

Books

Prehistory of the Somerset Levels, J. M. Coles and B. J. Orme *Somerset Levels Project*, 1981. 64pp, £1.00, plus 30p postage.

'WETLANDS' ARE NOW a most threatened wild-life habitat the world over, usually by drainage works and agricultural 'improvements'. Interests, as usual, are in conflict; some would wish for complete preservation of the remaining fragments of marshland, while we as archeologists will recognise that only in destruction and drainage will our investigations be made possible. Examples can be seen from around the world. The Wylie Swamp in South Australia has turned up boomerangs, and other wooden tools of c.10,000 b.c., while being mined for peat; the Waghi Valley swamps of highland New Guinea have yielded remarkable evidence of horticulture, and wooden tools, at more than 6,000 b.c. Even our own Star Carr was discovered (by an amateur archaeologist) in agricultural ditching works in lowland Yorkshire. The bog-bodies of North Europe have again been found during the commercial extraction of peat.

John Coles and Bryony Orme add another remarkable set of discoveries to any such list, in their work in the Somerset Levels during investigations extending over more than a decade. This short account summarises the essential discoveries of the archaeology, pollen work, dendrochronology, beetle studies and so on, and then guides the student to the complete sources for each.

The Somerset Levels excavations have been conducted in advance of commercial peat digging, and the authors carefully acknowledge the help given by the peat company. From about 4,000 b.c. trackways began to be laid over the wet surface of the valley bottom, with activity intermittent to about 400 b.c. The environmental evidence follows the evolution of saltmarsh to freshwater marsh, and then through phases of deposition of peats, flooding of surfaces, to a final marine incursion and the end of trackway building.

The sequence begins with the Sweet track of about 4,000 b.c., named after the person who made the discovery during peat cutting. This is one of a number of examples which indicate careful husbandry of local interests in the work of the project. The Sweet track is of complex construction, and consists of parallel beams supported by side-braces and apparently standing above shallow water. A dry phase following this is marked by the growth of fen wood, and the return to wetter conditions sees the construction of extensive tracks of well-made

hurdles laid directly on the ground. By 2,500 b.c. the Abbot's Way appears, made of timbers placed on the surface, at right angles to the line of the track. The occurrence of three types of trackway does not represent an evolution; construction methods change from hurdles to plank or log walkways, apparently in response to the changing land conditions and human needs.

The booklet includes a short section on the purpose of the trackways, for access by travelling man and livestock, which is supported by evidence from the earlier excavations at Glastonbury and Meare by Bulleid and Gray. How nice it would be to have data from a Neolithic site preserved in the same way!

Besides the data on the trackways, information is included on the other (usually stray) finds, but which include the well-known Neolithic bow, one of the very few jadeite axes from a secure archaeological context, flint hoards and several types of domestic wooden artefact.

Illustrations in the booklet show excavation in progress, and extensive exposures of excavated trackway. The image of volunteers digging steaming peat with the sticks of ice lollipops represents an unusual scene (p. 13, top) but one that reflects great credit to all concerned in this work.

The booklet is comprehensively illustrated with good line-drawings, and slightly muddied photographs. However, if this leads people on to the other publications of the project, all to the good.

The booklet ends with a plea for the future. Drainage? Well, yes, but not too much. Rapid humification follows lowered water levels, and fragile wooden artefacts and structures soon are destroyed. Like all patterns of human land-use, control is needed, but is usually applied too late to save very much. The contents of the book emphasise the need for close archaeological supervision of the exploitation of wetlands, with adequate conservation. Changes in the land-use of fenland areas, and the intensification of drainage, are surely now the major problem in rescue archaeology.

TONY LEGGE

This booklet, and Somerset Levels Papers 4-8, can be ordered from: Somerset Levels Project, Department of History and Archaeology, The University, Exeter. Papers 4 (Bronze Age), 5 (Neolithic and Iron Age) and 6 (Late Neolithic and Early Bronze Age) cost £2.00 each, Paper 7 (Late Iron Age) £2.50 and Paper 8, £3.00. Please add 40p postage for each item.

Londinium — a descriptive map and guide to Roman London. Ordnance Survey (1981) 95p.

OVER THE PAST ten years or so there has been a growing output of wall-charts ranging from a variety of vehicles to the successions of kings. These charts which tend to be large and colourful, are very popular in schools but they can also provide an attractive cover-up for the children's graffiti in their bedroom or the odd damp patch in the kitchen. They exude instant information on a specific subject and today no self-respecting income-hunting museum would be without at least one of these charts in their book-stall.

Because these charts tend to become permanent features and therefore a form of reference work, it is essential that the information is accurate. Unfortunately in the past however there have been some real horrors, such as the first edition of *The Sunday Times* 'The Roman Army.'

It is with this background that one must examine the publication of *Londinium* by the Ordnance Survey in collaboration with the Museum of London. It has been expensively produced with the Camomile bastion soldier acting as the frontispiece of the folded chart and a map of Roman London drawn by William Stukeley in 1772 as the back paper.

At first glance the chart which measures 1m (c. 39½ins) wide by 89cm (35ins) high, is most attractive with the main item being a large map of the City with a green land surface on which Roman features are marked in red and pink, a pale blue river and 42 full colour illustrations of structures, objects, reconstructions and plans in the area outside the Roman walls. There are also keys, some useful small maps and a little text.

On closer examination the green of the map looks as though the printer has blotched his colours with mid-greens, lime greens and a blue-green at the top. The key indicates that the relief runs from mid-green to yellow (which does not feature on the map itself) but gives no indication as to the actual heights concerned nor what the blue-green is meant to represent. The key is also inconsistent in that red shading sometimes means 'extant' features and sometimes 'recorded' ones while 'presumed' (?conjectured) features can be white or pink, which last colour can also indicate 'recorded' ones — all very confusing!

I regret to write that there are also a considerable number of factual errors, distortions in the text and misleading captions, for example: although the key indicates that *extant* interval turrets are shown as red and recorded ones as pink, the south-west turret of the fort is marked in pink despite its undoubted existence and its reference in the 'List of Visible Remains' on the chart; the text implies that the tombstone of Vivius Marcianus is of 1st century date,

compared with the Museum caption which suggests 3rd century (the most likely date is 2nd century as the find spot lies within the City wall of c. 200), while to say that "in AD 296 the Emperor Constantius Chlorus save Londinium from the rebels" is not exactly true — Constantius did not become Emperor until 305 when Diocletian and Maximian abdicated, while the "rebel generals" Carausius and then Allectus had had London under their control since 287; one caption is entitled "Mosaic floor from Bucklersbury House" but the arrow indicating its find spot places it (correctly) in Queen Victoria Street, some 100ft (30m.) north of the building entitled 'Bucklersbury House' on the map, while two other captions adjacent to each other mention respectively "Temple of Mithras" and "Mithraeum" which may mislead the uninitiated into thinking that two different buildings are being indicated.

There are also some peculiarities about find spots, 'viewpoints' and the 'List of Visible Remains'. Cognoscenti of Roman London, and I suspect most readers of *the London Archaeologist*, will find spotting the errors, omissions and commissions far more interesting than *The Times*' crossword—which is a great pity because such a laudable project should not have had so many defects. The pretty little chart showing when various objects were discovered, could without loss be dispensed with in order to increase the cramped text by a much needed 70%. In addition, the scale on the main map is in both imperial and metric measurement but regrettably the smaller maps have only metric, as does the text.

All in all *Londinium* is colourful, attractive and useful—buy it, cover your damp patch with it, study it but do not trust it. I look forward to an improved second edition.

NICHOLAS FUENTES

The Archaeology of Anglo-Saxon England, ed. David M. Wilson. Cambridge University Press, 1981. 21 plates and numerous figs. Paperback £9.95.

WHEN THIS BOOK was first published in 1976, at a cost of £30, students of archaeology unable to afford their own copies might have been found queueing in college libraries up and down the country for the use of the precious and necessarily limited volumes. It is a great pity that it has taken so long for a reasonably priced paperback edition to appear, the more so since it is unrevised.

In 1913 it was possible for E. T. Leeds, whose name is so closely linked with the development of Anglo-Saxon archaeology, to claim that the sole tangible evidence for early Anglo-Saxon settlement sites derived from the remains of cemeteries. Until the middle of the present century our knowledge of the so-called "Dark Ages" was based on regional studies and art-historical analyses of the more subs-

Mosaic

CITISIGHTS

WHEN VISITING our historic towns, I have always found the conducted tours given by 'official' guides to be both informative and entertaining. By contrast, on the only occasion that I have played the tourist and taken a guided tour of London (several years ago) I was appalled to discover that the guide was about 20 years out of date, at least in regard to the archaeology of the City. Perhaps I was unusually unfortunate but one suspects that many tourists may be missing out on the exciting story of the discoveries made in the City in recent years, and that archaeology is missing out by not being presented in this particular 'shop window.'

Now we have an organisation with the potential to put things right. Citisights offer 'walks around the 2,000 years of old London', guided by professional archaeologists. Individual tours, tailored to special requirements, can be arranged for parties of ten or more, at rates from only 50p per person, subject to a minimum charge of £15 per tour. Lectures can be arranged too, whether to explain a topic in more detail before a visit or perhaps as a follow-up. One of these tours could well fill a blank spot in your local society's programme of outings, and might be a good way of 'spreading the word' in non-archaeological groups, like social clubs, W.I.s or youth groups. The address is: CITISIGHTS, 12 Alpha Place, London, S.W.3.

(Continued from p.195)

tantial remaining artifacts, on the distribution patterns of largely unprovenanced material and on place-name and documentary studies. The series of essays by the eminent early medievalists of today here collected together under the editorship of David Wilson provides an invaluable synthesis of the change of emphases in Anglo-Saxon archaeology over the past thirty years or so.

The contributions include an extremely useful summary of recent work on excavated settlement sites, by Philip Rahtz, very fully illustrated and supplemented by a lengthy gazetteer listing those sites which have yielded definite evidence of domestic settlement. This is well complemented by Peter Fowler's study of rural settlement and land-use patterns, and by Martin Biddle's discussion of the development of towns. There are also chapters on ecclesiastical architecture, by Bridget Cherry, dealing with evidence from excavations as well as more substantial standing structures; on monastic sites, by Rosemary Cramp, and largely concerned with the writer's own extensive excavations at Monkwearmouth and Jarrow; on craft and industry, by David Wilson, a study necessarily limited by the poor survival of organic material; and on the animal resources, by Juliet Clutton-Brock. John Hurst's chapter on the pottery reflects the great advances that have been made in this field since his pioneering 1959 study in *Medieval Archaeology*, and is again

VENTURE DAY

ON SUNDAY 6th June Capital Radio sponsored a 'Venture Day' in Battersea Park. The intention was to give to young people who were short of ideas for filling their spare time, an opportunity to find out more about the various activities and organisations which requires an effort or offer a challenge to the individual — anything from Conservation to Mountaineering.

Wandsworth Historical Society was invited by Capital Radio to put on a presentation of archaeology. A dummy excavation with various improvised features was set up to give onlookers some idea of how a 'dig' is organised. The front cover shows Rosemary Ward, Chairman of Wandsworth's Archaeological Committee explaining the Society's intentions to Prince Charles who spent an hour visiting some of the participants of the Venture Day.

Other aspects of Wandsworth's exhibit included the various post-excavation activities, a publication sales counter (including the *L.A.*) and a general enquiry stall which offered advice on all matters archaeological. Apart from general queries there were about forty detailed ones ranging from how to read Physical Anthropology at university to a pipe layer who wanted to know to know where he should report any chance finds from his work. Some thirty people were put in touch with organisations undertaking excavations in the London area.

very well illustrated. It is perhaps unfortunate that the section on early pottery is so short.

Michael Dolley's study of coins and the editor's discussion of the Scandinavians in England are largely historical summaries. However, the much studied and analysed "art", the metalwork and stone sculpture notably, which once formed a mainstay of Anglo-Saxon archaeology receives only a brief mention, and that in the introduction. Art-historical approaches, to which Dr. Wilson has contributed so much, are of great value to the archaeologist, and it is to be regretted, as Catherine Hills noted in her review of the book on its first appearance, that they do not receive more attention in this volume. It is also unfortunate that there is little discussion of the cemeteries which figured so prominently in early studies, the more so in the light of recent excavations at such sites as Mucking and Spong Hill.

The blurb claims that this reprint is "without abridgement". However, revision would have been welcome in a book some of whose essays are now nearly ten years old, and full revision will certainly be required in about five years time when current major excavations have been assessed. At least until then, this book will surely remain the standard basic reference for all students of the Anglo-Saxon period, whether potentially professional archaeologists or not, especially as it is now available at almost one third of the original price. JACQUI PEARCE