

Books

The Social Foundations of Prehistoric Britain, by Richard Bradley. *Longmans Archaeological Series*, 1984. 195pp., 17 tables, 25 figs., index, bibliog. £6.95.

THIS BOOK IS A CLEAR and readable account of the social development of British society as the author sees it between the introduction of cereal agriculture and the Claudian invasion. It takes as its theme the rise of social 'elites' traced through the fine and elaborate artefacts and monuments of the day which these 'elites' used.

At an early stage Bradley declares himself an optimist; taking up Christopher Hawkes' theme he says that although technology and subsistence are the easier aspects of prehistoric society to decipher (and some schools of archaeology seem to consider these aspects exclusively) it is the social and religious organisation of these people which are potentially of most interest, because these would have been over-riding considerations in the lives of these ancient people themselves. An optimist indeed, but here is a lucid and comprehensive account of prehistoric Britain seen through the eyes of a processual prehistorian (one who looks at the underlying causes of change) strongly influenced by American social anthropology. No invasions here. The appearance of farming is ushered in by a trickle of settlers; 'beaker' pottery is not seen as the products of a new people, but a neolithic symbol of prestige and status widely recognised in Europe. The neolithic *American Express*. Indeed, one of the great strengths of the book is the way it explains the

starting point of future scholarship. It is a pity that individual points are not footnoted.

There is a more general issue which any book of this nature is bound to raise in view of current political controversy. What and where is London? Schofield is writing essentially about the City of London but inevitably discusses Westminster and those areas which by the seventeenth century were suburban. There are also illustrations of buildings such as Fulham Palace and Eltham Palace. Antiquaries have often written about the City's legal status and its ancient rights – usually at times when the authorities and the citizens were doing their utmost to destroy whatever physical remains of ancient times they could find – and the City in the seventeenth and nineteenth century resolutely set its face against any metropolitan reform which may conceivably have affected its 'ancient liberties'. But scholarship has recognised for many years that the realities of London are those of an area centering geographically upon but much wider than the City

complex arrays of pottery and other artefacts of the past not in terms of 'cultures' or new peoples but as the attempts by these ancient peoples to keep up with the neolithic Joneses. Certain areas particularly prosper at various times and these become centres of cultural influence in the period. Thus at one time Orkney is a major centre and its locally produced and rather dowdy Grooved Ware becomes the fashion for the whole of Britain. Nothing changes. Today every bride wants a dress like Lady Di's.

This search for fashionable prestige goods, the building of large sacred monuments continues through the Early Bronze Age, but around 1200 b.c. there is a major change. Rich burials disappear and so do the massive ritual tombs and temples. Bradley sees the bronze hoards and river finds of the succeeding period as the new expressions of power and wealth, intending not only to impress those witnessing such ritual depositions but possibly to control the supply of wealth in circulation by destroying some. It sounds like Bronze Age monetarism to me. Above all, the L.B.A. emerges not only as the warlike period often portrayed, but with a highly organised society controlling its social relations through trade and ritual.

Bradley sees the Iron Age as having much more fragmented communities, but more productive and decidedly more self-reliant and at the same time diffuse. Invasions here too are played down and even the classically recorded Belgic movement is seen as relatively unimportant. By the end of the Iron Age society is very complex indeed and power

itself. Until the sixteenth century this may not have been especially significant (though there is at least one recent book devoted entirely to medieval suburbs) but from then on the building of London is dependent on a discussion of what was going on outside as well as inside the City's boundary. Building types were as dependent on where they were built as when, and in 1644 John Evelyn identified a 'wooden part of the City'. The placing of plates of Lindsey House, Lincoln's Inn Fields, and Long Lane, Smithfield, next to each other provides a text-book example of both the similarities and the differences in near-contemporary buildings in different parts of London. Writers on pre-Great Fire London are bound to concentrate on the City, but it is salutary to remember that if the bill for the reform of metropolitan councils presently before parliament goes through then the appreciation of what comprises London, apparent to most Londoners from the sixteenth century onwards, will have little basis in the law, and Lincoln's Inn Fields might just as well have been in Berwick-upon-Tweed.

generally is in the hands of a few powerful rulers.

Bradley will not find universal agreement for his views. As one young archaeologist I know says, the only thing that archaeologists are agreed on, as regards social organisation in the prehistoric period is that the early societies had very little of it while the latest ones had an awful lot. But the book is never less than stimulating and provocative. Indeed, it is certainly the least dogmatic and probably the best account of its type yet written.

I would quibble with but a few issues. The book seems too pre-occupied with the affairs of lowland Britain as a whole and some generalisations he makes for Wessex for example clearly would not apply to other regions. For me the emphasis is too much on what happened and not why. Thus we are told that social 'élites' emerged in the third millennium b.c. in terms of artefacts and monuments, but never why this came about. Finally, despite Bradley's claim to aim at recognising aspects of prehistoric activity that would be important to the people themselves, religion and ritual take a back seat. Indeed, he takes the straight marxist line that religion is a mere adjunct to social organisation.

Of course, the book views the past in today's terms. Thus, unlike in works written ten or fifteen years ago, the past is seen not as a steady advance, but as a period with recessions and slumps like the one we are enduring now. Monetarism seems a favourite topic of the author too. Some indeed may quibble at the peculiar juxtaposition of notions from a wide variety of fields. And possibly the main weakness of the work is its lack of a unified aim or view. The work lacks dogma as a result, and rather than choosing between alternative views of the past, Bradley aims at a consensus view. A sort of SDP of archaeology.

The work is of Bradley's usual high scholarly standard. It has a useful index and an indispensable bibliography. However he never shrinks from difficult concepts and always assumes the reader has some knowledge of the subject. It is decidedly not a work for the beginner, but all who work or just have general interest in the period discussed will benefit and gain insight from this fine work. It is essential reading for all serious students and scholars. Personally I found the first half of the book so authoritative and stimulating that it was impossible not to read it at a single sitting. STEPHEN PIERPOINT

Croydon Airport Flypast, by Peter Cooksley. *London Borough of Sutton Libraries and Arts Services*, 1984. 20 colour pl., £4.50.

CROYDON AIRPORT FLYPAST is likely to appeal more to those whose interests are in individual aeroplanes rather than aircraft types. It is an ambitious work, written by Peter Cooksley and

published by the London Borough of Sutton Libraries and Arts Services, as one of a series on the history of Croydon Airport. This is a very commendable project which, frankly, rather disappointed me. I found the style to be moderate – surprising when you realise that the author has some dozen aviation titles to his credit. The introduction has lost a line (presumably at the printers) and, to nit-pick in extremis, there is a smattering of unnecessary capital letters. There are twenty reviews, each of which gets two pages – one of text and the other showing a coloured illustration. Each type has an association with Croydon Airport. The coloured illustrations are excellent and the text is interesting enough when it sticks to its subject. Unfortunately, it tends to wander. For instance, the final review is of the French Druine D.31 Turbulent. Of the page's 26 lines, the poor old Turbulent gets two, and they are almost incidental. The rest of the text is concerned with an air show staged by the publishers in May 1980. And the Tiger Moth review deals solely with the tribulations of converting three of these lovely ladies to resemble German types for the film *Lawrence of Arabia*. I think that £4.50 is a bit steep for this paperback which was a good idea but, in my opinion, didn't quite come off. JOHN HOBBS

The Koptos Lions, by Barbara Adams and Richard Jaeschke. *Milwaukee Public Museum, Contributions in Anthropology and History* no. 3, 1984. 32pp., 20 figs., £4.95 (available from Petrie Museum of Egyptian Archaeology at University College, London).

SINCE 1982, a pair of limestone lions have guarded the entrance to the Provost's Office in University College, London. The lions were acquired by the Petrie Museum in 1980; their discovery, historical background and conservation are described in this well-presented monograph.

The lions were found in 1894 by Flinders Petrie at Koptos, a predynastic site in Upper Egypt. They were subsequently shipped to London but had been lost until Barbara Adams discovered them, by now in fragments, in the stores of the Wellcome Collection.

Conservation and display of the lions were undertaken by Richard Jaeschke. Within two years, reconstructions of the several thousand fragments were completed. He describes his system for sorting and joining the fragments, perhaps the most difficult stage of his work. Full details of his method and materials are accompanied by clear photographs.

The publication includes a summary of Petrie's work at Koptos, detailed descriptions of the lions, and microfossil investigation of the limestone. In the final section, Adams discusses evidence for the date of the lions, presents a catalogue of contemporary lions in the round, and speculates on the symbolism of lions of this period. HELEN GANIARIS