

REVIEWS

The Archaeology of Mendip: 500,000 Years of Continuity and Change edited by Jodie Lewis. Heritage (Oxbow Books) Oxford. 2011. ISBN 978-1-905223-28-2. Hardback 424 pages. £35.00.

In November 2006, a conference entitled 'The Archaeology of Mendip and its Environs' was organised by Jodie Lewis and held at the Bishop's Palace in Wells. The aim of the conference was to bring together individuals researching aspects of Mendip's archaeology and its historic landscape and to promote the dissemination of new work and new ideas within the academic and local communities. This book is based on the conference papers that were delivered. Individual contributors have elaborated and expanded their accounts to make them suitable for publication and in all, 19 of the original 22 papers are presented here, some combined into single jointly-authored papers.

Coverage extends from the Palaeolithic, Roger Jacobi and Andy Currant on Late Pleistocene mammalian palaeontology and archaeology, to the Twentieth Century, Donald Brown on Second World War military installations. There is something for everyone with an interest in Mendip archaeology. That this book will be of great interest to our readership is attested by the vast number of references it includes to papers published in these *Proceedings*.

The book is well-presented, the figures are generally very well reproduced, though Figures 7.16 and 7.17 do seem to be the same, and I am pleased that space has not been skimmed on these, everything having been reproduced at a decent size. The one thing that is lacking is an index.

It would be difficult in a short review to do justice to the entire breadth of the contents of this book so your reviewer will just mention a few of the contributions; the first is the paper on mammalian palaeontology and archaeology by Andy Currant and the late Roger Jacobi, to whom the volume is dedicated. These two spent many years researching Pleistocene material from Mendip and this paper gives an excellent summary of their findings, though it, yet again, demonstrates the Society's need to get a full account of Picken's Hole into print.

The second paper I should like to mention is that on Iron Age cave use on Mendip by Abigail Bryant, given that the preliminary report on the most recent excavations in the important Iron Age site of Read's Cavern is also in this volume. This work, especially where it relates to 'hearth' deposits will certainly inform and modify her conclusions, though, already she is discarding earlier ideas about this being a domestic site and concluding, rather, that it was a somewhat more special place and that the finds did not get there by accident. Although I agree with her that the excavation techniques of a century ago do not allow "a closer contextual and spatial study" either at Read's or at Wookey Hole, it is worth noting that nothing resembling a complete pot was found here. One thing that I do find surprising, however, is that she should seem to be unaware of the current curation of the Read's Cavern material. Everything that survived the Blitz is part of our museum collection and remains with us, save some items on loan to and on display at Woodspring Museum.

The last paper to mention is something completely outside this Society's usual interests, not least because the archaeology that it describes is rather younger than it is! Donald Brown has described the Second World War remains still to be found on Blackdown. Those who have walked up the hill from our Hut will have seen the long lines of tussocks that criss-cross the heather on the top of the hill and some will probably be aware that they are the

remains of decoys designed to divert German bombers from Bristol. Mr Brown tells the story of these and of the other, less obvious and well-known, remains found there and on the south side of Blackdown by Tynings Farm. I had never heard before of the Z-batteries, missile launchers built as part of an air defence ring around Bristol and so secret that the bomber that they did bring down was officially credited to a Weston-Super-Mare AA gun battery. Fascinating stuff.

This is an excellent book, both for the archaeologist and for the lay person who wants to know a little more about the Mendip landscape.

Graham Mullan