

# Book reviews, 2020

By

JOHN C. EISEL, DAVID WHITEHEAD and JANE ADAMS

***The March of Ewyas. The Story of Longtown Castle and the de Lacy Dynasty* by Martin Cook & Neil Kidd (Logaston Press, 2020) xvi+ 254 pp illustrated ISBN 978-1-910839-47-8, £12.95**

The history of Longtown Castle and its relationship to the close-by motte-and-bailey castle at Ponthendre (or Pont Hendre) has been discussed many times over the years, with varied conclusions even when using the same evidence. There is little documentary evidence, and what there is difficult to interpret, so the only real way forward was to carry out archaeological excavations. This challenge was taken up by the Longtown & District Historical Society, which in 2004 put together a project to do this, which was supported by English Heritage (now Historic England) as guardian of these two Scheduled Ancient Monuments. The challenge was to make the minimum intervention but targeted so that the maximum information could be obtained. Dr (now Prof.) Keith Ray advised on a suitable design and funding was eventually obtained from the National Lottery Fund. This was essentially a community project, although with professional archaeologists involved, and many volunteers took part in the excavations which took place simultaneously at both sites over two three-week seasons in 2016 and 2017.

The results have been surprising and unexpected. At Ponthendre it was found that while the earthworks of the motte-and-bailey had been dug, the castle was never completed and had never been occupied. At Longtown Castle an initial geophysical survey was relatively unsuccessful in identifying features in the Castle Green, the eastern part of the enclosed area, and later excavations shows that this had been covered with an overburden of redeposited material, which obscured the responses. A section on the east side of the square earthworks at Longtown revealed that these had been built in three phases, the earliest being a low structure of turves, the next when this was covered with a very high rampart, and the third when this was further raised. Towards the end of the excavations a small number of Roman artefacts were found, the first such that had been properly recorded. The deduction was that the first phase of the ramparts were those of a Roman fort, with two later phases of use.

The results of the excavations, together with a reassessment of the written evidence, enabled what is a more likely scenario to be developed. As indicated above, the first phase at Longtown was a square Roman fort, surrounded by relatively low walls of turf. No evidence of timber walls was found, and it is suggested that there might have been something like a barrier of thorn, which would leave no archaeological trace. Occupation was probably from the late first century to the second century AD, after which it was abandoned. In 1055 there was a severe incursion into Herefordshire by the Welsh, with hostile intent, and this was responded to by an army led by Harold Godwinson, part of the army being taken 'beyond Straddele'. i.e. into the area under consideration. This seems to be the most likely time when the second phase of the ramparts came into being, with a considerable body of men who could pile up the material to make the enormous rampart. Post Conquest there was the Norman push into Wales, and the final phase of the ramparts dates from this period, the scenario being that the Welsh took refuge in the enclosure, which they further reinforced.

With such a formidable obstacle in the way of the invasion, and perhaps with not enough men to make a direct assault, the most likely interpretation is that Ponthendre was built

as a holding operation against the Welsh in Longtown. The situation must have changed dramatically, as before that castle was completed the threat from Longtown must have gone away, enabling possession to be taken of the enclosure. This enabled a motte-and-bailey castle to be built in a much better defensive situation inside the ramparts, with a motte at the north-west corner to which was added a bailey on the south side, partly utilising the earthen rampart. Subsequently the defences were rebuilt in stone, and a circular keep was built on top of the motte; the proportions of the motte suggest that it was reduced in height, and this material was almost certainly the overburden that had been spread and made the geophysics work of little use. From a consideration of the known history of the de Lacy family, the most likely builder of the stone defences was Gilbert de Lacy in the 1150s, making this one of the earliest round keeps in the country. Subsequently a cross-wall with gate was built across the bailey, most likely in the thirteenth century. A borough was based on this castle, and Lidar shows clearly burgage plots to the north and south of the castle, probably after the lordship was divided between co-heiresses in 1250. This did not prosper, but neither did it become deserted, and remained a village.

Ardent readers of these *Transactions* will already be familiar with these conclusions, as these were published in the 2018 volume in a paper written by the two authors of this book. This was, of course, bringing it to an audience which is interested in these matters, but there will be others who are not aware of this paper, or would want to read the story in a somewhat more popular form. This is the wider audience which this book is aimed at, but as will be seen, it goes further than that.

The book is divided into two main parts, the first descriptive of the Longtown Castles Project, with introductory chapters on the situation in the two castles today, discussing the possible reasons for building round keeps, and then going on to a narrative of the excavations. At the beginning of the narrative are listed the questions it was hoped to answer, and the locations of the trenches by which it was hoped to answer those questions are clearly marked on 3-D models of the two castles, which shows more clearly how they are in relation to the topography. Those in the Longtown Castle were all in the eastern part of the enclosed area, to the east of the modern road. This part concludes with a section of post-excavation analysis and interpretation. For the Ponthendre site, the various theories about its history and object were reviewed in the light of the results, leading to a different interpretation. The results for the Longtown Castle excavations made clear that the reason for the paucity of Roman material was due, on the north side, to later activity, and on the south side by being buried too deep below the overburden. To round out the argument, the research questions were posed again, with the results of the excavations below each question and, remarkably, all questions were answered. Finally, for Longtown Castle there are, firstly, a series of four plans of the ramparted area, showing how this was developed, and then a series of five drawings.

The second (and main) part of the book is a new history of Ewyas and the de Lacy family, beginning with Ewyas in prehistory. Taking the general reader through the Stone Age, Bronze Age, and Iron Age in a wider context, it relates it to evidence in Ewyas. Inevitably the Roman subjugation is dealt with in detail, to enable the siting of a Roman fort at Longtown to be put in context. There is not a great deal to say about Ewyas in the Dark Ages, but there is an illustration of the ninth-century grave stone in the nave of Clodock church, of the wife of Guinnda, charmingly described as a 'seemly woman.' A discussion of Anglo-Saxons and Vikings in the borderlands leads up to the Welsh incursion of 1055 and Harold Godwinson's strong reaction, which is important in our story. Post Conquest William fitzOsbern became earl of Hereford, and secured this by a chain of castles along the Welsh border, including the

magnificent Chepstow Castle. He granted large areas of land to Walter de Lacy I (d.1085), another Norman adventurer, and his descendants held this land on the border, off and on until 1241, when Walter de Lacy II, the last in the direct line, died at Ludlow Castle. Through all this time there is an involved history of politics, rebellion, and extension of power and interest, and the shift of power to Ireland after 1171, all too complicated to detail here. All this is discussed in detail, where possible going back to original sources. Ownership post the de Lacys is inevitably discussed in much less detail, and there is a chapter on the borough of Longtown. All this is leading up to the climax of the book, when the names of those who are considered to have built Longtown Castle are revealed, with supporting arguments, underpinned by the knowledge that Ponthendre had never been completed, so that earlier interpretation of what little written record there is was not to be relied on. It is unlikely to be disputed that the motte-and-bailey castle was first built by Walter de Lacy I. Using archaeological evidence for the excavations in the eastern part of the enclosure, and a reassessment of the existing stonework, as well as a comparison with other round keeps, the balance of probability is that Longtown Castle was rebuilt in stone in the 1150s, by Gilbert de Lacy, a name not suggested by any other writer on the castle and a very early date for such a structure. The authors state that Gilbert de Lacy was responsible for the round church in Ludlow Castle (although according to other authorities this is by no means certain, as architectural details indicate a date somewhere in the first half of the twelfth century), and produce strong evidence that the keep at Longtown was inspired by a similar keep at Houdan in France, understood to have been built between 1120 and 1137 by Amaury de Montfort, with whom de Lacy had connections. This is a most surprising conclusion, but has been accepted by English Heritage, for which the authors rewrote the website entry.

A reviewer must be allowed to have a niggles, if only to show that he has been through the book in detail, but mine are only of a minor nature. Despite its detailed nature, the book seems remarkably free of typos. However, in the time line on p.216 there is the date 1175 when it should be 1075, but its position in the timeline makes this obvious. Not so obvious is the incorrect statement on p.168, which says that nothing of Hereford Castle remains above ground. It is generally agreed that there is medieval masonry incorporated in the dwelling called Castle Cliffe. Also it would have only be fair to note that the fine impression of Hereford Castle as it might have been c.1250 is the work of that talented artist Brian Byron. In 1869 the Rev. Charles J. Robinson stated that there was little doubt that the Romans had occupied the site at Longtown, and in the same year a new school was built within the ramparts, to the west of the central road. A later report in the trade directory of 1905 claims that Roman remains were found when the school was built, and this is noted. It is possible that there is a report of the building of the school in a contemporary newspaper, and that this might give details of what is said to have found. I did check in our *Transactions* for 1869 to see if anything had been reported there, but not so. Coincidentally, in that year there was a field meeting of the Club at Pontrilas, where the members met at the station, and then walked over to Ewyas Harold common, where Dr. Bull read a paper on Ewyas Harold, its name, its castle, and its priory. Included in that were the Domesday entries for Ewyas, both in the original form and in a translation. Of the latter he said:

‘*Castellaria*.—I have coined the word castlery, as best expressing the tract of land immediately appertaining to a castle.’

While the OED has a reference to the word in 1679, it does not appear to be in the sense in which it is used here, for which the earliest reference given is 1877, when it was used (in the

form ‘casteltry’) by G. T. Clark in a paper on Ewyas Harold Castle, published in *Archaeologia Cambrensis* in that year, which had been previously published in *The Builder*.

So what are my conclusions? I found that the book was well argued, with a logical conclusion, based firmly on archaeological evidence. There are elements of interpretation, but in the text it is made clear which these are. The book is well illustrated in colour, with varied illustrations, including a photograph of members of The Old Straight Track Club ascending the motte at Ponthendre in 1933, most likely taken by Alfred Watkins.

For myself I find the arguments compelling. It will be interesting to see the reaction from those whose area of study this is. (I have a good general knowledge, but do not claim to be a specialist.) Coincidentally, in April 2016, when this project was in its infancy stage, the Castle Studies Group held a conference in Hereford, and at that event there was a paper read on Lyonshall Castle, which also had a round keep, now reduced to a stump. It was then stated that the received wisdom was that Lyonshall keep was built in imitation of Walter de Lacy’s keep at Longtown in the 1220s. A comment was made that at Lyonshall the chamfered plinth indicated a date in the twelfth century, and that Longtown keep certainly post-dated that at Lyonshall. This was, I suppose, based on the premise that the keep of Longtown Castle was built in the 1220s, which we now know to be incorrect. But it emphasises that much work on the development of circular keeps still remains to be done. This volume is a significant step along that way.

This volume should be on the shelves of anyone seriously interested in the history of Herefordshire, but is written in a more popular style so should also appeal to the general reader.

John Eisel, December 2020

***Decorated in Glory: Church Building in Herefordshire in the Fourteenth Century* by Nigel Saul, (Logaston Press, Eardisley, Herefordshire, 2020), 149pp £10. ISBN 978-1-910839-46-1**

Some time has passed since a book was published devoted to the medieval architecture of Herefordshire. Malcolm Thurlby’s, *The Herefordshire School of Romanesque Sculpture* (Logaston 2013) was the last one. But, as Professor Saul reminds us, at one time in the early 20th century the Club’s *Transactions* were the repository for many learned articles on the subject, most of which were provided by George Marshall whose work, according to the present author, was ‘a model of precise scholarship’. More recently, he reminds us, that during the 1970s and 80s the late Richard K. Morris broke new ground in the *Transactions* by presenting us with the results of his analysis of the Decorated style based upon a rigorous investigation of the mouldings used by masons in the churches of Herefordshire during the first half of the 14th century.

In chapter two of this new book Professor Saul summarises Morris’s work, examining its strengths and weaknesses but ultimately accepting it as a useful tool to pursue the Decorated style in Herefordshire, extending the synthesis that Morris commenced in his chapter on the cathedral in G. Aylmer & J. Tiller (eds.), *Hereford Cathedral: A History* (2000), pp. 232-40. Without hesitation he has no misgivings in identifying the architecture of the early 14th century with ‘the flowering of artistic and architectural endeavour in the Welsh Border’ which he traces back to the social developments in the 12th century with the emergence of a knightly class who produced the principal patrons.

However, the story begins with Hereford cathedral where the author identifies the work of masons who had previously been busy at Westminster Abbey e.g. in the north transept but also craftsmen from Wells working on the tracery of the windows in the north nave aisle. The

reconstruction that this heralds is closely linked with Bishop Swinfield (1283-1316) and the process leading to the canonisation of his predecessor, Thomas Cantilupe, which brought pilgrims flocking to the cathedral. This produced resources to pay for the new Decorated style of architecture brought by innovative masons, whose trail via distinct mouldings can be traced elsewhere. The great tower of the Cathedral, begun in c.1305, was one of the climaxes of this programme, displaying on every surface one of the distinct features of the style—the ballflower ornament—which was taken up with enthusiasm elsewhere in the diocese.

Here Professor Saul stretches the use of mouldings to its limits. The master-masons working at the cathedral disappeared as resources ran out but their innovations were imitated by lesser craftsmen and can be traced by observing the moulding profiles on many village churches. The author is aware of the dangers of this thesis but without documentary evidence, it enhances the process of classification. It also tends to diminish the role of patrons and their connoisseurship. As with much medieval creativity the commissioning classes were left as boorish bystanders, paying the bills and beating the hell out of each other. Ballflower, brought from the cathedral, is widely dispersed in the diocese, but at a local level it intermingles with innovation from other sources e.g. the north chapel at Ledbury where mouldings are found from Chester and Lichfield. Here we enter the world of erudite specialist knowledge, well beyond the average church visitor—a skill belonging to ‘one of the crew that tap and jot’ (Philip Larkin, *Church Going*). However, in the hands of Professor Saul it enables him to identify groups of churches in west and north Herefordshire where common features can be identified e.g. ‘hints’ of the Midlands; of ‘links’ with Bristol. For those readers who take their church-visiting seriously, this book will transform the ‘stand-alone’ entries found in *The Buildings of England* (Pevsner).

But there is more. Professor Saul is an expert on medieval funeral monuments, produced, he believes, as ‘a winter activity’ by the itinerant mason who worked in the summer on the parish churches. He brings to our attention the monuments of men and women with ‘sleek lines’ such as the outstanding image of Blanche Mortimer (d.1347) at Much Marcle. The craftsman, he believes, came from Exeter where Blanche’s brother-in-law was bishop. He may also have worked at Hereford cathedral where Precentor John Swinfield has a similar monument. Like the parish churches, the author has a second division list of less accomplished monuments, including some with heavy drapery, which he suggests were created by the masons who in the summer were working on country churches. Their monuments were carved in local sandstone whereas the top-flight monuments were often carved in Painswick limestone, probably *in situ* and not in the mason’s yard.

Professor Saul devotes a chapter to the expression of piety via the construction of private chapels attached to parish churches. In many respects they replaced the monasteries as places of prayer for the dead. The feudal elite (e.g. the knights) were released from onerous military duties by the late 13th century and had secure tenure of their land; they therefore invested in the parish church and, specifically, private chapels. The author believes the great engine of piety in the Southern Marches was the cult of St Thomas Cantilupe, and although the peak of his cult was passed even before his canonisation in 1320, it rejuvenated piety among the knightly classes who rebuilt their parish churches, contributed to work at the cathedral and encouraged members of their families to enter the church. The Mortimer family in the 14th century embodied these diverse strands of religious patronage. Notwithstanding the loss of much land and influence with the fall of Earl Roger in 1330 the family recovered its status, and was rewarded by Edward III with a number of advowsons, which provided new opportunities for church patronage e.g. at Kingsland and Pembridge. Mortimer women were also notable

founders of chantries e.g. Roger's step-mother, Margaret, left her mark upon churches at Pembridge, Orleton, Kingsland and Presteigne.

The book ends with a round-up of gentry-patronage, which can be detected in surviving work e.g. the Grandisons at Ashperton and Stretton Grandison, the Pychards at Almeley as well as numerous chantries. Church-knights, holding ecclesiastical estates but now without irksome military service, took their responsibilities for the local church very seriously and found themselves depicted on Cantilupe's tomb. There is also a chapter on town churches and because the author regrets that he is unable to muster much documentary material for Herefordshire, he provides some striking examples from elsewhere in England to provide some guidelines. A small chancel added to an existing church might cost in the region of £73; three bays of arcading perhaps £34 and for the complete rebuilding of a small church £100. Much church building in Herefordshire, he suggests, was financed from the profits of the wool trade but this came to an end with the Black Death. Heavy mortality made masons hard to find. Even the cathedral authorities had difficulty in finding a skilled workforce to repair the cathedral tower. In the countryside 300 parishes lost their priests. Ecclesiastical landowners gave up the direct management of their estates; this benefitted their tenants but they were slow in taking-up the responsibility for the maintenance of local churches. The wool trade ceased and was transferred to Eastern England where it sustained the cloth industry. As a result East Anglia is rich in Perpendicular architecture, whereas it is almost completely absent from Herefordshire. As Professor Saul points out, tourists generally come to Herefordshire to visit Romanesque and Decorated churches, not Early English or Perpendicular. The book ends with a gazetteer, pinpointing the best examples of the Decorated style but those who just glance at this will have missed a great deal, packed into an inexpensive book.

David Whitehead

***Sir John Oldcastle of Herefordshire: Traitor, Martyr or the Real Falstaff* by Andy Johnson, (Logaston Press, 2020), pp.274 £15.**

It comes as a pleasant surprise to discover that the founder and recently retired owner of one of the most successful local publishing houses in the United Kingdom—Logaston Press—has been discreetly, but very seriously working upon a major biography of a key national figure; namely, the heroic rebel, Sir John Oldcastle, wrongly cast as a buffoon in Shakespeare's *Henry IV* Pt 1. As someone who has several files of Andy's critical responses to manuscripts submitted for his approval as the owner/editor of Logaston Press, this comes as a complete surprise, especially. After several hard battles to secure footnotes, it's a wondrous thing to find twenty closely printed pages of references here, not to mention several pages of bibliography.

As we learn in the acknowledgements, the author's enthusiasm for Oldcastle was kindled when he moved to Almeley some forty years ago and was handed a collection of research carried out by the parish clerk. This, no doubt, showed that Sir John (c.1370-1417) came from a prominent local family, enjoyed a career as a military commander and courtier and returned to Almeley in later life as a fugitive, becoming Herefordshire's equivalent to Robin Hood. It was, surely, the local episodes in Oldcastle's life that intrigued the new resident of Almeley. On this topic there is a good deal that is new and what was already known is examined very rigorously. No doubt, the book will be bought locally for these revelations. But the core of the book is a re-assessment of Oldcastle as a military leader—the key opponent of Owen Glyndŵr—a servant of two kings, a diplomat and above all else a premature Protestant martyr. With great skill the author sifts through a great deal of hagiography and five centuries of revisionism. It is this that will put the book on the shelf of university libraries.

One senses some disappointment in the sparseness of material that fixes Oldcastle firmly in Almeley. Even his home is unknown although, following earlier authorities, the author suggests that it may have been in the vicinity of the large motte, near Oldcastle Farm, north of Almeley village. We learn a great deal about earlier members of the Oldcastle family and their gentry neighbours. These include John's grandfather (also John) and his uncle, Thomas, but his father Richard, albeit the first in the family to be described as 'Sir', lived a very quiet life. Nevertheless, the Oldcastles were very well connected and the author suggests, without too much evidence, that they enjoyed the patronage of the Mortimer family. It is John's connection with the rise of Lollardy that makes him important in the history of England but, notwithstanding Lollard preachers were active in north-west Herefordshire from 1389, there are few connections with the Oldcastles. In preparation for later chapters, the author gives us a useful introduction to the theology of John Wycliff, but we are unable to gauge the influence this had on the young Oldcastle. Indeed, John's uncle Thomas was on a commission to arrest William Swynderby, one of the local Lollard preachers. Closer connections have been postulated with Walter Brut, a Lollard gentleman living at Lyde, to the north of Hereford. John and he went on a naval expedition to attack the Burgundian fleet in 1387. This was the beginning of John's military career and a decade later he was in Ireland with Roger Mortimer and in Scotland (1400), where, the author suggests, he came to the notice of Prince Hal, the future Henry V. But it was his central role in the war against Glyndŵr (1400-8)—fully covered here—which made his reputation. It also enriched him, and several local castles and other properties were added to the family portfolio.

When the prince returned to London to share in the government of England with his sick father, Henry IV, he was accompanied by several veterans of the Welsh wars, including John Oldcastle. Presumably with the Prince's support he married a rich widow, Joan, Lady Cobham, and installed himself, as Lord Cobham, in Cooling Castle, Kent. He was now a nobleman of some standing and his documented connexions with Herefordshire become very sparse. These are traditionally the boisterous years misspent with Prince Hal but notwithstanding the author's skill in identifying potential London pubs, the prince seems to have been a diligent son, attending royal councils in the place of his ailing father and carefully managing royal finances. Oldcastle was a valued royal servant and was sent off jousting in Burgundy, making useful connections with England's new ally. The prince was keen to go to war with France but needed money. This raises the sensitive issue of the wealth of the established church, which was a key platform in the Lollard argument for dismantling it. Strangely, there is no evidence of Oldcastle's opinions on this. The French campaign of 1411 found him second-in-command of the English forces, bringing him even closer to the Prince, albeit the war ended indecisively.

At home the Archbishop of Canterbury, Thomas Arundel, had launched a new campaign against the Lollards and had noticed that a radical preacher had been installed at Cooling Castle. Moreover recent research, which the author consults, shows that Oldcastle was personally in touch with the continental reformer, John Hus of Prague, who was an admirer of John Wycliffe. Here the author commissioned a translation, revealing in this work for the first time, that Oldcastle was capable of engaging in theological discussion with one of the foremost intellectuals of Europe. This scales up the importance of the narrative, which has become national, not local history and for the next fifty pages we follow one of the great episodes of English history; Oldcastle's arrest and trial, which leads to the cooling of his relationship with Prince Hal, who became king in 1413. As the references indicate this story has been told many times before, but the author is keen to keep the reader's interest and explains the complex

processes involved and the difficult decisions faced by the new king.

In September 1413 Oldcastle was delivered to the Tower to await execution. He escaped but stayed in London where he plotted a Lollard uprising, which was soon discovered and the government compiled a nationwide list of suspects. Surprisingly, there were none from Herefordshire where Oldcastle's land was confiscated but, remarkably, granted back to family members. Oldcastle was soon on the run but the king granted pardons to many of his erstwhile supporters, thus cutting the ground from beneath his feet. He was at large for the next four years. Much of this time was spent in the Marches and in August 1414, when the king was on his way to France and the victory at Agincourt, a rising was organised at Malvern; it failed but one of the founders of the Woolhope Club, the Revd W.S. Symonds, romanticised the event in his *Malvern Chase* (1881). The author leaves few stones unturned and pursues and evaluates every known sighting of his hero. The government at the time were so ineffectual that Oldcastle continued to receive rents from property in and around Almeley and in the city of Hereford. Inevitably, with a high premium on his head, he was eventually betrayed and captured in a glade near Welshpool and in early December 1417 carried to London for a brief hearing before Parliament where he made his execution inevitable by affirming loyalty to the deposed king, Richard II—a surprising turnabout.

Thus begins the conclusion to the book. Lollardy was in decline and Oldcastle quickly dropped out of sight until the rise of Protestantism in the 1530s. He makes a starring appearance in Foxe's *Book of the Martyrs* (1563) where he is enshrined as a 'godly and valiant warrior'. The author's final flourish comes in the last chapter where he explains how the ribald character of Falstaff, emerged by accident out of the saintly and chivalric Oldcastle. Like everything else in this book this is pursued with typical rigour and further scholarly endeavour. From its beginning to the end, this book is a great read and I learnt a lot.

David Whitehead

***Mercia: the Rise and Fall of a Kingdom* by Annie Whitehead (Amberley, Stroud, 2018), 288 pp, ISBN 978 1 4456 7652 4. £20.**

Annie Whitehead (no relation of the reviewer!) writes historical novels about the Anglo-Saxon period and was a student of the eminent Anglo-Saxon scholar, Ann Williams. This thorough account of the foremost Anglo-Saxon kingdom seems to have started life as a dissertation, for there are occasional breaks in syntax which suggest hasty editing. For example, the crowning of King Edgar at Bath in 973 is followed by a trip on the river Dee, which seems like another place and time. However, these minor blemishes highlight the density of information deployed in this monograph, which sometimes requires close reading and intense concentration. In terms of both primary and secondary material, very few stones are left unturned. More could perhaps have been made of modern place-name studies and archaeology but for the local antiquarian marooned on the western fringe of Mercia, there is a great deal to be gleaned here. For example, the Mercian claims to sovereignty in Herefordshire in the 7th century via the indigenous dynasty of the *Magonsaete* are discussed thoroughly albeit, as anticipated, there are frequent references to P. Sims-Williams, *Religion and Literature in Western England 600-800* (1990). The assumption that Merewahl, the first recorded king of the *Magonsaete*, was the son of the great Mercian king, Penda (c.605-655), is discussed here but the author believes that Herefordshire had hitherto been part of Greater Powys and only slowly became a Mercian territory. Any idea of an English 'conquest' is absent from her account. Here Margaret Gelling's analysis of the early place-names of the region would have given support to her argument. However, contemporary with this process of quiet assimilation in the south, in the



northern borderland, in what became Cheshire, the Mercians were determined on conquest, for this was an outpost of the kings of Gwynedd, who were allied with Penda's principal enemy, the English rulers of Northumbria. It is significant that throughout the period covered by the book there are regular sorties by Mercian armies into North Wales but little conflict to the west of Herefordshire until the Viking era.

The dynasty of Merewahl appears to have disappeared fairly quickly but the author believes this may have been an illusion created by the absence of a corpus of land grants (charters), which were probably destroyed when Hereford Cathedral was sacked in 1055. However, the Worcester Cathedral archive was more fortunate and it is suggested that the Mercian treatment of the *Hwicce* of the Severn Valley, who survived by co-operating with their powerful neighbour, was paralleled beyond the Malverns. They lost their kingship but survived as a hereditary aristocracy, frequently becoming *ealdormen*. Since there were still elements of English army fighting against Cnut in 1016 referred to as the *Magonsaete* it suggests there was some continuity among the elite of the shire between the age of Merewahl and Eadric Streona, earl of Mercia on the eve of the Norman Conquest.

The unique identity of the shire might have been lost had Herefordshire succumbed to the Danes in the late 9th century. As the author makes clear, Alfred the Great took a great risk in marrying his daughter Aethelflaed—a 'chip off the old block' if ever there was one—to a relatively unknown Mercian nobleman Aethelred. But the lands of the *Magonsaete* and the *Hwicce* were cosseted as an outpost of Wessex and received the protection of Alfred's military reforms—Hereford was defended as a 'burh' and the region around it—later the shire-supported a military force, which when it campaigned elsewhere was identified by its archaic name—the army of the *Magonsaete*. Herefordshire avoided Danish conquest but also, from the author's refreshing perspective, conquest by the kings of Powys and reintegration into Wales. It is interesting that we find Aethelflaed fighting against the opportunist princes of South Wales at the same time as the Herefordshire *fyrð* was rescuing the bishop of Llandaff from the clutches of a Danish raiding party—a contradictory approach to the Welsh threat but ultimately the right policy. This episode and the creation of the 'burh' is recounted in Tim Clarkson, *Aethelflaed: the Lady of the Mercians* (Birlinn, Edinburgh, 2018), which also comes highly recommended. To provide some up-to-date archaeology relating to Aethelflaed's raid of 916 there is also the award winning *Llangorse Crannog: the Excavation of an early Medieval site in the Kingdom of Brycheiniog* (Oxbow, 2020) by Alan Lane and Mark Redknapp.

The Vikings destroyed the kingdom of Mercia and the land to the east of Watling Street in Warwickshire became the Danelaw but 'free' Mercia survived in the West Midlands albeit now theoretically ruled from Wessex. However, local identities survived—*Magonsaete* in a charter of 958 and the *Wreoconsaete* in South Shropshire. As we have seen Mercian relations with the Welsh were very complex and the Mercians often allied with the southern Welsh against the King of Gwynedd. Seen from Wessex the Anglo-Welsh relations were much more black and white. However, 'Free' Mercia comes back into prominence with the arrival of another Danish army in the reign of Aethelred *Unraed* ('Unready') (978-1016). This was a very professional force, commanded by the King of Denmark himself—Swein, and his son Cnut. As a result Herefordshire, according to the author, became part of the patrimony of the unofficial earl of Mercia Eadric Streona, whose nephew Edric 'Sylvaticus'—'the Wild'—is similarly 'earl' of the land of the *Magonsaete*. In 1016 Eadric (and presumably Edric) led the army of the *Magonsaete* against Cnut at the battle of Ashingdon in Essex, to support Aethelred's son, now King Edmund 'Ironside'. At a crucial moment Eadric withdrew his contingent from the battle and Edmund was defeated. The author suggests that this was

explained by the King's involvement in laying waste to Herefordshire a few months earlier. The betrayal of King Edmund by the men of Herefordshire at Ashingdon was well known to me but the explanation is new. Such are the jewels of local history to be found in this excellent book.

David Whitehead

**Colwall, James P. Bowen and Alex Craven (eds) with Jonathan Comber, Keith Ray and David Whitehead (Victoria County History, University of London Press, 2020) i-x, 207pp illustrated, i-x, ISBN 978-1-912702-07-7. £14.00.**

This publication is the third parish history to be produced by the Trust for the Victoria County History of Herefordshire, following publication of *Eastnor* in 2013 and *Bosbury* in 2016. The publication of each additional volume brings to light the unique characteristics and histories of the individual parishes in this area. It is heartening to know that research on Coddington, the next parish to be researched, is already underway and that eventually all these will form part of a VCH red book on Ledbury and the neighbouring Malvern Hills parishes.

Colwall lies on the eastern edge of Herefordshire and has a spectacular boundary with Worcestershire which runs along the Shire Ditch at the top of the Malvern Hills. (See a beautiful map of 1780 on the Club's website: keywords are 1780, Holder, map) The ridge of hills running north to south includes the Herefordshire Beacon which is the most dominant landscape feature in the parish. Colwall, or *Colwelle*, meaning 'cold well' or 'spring' is presumed to refer to the numerous natural springs which arise in the hills, many of them of a purity which has been celebrated since the seventeenth century.

As we have come to expect from these excellent short volumes, the text is presented in a succinct but informative style and includes consideration of landscape and geology as well as a history of settlement from prehistoric times to the twenty-first century. Evidence of early settlement has been found in the north and west of the parish while the extensive hill fort at British Camp, on the Herefordshire Beacon, indicates activity there since the Iron Age. Like many Herefordshire parishes, later settlement developed though scattered farmsteads and small hamlets with early concentrations of houses developing close to the parish church and in the area of Evendine Spring. By the early nineteenth century there was a cluster of cottages at Colwall Green with the main modern centre at Colwall Stone developing after the opening of the railway in the early 1860s.

From the mid-nineteenth century Colwall's development was influenced by the rapid growth in popularity of nearby spa resorts at Great Malvern, Malvern Wells and West Malvern which attracted many visitors to the Malvern Hills area. While the only spa facility to develop within the parish, that at Royal Spa close to the Wyche cutting, was short lived, Colwall nevertheless acquired some of the facilities expected of an inland leisure resort. These included visitor accommodation, hotels, a race course and golf club. The passage of the Malvern Hills Act in 1884, which prevented further development on the Malvern Hills, ensured the parish maintained easy access to unspoiled countryside and this, coupled with good road and rail communications, has proved attractive to both residents and visitors.

As the authors draw out, Colwall is uncharacteristic of many Herefordshire parishes as it did not experience a trend of falling population and economic decline in the nineteenth century. The authors find space to introduce several of Colwall's well-known residents, including the railway engineer Stephen Ballard and his entrepreneurial family, and, of course, the family of Elizabeth Barrett Browning who lived at Hope End. From the nineteenth century a variety of cultural figures were also associated with Colwall, including the distinguished

soprano Jenny Lind, director Barry Jackson, artists Harold and Dame Laura Knight and poet W.H. Auden.

The extensive acknowledgements at the front of the volume indicate the large numbers of volunteers and experts who have contributed to the research which underpins this volume. It is a testament to the skills of the editors to have brought it all together so successfully. The volume is greatly enhanced by thirty-one attractive illustrations which admirably complement the text and enable the reader to visualise the main features discussed. There is certainly sufficient in this volume to satisfy the already well-informed local resident as well as pique the interest of those readers unfamiliar with this corner of Herefordshire.

Jane Adams

***The Welsh Marcher Lordships. 1: Central & North* by Philip Hume (Logaston Press, 2021) xix +300 pp, illustrated. ISBN978-1-910839-45-4. £15.99.**

The Mortimer History Society was launched in 2009 as a focus for those interested in the medieval Mortimer dynasty and the history of the Welsh Marches. Thus the society aims to place the Mortimer family and its history in the much wider context of its times. This includes the wider study of the Welsh Marches, a term which immediately calls to mind the current English/Welsh borders, but which had much wider ramifications. As part of this remit, the society has now published the first of an intended three volumes, in which the history of the Marcher lordships is discussed, both in overview and then through the history of the various lordships. This first volume in the series gives a general history of the lordships from their establishment after the Norman Conquest, until the abolishment of their special status in the sixteenth century. The volume is completed by short histories of the lordships in Radnorshire and north Herefordshire, Montgomeryshire and Shropshire, and Denbighshire and Flintshire. Thus while Herefordshire seems to be a very minor part of this, since the Mortimer family gradually acquired a substantial number of lordships, scattered through the wider March, much of it relates back to them and their caput at Wigmore.

The main author is Philip Hume, secretary of the Mortimer History Society, but with specialist help. So, for instance, after the preliminary introductions, the first chapter sets the context by discussing the distinctive features of Marcher lordships; the section on the law of the March is by Dr Sara Elin Roberts, and that on the castles of the Marcher lords by Dr John Kenyon. The necessary background is completed by a chapter on Wales before 1066. This shows clearly how Wales was divided into a number of small kingdoms, and the difficult terrain, which made them difficult to unite (had they wanted to!), made them, as the Normans found, equally difficult to conquer.

After the invasion of William the Bastard in 1066, to stabilise the border with Wales earldoms were established centred on the suitable English towns of Hereford, Shrewsbury, and Chester. That of Hereford soon fell back into the hands of the Crown, followed by that of Shrewsbury, following the rebellion of their earls in 1075 and 1102 respectively. As a consequence a number of the lords of the smaller lordships along the border became tenants-in-chief i.e. holding them direct from the Crown, and these developed into Marcher lordships. Because of the special conditions in this border region they gradually developed into almost semi-independent entities, with their own laws and customs, although held from the king. Even Magna Carta recognised that the law of the March was different from the common law of England. Over the next couple of centuries or so the situation along the Marches was fluid. A strong king of England meant that there would be incursions into Wales, but these could be reversed when the situation was different. So, for instance, when a Welsh leader managed to

unite the disparate kingdoms, the reverse would happen. All in all it was a bloody conflict over a number of generations, with little or no credit to either side. Because of their insatiable desire for possession of land, there was continual pressure from the Norman lords. South Wales was conquered fairly early on, becoming a patchwork of Marcher lordships. The final phase was the establishment of a number of Marcher lordships, almost all in north and central Wales, by Edward 1 in the period 1277 to 1282, just prior to his final push into Wales.

After Edward's conquest of Wales, the remaining part of the principality became under the control of the Crown, although the Marcher lordships continued under their own laws until these were finally abolished by statute in 1536 and 1542.

This complicated picture is gone into in detail in the text, but inevitably, because of the complicated history that in itself can only be a summary. The gradual encirclement of the heartland of Wales is most vividly illustrated by the map on p.3, which marks the different phases of the establishment of the Marcher lordships, and shows how the grip of the invaders was gradually tightened before the final conquest. There is another compelling map on p.123, which marks the different Marcher lordships held by seven of the major English aristocratic families at the end of the fourteenth century. It comes as no surprise that dominant among these were the holdings of the Mortimer family. These holdings were scattered, to ensure that there was no consolidated power base from which the authority of the Crown could be challenged.

Almost the first half of the book, outlined above, gives the overview of the history of the Marcher lordships in seven chapters, while the remaining three chapters, each rather longer, cover the individual histories of the lordships themselves. The chapter on the lordships of Radnorshire and north Herefordshire is of more immediate interest to me, beginning with that of Wigmore and the other Herefordshire lordships, before dealing with those of Radnorshire. This is followed by a chapter on the lordships of Shropshire, and those of Montgomeryshire to the west, a natural pairing, the research for which was carried out by Phill Willson, and the final chapter is the pairing of the lordships in Denbighshire and Flintshire. Because of the number of lordships these descriptions are necessarily brief, but give a summary of the current state of knowledge.

The volume is well illustrated throughout with coloured maps and images of sites mentioned in the text, as well as images of statues, monuments and images taken from illustrated manuscripts. There is an evocative photograph of Wigmore Castle, with a farm cart in the foreground, taken by Alfred Watkins with an artistic eye, an image supplied from the Herefordshire Library Service. Some of the aerial photographs of castle sites give a much better idea of the layout than either a plan or even walking over the site, and full advantage has been taken of this.

A reviewer must be allowed a few niggles. I would have preferred that the map which illustrates castle sites to mark those that were known to have been rebuilt in stone, as this gives a better idea of intended permanence, and perhaps to differentiate between native Welsh castles and those of the Norman invaders. There were a few instances of castle names mentioned in the text, with which I was not familiar, requiring some looking up as I went along, and perhaps for these relatively minor sites it might have been worth giving an indication of location, such as 'near...'

This, then, is a volume that contains much detailed information. It is a volume that is not to be taken lightly: because of the detailed, and interlocking, material, it needs careful study, which will be rewarded, and as such I recommend it to those interested in the history of the March. We look forward to the publication of Volume 2 (West Wales) and Volume 3 (South Wales).

John Eisel

***Matilda, Lady of Hay* by Peter Ford (Logaston Press 2021) viii + 120 pp, illustrated. ISBN 978-1-910839-43-0. £7.99.**

One of the most influential of the families on the Welsh border was that of de Braose, which acquired large holdings on the border and elsewhere, all stemming from the support of William the Bastard in the invasion of 1066. Being a male-dominated society, the history of this turbulent period was told from that perspective, and the influence of women, while undoubtedly there to some extent, was exercised in the background. There were a few exceptions to this rule, and one of them was the redoubtable Matilda, the Lady of Hay, whose exploits brought her to prominence, and to a distressing death. Her story was told in a book published in 2018, and this new edition was published by Logaston Press in March 2021, with many new illustrations.

In this book the story of Matilda is told using, as far as possible, such few contemporary sources as survive, giving the most likely interpretation from often conflicting evidence. Some of this comes from the writings of Giraldus Cambrensis, who knew the couple, but whose description altered as his text was rewritten! Matilda was a member of the Saint Valery family, also a Norman family with some estates in England, who married William III de Braose, probably in the late 1160s. Because of a notorious massacre at Abergavenny in 1175, William III became known as 'the Ogre of Abergavenny.' He succeeded his father in 1190, and was a supporter of King Richard I, and then of King John, until he fell out with that unsavoury monarch in 1208, allegedly because of remarks made by Matilda about King John's disposal of Arthur of Brittany, a competitor for his throne. No doubt this was an excuse at a time of shifting loyalties. Declared an outlaw, there followed a period of conflict, until Matilda and her son William IV were captured, and subsequently moved to the royal castle at Corfe, where they were reported as being starved to death in 1211.

Matilda made her mark in Hay, and was responsible for the remodelling of the mid-twelfth-century tower gatehouse, and building an adjacent new entrance, together with stone walls. She and her husband, as was the custom of the time, made many donations to the church, and she herself endowed Llanthony Prima Priory, not too far from Hay, in the vale of Ewyas. This is discussed in a chapter after the complicated history of Matilda and her husband has been explained, in which the known lives of the various offspring of the union are laid out. Because of the difficulties of sources, there is no absolute certainty, except that it was a large number! Among these was Giles de Braose, second surviving son and bishop of Hereford 1200–1215.

The final chapter of the book is on the legacies of Matilda de Braose. One speculation is that the imprisonment and death of Matilda was one of the influences which led to the insertion of clause 39 in Magna Carta, which basically decreed that no free man should be outlawed or exiled 'save by the lawful judgment of his peers and by the law of the land.' This embodies a fundamental principle, but in the attitudes of the times it only refers to men, and I question whether women were even considered! The chapter concludes with a discussion of various legends that arose, centred around Matilda de Braose ('Moll/Maud Walbee') and considers how they might have arisen, and how they could have been based on fact.

There are a few little things that I picked up on. So, for instance, Llanthony Priory was referred to as Llanthony Abbey, which it was not. After being established around 1100, after attacks by the Welsh, in 1135 a move was made to Gloucester (Llanthony Secunda), and it was refounded about 1186 by Hugh de Lacy, who endowed it with money from his Irish estates. From what is said in the text, it seems that Matilda also helped in this pious work. Also mentioned in the text is an almost throwaway remark about Giles de Braose that 'he was also

believed to have overseen the building of the central tower of Hereford Cathedral with its fine decorative work and ballflowers.' The source used was A.H. Fisher's guide book in the Bell's Cathedral series, first published in 1898, which goes on to say that the tower appeared to have been partly rebuilt 100 years after de Braose's time. While there may well have been a low central tower in de Braose's time, the superstructure, complete with ballflower decoration, was rebuilt in its entirety in the early years of the fourteenth century, so to couple de Braose with ballflower decoration is an anachronism.

In the context of the book, however, these are small matters. This is a very readable account of the life of Matilda de Braose, which uses all the relevant sources for her life, and gives a very balanced view. It is well illustrated, some of the illustrations having been previously used in *The Welsh Marcher Lordships Volume 1*. There are also historic images of Hay Castle, both engravings and photographs, and one that appears to be an early coloured postcard, as well as a photograph of the early stone cross at Llowes.

It is remarkable that the first edition was produced in 2018, only three years after the writer arrived in Hay, and this must have entailed much detailed work in a very short time. I do not have a copy of the first edition to hand, but it is a reasonable assumption that this new edition is much enlarged. It should find a place on the bookshelves of anyone interested in the history of this troubled border region.

John Eisel