

BOOK NOTICES

Aspects of Somerset History by T. J. Hunt, drawn and edited by R. R. Sellman, Somerset County Council, 1973, pp. iv + 59, 95p.

The demand for books on local history continues to grow, and a balanced and trustworthy introduction to Somerset's history has for long been needed. The difficulty of writing such a work in face of relatively little research on the county has until now proved too daunting, but our Chairman, Mr. T. J. Hunt, has now produced a text which manages to achieve a very great measure of success in a demanding situation. Particularly is this true of the way in which he interprets the archaeology of the county for the first time in historical terms so clearly and concisely. Much of the text has been arranged topically, and it includes a fascinating chapter on beacons and coastal defences. Monmouth's rebellion, 'one of the most vivid and moving incidents in the history of the County', is told with the care, which is not often devoted to it. Roads, canals, railways and inclosures are treated in detail, providing useful information for the growing number of people interested in more recent history and industrial archaeology. And in all this work, Mr. Hunt has been at pains to place the historical developments in Somerset in a wider context, and to suggest lines of further enquiry.

Mr. Hunt is responsible for the text. The maps, illustrations and presumably presentation are the concern of the editor, Mr. Sellman. The illustrations as a whole have been neatly executed, but in some cases it is evident that the text has not been consulted by the cartographer. The map of turnpike roads, for example, was not the best to use when the text rightly emphasises the importance of the southern route from London to Exeter. More serious still is the map on p. 36 which purports to show post-1794 arable inclosure and, therefore, by implication would seem to be a map showing the distribution of open-field arable. It is, in fact, nothing of the kind, but is simply a map of Parliamentary inclosure, and is therefore of very little historical significance. The map of the Civil War in the county is equally misleading and meaningless; and several other maps have so many symbols that the key alone is difficult to interpret. The map entitled 'Religious Houses and Hospitals in 1500' contains symbols at variance with the title and is full of mistakes, misunderstandings and omissions. The stylised illustrations add at least one more doubt — the statement that the Alfred Jewel was found at Athelney, though the map on the previous page shows otherwise.

The intelligent reader may find it annoying to have to turn the book sideways to read some of the maps and plans. Could not the producers have foreseen that the shape of the county is such that a different format is necessary? Could they not have foreseen that the type-face is not easy to read, and is certainly too small for use in schools? Presumably the omission of any form of source references is editorial policy. Such policy is difficult to justify, but some explanation should surely have been attempted. Teachers and, indeed, general readers will want to know the sources from which Mr. Hunt's text is drawn before the work can be of full use to them. So valuable a text is deserving of better production.

R.W.D.

David Underdown, *Somerset in the Civil War and Interregnum*, David and Charles, 1973, 229pp., £4.50.

This is an important and stimulating contribution to both county and national history, a worthy continuation of Dr. Barnes's story of the county from 1640 to 1660. In many ways it was a more difficult story to tell; a more complicated situation with more scattered and difficult sources. The success is the more notable. To write the history of the civil war without becoming over-involved in military history is a considerable achievement. Particularly impressive is the work on personalities, including not only the important but unpleasant John Pyne, but also lesser men such as Humphrey Willis of Woolavington. The whole work is written with imaginative insight and a lightness of touch which is not only a pleasure to read, but which, by its very nature, keeps alive what could in other hands degenerate into a morass of complications.

The political story of these years is complicated — a war 'fought between two minorities, struggling in a sea of neutralism and apathy', and a peace which was no less of a struggle between different factions. And it was a war and a peace fought in a context of economic and

religious change and uncertainty. The uncertainty is at least in part due to a lack of recent research. Professor Underdown paints a gloomy picture of the cloth industry which has yet to be justified. Somerton, for example, was no 'run-down' place in the early 17th century. It is true that its position then cannot, for lack of material, be compared with its economy in the 16th century, but the range of obviously prosperous manufacturers was very wide. Professor Underdown has relied a great deal on an unpublished thesis for the ecclesiastical background; a more profound study of available material would produce a more convincing picture. The Bath-Frome-Shepton Mallet triangle of puritan parishes (p. 22 and note) were those showing most opposition to authority in Mary's reign; falling benefice values will simply not do as an explanation.

A pioneer work of this kind is likely to be open to criticism on its subsidiary themes, but the main subject is here treated in a masterly way. It is a wide canvas, its many characters adding fascination to the whole. Further research on family papers, now inaccessible, will add a few details, but the main lines are now firmly laid down. Perhaps in this context it might be worth suggesting that the site of the battle of Langport, to which Professor Underdown devotes some space, is not so well established. It seems at least as likely that the battle, evidently involving widespread skirmishing, took place further north, on the line of the present Somerton—Langport road. To reach the spot the Parliamentary troops had to march through the fallow Upton West field in Long Sutton parish, where they met with some opposition. Cromwell later referred to the encounter as the Long Sutton Mercy (from Cromwell's *Letters*). Ham Down was not then enclosed at its southern end, and the windmills where Fairfax set up his headquarters were more probably those at the west end of Long Sutton. There is not other evidence for such mills in Pibsbury until the 19th century.

R.W.D.

Marine Archaeology. Colston Research Papers, No. 23, ed. Blackman, price £10.00

The work of the Colston Research Society is impressive in that it provides funds, otherwise not available, to bring together experts and enthusiasts in a particular subject or discipline. These papers published in 1973 are concerned with a symposium held in 1971 and generally describe work carried out in 1970. Therefore when we consider the purchase of this well presented and well-illustrated but not inexpensive volume we are concerned with its value as a book of reference in 1973.

Marine Archaeology is not necessarily underwater, as it is concerned with ships, seamen, merchants, trade, ports, wherever they are found. However, it has always been obvious that much material was below the surface of the seas, rivers and lakes of the world. All that was lacking was a means of entering this hostile environment. The post-war development of the aqualung has provided the necessary means, and since the early 50's the techniques of archaeological investigation underwater have been developing rapidly. This symposium was the first long meeting in the United Kingdom on the subject and was attended by some 71 experts from all over the world.

The geographical scope of the 24 papers was purposely limited to work in United Kingdom and Mediterranean waters. Subject matter ranges over sea level change, underwater search, conservation, harbour and wreck survey, naval warfare, trade and the use of anchors. They represent valuable contemporary comment and are of considerable importance to those with either an amateur or professional interest in marine archaeology and history. Certain of the papers are of interest to those in other disciplines and to the general reader. Their value is further increased as the discussions of the expert audience which followed each paper are also included.

However, one must return to the matters of space and time. A massive amount of relevant work has taken place in Scandinavia. Conditions are in many cases similar to those in the United Kingdom and without upsetting the general geographic limitation of the conference a representative paper would have increased the scope of the proceedings considerably.

Finally, techniques have increased so rapidly that the 'Journal for Nautical Archaeology' and 'Cahiers D'Archeologie Sub Aquatique' commenced publication in 1972 and provide an authoritative background to the subject. The papers then provide an excellent contemporary review within their geographical limitations and should take their place on all reference shelves — alongside the new journals and other relevant publications now available.

Alan Bax.

Book Notices

Several books reached the Editor just before the Proceedings went to Press, so it was too late for full reviews to be undertaken.

Four titles from David and Charles of Exeter will all be of interest to members of the society. The first, *South West England (3,500 B.C.—A.D. 600)* by Aileen Fox (232 pp., 24 pl., 56 figs., price £3.95), is a revised version of Lady Fox's book of the same title in the Thames and Hudson series, 'Ancient People and Places.' The size is a little larger and the format more convenient, the plates and their captions appearing together in the appropriate part of the text, instead of at the end, as in the original book. The information in the book is up-to-date to the end of 1972, and the new material has been fully integrated into the text, instead of being just tacked on. The book does not claim to be a comprehensive handbook for the area, (in the way that L. V. Grinsell's *Exmoor* is for North Devon and West Somerset), but is a general survey by one of the best-informed archaeologists working in the South-West. It should prove both useful and stimulating, and worth buying, even by those who have the first version, although some people may be rather dismayed by its price.

The second book from David and Charles is *Somerset Legends* by Berta Lawrence (179 pp., 12 illustrations, price £3.25); Somerset is a county particularly rich in legend, and this book is necessarily selective. It excludes all the fairy legends and all those of Exmoor, and omits the detailed references to earlier documentation (though these aspects are made available through the Bibliography). The book is divided into four main sections on Saints, Kings, Monmouth's Rebellion and on Rogues. The Arthurian cycle plays a prominent part in the book and so do stories of Alfred, St. Joseph of Arithemaea, and other famous people with Somerset connexions; but there are also stories of many lesser known saints and ordinary people. Berta Lawrence writes in a lively way, and includes modern evidence, both confirming and refuting the legends.

The third title is *Bristol Brass: the History of the Industry*, by Joan Day (240 pp., 32 pl., 15 figs., price £4.75). Bristol was selected as a centre for the brass industry in the reign of Queen Elizabeth, because of the discovery of zinc on the Mendips, but the industry did not become very important until the end of the 17th. century. Bristol was the chief centre for the brass industry in the 18th. century, but was unable to compete with Birmingham after the discovery of copper in Anglesey in the last years of that century. The Bristol industry was located principally in the Avon valley, many of the works being outside the city, and the book includes a useful gazetteer of the sites that can still be seen and those that have disappeared. It is to be hoped that the production of this book will encourage the preservation of some of the still-standing buildings of this industry, which played an important part in Bristol's commercial development. The fourth book from David and Charles is a paperback, *The Roman Land Surveyors: an Introduction to the Agrimensores*, by O. A. W. Dilke (260 pp., 33 pl., 53 figs., price £1.75). This is not specifically relevant to Somerset, where the survival of Roman land divisions is unlikely, but it is of great general interest, especially to those working on the study of whole Roman towns, possible villa estates, etc. The book describes the development of Roman land surveying systems and methods, the training of the Agrimensores and their work. There is a fascinating chapter on the surviving maps and plans of Roman date, and the instruction books of the Roman period. Perhaps the most interesting aspect of the subject is centuriation, and this is examined at some length, using surviving areas of centuriation in Italy and North Africa to illustrate the methods and the problems the surveyors had to overcome in large-scale mapping, etc. There is a chapter on areas in Britain, where centuriation seems to have partly survived, and the recent fruitful surveys of the Fens may encourage more detailed examination of parts of Somerset. It is very reasonably priced, and one wonders if the Publishers would not sell more of some other titles, if they put them into paperback.

The Exmoor Press have issued two more Microstudies: *The Exmoor Handbook and Gazetteer*, by N. V. Allen (76 pp., illustrated, price 50p.), and *Legends of Exmoor*, by Jack Hurley (64 pp., illustrated, 50p.). The first is a general introduction to the Exmoor area, and in particular to the National Park. It has chapters on various aspects of the Moor — climate, landscape, history, wildlife, etc. — and details of recreations and amenities, as well as a gazetteer of over 100 places of interest to visit. It should be of interest both to local people, who wish to make better use of Exmoor, and to people on holiday in the area. The *Legends of Exmoor* helps to fill the gaps in Berta Lawrence's book; this is a well-written and amusing group of

stories of witches, pixies, ghosts and fairies, associated with various places on Exmoor; not only are the stories told, but in some cases their 'debunking' is also described. It makes an interesting addition to a useful series; Exmoor is rapidly becoming the best documented area in Somerset.

Two pamphlets deserve a brief notice. One is *The Folklore of Stanton Drew* by L. V. Grinsell (West Country Folklore Series, no. 5, 13 pp., illustrated, price 15p.); this gives the two stories associated with the stones, one that they are a petrified wedding party, and the other that, for various reasons, the stones can never be counted, and it includes the story of Hautville's Quoit, and an explanation of how the Druids came to be associated with the site. The other pamphlet is published by The Sealed Knot, Ltd., the firm that stages reconstructions of various battles from English history; the pamphlet is called *Prince Rupert's Bluecoats*, by Lawson C. Nagel (no price, 28 pp., illustrated). It is the history of a regiment of Somerset men, raised by Sir Thomas Lunsford, and later adopted by Prince Rupert as his special troops; the regiment, which fought from 1642-45, was unusual at that time, because it retained its identity throughout the Civil War; it played an honourable part in many engagements, particularly in the battles of Marston Moor and Naseby and the storming of Bristol. The pamphlet is adequately documented, and will be of interest to those who study the Civil War period.

N.G.L.