

Books

Excavations of the Roman and Saxon site at Orpington, by Susann Palmer. *London Borough of Bromley*, 1984. 67 pp., 1 pl., 8 figs., £4.

THIS REPORT is mainly of the excavation in 1971-80 of a Roman building, associated features and Saxon cemetery at Orpington, and includes information on other work in the area.

The excavation was characterised by its use of sondage (over two dozen small trenches and slots in an area 70m × 70m [230ft × 230ft]), and four layers were recorded (pp. 3-4):-

Layer 1: mainly containing Victorian material.

Layer 2: mainly containing Saxon material (average thickness 0.45-0.6m [1½-2ft]).

Layer 3: mainly containing Roman material (average thickness 0.6-0.9m [2-3ft]).

Layer 4: mainly natural silt and greensand.

It is reported that "there were no visible sub-divisions or sub-layers within this Roman layer, ruling out the possibility for using the evidence of this nature to establish a chronology of site development within the Roman period" (p. 4), although "Layer 3 [Roman deposits] was found to be quite thick here, up to 4 or 5 ft ... and much better stratified" (p. 4). This led the pottery analyst to comment "No detailed stratigraphical breakdown appears to have been recognised within the Roman Layer 3. ... in the circumstances the whole collection has been treated as unstratified." (p. 31).

The interpretation of the remains is vague, possibly due to the apparent method of excavation. For example, "... Room 2 was possibly the *tepidarium*. Most of the loom-weights found on the site came from this room, suggesting that it also served as a work-room for the ladies of the house" (pp. 8-9). This seems a strange combination of functions, and we are told little more of these "quantities of fragmentary loomweights" except that they were made mostly of fossiliferous oolitic limestone (p. 26), nor whether Room 2 served as a work-room and *tepidarium* at different dates or at the same time.

The finds reports, which are mainly in appendices, convey little useful information. Appendix 1 is on the Roman pottery; appendix 2 is on tiles; appendix 3 is a lengthy report on a chemical analysis; and appendix 4 is a list of Roman small finds, ordered by year of discovery. As an example, entries for 1974 include "Two flat round pebbles, approx same size from area of hearth - ?perhaps used as counters. Bronze disc with hole, diam 35mm. Iron pin." (p.

55). Appendix 5 is a list of coins, of which under half are identified. Appendix 6 is a list of querns "millstone grit or imported lava. Querns - T32 (3 pieces), T17BL3 (3 pieces), B78 (3 pieces unloc), T21L3 (outside wall), T16L2 (2 pieces)" (p. 59). No further details of the querns are given. Appendix 7 is a specialist report on one inhumation, with no explanation of why only this particular inhumation was treated in this way. Also, no details of the date of the inhumation, or of its accompanying grave goods, are given. Reports on finds also occur in the discussion of the excavation, but some of the few cross-references are spurious. For example, in the Iron Age section it is stated that "One of the brown sherds is a rim with finger indentation (see pottery report)" (p. 6), but there is no mention of this in the pottery report. Similarly, Samian stamps referred to in the description of the excavation (p. 15) are not mentioned in the Samian report (pp. 36-7).

Fig. 1 (location map) is a curious collage. Fig. 2 (site plan) shows several graves, a pit and a ditch which seem to be from an earlier excavation - what was excavated in 1971-80 is not at all clear. Fig. 3 is a stylised plan of the building, and Figs. 4, 5 and part of 6 are illustrations of pottery, despite the statement about pottery type-specimens that "... owing to restrictions of space, it is unfortunately not possible to illustrate them" (p. 36). These illustrations are not correlated with the pottery report, nor catalogued, so one can only guess at their identification. The caption to Fig. 5 is *Pots from the May Avenue cremation burials*; the relationship of this site to the main excavation is unclear. The rest of Figs. 6, 7 and 8 contain drawings of other finds. Captions to the illustrations of finds are poor, and in the list of small finds (appendix 4), an entry is merely asterisked if illustrated, necessitating a search through the illustrations. For example, "pieces of wooden platter" are supposed to be illustrated (p. 53). These may occur on Fig. 6, but it is difficult to be certain: the caption is *Items from various areas of the excavation*. Other figures remain totally unexplained. A complete necklace of jet and glass beads, illustrated on Fig. 8 *Items from May Avenue burials*, is not discussed in the text.

While it is always good to see a site published, and to see the publication supported by a local authority, the report fails to do justice to the site. Although the amounts of text (16,000 words) and illustrations are less than in *the L.A.*, the report has more than twice as many pages and costs more than four times as much.

LESLEY ADKINS
ROY A. ADKINS

Family History Research, Vol. 1 'The French Connection', by Patrick Delaforce. *Regency Press Ltd.*, 1983. 223 pp., 17 pl., £4.95.

THE FIRST PART of this book consists of 56 pages of useful information, and lists many sources of material for research into family history and genealogy.

The second part is a fascinating account of the author's endeavours in this field. Starting as an amateur with what he knew of his own English wine-shipping family, by hard work, persistence and 'a lot of luck' he has discovered almost one thousand years of its history. Although the book is sub-titled *The French connection*, there are American, Canadian and Australian connections as well as French Huguenot. There is considerable sociological interest as well as the genealogical. The Delaforce family produced courtiers, silkweavers, pawnbrokers, fishmongers, convicts and smugglers. The London Delaforces has connections with several London churches and Trade Guilds, and there is a good deal of incidental detail about their occupations and working conditions.

Each chapter has notes on the sources and methods of research used for a particular area. This will be appreciated by other aspiring genealogists, who will enjoy this entertaining and informative book.

JOYCE STEVENSON

The Golden Age of Anglo-Saxon Art 966-1066, edited by Janet Backhouse, D. H. Turner and Leslie Webster. *British Museum Publications Ltd.*, 1984. 216pp., 32 colour pl., c 275 b&w illus., bibliog. £10.00 (£7.50 from the British Museum Shop).

ANYONE WHO FOUND the opportunity to visit the British Museum's exhibition of the same name last winter will be well aware of this book and its contents, for it is very much 'the book of the exhibition', a catalogue of the same type as the Arts Council's recent *English Romanesque Art* – which it closely resembles. The exhibition brought together for the first time from many institutions, British and foreign, over 270 of the best manuscripts, ivories, metalwork and sculpture produced in England in the 10th and 11th centuries; the book does the same, each object being given detailed description and discussion, with its own bibliography, very nearly all being illustrated, many in colour – and the book would be worth its cost merely for the fine reproductions of those extraordinary illuminated manuscripts and books, complex, lively and above all colourful, that were such a feature of the exhibition. The catalogue entries occupy by far the bulk of the book, together with short introductory essays by individual scholars on aspects of the period

and on particular types of material – for the exhibits are classified by material, an academic approach best suited to both the exhibition and the catalogue.

For it should be made clear what the exhibition was (and indeed was not) about. It was, as its title indicates, an exhibition of 'art'. It was *not* an attempt, as was the earlier British Museum exhibition *The Vikings*, to portray the way of life of a whole culture or period; it could therefore avoid the conflict – which was evident in the earlier exhibition – between the need to display objects in their own right and to display them in context as illustrations of their social and economic environment. The term 'art', however, is not defined in the catalogue; it seems to be taken to refer to the sort of material we would today term 'decorative arts'. Homely, undecorated artefacts are omitted – wisely; the few pieces of medieval pottery included in the *Romanesque Art* exhibition last year looked uncomfortably out of place. Yet there were other more important omissions from the exhibition, caused one by the sheer size, one by the perishability of the material. The exhibition could illustrate architecture only by plans and photographs. Richard Gem provides for the catalogue an excellent brief account of 10th-11th century architecture; yet it is perhaps the least satisfactory section in the book, for it lacks the solid foundation of a compendium of illustrative examples that the catalogue entries furnish for the other contributors. The other omission is the decorated needlework for which Anglo-Saxon England was internationally renowned – not represented in the exhibition, and by a single illustration in the catalogue.

This book, then, reflects the understandable limitations of the exhibition. Its chief value lies in its catalogue entries, and these, largely the work of Leslie Webster, Cathy Haith, D. H. Turner and Janet Backhouse, are of uniformly high standard. It seems invidious to single out any particular contribution; however, Marion Archibald's chapter on coinage, just 22 pages, deserves mention as a model of clarity and conciseness.

This publication should not be compared with such works on Anglo-Saxon art as those of T. D. Kendrick and, more recently, Sir David Wilson, which survey the whole field and attempt to trace developments and schools of art; it is, rather, complementary. It is not a book to be read straight through; it should instead be on the bookshelf of anyone interested in the Anglo-Saxon period, to be referred to for authoritative accounts of a wide selection of the most important products of 'one of the greatest periods of English art' – a claim for the period which both exhibition and catalogue have done much to vindicate.

JOHN CLARK

Anglo-Saxon Towns in Southern England, ed. Jeremy Haslam. *Phillimore & Co. Ltd.*, 1984. 429pp., 129 figs., bibliogs., index. £20.

THIS IS A STRANGE concoction. Fifteen authors contribute fourteen essays on Anglo-Saxon towns in eight counties to the south and west of the Thames, and on six individual towns including Gloucester and London. The basic approach is archaeological, but a good deal of reference is made to documentary sources, to the evidence of modern or recent street patterns and other aspects of urban topography, to parish boundaries, and to the arrangement of rural estates in relation to central places. This is as it should be, but all too often in reading the book one feels that each of these categories of evidence should have been handled with greater competence and understanding, and even on those occasions when the arguments seem sound one wishes that the insight had been present to draw conclusions of more than antiquarian significance. Yet the book contains a great deal of useful information gathered from awkward bibliographical locations or from unpublished material. The use of the latter source, however, causes problems of its own, since conclusions based on unpublished excavations (e.g. London) or unfinished studies of estate patterns (e.g. Devon and Wiltshire) have not been fully worked out, nor does it seem that their validity has been subjected to serious consideration.

Before using the book as an introduction to particular places or as a quarry for information, readers should be warned that it contains an unusually high proportion of error. Wrong internal cross-references abound. One essay cites several references which do not appear in its bibliography. Apart from obvious typos, there are transmutations which could mislead; thus in one essay alone we find shop for ship, *selde* for *sele*, and Theobald for Theodore. One transmutation is to be treasured: Golder-Egger for the editor of the *Vita Willibaldi*, Holder-Egger (alphabetized under G); one wishes that it could be treated as evidence for an editorial sense of humour. But the root of error goes deeper. An author who considers the western suburb of Winchester during the 11th century has paid little attention to his source, for he writes of a medieval church of St. Paul (it was a 19th century foundation) and unconvincingly characterises the occupational structure of the area on the basis of property ownership. In another essay a late 10th century account of recent miracles associated with a saint who had died in 861 is cited (from a secondary source) as evidence for conditions in the 9th century. Even more alarming are the possibilities which, after a page or so and without further evidence or argument, turn into probabilities, and the preval-

ence (particularly concerning Wiltshire and Devon) of the form of 'argument' by which a cluster of possibilities is made to lead to a certain conclusion. Some essays are free of these faults and in others they are only intermittently present, but to provide a guide through this minefield would take more space than is available here. That such a guide is necessary seriously limits the value of what, if the basic plan had been competently carried out, would have been a useful course book for students. The editor has failed in his responsibility to his authors as well as to his readers.

As an approach to the subject of Anglo-Saxon towns the book does not make much progress, although it does illustrate the difficulties, arising from the fragmentary nature of the evidence, of attempting any wide-ranging discussion of towns as such in this period. A more fruitful approach implicit in the interesting essays on Dorset and Berkshire, takes those places or settlements for which it is possible to identify or suggest any specialised function (not always straightforward, as the piece on Hampshire points out) and then goes on to consider the society and exchange system within which they operated. In some other parts of the book the search for the proto-urban settlement, or for the 'bundle of urban characteristics' of which so much has been heard in recent years, becomes truly burdensome and restrictive. This apart, there is not much evidence of a conceptual framework within which the discussion takes place. From time to time there are references to a development from a 'redistributive' to a 'market' economy, particularly in the more scholastic passages of the two papers contributed by university lecturers in medieval archaeology. Fortunately, neither of these authors seems convinced of the value of this distinction in the context, but nor do they really engage with the issues involved. In general, the lack of both a deductive approach and of a concern with function rather than form means that many of the discussions, particularly of the topographical evidence, lack conviction. Some papers have more traditional virtues. A workmanlike piece on Kent brings some of the smaller towns into focus. There are flashes of light on London (but also some terrible tangles over chronology and structures). Exeter comes across well, though with perhaps an excess of patriotism.

There has been a long interval between composition (c 1979-80) and publication. Some information is thus out of date. The author of the piece on Bath appears, from his postscript, to have renounced his contribution. Some authors have managed to update their essays, but others have not, so that there are some inconsistencies. But its occasional outdatedness is not the real weakness of the volume.

DEREK KEENE