

## REVIEWS

THE ARCHAEOLOGY OF SOMERSET, a review to 1500 A.D.

M. ASTON and I. BURROW (editors).

Somerset County Council, 1982. 153 pages, £5.25.

The book opens with a generous tribute to the Society's late Vice-President, Dina Dobson. It is the outcome of a conference held in 1981 to mark the 50th anniversary of her book on the Archaeology of Somerset. It has been published by the County Council in an attractive and reasonably priced form.

The book consists of thirteen chapters all by different authors, which it is hardly practicable to review *seriatim* even were one reviewer competent to do so. A welcome feature is that archaeology does not end with the Romans. The last four chapters are concerned with Dark Age and medieval times, and in fact about half the book is devoted to Roman and later periods. Many contributors try to understand the social structures of the peoples involved, and their relation to the landscape and means of subsistence. These matters were not, indeed, neglected by Dobson but new methods of study and better evidence offer some new possibilities here.

Only a few chapters can be noticed individually. It was probably a mistake to divide the palaeolithic between two rather short chapters by different authors. The sequence of stone industries is not really described very satisfactorily. Chapters are then devoted to the Mesolithic, Neolithic, Bronze Age and Iron Age, and two extra chapters cut across the traditional 'ages'. One is devoted to the environmental and human history of the Somerset levels from 4000 B.C. to 100 B.C., while another deals with hillforts from 1000 B.C. to 1000 A.D. The latter is a particularly instructive survey of the use and re-use of these conspicuous sites. With the Roman and later periods historical evidence can be brought in, but much of this is so scanty or ambiguous as to justify the archaeological study which has attracted increasing attention and needs to develop still more in the future.

The advantages of multi-authored books such as this one include the expert and very up-to-date treatment which is evident in many of the chapters. The disadvantages lie chiefly in the difficulty of achieving uniformity. The authors appear to have been given a brief but there is nevertheless some variety of treatment. In the illustrations, a conspicuous feature of the book, uniformity has been achieved with the twenty distribution maps, but not always with other figures. Even within one chapter the thumb-nail plans of hillforts (figs. 9.5, 9.14) are to different scales, and the scale given for fig. 9.14 is wrong. There is an undecided attitude towards typology which is perhaps the most irritating feature of the book. Flint tools are illustrated profusely for the Mesolithic, but not

for the Lower Palaeolithic or for the important Later Upper Palaeolithic. Some finds are shown for the later prehistoric cultures, hardly any for the Roman and later periods. Too many of the illustrations of finds lack a scale.

While it is possible to find inconsistencies and gaps, the book is a good five quid's worth and is surely an essential possession for anyone at all interested in our local archaeology. Let us hope, however, that we do not have to wait another 50 years for the next comprehensive review.

D. T. Donovan

THE MAMMAL FAUNA OF THE EARLY MIDDLE PLEISTOCENE  
CAVERN INFILL SITE OF WESTBURY-SUB-MENDIP, SOMERSET,  
by M. J. BISHOP

Special Paper in Palaeontology No. 28; Palaeo. Assoc. 1982, 108 pp.,  
47 text-figs., 6 pls., 50 tables.

In 1969 some students visiting the Westbury-sub-Mendip quarry found mammal bones in a fissure; at first they looked like those of cave bear and woolly rhino—late Pleistocene mammals so common in Mendip caves and rock shelters. However, within a few weeks Prof. Tratman produced the canine tooth of a sabretooth tiger; this was only the fourth such tooth to have been found in Britain, the others being from Kent's cavern in Devon, Dove Hole and Creswell Crags in Derbyshire. It soon after became clear that the bear was not a cave bear nor the rhino a woolly rhino. We had here an exciting and very rich fauna quite different from anything else in Somerset. During the early 1970's the Spelaeos under Tratman's direction made extensive collections at the site, but the quarry owners were less than helpful; they blasted the face containing the fissure and succeeded in destroying much of the fauna. A rescue operation was mounted and Mike Bishop began research on the collections then at Bristol University. In the course of time the British Museum (Natural History) succeeded in getting permission to excavate and have during the late 1970's made further collections.

The current monograph is the product of Mike Bishop's work over almost a decade and represents the most important contribution to the British Pleistocene mammal fauna for several decades. Bishop records the preservation of 48 species; he gives a description of each and supplements this with commentaries on their distribution in time and space. In the fissures there are three faunas, recognised on both lithological and ecological criteria. The first fauna is a derived woodland fauna recovered from the basal waterlaid sands and gravels; the assemblage may be mixed and is certainly very small. The taxa include the stratigraphically important Early Pleistocene vole *Mimomys*, lynx, hyaenid, beaver, small deer, primitive rhino and small bovid.

The main fauna which Bishop interprets as a carnivore lair is dominated by the presence of very large numbers of Deninger's bear (over 2,000 specimens representing not less than 65 individuals); this species is a probable ancestor of the cave bear. Along with the bear are