Book reviews

Extracted from the Proceedings of the Somerset Archaeological and Natural History Society for 2021.

Volume 165, 307-311

Produced in Great Britain by Short Run Press, Exeter.

1SSN 0081-2056

BOOK REVIEWS

Eckweek, Peasedown St John, Somerset: survey and excavations at a shrunken medieval hamlet, 1988-90, by Andrew Young, with contributions by Alexander Kidd *et al.*, Society for Medieval Archaeology Mono. 40, 2020, 312 pp., 244 figs, Hbk., £34.99, ISBN 978-0-367-86029-5.

Earthworks of a former hamlet around Eckweek House Farm were first recorded by Mick Aston during aerial reconnaissance in 1984. In 1988 Avon County Archaeologist Rob Iles, responding to plans for a new road and housing development which would destroy the site, initiated a programme of archaeological survey and selective excavation. The project was directed by Andrew Young, principal author of this report, who apologises for its delayed appearance: its preparation was disrupted by the disbanding of Avon County Council's archaeological service in 1992 and by the loss of many of the field drawings and photographs in an office fire in 2001. Some sections of the report remain little changed from drafts produced in the early 1990s. Others have been updated, or added more recently, notably Nick Corcos's valuable contribution on the documentary evidence and landscape context, compiled in 2013. Two final chapters, written in 2015, include discussions, reinterpretations and syntheses of the data, which provide ample compensation for any limitations in the unrevised portions.

While the site's interest lies primarily in the medieval settlement, it also provides evidence of Iron Age industrial and trading activities. Despite antiquarian accounts of Roman occupation near Eckweek, no Roman structures were identified.

The excavations revealed a succession of buildings from the mid-10th to the 14th century, when the hamlet reached its greatest extent and prosperity. Investigation concentrated upon areas towards the northern and southern margins of the settlement, where two substantial earthfast timber houses were erected in the early 11th century. Both had rounded gable-ends, probably indicating hipped roofs. They may reflect Eckweek's Domesday record of two landholdings. The more southerly dwelling was evidently of higher status, incorporating a possible timber turret, and set alongside another contemporary building within an embanked and ditched enclosure. This may have been the home of Alwaker, resident thegn before 1066, abandoned by his Norman successor Walter of Douai. The northern dwelling was divided into two rooms containing sunken features probably covered by wooden floors in the Anglo-Saxon *grübenhaus* tradition, not previously recorded in Somerset. This may have been occupied by the villein of an absentee landholder, Alstan, whose property came to Ralph, tenant of the Count of Mortain, after 1066.

A period of redevelopment, expansion and rising prosperity through the 13th century is signalled by the earliest stone constructions. Around 1200, the northern timber dwelling was initially replaced by two new buildings with drystone sill walls. Shortly before 1300, these were in turn replaced by a new farmhouse and an open-fronted byre or cartshed. The rebuilt farmhouse had higher sill walls, probably carrying a raised-cruck superstructure. Meticulous recording of artefact distributions provided valuable insights into the organisation and functions of its limited interior space. The eastern bay probably served as a store and workshop. A cross-passage separated this from a combined hall and kitchen with an open hearth and two corner ovens. The western bay included a probable sleeping area and a chamber which contained the household's most valued possessions, the best ceramic and metal tableware, and personal items within the burnt remains of a lockable wooden chest. Soon after 1352 (the date provided by a groat of Edward III recovered from the latest floor layer in the chamber), this farmhouse was abruptly abandoned, leaving many of its household possessions and furnishings in place. Although documented plague outbreaks may have been responsible, a neighbouring dwelling was apparently occupied into the 15th century, and another area further west produced pottery and clay pipes indicating continuing occupation up to around 1800.

The large assemblage of stratified domestic pottery dating from about AD 950 to 1400 is the subject of a thorough report. One notable item, a 14th-century cistern decorated with a stylized stag's head and antlers, has no known close parallels. Specialist reports on metal finds and worked stone and bone objects provide many insights into the lives of the occupants. Environmental evidence and faunal remains indicate broad continuities in the farming regime throughout the occupation sequence. Wheat was the predominant cereal. Sheep accounted for more of the bone assemblage, but beef probably contributed more to the diet.

Thirty years ago the organizational infrastructure of archaeology lacked much that is taken for granted today. The report acknowledges with honesty the loss of information through inadequate monitoring of construction works after completion of the

excavation. There is no indication that any recording of the upstanding domestic and agricultural buildings of Eckweek House Farm took place before their demolition. Nevertheless, despite limitations imposed by the circumstances of the time, the achievements of the project are impressive and significant. The report may be overdue, but it has been well worth waiting for.

JAMES BOND

Bath and Wells ordinations, 1465-1526, edited by Robert Dunning, Somerset Record Society 99, 2021, xxv, 273 pp., £24, ISBN 978-0-901732-49-1.

For some unexplained and inexplicable reason, the previous editor of the bishop's registers, Sir Henry Maxwell-Lyte, did not include these ordination lists. Robert Dunning makes good this deficiency, with useful and interesting information about ordinations in the diocese in the late medieval period.

The conferring of orders was an important episcopal duty, necessary for ensuring a regular supply of ministers of all ranks for pastoral care in the parishes. At this time, though, ordinations were rarely conducted by the Diocesan, who was often absent from his diocese, busying himself with affairs of state. The solution to this problem was the appointment of suffragan bishops, and Bath and Wells was fortunate if having two successive bishops of Tenos: John Valens (1459-79) and Thomas Cornish (1486-1513). Such bishops were given the title 'in partibus infidelium', that is, of sees under Moslem rule. Tenos was a see in the patriarchate of Jerusalem, and the two bishops of Tenos conducted the greatest number of the ordinations recorded in these lists.

The actual number of men ordained is astonishing – not far short of 3,000, but the list does contain ordinations to the minor as well as to the major orders of sub-deacon, deacon and priest. Large numbers of candidates came from places where no suffragan bishop was available.

Ordinations were held at the Ember seasons, and celebrated in various parts of the diocese. Many took place at one or other of the chapels at the cathedral in Wells, but also in churches or religious houses in the diocese and occasionally outside it. The candidates presumably had to undergo some form of scrutiny to assess their suitability and to check that they had at least a modicum of education appropriate to their order. A comparatively small number had connections with Oxford colleges or religious houses. External candidates had to prove their suitability by bringing letters dimissory from the bishop of their diocese, or his vicar-general, and also to give evidence of a title. The title was to a fixed sphere of work, and source of income. In the case of candidates who held a benefice or had some other source of income, there was no difficulty. Others had to give evidence of the necessary support, which quite often came from religious communities.

On the whole, the ordination lists give no clue as to the subsequent ministries of those ordained. But they do contain the record of some men proceeding up the ministerial ladder by receiving the order of acolyte, sub-deacon, deacon and priest. Notable amongst these is Dom Richard Bere, of Glastonbury, who was ordained acolyte and sub-deacon at the same ordination in 1477, deacon in 1479, and eventually became abbot of Glastonbury. Richard Whiting, the last abbot of Glastonbury, martyred on the Tor in 1539, received successively the orders of acolyte, sub-deacon, deacon and priest. Most of the other ordinands remain unknown, leaving only their name, place of origin, and date of ordination.

MICHAEL LEWIS

Late medieval pottery kilns at Newport, Pembrokeshire, and the recording and interpretation of pottery production sites, by David Dawson and Oliver Kent with contributions by Nick Tavener and Bill Stebbing, Medieval and Later Pottery Research Group Occasional Paper 9, 2021, xiv, 80 pp., b/w & colour illus., price not shown, ISBN 978-1-838351-80-9.

The authors of this authoritative and wide-ranging volume are well known to SANHS members. David Dawson is the current (2022) President of the Society. He and Oliver Kent have been leading figures in the study of pottery for many decades. Indeed, they have collaborated on several important publications and have promoted the study of Somerset's pottery assemblages.

This book falls into two sections. The first describes the excavation of the Newport kilns, provides a detailed assessment of the site and sets the results in a wider context. The second section reviews the methods of pottery production and analyses the issues that should be taken into consideration in the excavation and recording of kilns.

Two kilns were first recognised during the excavation for the foundations of the Memorial Hall in Newport in 1921. They were identified by Mortimer Wheeler, then Keeper of Archaeology at the National Museum of Wales. Kiln 1 was destroyed during the construction of the Hall. The other (kiln 2) was partially excavated, scheduled as an ancient monument and preserved beneath the hall's stage.

Associated pottery was later identified as Dyfed Gravel-Tempered Ware and by the authors to be of the late 15th/early 16th century. It was to Wheeler's credit that he recognised the significance of the site, recorded kiln 1 in detail and ensured the preservation of kiln 2.

In 2013, the Newport Memorial Hall Committee began the process of seeking permission and funding to conserve kiln 2 with the aim of developing access to an important heritage asset. An investigation at that time suggested the presence of a previously unrecognised second firebox. In 2016 the authors were commissioned to report on the significance of the kiln and to explain its structure. This was achieved through investigation, exposure and recording. The brief included advising on the conservation and preservation of the structure. The authors were assisted by Bill Stebbing, David Mason, Chris Webster and Nicholas Dawson. Nick Tavener was appointed as site archaeologist with effect from 2017.

The book provides a detailed account of the excavation, an interpretation of the kiln and a description of the sherds recovered. The investigation established that, in its completeness, kiln 2 is a rare survival for its date incorporating a well-preserved substructure beneath the ware chamber and a system of distributing heat from two fireboxes. No documentary record of contemporary potters has been found. The authors suggest the infrastructure that might have supported the Newport operation. This could have included clay-processing tanks, drying areas, workshops, storerooms and (probably) accommodation for the potters' families.

The second section of the book deals with the wider issues of understanding and recording kilns and discusses the technical and cultural implications of pottery industries. The authors draw on their own practical experimentation over 40 years at Bickley in North Somerset, on extensive personal research and on their study of international sources. Numerous diagrams and photographs illustrate the five basic types of kiln.

This section of the book explains the complexities of successful kiln construction and the skill of generations of potters in managing resources to produce functional and aesthetically pleasing products. Modern scientific analysis of both kilns and pots has heightened awareness of the sophistication of the technology involved. The authors' contention is that the excavation and interpretation of kilns are tasks for the specialist. Experience of actual firing is necessary to recognise the signatures of the various gases and chemical reactions in the archaeological record.

A strength of this book is its contribution to the development of a systematic approach to the recording of pottery production and its advocacy of the need for a common terminology. The authors propose a new classification of simple updraught kilns.

This book will interest a range of readers. An archaeologist charged with the task of excavating a kiln will find the step-by-step account of the investigation of the Newport kilns an invaluable model. For those wishing to acquire a greater understanding of the processes involved in the production of pottery, this book will also prove enlightening. The non-specialist reader is likely to be fascinated by the universality of pottery production and the range of examples referenced by the authors. Of particular note is a group of painted votive plaques from Penteskouphia near Corinth illustrating pottery kilns and dated to c. 570 BC. The authors rightly stress the importance of setting pottery production within a wider context. This cultural value has clearly been recognised in Newport with the establishment of a bilingual heritage asset with participation and learning as core principles.

The book is well written, clearly printed and lavishly illustrated. It would perhaps have been helpful to have illustrations adjacent to the text to which they principally refer. In some of the diagrams and photographs more detailed labelling of significant features would have aided the understanding of non-specialists. These, however, are minor quibbles. The litmus test of any book is whether it excites the reader to learn more about the topic or to visit the site in question. As regular visitors to Pembrokeshire, the reviewers have already planned one excursion for their next trip.

MADELEINE AND DAVID ROBERTS

Partisan politics: looking for consensus in eighteenth-century towns, by Jon Rosebank, University of Exeter Press, 2021, ix, 297 pp., £75, ISBN 978-1-905816-67-5.

The traditional interpretation of Britain's transition from the political turbulence of the 17th century to the stability of the 18th is that of J. H. Plumb – though scholars have recently challenged it. Plumb argued that stability came from political structures and the operation of them by both politicians and landowners. Rosebank's book, rooted in the smaller West Country towns, suggests that political stability was illusory and that violence remained a feature of urban life across the period from 1688 to 1730. He claims that civic structures often failed to establish law and order in the towns. In some respects, this contradicts John Miller's *Cities and towns, politics and religion in English provincial towns, 1660-1722* (2007), which sees the

government of towns as becoming more participative and less violent. Rosebank recognises that there is a gap in studies of smaller towns in this period and aims to fill it, which he does well. In particular, he seeks to understand the important connections between economic, religious and political factors. It was not a coincidence that West Country towns were marked by both high levels of religious commitment (to both the Church and Dissent) and a thriving textile industry. This is especially important as some historians fail to connect religious and economic factors coherently. Rosebank also roots his discussion in a detailed examination of the records of town government, which he acquits of any serious abuses of power or inefficiency, though he does not find that they restrained partisan politics.

The electoral process in Somerset was marked by a high degree of voter independence; moreover Tory and Whig factions were increasingly impermeable and this meant that elections were usually a source of strife. In Bridgwater in the 1720s, the Duke of Chandos's attempt to strong-arm electors for his candidate ended in humiliation. In Taunton in the same period, the complex blend of Church and High Tories and Dissenter-backed Whigs was prone to shifting alliances between various groups. But here too, landowners and gentry exercised little direct influence on elections. Interestingly, Rosebank queries James Bradley's assumption that it was always Low Churchmen who were willing to ally themselves with Dissenters, though there is no clear evidence that Bradley is wrong. Certainly, in the decade after 1710, Sacheverell's popularity created a wide gulf between High Church Tories and Dissenters.

The consequence of what Rosebank calls the 'horizontal solidarities of labour and the vertical bonds of religion' was that Taunton in this period was a violent town, and especially turbulent at elections. Few people can have been untouched by Taunton's partisanship; and severe tensions affected its government. In Bridgwater, Rosebank accepts Oldmixon's view that there was an ambient Jacobitism that meant the Pretender's birthday was an opportunity for displays of anti-government feeling. But, as in Wales, Jacobitism could sometimes be a proxy for other factors, something that Rosebank does not consider. Like Taunton, Bridgwater had a wide franchise and this led to disturbances in times of political conflict.

The question, of course, is to what degree are the towns that Rosebank puts together with Taunton and Bridgwater (Plymouth, Tiverton, Dartmouth and Totnes) representative of the region or the national picture? Here Rosebank is tentative, but detects some regional patterns. However, by excluding larger towns, especially Exeter and Bristol, Rosebank does not consider their influence on smaller towns. For the period after 1730, the patterns are less clear. As this study ends in 1730, Rosebank does not assess the degree to which factors such as theological splits within West Country Dissent, the rise of freemasonry in even small towns like Taunton, and the impact foreign policy – in both interrupting trade and boosting government spending – had on Somerset and Devon towns.

Despite the rather overblown claims to be an entirely fresh interpretation of the study of West Country towns in the period 1688 to 1730, this is an interesting study, rooted in a detailed study of archival material, which configures the interplay between the forces at play in urban politics well. Corporations, gentry, workers, churches, chapels, and government agencies such as the Excise, Admiralty and Post Office all had to find some accommodation. When they failed to do so violence often resulted; but increasingly they did, and Rosebank has contributed to our understanding of that process.

WILLIAM GIBSON, Oxford Brookes University

The Isle of Wedmore remembers the First World War, 1914-1919, by T. R. Moreman, self-published with assistance of the Heritage Lottery Fund and the British Legion, 2017, 370 pp., 24cm, illustrations b/w & colour, £30, ISBN 978-1-5272117-3-5.

This book began with very worthwhile intentions of recording the local history of the First World War and of those who served king and country but unfortunately there are a number of annoying typos that detract somewhat from the presentation. After an introduction in which many researchers and families are thanked, the author begins with a chapter setting the area in time and place, with a population of about 2,500, before the outbreak of hostilities. This is followed by The Home Front 1914-1915, in which he describes the mobilisation of the local men who were already in the Territorials or the Reservists and 14 named volunteers who responded to Earl Kitchener's first call for recruits as well as others from abroad who had emigrated from the Isle of Wedmore. By the Spring of 1915, about 150 local men were serving and further volunteers enlisted in response to recruiting drives. The absence of male bread-winners is highlighted along with the increases in prices and shortages.

Belgian refugees, five families, arrived in October and were quickly integrated but they left in August 1915. Egg collections and comforts for the troops get a mention as does the Volunteer Training Corps (similar

to The Home Guard of WW2). The shortage of labour due to the absence of men is again highlighted with the recruiting of women to agricultural work.

In 1916 there were great changes. Thirteen local men were killed in action, or died of wounds or disease, while others were wounded (eight had been lost up to the end of 1915). On 15 July 1915 the National Registration Act had been passed but Lord Derby's Scheme had not produced sufficient volunteers so conscription followed in 1916. At the same time more women sought employment as the value of their separation allowances and pensions dwindled by inflation and, simultaneously, taxes were being increased. Also in 1916 discharged men began to return home having completed their contractual service or rendered unfit for service due to wounds. Comfort parcels to the troops were sent on a community basis and were certainly appreciated by the recipients. The Volunteer Training Corps became Volunteer Battalions of the County Regiments and the Wedmore Platoon won a shooting competition in 1917. Egg collections continued as did fund-raising and the sale of War Bonds reached £1,500 by the end of that year.

In 1917 and 1918 the largest factor affecting life at home was the scarcity of food and consequent hunger, caused by poor harvest in 1917 and the resumption of unrestricted U-boat warfare. Rationing was introduced. The 1918 German 'Spring Offensive' prompted the Government to end agriculture's status as a protected industry and increased to 51 the maximum age for conscription. This further drain on local agricultural manpower prompted more families to turn their lawns and flower-beds over to food cultivation; similar moves were made at the local schools and allotment gardens were created in a number of parishes. Even private householders were instructed to cultivate their land. In the final 100 days of the War in France and Belgium a further eight men from Wedmore were killed or died of wounds.

The fourth chapter tells how the men returned home after the armistice and the volunteer units were disbanded. The ten prisoners held in Germany were all home before Christmas 1918, but the majority had to wait, some being moved to other theatres, as well as the large contingent of the Army of Occupation in the Rhineland. The chapter then describes the personal and parish memorials, the church services held to dedicate them and the role of the British Legion in the area.

There follows on pp. 149-326 the Roll of Honour: 58 names with details of their background and service, some of which had already been mentioned in earlier chapters. Photographs of many of the 58 are included. Then with some comments on World War 2, the author tells of the recent and current commemorations of Armistice Day.

Five appendices give the nominal roll of the Wedmore Section, 2nd South Western Brigade Transport and Supply Column ASC, the 16 officers with connections in the Isle, the volunteers, the Prisoners of War held in Germany and 416 men who served, stating their name, residence, service number, rank, unit and whether wounded or killed.

GRAHAM MARK