

REVIEWS

THE ROMAN CITY OF LONDON. By Ralph Merrifield. Pp. xx + 344. 140 pls., 31 text figs. and 1 pocket map. London: Ernest Benn Ltd., 1965. £3 3s.0d.

Whatever the capital of the *civitas* to which the Romano-British occupants of Surrey belonged, it is certain that Roman London loomed large in their lives. It is even possible that when London was raised to the rank of *municipium*, which can be assumed on the dating evidence of its basilica to have happened well before A.D. 100, the northern section of our county was assigned to it as part of its *territorium*. Certainly London was the market to which the agricultural produce and manufactures (tiles, pottery) of Surrey were attracted along the roads which converge on the city. Though these points are not specifically discussed therein, this book is close to our Society's interests; coming from the pen of the Assistant Keeper of the Guildhall Museum, it is authoritatively written in an easy, readable style. The first part sketches the growth of archaeological interest in Roman London and the struggle against official apathy; next, the topographical setting and history of the city seen against the wider background of Roman Britain, and a description of the principal sites. Then follow 140 magnificent photographs of structures and museum objects, many of them unpublished before, together with descriptive notes. Last comes a topographical index which enables those interested to obtain further details of all the numbered sites, which can be located on a large folding map in the end-pocket. The only thing missing is a full-scale discussion of the sources from which the city drew its materials, but this, though a task well suited to a museum-curator, would have taken too much space.

Roman London was one of the largest cities of the western provinces, and its commerce brought it great prosperity. Readers of this book will have good reason to lament the weakness of our antiquity laws, for the city has suffered as much as anywhere from the philistine disregard of the British for evidence bearing on their country's history when there is a conflict with the material interests of the moment. The bits that devoted field-workers have managed to snatch from obliteration are nevertheless of great interest, and this book will be the last word on its subject until the detailed reports on the post-war excavations of Professor Grimes come to be published—a necessarily long-term project. This, then, is a book worth buying.

S. S. FRERE.

PRE-ROMAN BRITAIN. By Stanley Thomas. 10 × 7½. Pp. 191 with 320 plates and 2 maps. Studio Vista, London, 1965. 63s.

An important part of archaeological experience is the seeing, and, if possible, the handling of specimens, but for the majority of interested people the opportunities will always be very limited. Recognising this the author of this book has made it one of his aims to provide photographs which by giving a feeling of scale, mass and texture will be an alternative. This, though admittedly second best, will do something to remedy the deficiency. It must be said immediately that in many cases he has succeeded superbly. Although arrangement, lighting and depth of focus were the main considerations, it will be seen that the choice of background texture is not unimportant in giving life to the photographs. The text is necessarily brief and non-controversial, being subsidiary to the pictures, and the captions are correspondingly fuller. Two important items from our area find mention: the Battersea Shield and the Wandsworth Shield-boss. In addition there are objects described only as 'from the Thames' and a photograph of the bell-barrow in Deerleap Wood, Wotton.

This is more than just another picture book of archaeology and the student will find it valuable as a visual reference book. With this use in mind, it seems unfortunate that some of the objects are not more precisely identified; for instance, the well-known storage jar from Plumpton Plain in Plate 194 is described merely as 'from Sussex.'

E.E.H.