

Reviews

A. BULLEID and H. ST. GEORGE GRAY, *The Meare Lake Village*, vol. I, pp. xvi + 106, with 24 plates. Taunton : privately printed, 1948.

THE first volume of the report on Meare is a worthy successor to *The Glastonbury Lake Village* and is published in the same format. It contains a short general account of the site and reports on the pottery, weaving combs and spindle whorls from the West Village.

The preliminary chapter brings out several points of difference between the lake villages of Meare and Glastonbury. The former lay nearer to the dry land, in less swampy surroundings and therefore used less timber in the foundations. So far there is no trace of a surrounding palisade at Meare nor have a causeway or landing-stage been located. The natural conditions of the peat and the clay used for the floors also vary. These are however minor differences and it is clear that the two villages belong to the same period and culture.

Most readers will turn first to the chapter on the pottery, which occupies a key position among the British ceramics of the Iron Age. It deals chiefly with some of the decorated pottery from the west village, the writer stating that the plain wares still await study. The illustrations show few vessels that could not be paralleled at Glastonbury and the text bears this out, though noting some differences in the frequency with which certain types occur. The few pieces that show features characteristic of Iron Age A are considered to be survivals into the following period.

We congratulate the two authors on the appearance of the first volume of this work, which fittingly crowns their long and devoted study of the lake villages of Somerset, and we hope that the rest may not be long delayed.

C. A. R. R.

ILCHESTER HISTORICAL MONOGRAPHS

BY J. STEVENS COX

Small octavo, illustrated, published and sold by the writer at Ivel House, Ilchester. Average price, two shillings each.

Mr. Cox has set out to write a social and political history of the Borough of Ilchester in a series of twenty or more monographs over a period of years. Five of these have already been published and are reviewed here. We look forward with interest to further issues from our enterprising member.

Mr. Cox has presented specially bound copies of these books to the Society's Library, No. 1 being extra-illustrated with photographs.

No. 1. *St. Mary Major, The Parish Church of Ilchester, Somerset.*
Notes on the Architecture and History, 1947.

No. 2. *The Dominican Priory at Ilchester, 1947.*

These are two small books very carefully compiled with full references and some illustrations. They are the first two of a series dealing with the strange old decayed town of Ilchester, important in Roman and Saxon times and possessing in the medieval period seven parish churches and three religious houses. Of these we still have the existing parish church of St. Mary Major, but the rest are gone and have been for a long time. They do not include Northover, which is still in use. One had the rare dedication of St. Olave, who is seldom found save on the coast or on a river. The Dominican Priory must have been the largest and most prominent building in the town. It was the only house of the order in Somerset.

Mr. Cox has provided a careful description of the parish church, but we think he has dated the east window too early. It was an early type of plate-tracery which suggests the latter part of the thirteenth century rather than the twelfth. It may be compared with the east window of St. Decuman's. We also doubt if there is any twelfth-century work in the tower, which is one of the dozen octagonal towers we have in the county, most of them begun in the thirteenth century.

F. C. E.

No. 3. *The Ilchester Mint and Ilchester Trade Token, 1948.*

The third monograph deals entirely with the local coinage of Ilchester and admirably demonstrates the relative importance of the town in Saxon and Norman times as compared with its dwindling prosperity in the seventeenth century and reduction to no more than a village, by the end of the eighteenth century.

From the middle of the tenth century to the middle of the thirteenth century Ilchester was amongst the largest towns in the kingdom and not only had the privilege of striking coins but probably produced more money than any other mint in Somerset. Mr. Cox gives a complete list of all known types of Ilchester silver pennies including many from the cabinets at Stockholm, Uppsala and Copenhagen, which reached Scandinavia as loot or Danegeld. He lists no fewer than 47 different moneyers, but if we take into consideration the duplication and triplication of the commoner Saxon names the number may well have reached 70. When the first trade tokens were struck in the Commonwealth and reign of Charles II we see a very different state of things. Only three traders besides

the Bailiff are found issuing tokens as compared with over 50 in Taunton and 28 in Bath. No token for Ilchester appears in the late eighteenth century, but a Bath Token, struck by the benevolent William Gye in 1794 and belonging to the class used to broadcast social propaganda, points out the misery of the debtors in Ilchester gaol. This is indeed a pathetic reminder of the state into which a once prosperous town was reduced.

If criticism is made, it is to point out the need for more italics, especially for foreign words in the text, the desirability of using Anglo-Saxon type for coin legends and a typological error in the name 'Brussels'.

W. A. S.

No. 4. *Ilchester Gaol and House of Correction, 1949.*

In Monograph No. 4, Mr. Cox, in a well-documented and well-illustrated survey, traces the history of the County Gaol at Ilchester from its establishment in about 1166 to its final closing and removal to Wilton, just outside Taunton, in 1843. He shows that during its existence there of nearly 700 years the gaol occupied three sites: the first within the town walls; the second, in what must have been very cramped quarters, on the bridge, where it was noticed by Leland in 1542; and the third on the north bank of the river, a move made early in the seventeenth century probably necessitated by the increased space required for its use as a house of correction as well as a gaol. There, the conditions, though extremely bad by modern standards, were, no doubt, normal for the age.

In Appendix 'G' Mr. Cox gives a list of Keepers of Ilchester Gaol, drawn from various official sources; and in Appendix 'F' there is a list of executions at Ilchester carried out between 1789 and 1825, which is interesting as a contribution to the statistics of crime in Somerset during that period. It shows that out of 98 persons executed, only four were convicted of murder; nearly all the rest had been found guilty of some form of theft. It is a pity that similar lists for other periods are not available for comparison. If any exist, no doubt the author would have printed them. Very little seems to have escaped his net.

A. D. H.

No. 5. *The Almshouse and St. Margaret's Leper Hospital, 1949.*

The fifth monograph was issued just as this volume was going to press so that only passing mention can be made here. In 23 pages illustrated by six photographs and a plan the author has brought together what is known of the ancient Almshouse founded by Robert Veel in the early fifteenth century and its continuance as a charity up to the present day. Little is known of the medieval Leper Hospital except that it lay without the town and is first recorded in 1212.

W. A. S.

M. LOVETT TURNER. *Somerset*, pp. viii + 270. 27 illustrations and map. 1st ed., 1949. Robert Hale. 15s.

Mrs. Lovett Turner has produced a series of impressions of Somerset, presented in the fashionable and thoroughly bewildering kaleidoscopic manner. A superficial attempt is made to achieve some degree of historical perspective, but this, like the rest of the book, is marred by an irritating facetiousness and by frequent clichés. The book is attractively produced and most of the photographs are excellent.

SYLVIA TOWNSEND WARNER. *Somerset*, pp. 88. Illustrated. 1st ed., 1949. Paul Elek. 15s.

This is a superbly illustrated but surprisingly expensive book which aims at recapturing in a short space some of what the author feels to be the essential flavour of the county. It does not purport to be a guide-book in the usual sense.

G. W. and J. H. WADE and MAXWELL FRASER. *The Little Guides : Somerset*, pp. xii + 216. 10th and revised edn., 1949. Methuen and Batsford.

Miss Maxwell Fraser has revised very thoroughly the original version of this useful little guide to Somerset and the result is a good, solid book containing a remarkable amount of well-planned material. Individual places are arranged alphabetically and reference is a simple matter.

A. K. H.