
Books

LONDON has a wealth of national and local museums and most of the books discussed in this issue reflect in various ways their work.

Medieval Tiles, a handbook by Elizabeth Eames. *British Museum*, 9/6d.

The Vasa, her place in history by George P. B. Naish. *National Maritime Museum*, 5s.

Medieval Catalogue by J. B. Ward Perkins and others. *London Museum*, 63s.

The British Museum has redesigned many of its well established *Handbooks* in recent years and is now producing new ones. *Medieval Tiles*, a handbook by Elizabeth Eames needs special notice as an excellent and much needed introduction to its subject. It is illustrated with colour and monochrome plates and line drawings with a soft cover binding. Mrs. Eames surveys the main types of Medieval English decorative tiles based on the British Museum's collections. Mosaic, inlaid, printed and relief types and their technique of manufacture are discussed, as are the regional variations and the booklet concludes with a useful bibliography. Some details of the Clarendon Palace tile kilns are also included. It is to be hoped that a companion handbook on Medieval pottery will continue the series. The British Museum has also published a new handbook on time pieces. This is *Clocks* by Hugh Tait which provides an excellent survey illustrated with examples from the Museum's fine collections.

The National Maritime Museum at Greenwich has issued a booklet *The Vasa, her place in history* by George Naish, on the remarkable post-medieval time capsule of 1628, the Swedish warship *Vasa*. The story of the raising of this wooden ship from Stockholm Harbour in 1962 and its subsequent conservation must rank as one of the great archaeological achievements of the 20th century. George Naish who is Chairman of the Committee for Nautical Archaeology, presents a useful summary of the ship, its decorative woodwork and illustrates some of the smaller finds. (It is perhaps useful to note here that the Guildhall Museum's publication *A Roman Ship from Blackfriars*, London by Peter Marsden is still available at 5s.)

The third museum noted on this occasion is the

London Museum at Kensington Palace which has recently reissued its well-known *Medieval Catalogue* in a hard cover format. First published rather hurriedly in 1940 under wartime conditions this new edition has been photo-litho printed with an increase in page size and now provides a more impressive and hard wearing volume. Naturally this has to be paid for and the new book is much more expensive than the old soft cover edition. Another drawback is that the increase in page size invalidates the scale of some of the text figures (but not the plates) and this could be very confusing. But what a remarkable catalogue this is especially when it is recalled that it was compiled nearly thirty years ago, before the considerable increase in Medieval archaeological studies as now illustrated by the ten or so published volumes of *Medieval Archaeology*. Without doubt the *Catalogue* has played an important part in this process of change.

Adequately illustrated with plates and text figures the *Catalogue* is divided into three sections: weapons, horse furniture, and domestic and agricultural objects. The multitude of small finds illustrated rewards not only the excavator but anyone interested in Medieval life. Swords, axes, spurs, spoons, keys, dress articles, combs and badges; objects of iron to objects of leather cascade from the pages. The discussion of cooking vessels does much to redress the normal dominance of ceramics by discussing vessels of brass, bronze and iron. Nevertheless, Gerald Dunning's chapter on the Medieval pottery of the London region has not been superseded in print and provides a representative collection of local and imported vessels. The type series of decorated floor tiles forms an important supplement to Mrs. Eames' handbook. The bibliographies are now out of date in some cases and there are gaps, for example, glass but these reflect gaps in the collections of the Museum and are not the fault of the compilers.

It must always be remembered that the *Catalogue* is not intended as a guide to the everyday objects of the Middle Ages but is first and foremost the catalogue of the London Museum's Medieval collections. There are not many museums that after a visit, the collections can be taken home between covers and referred to at leisure. If you missed the

original paper back edition and you are interested in the Middle Ages, this is a very necessary possession and one which unlike the *Guide to the British Museum's Medieval Room* or the *Guildhall Museum Catalogue* does not now require searching the second-hand market.

Roman London by Ralph Merrifield. *Cassell and Co Ltd.*, 50s.

Elizabethan London by Martin Holmes. *Cassell and Co. Ltd.*, 36s.

THE first two volumes in a new series of portraits of London at significant periods in its history are now in the bookshops. Published by Cassell, each volume, while of unequal length reflected in the prices, is in a uniform format with effective dust jackets featuring Alan Sorrell drawings. Each has black and white illustrations within the text and are phototypeset and printed with a rather harsh appearance which tends to smudge. Both volumes show the fruits of many years research and are extremely readable but they differ considerably in approach. Ralph Merrifield, who as Assistant Director of the Guildhall Museum is well-known in London's archaeological circles, provides an up-to-date account of Roman London which by its very nature is based largely on archaeological evidence. In contrast Martin Holmes, formerly with the London Museum, eschews archaeology and uses the discipline of the historian in his companion on Elizabethan London.

Roman London is a comprehensive study of Londinium and its countryside for the general reader. No attempt is made to catalogue items for which the author's previous *Roman City of London* should be consulted. Here we have a lucid description of early London, its founding, trade, communications and small finds to which are added the answers to many a usual question—Why is the Roman city buried? Which museums should be visited to see finds? It is however no guide book. The complex problems of the specialist are discussed and often the author has alternative suggestions of his own to offer. The methods of restoration employed at the Temple of Mithras even excites some anger. As this is the third book on Roman London to be noted in these columns, let me not hesitate to suggest this is the one which will appeal to a great number of our readers. There is no question here of the life behind the artefact being lost. It is also useful to note that the discussion is not restricted to the present City of London but covers the, admittedly inadequately known, countryside of Londinium.

In his *Elizabethan London* the period allows Martin Holmes to get very much nearer to people by the use of the writings of Londoners themselves; Stow,

Shakespeare and the many play and broadsheet writers for example and he makes the most of his opportunity. This is combined with his particular flair for interpreting the picture maps which appear for the first time in Elizabeth's reign. The end pages of the book provide clear black and white reproductions of two of these; the Civitates map of the 1570's and part of the Moorfields copper plate map of 1559. Others are provided as vignettes within the text.

The gradual change of London from a Medieval city to an early modern one, with development and traffic urging the outward expansion that has never stopped since, is described with clarity. The author is also very much at ease when describing the many fine objects in the London Museum and elsewhere, particularly the armour and dress and also the fine wooden head of Elizabeth. The life from youth to death of the great Queen who was "mere English," forms a consistent background to the story in which as Martin Holmes points out, London and Elizabeth belonged very much to each other. When regretting the avoidance of archaeological evidence it does seem rather strange to read that the Elizabethan collections of the Guildhall Museum consist "for the most part of excavated material . . . not always immediately impressive to the beholder." However, perhaps after all the searcher for the Elizabethans should be led to the monuments of Westminster Abbey and the relics of the Inns of Court and in this Martin Holmes will serve them well.

Nicholson's Guide to the Thames, from source to sea, edited by Paul Atterbury. *Roberts Nicholson Publications*, paper back 12/6, hard back 25s.

RATHER away from the theme of London's museums is a new guide book to our oldest highway the Thames. The *Guide* is packed with factual information on the architecture, townscape, natural history, fishing, eating, recreations and archaeology to be seen on or near the river. Illustrated with clear colour maps and with background sections on geology, rivers, birds, fish and holiday information the text is presented in an attractive modern format. Designed for easy reference the pages are enlivened with thumb nail sketches of buildings and bridges. The coverage of London's archaeology is a little uneven, with a conspicuous gap along the City foreshore but is adequate for example on finds from the river bed in west London. The fact that archaeology is included at all will indicate that this is an unusual and comprehensive guide which will fascinate the Londoner and perhaps lure him up or down stream.

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