

Stuart Bligh, Elizabeth Edwards, and Sheila Sweetinburgh (eds). *Maritime Kent Through the Ages. Gateway to the Sea*. Rochester, NY: The Boydell Press, www.boydellandbrewer.com, 2021. 567 pp., illustrations, maps, notes, bibliography, index. US \$90.00, hardback; ISBN 978-1-78327-635-7. (Distributed by Casemate.)

This book covers topography and the entire swath of prehistory and history of what is now the county of Kent in southern England through the lens of its connection with the sea. The book is the published record of a conference entitled *Maritime Kent Through the Ages*, held at the Centre for Kent History and Heritage of Canterbury Christ Church University in 2018. Following the introduction, 20 individual chapters by specialist scholars are arranged into five parts corresponding to major themes: topography, defence, trade and industry, and coastal communities, followed by seven “case studies” and an afterword. Each chapter is written by a scholar specializing in the subject. The arrangement of the chapters follows a logical order conforming to Kent’s history and psyche.

Part I, “Topography” is a single, long chapter entitled “Kent’s Changing Coastal Landscape: a View across Space and Time” that uses text, coloured diagrams, and maps to show the landscape to be a dynamic arena for the people and events, beginning with the ice age up to modern times. Photographs show changes in the coastline through erosion and deposition up to the present time to show the fluidity and plasticity of the landscape and the rapid pace of change of the shoreline, which has affected some communities positively and others negatively up until modern times.

Part II, “Defence” consists of four chapters on the history of Kent covering aspects of defence and strategic concerns from Roman to Victorian times. Because Kent lies between Europe and London, it includes the major wars and especially invasions. Being based on archival records down to the level of the individual and community, it presents an extremely detailed history of the major currents of English naval and military history from Roman times through Anglo-Saxon, Danish, and Norman invasions. It shows the creation and development of what would become the Royal Navy through the histories of the coastal communities in mediaeval times through the civil wars of the early modern period, the Dutch, and Napoleonic wars. There is great detail on the burgeoning communities associated with the navy, like Chatham, Woolwich and Greenwich in the heyday of the British Empire. The study ends with the introduction of steam power in 1865.

The theme of “Trade and industry” is presented in four chapters that tie the land and its people to the sea through thousands of years of economic history. The chapter dealing with Roman Kent uses the techniques of archaeology to

study the remains of industries like pottery-making and salt production on the landscape. In another, the exchange of material culture in the Kingdom of Kent is studied to trace trading networks and relationships that produced the “wealthiest and most sophisticated in lowland Britain” (196). This is a statement echoed throughout the work in different ways. The same chapter details boatbuilding as evidence of the influence of cultures in continental Europe, using what little evidence remains, like nails and impressions in sand of wooden planks to conclude that the dominant boatbuilding tradition was “one of Scandinavian-type, clinker-built vessels.” Other chapters describe farming, woolen manufacture, and especially fishing. From the mediaeval period onward, records like customs accounts allowing the role of trade in individual communities to be understood, for instance, Sandwich, with its large harbour, was the important port for overseas trade with Genoese and Venetian galleys.

The “Community” theme has four chapters on the social history and especially the role of class relating the people to the monarchy and the Anglican and predecessor churches. Chapter 13, “Empire, Race, and Diversifying Kent’s History c. 1500-1840” records the role of Kentish individuals and families in the slave trade and the colonies for which they were bound. The ways in which Kent profited included commissioning voyages carrying manufactured goods to be exchanged for slaves, transporting the slaves to the colonies, and returning slaved-produced goods to England. As early as 1821 William Cobbett, the radical reformer, commented that “swarms of West Indians, Nabobs, Commissioners, and others of nearly the same description, that have selected it for the place of their residence” (314-315). The relative wealth of Kent is underlined.

Each of the four chapters grouped as “Case studies” is a detailed, sometimes whimsical, look at an individual community or aspect of society, such as, the place of Dover in literature; the beginnings of sea-bathing as a pastime; and the growth of “holiday-making” following the development of the railway. The pieces dealing with the nuances of the class system will be best appreciated by British people. Chapter 19, “Early Modern Thanet: an Open Society,” provides the key that makes possible the detailed study of the lives of people, families, and communities over a span of hundreds of years throughout the book: a wide array of complete, undisturbed archival records dealing with people and their property and trade. They include parish registers and other records of births, marriages, and deaths; ecclesiastical court records; wills and probate inventories; quarter session papers; deeds; and manorial surveys and court records. The church is pervasive in this book as it was throughout history. Chapter 22, “Rhododendrons and Raids: Dover Naval Women’s Daily Life and Emotions in 1918” covers the introduction of women into the Royal Navy

as members of the Women's Royal Naval Services (Wrens). The "Afterword" ties the book together and particularly traces areas that need further study.

The book succeeds in drawing out the place of the sea in every facet of the county's development. It is more than a common local history, enjoying the resources of a well-established archaeological society and the academic headquarters of the Anglican Church in its conception and publication to produce a fine academic work. This is an amazing physical production. The paper it is produced on is high quality kaolin stock that will last indefinitely and which allows production of high resolution maps and charts that are not only beautiful but convey very detailed information. Perhaps it betrays itself as a "local" history only in treatment of the bibliography. The first part entitled "Primary Sources (Excluding archival references)" oddly lists secondary, that is, published works, including monographs and websites as well as some primary sources. In the part entitled "Secondary Sources" there are listed journal articles, which are also secondary. This is a dense-packed academic book requiring time and effort. It is also physically heavy, with a high specific gravity. I wonder if it would float but did not find out.

A few of statements need checking: HMS *Achilles* was the first iron-hulled warship. (p. 156, para 1). HMS *Warrior* is commonly given. Average size of ships crossing the Atlantic in 1815 is given as 100 tonnes (p. 259, para 2), which seems low. "In terms of sheer number of ships deployed, the naval battles of the Dutch Wars are the largest Britain has been involved in" (p.5, para 4). Does this include the Second World War? Not likely.

This book is for libraries with big budgets but not limited to the county, because the political and military history of Kent is the history of Britain.

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Przemyslaw Budzbon, illustrated by Paul Wright. *The Polish Navy 1918-45. From the Polish-Soviet War to World War II.* Oxford, UK: Osprey Publishing, www.ospreypublishing.com, 2022, 48 pp., illustrations, bibliography, index. US \$19.00, CDN \$25.00, paper; ISBN 978-1-47284-700-3. (E-book available.)

The history and development of navies in smaller countries typically receive less attention than the major maritime and continental powers. The Polish Navy (*Marynarka Wojenna*), founded in its modern iteration along with the Polish state after the First World War, is today a growing and increasingly capable naval force in Eastern Europe within the context of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and European Union (EU). Addition of warships