

# Books

**London Cemeteries: An Illustrated Guide and Gazetteer**, by Hugh Meller. *Avebury Publishing Co.*, 1981. 319 pp., 90 illustrations, indices, bibliography. £7.95 (paperback)

IT MIGHT BE considered that the subject of London cemeteries (or any cemetery for that matter) has a generally limited audience, and does not warrant the sort of presentation provided here by Mr Meller. However, as one reads through the pages of this book, it becomes increasingly clear how much information i.e., architectural, historical (local and general) and environmental etc., is available from these distinct plots of land, and how important this data can and indeed should be to the communities in whose areas they occur.

The book has two main parts, the first consisting of six short chapters (the first chapter is an introduction) dealing with the history, planning, monuments and buildings, epitaphs and flora and fauna of London cemeteries. These are followed by a gazetteer of 100 cemeteries, located in the inner London boroughs as well as others within a nine mile radius of central London, each with a brief history of the site and a list of the interesting burials to be found within them.

One of the themes of this book is the dilapidated and in many cases vandalised state of cemeteries in the London area; although this problem is not, of course, confined to London. Mr Meller indicates that some cemeteries, such as Abney Park Cemetery in Stoke Newington High Street, N.16, and Highgate Cemetery in Swains Lane, N.6, for example, now have committees formed from local residents, whose aims are to save and preserve their cemeteries from further damage and deterioration. The work undertaken by these committees includes repairing damaged monuments and the clearing of dense undergrowth, plus the planting of a wider variety of flora (in part to attract a more diverse variety of fauna). These examples might be held up for other communities to emulate, so that all local cemeteries can be cherished and enjoyed by the living, while at the same time giving some dignity to the memory of the dead.

Overall, this is an interesting book, and I believe long overdue. Hopefully it will prompt further research on the cemeteries of London (and elsewhere in the country), and also create more interest in their upkeep and maintenance, the latter possibly with the help and assistance of the local community.

If there is any criticism to be made of this book,

it is Mr. Meller's somewhat cynical view (noted several times) of the way people wish to remember loved ones. This clearly comes across when discussing Streatham Park Cemetery at Rowan Road, S.W.16, where he says of the columbarium that it is "about as attractive as a post-office sorting room. Stacked at one end of this chilling place are pathetic rows of plastic flowers, photographs and lurid mementoes of the deceased, beside their ashes". Although, I am sure, not meant to be unkind, views of this sort are best tempered with humanity, or better still not stated at all. This is a small criticism from an otherwise excellent book.

ALAN THOMPSON

## Also Received

**The Myrelaion (Bodrun Camii) in Istanbul**, by Cecil L. Stuker, *Princeton University Press*. 50pp, 84pl, biblio, index. £26.50.

MAKING a complete and detailed record of a standing, or just-standing, building is a remarkable way of really looking at it for the first time. You are forced to find out where that course of thick stones goes, and what the original floor level was. This volume from Princeton is the record of just a project applied to one of the rare standing buildings of the tenth century in Constantinople. The substructure of the church filled up with late Byzantine and Turkish rubbish, so that the pottery recovered gives the art historical report an archaeological flavour.

RICHARD REECE

**Morgantina Studies, Vol 1: The Terracottas**, Malcolm Bell III. *Princeton University Press*. 266pp, 150pl, index. £38.70.

THE problem of writing up large-scale excavations has loomed large on the British scene in the last ten years. This volume is part of the, by now, long American tradition of putting whole classical sites in the Mediterranean area into print. It is the first of a series which will publish the material from the city of Morgantina in Sicily spanning the mid sixth to the first century BC. This treatment of the terracottas is clearly detailed, comprehensive, but not overweight, and a readable summary is supported by a well organised catalogue, complete with excellent illustrations.

RICHARD REECE