

BOOK NOTICES

Somerset Record Society — Volume LXVIII — *The Hylle Cartulary*, edited by Robert W. Dunning (xxxi+188 pages).

The cartulary of Robert Hylle of Spaxton (c. 1361-1423) survives in two early 15th century copies in the Public Record Office. It is one of only 15 extant lay cartularies relating principally to the West Country, and includes documents dating from the 12th century. Hylle's lands were sited mainly in Somerset, although he also held seven estates in Devon, four in Cornwall and one in Berkshire, all of which are represented. His principal possessions came to him through his marriage with Isabel, daughter of Sir Thomas Fichet, heiress of a family which by purchase and marriage, had amassed an enviable inheritance. Somerset properties treated comprise the manors of Spaxton, Harnham (in Oake), Perry Fichet (in Wembdon), Littleton (in Compton Dundon), Aley (in Over Stowey), Shurton (in Stogursey), East Postridge (in Spaxton), Postridge (in Cannington, Aisholt and Goathurst), Edington and East Harptree, and lands in Bridgwater, Yard (in Combe Florey) and Fiddington (glebe lands). The content of the cartulary is not limited to title deeds, but includes Hylle's account of the descent of his properties, extracts from court rolls, and personal memoranda.

Dr. Dunning's introduction supplies an extensive account of the cartulary and its compilation, together with details of the Hylle and Fichet families and their estates. Relevant charters of Burtle Priory with lists of Hylle documents in the Public Record Office appear in appendices.

R.J.E.B.

The Quest for Arthur's Britain, edited by Geoffrey Ashe (Pall Mall Press, 1968) 282 pp. with 200 illustrations including 10 colour plates. 70s.

Brought together within this single volume are contributions from three distinguished archaeologists who have excavated sites connected with Arthur by tradition or surmise. Dr. Raleigh Radford writes on Tintagel and Castle Dore in Cornwall and on Glastonbury Abbey, and relates these sites to Arthurian legend; Mr. Philip Rahtz does the same thing for Glastonbury Tor and other sites in the neighbourhood which he has excavated in recent years; Mr. Leslie Alcock contributes a chapter on "Wales in the Arthurian Age" and, in collaboration with Mr. Ashe, describes the results so far achieved by the excavations at South Cadbury. The whole Arthurian background is filled in in great detail by Mr. Ashe, who has been joined in his chapter on "Life in the Arthurian Age" by Miss Jill Racy with her specialist knowledge of costume. The book is lavishly illustrated and it seems a pity that simpler, but more effective, arrangements were not devised for marrying the text to what is on the whole a very fine collection of pictures and maps. It is hard for the reader to find quickly the illustrations to which he is constantly being referred (how much easier it would have been for him if the references had been to the page numbers!); the long captions — sometimes repeating what is in the text, sometimes adding much new matter — are daunting; and there are no bold, easily-read titles such as would identify each picture at a glance. As regards the text itself, it would have been nice to know the basis for some of the statements, but it is easy to understand that a complete apparatus of references would have been out of place in a book of this character

and would have occupied too much space. A glance at the wording of one or two of the acknowledgements in the List of Illustrations leads one to suppose that there has been some lack of care here. But these comparatively small criticisms are mainly concerned with certain technical features of an otherwise excellent production. Anyone interested in Arthur (and who is not?) will find this an exciting book, packed full of scholarly information.

I. I. J.

The Domesday Geography of South-West England, edited by H. C. Darby and R. Welldon Finn (C.U.P., 1967) 469 pp., frontispiece and 95 maps. £6 6s.

Sixteen years ago the first volume appeared of the Domesday Geography of England under the editorship of Professor Darby. This dealt with eastern England. Now the fifth volume, containing the five south-western counties, is available. In this Professor Darby has had the collaboration of Mr. Welldon Finn, who has added his minute and unique knowledge of the Exeter Domesday. A sixth volume containing maps and summaries covering the whole of England will complete the series. The whole enterprise is invaluable, particularly in giving those, who may have studied their own county in some detail, a picture of the rest of Domesday England. Thus in the volume now published we have Somerset, and four neighbouring counties for comparison.

Probably the maps of most general interest are those showing the distribution of population and of plough teams. There are two maps in each case, one showing distribution by densities, and the other by settlements; in the latter the size of the spot indicates the recorded number of inhabitants or teams. Each method has merits, and each has inherent difficulties. For instance, the Polden Hills were fully cultivated, the moors to north and south were waste, but the parishes include both hill and moor. Consequently a map by densities, being based on parishes, shows a wide area of low density, while a map by settlements, more realistically, shows a string of spots between empty spaces. Unfortunately many larger Somerset manors were not in one piece, and a single spot on the map may represent a number of villages, sometimes far apart.

The maps showing plough-teams and population by settlements have, in the way that boroughs are indicated, a fault that could have been avoided. In Somerset the boroughs were of two distinct types. Bath, Axbridge, Langport and Ilchester were small in area, purely 'urban', without plough-land or agricultural population. (The manor attached to the Church of St. Andrew of Ilchester was agricultural, and corresponds with the old parish of Northover.) At Taunton, Frome, Milborne, Bruton and Milverton there was a small, sometimes extremely small, urban element in an extensive agricultural estate. The same symbol is used on these maps to indicate Axbridge with 34 burgesses, and Taunton with 64 burgesses and an agricultural population of 415; Langport with no plough-teams and Milborne with 71. The importance of some of the largest agricultural estates in Somerset is not apparent.

The account Domesday Book gives of the boroughs is seldom satisfactory, but all the information contained about each is brought together and clearly set out. We learn that Exeter was the largest town in the South-West; that in some Dorset towns half the houses were in ruins; and that the Somerset towns were smaller but almost intact.

Exeter Domesday gives particulars of livestock which are not available (except for Norfolk, Suffolk and Essex) for the rest of England. Nearly 47,000 sheep are recorded

in Somerset; Devon, with its larger acreage, had 50,000; Dorset, with 23,000 on less than half the manors in the county, had large flocks on the chalk hills; Cornwall was poor in sheep as in everything else. Except in the case of one manor, the Wiltshire records have not survived.

We owe an immense debt to Professor Darby and his collaborators, and to the Cambridge University Press, for the production of these volumes. Minor criticisms do not detract from their value. They provide basic material for the study of the social history, agriculture and geography of medieval England.

S. C. M.

E. M. Palmer and D. K. Ballance, *The Birds of Somerset* (Longmans, 1968) 204 pp., 17 half-tone illustrations and 1 map. 42s.

Miss Palmer, who is Hon. Secretary of the Society's Ornithological Section, and her collaborator, Mr. Ballance, have put a tremendous amount of research into the preparation of this book, and they are to be congratulated on the result. The book contains not only a systematic list of all the species and subspecies known to have occurred in Somerset since 1750, but also a general description of the county and particular descriptions of the seven districts into which it has been divided for ornithological record purposes since 1923. There are notes on the reservoirs, a history of ornithological activity in the county, and a list of 'prehistoric' Somerset birds, put together from published accounts of bird remains found in the Mendip caves and the Lake Village sites. The systematic lists do not merely contain bare records, but in many cases attempt to show how the various species have fared over the years and to give reasons for their ups and downs. Nor is it considered a waste of valuable space to include such interesting odds and ends of information as that the three different species of woodpecker all nested in one apple tree at Stocklinch in 1940, or that 2d. or 3d. was paid by the churchwardens at Dunster in the 17th century for each bullfinch ('hoop') killed. The book contains some fine aerial views and there are ten of Mr. George Young's splendid bird photographs. All in all this is a book which will give the local bird-watcher not only interest and delight, but also a feeling of confidence; for here he has a firm foundation upon which to base his own observations.

Robin Atthill, *The Somerset & Dorset Railway* (David and Charles, 1967), 200 pp., 56 half-tone and 19 line illustrations. 42s.

This book is one of the excellent series of Standard Railway Histories published by Messrs. David and Charles. Mr. Atthill tells the story of the line from its beginnings in the 1850's to its closure in 1966. After a short period of independent existence the Somerset Central and the Dorset Central amalgamated in 1862 to form the Somerset and Dorset Railway. But only 13 years later with, as Mr. Atthill says, 'the cupboard . . . bare', the directors made an approach to the Great Western Railway. There followed a short and sharp take-over battle — sharp in more ways than one! — which was won by a consortium of the Midland and the London and South Western Railways who outbid and outmanoeuvred the G.W.R. The story is continued through the palmy days of the Joint line and the between-war years of grouping to the sad run-down period

after nationalisation and to the fall of the Beeching axe. There is also a detailed description of the line, together with chapters on train services, signalling and accidents. Mr. O. S. Nock contributes two chapters on locomotive history, practice and performance. The book is copiously illustrated with photographs, drawings and maps.

Max Hebditch and Leslie Grinsell, *Roman Sites in the Mendip, Cotswold, Wye Valley and Bristol Region* (Brist. Arch. Res. Group: Field Guide No. 2) 32 pp., 3s. 6d.

The guide contains a historical introduction which is followed by sections on military sites, towns, villas and the countryside, temples and tombs, industries and roads. The notes on Bath and Gatcombe are by Professor Barry Cunliffe.

We have also received *A Guide Catalogue to the South Western British Prehistoric Collections* by Mr. Grinsell, who is the Curator in Archaeology at the Bristol City Museum. This guide covers only the collections in that museum, although anyone glancing at the title of the booklet might be forgiven for failing to appreciate this fact at first. The catalogue is fully documented, which is just what one would expect in any publication for which Mr. Grinsell has been responsible, and it is well illustrated with 14 pages of line drawings and 8 pages in half-tone. The guide is attractively produced and the price is 7s. 6d.