

REVIEWS

HILLFORT AND HILL-TOP SETTLEMENT IN SOMERSET IN THE
FIRST TO EIGHTH CENTURIES A.D. by IAN BURROW. 328pp,
13pl, 42 figs, 1981, B.A.R. British Series 91, £12.

This book is based closely on the text of a dissertation for Ph.D. written in 1975-7. Examining dissertations is one of the weightier and often unrewarding chores of academic life, their publication in a crude state without critical editing is the major disservice afforded to readers and buyers of archaeological literature by *British Archaeological Reports*. This is no exception, though well presented as a thesis, it is an uneasy combination of general survey, better left in the library of the University of Birmingham, highly specialised discussion of particular aspects of the results of excavation on one site, that could well have been presented in microfiche, lists and appendices, that would have been adequate as typescript in local archive for consultation as needed, and studies of details of several forts, that would have been suitable for concise publication in the Somerset *Proceedings*.

It contains 13 fine air photographs of hillforts, losing something in reproduction, plans by the author of nine hillforts correcting points of detail and eight distribution maps. The appendices contain a gazetteer of hillforts and enclosures, a list of Roman and post-Roman material from such sites and a list of British place-names in Somerset.

What chiefly emerges from the study is the patchiness and inadequacy of investigations on hill-top sites. For the Roman period, once the disturbances of the Boudiccan rebellion had passed, there is little reason to think that any hill-fort was of continuing military significance. Settlement within them there often was, but any importance is likely to have been due to accidental factors, such as the quarries for fine building stone at Ham Hill. One or two (counting Blaise) rural Romano-Celtic temples (and three possible sites) lie inside Iron Age hillforts, four known temples are unenclosed; other activity on hilltop sites is no more than might be expected in the intensively exploited countryside of Roman Britain.

For the post-Roman period, prior to Saxon settlement in the area, achieved by around 700, the evidence is scarcely more substantial; South Cadbury has a defensive bank dated somewhere between A.D. 393 and the tenth century, with three impressive but stratigraphically isolated internal buildings, Cadbury (Congresbury) has a (uncertainly) defensive bank and at least eight structures inside of probable late fifth or seventh century date. On all other sites work has been inadequate for detection of post-Roman occupation though there are burials at a number. No other hillfort has yielded structural evidence from the period and his study of the Wansdyke suggests that its, probably 6th century, builders were uninterested in the defensive potentialities of the

hillforts—Maes Knoll and Stantonbury—along its line. One might note here the recent removal of the Lydney (Glos) site from the list of post-Roman fortifications, as well as the re-dating of the temple there to before and not after the mid 4th century, so weakening the case for the supposed late revival of pagan cults in the countryside.

Three introductory chapters deal with aims and background; a review of site evidence; place-names and British church dedications; followed by a survey of earthworks and sites. Succeeding chapters are essentially a detailed review of certain aspects of the 1968-73 excavations at Cadbury (Congresbury), followed by a general discussion. There is much dutiful but inconclusive discussion of possible models of use for hill-top sites in the final chapter, from which it emerges that though nothing in the evidence encourages ideas that Cadbury was Congar's monastery, nor can continuity of occupation from Romano-British times be demonstrated, it was an important site with permanent occupation and some imported pottery and glass reaching it, probably in the early sixth century, and that it was possible for Romano-British coarse-ware pots, mass-produced up to about A.D. 400, to be brought to the site and broken there around a century later. Burrow suggests an excavation strategy for Cadbury which might take 15 years to complete; given the difficulties of the site he would be a brave man to embark on it and an even braver man to find the necessary money.

It remains to be seen whether orthodox archaeology can ever inform us about the post-Roman, pre-Saxon period in Somerset as it can for the previous centuries. Recent studies such as S. Pearce's *Kingdom of Dumnonia* (1978) and L. Fleuriot's *Les Origines de la Bretagne* (1980) suggests that its nature may have been rather different from the romantic picture generated by excavations such as those at South Cadbury. Historically we cannot doubt an essential continuity extending through the 5th century, despite the loss of the material trappings—coinage, masonry buildings, bricks, tiles, glass, mass produced coarse pottery and trinkets—of the Roman socio-economic exploitative system. If there was discontinuity and abandonment on the massive scale which site archaeology might suggest, it will have followed the large scale planned and peaceful migrations of Britons to Armorica in a time of prosperity in the late fifth and sixth centuries A.D., documented now by Fleuriot. How far these affected Somerset is uncertain, some 50% of the British saints whose names occur in Somerset may have Breton connections, but of the British leaders of that migration, only Congar (and who more apposite?) can be linked to a probable origin in Somerset (Fleuriot 1980, 215).

In truth we need not expect the archaeology of the period to be very different or distinguishable from the early, practically aceramic Saxon settlements in the region, its weapons and trinkets may well show the same mixture of late-Roman and Frankish fashions as their Saxon contemporaries. This artifact-poor archaeology will not be easy to detect without a deliberate opportunistic strategy employing radiocarbon dating as a detector device, as has been done in Brittany by Giot, but it remains to be seen whether the relatively rich documentary evidence for

British settlement in Brittany can be used to model with predictive success the pattern of settlement in their native land.

Much hard work has gone into this book; it is sad therefore to have to say that it could have been so much better if it had been re-written and at the very least provided with an index and some genuinely informative chapter headings.

A. M. ApSimon

THE CAVES OF COUNTY CORK by Tony Oldham

Part 1 in a series THE CAVES OF IRELAND

£3.00 (40p) from Anne Oldham, Rhychydwr, Crymych, Dyfed SA41 3RB.

Tony Oldham has produced a very useful softback Index of the 48 caves and sites of County Cork. There are 31 area maps, cave plans and sections, though unfortunately a county cave location map is missing. Many of the maps too, are reproduced unchanged with their original magnetic norths, imperial measurements and poor quality reproduction. A little cosmetic work would have made them into fine surveys.

A quick leaf through these maps reveals the strong phreatic nature of most of Cork's systems. This is seen in its most extreme development in that incredible Cloyne maze with approximately 2½ km of passages crowded into a couple of hectares: the Cork Speleological Group survey continues bravely on. In all there are five sites with over ½ km of passages and a further six with 100m or more. Although some are active, this is usually due to invasion of a phreatic cave rather than to the development of a vadose system. So, this is real pushing country, a place where you can find digs galore and the chance to discover your own virgin passage.

An interesting section by Cian Ó Sé on the meanings of Irish place names includes, for the visitor especially, a guide to phonetic pronunciation. You can make yourself understood when asking for the cave of your choice!

Co. Cork along with Co. Waterford contains most of Ireland's caves with deposits, which have yielded Pleistocene fauna and Neolithic human remains. A brief chapter is aptly included on these important archaeological and palaeontological sites.

Since many of the Cork caves are (at first sight) comparatively easy, a brief note on caving practice (and cave rescue capabilities) is timely. Many of the users of this book will be local novices exploring their home territory. Mr. Oldham was most fortunate in being able to rely on the accumulated notes and advice of Jerry Aherne and his friends of the Cork Speleological Group, in compiling this essential work. It can only stimulate exploration in the area and I expect it to yield a rash of discoveries.

Here are some of the features of interest to be found in the cave descriptions: