

BOOK REVIEWS

The Archaeology of Avon: a Review from the Neolithic to the Middle Ages edited by Michael Aston and Rob Iles, Avon County Council, nd[1987], pp. xi + 190, £6.95

The day conference on the archaeology of Avon, held in 1984, was a stimulating affair. This book of fourteen essays is the long-awaited publication of that event. It takes its place alongside *The Archaeology of Somerset*, a similar compendium of thirteen essays edited by Mick Aston and Ian Burrow, published by Somerset County Council in 1982. The pungent preface by the masterhand Peter Fowler neatly explains the presence of the county of Avon, after thirteen years (the only place where any publication date for the volume is given!), summarises the aims of the book and excuses the traditional chest of drawers approach. What it does not explain is the total omission of the Palaeolithic and Mesolithic periods, surely a disastrous mistake when sites on Mendip are of national importance. Admittedly the new county boundary wreaks havoc with studies of Mendip; and Aveline's Hole with its occupation in the Upper Palaeolithic and burials into the Mesolithic is mentioned in *The Archaeology of Somerset*. But what about the Mesolithic sites of Blackstone Rock, Clevedon and Birdcombe at Wraxall, where a rare Mesolithic hut was excavated by C.M. Sykes in 1955, to mention only a couple of examples? The work of C.M. Sykes is mentioned but surely Professor Tratman should be given some credit for his outstanding contribution over half a century. At least eight references are listed under his name in the bibliography. Perhaps it is inevitable that a book with twelve contributors for fourteen chapters (not fifteen as stated on page v) and two editors should be disjointed. There are even two forewords as well as the excellent preface. It has to be said that, in addition to the missing drawers, some of the others do not fit well into the chest, and that the book does not live up to its full title.

Most of the chapters contain useful material put over in a varied way by chosen experts. The individual chapters on Bristol (Mike Ponsford) and Bath (Barry Cunliffe) are particularly welcome, providing lucid and lively summaries for all to understand of the results of many years of work excavating in these two very different, important cities. 'Roman Avon' (Stephen Bird) is an excellent survey on published and some unpublished evidence. Leslie Grinsell gives his usual ~~comprehensive~~ summary of finds of Bronze Age date, spiced with a humorous gentle reminder that those interred would in life have been less interested in the beakers than their contents. The hillforts (Ian Burrow) are subjected to some inconsistencies and Reads Cavern is in Avon, not Somerset (p. 42); the Christon M5 excavation report is still awaited (p. 43). In 'Post-Roman Avon', Philip Rahtz emphasises the continuity of land usage and comments that a Sony TV does not make the owner a Japanese. Two thirds of the book is devoted to different aspects of the medieval period. It is confusing to split the settlements from their landscape

with the result that a plan of the shrunken village of Christon (p. 98) in one is far removed from an air photograph of the same area in the other. It is a pity no mention is made amongst the industries (p. 121) of lead mining, for example at Burrington Ham, as it was to play such an important part in post-medieval times. It is surely an omission that the photograph of the Banwell Saxon stone cross (p. 89) receives no mention in the text. Nevertheless, the book seems more at home here, no doubt reflecting the interests of the editors. Perhaps it should have been confined to the medieval archaeology of Avon. The most disappointing chapter is the first, 'The Physical Character of Avon', which reveals a total lack of comprehension on the part of the writer of geology and geomorphological process: a topographical map (p. 6) devoid of rivers and contours is meaningless; the geological table (p. 4) is upside down; measurements are given imperially whereas in the rest of book they are in metric.

What could have been mentioned is the fact that this is a sea-girt county – very important in terms of prehistoric and medieval archaeology. Man's battle to tame the changing coastline, though not yet fully understood, could have been mentioned, also the importance of the Severn Estuary in economic terms – as a highway, for trade and food resources. The Avon's significance has recently been the subject of an article by Grinsell in *Bristol and Avon Archaeology* vol 5. For lovers of Steep Holm, the island's omission from all maps is sad, although its medieval priory is mentioned in chapter 10.

The county maps on the whole have such large symbols it is not possible to locate the site intended. There are a few spelling mistakes:- p. 17 'includes' should be 'include'; p. 173 'on' should be 'in'; p. 65 'Odd Down' should be 'Old Down'; p. 4, 10 and 31, 'Worlebury Hill' should be 'Worle Hill', (Worlebury being used for the name of the hillfort not the hill; it is also the name of a modern building estate).

There are two areas of inconsistency which should have been cleared up in editing. One is in the citing of the County Sites and Monuments Record to which reference is made variously (Avon SMR 314 on p. 25 and Avon CC SMR no 180 on p. 49). It is good to see the SMR used but the numbers in isolation are meaningless. For instance, is SMR 314 the same as Grinsell's wooden stake on p. 30? The other inconsistency is in the citing of radio-carbon dates. This is a tricky issue and not all archaeologists follow the Trondheim convention (see *Antiquity* vol 61, no 231, p. 135, and editorial) but a book such as this should adopt a single pattern. There are several mistakes in the bibliography. The ones I spotted: 'Boon 1964' cited on pp. 52 and 71 is missing, as also is 'Tratman 1946' cited on p. 15. The reference to Thomas 1981 on p. 67 appears as 'Thomas 1982'. 'Haldene' on p. 181 should be 'Haldane'.

The book is good value at £6.95 for several excellent essays. It is neither a popular book, nor an undergraduate's text book. I am not sure for whom it is aimed – I suppose for the extra-mural student of the subject, rather than for the interested member of the general public.

JANE EVANS

The New Bell's Cathedral Guides: Wells Cathedral, by L.S. Colchester, Unwin Hyman, 1987, pp. 192, numerous illustrations, 3 plans, £10.95 cased, £5.95 paperback.

Those familiar with the original Bell's Cathedral Series, published in the 1890s and 1900s with their distinctive green *art nouveau* cover design, will welcome the New Bell's Cathedral Guides. The Wells volume is an early title in the new series, under the authorship of L.S. Colchester who has made the study of Wells Cathedral a subject peculiarly his own.

The arrangement is similar to the original series: an introductory chapter contains a brief history of the Cathedral with particular emphasis on the structural history; the next chapter is an architectural description of the exterior including the West Front statuary and the cloisters; the third chapter – the longest – describes the interior with its fittings. A concluding chapter deals with the surrounding buildings such as the Bishop's Palace and Vicars' Close which form one of the finest assemblages of medieval ecclesiastical buildings in Europe.

This book will appeal most to the keen student of medieval architecture who requires a far more detailed description than is provided by more popular guidebooks. Such a reader would probably need to make several visits to the Cathedral to study the features in conjunction with Mr Colchester's text, for to attempt to absorb the whole on a single visit would probably overtax the mental and physical stamina of the most dedicated enthusiast, such is the wealth of scholarly information provided. The text is up-to-date with its reference to David Wynne's somewhat controversial statue of Christ in the West Front gable; and incorporates the results of Warwick Rodwell's 1978–80 excavations in the Camery: unfortunately the alignment of the Market Place and High Street on the late-Roman mausoleum and succeeding Saxon chapels and cathedral church is not made fully clear. A plan would have been helpful in this regard, and it is in the insufficiency of the plans that the book's principal weakness lies – indeed, this was a fault of the original series. The only general plan of the present Cathedral is much too small and gives no indication of the various phases of construction. This is a pity, as the author's text reveals the architectural and documentary sources he has skilfully drawn upon to unravel the Cathedral's complex building history. The only graphic indication of his detective work is a plan shewing breaks of work at the east end.

These minor criticisms apart, this is a work to be thoroughly recommended. George Hall's fine photographs provide a worthy and well placed complement to the narrative.

JOHN C. PENTNEY

Excavations in Redcliffe 1983–5, Survey and Excavation at 95–97 Redcliff Street, Bristol. An Interim Report, by R.H. Jones (City of Bristol Museum and Art Gallery and Bristol Threatened History Society, 1986), pp. 28, 20 figs, £1.25

This is the fifth interim excavation report to be published by the museum's Department of Archaeology and History in the form of a separate booklet, aimed at the interested member of the public, and takes up the story from the fourth, *Excavations in the Medieval Suburb of Redcliffe, Bristol, 1980*, by Bruce Williams.

In 1980 Bristol City Council decided that redevelopment of land fronting Redcliff Street, a major part of the inner area improvement programme, should be accompanied by full archaeological survey and excavation in recognition that Redcliffe was one of the most important of the city's medieval 'new town' suburbs and an area which offered an opportunity to investigate the growth of the medieval port. 95–97 Redcliff Street is also the site of a substantial medieval house which tradition associates with the Canynges family. It was demolished in 1937 to widen the then main highway from the Midlands to the South West.

The author presents a straightforward interpretation of the site, concentrating on his principal theme – the development of the waterfront from the 12th century when the first buildings appear along the riverside of Redcliff Street. Based on the conclusions that he and his colleagues have drawn from the Redcliffe Project, the purpose behind the progressive reclamation of the Avon is discussed in detail in

relation to the changing tidal régime of the river and the increasing size of shipping in the 13th to 15th centuries. There is still much to be done on the wealth of evidence removed from the waterlogged parts of the site, particularly the extensive series of environmental samples which promise so much information concerning industrial waste, standards of public hygiene and identification of foodstuffs. Deposits of spent madder give hope that other dyestuffs might be isolated as evidence of the archaeologically elusive woollen industry. It is good to have fifteen illustrated small finds to ponder on – a pulley block, surely too fragile to be part of a ship's rigging, and a mould for tokens or counters but at 6mm in diameter smaller than those normally found in the 13th century.

However, it is disappointing that the excellent material relating to Canynge House is not arranged in a more comprehensible form. The concise summary of records made before 1937 and Pantin's interpretation of those, is not integrated with the explanation of the standing structures and stratigraphical evidence. Perhaps an annotated outline block plan accompanying the plans in Fig. 2 and captions to the reconstructed section in Fig. 19 would have clarified the possible layout of the building complex.

The booklet is essential reading for all interested in the development of towns and provides important evidence to complement that from Dublin, York and London – good value at a very reasonable price.

D.P. DAWSON

Octavius Warre Malet and the Conservation of Taunton Castle, by Hugh Malet (published by Enmore and distributed by Status, Ponsford Road, Minehead), 1987, pp. 54, 21 illustrations, 1 plan, card covers, £2.00.

This is a short account of the life of Octavius Malet, a member of the author's family, with particular reference to his involvement with Somerset Archaeological and Natural History Society's purchase and restoration of Taunton Castle. Octavius Malet (1811–1891) had a varied and adventurous career: he was expelled from Winchester College for resisting some of the objectionable practices of the unreformed public schools, but subsequently found employment in the service of the East India Company. He retired to Haygrass House, Taunton in 1864, and busied himself in local affairs; he was elected Joint Honorary Secretary of SANHS in 1871, shortly before the Society undertook the most ambitious project in its history: the acquisition of Taunton Castle to ensure its preservation and for use as a museum to house the Society's ever-growing collections. The purchase was completed in 1874, and to this end Octavius Malet had been vigorous in organising fund-raising events and using the influence of his family connexions in persuading the local gentry to subscribe generously.

In his Foreword, the author confesses to a penchant for 'the terminal infirmity of family history research', and unfortunately an otherwise interesting narrative is somewhat marred by irrelevant digressions regarding the Malet family's multifarious branches through the ages. This weakness is reflected in the choice of many of the illustrations which have not reproduced well. One would gladly sacrifice the appendix listing the Somerset incumbencies held by members of the family from the twelfth to twentieth centuries for more details of the work carried out by the Society following its purchase of the Castle.

JOHN C. PENTNEY

Security and Defence in South-West England before 1800, ed. R. Higham (Exeter Studies in History, 19 – Exeter University), pp. 102, £2.25.

This collection of six articles with preface has to be a bargain. It is also a very valuable contribution to regional history although, understandably bearing in mind its provenance, Devon and Cornwall dominate. Somerset is not totally omitted, however, and essays like that by Joyce Youings would appeal even to readers outside the region. There are a few minor niggles such as a list of figures without page numbers and a map (p. 20) with none of the places named, making it of very little use to the general reader.

The first essay is a useful summary of the Roman occupation of south-west England with a map of the forts and roads which are the subject of the article. The second piece appears to attempt too much in too little space with the result that statements are not always backed up with examples, and omissions such as the burh at Watchet seem strange to a Somerset reader (as does the inability to spell Bridgwater!). Again, it may be that the title is misleading as Devon dominates the essay. The article by Joyce Youings is a fascinating and very readable account of the difficulties in organizing the Elizabethan militia. Among the many items of interest revealed are the costs of military equipment, evidently a perennial problem, and the fact that a man's obligation to provide horses was related to the sumptuousness of his wife's apparel! The next article illustrates the isolation of Cornwall from the government in London in the early 17th century and the menace of the Barbary pirates whose victims appear so frequently in Somerset parish records. In his essay Ivan Roots shows Cornwall's vulnerability to pirates nearer home lurking in the Scillies or the Channel Islands where Royalists also held out against Blake in the 1650s. The latter proved easier for Blake to deal with than the former. The last article considers the relationship between the cod fishery and the navy and throws up some interesting details of resistance to the press gangs and of early settlement in Newfoundland.

MARY SIRAUT

Revel, Riot and Rebellion by D. Underdown, Oxford University Press, pp. vii + 324, 8 pp. illustrations, £17.50.

This is an important, if complex and possibly controversial book, of interest to both national and local historians. It is based on a study of cultural and political activity in Somerset, Dorset, and Wiltshire in the early 17th century. The book destroys the myth of idyllic village life by showing how repressive rural society was at all levels but especially for women and the poor. In the decades leading up to the Civil War we see the importance of custom reinforced by the authorities and upheld by local people over matters such as common rights and copyhold tenure. This attitude led to extraordinary pressure on individuals to conform and the suppression of innovation and change. But the market economy, population growth and inflation did bring change, including at one extreme a mobile landless class and at the other the gentry, acutely conscious of their status, fussing over the placing of seats in church. A study of festivals such as church ales shows decline as they came to be associated with popery and disorder. The Court probably came to be viewed in a similar light. Riots and demonstrations are shown to have been common throughout the period. Professor Underdown attempts to clarify the cultural and political differences between various areas within the three counties, pointing up the influence of the aristocracy and gentry on local leanings and devoting a chapter to the power of traditional allegiance. He explores the predictable effects of the

Civil War and the continuation of disaffection during the Interregnum, resulting from disillusion with the new régime and dislike of the army. One chapter is devoted to the religious and moral aftermath of the war, the proliferation of sects and attempts at moral reform. Localities which sought to continue their ancient festivals found their new rulers as disapproving as their predecessors. Traditional culture, however, was still too strong for those who desired change and the Restoration can be seen as a desire for the old order and a familiar way of life. The return to the old ways was only superficial and after the initial backlash changes began to creep in. The Monmouth Rebellion is briefly considered as a rebirth of ideas of the 1640s and also of local differences which had lain dormant since the Restoration. The reader may find some of the arguments conflicting and difficult to follow but there is copious local detail with footnotes and a good bibliography of printed sources.

MARY SIRAUT

Somerset Roads: The Legacy of the Turnpikes, Phase 2 – Eastern Somerset by J.B. Bentley and B.J. Murless, Somerset Industrial Archaeological Society, 1987, pp. 121, 12 maps, 8 pp. illustrations, £4.00.

This volume covers 101 routes in the eastern half of the county and completes the study which began with Phase 1, reviewed in the *SANHS Proceedings* volume 129. Phase 2 is a work of scholarship in its own right and to some extent is an up-date of the first volume. The Introduction and Bibliography have been revised and there is a useful section which provides additional information concerning the roads detailed in Phase 1.

Phase 2 extends the study of Somerset's roads and includes those turnpiked by the Bath, Black Dog (Bath & Warminster), Bristol, Bruton, Frome, Radstock, Sherborne & Shaftesbury, Shepton Mallet, Trowbridge, Vale of Blackmoor, Wells, West Harptree, Wincanton and Westbury Trusts, together with a selection of non-turnpiked routes. The Bruton Trust appears to have been the most ambitious because it came to control no less than 21 distinct routes. This could explain, in part at least, the financial difficulties which it experienced and may even explain why Bruton still does not enjoy a very direct route from the west of the county.

The work includes a few minor confusions – mainly in the Introduction. The Highways Act (p. 11) certainly abolished statute labour but many parishes had negotiated with their local turnpike trusts to commute this for a money payment long before that date. The Local Government Act of 1894 created the urban and rural district councils which took over the functions of the sanitary and highway authorities which they replaced (p. 12). Bourne's patent scraper (p. 13) was in use at least twenty years before the date suggested here, as the evidence given in the description of the Wells Turnpike Trust clearly demonstrates. Overall, however, the work reflects a vast amount of work done both in the Record Office and literally on the roads themselves. The authors modestly claim that their study was not conceived as the definitive history of Somerset's roads, but it is unlikely to be surpassed for a long time and will certainly be an essential starting point for those prosecuting detailed research into local turnpike trusts. Not only do the authors demonstrate an impressively detailed knowledge of each trust with roads in this part of Somerset but they also indicate the range of primary sources available in the Somerset Record Office and point to areas of further research which could be usefully undertaken.

The old myths die hardest and it is good to be reminded that the mighty Macadam learned his famous road building techniques from those practised on the

roads round Bridgwater. The authors have catalogued a vast collection of road-side buildings and artifacts, some of which date back to the age of Macadam and his family of road surveyors. This is perhaps the most valuable function of the study. It demonstrates what survives today and it is sad to note that the county is at least one toll house the poorer since Phase 1 was published; the derelict Clanville Toll House near Castle Cary has been demolished.

The roads of Somerset form a vital link running through the history of the county and this volume concisely and ingeniously documents the physical remains and places them in an appropriate historical context. John Bentley and Brian Murless are to be congratulated on maintaining the standards of originality and scholarship which characterised Phase 1, and the Maltwood Fund is to be thanked once more for ensuring that both volumes could be marketed at a modest price.

C.A. BUCHANAN

Exmoor Writers and their Works, Volume One, Victor Bonham-Carter, The Exmoor Press, 1987, pp. 48, 15 illustrations, card covers, £1.95.

This attractive booklet, in similar format to the publisher's Exmoor Microstudy series, contains brief biographical and literary accounts of nine writers associated with the Exmoor region by residence or through their writings: Noel Allen, R.D. Blackmore, Hope Bourne, Jack Hurley, Richard Jefferies, Berta Lawrence, Phoebe Rees, A.L. Wedlake and Henry Williamson. Some of the productions of Blackmore, Jefferies and Williamson are quite widely renowned as minor classics, but it is refreshing to see equal prominence given to the other local writers whose lives are often no less interesting.

Mr Bonham-Carter's thumb-nail sketches are lively and candid – Williamson's fascist sympathies are not glossed over, and few would wish to emulate Hope Bourne's arduous and eccentric lifestyle in old caravans sited on remote Exmoor farms. The photograph of her shows an Annie Oakley figure complete with rifle, cartridge-belt and hunting knife – a truly remarkable chronicler of Somerset's 'wild west'.

An interesting and recommended read; it is surprising to learn how many writers have Exmoor connexions, and one looks forward to the appearance of later volumes.

JOHN C. PENTNEY

From Portreeve to Mayor: the growth of Yeovil 1750–1854 by L.C. Hayward, Castle Cary Press, 1987, pp. 144, numerous illustrations, £5.

In recent times Yeovil has earned the reputation of a well-run, patriotic and vigorous borough, trading with determination, and wisely diversifying its products from textiles to glove-making, dairy products and engineering. In 1849 it was in some ways different. Dr. Tomkins then described his native town with sad emphasis, as 'a very filthy, a very dirty and a very stinking place.'

Drawing on a rich treasure trove of rediscovered archives, Mr. Hayward traces part of this transition in patient detail, describing the growth of responsible local government, and paying tribute to the contribution made by the Phelps family of Montacute, who held the living of Yeovil's superb church, and provided four vicars. Supporting them were professional and business families like the Battens, who offered a continuity of service and led the reform movement. Here and there the worthy record of municipal government, worship, trade and education is alleviated by lighter touches, like the two watchmen who patrolled the streets

armed with rattles, staves and cutlasses, though sometimes penalised for lifting the elbow too often *en route*. There was also the public-spirited gentleman who protested against the idleness of the scavengers by wagering the Town Commissioners that he could grow a rich crop of turnips in a lane near the church. He signed himself *A Sanguine Farmer*.

The transition from Portreeve to Mayor became quite exciting when the Portreeve refused to resign, but these titles were less significant than the reforms which sprang from a new approach to administering an ever-growing town. Until people were willing, or obliged, to pay sufficient rates, the necessary reforms in clean water supply, sanitation, education, garbage removal and town planning could be initiated only on a very modest scale.

Mr. Hayward has done a valuable service to the municipal history of an important and industrious West Country town, though some readers might have appreciated a brief outline of the earlier history of Yeovil, while the reviewer (who has not bicycled there since 1938) was a little handicapped without the map, which was missing. These are small points, though, in a richly illustrated book which will guide the reader through this important transition in Yeovil's fortunes.

HUGH MALET