

Books

The Roman Riverside Wall and Monumental Arch in London and Excavations at Billingsgate Buildings, Lower Thames Street, London, 1974. *London & Middlesex Archaeological Society*, special papers No 3 & 4, 1980. Issued free to members. £7.50 and £5.00 respectively to non-members.

THE FIRST OF THESE reports deals with the excavation by the Department of Urban Archaeology of the late fourth-century river wall at Blackfriars and the subsequent reconstruction of a monumental arch re-used in its build. This publication is a milestone in the history of Roman London archaeology. At last the prolonged dispute over the existence of a defensive riverside wall can be laid to rest and those who have argued for it over the last hundred and fifty years stand vindicated.

The structural section of the report is largely the work of Charles Hill who supervised the main 1975-6 excavations. In addition there is an account by Martin Millett of a much smaller investigation carried out in 1974. The drawings illustrating the latter are rather disappointing, especially when compared to the high standards established elsewhere in the report. For a small trench the positions of the phase plans are surprisingly difficult to correlate. It proved impossible to relate sections 7 & 8 (20-21) to any of the plans while the absence of an O.D level on 7 posed a further hindrance. Much could have been clarified by the use of simple co-ordinates.

The main structural report is primarily concerned with some 115 metres of Roman walling. The fact that much of it was recorded during a difficult and often hazardous watching brief, and that in all it represents only 28 days of work, is an indication of the credit due to Charles Hill and his team. Throughout its course that wall was found to have been severely eroded by river action, thus providing dramatic confirmation of Fitzstephen's twelfth-century account. A number of constructional changes were encountered and it is unfortunate that time did not allow a more detailed examination to erase possible doubts surrounding contemporaneity of build. Such doubts are perhaps supported by reference to a culvert incorporated in the main body of the wall. It is argued that this and an associated drain formed part of the original work (32-33). Confusion arises, however, when the internal bank through which the drain was inserted is also des-

cribed as contemporary with, or later than, the construction of the wall (37).

In his discussion on the date of the wall, Charles Hill sets out clearly three historical contexts to which he suggests the wall may be attributed (i) the visit of Constans in 342-3, (ii) the Theodosian reconstruction of the early 370's and (iii) the efforts of Stilicho during the closing years of the fourth century. He favours the second, a choice now strongly supported by evidence from subsequent excavations at the Tower and New Fresh Wharf.

The specialist reports are dominated by Tom Blagg's admirable study of the sculptured stones. Together with Sheila Gibson he goes on to ingeniously reconstruct a monumental arch and an architectural screen of gods. The reconstructions afford not only a considerable appreciation of dimension and character of construction, but also a striking display of visual ornamentation as yet unseen on any of the other public structures in Roman Britain. Additional sculptured stones include a unique votive relief of four Mother-goddesses and two inscribed altars, one of which Mark Hassall identifies as commemorating a hitherto unknown governor or acting governor of Britannia Superior.

Other notable specialist entries include a report by Ruth Morgan who, in default of adequate archaeological dating, combined radio carbon analysis and dendrochronology to provide a date for the construction of the wall. Tony Dyson contributes a documentary survey in which he presents fresh evidence for the wall in two royal grants of the late ninth century. Ralph Merrifield concludes with a lucid discussion on the contribution the excavations and the studies derived from them have made to our knowledge of Roman London.

The second publication concerns another D.U.A. excavation, this time on the site of Billingsgate Buildings on the north side of Lower Thames Street close to the Fish Market. The trench was a small one, only 12.5 m long and 2.5 m wide, and in the words of the supervisor David Jones, who prepared the structural report, "not one which allowed for significantly firm conclusions to be drawn." Furthermore, the position of a destructive modern sewer meant that "layer recognition and the linking up of layers in the north and south ends of the trench was extremely difficult" (2).

Despite these restrictions the D.U.A. has found it necessary to produce a 170 page report.

The structural account is almost entirely concerned with a series of timber revetments of the late first and second centuries A.D. A modern basement removed most of the subsequent deposition, and what remained was thinly date and uninformative.

I found the excavation report rather drawn-out and tedious, even though it comprised only 18 pages (including drawings). Faced with describing a repetitive and uninspiring sequence the author has my sympathy, but a shorter version could have increased lucidity with no loss to the general picture.

The main body of the publication comprises the finds reports (136 pages). Fundamentally the whole affair is too long given the nature of the site and the limited quality of the information obtained. There seems little justification for such extensive treatment. This said, it is only fair to point out that the reports themselves, the drawings (the leather in particular) and indeed the presentation as a whole, are of an unusually high standard.

While applauding any effort by L.A.M.A.S. to increase the returns on their members subscriptions, with the Frere recommendations in mind it comes as some surprise that they have accepted what appears to be a level III report for publication. With major D.U.A. sites like New Fresh Wharf and Trig Lane approaching the publication stage they may be forced to adopt a stricter editorial line or invest in a paper mill.

GEOFF PARNELL

Saxon and Norman London, by John Clark. *Museum of London*. 1980. 32 pp., many pl. and figs. £1.65 (by post, £2.00).

THIS BEAUTIFULLY PRODUCED and lavishly illustrated booklet sets out to give 'an overall picture of London's development' in the period from A.D. 410-1215. It is designed for the interested layman rather than the professional archaeologist or historian, and therefore deliberately avoids the innumerable controversial points which any study of the history of London is bound to throw up. In the introduction the author states that he will avoid 'thorny historical and archaeological problems'; the booklet must therefore be judged on its merits as an introduction to the history of London for the 'average' reader or museum visitor, not regarded as a definitive

scholarly pronouncement on the present state of research into London's past. It fulfils its stated purpose perfectly.

The booklet is divided into a series of chronologically arranged chapters which deal both with London specifically and London in relation to its hinterland. Documentary evidence and that produced by recent excavations carried out by the Department of Urban Archaeology of the Museum of London are integrated, and the author does not try to hide the fact that at certain periods (the 5th and 6th centuries, for example) London is archaeologically 'a virtual blank'. The late Saxon period, however, is very fully covered and it is perhaps this period which will be of the most interest to those with both archaeological and historical interests. Here we are told about Aethelred's replanning of London on a totally new system, quite different from that of Roman London (p.8), and the types of buildings occupied by London's Late Saxon inhabitants (p.12). The development of London as an international commercial port, with trading connections with France, Germany and the Low Countries, is also graphically illustrated from the archaeological evidence.

London's post-Conquest growth is described more in documentary than archaeological terms, perhaps a reflection of the emphasis of recent archaeological work in the City, and these sections are less exciting than the earlier ones. Nevertheless, they serve as an excellent introduction to High Medieval London, and whet the appetite for a companion booklet on London from 1250 onwards.

Altogether, John Clark must be congratulated on producing a succinct work which is authoritative in approach and popular in appeal. It is highly recommended to anyone interested in the past of this great city.

HELEN CLARKE

A London Album : Early photographs recording the history of the city and its people from 1840 to 1914 by Roger Whitehouse. *Secker and Warburg Ltd.* 306 photographs with introduction and comments. £12.50.

BOOKS OF 'OLD PHOTOGRAPHS', a good many of them devoted to London, have been one of the publishing industry's growth sectors over the last decade or so. Roger Whitehouse's contribution, then, comes to join an already well stocked bookshelf. It is undoubtedly a useful

addition to those already available by virtue of it being the largest and most comprehensive set of photographs of London ever published in a single volume. The layout is attractive, its subject matter neatly organised, with a good number of large prints which make the most of some very stunning images.

A fuller enjoyment of the book, however, is somewhat lessened by a series of irritating flaws. To begin with, there are no photographs dating to 1840 as the title suggests — the earliest being Fox Talbot's famous photograph of Trafalgar Square taken in 1844, and only a handful date to the period before 1860. Another is the book's two introductory 'potted histories' — dealing with 2000 years of London's history and the history of photography respectively — which ought, in my mind, to have been omitted altogether. It is difficult to see any real connection between Caesar's invasion, Viking raids, the Great Fire, etc., etc., and the photographs which follow, except that mention of them may, just possibly, help the book to Americans. Equally, the section on the development of Calotypes, Daguerrotypes, Ambrotypes and the whole range of early photographic materials seems to have been included just for the sake of it.

More serious criticism can be levelled at the quality of picture research that Mr. Whitehouse has presented his reader with. All too often his pictures are credited "photographer unknown" when just a little delving into published works would have revealed who they were. Two well known photographs by Paul Martin — news vendors at Ludgate Circus (not Charing Cross as stated, plate 150) and an apple seller in Cheapside (151) — amazingly, go uncredited. In the same company are the famous photograph of the Sydenham Crystal Palace under construction in 1853 which is by Paul Henry Delamotte (251) and the photograph of Duval Street (162) which is from the well known series by C. A. Matthews, an East Anglian photographer who wandered into Spitalfields to kill time while waiting for a train at Liverpool Street in 1912. Many more could be added. Elsewhere, the credits are misleading in other respects. Photographs from George Sims' widely available *Living London*, 1900, are surprisingly listed as 'private collection, photographer unknown' (108, 165) giving them an air of rarity. The captions, too, often contain inaccuracies. The very poignant picture titled 'mother and child in a London doorway' (172), taken from Smith and Thomson's *Street Life in London*, 1877, is, in fact, a photograph showing

a baby in the arms of a destitute minder, one of London's many 'crawlers' or down-and-outs. The minder looked after the baby, on the steps of St. Giles' Workhouse, from 10 am to 4 pm, and again from 8 pm to 10 pm, while its mother worked in a coffee shop to support them. Here, a correct caption would surely have made a far more telling comment on life in Victorian London. Once again, other examples abound. The photograph of Penn's engine works, Blackheath (238), was taken in 1862 and not 1855 as stated. The 'Billingsgate fish porters' (137) are orange porters who worked around the Monument. The photograph of poor children queueing for a Salvation Army farthing breakfast (185) must have been taken around 1900 and not 1880. Newgate Prison was demolished in 1902 and not 1900 (210-211). The author could also have been more generous with locational information — the photograph of the S.S. Tanjore under construction in 1865 (236), for instance, would have been more informative if we had been told that this was at the Thames Ironworks and Shipbuilding Company's yard on Bow Creek with the impressive chimneys of the Thames Plate Glass Works seen in the background.

On a more fundamental level, certain important events in the history of London photography go unnoticed, to the detriment of the book's readers. John Thomson's 'Street Life' photographs, mentioned above, are now the earliest surviving social documentary photographs of the city — a point surely worthy of comment. George Sims' three volume *Living London*, which made great use of half-tone photographs to convey a very original mix of material to a wide readership, goes completely unmentioned.

If Roger Whitehouse had relied less on certain well known picture agencies, notorious for their lack of adequate captioning even for well known images, his two years of research for this book would have been more productive and his readers more adequately informed. One final point must be the quality of some of the photographs reproduced — these are sometimes dark and lacking in tonal range. Part of the blame here must be laid at Mr. Whitehouse's door, for many of the photographs are said to be reproduced from his own 35 mm negatives which is surely less than a book of this price deserves. If, as the old adage would have us believe, 'every picture tells a story' this book had a better story for the telling.

CHRIS ELLMERS