

Reviews

Iron Age Communities in Britain by Barry Cunliffe (Routledge Kegan Paul, 1974, £9.50); *The Iron Age in Lowland Britain* By Dennis Harding (Routledge Kegan Paul, 1974, £6.95)

Early in the 1960's our conventional ideas of the development of the British Iron Age, characterised by three major invasions, was drastically challenged by Roy Hodson and others. Since then prehistorians have scarcely dared comment for fear of appearing demode. Ten years later a major English publishing house has presented us, almost simultaneously, with two interpretations of this crucial period of prehistory.

Barry Cunliffe, Professor of Archaeology at Oxford, leads a school of archaeologists who challenge the invasionist theory, whilst Dr Dennis Harding of Durham University, a former pupil of Christopher Hawkes, champions and develops the theories of his former teacher.

Cunliffe's *Iron Age Communities in Britain* ranges over the whole of Britain in considerable detail, looking not only at the history of the period, but its economic and social development too. It is a major achievement to have covered the material so comprehensively and penetratingly. Perhaps Cunliffe's greatest achievement is to bring together so many important illustrations of comparative material, both objects and sites, which are scattered through hundreds of books and journals, and are largely inaccessible to most students outside the major university departments. His addition of the source to the picture is particularly valuable. In a book of this size and scope there is much that one can challenge, but at a time when we urgently needed a consensus of Iron Age material it is better to leave the quibbling to the pedants.

Harding first considers the invasion hypothesis and, like the reviewer, feels that its oponents can best be defeated by their own arguments. How many historically recorded invasions could be detected solely by archaeology? Could we spot the Danelaw division of Bedfordshire on the non-literary evidence? I think not. He also continues to believe in the value of pottery for assessing the date of Iron Age occupation in Britain, and whilst recognising the hazards postulated by Hodson and others, points out that the vast quantity of material found and its regional variations, will probably, with the development of more refined laboratory techniques, eventually lead to more precisely dated

local classifications; something which is not possible with the more popular metal types, which may well have been distributed by way of trade from centralised workshops.

Perhaps Harding's major contribution lies in two particular theories. Firstly he convincingly resurrects the Marnians, first suggested by Hawkes as appearing around 250BC. That date is too late, and Harding would see this appearance around 400BC, represented particularly by angular vases, so similar to the 'vases carenées' found in the Marne. Secondly the problem of the Belgi is reconsidered. Harding takes Caesar literally and allows them to settle primarily south of the Thames. From there they moved north to Hertfordshire, an area responsive to continental influence, and possibly settled three centuries before by the original Marnian immigrants. Such an argument has lots to commend it, and regrettably Harding does not develop it as far as he might. If the inhabitants of Hertfordshire at the time of Caesar had lived in Britain for three hundred years, their architecture would have reflected native British works, not the new continental hillforts with Fecamp defences or the great Belgic oppida. This should give us a clue when searching for the headquarters of the Catuvellauni in Britain. We are not looking for an oppidum of continental type, surrounded by sets of dykes, but a native hillfort of massive construction, possibly founded by the Marnian immigrants around 400BC. Wheat-hampstead has long been considered unsatisfactory as the Catuvellaunian headquarters. Surely it is time to wipe the slate clean and look again in our area.

In the last part of his book Dr Harding ranges over enclosures and house types, economy, religion and burial, but he is best at home in describing fortifications and warfare. His study of hillforts is provocative and penetrating, and we are left to ponder on their use as military bases from which the warriors sallied forth to fight in the open, leaving the elders and children to line the ramparts; or to consider again Posidonius' comment on the Celtic method of deciding battles by single combat between champions, each cheered on by groups of noisy supporters.

In conclusion Cunliffe treats us to a major survey of the Iron Age communities of Britain in a broad and concise form which will have immediate appeal to all students of general prehistory.

Harding's work is shorter but is more academic and authoritative, and likely to have a deeper and more lasting impact on the serious student of the Iron Age.

JAMES DYER

The Spearheads of the Anglo-Saxon Settlements, by M.J. Swanton, (The Royal Archaeological Institute, 1973, £5.00); *A Corpus of Pagan Anglo-Saxon Spear-Types*, by M.J. Swanton, (British Archaeological Reports, 7, Oxford 1974, £1.10).

Half a hundred years ago, or rather more in fact, a man was given the task of cataloguing a major collection hitherto in private hands. The collection was that of Sir John Evans, the man Edward Thurlow Leeds, and the book that came was *The Archaeology of the Anglo-Saxon Settlements*. Michael Swanton has succeeded in an equally difficult task: his *Corpus* shows the magnitude of the problem, some 3000 objects are listed by site and correlated to his type series, with a measured length (taken before the devastating actions of over-conservation) accompanying the notice of museum location and number together with published reference where available. It, the *Corpus*, is the essential foil to the épée of the *Spearheads*. In the volume, by any standards good value at £5.00 for x plus 215pp, with 88 figures, the ideas are well set-out presenting the formal characteristics which distinguish Swanton's various types, thirteen main series by shape with a total of thirty groups sub-divided off within these. There is too a lengthy introduction (pp 1-15) setting the spearhead in context and a summary covering his deductive points. This is followed by a register of associated examples (pp 146-215) with thirty-four figures (figs 55-88) illustrating fifty-four different graves with spearheads, where possible two at least for each group. These will be used not only for the spearheads but this register of weapon graves will find uses in many other studies. That the register does not correlate easily to the figures, though it follows the order of the main text which has copious cross-referencing, is a minor criticism but it does make it difficult to discover from the register which exactly the illustrated groups are. Against the extremely wide knowledge that Swanton has of the literature, both insular and continental, and his display of the personal acquaintance with collections from Lund to St-Germain-en-Laye, like any comment on the over use of "op. cit." rather than the provision of a bibliography or even just a date citing, it pales into insignificance.

What is of no small insignificance is the sheer bulk of Swanton's work, who in the best tradition does his own figures and makes them both visually attractive and archaeologically clear. Among material illustrated in *Spearheads* is the only associated example of his group K2 from Toddington (fig 87 a-d), and associated examples of his group D1 from Luton graves 20 and 32 (fig 65 a-c, d-f). With no significant associations are that of group C1 from Luton grave 6 (fig 9a), one of group C5 from Kempston (fig 16b), another of group E1 from Luton (fig 23c), and one of group E3 from Kempston (fig 27c). Among those representing group F1 is one from Luton (fig 31d) and group F3 is illustrated by one of the Astwick spearheads (fig 34b). Corrugated types include group T2 with one from Kempston (fig 47e) and group K2 with one from Luton (fig 52d). Counties other than Bedfordshire have an equally diverse array of illustration.

The serious student will long have cause to be grateful that the Royal Archaeological Institute undertook the publication of *The Spearheads of the Anglo-Saxon Settlements*. Its importance and its quality may be judged by the comparison with which this review began.

D.H.K.

The Age of Arthur, a history of the British Isles 350 to 650, By John Morris, (Weidenfeld and Nicolson, London, 1973, £5.35).

Oed gnodach y guet ar wyneb (y) gwellt
Noc eredic brynar

Europe's oldest language illustrates the initial problem of he who would set the story of the British Isles in the Volkerwanderungszeit in focus and make of it a coherent whole. The sources are so diverse, both in the material remains and in the literary record. They are archaeological and theological, and include myth and history woven in patterns which are not easy to disentangle. It is perhaps small wonder that few men have chosen to do what may be the impossible. It is a task which can only be done in the long years of a lifetime's concentrated scholarship. In a variety of places including *Bedfordshire Archaeological Journal*, 1, 1962, John Morris had already set out preliminary thoughts on his synthesis, and though these are incorporated in his book, they do not seem to have been revised in the light of more recent work. This is a pity for his dating of Anglo-Saxon grave goods relies on a chronology which is very short, and places all over by the

620s. His point though that the power of old beliefs had begun to die before the cemeteries of the Final Phase (now placed in the late seventh century) is, however, a valid one. He has a go too at the knotty problem of *Biedcanforda* (sub anno 571 in the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle). The solution is as in 1962: an invasion from south-west Cambridgeshire, but relying on his evidence, the applied saucer brooches of the 'Kempston type', there are two pairs from Winterbourne Gunner, (Wilts.), published in 1964. Quite apart from the incidence of plain backplates which have lost their ornamented frontplates, the type on its present distribution might just as conceivably have had a Wessex origin. The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle is a Wessex document and there are other brooches, cast in one piece such as button brooches and great squareheaded brooches of Leeds' class B6, which have a similar extension. One is less than certain also about an early-sixth-century depopulation being reflected in Anglo-Saxon cemeteries. It is an attractive hypothesis, and if the material does admit of such a fine dating, it is one worth pursuing as an idea requiring vindication. Morris floats a number of ideas which are highly personal interpretations and seems to present them as fact, and this is a pity for the book he set out to write will have a wide sale, if only because of its title, concentrating on

. . . that Arthur of whom modern Welsh fancy raves. Yet he plainly deserves to be remembered in genuine history, rather than in the oblivion of silly fairy tales; for he long preserved his dying country.

William of Malmesbury, a twelfth century monk, wrote those words. From the indignity of all, Hollywood included, Morris does salvage a real character and places him at the centre of his stage: in that he has served his publishers well, although this reviewer, for one, is less than happy with a concept of the period centred on a single man.

Such a concentration does place less emphasis on the central event of the first millenium A.D.: the great folk-wanderings, which give the period its name, the *Volkerwanderungszeit*, a word not adequately translated by 'Migration Period', because that implies a terminal date c 700, and the real end came dramatically on Christmas Day 1066 when, a Viking, Duke William, bastard son of Duke Robert of Normandy, placed upon his head a crown which had been worn by a Wessex man, Alfred, and by a Dane, Cnut, but never by a Briton, Arthur, who harked back to the Roman

time. Morris' concept is Romano-British in its initial standpoint, insular in its objectives, and this gives it a certain unity for there can be no doubt that as presented it is a coherent whole. In what seems a weighty strength might be the volume's greatest weakness that it seems just too coherent. With considerable honesty, Morris presents always the case of the limitations of the evidence, though sometimes this is not as clear as it might be, but it is with the opposite, and profoundly disappointing, sense of being presented with the finite answer to the several possibilities that this reviewer is left.

Commoner was the blood upon the grass

Than the furrow of the plough

So sang the poet whom we have quoted in a language of more infinite beauty than any translation can ever command. "Eredic brynar" is required of us all, because it is only with more study, with greater emphasis on primary publication in all fields — archaeological, historical, theological — that an advance in total knowledge will be possible. Then, and only then, will

Oed gnodach y guart ar wyneb (y) gwellt

be possible. That it may be legitimate, or even desirable, is another question.

D.H.K.

The Cambridgeshire Landscape: Cambridgeshire and the Southern Fens, by Christopher Taylor (Hodder and Stoughton, 1973, £3.50).

To most people Cambridgeshire, or more properly the administrative county of Cambridgeshire and the Isle of Ely, probably means the University of Cambridge and Ely Cathedral. This is not without some reason, for some of the University and College buildings and the great cathedral of Ely are amongst the finest buildings of Europe; and the rest of the county is at first glance poor by comparison. The geomorphological basis is singularly unpromising. The chalk hills to the south rarely reach the 500ft contour and there is nothing to equal, say, Sharpenhoe Clapper or the downs above Barton-in-the-Clay in Bedfordshire. For the rest, the southern half of the county consists of clay-lands lapping the chalk; and the whole of the northern half is taken up by peat fens and silt fens with only the occasional 'island' (e.g. that of Ely) rising above the general flatness. It is also a predominantly rural county, with only three old-established urban centres: Cambridge, Ely, and Wisbech. 'Chatteris and March,' as Mr Taylor

observes, '... are both relatively new as towns and their growth as urban centres has been late.' (p245) Added to this, as Mr Taylor points out, 'by no stretch of the imagination can [Cambridgeshire] be considered one of the most beautiful counties of England.' (p21)

To conclude from all this that the Cambridgeshire landscape has little to offer would, however, be very wide of the mark. One needs to take seriously Professor Hoskins' remark in the Editor's Introduction to this book: 'There is no part of England, however unpromising it may appear at first sight, that is not full of questions for those who have a sense of the past.' (p19) This general statement is being impressively supported by the individual case-studies in the 'The Making of the English Landscape' series, to which Mr Taylor has already contributed a justifiably well-received volume on Dorset. His Cambridgeshire volume follows the same high standards of research and presentation. In a remarkably short compass (274pp) Mr Taylor uncovers the story of the formation of the county from prehistoric times to the present day. It is a high achievement, one requiring conversation with the documentary and archaeological evidence from all ages, geographical expertise, an appreciation of architectural and building history, and above all that eye for the landscape which enables it to be 'read' fully and accurately. To hold all these strands together without either dropping most of them or tangling all of them is a task of immense difficulty. Yet Mr Taylor has performed that task with apparent (but it must be *only* apparent) effortlessness.

Some will wonder whether a little more space might have been given to the prehistoric period, or at least to the Early Iron Age, for the hill-forts of that period — like the War Ditches near Cherry Hinton or Wandlebury in Stapleford parish — certainly imply a greater degree of (tribal?) organisation in the area than Mr Taylor seems to allow (pp32-4). From a later age there might have been more about farm buildings — the actual barns and other structures connected with the day-to-day running of a farmstead — and perhaps something about toll-houses — like those surviving at Arrington, Chesterton, and Croydon. More space too might have been given, without disproportion, to variations in vernacular building-materials due to location.

But all these are perhaps personal preferences; and certainly a reviewer can do little but praise Mr Taylor's achievement. There are indeed some

contentious matters: Mr Taylor's theory that 'the Saxon settlement consisted mainly of slow infiltration into and between existing Romano-British settlements in most places and was only carried out on a large scale in those marginal areas which had been left largely unoccupied by earlier generations;' (pp53-4) or his view that medieval moated sites were built *only* as status symbols (pp127-8). This is not to say that Mr Taylor's views on these matters are *wrong*, and I am humbly aware that they are areas in which Mr Taylor has made and is making significant original contributions to the dialogue; I wish only to emphasise that the state of research *is* still one of dialogue. But in any case the general reader is adequately informed that these *are* matters for dispute; and Mr Taylor's own case is always well and convincingly argued.

The whole story which Mr Taylor has to tell is fascinating and never without interest. This reviewer was particularly absorbed by the account of fen drainage; by the refreshingly different account of the growth of *non*-university Cambridge; and by the description of the former port of Reach, where basins may still be seen along the river's edge and where some of the buildings connected with the port may still be recognised. Mistakes in the text seem to be almost non-existent, though Morton's Leam dates from 1482, not 1490 (p189), as Mr Taylor's map (fig 13, p190) in fact correctly shows. The text is easily, but not loosely, written, and is supported by clear maps and excellent photographs.

The book is attractively produced, and its clear print was a joy to at least one myopic reader!

It now remains for Mr Taylor's book to be *used*, for this is certainly not a work to be read *only* in one's armchair. Lecturers and teachers should take their students and pupils over the actual landscapes chosen by Mr Taylor for his detailed examples, and the individual reader should also get out and look at those examples. After that, other landscapes can be looked at and will be seen with greatly enhanced understanding and appreciation. Mr Taylor has provided the best kind of guide and stimulus to such pursuits — better than a whole library of the normal 'tourist's guides' — and if his book is not used in this way that will be due to others' indolence, and no fault of Mr Taylor.

T.P. SMITH

The Northamptonshire Landscape, by John M. Steane, (Hodder and Stoughton, London, 1974, £3.95).

Landscape history is a multi-faceted subject which has attracted historians, geographers and archaeologists and each has a contribution to make to the study of the landscape man has made. In their series of books on 'The Making of the English Landscape', the publishers, Hodder and Stoughton, commissioned a man who came to the county to tackle our northern neighbour, Northamptonshire. Of his pages, Steane devotes pp 25-87 to before 1066, pp 88-183 to the Middle Ages and pp 184-310 to 1500 and beyond. The last named are generally successful though at times there is an unfortunate tendency to cram a little too much into the compass. Future writers for the series might adopt a plan of fewer examples in greater depth to illustrate nineteenth century developments in particular. The Middle Ages are well-served and here the author is able to summarise his own researches on the pottery industry at Lyveden and the forests and to call upon the recent work of specialists in a number of fields, including our contributor Mr Hall, though this reviewer notes a rather restricted range of citations in the sparse footnotes. The earlier part is perhaps of greater interest to many readers of the *Bedfordshire Archaeological Journal* and they will be rewarded from the Romano-British section (pp 40-53) but those looking for an authoritative statement on the prehistoric and Saxon archaeology of Northamptonshire may find the treatment superficial with consideration given only to recent discoveries. The Earls Barton barrow of the 'Wessex Culture' gets a full treatment on page 33 but there is no attempt to assess the implications for settlement of the forty or so urns from the Ise valley, which must surely rate as one of the largest concentrations of Bronze Age pottery in England.

For those centuries when England was formed, Steane's work is entirely derivative and his treatment open to question. He begins by accepting Myres' ideas of 'Romano-Saxon pottery' without the caveat that these may prove to be no more than one variety of the quite common late Roman stamped wares. He then goes on to provide a list of cemeteries, uncritically taken from Meany but that list contains one overstatement. It would be unkind to draw attention to this if it were not

that the site in question is Irchester. There is no evidence for any Saxon burial at the Roman town. There was a point when sorting of the proveniences of the Dryden collection had not finally distinguished the Marston St Lawrence brooches, to which those referred to by E.T. Leeds in his 1912 paper as from Irchester should most properly be ascribed. The mistake and its correction can be traced from Leeds' notes now in the Ashmolean Museum. A Saxon burial at a Roman town needs very careful authentication. The Saxon penetration, Steane surmises points to "an intensive and very early settlement" but how much of the material for Anglo-Saxon Northamptonshire is early. Certainly not Desborough (p 56) where one cemetery is late in the seventh century and that which it replaced on the available evidence — a photograph in Leeds' notes of two brooches and a comment by R.A. Smith on a silver necklet — seems not to be earlier than the second half of the sixth century. If "early" is to be used it should be confined to those items which are *indisputably* fifth-century and for Northamptonshire that is very little: the Great Addington jug urn, but that is a rare type and not diagnostic of continental origins, possibly the Milton Buckelurne and bowl and certainly one cruciform brooch at Nassington. But there is nothing else at Nassington which needs be as early and the five-coil spiral saucer brooch from Duston and the late example of a cruciform brooch of Aberg's group I from Brixworth are surely to be seen as the accoutrements of the earliest graves in their respective, if ill-recorded, cemeteries. A similar confusion over what "early" means is found in using a conflation of "four early names and four pagan cemeteries" (p 58). His list is four names only, and of these only the cemetery at Kettering has fifth-century pots, but seemingly none of the first generation of that century.

Kettering is where the author freely tells us he first stepped out of a train to behold a Northamptonshire spire in 1964 (p 128). To write an account of a county from Stone Age to steelworks in under a decade's acquaintance is a remarkable achievement. The well-produced volume with excellent photographs accompanies an easily-read text. Perhaps we have no right to ask more of an author than that.

D.H.K.