

BOOK NOTICES

A History of the County of Somerset, edited by R. W. Dunning, Vol. III (The Victoria History of the Counties of England, edited by Prof. R. B. Pugh. Published for the Institute of Historical Research, University of London, by Oxford University Press, 1974), xx + 293pp., 40 illustrations, 17 maps and plans, £24.

The publication in September 1974 of Vol. III of the History of Somerset in the Victoria History of the Counties of England series is a notable event for all those interested in Somerset and its history, and one on which the Editor, Dr. R. W. Dunning, and the Assistant Editor, Mr. R. J. E. Bush are to be warmly congratulated. The first two volumes for Somerset in this series, which covered the general history of the county, were published in 1906 and 1911 respectively; but work on the parish histories, which had already started, was brought to a stop by the 1914-18 War. While the series was continued for other parts of England, Somerset is the first of the four western counties to have embarked on a plan, drawn up by co-operation between London University and the Somerset County Council, for the production of the topographical volumes. The long interval between volumes II and III has turned out to be an advantage, for methods of research, and views on what subjects are of importance in local history, have changed over the years, and recent vicissitudes, such as the closing of schools and railway stations, and the uniting of benefices, can be recorded. More attention is now given to agriculture, industry, and manorial and parochial administration.

The present volume deals with the twenty parishes of the hundreds of Pitney, Somerton and Tintinhull, and the parish of Huish Episcopi (a detached portion of the Bishop's Hundred of Kingsbury East, whose centre is the town of Chard). There are maps of the hundreds and of about half the parishes; and the forty illustrations, mainly in groups of two and four to a page, include modern photographs and a number of views from the mid-nineteenth century water-colours of J. Buckler and W. W. Wheatly, now in the possession of the Somerset Archaeological Society. There is an excellent index, with a subject index for each parish.

Fifteen of the parish histories are by Dr. Dunning, and six (including the town of Langport) by Mr. Bush. Each follows a uniform plan. Firstly there is a general description, followed by the descent of the manor(s) and by sections devoted to economic history (the records of agriculture, trade and industry) and local government (the records of manorial courts, parochial administration in the villages, and borough organization in Langport and Ilchester). Under the brief heading 'Church' is the history of the advowson, and a description of the church and of the rectory or vicarage if of architectural interest, with notes on the incumbents; this is followed by an account of the activities of Catholics and non-conformists in the parish, of the schools old and new, and of charities.

The long lists of references in the footnotes show the immense amount of research which has been undertaken even for the smallest parish. Estates changed hands frequently. In 1919 Victor, Duke of Devonshire, sold the estate in Long Sutton which had descended to him from his ancestor Sir John Spencer, Lord Mayor London, who died in 1610, but such long tenures seem to have been the exception rather than the rule in this area, and families such as the Phelipses, residing for three centuries in the house which they had built, are even more unusual. This pattern may not be repeated in other parts of the county. It is a great advantage for the present historians of Somerset that so many family archives, such as those of the Phelipses, are now available for research in the Somerset Record Office.

The three hundreds covered by this volume contain parishes with a wide variety of interest: from Ilchester with its Roman foundations (which are still being uncovered) to Aller where, in the thirteenth century, the abbots of Glastonbury embarked on the construction of 'rhines' for the drainage of the moors; from Montacute with its great Elizabethan mansion, and Muchelney, where the Abbot's Lodging of the Benedictine monastery still stands 'remarkably complete', with two well-preserved little stone lions still

fixed to the wall above the carved fire-place in the abbot's parlour, to East Lydford where the parishioners, though in a county long accustomed to inundation, at last objected to their damp and inconvenient church which was liable to be isolated by floods, and a generous rector built a new church in the centre of the village, and to Yeovilton, where an inland agricultural village has experienced the strange fate of being taken over by the Fleet Air Arm, and is known far beyond the bounds of Somerset as the site of H.M.S. Heron.

Of the three towns, Somerton, which has grown considerably in the 1960s, has some of the most interesting houses, including the vicarage with a late-medieval wing, while Ilchester, once the county town, has perhaps the most interesting history. Having sent representatives to Parliament in the fourteenth century, it ceased to do so from 1361 until 1621, when Sir Robert Phelips obtained its re-enfranchisement to provide himself and his descendants with a pocket borough. It proved less useful than expected, and by 1715 the Phelips influence had disappeared. There is an interesting account of the methods used to secure votes by other 'borough mongers' in the eighteenth century, nor would any account of the town be complete without reference to the notoriety conferred by the grim conditions in the county gaol and the public executions remembered long after the gaol was closed in 1844. A footnote rightly draws attention to the amount of research on the history of Ilchester previously done by Mr. J. Stevens Cox.

The V.C.H., as it is usually known for the sake of brevity, is planned primarily as a work of reference, but there are many sections which are both readable and of general interest to anyone wishing to increase his knowledge of Somerset past and present. It is to be hoped that those who may be deterred by the price of this volume will be able to borrow it from the county libraries.

Voi. IV is in active preparation, and will cover the hundreds of Martock, South Petherton and Crewkerne.

Mrs. S. W. Rawlins

The Iron Age in Lowland Britain, by D. W. Harding (Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1974), xviii + 260pp., 37 plates, 81 figs., £6.95.

Dr. Harding has produced a substantial, authoritative yet unassuming volume. Its appearance, simultaneously and in conjunction with Professor Cunliffe's *Iron Age Communities in Britain* from the same publisher, transforms the study, and the teaching, of those seven or eight centuries before the Roman Conquest which archaeologists have labelled 'The (Early) Iron Age'. Curiously, however, Dr. Harding does not discuss the appropriateness or otherwise of the conventional terminology, and indeed, apart from the 'primary Iron Age', he reverts to a pre-ABC Hallstatt/La Tène nomenclature.

Indeed, welcome though the book is in assembling, analysing and interpreting a great corpus of evidence, in the midst of all the current alarms and excursions about the nature of prehistoric archaeology, Dr. Harding presents to us a strangely, even satisfactorily, conventional work of scholarship. His prose is lucid and workmanlike, eschewing even what threaten to become the norms of contemporary, mid-Atlantic jargon; nowhere does he overtly quantify or build 'models'; he does not make great play with C14 dates and indeed glories in the minutiae of ceramic typology; and, a decade after nearly all those iron-using continentals were pushed back across the English Channel, however ambivalently the author allows their return, embedded deep in the Harding concept of the British Iron Age is a fundamental commitment to invasion as a catalytic factor in the mechanics of the period. Transparently, the book is from an Oxford man, not the Cambridge School.

Beginning with a 'Background' and ending with an 'Historical Summary', the volume stands or falls by its two central sections, 'Settlement and Society' and 'Material Remains and Chronology'. Each is economically balanced into about one hundred pages of five or six chapters. The former basically divides up the structural evidence from fieldwork and excavation and discusses it by topic, e.g. 'Celtic religion and ceremonial monuments' and

'Burials and funerary practices', both chapters containing much that is new reviewed with clarity and discretion. The other chapters in this section are not consistently so well-informed. Doubtless some will deplore the dependence on pottery styles in the other section, but here we have a crucial statement in the development of insular Iron Age studies from a scholar who has, over a decade and more, devoted much time and thought to the 'pattern and purpose' of the later prehistoric ceramics of lowland Britain. There is not space here to discuss his views in detail and any summary must be crude compared with the nuances of his text, but it would seem fair to say that he re-instates late Hallstatt immigrants (their status tends to vary somewhat throughout the book but they are definitely there, triumphantly on p. 229), re-invokes a Marnian invasion but redates it to the 5th century BC, and then, contrariwise, pours some fairly tepid water on the whole idea of a Belgic invasion. Intrigued readers, and all students, must take that bait and read the book itself. It is recommended as a sound and sensible review of much that is relevant to the later prehistory of lowland Britain; it goes a long way towards filling, for the time being, the yawning void which the absence of an 'Iron Age textbook' has created for far too long. Yet it is a pleasingly modest book: the author is not trying to 'prove' anything, neither does he protest too much. He seems to be simply saying, 'This is what appears to be the most useful evidence from a mass of dross which I have otherwise ignored; we all know it is inadequate but let us still try and make some sense of it rather than have no book at all'.

P. J. Fowler

Ghosts of Dorset Devon and Somerset, by Rodney Legg, Mary Collier, and Tom Perrott (Dorset Publishing Company, Milborne Port, Sherborne, Dorset, 1974), 148pp., £3.25.

The present interest in many aspects of local history ensures an adequate demand for books on this subject. Some of the ghosts described are connected with prehistoric sites, including Bronze Age barrows (pp. 26-7, 33-4, 126-7), and Iron Age defensive earthworks (pp. 11-13); others are associated with old churches and churchyards and manor houses, among the latter the story of the Bettiscombe Skull (pp. 55-58) taking a prominent place; but many of these ghosts relate to the Monmouth Rebellion and the subsequent trials by Judge Jeffreys (pp. 25-6, 53-5, 62, 71-5, 128-36).

The book unfortunately contains no map. If one were included, it would probably show the strong tendency for ghost-lore to occur in the more rural areas rather than the larger towns where almost everyone is fully occupied with the realities of modern life.

The Somerset part of the book (pp. 115-147) is by far the weakest. It does not mention such important items as the Fairy Market of Churchingford on the Blackdown Hills, first recorded in 1684, and King Arthur and his spectral army at South Cadbury; neither does it quote anything from such obvious sources as *The Customs, Superstitions and Legends of . . . Somerset* by C. H. Poole (1877, 1970), *Somerset Folklore* by Miss R. L. Tongue (1965), or any of the other publications of the Folklore Society. None the less it is a useful collection of material gathered largely from local newspapers (and therefore of variable value). The book would have been improved by the inclusion of a bibliography and index.

L. V. Grinsell

In Praise of Bratton St. Maur, by Mary Whitfield (Bratton Publishing Ltd., 1974), 160pp., 4 plates, 15 maps, 9 line drawings, £3.50.

The writing of this parish history, obviously a labour of love for its compiler, has clearly not been conducted solely from the desks of record office, library, and study, but must also be the product of many excursions into both field and cottage. The sources consulted, both printed and manuscript, have a much wider range than is usually to be expected, and the superb series of maps which illustrate the book, depicting subjects such as land use, settlement

development, and patterns of ownership, would be an ornament to any such work. Miss Whitfeld, while treating much of her material analytically, has not lost sight of the characters of those who left their mark on Bratton Seymour: Jane Dyer, the 16th century lady of the manor, Jerome Littlejohn, the minister ejected at the Restoration, Betty Longman, the pauper who in 1859 bequeathed to her nephew the bed and bedclothes 'on which I am now lying'. On occasions Miss Whitfeld becomes a little too picturesque and fanciful in her narrative and one would have welcomed some illustrations of Bratton past or present — perhaps an aerial photograph; but this is a most creditable work in both content and appearance.

R.J.E.B.

Ships and Harbours of Exmoor, by Grahame Farr (The Exmoor Press, Dulverton, 1974. Microstudy D1), 64pp., illustrated, 60p.

Exmoor Custom and Song, by R. W. Patten (The Exmoor Press, Dulverton, 1974. Microstudy G3), 64pp., illustrated, 60p.

The first of these two titles in the Exmoor Microstudies series is an enlarged edition of a title originally published in 1970. Grahame Farr has devoted almost half his book to a study of the maritime history of Ilfracombe, and the remaining chapters deal with Watermouth, Combe Martin, Lynmouth, Porlock Weir, Minehead and Watchet.

R. W. Patten's book, which has been supported by a grant from the Ralph Vaughan Williams Trust, examines Exmoor customs under three headings (calendar, farming and social customs) and provides both the words and the music for a number of Exmoor songs.

Discovering the Quantocks, by Berta Lawrence (Shire Publications Ltd., 1974), 48pp., illustrated, 35p.

This is another booklet in the *Discovering* series, and is written by the author of a number of books on Somerset themes. The information is arranged in the form of a gazetteer of villages, and there are lists of suggested walks and motor-routes. There is also a short bibliography.

ALSO RECEIVED. *Bath Millennium: The Christian Movement 973-1973*, by Barbara G. Stone (published by the author), 167pp. *Guide to Poet's Walk Nature Trail, Clevedon*, by John Burton (published by the Clevedon Civic Society with the support of the Clevedon Urban District Council, 1974), 20pp., illustrated, 15p.