

NOTES

A ROMANO-BRITISH SITE AT WOOLAVINGTON

Amongst the archaeological material in his small museum, William Stradling had "A Roman fibula or buckle, from the ruins of a Roman Villa at Combe in the parish of Woolavington"¹. The probable location of this site was indicated in May 1965, when a sewer trench on the west side of Cossington Brook valley cut through several features of Romano-British date. Although Stradling's claim to the existence of a villa cannot be upheld on the evidence at present available, for the sewer trench revealed no substantial foundations or tesserae, the site was clearly extensive and occupied continuously from the first to the fourth centuries. Sherds have been recovered from the fields to east and west of the trench, along with a few scraps of box-tile, indicating a large area of occupation, the focus of which has yet to be identified.

The largest feature discovered by the sewer trench, which ran N.-S. just above the 75 ft. contour, was what appears to have been a watercourse, 15 ft. wide and running approximately E.-W. at ST358413. It should, however, be pointed out that the nature of this is not certain, for Mrs. Langdon, on whose observations this note is based, and to whom the writer is indebted, considers that it was probably a pond rather than a channel for running water. The lower 6 ins. of silting in this 18 ins. deep depression produced samian ware and sherds, some of which were as late as the 3rd-4th centuries. This was immediately overlain by a line of burnt clay, probably daub, above which the filling consisted mainly of large stones and comparatively few sherds.

To the north of this were several ditches of uncertain character, most of which contained Romano-British sherds ranging from the 1st to 4th centuries. To the south was another trench or ditch running NW.-SE., containing 1st century sherds, and which had been cut into by a later ditch containing 3rd to 4th century sherds.

R. F. TAYLOR.

AN ANGLO-SAXON CEMETERY AT COMPTON PAUNCEFOOT

Hicknoll Slait is an impressive hill in Compton Pauncefoot parish, rising to 590 ft. O.D. and overlooking South Cadbury Camp half a mile to the west; the summit is most easily approached by a gentle slope to the east, the land falling away steeply on the other three sides. In June 1966 workmen excavated a circular area 15 ft. in diameter, to a maximum depth of 3 ft. for a reservoir situated on the

¹ W. Stradling, *A Description of the Priory of Chilton-super-Polden* (Bridgwater, 1839), 12. This bronze penannular brooch is now in the Somerset County Museum (No. A.708).

crest of the hill at ST63972503. Within this excavation four inhumation burials were discovered, but unfortunately the first to be found was not recognised as human until all the bones had been removed, and only two skeletons were seen *in situ*.

On top of the hill the topsoil is only 9 to 12 ins. deep, passing immediately to rock, the upper 9 ins. of which are fractured and weathered. Because of the nearness of the rock to the surface the graves are all shallow; only the soil and loose stones had been removed together with as much of the underlying rock as could be prised out easily to give a relatively level floor about 20 to 24 ins. below the present surface. After the interment, the stones were replaced and the graves were almost impossible to distinguish in section. Of the four graves discovered, three were oriented roughly E.-W. and the fourth one was probably similarly aligned. The only grave-goods to be recovered were unassociated, being found on the spoil-heap, but they included a recognisably Anglo-Saxon spear-head, and a straight-sided sugar-loaf shield-boss dating from the end of the 7th century. At this late date graves in east Somerset can be safely assumed to be Christian, and the orientation points to the same conclusion.

Grave I, found on the northern perimeter of the excavation, was an extended burial oriented E.-W. with the head to the W., the body lying on its back with the left arm at least extended along its side; the right side had been removed by the workmen. The bottom of the grave was level and 24 ins. below the surface, and the burial, which was of a man about 30 years old, was covered with stones.

Grave II was actually the first to be discovered and lay to the SW. of I, but no bones were seen *in situ*. The workmen believed that the body, which was that of an adult man, had lain roughly SW.-NE., with the head to the SW. Their description also suggested that it lay on its back in a grave that was deeper in the middle than at either end.

Of Grave III only a few lower limb bones were preserved, but part of the feet remaining *in situ* in the southern edge of the excavation showed that the grave was 21 ins. deep and that the feet had lain to the east of the head.

Grave IV was discovered and excavated by Mr. L. C. Hayward, though it had already been disturbed. The body, that of a man about 30 to 35 years old, was oriented E.-W., head to the W.; the limbs were extended except for the right forearm, which lay across the pelvis. No grave-goods were found, but there were two stones set on edge to the W. of the skull, packing the end of the grave and suggesting that there could not have been a coffin; a single large flat stone appears to have been placed over the skull. The grave was irregular in outline, 19 ins. wide at the W. end, and 24 ins. deep.

Of the grave-goods, both the spearhead and shield-boss were recovered from the spoil-heap near grave II. Only 15 ins. of the spearhead remain, most of the socket being missing. The blade is

now $1\frac{3}{8}$ ins. wide, with almost parallel sides and a slight rib, while the socket appears to be split and contains traces of a wooden shaft. The shield-boss is represented by a damaged fragment, and in shape consisted of a simple straight-sided cone springing direct from the flange. At the base of the cone the external diameter is $4\frac{1}{4}$ ins.; the flange diameter would have been about 6 ins., and the complete boss would have stood at least 5 ins. tall. Such bosses have been dated to the end of the 7th century.¹

A fragment of thin sheet bronze, decorated with rows of small punched indentations, and presumably a mounting from an object of perishable material, was also found on the site, along with a small piece of corroded iron, probably a strip with a rivet or nail at one end. The spear and shield-boss probably came from the same grave, and the small number of grave-goods suggests that perhaps only one burial of the four discovered was accompanied. There can be little doubt that these four burials form only a part of a larger group of graves dating in part at least from the late 7th century.

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The writer is indebted to Mr. R. Schiessl, the landowner, to the workmen, and to Mr. L. C. Hayward, F.S.A., for their help. The finds are now in the Somerset County Museum, Taunton (Nos. 66.A.64-67 and 66.A.69-70).

¹ V. I. Evison: "Sugar-loaf Shield Bosses", *Ant. J.* 43 (1963), 36ff.

BOOK NOTICES

Phyllis M. Hembry, *The Bishops of Bath and Wells, 1540-1640* (Athlone Press, 1967), pp. xii+287, 50s.

For more than a decade the period 1540-1640 has been the battleground for controversy concerning the economic and social position of the gentry, a controversy which has, on the whole, been concerned with laymen and their estates. Dr. Hembry has now added a fresh dimension with this 'pioneer attempt to study the social and economic repercussions' of the century following the Reformation, a study in depth of the estates of the bishops of Bath and Wells.

The medieval bishopric of Bath and Wells was endowed with estates centred in Somerset, with outliers in Gloucestershire, Berkshire, Hampshire and London. In terms of value, the see ranked seventh in England in 1535, with a net income of £1,843 14s. 4d. (not £1,899). In 1539, just before the crisis, the see was valued at £2,202; by Elizabeth's reign this had been reduced to a nominal £533, though careful management by the 'firm administrator', Bishop Still, had improved this by the end of the century. In the general attack on the wealth of bishoprics after the break with Rome, Bath and Wells fared particularly badly at the hands of Crown and courtiers. Bishop Clerk lost his London house to the Earl of Southampton in 1539 and Dogmersfield (Hants.) to the Crown in the same year. In 1545 Bishop Knight sacrificed Wyke (Glos.). During Barlow's episcopate (1548-53) the remaining twenty-four manors were reduced in two onslaughts, first by the Crown and then by Protector Somerset, the latter in 1548-9 acquiring the manors of Wells, Wookey, Banwell, Chew, Congresbury, Yatton, Blackford, Wellington, Cranmore and Evercrech, together with other smaller properties. Only Wells and Banwell were recovered. At one point during this period the bishop was left with an income of only £348.

In order to survive at all the bishops were obliged to exploit their remaining estates to the full. Long leases granted by predecessors in the see often hampered this process and, as in the case of Bishop Berkeley in his struggle with Richard Bourne over Banwell, Westbury and Wiveliscombe, attempts to remove the lessees could lead to bitter quarrels. The markets and fairs of Wells, Binegar and Priddy could be, and were, exploited, and productivity in the Mendip lead mines was doubled in the first half of the seventeenth century.

Post-Reformation bishops often had wives and families to provide for: Dr. Hembry describes the ways in which they supported or were induced to support their dependants, and shows, in the case of Bishop Godwin, 'an outstanding example of the unhappy pass to which the liabilities of episcopal marriage could bring a prelate in the time of Elizabeth I.' Apart from their obvious economic consequences, Dr. Hembry considers the social aspect of these new family groups in county society, a subject which deserves further investigation.

Despite the dates given in the title of this book, the history of the estates is taken down to the death of Bishop Piers in 1670. The wholesale disposal of the properties during the Interregnum and their subsequent restoration forms a fitting contrast to the story of a century earlier. The bishops themselves — absentee Clerk; subservient Barlow; Bourne, dominated by his brother; Godwin, dominated by all his family; the efficient Still; Piers, 'meticulous, orderly, a little mercenary', who died the oldest bishop in Christendom at the age of ninety-four — were not, on the whole, a distinguished group of men. A study of their spiritual administration, although much needed, is not likely to alter this impression.

R.W.D.

H. M. Porter, *The Saxon Conquest of Somerset and Devon* (Bath: James Brodie Ltd., 1967) pp. 88, 15s.

This book brings together the historical and archaeological evidence for the Saxon conquest of the two counties. There are four chapters in the main part of the book, bearing the names of Ceawlin, Cenwalh, Centwine and Ine — the four kings of the West Saxons chiefly responsible for the westward expansion of Wessex. The remainder of the book is taken up with a very detailed section of notes and references and with two appendices, one of which summarizes the archaeological evidence.

Neil Cossons, *Industrial Monuments in the Mendip, South Cotswold and Bristol Region* (Brist. Arch. Res. Group: Field Guide No. 4), pp. 32, 1 map, 3s. 6d. (post free 4s.).

This booklet is on the same lines as others in the series and is intended 'to provide an introduction to the more noteworthy visible remains of industrialization' within the area covered and 'to stimulate awareness of their significance'. The sites are grouped under five main headings: Bristol, Port and Commerce; Traditional Industries; Mining, Quarrying and the Metal Industries; Wind and Water Mills; Transport and Service Industries.

H. St. George Gray, *The Meare Lake Village*, Vol. III, edited by Mrs. M. Aylwin Cotton (Somerset Arch. and Nat. Hist. Soc., 1967) pp. ix+139, 11 plates, 6 text figures, 50s. post free.

Before his death in 1963, the late Harold St. George Gray prepared the bulk of the text and illustrations for this the third and concluding volume of the report on the excavations carried out by himself and the late Dr. Bulleid in the western of the two Meare settlements. At the invitation of the Society Mrs. M. Aylwin Cotton kindly undertook the task of arranging this material and seeing it through the press. The volume has been published by the Society in accordance with the provision made by Mr. Gray before he died. It contains descriptions of the objects of amber, jet and glass, of

bone and antler, and of flint and stone, together with a section on the human and other bones found. There is also an index to the three parts of the complete work.

J. W. Gough, *The Mines of Mendip*, revised edition (Newton Abbot: David and Charles, 1967), pp. xii-269, 2 maps, 42s.

Messrs David and Charles are to be congratulated on making available a second edition of this important work, first published in 1930 and now for some years out of print. A few small corrections have been either incorporated in the text or included in a new preface which Dr. Gough has written for the present edition. This preface contains notes on material published by other researchers since the first edition was issued, as well as sidelights on some of the matter contained in the body of the book itself. Also noted are some recent changes in the landscape of Mendip and the disappearance of the certain remains of the old lead works.