Reviews

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Michael Hicks, ed., *The Later Medieval Inquisitions Post Mortem: Mapping the Medieval Countryside and Rural Society*, Woodbridge, Boydell Press. 240 pp. £60. 9781783270798.

This volume focuses on the series of documents commonly referred to as the inquisitions *post mortem*, being formal inquiries into the landed estates of those who held their land directly from the king after their death. They ensured that escheated lands would return to the crown, in turn protecting the king's position at the head of the feudal system. The collection of papers in *The Later Inquisitions Post Mortem* illustrates the potential of inquisitions to advance the understanding of medieval politics and society through an array of thought-provoking and insightful approaches. Particular attention is paid to the complexities of the landscape, countryside and rural life, throwing light onto the possibilities and rewards of interdisciplinary study.

The result of a conference held at the University of Winchester (2014) with further supplementary contributions, *The Later Inquisitions* is largely influenced by the commendable efforts of the AHRC-funded *Mapping the Medieval Countryside* project <www.inquisitionspostmortem.ac.uk>, which raises the profile of and improves access to the inquisitions *post mortem* (c. 1236–1509) in a digital database available online. The collection is the successor to Michael Hicks's edited companion to the inquisitions *post mortem*, *The Fifteenth-Century Inquisitions Post Mortem: A Companion*, published in 2012. It is an excellent introduction for those who are less familiar with the documents, and is enhanced by the work presented here. From the bureaucratic domain of government, administration and warfare to trade and religion in the localities, *The Later Inquisitions* testifies to the flexibility and depth of the inquisitions, and the progress made in their interpretation and use.

As much as *The Later Inquisitions* is a celebration of the inquisitions *post mortem*, quite sensibly it advises historians to adopt a cautious approach. It does not attempt to disguise the potential pitfalls of the sources, for example their fragmentary survival, traceable plagiarism, or failing to treat them in the context of further evidence. The latter is achieved commendably throughout the volume, where the inquisitions are used in conjunction with previous scholarly research and primary sources such as manorial accounts and court rolls. The reader does not emerge, however, doubting the value of the inquisitions. Despite the difficulties of interpretation, the importance of paying attention to sources where evidence is relatively scarce is highlighted in the introductory chapter, and supported by the following contributors' intriguing and helpfully provocative conclusions.

In the second and third contributions, Gordon McKelvie and Paul Dryburgh consider the use of the inquisitions in English territories further afield – the former in Scotland and Calais, the latter in Ireland – demonstrating how the understanding of the English system

can be enhanced in the analysis of its application elsewhere. Jennifer Ward expands the significance of effective bureaucratic administration in the fourth contribution, which explores the honour court of Clare and its experience in the face of royal authority.

Here *The Later Inquisitions* changes focus slightly to view the inquisitions through an interdisciplinary lens, with notable examples of toponymy and archaeology to reveal regional transition. In the fifth contribution, Christopher Dyer illustrates the supplementary role of the inquisitions, which lend further detail to lay estates in his analysis of regional variation in the West Midlands, using field names as evidence for land composition. Stephen Mileson's following contribution adopts this approach, alongside bynames and place names, to advocate the value of the inquisitions in understanding the peasantry's perception of landscape, in turn illuminating their relationship with the natural world.

Themes of economy and industry become more concentrated in the later contributions. Matthew Holford highlights the potential role of inquisitions in shedding light on the history of fairs and markets, demonstrating their value in understanding contemporary marketing systems, trading networks and market competition. Attention is then drawn to inquisitions' value in the comprehension of local industry in Matthew Tompkins's analysis of the structure of the milling industry, which exposes regional variation and an apparent decline in the industry from the mid-fourteenth century onwards. Tompkins recognises the rewards of digitisation that has facilitated comparisons across longer time periods. The digital approach re-emerges in William Deller's exploration of over 10,000 jurors' testimonies. Deller's research exposes attitudes towards trade amongst the jurors' proofs of age, concluding that they appear to have belonged to a materialistic society centred on social advancement.

Katie Clarke and Hicks's analysis of the life of the parish church as told through jurors' proofs of age reveals human experiences at key moments in the church calendar. The role of women is inferred in the practices of churching and baptism, indicating their prominent position in certain religious rituals. Hicks's third contribution to the collection explores the relationships between lords and tenants in feudal tenure, the role of monasticism and the religious in aristocratic ceremonies, and the material possessions of aristocratic society and access to the wine trade. Each demonstrates the diversity of possible themes for researching the inquisitions.

The final contribution is made by Simon Payling, whose interrogation of the inquisitions' vulnerability to manipulation, especially in the context of land disputes, illuminates the potential deception involved in these documents. The jurors at the inquisition were particularly vulnerable; a sentiment echoed by Janette Garrett in the preceding chapter. Garrett's exploration of the role of distance in the administration and efficiency of the inquisitions in Northumberland recognises the possible spread of malpractice, but suggests that geography did not impact upon the mechanics and efficiency of the system beyond the occasional delay.

The Later Inquisitions is a fascinating and clearly rewarding collection of research. It emerges from bureaucratic analysis into exploration of medieval industry, shifting from inquisition sources such as manorial extents to proofs of age. Throughout the volume inquisitions are considered as evidence for understanding and investigating the

perspectives of both individual and community at all levels of the social hierarchy. Each contribution supports the volume's intention to explore the inquisitions further. The collection is thoroughly convincing as an argument for the challenges and rewards presented by these documents.

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Edward Impey with Daniel Miles and Richard Lea, *The Great Barn of 1425–7 at Harmondsworth, Middlesex*. Swindon, Historic England, 2017. 89 pp, 31 figs, 6 tables. £20. 9781848023710 pbk.

Harmondsworth in Middlesex, a village seventeen miles from London, is best known as the original home of Penguin Books, but is also celebrated for its surviving medieval barn, 192 feet long and as magnificent, as John Betjeman said, as a cathedral. It is not, as he thought, the longest medieval barn known in England, but is placed at thirteenth in the league table, and fifth among those still standing. It deserves to be well known, but unfortunately is only likely to become famous as it stands only 150 metres from the end of the projected third runway for Heathrow airport.

The building has lasted well but it was in danger towards the end of the last century, when it was acquired by English Heritage. Over a number of years sums in excess of £600,000 were spent on its repair and restoration. Historic England, who have succeeded English Heritage, were inspired to publish this thoughtful and thoroughly researched account of the architecture and history of the barn in a well-illustrated book. It will be read with profit by those interested in timber buildings and medieval agriculture.

Like many other imposing barns, Harmondsworth's was built for a manor on the estate of a great church institution, in this case Winchester College. The manor had belonged to an 'alien priory' attached to a monastery in Normandy, and the building of the barn in 1426–7 was part of the College's programme of investment and improvement of its relatively new acquisitions. The Winchester documents throw light on the use of the barn, but not on the main phase of construction. The date comes from dendrochronology with support from the documents. The surviving structure itself tells us about the decisions made by the builders, and also reveals some errors. It was built of good quality materials, and in particular the timbers were probably selected in a distant wood, though we do not know the precise source. The carpenter in charge of the project was evidently not in the first rank of his craft, and may have lacked experience. Some of the jointing methods he used are described as 'inept'. The masons with whom the carpenters had to cooperate did not do their work very competently, and the sill walls were poorly levelled. In a remarkable failure of communication, the masons built the sill walls with spaces for doors, but the timbers that were cut and made ready for assembly away from the site were designed with the doors in different positions. The mistake was corrected when the timbers were reared