

Buildings and People of a Rutland Manor - Lyddington, Caldecott, Stoke Dry and Thorpe by Water

By Rosemary Canadine, Vanessa Doe, Nick Hill, Robert Ovens and Christopher Thornton

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This book owes its origins to two developments: the cataloguing of the vast trove of Lyddington manorial documents held at Burghley House and a proposal for dendrochronological research on buildings in Lyddington village. The idea of linking these two developments led to the foundation of the Lyddington Manor History Society. Armed with a grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund, the Society undertook a prodigious amount of research in a very short time, one of the outcomes of their efforts being the publication of this handsomely produced volume.

The book is a collaboration of five authors, two of whom are residents of Lyddington. Christopher Thornton has established succinctly the context of the manor's medieval development. However, the bulk of the volume concerns the period from the mid-sixteenth to the early nineteenth centuries when the manor was in the hands of the Cecil family. The nature of the available sources has determined the parameters both of the project and of this volume. As a result, there is little about the religious and political history of the area. However, there is a substantial account of the manor's social and economic history written by Vanessa Doe, along with what seems likely to appeal to most readers of this volume, a discussion of vernacular building by Nick Hill and Robert Ovens and a series of individual house histories produced by Rosemary Canadine.

Vanessa Doe's account of the social and economic history of the manor is substantial and erudite. Her strongest section is that on farming. The detailed and subtle analysis of the agrarian history of the manor seems likely to remain definitive. A couple of opportunities for further comment on other aspects are not taken. Thus, the section on 'Poverty and the Poor in Lyddington Parish' is insufficiently linked to the legislative framework which defined poor relief, and Edward Watson's bequest of 1530 to pay for a priest to pray for the souls of the departed and to teach the children of the poor was not linked to the dissolution of the chantries, which presumably resulted in that endowment passing to the Crown.

Nick Hill and Robert Ovens discuss the development of what they consider to be 'the rich tradition of local vernacular architecture'. One of the outcomes of the dendrochronological research is that an additional seven buildings in Lyddington have been found to have fabric surviving from before the seventeenth century. The analysis in this section is detailed, convincing and supported thoroughly by dendrochronological data. The authors link the upsurge in vernacular building not only to the improvements in some agricultural incomes but also to the consciousness of status of many of Lyddington's residents. The material in this section is closely linked to Rosemary Canadine's detailed accounts of individual buildings within the manor. These hint at numerous family stories which might provide the basis future research. Why, for example, did Joseph Clarke, a substantial property owner, go to the USA in 1842, dying there in the following year?

There are one or two minor errors in the book. Robert Browne did not lead the Pilgrim Fathers to America and in 1620 few of their number would still have acknowledged him as the leader of their religious movement, and two dates of death are given for Bishop Magee of Peterborough. (1891 is the correct one). These do nothing, however, to detract from the quality of this book, which contains much ground-breaking research and is a worthy monument to the collective efforts of the Lyddington Manor History Group.

Mike Tillbrook

