

Book reviews

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BOOK REVIEWS

Of mounds and men: prehistoric barrows of the Frome area, by Mick Davis, Frome, Frome Society for Local Study, 2020, 137 pp., 108 illus., most in colour, £12, ISBN 978-1-9162647-0-0.

It is refreshing to see a book aimed at a wide readership that draws attention to the value of archives for conducting archaeological research on a local scale. Mick Davis has achieved this in his archaeological history and overview of barrows in the often-overlooked Frome area.

The book itself is an attractive volume. Whilst the font size is small, the content is well structured and it presents a wonderful array of large, full-colour, figures. These include the reproductions of the Reverend Skinner's own illustrations from his manuscripts in the British Library, all of which are fully referenced. It is regrettable that copyright costs prevented the inclusion of a map, as even a simple plan would have been useful to show the site locations, especially for readers not familiar with the area.

Davis begins the book by introducing the relevant antiquarians and archaeologists who excavated barrows in the Frome area with short and characterful biographies. The Reverend John Skinner, whose manuscripts form the most important part of the book's original research, receives the most attention, and Davis also outlines the scale of the resources he created. The book then proceeds with the descriptions of long barrows and round barrows, each within their respective chapters preceded by a useful contextual overview of the monument types and the period they belong to. However, it appears that more attention and research was paid towards long barrows than round barrows, with the overview for the former receiving greater efforts to provide information on burial customs and form despite the incredible variety also found in round barrows.

The individual site descriptions and histories are well researched, entertaining, and sometimes humorous. All the site titles in the catalogue receive national grid references, and occasionally the Historic Environment Record (HER) number is referenced, although it would have been welcomed to see this for all the sites in the text. Davis has clearly made significant efforts to examine the sources and relevant archives for each site, including some of the excavated material. He also pays attention to more recent studies, frequently citing the work of Dr Jodie Lewis,¹ as well as brief summaries of his investigations with BACAS at Fromefield.² The last

of these is accompanied by an assessment of the human remains from the long barrow by Jackie McKinley, reproduced in the book's appendix.

Publishing Skinner's sketches and descriptions, as well as those by the other antiquarians, is perhaps Davis's most valuable contribution. Passages of Skinner's text are frequently quoted and contextualised by Davis, providing interesting details on several of the barrows, especially those which have since been significantly damaged (e.g. Braysdown Barrow at Shoscombe, or the completely levelled Staplemead round barrow). He also comments on the useful information visible in the antiquarian sketches, sometimes noting the changes visible between the various illustrations themselves (e.g. the 'Druid Stones' at Orchardleigh). The overall result of this research provides us with a much-enhanced catalogue of barrows in the area with fuller excavation histories since the survey produced by Grinsell half a century ago.³

Of Mounds and Men is an excellent addition to any bookshelf for a reader interested in prehistory, whether they are an enthusiast, student, or professional archaeologist. The book not only successfully demonstrates the usefulness of archives and antiquarian research for contemporary archaeological study, but it also shows that the history of archaeology can be both insightful and entertaining to read.

1. Lewis, J., 2005. *Monuments, Ritual and Regionality: The Neolithic of North Somerset*, Oxford: B.A.R. Brit. Ser. 401.
2. Davis, M. and Oswin, J., 2015. *Geophysical Survey at Fromefield, Frome, Somerset*, Bath and Camerton Archaeological Society Report; Davis, M., 2016. *The Mysterious Stones at Fromefield*, Bath and Camerton Archaeological Society Report.
3. Grinsell, L. V., 1971. 'Somerset barrows, part 2: North and East', *SANH* 115, 44-137.

JACK FULLER

The material fall of Roman Britain, 300-525CE, by Robin Fleming, University of Pennsylvania Press, 2021, 303 pp., 22 figs, £36, ISBN 978-0-8122-5244-6.

The Material Fall utilises the wealth of archaeological evidence available particularly from grey literature to evaluate the transition from the Roman to early-medieval

period. The impact of the disappearance of Roman style material culture on everyday life for the majority of the population is emphasised and will be of interest to a broad readership. All too regularly we have an over reliance on the historical framework from sources written in the late Roman period or early-medieval texts which frame the past in a particular way. Robin Fleming argues that these sources underrepresent those who she believes stood behind the most crucial transformations.

The book builds on the work of previous research projects such as the Roman Rural Settlement project¹ to evaluate the disappearance of Roman material culture and the deskilling of some industries. She argues that the impact of this disappearance is virtually absent in scholarship. Instead she considers what implications this had to the daily life of the vast majority of the population of Britain and how the population of Britain responded to these challenges to create a new cultural package.

A criticism could be levelled that there are limited numbers of distribution maps, yet, as Martin Millett comments, the general approach is refreshing. It forces the reader to consider the material from a different perspective and Fleming adeptly considers this at a regional, provincial and wider continental level. The catastrophic collapse of Roman lifeways and material culture is presented through a range of case studies including changing use of plants and animals, burial rites, pottery, glass vessels, building materials, metal production and recycling. Items that are ubiquitous in Roman Britain such as the oft ignored iron nail are used to great effect to underline these changes. Through iron production we can trace the availability of raw materials and how they were utilised; a steep decline in production of raw materials led to a greater reliance in recycling. This, in turn, led to deskilling, and the reliance on recycled metals impacted production of particular objects that required freshly smelted metal rather than scrap.

Case studies include Cadbury Congresbury which had little durable Roman material culture. Fleming demonstrates that although Roman objects were used, the events in which they were used changed and this is crucial. Some at the site used Roman material culture strategically to differentiate status while most of the foodways at the site had shifted dramatically. She emphasises that the disappearance of the Roman pottery industries affected the ways that people cooked, ate and stored goods. This necessitated a change from traditional methods of cooking, such as stewing; instead new preparation strategies were required. Fleming explores the changing treatment of infant dead in the 4th and 5th centuries. The 26 infant burials and one child burial at Bradley Hill are used to demonstrate how many communities in Britain and across the empire

buried infants under buildings viewed as the pragmatic collective social memory of a community. In the 5th and 6th centuries, in contrast, neonates were buried in novel archaeologically visible ways.

The impact of changes to the *annona* military supply system around AD 350 and the collapse of the taxation/payment cycle in the early 5th century is presented as a major cause in the transformations traced within the book. Fleming notes a number of changes which occur regionally suggesting that the 5th-century systems collapse is in part too simplistic a model for the end of Roman Britain. The date of the transformations and the ways that the population were dealing with these changes and utilising elements of Roman material culture noted underline regional trajectories. In this respect, although the collapse of military supply networks and the taxation/payment cycle were incredibly important, regional factors should not be downplayed.

The Material Fall challenges how we have viewed the long 5th century. The sources considering warbands and approaches that focus on ethnicity and material culture are deconstructed. Instead a framework is presented highlighting that a new material reality was created within the hall rather than the warband and was not imported wholesale. Fleming highlights the role played by the indigenous British population. This is a well written book which is arguably transformative, challenging a number of the perceptions and assumptions made when studying the period. Those who were considered as underrepresented are placed within the events and transformations that occurred and we see them forging new identities.

Smith, A., Allen, M., Brindle, T. and Fulford, M., 2016. *The Rural Settlement of Roman Britain*, London: Britannia Mono. Ser. 29.

RICHARD HENRY

Thomas Kytson's 'Boke of Remembrance' 1529-1540, edited by Colin Brett, London Record Society 54, 2020, 501 pp., Hbk., £40, ISBN 978-0-900952-59-3.

Masterful in so many ways and a 'must read' for any researcher interested in the English woollen industry, local history in north-east Somerset, or the management and movement of materials across sections of Europe in Tudor times

Colin Brett has been familiar with Kytson's 'Boke', Cambridge University Library Hengrove Hall manuscript Ms78/2, for many years. In 2001 he published 'Thomas Kytson and Somerset clothmen 1529-1539' in *SANH* 143 in which he discussed the business links that Kytson, a significant London Merchant Venturer, had

with clothmen in north-east Somerset. Brett highlighted the purchase of white broadcloth from clothiers in Bath, Beckington, Farleigh Hungerford, Hinton Charterhouse, Keynsham and Stoke Lane amongst other nearby places, their sale in London and the onward movement for sale in named European marts.

Now the reader is treated to a transcription of the entire document which details Kytson's dealings with merchants from Devon to Manchester as well as full details of Somerset broadcloth and Kersey sales from 1529-40 and not just from 1531-32 as in his previous article. Furthermore, this volume contains a transcription of one of Kytson's factor's accounts of cloth sales in an Antwerp market in 1536. This allows the reader to see, for example, how much the various grades of cloth produced under the supervision of John Clevelode of Beckington made in that Antwerp market.

Careful editing and thorough useful appendices allow an understanding of the history of almost individual cloths from their production in Somerset, through their sale in London to Kytson, their transportation in named ships and under named ship masters across to Antwerp for example and their purchase price in Europe. Records of the goods such as woad that were bought and transported back to the Somerset clothmen are also copiously detailed within the volume.

Brett has a way of clearly explaining the idiosyncrasies of the original documents, the background to the trade, the complexities of international trade at the time, the locations considered and the profits made by Kytson. Lists of traders by county and product, lists of ships that transported the cloth, a very full and interesting glossary, copious biographies of Kytson's main business associates including several Somerset clothmen, thorough indexes of persons (which usefully include their home location) and places as well as an introduction with very clear subsections all help make this volume a 'tour-de-force' which will be referred to by researchers into English business history for hundreds of years. Brett is to be warmly congratulated for his tenacity and achievement.

PHILIP ASHFORD

Glastonbury holy thorn: story of a legend, by Adam Stout, Green & Pleasant Publishing, 2020, xiii, 154 pp., 59 b/w illus., 16 colour plates, £12.99, ISBN 978-1-9162686-0-9.

This book gives us exactly what its subtitle promises, not so much the familiar content of the holy thorn legend as the story of when and how it appeared and developed and was promoted, suppressed and exploited by a cast of colourful characters variously motivated by religion, politics, commerce and romantic imagination.

It turns out to be a fascinating story, and it could not have been told any better.

We are introduced, amongst many others, to Thomas Hearne, expelled and locked out of the Bodleian Library as a non-juror, who published a Catholic-inspired history of Glastonbury and a series of its medieval texts; Thomas Prew, a Presbyterian tenant who set about demolishing the abbey ruins but was content to retain a specimen of the thorn; John Jackson, a 'fascinating and endearing individual' who walked all the way from Yorkshire to see for himself whether the thorn flowered on Old or New Christmas Day; to 'Orator' Henry Hunt, the celebrated radical who was imprisoned at Ilchester for incitement at Peterloo and on his release vaunted his role as lord of the manor of Glastonbury and successor to its old glories in monastic days; and to James Austin, who returned to Glastonbury and bought the abbey and its estate after making his fortune in Australia, and staged an elaborate replanting of a thorn tree on Wearyall Hill on the occasion of the wedding of the Prince of Wales in March 1863.

The change from the Julian to the Gregorian calendar in 1752/53 showed up a wide range of attitudes to the legend. Polite educated society approved of following the science, but resented doing so at the bidding of a pope. The populace retained a sentimental attachment to the old days. What would the tree do? The author has found three contemporary sources which claimed respectively that it flowered on the old day, that it flowered on the new day, and that it did not exist at all! John Jackson observed that the vicar of St John's pointedly avoided holding any services on Old Christmas Day, while 'most of the day the bells rung as hard as they could.' The author comments that 'bell-ringers were the unruly guardians of tradition and customary values' and your reviewer, a ringer himself, pleads guilty as charged, though our rebellious streak has toned down since the 18th century.

The book is much enhanced by high production standards: good quality matt paper for the text and glossy paper for the two sections of colour plates, a well-chosen typeface, attractive layout with well-proportioned margins, traditionally sewn sections and just the right weight for the hard covers. Proof reading is meticulous with the sole exception of 'principal' twice misspelt as 'principle', on pages 30 and 74, surely the result of the modern scourge of auto 'correction'.

At the end come a more than adequate bibliography, list of references and index, modestly if a little self-consciously introduced as 'a workshop manual, not as a display of erudition'. That in a way sets the tone for the whole work. It represents a real scholarly addition to our knowledge, but at the same time is thoroughly accessible and a pleasure to read.

DAVID BROMWICH

The Old House at Lower Cockhill Farm, by William Vaughan, The Cockhill Press, 2019, 67 pp., illus., £15, ISBN 978-1-9997946-2-0.

William Vaughan, Professor Emeritus at Birkbeck College London, and his wife, the artist Pek Pippin bought the Old House at Cockhill in 1992. The sales description called it 'a medieval hall house with wall paintings', which needed repair and conservation. With Vaughan and Pippin's enthusiasm for history and art, Cockhill made an excellent choice of property to renovate. *The Old House at Lower Cockhill Farm*, Vaughan's beautifully illustrated book regarding the history of the Cockhill estate, provides new details about the people who lived there, and the changes and repairs made to the house over 500 years.

After the Preface and Introduction, Vaughan's book is divided into three parts. Part One provides readers with a historical overview. This covers the etymology of the placename from the earliest possible time of habitation. It also discusses the connectivity of Cockhill to local market towns such as Cary, and the final, growing isolation of the settlement as a railway encroached and markets closed.

Part Two forms the book's main section and consists of Chapters 4, 5 and 6. Chapter 4 covers the 1435 building: a three-room and cross-passage house. Vaughan's analysis identifies how this was a style of reasonably high status. Particularly noteworthy is his inclusion of reconstructed drawing showing the open hall shows the layout of the building with wind-braces, door position and ladder to the upper floor. Attending to evidence of lost features, Vaughan suggests that the building may have had a spiral staircase, removed when the house was developed in 1480.

Chapters 5 and 6 discuss the 1480 development of the north end of the house and the addition of a jettied porch with vibrant wall paintings, which Vaughan

names the Painted Room. This chapter's discussion of the extensive wall paintings is highly interesting. The decorations are painted in a vigorous vernacular style depicting large flowers and an IHC symbol in the centre of each wall. Vaughan surmises that the room was probably a chapel. He develops the idea, discussing the possibility that the chapel was associated with the cult of the 'Holy Name of Jesus'. The chapter concludes with the explanation of paintings being carefully covered over with a layer of plaster presumably to hide them. Vaughan rightly argues that this would be the case if the room were being used as a secret chapel.

The third part of the book – Chapters 7 and 8 – turns to the decline in the importance of the house, and its integration into a farm during the 17th century. Vaughan discusses the insertion of rooms and the addition of a chimney, which lead to the destruction of one of the walls of the Painted Room. At the same time, a second house was added to the north of Cockhill, and the two buildings were knocked together. The new house became the main living space for the family. This allowed the old house of Cockhill to be preserved without further changes.

Lower Cockhill Farm is of sufficient historical interest to merit this short publication. The volume allows the recording of information that would otherwise be lost in a site report or listing description. Considerable value is added by Vaughan's research into the site's history and the people who lived at Cockhill. As well as the subject matter, *The Old House's* lavish layout proves especially pleasing, for example the estate map on page 18 is accompanied on the adjoining page by an aerial view of the same landscape, both reproduced at the same scale, allowing a direct comparison. Vaughan's enthusiasm for Cockhill is further exemplified by details such as the reconstructed drawing of the hall and the model of the house. The book makes an informative and interesting read.

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