

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.

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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.

GREATER LONDON ARCHAEOLOGY

ANDREW SELKIRK'S RESPONSE (*Mosaic*, Vol. 4, no. 15, Spring 1984) to the comments made by *Gromaticus* (written by myself in this instance, and not by the Editor) in the previous issue, deserves some reply.

Mr. Selkirk's tone of injured innocence is disingenuous. He claims to have "supported the units consistently for nearly 20 years" - a good deal longer than most have existed! Presumably he had forgotten his editorial in *CA* 57 which asserts, quite unambiguously, that "the unit system has failed and should be replaced as soon as possible" (*CA*, Vol 5, no 10, July 1977, 291).

He states that "there have been several editorials lavish in praise of the GLC" in this magazine. As far as I am aware the GLC has been praised only for its willingness - at long last - to make realistic contributions towards the cost of rescue archaeology in Greater London. This seems to me a fairly reasonable point of view for *the London Archaeologist* to hold.

He asserts that the GLC has a "totalitarian attitude towards archaeology: it wants to do everything itself." But Mr. Selkirk is well enough informed to know that the GLC *itself* does virtually nothing in the field of rescue archaeology. What it does do is to make grants available to other public bodies, principally the Museum of London and the Passmore Edwards Museum so that *they* can carry out the work.

Mr. Selkirk tells us that the GLC's funding of rescue archaeology is "huge" and "excessive". Well, large and welcome it may be, but the grant of £250,000 spread over Greater London still doesn't actually go all that far!

The situation in London, Mr. Selkirk informs us, is "anomalous" and he points out that many counties with a rich archaeological heritage get less and that Greater London has relatively few scheduled sites. Both these points are correct, but the lessons he draws from them are wrong. Firstly, if rescue archaeology cannot be undertaken adequately in the counties he cites, such as Dorset and Hampshire, then surely what needs to be done is to persuade the relevant local authorities to provide more funds, not to get the GLC to reduce their support for London. Secondly, less sites may be scheduled in Greater London than in many other parts of Britain, but this doesn't mean that fewer archaeological sites are threatened by redevelopment, a factor which might also be a reasonably important determinant of expenditure. In any case, how reliable a guide is the number of scheduled sites in an area for assessing the number and importance of sites there or elsewhere? Mr. Selkirk is probably aware that in Southwark neither the site of the Globe Theatre nor the medieval London Bridge are scheduled, although their locations can reasonably be estimated. It is surely feasible that the lack of visible remains in what is in general a heavily built up area is at least partly responsible for the small total of scheduled sites.

Much of what Mr. Selkirk tells us about the relative roles and relationships of what he terms 'professionals' and 'independents' is, to say the least, fanciful. What is his evidence that the former are "sucking up all the available sites"? I would be very surprised if independent investigation demonstrated that amateur groups alone would have the resources to handle areas the size of Merton and Beddington.

Also, is he really serious in his belief that "a strong and active local society" is a direct consequence of local authorities not making grants for archaeology, and vice-versa? Surely the strength, or otherwise, of local societies is likely to be the result of more complex factors, and to base a London-wide generalisation on two neighbouring but very different boroughs is naive nonsense.

At least Mr. Selkirk's solution to the problem of archaeology in the 32 London Boroughs has the virtue of simplicity. Everything beyond Southwark, Westminster and "the monastic fringes"

should be left to local societies. This would only be possible if such bodies could handle adequately such schemes as the extensive mineral extraction programmes in East, West and South London. These works destroy what remains of the once widespread prehistoric and later farming settlements on the gravels in much the same way as urban renewal removes the vestiges of Roman roadside settlements at Brentford and Enfield and medieval towns such as Kingston and Uxbridge.

Surely it is necessary only to point to the amount of unrecorded destruction in the recent past to reveal that to return to the situation of 10 or more years ago is no answer. Let me give one example: Uxbridge, reached last year, thanks to greater resources, by the Museum's West London Field Group (a combination of full- and part-time archaeologists). Here a series of prehistoric ditches running along the contours of the River Colne were traced as well as a sequence of medieval and Tudor buildings fronting the High Street. But a comprehensive search for the origins and development of Uxbridge is not likely to be easy. Virtually all of the centre of the town has been redeveloped in the last two decades, without the benefit of any archaeological work at all. There has been no active archaeological society despite Hillingdon's "refusal to support archaeology".

My own belief is that there is a considerable amount of archaeological work to do in Greater London and that the increased resources now available are a necessary pre-requisite for doing it. I also believe that these resources will provide for more opportunities than hitherto for amateurs to participate either institutionally or individually in what should be a collective and co-operative effort to obtain a better understanding of the area's history.

You will therefore understand how amazed I am by the attitude that Mr. Selkirk, himself a London resident, takes. It seems to me that he constantly understates the extent and complexity of the need; and that the naive solutions he proposes to what are largely imaginary problems are totally unnecessary.

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IN READING Andrew Selkirk's wounded rejoinder to *Gromaticus* in *LA* 4, 14 (Spring 1984), one might be forgiven for naivete in thinking that the editor of a national archaeological magazine - and hence to some extent an influential arbiter of current thinking on the subject - was actively campaigning against GLC funding for archaeology.

Whatever one might think of the GLC - and Mr. Selkirk's views *here* are not in doubt - it has at least taken its strategic responsibilities seriously, for which I would suggest praise and not carping criticism an appropriate response. Surely the skills (and column space) of the editor of *Current Archaeology* would be more usefully employed lobbying for an increase in funding for the 'very heart of British archaeology' than in seeking to amputate another section of its anatomy?

I should perhaps make it clear that, like Mr. Orton, I too am a member of the new 'London Suburban Unit' (*sic*), and thus also able to look forward to at least another year of unbridled luxury at ratepayers' expense.

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