

MONKS ELEIGH MANORIAL RECORDS, 1210-1683 edited by *Vivienne Aldous* (Boydell & Brewer vol.65 for Suffolk Records Society 2022 486pp ISBN 978-1-78327-679-0) £75 hb; £19.99 ebook [£35 directly from SRS]

This book was prompted by over twenty years of research by the late John Brian Weller. He did not live to complete it but bequeathed his archive to the University of Suffolk, along with funding to further his work. Vivienne Aldous, a part-time lecturer in history at the university and an experienced archivist, took on the task of compiling and editing the many transcripts in his files for this volume published by the Suffolk Records Society. She has also written a well-researched introduction. Monks Eleigh is blessed with a large number of surviving manorial records from this period. These take up about 300 pages of the book; according to Aldous, this leaves only a handful of such documents which have not yet been transcribed. Perhaps surprisingly, court rolls do not make up the majority of papers transcribed: there are over 200 pages of thirteenth and fourteenth century charters and extents, accounts and rentals. In 991 the manor was bequeathed to the monks of the priory of Christ Church, Canterbury. Most of its records survived because they were stored centrally in Canterbury, where they remain in the care of the Cathedral archives. It is suggested that the distance of these primary sources from Suffolk explains the previous relative lack of research by local historians.

The first chapter presents 36 charters dating from the mid-twelfth century to 1360 describing the granting of various property rights by the prior and convent. There follows a translation of seven extents dating from the early thirteenth to early fourteenth centuries. Some meticulous detective work by Aldous (by comparing details with other dated documents, such as accounts) has provided some fairly precise dates for each one. These extents provide a fascinating insight into the feudal dues of the tenants: they included ploughing, harrowing, sowing, reaping, carting, spreading dung, gathering straw for thatching the lord's barns and carriage services. Different service requirements were made of tenants according to the size of holding, quality of land or conditions at the time the services were laid down. There was also differentiation between free tenants and unfree tenants. The terminology used can be a barrier to understanding: for instance, there are many words which describe different types of labour service (such as 'mondaylands', 'gafols' and 'benerthes'); all are carefully explained.

The next chapter covers accounts, dating from 1285 to 1482. These documents were drawn up by a bailiff or local serjeant to answer to the lord's auditors for the obligations with which he had been charged. Cash received in rents and other income, such as sales of corn or of livestock, was shown alongside that discharged such as expenditure on ploughs, carts, building repairs, harvest expenses, wages of servants, fencing, mowing, ditching and weeding. Each account provides a view of activities performed on the manor for that year, and also, by comparison with each year, an assessment of economic progress may be made. All the different types of crop are mentioned and also those of the livestock. A separate chapter on building accounts gives a wealth of detail on building materials, costs and techniques, and we are also informed of the different types of building in the manor, such as ox shed, well, dairy and dovecote.

Given the book's title, I expected there to be many more manor court rolls but in fact only about 40 court proceedings have survived from 1305 to 1590, about half of them in the 1349-1374 period. Nevertheless, this collection allows an investigation into various aspects of rural life and the sorts of minor transgressions brought to court such as assaults, illegal recoveries of impounded animals, theft, aggravated housebreaking and raising the hue and cry. Also, the 1349/50 rolls cover the short-term aftermath of Suffolk's experience of the Black Death. In the introduction Aldous describes how Weller had made enquiries as to whether any person mentioned in the court rolls might have been involved in the Peasants' Revolt of 1381. From

a list of known Suffolk rebels three of Eleigh's tenants were identified who might have taken part in the revolt, one of whom was the serjeant or bailiff. All three were amongst the better off in social status. When I saw that there was a chapter on rentals I anticipated lists of names and their respective rental values. However, Monks Eleigh rentals (there are eight, dating from 1379 to 1683) run to over 100 pages in this volume because each property holding contains a long description of its nature and location. The 1379 rental marks the year in which all labour works and services were commuted to cash for the first time. Aldous recounts that the process of assembling that rental took 94 days while the surveyor and jurors would perambulate the manor discussing and listing each holding and any details worthy of remembrance.

Drawing on all this information, Mr Weller also left a series of sketch maps of the manor and five have been published. Each is carefully drafted, illustrating features from different periods. Monks Eleigh does have a very detailed map, dated 1724, and part of it is displayed on the cover. It is beautifully drawn and in colour, showing each building illustrated with a red roof. What a pity it was not shown in full. The final transcript is of paper copies of an equity case relating to a riot in 1481. The lessee (farmer) at that time was alleged to have failed to repay a debt to a tenant who took matters into his own hands and impounded the manorial livestock in his own farmyard. A riot ensued but as with many such documents the outcome of the case is not known.

In summary, this is an excellent publication, professionally produced, with a very helpful glossary and indexes of people, places and subjects. Aldous' use of footnotes throughout is particularly worthy of mention providing a meticulous interpretation of all aspects of the translations. Monks Eleigh is extremely fortunate to have such a wealth of surviving documents from this period and this volume provides the reader with a comprehensive insight into how its inhabitants led their lives at that time.

Since 2008, DAVID CROFT has led documentary research activity in the Norton Community Archaeology Group which has produced three volumes of transcriptions of Norton's manorial court records, dated 1244-1916. The earliest of these volumes (1244-1539) was published by the Hertfordshire Record Society in 2014.