

# Books

**Medieval England: A Social History and Archaeology from the Conquest to A.D. 1600**, by Colin Platt (RKP 1978), hardcover, £8.50.

A DIFFICULT book this, but rich. Colin Platt has attempted to outline some of the main developments in England's history from the Norman Conquest to 1600 as illustrated by the increasingly abundant results of medieval archaeology. With apologies for the interim nature of some the exiguous evidence, he plunges in.

There are seven chapters, of varying lengths. The first deals with the Anglo-Norman settlement: Domesday, castles, cathedrals, monasteries and parish churches. Lightly peppered throughout the book are maps and reconstructions of buildings in tones of red on black: the reconstruction of the Abinger motte is a brave attempt to interest an historical readership in patterns of post-holes. The discussion of stone keeps is admirably illustrated—a dialogue between photograph and text used to effect in Platt's previous *English Medieval Town* (1976)—though it is hardly necessary to have both plans and a colour picture of Farnham Castle.

The second chapter deals with economic growth: the boroughs, villages, the friars and their effect upon parish church building, along with the great building programmes at royal and episcopal houses in the thirteenth century. Platt does not want to repeat more than a little of *English Medieval Town*, and thus urban topography, crafts and buildings get virtually no treatment. New examples of twelfth century aisled halls fill out our patchy knowledge, and it is interesting to hear that stone-built first floor halls such as Boothby Pagnell may have had monastic precedents: certainly in London some of the first and probably finest Norman houses were in monastic complexes (e.g. Holy Trinity Priory) or pieds-a-terre in town for the priors. Platt eschews details of timber framed construction, 'absorbing though many have found (them) to be', and thus consigns to oblivion the work of Cecil Hewett on Norman carpentry and a whole range of studies in vernacular architecture which would have reinforced his points.

On to the setback of the early fourteenth century, with overpopulation, deterioration of climate, an agrarian crisis, inflation, and the Black Death. Here the narrative swings along as Platt brings together evidence, formerly widely scattered in learned journals and in geography, of concern about and measures against rising sea and river levels, aggravated by heavy rains; the relation between the price of wheat

and crime, the latter dogging the former in its peaks and troughs for 1300-45; and the mania for moated sites probably dating from 1275-1325, another sign of the uncertain times. What a card index Platt must have! There is rather a lot of medieval name-dropping, as with the unexplained significance of certain thirteenth century villein families of Ely, Glastonbury and Ramsey Abbeys: 'the Hunnes, Lawemanns and Lanes, the Riptons, the Scots and the Godfreys'. Mostly unexplained historical terms are beginning to irk the archaeologist—Discuss the following: gavel-kind, assarting, manorialization. On occasion Platt slips into an irritating oblique style which presumes that we have read certain of the works in his card index, but not others, which he summarises in detail. Fortunately there are 803 extensive footnotes at the back to give full references so that this may be remedied, an unselfish gesture of scholarship.

Fourthly, after the Malthusian checks of war, famine and pestilence, a short chapter on the immediate effects of the Black Death: dilapidations and desertions in villages and the transformation of peasant into yeoman. Then follows a long study of the late medieval church, in which new departures were especially evident. Generosity in the face of death contributed greatly to expenditure on church fabrics in fifteenth century England; there is much evidence in London, but no evidence from the capital is cited. Colleges, hospitals and almshouses receive a welcome treatment, and there is good discussion of monastic establishments, though differences in plan between the Orders might have been stressed. There is again little on the urban church. The effect of property development in towns by monasteries is sketched, but should have been extended. There is no mention of inns, those very important fifteenth century ventures (has nobody excavated any?) and perhaps there might have been more on the major pilgrim shrines and the medieval tourist industry.

The late fifteenth century was the period of Conspicuous Waste: castles such as Caister, built for Sir John Fastolf, on continental models; jewellery, here shown mostly in colour (and showing up the pieces illustrated only in black and white); and a fine attempt to interest historians in the diet-from-bone—evidence figures of two major monasteries which suffers from Platt's continual urge to rehearse the evidence for and against each of his major points. Here at last is some London archaeology, and of the type dear to this reviewer's heart: but the London wharves are not evidence of economic resurgence in the thirteenth to mid fourteenth centuries, but of continuous land reclamation from the early twelfth to

the sixteenth. On a plan of houses at Pottergate, Norwich, two of the crucial periods are shown in identical hatching. One suspects that all round the country are archaeologists reading this book and muttering about the treatment of their results.

With the Tudors comes re-orientation, a population explosion and galloping inflation. Platt brings together a fine selection of monastic buildings adapted to secular uses, and points out the effects of the Reformation on church design, though illustrations here would have been helpful. The Great Rebuilding is outlined and linked tortuously (so that they can be included, one feels) with blast furnaces and glass-working to underline the technological advances of the time. A final paragraph looks forward to the greater changes which are to follow.

For Platt's purpose in making archaeological sites intelligible and giving them an historical context, nine out of ten for effort. The book is lavishly illustrated with line drawings and photographs in black and white and in colour, though some of the latter are disasters, out of focus and quite unintelligible. The book is admirably cheap and will quickly become a manual for medieval archaeologists and extra-mural teachers. It is however clearly meant to be read with *English Medieval Town* and thus is lopsided in treatment, favouring the rural and the ecclesiastic. Moreover the archaeology, as Platt foretells in his introduction, is already out of date; so, an historian tells me, is some of the history. The book becomes a valuable fossilisation of a particular moment in the rapidly developing thought in medieval archaeology. The second edition, and I hope there is one, will have to be totally rewritten.

Medieval archaeology is necessarily very different from that of previous periods. The archaeologist has to work with the historian. Who should take precedence, if either, is the subject of current debate and some acrimony. This book may be seen as a noble attempt to push the two unwilling bedfellows together. We need more books of this type, but written on smaller canvases. A national review such as this has to resort to typological comparisons: castles, DMVs, moated sites. Also required are studies of regions, in which town and countryside are seen to interact. Who will write the archaeology of London and its region in the medieval period? Who could?

JOHN SCHOFIELD

**Georgian London** by John Summerson.  
Penguin Books. 349pp. £2.50.

WHEN IT FIRST appeared in 1945, John Summerson's *Georgian London* broke new ground by offering a comprehensive survey of one of the city's most exciting ages through an intuitive analysis of the economic, social and artistic factors affecting the

urban fabric. Much of the originality of Summerson's work lay in its essentially multi-disciplinary approach and perceptive overviews of London's growth and pattern of buildings. *Georgian London* proved both an immediate success and inspiration to a generation of students and researchers—our debt to Summerson, both direct and indirect, is immense.

The appearance of *Georgian London* under Penguin's Peregrine imprint ensures a continued and well deserved market for this classic. This said, however, one is forced to question the publisher's description of it as a "revised edition" when Summerson's own preface admits that "there have been few textual changes" to the 1962 Penguin edition on which it is based. Indeed, on reading, the text appears to be a straightforward re-print using a slightly larger page-size. No attempt has therefore been made to take further account of more recent researches into the pattern of the building cycle, the processes of property development, population movements, or to direct attention to the less grand components of the Georgian townscape. Invariably, too, some slight errors in the text remain—that, for instance, the effect of the new dock building of the first decade of the nineteenth century "was to clear the river of shipping". The select list of surviving Georgian buildings which forms Appendix I still covers only the inner London areas (re-arranged on a GLC borough basis) and incorporates a few minor alterations and additions. Looking at this list it is difficult to tell what the basis for inclusion has been. In content it reflects, almost exactly, the earlier lists which themselves reflect Summerson's preoccupation with his two "foundationstones" of Georgian London — taste and wealth. The local student, therefore, will notice many unexplained omissions in this section and will need to remain familiar with the current DoE Borough Lists of Buildings of Architectural or Historic Interest (which, rather surprisingly, receive no mention in the updated book list) and the building stock of his own patch. The illustrations which have been used are the same as in the earlier editions although they are of a higher quality and retain more detail.

Finally, Summerson's preface to this new edition paints a somewhat over-optimistic picture of the fate of surviving Georgian buildings which are said to be "less threatened than at any time since 1945" and benefiting from "the changed public attitude towards urban environments". One has only to look at the photographs of run-down, disused and semi-derelict buildings used to illustrate Cruickshank and Wyld's *London: The Art of Georgian Building* and the chapter on London in Amery and Cruickshank's *The Rape of Britain* to realise that all is not well. Two of the saddest views in London today are the pitiful remains of Daniel Alexander's north quay

warehouses at the London Dock and Thomas Telford's St Katherine's Dock — until recently amongst the most important group of early dock buildings in the country — which empty illustrate that planning controls *per se* are no panacea for the preservation of historic buildings in a capital city where all land has a high re-development value and "public attitudes" to the built environment are often ambivalent and ethereal.

CHRIS ELLMERS

**London &c Actually Survey'd and a Prospect of London and Westminster**, by William Morgan, with an introduction by Ralph Hyde. *Harry Margary in association with Guildhall Library*, 1977. iii + 16pp, 70x57cm. £8 (loose sheets), £12 (card covers), £20 (hard covers).

*LONDON &C ACTUALLY SURVEY'D* was published by William Morgan in 1682 and in its origins has much in common with Ogilby and Morgan's *Large and Accurate Map of the City of London* of 1677 (republished by Mr Margary and the Guildhall Library in 1976 and reviewed in these pages). Both were produced as a means of raising funds for Ogilby's projected, and financially embarrassed, English Atlas; and both were based on detailed surveys, originally intended for *Britannia* (1675), undertaken for the City and Westminster in 1674 and for Southwark by 1678. The important difference between the two plans arises from Morgan's decision to overcome predictable marketing difficulties by publishing all three surveys as a single map to a scale of 300ft to the inch, compared with the scale of 100ft to the inch used for the *Map of the City*. In this way he was able to produce a detailed survey of the outlying suburban districts from St James' Park in the west to Shadwell in the east, and from Bunhill Fields in the north to Lambeth in the south, at a scale fully adequate for the generally less intensive pattern of occupation in the suburbs.

In addition, the new map was very obviously designed for a wider appeal. All available space around the edges was taken up by a rather oppressive medley of palaces, cathedral, abbey, livery company halls and the new Royal Exchange, and by lists of persons who had either purchased the previous map or who, it was hoped, would purchase the present one. As part of all this, but of more immediate interest, there was also a long prospect of the waterfront from Westminster to Shadwell, as seen from the south bank, which Mr Hyde in his excellent introduction describes as the first attempt accurately to show each Thames-side building, offering a far more reliable depiction than earlier efforts by Norden, Visscher and Hollar. As for the main map, the more popular appeal is evident from the pictorial representation of important public buildings. In fact for a small extra fee the purchaser could have his own house done

in the same fashion; alas, of the 18 persons who availed themselves of this conceit, twelve aldermen were all dead by the date of publication.

The larger scope of the present map reflects the westward expansion of London at this period. This is particularly apparent in the St James's area, developed since 1651, and in the districts north of Piccadilly and south of the Strand—where the sites of Exeter and York houses were already built up. The names of 176 taverns and inns—mostly in the City and Westminster—are in the key which features along with other material around the edges. A similar discrimination appears in the identification of streets, courts and alleys; very little attention is paid to the area east of the Tower. Nevertheless some 1,800 items are listed, and they alone constitute historical evidence of great importance. The present facsimile is based on the 15 sheets of the Museum of London copy, supplemented by Sheet 12 of the British Library copy (Crace 11.58).

TONY DYSON

**Transactions of the London and Middlesex Archaeological Society**, Vol 28 (1977). Editors: Lawrence Snell and Hugh Chapman (issued to members, c/o Bishopsgate Institute, 230 Bishopsgate, E.C.2); 345 pages.

THIS VOLUME of Transactions, which has been produced to its usual high standard, contains six excavation reports including lengthy accounts of sites at Angel Court in the City and Lincoln Road in Enfield.

The report on the excavation at Angel Court by the Department of Urban Archaeology clearly shows the difficulty of attempting to write up a site from someone else's notes. The major part of the site report is a description of one trench (Trench A) with a sequence of channel deposits and timber structures of Roman date interpreted as belonging to the Walbrook. The suggestions that the timber structures were revetments, steps, and a footbridge are not convincingly supported by the published drawings (Fig. 2). As evidence of a timber footbridge, for example, it is not enough to be told that: "in at least two of the revetments there were a number of large vertical timbers which are inexplicably large if regarded as merely parts of the revetments" when channel revetments of contemporary date in Southwark (at 175 Borough High Street) have posts of roughly the same size. What the published plan and section do show is that not enough of the timber structures was excavated to be able to determine their function(s). It is hardly surprising that the author himself comments "why the revetting in this second phase appears in the middle of the stream is not clear" since it is stated elsewhere that the stream was "never much more than two metres wide". In fact

evidence relating to the stream itself is also rather unsatisfactory. Unfortunately a drawing of the part of the section said to show the northern edge of the channel has not been published but the suggested flat-bottomed profile looks rather unlikely and in its second phase the channel is approximately the same size as the unrevetted ditch found to the South. In addition to Trench A a number of other trenches were examined on the site. It is reported that these contained evidence of Roman structures but none can be clearly seen in the published section (Trench D, Fig. 3) which is rather confusingly labelled "North Section" and lacks an O.D. height. It is regrettable that such an apparently rich site in an area of the Roman city about which comparatively little is known was not more thoroughly investigated. Accompanying the site report is a well-illustrated finds report; however given the general inadequacies of the excavation it is perhaps rather too long, after all the major phases of the stream fill were mixed and the attempt to separate them by post-excavation work is not an archaeological technique to be recommended.

The part of eastern Enfield near to the projected line of Ermine Street is rich in chance finds of Roman material including two 3rd-4th century coin hoards and a number of inhumation and cremation burials, but the site at Lincoln Road is one of the few in the area to have been fully published. The site report includes the results of separate excavations by John Ivens and Anne Gentry and the subsequent observations made during developer's work by Heather McClean and Graham Deal. The major Roman features described are a series of late 1st-2nd century ditches, possibly forming an enclosure, a gravel road, and one probable timber structure. In addition several pits and two hearths were found, possibly having industrial functions, one cremation burial and a late Roman coin hoard. A notable find was a late Roman/Saxon decorated belt buckle from the fill of a ditch with 4th century pottery. The suggestion that the ditches formed an enclosure seems reasonable but an excavation of a greater area at the western end of the site — the proposed "inside" of the enclosure — might have helped to confirm its existence. The major difficulty with the Enfield report lies in its organisation. The three excavations have been presented separately and thus it is hard to understand the development of the site as a whole. It would have been helpful to have had a series of plans of the entire site in its different phases. The only plan which attempts this synthesis (Fig. 11) shows "major features of all phases" and the context numbers of the features are not given. Another source of confusion is that a different layer numbering system has been used for the text and plans from that used

on the sections. Thus a dumped deposit in Area 3 in the text is designated layer 4, while on the section drawing the same deposit is layer 26 and layer 4 becomes the fill in a later pit. It would have been much clearer to have used one set of numbers, and perhaps to have included the feature numbers on the sections. The finds report is generally detailed and well-illustrated but perhaps suffers from two omissions. One is that, because some of the metal small finds were not available for study, a complete report could not be made, and in particular, the group of bronze "fragments and fittings" found in one of the earliest contexts on the site (Area 1, layer 2) was apparently not fully published. Additionally a longer report might have been written about the late Roman/Saxon belt buckle (Fig. 3, no. 18), since few finds of this date have been published from occupation sites in London. The second major omission is the detailed listing of the pottery found in each context which would have presented the basic dating evidence for the features excavated.

The four shorter excavation reports in this volume include three by the Inner London Archaeological Unit. Graham Black describes further work at Westminster Abbey in the area between the monastic kitchen and the Frater. Irene Schwab and Bernard Nurse report on a site at Butcher Row, Ratcliffe with evidence of a 14th-15th century building. Both of these reports are clear and well-illustrated and successfully blend documentary and archaeological evidence. In addition the ILAU contributes a catalogue of the various trial excavations undertaken by them since 1974 in the seven Inner London Boroughs north of the Thames, listing details of why a site was investigated and what was found. Although many of the trial trenches failed to produce archaeological deposits the recording of even negative evidence is important as a basis for future work. The fourth of the shorter site reports concerns an excavation at Sefton Street, Putney, where late Prehistoric features and flints of Mesolithic-late Neolithic types and Neolithic pottery were found. Given the rarity of sites of this date in London, it is unfortunate that more detailed plans of the two hearths with associated finds were not included, and that the stratigraphic contexts of the flints were not given.

In addition to the excavation reports Volume 28 contains some notes on individual finds of interest and nine short articles, based largely on documentary research, including an account of a 15th century wharf at Vauxhall, suggested evidence for the manufacture of amber beads in London, and a history of the Greenwich and Blackwall Railways.

LAURA SCHAAF