



# The Archaeological Journal

## Book Reviews



**DESERTED VILLAGES REVISITED.** Edited by Christopher Dyer and Richard Jones. Pp. xix and 207, Illus 39. University of Hertfordshire Press (Explorations in Local and Regional History, 3), 2010. Price: £14.99. ISBN 978 1 905313 79 2.

When writing a book on such a well discussed topic as village desertion, there is always a danger that it will be seen as going over old ground without presenting anything new. In the case of *Deserted Villages Revisited*, editors Dyer and Jones successfully avoid this. The book brings together a good mix of landscape researchers who critically assess the long-standing debates surrounding the desertion of villages and small settlements between 1340 and 1750.

Christopher Taylor neatly distils the academic enquiry of deserted villages, forming a precise introduction for those new to the subject, as well as a timely reminder for those who have forgotten how far the subject has moved forward in sixty or so years. Taylor's synthesis is followed by chapters that aim to provide new light on the subject. Each chapter presents a mix of traditional scholarship and fresh ideas: Christopher Dyer's approach to the problems of dislocation and desertion, from a social perspective, is particularly enlightening. The notion of a medieval 'sink' type community, and the problem James family, adds a human perspective much missed from more traditional research of this kind. The picture suggests that change does not necessarily bring negativity but it can foster growth and technical innovation — this was refreshing to read.

No collective work of this kind should be without reference to the eminent fieldwork of W. G. Hoskins and Maurice Beresford and the formation of the department of English Local History. Paul Everson and Graham Brown manage to navigate away from being either overly reverential or dismissive of this body of work, and they explore the case studies of Hamilton, Ingarsby, Streeton Magna, and Knapton, in terms of what has been subsequently learnt. They pose a number of themes, such as the evolution of deserted medieval settlement fieldwork, and the study of change within the lifetime of villages.

Sally V. Smith's study into the late medieval peasant experience in Buckinghamshire addresses changes in settlement type as a humanly created phenomenon that is meaningful to those using the space. Smith suggests that the investment of social experience in a particular space over time, varying from fifty years to a few centuries, reveals that previous thinking on this topic may have been too simplistic in the past. This is a welcome approach and one that opens up a wealth of possibilities for further studies.

*Deserted Villages Revisited* is challenging and thought-provoking, and although the book presents no real surprises, this is in no way a criticism. The papers serve as a clear,

The final version of this review will appear in *The Archaeological Journal* 169 for 2012.

considered and well-written distillation of past and current thinking which challenge, without dismissing, the ideas that went before. This volume serves as a neat stepping-stone for an exciting next phase in research of settlement desertion. As Jones and Dyer conclude, there is still much to fascinate academics and the public for years to come.

LUCY RYDER