

BOOK REVIEWS

The Victoria History of the Counties of England: A History of the County of Somerset, Volume X, Castle Cary and the Brue-Cary Watershed, edited by Mary Siraut, Boydell and Brewer for the University of London Institute of Historical Research, 2010, 236 pp., 57 plates, 17 maps, price not stated. ISBN 978-1-904356-35-6

It is always a pleasure to welcome a new volume of the VCH, and in times when long-term research-based projects of this sort all too frequently become sacrificial lambs at the altar of cost-cutting, the continuing support of Somerset County Council is commendable. The area covered by the latest volume consists of ten ancient parishes making up the northern half of Catsash Hundred, extending from Castle Cary in the east to Kingweston in the west. Apart from the Oolite-capped escarpment at Castle Cary, rising over 500ft above sea level on Lodge Hill, and a ridge of Rhaetic clay in the west, rising to over 300ft in Copley Wood, most of the area is low-lying, gently undulating country based on Liassic clay and limestone, drained by the River Brue to the north and by the River Cary to the south, with a large area of former marshland around the headstreams of the Cary at Cary Moor.

Accounts of the individual parishes are preceded by a helpful introduction summarising the characteristics of the whole area. Evidence for early settlement remains relatively scanty. Several round mounds which may be barrows have been identified around Babcary and Foddington; however, the most prominent of these, Wimble Toot, was named *Wyndemilltowte* in 1566, which raises the question

of whether its use as a windmill mound was a primary or secondary function. The Roman Fosse Way bisects the area between East and West Lydford, and the modern B3153 connecting Castle Cary and Somerton, generally following the watershed between the Brue and Cary, also has the appearance of an ancient long-distance route. However, a combination of clay subsoil, extensive medieval ploughing and predominantly pastoral land use in modern times limits the potential for the survival of early earthworks or the recognition of levelled sites from aerial photography or field-walking. It is, therefore, no great surprise that the principal evidence for Bronze Age, Iron Age and Romano-British activity has come from modern development around Castle Cary and Ansford.

The pattern of rural settlement, based mainly on closely-spaced small nucleated villages and hamlets, is assumed, more from general parallels than from specific local archaeological evidence, to have taken shape during the early middle ages. Division of some of the larger estates, probably shortly before the Norman Conquest, may have initiated a secondary development of hamlets, while medieval colonisation of the waste probably produced the isolated farmsteads at Thorn and Dimmer. Further single farms reflect a later dispersal in the wake of enclosure. West Lydford acquired a market in 1260 which is not recorded after 1353, and a fair which continued into the 1840s. Babcary also had a fair between 1609 and 1754. Alford Well enjoyed a brief reputation as a spa after 1670. Kingweston was transformed after the middle of the 18th century by the Dickinson family, who built a new mansion

surrounded by parkland, diverting several roads in the process, and developed distinctive farm buildings and estate cottages. One wonders if the segregation of the church and manor-house from the village at Alford are a product of similar processes, perhaps less well documented because they took place either at an earlier date or in a more piecemeal way over a longer period. In modern times the villages have become more strongly nucleated, a consequence of planning controls favouring infilling rather than expansion.

Every parish had its own church by the early 13th century, with the exception of the tiny parish of Wheathill, only 325 acres in extent, which seems to have acquired its church only after 1291. The hamlets of Foddington and Steart in Babcary both had chapels-of-ease, neither of which survive. The quality of surviving Norman work (relatively rare in Somerset) at Barton St David and of the 13th-century tower at Lovington, and the sheer size of the late medieval church at Castle Cary, reflect not insignificant local prosperity. Most of the churches were enlarged or rebuilt during the 19th century. Construction of nonconformist chapels followed the growth of an industrial working class in Castle Cary and Keinton Mandeville.

The agricultural landscape of the middle ages was dominated by common arable fields, with ample meadowland alongside the watercourses. Large extents of woodland are recorded in the Domesday survey at West Lydford and Castle Cary, but much of this was cleared during the middle ages, and the only substantial surviving stand of ancient woodland is Copley Wood in Kingweston, designated as an SSSI. Some woodlands at Ansford, Castle Cary and West Lydford were converted to parkland in the late 13th century. The principal lack was pasture, which may have contributed both to a reduction of cultivation (through difficulties in maintaining sufficient draught beasts) and fall of estate values in the late 11th century, and to the limited medieval involvement in wool or cloth production. Piecemeal enclosure took place between the 16th and 18th centuries, and three parishes lost their remaining common fields through parliamentary enclosure in the early 19th century. During the 18th century the extent of arable land began to contract in favour of grass, and thereafter dairying predominated. Cider orchards were also developed, though they suffered considerable reduction during the later 20th century. Minor crops, grown mostly on small freehold farms, included potatoes, flax and teazles.

An expanding range of rural industries has offered some employment since the 16th century. Liassic limestone, quarried in the western parishes, provided building and paving stone, also large slabs distinctively used in local garden walls. Quarries at Keinton Mandeville were exploited on an industrial scale from the late 18th to early 20th century. Road improvements in the mid-18th century and the subsequent opening of railways linking Castle Cary with London and Taunton boosted the local economy, though a tramway planned in 1892 to connect the Keinton Mandeville quarries with the railway was never completed.

The largest and most important settlement covered in this volume is Castle Cary, where the Norman castle and 13th-century manor house were centres of a barony held in succession by the Lovels, Seymours and Zouches for nearly four centuries. However, even Castle Cary long remained a predominantly agricultural settlement. Its market operated only intermittently, and it could hardly be regarded as a town before the late 18th century, when the appearance of grander houses began to reflect a new prosperity based on commerce and industry. Stocking manufacture, beginning in the early 17th century, continued into the 19th century, along with serge weaving. Linen and horsehair weaving prospered in the 19th century, giving rise to new factories and terraced housing for industrial workers. A brickyard operated between about 1810 and 1910.

One always knows exactly what one is going to get with a VCH volume: a standardised scholarly presentation based upon systematic, meticulous investigation of a formidable range of original and secondary sources. Reviewers have sometimes disparaged the format as a straightjacket, criticising the encyclopaedic gathering of factual information, and bemoaning the lack of engagement in currently fashionable debates. Yet consistency does not mean stagnation, and the VCH has not been unresponsive to fundamental shifts of emphasis in historical interests. The traditional concerns of manorial descent and church advowsons are still properly covered, but no longer dominate the parish accounts as they did in earlier volumes. The landscape is now accepted both as a legitimate topic to be explored and explained, and as a source of information in its own right. In this context it is good to see a significant improvement in the presentation of parish maps; whereas in earlier Somerset volumes these served merely as location maps, presenting hardly any information that could not be gained from a

1:50,000 Ordnance Survey map, here the ten parish maps do have a real historical dimension, being based upon the tithe maps of the early 19th century, with additional maps of Ansford and Castle Cary derived from a map of c. 1684. This is not rocket science, but it provides a welcome first step towards a better understanding of the pre-modern settlement pattern and the earlier distribution of arable land, grassland, orchards and woodland. There is more appreciation of the importance of vernacular architecture, and much-improved coverage of developments in the 19th and 20th centuries. The VCH will never provide every user with the answer to their every question, but it provides wonderful service as a springboard to further research.

JAMES BOND

The Archaeology of Mendip: 500,000 years of continuity and change, edited by Jodie Lewis, Heritage (Oxbow Books), Oxford, 2011; 440pp, 234 figures (many in colour), £35, ISBN 978-1-905223-28-2

This welcome book reports the proceedings of a conference in 2006, held to bring together those working on Mendip and to raise the profile of the area, so often passed over in favour of the south-west's moors or Salisbury Plain, when considering the uplands of southern England. The 18 papers have been brought together by Jodie Lewis, active on Mendip while a student at Bristol and now continuing her work on the Neolithic and Bronze Age with her own students from Worcester. This research has been part of a growing interest in the area, or particular parts of the area, with projects such as CHERT (Charterhouse Environs Research Team) galvanising local support and achieving prodigious amounts with voluntary labour. Perhaps encouraged by this enthusiasm, the academics and other professionals have also turned their gaze Mendipwards as can also be seen from the work reported here.

The papers are arranged chronologically starting with a review of the history of geological work beginning with William Smith's development of stratigraphy while working on the Somersetshire Coal Canal, followed by a detailed history of later mapping. The late Roger Jacobi, to whose memory the volume is dedicated, and Andrew Currant follow this with a masterful review of the Late Pleistocene,

combining the mammalian fauna and archaeology. Mendip is well known for its cave deposits, many excavated years ago, but this shows how much can be achieved by revisiting old finds using new techniques and ideas. There is a huge amount of detail, together with an extensive bibliography; perhaps the only improvement that might have been made would have been a timeline for those of us who have difficulty remembering the correlation between archaeological, geological, biostratigraphic and absolute dates. This is followed by a short paper by Paul Davies, reprinted from elsewhere, surveying the potential for tufa deposits and then by Lewis's own paper on the Mesolithic and Neolithic. This covers the extensive flint scatters, with new thoughts on what this type of information can tell us about these remote times. The Bronze Age is next well reviewed by David Mullin, including the so-called 'Priddy' hoard of gold metalwork but without indicating the existence of a fine photograph of it at the end of the volume.

The Iron Age is covered by two papers, one on caves by Abigail Bryant and the second on cropmarks by Ian Powlesland. The former examines various uses of the caves by Iron-Age people and suggests that they may be being used in a specific variety of ways, perhaps analogous to the use made of pits on settlement sites for mundane, specialised and ritual functions. Unfortunately this is such a broad conclusion, and the evidence-base is often very poor, that it is impossible to attach any certainty to it. Powlesland's paper covers Mendip and the areas to the east and north of it. This allows him to suggest that Mendip appears rather devoid of the new types of settlement enclosures that he sees developing in the surrounding areas and it may have supported a lower population.

Malcolm Todd's paper on Roman lead mining covers ground he has been over before, both in this journal and in his own book, but Peter Leach provides a useful overview of the various pieces of work at Roman Shepton Mallet that have been undertaken since his large-scale excavation at the Showerings site in 1990. He suggests that the town may have been a deliberate foundation with a financial motive, in the same way that many medieval settlements are known to have originated. The central, but fragmentary 'villa' may have been the home of this entrepreneur. Unfortunately Leach can't quite bring himself to admit that the famous 'amulet' is the modern forgery that scientific tests have shown.

The first of the medieval papers, by Albert

Thompson, covers Priddy between the 5th and 10th centuries but is a rather odd collection of detailed descriptions of overall methodology, together with interesting bits of fieldwork and documentary research. Extending to over 50 pages and with a similar number of illustrations, this could have done with a good deal more focus and sharper editing – parts of it are unintelligible. Michael Costen and Nick Corcos follow this with two scholarly papers on the early medieval origins of place-names and land-holdings, the former taking a wide view and the latter concentrating on Chew hundred. Costen's work appears slightly old-fashioned with few mentions of recent work, apart from Mick Aston's, but this may be down to the long gestation of this volume. Corcos produces a convincing argument for the relationship between the hundreds of Chew and Chewton but seems slightly less sure of himself when considering Chew's urban status. There then follows a magisterial discussion, by James Bond, of the role of the monasteries as landowners, covering first the estates themselves before moving on to the infrastructure of their exploitation: farmhouses, barns, dovecots and the like. The production of the arable land and pasture is then detailed followed by discussion of other economic activities from woodlands, parks, orchards, vineyards, metals to bee-keeping, finally discussing the income from churches and urban exploitation.

The post-medieval paper, by Penny Stokes, is in much the same vein, looking at the key themes that characterise the changes during this period, illustrated with useful and interesting examples of the religious, domestic and industrial buildings. Unfortunately, the paper ends with a very short, error-prone and rather weak paragraph on the Second World War, which would have been better omitted, but which presages what follows, a paper on the bombing decoy on Blackdown by Don Brown. Written with his usual gusto, this is also littered with numerous errors of nomenclature and interpretation. He is confused by the different types of decoy (Q, QL, QF, Starfish) and despite noting detailed work published in this journal (Schofield *et al*, 1998), he proceeds to ignore that evidence in favour of elaborating the myth that the anti-aircraft landing 'tumps' formed streets in a decoy town.

Having brought the story, more or less up to date, the last few chapters seem rather peripheral. Richard Brunning gives a well-written overview of the wetland archaeology and occasionally manages to fit in a reference to Mendip. The paper comes to a

rather sudden stop with the end of extensive sea-level changes – a few ports represent the medieval period and duck-decoys the post medieval. Hannah Firth and Krystyna Truscoe provide a joint paper of two individually authored sections united only by their funding source, the Aggregates Levy Fund. Firth's paper reads like the project report it is presumably based on, and catalogues the known sites by period but Truscoe's is more interesting, covering the air photographic survey work with excellent plans and photographs. The volume ends with a short summation by Bob Croft.

Overall the book is well-produced, although it might be thought over-designed with running footers (giving the book title), running headers (a shortened chapter title) and also running side-bars (an even shorter title). The text is also a little oddly spaced, particularly a lack of space between sentences, which sometimes interferes with easy reading. Perhaps the worst feature of the book is the quality of some of the 'maps'. Computers make it far easier to use a terrain image than spend the time drawing a map designed to make a point. This is particularly noticeable in Truscoe's paper, where the distribution maps contrast with the excellent clarity of the site plans, but Bryant's black and white examples are worse. The time (and thought) taken by James Bond in producing his excellent maps shows what can be achieved.

Finally, it is a pleasure to read a book about that singular place, Mendip – other than in Costen's paper few uses of the plural have crept through. This is a volume to be welcomed and Jodie Lewis is to be congratulated on its appearance, particularly after the long delay caused by problems at the original publishers.

Schofield, A.J., Webster, C.J., and Anderton, M.J., 1998. 'Second World War remains on Black Down: a reinterpretation', *SANH*, **142**, 271–86.

CHRIS WEBSTER

The Archaeology of South West England, edited by C.J. Webster, Somerset County Council Historic Environment Service, 2008, 371 pp, 34 figs, 24 tables, ISBN 978-0-86183-392-4

This survey of the archaeology of our area at the beginning of the 21st century originates from English

Heritage and is one of a series of regional books aimed at bridging the gap between their responsibility for England's archaeology and its commercial practice. The book's introduction sketches in how thinking about maintaining the academic focus of archaeological work has developed. Earlier surveys like this one were usually by a single author, from the universities, and perhaps a little out of touch with the realities of commercial fieldwork, and their subject matter had tended to coincide with the author's interests. Further their national basis was seen as too widely based to address the realities of regional issues. This book is the result of a more inclusive policy starting initially with invitations to all interested parties, followed by smaller period-based working groups, with the final text the result of the circulation and critiquing of individual or collective drafts. The whole process has been given an acronym – South West Archaeological Research Framework or SWARF.

Somerset's county archaeologists have played a key role in overseeing the process and producing the final outcome. The study area is the counties of Cornwall, Devon, Dorset, Somerset, Wiltshire and Gloucestershire, and the material is divided into three prehistory periods (Palaeolithic to Mesolithic, Neolithic to Early Bronze Age, Later Bronze Age to Iron Age), the Roman period, two medieval periods divided by the Norman Conquest, and a post-medieval to modern section. Under Chris Webster's overall editorship, the sections are authored by one to three hands based on contributions by from five to eleven hands. A new departure, and one of great value, is the provision of an overview of the environment before each section (though curiously each starts with the same repeated paragraph). This serves to ground the archaeology in landscapes reconstructed from the environmental data, acting both as a background to our thinking about sites and as a reminder of environmental constraints. It also gives priority, in the periods up to 1500, to relating chronology to the deep background of changes in sea levels and river courses, afforestation, air temperatures, the presence and absence of species, and the evidence for land uses. For the last half millennium of course the environment becomes something that we are affecting rather than vice versa.

Like earlier surveys the book is intended as an overview of the archaeology and a research agenda. Many readers will use it for the former in order to keep up with current archaeological thinking across

the whole timespan of human occupation in the pages of a single book. For some readers this may lead on to contrasting it with past archaeologies and making a judgement on the health and vitality of the discipline as a whole. Another group of readers – perhaps the target group – will be those responsible for research designs, whether putting them forward or supervising them. Without doubt the research agenda part of the book will dominate the pattern of future work for years to come.

The book could stand alone simply as a compendium of current archaeological thinking. The area chosen turns out to be most fruitful. The introduction notes that it has little historical baggage having been used first as a regional entity by Oliver Cromwell – and then a rather unpopular one. In all periods and with all types of monument, contrasting the data from each of the counties opens new avenues. Prehistoric Wessex looks rather different viewed from the west while the peninsula and up-country data work well off each other. Whether the topic is ritual sites or domestic settlements there is an opportunity for the authors to extract new meanings from the variety of landscape types. The editor also notes that the area has a wider significance than England in that from the Neolithic to the present it has always had a maritime international dimension. The Somerset based reader looking in particular at any of the periods will be interested to see our county in this new context, one that opens out into a wider world ranging from the seaboard contacts of earlier periods to the relationship with British colonialism of more recent years.

The prehistory sections occupy more than half the book. Having different voices involved works very well, allowing different types of interpretation to co-exist without a straining toward some overall grand design. This allows the complexity of prehistoric archaeology – the interleaving of cosmology and the everyday, the importance of landscape and so on – room to breathe. The Mesolithic/Neolithic change is seen as having been achieved in a generation or two, but the actuality of a domesticated landscape resulting from a revolution in agriculture – the Neolithic Revolution of the past – has been shifted forward by 2000 years to the Middle Bronze Age. The huge quantities of labour involved in monument construction is now firmly seen as given in a spirit of cooperation not coercion. Hillforts are occupied by farmers not chiefs and seasonal occupation is likely at many sites.

In the research objectives section at the end, the book notes the losses resulting from using the transitional periods as breaks in the discipline. The change from Iron Age to Roman, for example, has usually seen a change in academic personnel and attitudes. It is a shame that this book didn't make a start by running the transitions at the beginning and end of the Roman period into what went before and what came after. The Roman period occupies fewer than 20 pages. The contrast with the multiplicity of approaches and the liveliness of interpretations in the preceding and following chapters is marked. The feel of these pages is that the lead author, Neil Holbrook, and his contributors see Roman archaeology as having come to the end of a phase of study while still being unclear about the future. The concentration of attention on separate themes – villas, towns, the military – may now be in decline to be replaced by a more integrated approach. The big problem with Roman archaeology is the scale of its material culture – re-interrogating the databases, which in all periods is seen as a major research priority, is not so easy when the museum collections are so dauntingly large.

The regional approach works very well with early medieval. What was hard to grasp in a single county now begins to make sense. Here is a complex of gradual spatial and temporal changes starting with the possible long survival of *Britannia Prima* and continuing with the shift of the British/Anglo-Saxon frontier. The rise of Christianity and its relationship with late-Roman paganism, the change from dispersed to nucleated settlement – all these themes are given new life by being looked at in the chosen study area.

The short text for the post-Conquest period (lacking Wiltshire and Dorset data) makes the point that much of post-Conquest archaeology – towns, fields, industry, monasteries – had its origins solidly in the pre-Conquest period. The regional approach gives a clear picture of rural settlement patterns varying, as one looks from the south-west to the north-east, from dispersal in the peninsula, through interesting variations in north-east Somerset and parts of Gloucestershire, to the well known overall template of the nucleated midland village. There are likely to be more theories to come on the reasons for this. As with the earlier criticism of the Roman period subject divisions, the medieval text acknowledges that isolating type sites may be counter-productive. Looking at castles by themselves, for example, misses out on their economic role and what can only be seen as their psycho-social significance – far removed from defence.

The more than 60 pages given to post-medieval and modern archaeology gives due weight to the period as an archaeological discipline now in its own right. Much of this is, inevitably, a summary of current knowledge, but the reader will find an awareness of new themes such as identity, urban life as a spatial and temporal experience, and the environmental impact of industry and agriculture. The authors note that post-medieval archaeology has an importance for the present in its ability – so far insufficiently tested – to provide evidence of why and how technological change initiates major and, it seems, permanent changes in the environment. It also has an importance in providing data that can perhaps be applied to earlier periods about the mechanisms by which the influences of people, places and things act on each other.

What does this book tell us about the current state of the discipline? It is good that the co-operative methods of data gathering (ie in excavations) are now being carried over into data dissemination with many authorial voices. It is clear that the amount of new information has meant that archaeology is now an independent discipline no longer there to provide background colour for history. This is demonstrated particularly in the post-medieval and modern sections and in their research objectives. The diversity and range of this new agenda for further work will surely dominate the region's archaeology over the coming years.

PETER ELLIS

Under God's Visitation: a Study of the City of Wells from the Civil War to the Restoration, by Anthony Knott published by the author, 2010; 270pp, 19 illus and maps; £15; ISBN 978-0-9564835-0-5.

This is a bold enterprise. Firstly the author deals with matters already considered by Underwood in his studies of the period and secondly he published this work himself. To begin, the potential reader should be reassured there is much fresh here and that the standard of the work with its handsome coloured plates is of a professional quality. Tony Knott is excellently qualified for this task. He was co-editor of the two substantial Record Society volumes transcribing the Corporation's Convocation Books 1589–1665. He provided a biographical appendix and has unparalleled knowledge of the burgesses.

For example, he discovered where the butcher-grazier Ralph Cinox moved when he left Wells, something that had eluded the Parliamentary surveyors in 1649.

The organisation is as one would expect. Having set the scene he moves on to the war years giving day by day attention to the key period at the beginning of August 1642 when Wells and its locality was at the forefront of the downward spiral into angry confrontation at Shepton Mallet and then bloodshed at Marshals Elm. Next comes the aftermath and Commonwealth years. He then takes a wider view of social and religious change before closing on the Restoration.

Besides offering unparalleled detail there are two main lessons from the study. Firstly, there were the efforts of the borough elite to close ranks in protecting the town. All groups co-operated to counter interlopers particularly (as Underwood had already noted) Cornelius Burges. The author's detailed study of surviving wills enables him to take matters further showing from bequests and appointments of executors how friendship continued between those taking different political and religious lines. The second point is that below this solidarity the social order had been ruptured by the crisis. Wells suddenly became home to several religious groups who could raucously disagree. Law and order also suffered. Neither side checked all abuses of their own follows. When the Corporation complained to Prince Rupert about his violent postmaster, Rupert responded by billeting a regiment in Wells. Later when David Barrett killed Dean Raleigh the county committee's main response was to take out warrants against Raleigh's son to stop him launching a prosecution. But there were also increases in private violence, drunkenness, illegitimacy and prostitution.

I have only two criticisms. Firstly, map 2 showing army movements 5–6 August 1642 is hard to follow. This partly stems from an over-detailed base but the use of bold arrows was needed. Secondly, the author is too inclined to accept property records to identify homes. They tend to report who held the tenancy rather than actual occupation. Also information in the abutments used to identify a house is often copied from the previous deed and can be badly out of date. Thus the claim that David Barrett was still living in part of modern 57 High Street in 1685 is based on a mortgage default concerning the house to the east. This was drawn up in Bristol and seems to follow transactions of 1676.

Nevertheless, this is an important addition to our understanding of Wells and a troubled but pivotal period.

TONY SCRASE

The Chronicles of John Cannon, excise officer and writing master, edited by John Money, published for the British Academy by Oxford University Press, 2010, part 1 1684-1733 (Somerset, Oxfordshire, Berkshire), £60, ISBN 978 0 19 726454 6, part 2 1734-1743 (Somerset), £70, ISBN 978 0 19 726455 3, cl, xxi, 674 pp, 22 plates.

Many readers of these pages will have made the acquaintance of John Cannon through Robin Bush's talks or Helen Weinstein's radio extracts, and may have wondered why such a tempting subject has taken so long to find his way into print. Now that he has, it is not hard to see why. Not only did he leave 600,000 words, nearly half the 1,250,000 in the eleven-volume edition of Pepys, but Cannon's autobiographical passages swing from absorbing to tedious and are interspersed with topographies, genealogies, 'occurrences' (of events in the wider world), full texts of wills and conveyances, and what even Cannon himself calls 'digressions' into scripture, antiquity and literature in quest of precedents for the trials and tribulations of his own life.

The editor who has grasped this nettle is John Money, Professor Emeritus at the University of Victoria, British Columbia. He has brought to the task a quarter of a century's time and patience, and an encyclopaedic knowledge of John Cannon's world, of the events he witnessed and reported, places he visited, people he met, and books and journals he bought and consulted. Only his rendering of Backwell as Barkwell betrays a lack of close familiarity with Somerset.

What he has done is transcribe the whole of the autobiography verbatim up to around the end of 1721 and then selectively, as Cannon grows more prolix, thereafter. Everything else, legal documents, occurrences and digressions, etc, is summarised throughout, with typographical conventions, which are clear and intuitive to follow, to distinguish the full text from the summaries. It is difficult to envisage any viable alternative to this treatment. Local readers may regret the absence of the topographical descriptions of Somerset towns and villages, but at least the summaries coupled with the index now provide instant directions to the folios in the

manuscript where they can be found. The places in question are Bridgwater, Bruton, Castle Cary, Cheddar, Compton Dundon, Glastonbury, Ilchester, Langport, Maperton, Meare, Milborne Port, Queen Camel, Shepton Mallet, Somerton, Taunton, Wells, West Lydford, Wincanton and Wookey Hole.

A full range of supporting matter is a little complicated by the division into two volumes. A long introduction headed 'Reading John Cannon's Chronicles' outlines the writer's life and puts it in context. There are footnotes throughout, extended notes at the end, biographies of significant people, glossaries of dialect and other words, lengthy bibliographies, and a range of comprehensive indexes of persons, places and subjects. The reader should be warned, though, that the indexes refer to folio numbers in the manuscript rather than the more instinctive page numbers in the printed book. Each volume carries a block of eleven mainly coloured plates (an odd number because one of them spans a pair of facing pages), with some of them repeated in both volumes.

John Cannon is remarkable only for his authorship of the chronicles, which are a unique production, or at least a unique survival, for a writer of his lower middling social class and period. Otherwise, he came from farming stock and never completely lost touch with it, though more often than not enjoying bad relationships with the more conventional members of his family. He taught himself enough to secure a string of appointments in the Excise and, when these came to grief, settled into a round of schoolmastering and much miscellaneous clerical work in Glastonbury, leaving a wife and family in his native West Lydford, and never earning quite enough to support himself and them and indulge his expensive taste in books.

So it is not any grand theme which catches the

eye of the modern reader, but rather a multiplicity of passing details: obsessively careful measurements of a new windmill on Wearyall Hill and of the extended seating in St John's Church, the fatal fall of a former pupil birds-nesting high in the ruins of the abbey, theft by Cannon himself from a rabbit warren on Brean Down, trade in great quantities of goose-quills for use in handwriting, discovery of a hoard of Roman coins in the mines at Shipham (but the glossary omits to tell us that most of the calamine mined there was destined for the brass-works in and around Bristol), a bitter feud over occupancy of the family pew in West Lydford Church, more about the great storm which killed Bishop Kidder in 1703, and the celebrated trial and execution of Mrs Branch and her daughter for the murder of a maidservant at Hemington. Cannon was not to know, and for once his editor has not spotted, that Reginald Tucker, a 'vile' runaway apprentice whose mother sought assistance from Cannon in 1736, went on, after army service at Culloden and civilian life in London and Ansford, to be tried and executed for another notorious murder, that of his wife Martha with a hammer blow to the back of the head, in 1775.

These volumes represent a major contribution to the source material for English social history as a whole in their period, which is why they have found a place in the British Academy's 'Records of Social and Economic History' series, but they are of course of particular interest in Somerset, and most of all to members of our society, which has owned the manuscript for the last 60 years. They will illuminate many nooks and crannies of both local and family history, and the present reviewer is unlikely to be alone in encountering one of his own wife's ancestral surnames in its pages.

DAVID BROMWICH