

Books

The Tower of London: its Buildings and Institutions, edited by John Charlton. *H.M.S.O.* 1978. 160pp. 72 plates, 13 figs, large pull-out plan. £10.00.

THIS COMMEMORATIVE volume should have appeared in 1978 as part of the celebrations to mark the 900th anniversary of the Tower of London. In the event H.M.S.O. were unable to meet the publication deadline and it arrived early in 1979, several months after the last of the festivities had subsided. What a pity, the considerable publicity accompanying the novo-centenary would have ensured the book a much wider audience, something it richly deserves.

The volume contains seventeen chapters written by a wide cross-section of people, most of them closely associated with the Tower at one time or another. The contributions are arranged into four categories. The first includes a review by Allen Brown of the development of the castle to the middle of the 16th century incorporating the most recent documentary and archaeological research available. Professor Brown continues with an architectural description of the Tower as it stands today; Peter Curnow follows with a detailed account of the Bloody Tower, which features a report on the remarkable discovery of a 14th century tiled pavement found beneath centuries of grime during recent refurbishings there.

Next come chapters on the Crown Jewels and the history of the Armouries as a showpiece, followed by an account of the Officers of the Tower and the Yeomen Warders. The past functions of the Tower include two particularly important chapters by Sarah Barter on the Mint and the Board of Ordnance. There are also accounts of the Royal Menagerie (moved to Regents Park in 1834), the Record Office, and the role of the Tower as a state prison.

The third section is devoted to the ceremonial and the part played by the Church and the Army in the running of the Tower. The final chapter by Dr Lipman, a former Director of the Dept of Ancient Monuments and Historic Buildings, deals with the curious jurisdiction of the Constable over the Jews of London and then defines and describes the various liberties outside the walls of the Tower.

Readers are certain to find this book a rich and fascinating source of information. Its diversity affords an unusually balanced view of the Tower's raison d'être and thus goes some way to combat the endless stream of racy publications which seem to depict a place where essentially people were imprisoned, tortured, and eventually executed. In trying to redress the balance Professor Brown goes as far as to suggest that 'if the morbid ravens there were shooed away or shot its history would be better served' (37). This solution seems a little unfair on the birds. After all their presence is both traditional and legitimate (they boast a charter) and if visitors associate them with gory tales then Nemesis should descend on those who propagate such misconceptions.

The book is presented and published to a very high standard and by today's yardstick the price is most reasonable. It is well-illustrated with early prints and engravings, contemporary photographs and line drawings. The latter — specially commissioned for the work — are excellent, with the combination of phase plans and three-dimensional reconstructions enabling the castle development to be easily understood. My only notable criticism concerns the absence of text references. The bibliography is useful up to a point, but when dealing with a subject as unexplored as the Board of Ordnance it is of little practical use to be informed that 'there is an abundance of material for research in the Public Record Office' (154).

It is now some 900 years since the Conqueror ordered the White Tower to be raised and during this time the Tower has witnessed great changes. One of the principal strongholds in the realm, a palace, an armoury, and a power base to watch over the aspirations of a vigorous and independent minded city, the Tower is so closely identified with celebrated events it is hardly surprising that it should occupy a special place in the history of the English people. No one should doubt that these associations, rather than the fabric of the building, or its contents, continue to represent the Tower's greatest attraction, but the arrival of this new and comprehensive work should help to widen its appeal a little.

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