

BOOK REVIEWS

Anglo-Saxon Somerset, by Michael Costen, Oxbow Books, Oxford and Oakville 2011, viii + 264 pages ISBN 978-1-84217-988-8

This is a welcome and important book. Dr Michael Costen (henceforth C), needs no introduction to many readers in Somerset, but others should be told that he is a professional historian and university lecturer, who has had a long interest in the shire. Over the years he has published a number of important papers relating to the county, especially on place-names, charters, settlement and religion and he has been involved in the long-running and ground-breaking (in both senses) project at Shapwick. His major book on the shire (*The Origins of Somerset*, Manchester, 1992) has been an essential reference.

The book is evidently the result of much reading, research and reflection. It is also up-to-date, with publications cited from the last three years. There will be those who would argue that such a book cannot or should not be written because the 'facts' are too few and too subject to differing interpretations. Yet a synthesis such as this, especially from a knowledgeable and even-handed interpreter, is an important summation of what is currently known and how it is presently interpreted; it can point the way to further investigations, not only of detail but also of wider issues.

The range in time and subject is wide, from the Roman 'withdrawal' in the early 5th century, to the eve of the Norman 'conquest' in 1066, taking in the establishment of post-imperial 'polities' by the Celtic population, the reuse of hillforts, the settlement of the Anglo-Saxons in the landscape,

a description of their society and its hierarchy, agriculture, trade, urban centres and religion. Within this framework, there is an admirable amount of detail, both unexpected and illuminating, such as the different types of Viking ships and their manning, calculation of the size of armies, the contrast between the feeble quantity of Saxon DNA in the West Saxons and their strong sense of kinship and identity, and the identification and importance of the infrastructure of roads and navigable rivers.

The book has a theme: 'that the stories of societies are largely the record of the relationships among the powerful and their attempts to control and exploit their environment, physically and socially to meet their needs' (p. 1). C sees hierarchy as essential to understanding West Saxon society and settlement. So the flatter social structure espoused by earlier historians, those 'free peasants' – that rather romanticised 'folk' digging and delving for each other – have now become largely unfree and subject to the domination of kings and their ministers. The landscape is a series of royal colonies. This is a case well-argued and well-supported, but, such is the richness of this book, it is not obtrusive or monomaniac.

There are many detailed and informative discussions in this book; for example, on agriculture, incorporating the evidence from pollen analysis, of changing sea-levels and for the existence of field systems, fisheries and woods; on the significance of simplex and compound place-names, with a study of 'wicks' and 'waltons', 'cots', 'huishes' and 'worths'; on the church-dedications to Celtic saints and whether they are directly the

result of that individual's missionary activity; on the identification of 'minster' churches (with an appendix presenting a scorecard of probability) and how they should be viewed as the possessions of the state rather than of the church; on the origins of key religious centres; on the way in which the location of early grants-by-charter can be used to show the directions and phases of the 'advance' of the West Saxons into 'Somerset'. C also reconstructs a good dozen estates in their ancient and undismembered form. There are illuminating investigations of charter-bounds, of the identity of central places and their dependencies; of the evolution and splitting of settlements, and of loan-land and book-land. In no sense is this a local or parochial book, since it cites evidence from elsewhere in England and from the continent.

There is some difficulty in writing a book about Anglo-Saxon Somerset, when the first mention of any sort of grouping of lands dependent on Somerton dates from the 9th century. Even then, there is no direct evidence for their extent, although the preponderance of natural boundaries (the River Avon, Selwood, the high ground shared with Dorset and Devon, Exmoor) argues in favour of such a unit. However, the border with Dorset in the Yeovil-Sherborne region merits more detailed investigation, perhaps in the light of the creation of the diocese of Wells *c.* 909 from that of Sherborne. On the northern edge of the county, C acknowledges that Bath was long in Mercia, but it is perhaps treated in this book as too much a part of early Somerset.

The comparatively late delimitation of Somerset means that the extended introduction, dealing with the collapse of Roman rule, and chapter 1 ('Post Imperial Politics') are perhaps too focused on a shire yet-to-be and at the same time are strong on suggestion and inference and short on fact. Some readers may wonder why there is so much uncertainty about this period. The book does not say who its intended audience is – a wide-reading public and academics whose specialisms lie elsewhere have much to gain from this book – but it would have been helpful to have an introduction on the nature and limits of the evidence. As C says (p. 26) 'All historians try to bring order and coherence to their material and thereby 'interpret' the past': the reader would benefit from knowing what this material is for the post-Roman period, as for the Saxon centuries. For the earlier period, statistics such as the number of hillforts known and the number investigated would provide perspective as well as how the putative territories of these are

determined. Archaeology can bedazzle; and it may be that too much can be built on a stray coin or a single burial-site. Are suggestions such as Professor Dark's (quoted on p. 12) 'that there may have been as many as nine post-Roman kingdoms in the west of Britain in the fifth century' based on evidence, deduction or are they *obiter dicta* or bright ideas that need testing? Scattered about the book are caveats about the use of written sources, but perhaps these could have been expressed more concertedly and at the beginning of the book.

That said, C adopts an open-minded and judicious stance on the fraught matter of continuity and is sensibly cautious about the identity of the 'West Saxons' (a political and linguistic rather than an ethnic group) and about the phases of the creation of Wessex, although the old word 'conquest' slips in occasionally (pp. 29, 73). Likewise, the criticism of charters and of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle is balanced, but would have benefitted from an overview (including the awkward notion that a spurious charter may contain authentic information) and a wider bibliography, just as in individual cases one might look for a more tightly footnoted discussion of the authenticity of form and content. For example, there are difficulties with King Alfred's 'will' (Sawyer 1507), not the least being the omission of ancient estates, such as Frome and Bruton, which he must have held as king. Are the estates mentioned only those that he held as an individual? It is not certain (p. 192) that the absence of a mention of Taunton in the will indicates that it was held by the bishop of Winchester at that time, and 'Cheddar' bequeathed to his son Edward, was probably only the 'religious' part.

The difficult evidence of Domesday Book is used sanely throughout and there is an especially good discussion on the ploughland, but a brief note on the nature and purpose of that survey would have indicated what one can and cannot expect to draw from it. As to other literary sources, C says (of the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle): 'As with any work of history, its compilers had an agenda' (p. 26), and it would be good to see this applied, if only briefly to, for example, Gildas, Procopius and Bede. In the case of Gildas, perhaps more should have been said about the Irish influence on his Latinity and, more generally on the communal relations of the Irish and the West Welsh at this early period.

For another sort of reader, more footnotes would have been useful, to pursue detailed points and to cite and argue with, if necessary, other writers. For example Tarnock and Winterhead (the second

looking like an Old English *winter + heafod*: ‘a source springing only in winter’ or some such) are said to have old Welsh names, but no elements, meanings or citations are given.

Another difficulty lies in the use and definition of terms, which these days have become something of a warzone. There is a useful discussion on the meaning of ‘town’ (p. 162), but rather confusingly the terms ‘burh’, ‘fort’ and ‘borough’ all seem to be used for Old English *burh*. One looks for a fuller discussion of Latin *monasterium* and how to translate it: ‘monastery’ and ‘minster’ seem to be applied to the same group of churches on pp. 178 and 186. Possibly ‘religious house’ is safer, with ‘monastery’ reserved for Benedictine establishments and ‘(secular) minster’ for those that can be identified as such. The term ‘multiple estate’ is used (p. 63) and the notion is said to have lost ground: a clear definition of it (with the obligatory references to the work of Glanville Jones) would have helped, as well as an explanation as to why it is out of fashion. Other terms, such as ‘Latin Romance’ (p. 12) which may puzzle the non-specialist reader occasionally slip through. There is an argument for a ‘definition of terms’ glossary.

There are a few minor matters, worth considering for a merited second edition. Firstly, one of the keys to understanding the top-down management of the Somerset landscape is to examine those estates held by King William in 1086 (DB). However, C could more clearly distinguish those unhidated estates with their food-renders, held by King Edward in 1066, from hidated estates, such as Chewton (Mendip) then held by others, which were probably of secondary importance and later creation. Secondly, in the handling of place-names it would be helpful to distinguish by typographical devices the document-form, the modern form, and any hypothetically modernised form and indicate whether the place still exists. The handling of the not-extant name Hamwic illustrates this. It is not located by C (it was in Southampton, probably the *wic* of South Stoneham). It appears as Hamwic in the index and on pp. 146 and 152, and as ‘Hamwih’ on p. 33 a usage which has been criticised by Alex Rumble (‘Saxon Southampton’, *Medieval Archaeology*, 21 (1977)). Thirdly, it would be helpful if all Latin (for example, *ad pedem de Munedup*, p. 32) was translated. Fourthly, in figure 7.12 (p. 155), Keyford has the wrong symbol as it is, in fact, named in Domesday, while in figure 3.4 (p. 59) Wedmore is wrongly shown as unhidated. Fifthly, it would be helpful to standardize the grid references on p.

50 and the punctuation of Domesday references, some of which are also wrong. There are also some slightly discrepant repeats, some spaces absent or unnecessarily present, and that great identifier and mapper of Roman roads, Ivan Donald Margary, has become Margery.

But in terms of proportionality, these suggestions and minor criticisms from one reader do not detract from the important achievement that is this book.

F.R. THORN

Clevedon: Medieval Manor to Victorian Resort, edited by Rob Campbell, Matador, Kibworth Beauchamp, for Clevedon Civic Society, 2009, 270pp, 6 maps, 68 b/w illus, £14.95, ISBN 978 1848761 759

This book commemorates the 40th anniversary of Clevedon Civic Society which, since its foundation in 1970, has achieved much in terms of practical conservation and civic improvements, and has a good record of promoting interest in the town through publications by its members.

More than two-thirds of the book are devoted to a translation of four previously unpublished 14th-century Clevedon manorial rolls now in the British Library, together with a commentary by David Fogden, Frank Willy and Jane Lilly. The earliest roll contains a record of three courts baron held in 1321. The second contains an extent of the main part of the manor, describing the lands, tenants and tenancies to be inherited by the heir in 1388, detailing also the portion which passed in dower to the lord’s widow, with a list of tenants at Wanstrow. The remaining two rolls contain the manorial accounts for the years ending in Michaelmas 1390 and 1397. The translations are followed by discussions of surnames and population, the management of the manorial demesne, the manorial descent and the shares of the dowagers, and the fields and field-names, followed by a glossary, three brief bibliographies covering general matters, personal names and field-names, and several maps and tables. Information from other sources, such as the lay subsidy rolls of 1327 and the tithe map of 1839, is integrated into these discussions. There is much of interest in these records, and the Society deserves congratulation for making their contents accessible to a wider readership.

Three shorter papers, all of value, occupy the remainder of the book. Jane Lilly dismisses the Victorian myth of Clevedon’s origins as a

fishings village, and shows that it was primarily an agricultural community before the 1820s, with numerous scattered farmsteads. Brief histories of many of the farms are provided, enriched with early photographs. The earliest known surviving vernacular house dates from about 1500. Extensive rebuilding took place in the later 17th century, but some of the older buildings were lost in the late 19th century, and many more succumbed in the dark years of the 1960s and 1970s. Derek Lilly continues the story from the development of the town as a seaside resort and genteel place of retirement in the early 19th century up to the immediate post-war years, taking into consideration the strict regulation of development by the Eltons of Clevedon Court, the contribution of individual builders, the problems of drainage and sewerage and the provision of new churches and chapels. At least 150 buildings in Clevedon are adorned with decorative bargeboards and finials, and the final section, by Ron King, explores their origins in early pattern-books and their often underrated contribution to the townscape. Their earliest use in Clevedon is dated to 1832, but they became much more widespread after the 1860s. Ninety-five different designs have been identified, classified into seven different categories.

The volume is not without a few presentational weaknesses. Two brief introductory sections aim to provide a context for the manorial documents but, though well-intentioned, their value is reduced by an absence of references. Statements such as ‘the villages [of the Gordano valley] were probably reordered by the Bishop of Coutances, the 1086 landholder, creating nucleated villages with regularly arranged rectangular tenements and open field systems’ raise all sorts of questions and carry major implications about the evolution of the landscape, and some readers will find it frustrating to have no guidance on the source of such ideas (this particular example appears to derive from Stephen Rippon’s *The Severn Estuary: Landscape Evolution and Wetland Reclamation* (Leicester University Press, 1997), pp 163–5, which does not appear in the bibliography). The translations of the manorial documents are printed over rather smudgy grey panels, presumably to distinguish the medieval texts from the notes and commentaries, but this detracts a little from their legibility. The numbered explanatory notes are helpful, but are arranged in a vertical column alongside the text, which means that notes relating to one page occasionally overspill into the next; one cannot help thinking that a more conventional layout with footnotes

might have served the purpose better. Although the content of the ensuing discussions is valuable, their arrangement is over-complicated, with a convoluted sequence of annexes and tables; this results in information on personal surnames appearing in two widely-separated blocks on pp 77–93 and 141–4, while information on field-names, concentrated on pp 122–140, has an unflagged supplement following the maps, on pp 170–4. The shading used to indicate the built-up area on Map 1 at the end of this section is different from that shown on its key. The printing process has not helped the quality of the illustrations, and some of the early photographs, though understandably from murky originals, have suffered particularly badly.

In compensation, the great strength of this book is that it has been compiled by local people whose intimate knowledge of the town and its surroundings has enabled them to interpret the documents and to gather and present local and personal information to a level which no professional academic historian working as an outsider could hope to achieve. The Civic Society has made another valuable contribution towards the history of a town which might have to wait a very long time for its VCH coverage.

JAMES BOND

The Search for the Durotriges: Dorset and the West Country in the Late Iron Age, by Martin Papworth, The History Press, Stroud, 2011, 192pp, 95 figures (some colour), £16.99, ISBN 978-0-7524-5737-6.

The Durotriges were identified by Rome at the time of the Claudian conquest, and subsequently during their administration, as a tribal group and region in the West Country centred on Dorset and south Somerset. Who they were and what was the reality behind this identity are some of the questions which Martin Papworth, National Trust Archaeologist in their South West Region, tries to answer in this survey. Literary sources are notably sparse, whereas archaeological evidence and remains are often abundant and sometimes spectacular. Dorset/Poole Harbour pottery, ancestral to most Roman Black Burnished ware, is some of the most distinctive Late Iron Age pottery made in Britain, while hillforts including Maiden Castle, Hod Hill, South Cadbury and Hamdon Hill are among the largest and most impressive found anywhere. This archaeological

wealth along with a relatively large corpus of well-published sites has aided this survey, along with the author's long association with Dorset and the region. Its core comprises a detailed description of seven 10km x 8km study areas distributed across Dorset and neighbouring counties, chosen to reflect areas where data is most abundant across as broad a geographical range as possible within the perceived Durotrigan region.

The first four chapters of the book give a context for the survey, reviewing British Iron Age research, the sparse contemporary historical sources, a history of archaeological research in the greater Dorset region, and an analysis of individual material elements attributed to a Durotrigan 'culture'. The period covered spans the Late Bronze Age through to the end of imperial Roman Britain, though inevitably with attention centred on the two centuries between 100 BC and AD 100. The survey chapters look at study areas focussed upon Purbeck, Maiden Castle, Pilsdon Pen, South Cadbury, Hod Hill, Cranborne Chase, and Badbury Rings. A final chapter draws conclusions, summarises the evidence for groups of distinct communities identified within the region and questions whether the Durotriges as a tribe ever existed.

Despite widespread distribution of the distinctive pottery and a characteristic coinage supportive of a shared tribal identity, the more varied character of settlement in different areas challenges the idea of uniformity. What this enquiry demonstrates, perhaps not surprisingly, is that 'the Durotriges' comprised and originated from a background of different, locally centred communities. Many appear to be identified with major hillforts, although the concept of a series of hillfort-dominated local tribes may be too simplistic. Their coalition into something recognisably Durotrigan by the time of the Roman conquest was certainly underway before that event, a process of political centralisation and perhaps upheaval stimulated previously by at least a century of contact and influence from the neighbouring empire. This process is better documented and more visibly manifested among the British tribes to the east, but whatever the mechanics here some form of Durotrigan identity had evolved by the time of the AD 43 conquest. Much of south Somerset and the Levels region for example, seem to have been incorporated into this new polity at a relatively late stage in its development, possibly with some force; the distinctive and separate character of these Somerset communities being recognised by a suggested separate Durotrigan administrative canton

centred on Ilchester under Roman governance.

This is a clearly presented, well-illustrated and useful assessment of the current 'Durotrigan' position. Textual errors are thankfully fairly rare, although the bibliography appears to be somewhat abbreviated; a more comprehensive referencing of the many sites identified is perhaps to be found in the author's fuller 2008 publication of the study in BAR British Series Volume 462 (*Deconstructing the Durotriges: A Definition of Iron Age Communities Within the Dorset Environs*). This review comes at an opportune moment with the current Bournemouth University 'Durotrigan Project' underway in east Dorset. In Somerset data from the South Cadbury Environs Project is already transforming our understanding of Iron Age communities in that locality, building upon the legacy of Leslie Alcock's groundbreaking work within the hillfort. At Ham Hill the current excavation project, providing an opportunity to examine an enormous transect within Britain's largest hillfort and a reassessment of earlier discoveries, promises even more.

PETER LEACH

The Dovecotes and Pigeon Lofts of Wiltshire, by John and Pamela McCann, Hobnob Press, for Wiltshire Buildings Record, 2011, 235pp, 159 b/w & 29 col. illus. £14, ISBN 978-0-946418-84-8

Many readers of this journal will be familiar with the McCanns' invaluable survey of the dovecotes of Somerset, published by the Somerset Vernacular Building Research Group in 2003 (and see their update on pp 67–77). It is good to welcome this companion volume covering our eastern neighbour, the fourth county to be explored by the authors.

Dovecotes are distinctive and appealing buildings, but antiquarian interest in them began only in the late 19th century, by which time all practical understanding of their use was forgotten. Hypotheses about how they worked, formulated by early investigators and relayed as facts by later writers, have generated many misunderstandings. The authors have performed sterling service in demolishing many of the inherited myths and placing the study of dovecotes on a much sounder footing. We can no longer maintain the old delusion that dovecotes supplied fresh meat through winter when otherwise only salt meat was available, a fallacy on two counts, because fresh meat was, in fact, available throughout the year for those who

could afford it, whereas pigeons do not breed through the winter months. Household accounts show that tender young pigeons from dovecotes were consumed only between Easter and November. The vision of peasants' crops being ravaged by flocks of marauding manorial pigeons is equally untenable, since pigeons cannot alight on standing corn; though they had to be deterred during sowing and would consume grain spilled during harvest, they constituted no threat through the time of growing and ripening. The concept of a typological sequence with circular dovecotes preceding square or rectangular examples has been roundly debunked. The belief that revolving ladders were first used in circular medieval dovecotes is equally unsustainable in view of the lack of any evidence for these devices before the 18th century. Other features overlooked by earlier writers have been explained, such as the blocking-up of the lower courses of nestholes and the occasional lowering of floor levels, which the McCanns have related convincingly to the appearance of the brown rat in the late 18th century.

The preliminary notes to the McCanns' new study include a useful glossary, and the following chapters describe the functions, designs and characteristic features of dovecotes, with a brief history of pigeon-keeping. The core of the book is the gazetteer (pp 19–139), which describes in some detail Wiltshire's 60 known surviving dovecotes (by comparison only 49 were recorded in Somerset). This section is well illustrated with excellent photographs, including a centrally-bound block of colour plates; but it is less well equipped than the Somerset volume with plans, elevations or sections of individual buildings. Many more examples now destroyed are known in both counties from documentary records; the McCann's preliminary scan of published sources suggests a Wiltshire total approaching 300. Several recently-demolished examples are illustrated by photographs.

Dovecotes are first recorded in England around the middle of the 12th century, and they begin to feature in Wiltshire manorial extents from the mid-13th century. They were initially restricted to the demesne holdings of manorial lords (including

monastic corporations) and to parsonages. Few early Wiltshire dovecotes can be dated with precision, but only four medieval examples were found, a quarter of the number surviving in Somerset, none of them earlier than the 14th century. The church of Collingbourne Ducis contains a small columbarium in its tower, serving the medieval priest, like that over the chancel at Compton Martin in Somerset. After 1619 freeholders acquired legal rights to build dovecotes on their own land, and numbers began to increase. The majority of surviving Wiltshire dovecotes date from the 17th and 18th centuries, generally a time of agricultural prosperity. Their economic viability was terminated by the French revolutionary wars of 1793–1815, when wheat prices soared and the Board of Agriculture condemned the keeping of pigeons because the value of the corn they consumed exceeded that of the meat and manure they produced. A few 19th-century examples were included within model farm layouts or built as picturesque ornaments.

In both counties the majority of surviving dovecotes are square or rectangular with a substantial minority of circular examples. Wiltshire also has five octagonal examples, all dating from the 18th century. As in Somerset, stone is the predominant building material, but Wiltshire has eleven 18th or 19th-century examples built of brick compared with only one in Somerset; no surviving timber-framed or cob examples were found. Most of Wiltshire's dovecotes were built free-standing, but rather more examples than in Somerset were inserted into earlier structures or combined with dwellings, stables, waggon or coach-houses, or granaries; two examples even stood over privies. Smaller pigeon-lofts incorporated into houses, barns, stables and other buildings appear much more common in Wiltshire than in the other counties so far surveyed, a representative sample of nearly 50 being described and illustrated in the penultimate chapter.

This volume is handsomely produced and well illustrated. The text is fully referenced and there is a helpful index.

JAMES BOND