

BOOK NOTICES

Field Archaeology in Britain, by John Coles. (University paperbacks), 267 pp., 78 figs., 8 plates. Cloth £3.50; paper, £1.75.

Many books on "How to dig" have appeared in recent years, but none I think, as detailed as this new handbook by Dr. Coles. It is written for students of archaeology of all kinds, and is intended as an explanation of how and why various techniques are applied, rather than as an instruction manual. Having defined archaeology and the roles played by amateur and professional archaeologists, Dr. Coles explains how sites are located, mapped and planned in detail. He then goes on to describe how an excavation should be conducted and organised; this should be read by anyone thinking of embarking on an excavation, and his advice heeded attentively. He gives lots of useful information about what to do and how to do it, balanced by sensible and much-needed warnings about the dangers and problems that can bedevil an inexperienced excavator. The book gives information about the organisation of archaeology in Britain and a useful introductory Bibliography of reports of fieldwork and excavations. Dr. Coles ends by paying tribute to the example set by those who participated in the M5 Research Project, the fruitful results of which have come almost entirely from the efforts of amateurs (many belonging to this Society). He predicts that it is in this kind of research that amateurs will find their most satisfying role in the future. Any of us working in field archaeology, whether it includes excavation or not, will find this book extremely useful, even the professionals, whom, Dr. Coles apparently hopes, are already beyond reproach.

N.L.

"By South Cadbury is that Camelot . . .", *Excavations at Cadbury Castle, 1966-70*, by Leslie Alcock (Thomas and Hudson), 244 pp., 110 plates, 36 figs., cloth £4.75; paper £2.50.

Arthur's Britain, by Leslie Alcock (Allen Lane), 415 pp., 32 plates, 33 figs., Price £0.00.

Two books by Leslie Alcock have appeared during the last year, both of interest to anyone studying the so-called "Dark Ages", and particularly to those in Somerset.

The excavations at South Cadbury, which were visited by many members of this Society, finished in 1970, and the final research report cannot be expected to appear for some time. Mr. Alcock has filled the gap between digging and publication with this admirable volume, *"By South Cadbury is that Camelot . . ."*, which gives a summary of the results of the excavation. The book is designed for the vast number of enthusiasts who went to see the excavation and for everyone interested in Arthur, or archaeology or history. I think that many professional archaeologists will find it an invaluable guide to the Research report, when that appears. The book starts by describing the development of the idea that South Cadbury might be the Arthurian Camelot, an idea that originated with Leland in the sixteenth century, and briefly examines the documentary evidence for Arthur. This is followed by what may, to many people, be the most exciting part of the excavation, the story of how the dig was organised, financed and conducted; the high hopes and reservations of all concerned; the false leads and inevitable disappointments that occur on all sites; and the excitement of the final fulfilment of the aims of the excavation, with the dramatic discoveries in the South West gate, and the proving of the Arthurian period hall and defences. An impressive account, carefully balanced by the last section of the book.

This, the interpretation, tells the story of the site, as it appeared early in the long process of evaluating all the evidence collected during five seasons of digging. South Cadbury is a hill fort with an unusually long history, stretching from the Early Neolithic (probably about 3500 B.C.) to at least the time of Ethelred in the 11th century. A rare Late Bronze Age phase has been identified, but the principal prehistoric phase was during the Iron Age, when the great ramparts were built. The prehistoric settlement came to a violent end at the hands of the Romans, at the surprisingly late date of around 70 A.D.; occupation started again in the Late Roman period and the hill was refortified in the late fifth century. At that time, the upper rampart was re-instated, a new gateway was built at the South West entrance, and a large timber hall was erected on the hill crest. Mr. Alcock wisely emphasises that no direct evidence for Arthur was found (or indeed expected), but argues convincingly that South Cadbury has the best claim to Arthurian association of any site excavated so far. The Etheldredan mint, church and gateway all seem rather disappointing after the exciting Arthurian evidence, but the site is unique in its evidence for this period.

The book is, therefore, of great interest for many reasons; it is written for the non-specialist and is generously illustrated with plates and drawings.

For those who wish to enquire further into the Arthurian period, Mr. Alcock's other book,

Arthur's Britain, will prove fascinating and most rewarding. Here, all the latest thought on the literary, historical and archaeological evidence is gathered together and discussed in a scholarly but lucid manner. The first part of the book discusses the literary evidence, pointing out the weaknesses and limitations of the various texts and giving a balanced account of the most recent interpretations of them. This section is followed by a discussion of the historical and archaeological evidence, not only for the Britons, in the limited sense of the successors of the Romano-British populations, but of their enemies as well: Picts and Scots, Angles and Saxons. Although *Arthur's Britain* is definitely not a picture book, it is adequately illustrated, and has a good bibliography. There are points in both books over which one could take issue with the author, but these are matter of detailed interpretation, not the basic theses that he puts forward. One feels he has cast as much light as is available at present onto this confusing and much neglected period, and that the books will be indispensable to anyone wanting to study any aspect of the period.

N.L.

Class and Ideology in the Nineteenth Century, R. S. Neale. Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1972, pp. viii plus 200, £2.75.

This volume brings together seven essays, in one of which, entitled "Class and Ideology in a provincial city: Bath 1800-50", Professor Neale takes further his work on Bath; an earlier study appeared in these *Proceedings*, volume 108 (1964), pp. 132-44. Bath was becoming a place of residence for retired "gentry", as distinct from a seasonal resort, but far from having, as the 19th-century antiquarians claimed, no manufactures to speak of, the majority of the city's population in 1831 were artisans and retailers providing for strong consumer demands. Led by J. A. Roebuck there was in the city a strong movement of Philosophic Radicalism which made Bath in the 1830s "the most vigorous reforming City of the Empire". By the middle of the 19th century the socio-economic structure of Bath had changed; the independent artisans had given place to a factory proletariat, and Bath was no longer in the forefront of national politics.

R.W.D.

In *A History of Wedmore* (published by the author, 1971, pp. 76, 55p) our member Mr. F. J. Pearce has collected a vast amount of fascinating information about his large and important parish or "island". He has been conscious that too often such histories are written as if the world outside was of no relevance, and has striven to place his narrative within the context of county and national history. While the text is arranged roughly in chronological order, reference is made more easy by divisions into small sections, each with its own title. The vast expense of printing has precluded any treatment of sources.

R.W.D.

Dusty Pages: a story of two families and their homes, Joyce Carew (published by the author, n.d., pp. 86, 60p). This is a period piece of very great interest. The author recounts, from her own long memory and from family diaries, the daily life of some of her relatives in the West Country in the Victorian and Edwardian eras. She is related to the Fortescues, the Rolles, the Fanes, the Phelipses, and the Stucleys, and her portraits of them in their homes are both vivid and revealing. Somerset readers will be interested in her description of Christmas at Montacute at the end of the 19th century.

R.W.D.

Essays in Local History, published by the Frome Society for Local Study. Numbers 1, 2 and 3 of this series of occasional essays have been published during 1971, and more are expected. No. 1 is a study of *The Poet of Beckington* (Samuel Daniel, 1562-1619) by Daphne Joy. No. 2 is the first part of a description and history of *Westbarn Grange*, the house of the author, Michael McGarvie; it describes the architectural and documentary evidence for the house in the sixteenth century, when it belonged, among others, to John de Vere, Earl of Oxford. No. 3, *Postlebury Hill, Cloford*, is a short account of the earthworks on the hill and their date, the author coming to the conclusion that they are more likely to be Saxon than Prehistoric; there is also a short history of Postlebury Farm. All these make interesting reading, and it is encouraging to see another of our affiliated societies in print.

N.L.

Exeter Excavations: the Guildhall Site, by John Collis, 16 pp., 8 plates, 4 figs. Price not known.

This is the first account of the 1971 season of digging on the Guildhall site in Exeter. An area of about 10 acres inside the old city had been cleared for redevelopment, and archaeological investigations were undertaken on a large scale, against the clock. The results of Mr. Collis's work have been partly responsible for the continuing excavation of Exeter, that is likely to go on for some years. The most important results of the 1971 season were the discovery of large timber buildings of the first century A.D. which are thought to be military; the tracing of house plans dating from the 3rd and 4th centuries A.D.; for the Medieval and later periods, useful pottery sequences were found, and waterlogged pits and wells had preserved leather and wooden objects that rarely survive.

The evidence from this excavation and the ones that have taken place since is providing a more detailed picture of the development of Exeter in Roman and Medieval times, and should be read by everyone working on the archaeology of towns.

N.L.

Roger Miles, *The Trees and Woods of Exmoor* (The Exmoor Press, Dulverton, 1972. Microstudy B2). 64 pp., 26 half-tone illustrations, folding map and 22 drawings. 50p.

The author of *Forestry in the English Landscape* has packed his microstudy with information attractively presented. He gives an account of the woods of Exmoor and Quantock from 20,000 B.C. to the present day and describes parkland, boundary and other individual trees. Most of the excellent photographs were taken by the author and the botanical drawings are by Audrey Bonham-Carter. As a landscape architect and a forestry officer with a thorough knowledge and love of the area, Roger Miles is well qualified to write about woodland management and the place of trees in the region; he is not so successful as an historian, especially of the medieval period for which neither his sources nor his interpretations are altogether reliable.

Apart from the chapter on Royal Forests, the book gives an admirable summary of the changes that have occurred in the woods of Exmoor, a balanced analysis of their present condition and function and a glance towards their future.

O.M.H.

Sedgemoor — Its History and Natural History by Bernard Storer. Published by David & Charles. Price £3.75.

The author has a pleasant style, the book being easy to read and to understand.

Its scope is far wider than the title implies, for his concept of the term "Sedgemoor" includes not only Sedgemoor itself but the remainder of the lowlands draining to the River Parrett, and the 50,000 acres of moor lying between the Poldens and the Mendips known in ancient days as Brent Marsh, and more latterly as the "Vale of Avalon".

The historical chapters provide a good condensation of the many reports and documents relating not only to the draining of the Levels, but to schemes for canals and railways. Any attempt to compress such a mass of information into two dozen pages, must lead to a few minor inaccuracies but the extensive bibliography provides adequate source material for anyone who wishes to study the subject in greater detail.

The chapters devoted to Plant Life deal not only with the rarities of the area, but with the common aquatic plants which would be passed unnoticed by the casual visitor to this unique part of Somerset.

The chapter on the Invertebrates contains excellent large scale sketches of some of the fearsome creatures which inhabit the river and rhynes. It might have been prudent to have included a note to the effect that these sketches are many times life size — if only to allay the fears of anxious parents.

Fish, reptiles, mammals, birds and other creatures are dealt with in less detail, though sufficient information is given to stimulate interest. Local industries are included in outline, but this chapter contains the only real "clanger" in the book. Bath bricks are described as "each has about twenty holes running through it from top to bottom"!! Which goes to show that you can't be an expert in everything.

Well illustrated with maps, diagrams and sketches of the locality and the plants to be found there, the book should increase interest in an area of Somerset which as yet is unfrequented by the tourist, and consequently still retains something of its ancient aura of solitude.

E.L.K.