strong local identity. The church south of Hereford was not only early in its 'Roman/Brittonic' identity but was also a bulwark of resistance to Anglo-Saxon political and ecclesiastical domination. Yet archaeologically it remains almost invisible, not least because it apparently lacked the tradition of raising the inscribed, commemorative monuments that are such an important feature in areas further west.

In this part of the Marches, there is also a need to focus upon the nascent kingdom of

Brycheiniog as a major locus of contestation and opposition to encroaching Mercian political control. It is therefore apposite that the Wye Valley, west of Hereford, will be one of the five intensive study-areas, in different parts of the early marchlands, encompassed within the three-year, interdisciplinary research project, 'Making the March'. This is due to start in 2024 and is led by Dr Andy Seaman of Cardiff University, by Dr Charles Insley of the University of Manchester, and by the author of this review (also based at Cardiff University).

The book is expensive to purchase in hardback. Judging by other titles in this series, however, it will soon be issued in paperback and should then retail at about half the price.

Keith Ray