

Books

TWO NEW BOOKS on Roman Britain have reached us this month, one a history of the province and the other a collection of historical reconstruction drawings. Both are, in their own way, valuable additions to the bookshelf.

Britain—Rome's Most Northerly Province. A History of Roman Britain A.D. 43-450 by G. M. Durant. *G. Bell and Sons Ltd.*, 30s.

Mr. Durant's History is directed to "those students and general readers who have not in the past been given the opportunity to learn what happened in Britain in Roman times" and in this task it should succeed. Its value to the history teacher will presumably not be overlooked, but it will also provide the novice *diggers* working on the excavation of a Romano-British site with a readable historical background to their labour at a reasonable price. Written as a continuous narrative from Julius Caesar's reconnaissance to the Saxon settlements, Mr. Durant describes the Conquest and Revolt followed by the stability of the south and unrest of the north. At convenient points interruptions are made to discuss town and country life, the Roman Army, religions and the art of the province. Changes in Gaul and the Empire followed by the withdrawal of central government leave the story to peter out with the writings of Gildas and the problem of Arthur.

Inevitably comparison will be made with the two books published by Bell in the fifties on Roman Gaul and Spain; and to an extent *Britain* is less ambitious in its description of the material remains. There are, however, several guides to Roman Britain and the author has wisely concentrated on the historical aspect of his subject. The book is illustrated with 13 useful plates and several rather scruffy line drawings (e.g. Romano-Celtic temple and the Villa). There is also an inadequate map (of England and Wales) omitting the names of several of the tribal areas discussed in the text (e.g. Atrebatas, Catuvellauni, Brigantes) and with an over-simplified road system (omitting Watling Street to the north-west of London). The rather better map of Scotland is unsure of the position of Hadrian's wall. It is also somewhat surprising that the suggestions for further reading omits Sheppard Frere's *Britannia* published in 1967. The archaeologist will pick further quarrels with Mr. Durant but others can

read his history without fear of going too far astray.

Roman London by Alan Sorrell. *B. T. Batsford Ltd.*, 30s.

If you like, as I do, Alan Sorrell's reconstruction drawings you will welcome this new collection on Roman London. Many are old friends from the London and Guildhall Museums and the pages of the *Illustrated London News* and it is nice to have them bound together. Ranging in quality from the photographic to the windswept impressionistic, pride of place is given to the well-known series of oblique aerial views of the Roman city. Alan Sorrell also brings to life the Heathrow Iron Age settlement, the Cripplegate Fort, the interior of the great Basilica, the Governor's Palace, the cemeteries, the Baths, and recreates the scenes of everyday town life. Skill and knowledge are welded together to provide these reconstruction drawings and they will satisfy all but the most pessimistic critic of this very valid method of historical presentation. One major point of disagreement with current archaeological opinion is shown by the clear inclusion of the disputed riverside defensive wall. The serious reader is referred to Peter Marsden's paper in the *Transactions* of the London and Middlesex Archaeological Society (Vol. 21 1967 p. 149) where the existence of this wall is argued as non proven.

A survey of the history of Roman London, its defences and buildings accompanies the reconstruction drawings backed out with a running series of photographs of actual remains and objects of everyday life. Somehow these are not really related to the drawings and it is a pity more information is not supplied to describe each drawing and plate. Each reconstruction could do with a detailed explanation of the scene particularly for the younger reader. The opportunity is also lost to explain the human elements behind such illustrations as the "Austalis" tile. A proper map is also missed.

This book which is well produced by Batsford's will, however, be bought for its reconstructions and if used as a companion to Ralph Merrifield's *Roman City of London* (Benn 63s.), the collection will be of great value. Some of the drawings like the revised Newgate or the Blackfriars barge are fine in their own right and give real pleasure.

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