

Books

Living with the Past, by David Baker (1983). 174pp, 76pl & figs., bibliog., index. £12.50 (hardback) or £8.95 (paperback) including postage from David Baker, 3 Oldway, Bletsoe, Bedford MK44 1QG.

WHEN THE COLLINS Archaeology series collapsed with only six of the projected 24 volumes published, several promising titles disappeared. Thanks to the determination of the author, who has acted as his own publisher, this one has emerged from limbo and I hope that others may be encouraged to do the same. But admiration or sympathy does not sell books, and the reader will want to know whether this do-it-yourself publication is worth buying.

First, I must say that the standard of presentation and production is no way inferior to that of a commercial publisher: it does not look like a 'home-made' book.

The title, *Living with the Past*, carries overtones of living with in-laws – a reluctant necessity, perhaps a burden, and definitely a mixed blessing – and raises the question 'do we need it?' ('it' being the historic environment, the book's subtitle). The author starts logically by examining what is meant by the historic environment (both rural and urban), sketches the development of ideas about it, since history is to some extent in the eye of the beholder. He points out that it is not a static idea: the frontier of the past is moving all the time, and even 1940s defences are now historic monuments.

The pivot of the book is perhaps Chapter 5 *Use and Misuse*: if the historic environment is useful (in the widest possible sense) we should be prepared to defend it against the various pressures outlined in the next two chapters, if not, we can let it decay without regret. In twenty pages we are taken through socio-psychological adjustment, education and academic research, tourism, job creation, treasure hunting and the lunatic fringe, and we are left to make up our minds on the case.

Later chapters deal with the complicated questions of the legal and organisational frameworks within which the historic environment can be pre-

served, recorded or destroyed. The final chapter discusses the priorities and choices that must be made in the preservation of the historic environment, given that total preservation is neither practically nor politically possible.

To cover such a wide field in a relatively short book is a considerable achievement, made possible by a 'tight' style and the ability not to waste words. Fast readers may find they have missed important points, and will have to back-track to retain the thread of the argument. The concentrated thought is lightened by the author's sense of humour: I shall beware of the 'curse of the sticky stones' in future (p.102). If you want to think seriously about what we are doing, or should be doing, in archaeological/historical research or conservation, then buy this book and read it. Slowly.

CLIVE ORTON

Hunting the Past, by L. B. Halstead. *Hamish Hamilton*. 208pp, many pl. and figs, bibliog., index. £10.95.

HUNTING THE PAST combines the results of investigations in geology, geomorphology and archaeology, and also explains how investigations in the field are carried out. The historical origins of geology and palaeontology are explained.

The book is divided into six chapters, each broadly based about a theme, and with each sub-divided into well illustrated 2-4 page sections. The scope of the book, in relation to the material of the past, is thus very large.

The first chapter *Reading the Past* takes the reader through the formation, destruction and redeposition of rocks and sediments by means of chemical and mechanical forces of erosion. The second chapter deals directly with the formation of fossils and fossil assemblages, with a valuable emphasis on the importance of the latter, a point with which archaeologists would agree. Man enters the scene in this chapter, in the section 'caves', but as a minor component of cave faunas. Most of the assemblages described are of 'natural' (i.e. non-human) origin.

(continued from page 415)

I am grateful to the Carew Manor Group for allowing me to draw and photograph the sherd, and for information about the circumstances of its finding. Mr Peter Albutt and the team from H. Turn-

bull & Co. have been extremely helpful to the Group, who would like to thank them for their continuing interest, and especially to Mr Reg Girdlestone who found the sherd. Dr. G. J. Dawson and colleagues in the Medieval Pottery Research Group gave valuable advice on its identification.

The search for fossils makes up the core of the third chapter, beginning with interesting accounts of the history of fossil hunting, culminating in the frantic "Cope-Marsh War" of the later 19th century U.S.A. The picture on p.78 of the Hayden fossil hunting expedition (on which Cope was palaeontologist) is complete with covered waggons and U.S. cavalry in a manner more familiar from the Indian wars. The section "Amateur Fossil Hunters" in this chapter emphasises the contribution of responsible amateur workers.

Chapter 4 is the longest part of the book, dealing with the origins and evolution of life. This begins with sections on primeval chemistry, the origins of cells, skeletons, dinosaurs, mammals, plants and many other related subjects. Here, the thematic approach to the past can result in an impression of a disjointed narrative as we pass from "The Origins of Toothache" to "Ancient Geography" or from "Coral Swamps and Deltas" to "The Evolution of Food Webs on Land" in succeeding sections.

With chapter 5 we reach the origins and evolution of man, and the development of the sections "Ice Age Mammals" and "Theories about the Ice Ages" leave man out almost completely, and their significance here may elude the reader. This is unfortunate, as it separates human history from the remarkable advances made in the study of ancient climates, illustrated by Halstead with an account of studies by Hays, Imbrie and Shackleton where the theory of Milankovitch for the cause of ice ages was strongly supported. In view of the geological orientation of this book, it might be noted that the original downfall of the Milankovitch theory was caused by its failure to fit with a very partial geological record, followed by the assumption that the theory (and not the geology) was at fault. But how (p.167) did "carbon 14 radiometric technique" contradict Milankovitch? We are told on the same page that his theory explained glacial cycles in the last 650,000 years, which seems a long span for any C14 date!

For the archaeologically minded reader, there are some errors in chapter 5 that will be noted. For example, the 'hearths' of the Escale Cave in France are not certainly the work of early man, and the site is a good deal older than the 70,000 years suggested. In the section "How Early Man Hunted", the conjectured illustration of man causing elephant stampedes into the swamp at Ambrona in Spain needs to be considered against the possibility that these are natural bone accumulations; see, for example, the death assemblage shown on p.41. Similarly, the supposed cannibalism of Neanderthal man gets too much consideration, and the modified bones and skulls at Middle Palaeolithic sites need to be re-examined as possible post-mortem bone mod-

ification by predators other than man, as described on p.55, at the Swartkrans limestone fissure in South Africa.

When we come to the section on the "Neolithic Revolution" I must again take issue. The fauna of Jarmo in Iraq is described as being of 'gazelle and wild ass', which it isn't; this must be the fauna of Ali Kosh in Iran. Neither of these early Neolithic villages has much of a 'hunter-gatherer way of life' as is implied. The seeds of wild plants found at Jarmo were convincingly shown by R. W. Dennell to be weeds of cultivation from crop-cleaning. So the large scale collecting of wild grain is an improbability, as agriculture was more likely the economic basis at *both* sites. Similarly, Jericho is hardly 'one of the best documented' Neolithic sites; the excavations were just too long ago for proper sampling to have been established. The Neolithic is said to have its birthplace at Jericho with 'buildings, pots and cloth', which overlooks the fact that the early Neolithic is widespread in the Near East, and as yet radiocarbon dating can hardly establish a chronological pre-eminence for any site; most are, of course, *pre*-pottery. It would be possible to debate these issues at some length, but there is not room here. The section on early man ends, rather oddly, with an account of the Piltdown Fraud. Considerable weight is given to the theory that the forgery was instigated by Professor W. J. Sollas.

Chapter 6 returns to a geological theme, and illustrates continental drift and plate tectonics. A short appendix considers living fossils, such as the Coelacanth, and imaginary ones, such as *Nessiteras*, the Loch Ness Monster. We are encouraged to compare its details with those of a Viking longship.

Archaeologists might find the diversity of scale objects in the photographs remarkable; we have feet, geological hammers, biros, humans, expanding tapes, trowels and coins (British pre-decimal issues were very big) and occasionally the more familiar black-and-white scales. Some microscopic objects (for example, p.113) have no scale, while others on the same page have. A few black-and-white photographs are too murky.

But on the whole, an informative and attractive book, a well-illustrated primer to a great deal of the past, and a good present for the enquiring young. Its only weaknesses lie in its scope, where no one writer can be equally authoritative in all fields.

TONY LEGGE

A History of Tower Hamlets, by Colm Kerrigan. *London Borough of Tower Hamlets*. 95pp, 47pl., index. £2.50 (plus 50p postage).

WITH THE INCREASING interest in the past, it is

good to note that the Libraries Department of the London Borough of Tower Hamlets has produced an introduction to the History of the Borough.

The book's 14 chapters are full of fragments of interest concerning the area from the east of the City of London to the banks of the River Lea, and from the Thames to Hackney Brook, but it would have been instructive to have included more maps, printed to a larger size.

Information on the earlier period is extremely brief. Prehistory is dismissed in 20 or so words and the whole of Roman/Saxon occupies only 2 1/2 pages but following each chapter is a bibliography of further reading and a list of places to visit.

The introduction asserts that the object of the book "is to provide a readable introduction" and the Preface refers to the "drawing together of the many threads" and in this regard the book is successful, but it is difficult to use for reference as the narrative does not lend itself to sub-titles and in consequence it is difficult to find a given fact.

It is disappointing that the Middle Ages are dealt with in only 3 1/2 pages with no reference to the Eastminster which occupied land near St. Katharine Docks; in fact the book is up to the 16th century by page 11. Certainly the area did not begin to expand until this period and the book includes more information on later development and change, but possibly the author felt that the interest of the reader would be centred on the latter 3 centuries, which are covered in 80 pages, or approximately 4/5 of the work. The method of treating the various aspects such as Religion, Housing, Education, Sport, etc., separately is to be commended.

Certainly a book such as this should be available for each area not already provided for, particularly one of such a high standard, but the provision of more and larger maps cannot be too strongly stressed.

MARSDEN ANDERSON

Living in the time of Jesus of Nazareth, by Peter Connolly. *Oxford University Press*, 1983. 96pp, all in colour, index. £6.95.

THIS EXCELLENT BOOK from the *rebuilding of the Past* series is exactly as the title states, a factual reconstruction of life in Judea, Galilee and the surrounding nations at the time of Jesus of Nazareth, and the pressures on it by the Roman Empire. It starts its historical countdown c. 100 B.C. when Judea was under the control of the Syrian, Antiochus IV. This is the time when the disputes among the Jews came to a head. When the Syrian king tried to change the Jewish religious practices to the more fashionable Greek forms, the Jews were eventually in revolt. It continues through the reign of Herod the Great and right up to uprising against the Romans, to the crushing of the Jewish resistance at Masada in 74 A.D. by the Roman armies.

The narrative is well set out and this is definitely not a boring history book. Once picked up, I believe you will find it difficult to put down again. Everyday life is covered, the complexity of the religious sects, the geography of the lands, the domestic, political and military problems. This book is based purely on historical, geographical and archaeological fact and contains no biblical stories as such, only references to the Bible to substantiate dates and records, and is therefore an ideal background guide to give the reader an insight into the problems of that era.

The book is extravagantly illustrated and suitable for young and old alike: each double page is headed with either the Ruler of the day or the main occurrence of interest pertaining to the Rulers, with an historical synopsis, illustrations and maps, plus separate notes on the geographical situation and the way of life at that time.

A very easy book to follow, full of facts and also an excellent reference book for any household.

GRAHAM PADDICK

Letters

DOCUMENT AUCTION

HAVING SPENT MANY years locating and recording documents in the course of local historical research, I was disturbed to read the article in the Winter 1983 issue, regarding historical documents for auction. While I am certain that no one would wish to deny this Foundation money for research, I wonder if the effect upon local historical research of the removal of such documents from the local context has been fully realised. It would have the same effect upon such research as digging up objects from archaeological sites and reburying them at random throughout the countryside would have upon archaeological research. As I am sure you are aware, both can provide valuable, irreplaceable evidence upon which the reconstruction of the past is based.

In conclusion, I would add that it is all the more disturbing to see such a request in a publication which reports, and is presumably devoted to, the study of the past, which employs both material and documentary evidence.

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This is one of several letters we have received on this subject, all expressing similar views—Editor.