

BOOK NOTICES

Small Medieval Towns in Avon: Archaeology and Planning, by Roger Leech (Committee for Rescue Archaeology in Avon, Gloucestershire and Somerset, 1975), iv + 60pp., frontispiece, 13 maps. Price not stated.

During the last two years or so few people interested in the archaeology of Somerset can have been unaware of the work of the Committee for Rescue Archaeology in Avon, Gloucestershire and Somerset, and particularly of its concern for the past and future of our urban heritage. The Society has shared this concern and in a practical way has contributed to the essential work of surveying the archaeological potential of Somerset's towns as part of a regional undertaking of considerable importance. This volume, covering what are described as 'small medieval towns', deals with Thornbury, Wickwar, Chipping Sodbury and Marshfield, formerly in Gloucestershire, and Keynsham and Pensford in the historic county of Somerset.

The precise purpose behind this survey is not entirely clear. The chairman of the publishing committee sees it as an attempt 'to build a sense of our heritage into the land-users' consciousness and, in particular, to establish the existence and status of the archaeological dimension in the Planning procedures' (p. 1). The author, however, sees it as providing his committee with information on which to base its own priorities, adding that 'it is also hoped that it will be used by the County and District Councils in considering the constraints imposed by the historic environment' (p. 5). The difference in emphasis is important. Is this survey for archaeologists, for planners or, indeed, for the general public, to whom its results are now made available in permanent form? The audience will surely influence both content and approach.

Both archaeologists and historians come badly out of this survey. The lack of adequate publication of over thirty excavations carried out between 1925 and 1965 is a serious matter, particularly so in the case of Keynsham Abbey. That the author could find only Collinson and Sir William Savage's work for Somerset towns must in part be a reflection on the lack of interest on the part of Somerset's historians. Yet given that this survey could not include original research if it was ever to see the light of day, it is surely premature, if not totally inaccurate, to dismiss what is called variously 'documentary evidence' and 'documentary history' (whatever that is) as able to tell us little or nothing more than the author already knows. Is there so little hope of information from written sources that 'nothing' can be said of Saxon Marshfield and its origins (p. 15), or 'little' similarly of Thornbury and Keynsham (pp. 15, 35)? What, for instance, of place-names, nowhere considered of any significance, but surely of the utmost importance in the whole field of urban origins? The statements that Pensford's early history 'can only be unravelled by archaeological research' (p. 56) or that 'surviving documents will probably tell us little of ordinary everyday life' in all these towns before the 16th century (p. 5) are remarks to say the least ill considered. The problem of early settlement is clearly a task for historian and archaeologist working in concert, not in ignorance of each other's potential.

A document such as this will and ought to raise questions which cannot as yet be solved. It must not appear too tentative lest it lose all authority, but at the same time it must not assume an authority it cannot claim to possess. It is thus a pity that a survey which can include the splendid statement that 'no generation . . . has the right to deprive its successors of the sense of historical perspective in their everyday environment' (p. 5) can also declare that 'a town's water supply usually came from wells and rain water butts' (p. 7) or that friaries, hospitals and priories were built outside town limits (p. 7). Readers with knowledge of the present will marvel that most towns support record offices (p. 5), and members of this Society will ask why its unrivalled collection of photographs, drawings and paintings of buildings finds no mention on page 57. Many will wonder why Pensford finds a place in an urban survey at all.

The archaeological potential revealed by this survey of six towns is considerable; the larger towns of Gloucestershire and Somerset are likely to yield even more, exposing difficult decisions and a daunting task. The decisions are not necessarily whether to excavate here or there, for sites and money are not automatically available. More detailed surveys may, instead, be needed, such as that now produced for Taunton. Which ever method suits the particular circumstances, this volume and its successors for Gloucestershire and Somerset towns will be seen as pioneer achievements. This volume suffers, as much pioneer work suffers; it is bound to be tentative in many of its conclusions, but it should more readily say so. Yet if it inspires archaeologists and historians to work, and to work together, in the field of urban origins; and if it alerts the general public to their heritage and planners to the implications of their decisions, it will be a considerable achievement.

R. W. DUNNING

Rescue Archaeology, edited by Philip A. Rahtz (Penguin Books, 1974), xii + 299pp., 34 plates, 8 figs., 90p.

This book is about the 'rescue situation' in archaeology which has developed over the last decade. Rescue, the trust for British Archaeology, was formed in 1971 to draw attention to the great destruction of our archaeological heritage during modern development, usually without adequate provision of staff or finance for a full and complete excavation. The authors of the twenty chapters have all been closely associated with Rescue or with rescue digging. Thus there are sections on The Background to the Crisis, Rescue Digging, Special Threats and Crisis Areas, and a final section, How you can get involved, is to some extent an appraisal of the digging situation in the mid 1970s.

As with other books with chapters contributed by different authors, some are better written and more informative than others and yet others seem more important, relevant or dated because of fast moving events. Some are particularly good. Chapter 3, The Scale of the Problem, by Philip Barker, the founder and former Secretary of Rescue, is a concise appraisal with figures of the rates of mineral extraction, road building and town expansion schemes set against the numbers of archaeological sites involved. Martin Biddle's The Future of the Urban Past and Peter Fowler's Motorways and Archaeology highlight particular rescue problems and Philip Rahtz provides entertaining anecdotes, yet with a serious undercurrent, in Rescue Digging Past and Present.

There is a good deal about Somerset in the past and even more of direct relevance today. The M5 motorway committee is considered with excavations on the Failand Ridge, at Christon and at the Roman site at Down End, Puriton. Elsewhere there is mention of Charterhouse on Mendip, the peat industry and a personal account by Philip Rahtz of the hazards of digging rescue sites in the Chew Valley as the lake was being filled.

Yet it is difficult to see for whom this book is written. Since it is in the Pelican series it is presumably meant for popular consumption and one wonders if the content, layout and illustrations would attract the man in the street. But it is easy to underestimate the intelligence of the public and there are many people of wide interests for whom this book will give a good account of the contemporary thought and activities of many archaeologists. Certainly it is a record for archaeologists of progress in rescuing the past over the last 5 years.

In some areas of the country the 'rescue battle' is considered to be won. Adequate staff with financial backing from local government and the Department of the Environment has been established with close liaison with planners and developers so that time and opportunities are available for rescue work before development begins. The improvement in this situation is largely due to the pressure of Rescue. And yet one wonders how much this is appreciated locally in Somerset, how much impact Rescue publicity has had for instance on the financing of excavations by local government, and more importantly whether the

time is not right for a case to be made nationally for the conservation of many more sites as a future archaeological reserve rather than, after rescue excavation, the continued sacrifice of them to modern 'progressive development'. Nevertheless anyone who is interested in the progress of archaeology today, and this will surely include every member of this Society, should acquire a copy of *Rescue Archaeology* and give great thought to the viewpoints expressed in it.

MICK ASTON

Landscape Archaeology. An Introduction to Fieldwork Techniques on Post-Roman Landscapes, by Michael Aston and Trevor Rowley (David and Charles, 1974), 217pp., 19 plates, 51 figs., £5.50 (paperback £2.50).

The last twenty years have witnessed a growing interest in the study of post-Roman landscapes, whilst at the same time the need for systematic fieldwork in this area has been intensified by the threat to the landscape (which includes historic towns) arising from development, road construction and new agricultural methods. The landscape has been aptly described as a palimpsest on which successive generations have left their mark, and *Landscape Archaeology* is intended as a handbook for the amateur enthusiast who wishes to make a serious attempt to interpret that palimpsest and record his discoveries. To this end the book provides an introduction to the kinds of features which may be found in the landscape (eg. earthworks, town plans, deserted settlements, moated farmsteads, medieval parks and field systems) and the techniques involved in investigating and recording such features: thus there are sections on the surveying of sites, the production of maps and plans, and the formation of card indexes, for example. There is also a chapter on the use of early maps; and there are many useful references to further reading in both the text and the notes and bibliography at the end of the book. The authors of *Landscape Archaeology* (one of whom is Field Archaeologist in the Planning Department of Somerset County Council) have managed to condense a great range of material into a text of less than two hundred pages, but they have succeeded in making the content digestible by presenting it in a clear and concise style, illustrated with numerous figures and plates. Some sins of both commission and omission are probably inevitable in a work which covers so much ground (Commander E. H. D. Williams is incorrectly referred to as the Secretary of the Vernacular Architecture Group; and it is a pity that there is no mention of Fox and Raglan's classic study of *Monmouthshire Houses*, whereas certain other titles on the subject of domestic architecture are referred to more than once), but these are minor faults in a book which should prove a very useful introduction for the beginner in this field, and a valuable reference book for those who have already embarked on such work.

M. B. McD

The Geological Setting of the Town of Ilchester, by C. P. Palmer (Ilchester and District Occasional Papers: No. 6. Toucan Press, St. Peter Port, Guernsey, 1974), 19pp., illustrated, 60p.

C. P. Palmer has produced what must be a useful compilation of information, both specific and general, relating to the geology, topography and, in small part, historical significance of Ilchester and the surrounding countryside. He deals with the evidence that might be found and recognised by anyone prepared to stand and look at the scene with analytical eyes, and suggests many suitable places where a start might be made. He appears to have written the booklet for 'those who abhor text-books and have not the time to wrestle with the technicalities of a geological memoir', which seems a paradox as it will surely exclude those who have either the interest or the time to read his own account. Mr. Palmer can be assured however that the geologist will not be too critical of the 'short-

comings' that he fears, as all the information has been published previously and he gives adequate references to details that might not be familiar to a geologist from outside the local area.

With this non-specialist readership in mind it seems unfortunate that there is only one illustration of fossils included, when many of the zone fossils listed are not readily to be seen depicted in geological literature, and amateur observers invariably wish to identify their finds, and that the one illustration is of a choice but nowadays virtually unobtainable specimen, rarely seen outside museums.

On one issue I must disagree with Mr. Palmer. He states in his conclusions that the Lias found in the Cardigan Bay borehole must clearly have 'extended right across Wales' because it exceeds 1,000 metres in thickness (approximately the height of the present mountains), with which reasoning I cannot agree. Land/sea levels are regarded by geologists as notoriously unstable, and this evidence alone is insufficient to support such an inflexible statement.

In the main, however, the booklet is sound, and contains much to interest a local observer.

P. G. HARDY

Taunton: History, Archaeology and Development, edited by R. W. Dunning (Taunton Research and Excavation Committee, 1975), 19pp., 7 figs., 50p.

The purpose of this survey, the material for which was originally prepared by Terry Pearson, but which has been edited by Dr. Dunning with contributions from T. J. Hunt, Mick Aston and Russell Lillford, is to draw attention to the historical importance and archaeological potential of Taunton, a town which is described as having 'much to contribute of national significance to our knowledge of urban origins and development', and to make recommendations for future action to exploit that potential (particularly in the face of the destructive process of redevelopment) and to make the results available to the public in the form of preserved finds and published reports. The survey includes a summary of the history of Taunton (there is an obvious need for an authoritative full-length History to be published in the near future) and, by combining historical knowledge with a study of the topography of Taunton and information which has already resulted from archaeological excavation, the writers of the survey have identified areas of the town which have particular archaeological potential. The survey also provides an account of the origins and activities of a number of organisations concerned with archaeology and local history (the Somerset County Museum, the Bristol University Extra-Mural Department, the Taunton Research and Excavation Committee, C.R.A.A.G.S. and this Society), and there is an explanation of the present statutory provision for the protection of individual buildings and the designation of conservation areas. The information is clearly arranged in numbered paragraphs with sub-headings, and there is a series of plans to illustrate the probable development of Taunton since Saxon times, and the location of development areas, listed buildings and areas of archaeological importance. The survey is not without its errors (plan 8, referred to on p. 16, has in fact been omitted, Castle House is incorrectly described as being 'of timber construction' on p. 11, and there are two errors of orientation on p. 13), but these should not be allowed to detract from the overall importance of this publication. It is to be hoped that it will be widely read by both the public and those serving local authorities, for the cooperation and financial support which the Taunton Research and Excavation Committee is seeking will only be forthcoming if local people become more aware of the historical significance of their surroundings.

M. B. McD

An Ilchester Word List and Some Folklore Notes, by J. Stevens Cox (Ilchester and District Occasional Papers: No. 1. Toucan Press, St. Peter Port, Guernsey, 1974), 24pp., illustrated, 75p.

This 'glossary of words, phrases and rhymes used at Ilchester and recorded before 1925' comes from the vast store of valuable information collected by Mr. Cox and published by him over the past twenty or so years. Many of these words and phrases were known and used in other places, but simply to read them is to return to a time long disappeared. A Barton boy could only come from Ilchester even if betel or bezom were used throughout the county; an Early Limington was a special kind of apple grown there and grafted in Ilchester, probably little known outside the two parishes, if gammer had been known to 16th-century London playgoers and tranter to Hardy's Dorset. But if 'Dang thee locks t'Kent' might have been used by angry men anywhere in the country (except, presumably, in Kent), it was certainly shouted by Dicky Ivey about 1900 in church in Ilchester when Miss Tuson kicked his hat up the aisle. Such documentation gives life even to the most well-known phrase, and makes this compilation of such value.

R.W.D.

A History of Mells, by F. W. Cleverdon, ed. M. McGarvie (Frome Society for Local Study, 1974), 102pp., £2.25.

It is a commendable hope that each parish in the old Frome Rural District should have its history in print, and Mells is an obvious early candidate. From its early connections with Glastonbury, through the Horners to the Asquiths, its owners have been prominent both in the village and beyond, and have produced not only a vast archive dating from the 13th century, but in the 19th and 20th centuries have commissioned works of art by Soane, Nicholson, and Lutyens, Burne-Jones, Eric Gill and Munnings, and memorials to such people as Ronald Knox, Reginald McKenna and Siegfried Sassoon. Church and village make Mells an architectural gem.

Mr. Cleverdon, rector of the parish 1959-69, 'collected odd bits of information' about Mells 'over several years', and the resulting work bears all the marks of such a procedure. It is one thing not to load the text with references; it is quite another to quote without source or to include a rare map without any indication of its whereabouts. The essential medieval documents for the parish have not, apparently, been consulted to any obvious purpose, but the writer is very informative on modern church affairs and in recounting stories about the Horners told him by old inhabitants. The index is curious, to say the least.

R. W. D.

Bellerica Farm. A Study of its History and Architecture, by Michael McGarvie (Frome Society for Local Study, 1974), 32pp., illustrated, 50p.

As the sub-title of this booklet indicates, Mr. McGarvie has approached his subject (a farm within the parish of Witham Friary) from two complementary points of view, historical and architectural. The author has traced the descent of the property from the early 16th century, when it was owned by the Carthusian house at Witham, and he has established the unusual fact that throughout its known history Bellerica has been occupied by members of only three families. Mr. McGarvie's handling of the architectural history of the building is rather less convincing. Some of the statements about roof construction on p. 8 are questionable, and the inclusion of a plan of the building would have clarified the discussion of its evolution. On balance, however, this is a useful study, conscientiously researched and well written; and it is pleasing to note that, in these days of high printing costs, the Frome Society for Local Study is able to support the publication of a monograph of this type.

M. B. McD

The Somerset Industrial Archaeological Society is to be congratulated on producing the first volume of its *Journal* during 1975. The contents of the volume include articles on 'Water-Power on Farms in West Somerset' (D. Warren), 'The Bath Brick Industry at Bridgewater' (B. J. Murless) and 'Horse Gins in Somerset' (including a contribution by B. Hook on horse gins at Ash and Long Load). The remaining articles are each devoted to a specific site (eg. Dunkirk Mill, Freshford), and there is also a section on 'Notes and News'. There are several figures accompanying the text (including a useful location map of the sites referred to in the various contributions), and a pleasing standard of presentation has been achieved. The cost of the volume to those who are not members of SIAS is 50p, and the Publications Officer is B. J. Murless, of 15, Gordon Road, Taunton.

ALSO RECEIVED. *The Wild Red Deer of Exmoor*, by E. R. Lloyd (The Exmoor Press, Dulverton, enlarged second edition 1975. Microstudy A1), 64pp., illustrated, 75p. *The Lorna Doone Trail*, by S. H. Burton (The Exmoor Press, Dulverton, 1975. Microstudy G4), 64pp., illustrated, 75p.