

# Books

**Atlas of Prehistoric Britain**, by John Manley. Photographs by David Lyons. *Phaidon Press Ltd.*, 1989. 160 pp., 40 figs. (incl. 27 maps), 101 pls., index. £22.50.

FOR AN ATLAS, this book has very few maps indeed, and most of these are distribution maps with scattered place-names. It is not the sort of reference book for looking up the location of sites. In fact, a far greater proportion of the book consists of photographs, both colour and black-and-white, most of which are very attractive, although a few do concentrate more on the view than on the archaeology. The presentation of the book is good, even though the term *atlas* has been used rather loosely in the title.

The theme of the text is a general guide to prehistoric Britain, and the author gives equal attention to England, Ireland, Scotland and Wales. It is well written, jargon-free, and presents a refreshingly open-minded, thoughtful, and unbiased account of the subject. Much interesting and informative material is brought together, some of which has not appeared in a book of this kind before. Without footnotes and detailed further reading, it is of limited use to students, but it is a welcome contribution for the general reader and a good introduction to Britain's prehistory.

Lesley & Roy Adkins

**Limekilns and Limeburning**, by Richard Williams. *Shire Publications*, 1989. 32 pp., many pl. and diagrams, £1.75.

THE AUTHOR, an active member of both the Surrey Archaeological Society and the Surrey Industrial History Group, begins this small but highly informative addition to the *Shire Album* range by describing the long history of limeburning. Lime kilns have been found dating from 2450 BC in Mesopotamia, but it was the Romans (who else!) who introduced the process of burning chalk or limestone to Britain where their demand for lime mortar for building was extensive. The use of lime as a fertilizer was well known at this time, although it was more usual to dress the fields with unburnt chalk, a process known as chalking or marling. From medieval times onward the demand for lime and lime products for building purposes and agriculture grew and the trade of limeburner emerged as a specialist occupation.

The booklet deals with the chemistry involved in burning the raw calcium carbonate to form lime, as well as the agrochemistry of soil improvement. Lime kilns have come in various shapes, types and sizes, and

their construction and siting are discussed as are the loading arrangements, types of fuel and sources of raw material. The book contains many photographs and diagrams, and the author is to be congratulated on packing a great deal of information into a small, easy to read, inexpensive volume.

Rod Le Gear

**Aspects of Saxo-Norman London: I Building and Street Development**, by Valerie Horsman, Christine Milne and Gustav Milne. *London Middlesex Archaeol Soc Special paper* No 11, 1988. 123 pp., 111 figs., French and German summaries, bibliog., index. £12.95.

WHEN A FEW years ago the Public Record Office published a booklet to celebrate the novocentenary of the writing of Domesday Book, they included a montage to show a typical settlement of the period. In the background stood the church of Rothwell, Lincolnshire, but rather incongruously in the foreground were placed the buildings of the Suffolk village of West Stow, which pre-dated Domesday Book by four hundred years. The caption to the reconstruction acknowledged this anachronism, but said that West Stow probably looked much like an 11th-century settlement.

The cover of the volume discussing the results of excavation in Saxo-Norman London by the DUA also shows a reconstruction. But this, by contrast, is based for the first time in England on the discovery of a substantial number of buildings from the Saxo-Norman period. But the naive child's picture-book illustration on the front cover is unrepresentative of the contents of the book, which do not make bed-time reading. The book begins with a summary of the methods of excavation and dating used. The sites, which all lie within the Billingsgate and Cheapside areas, are summarised and the buildings catalogued. Details of the structural methods used and the internal fittings are discussed. Finally, the reconstruction of two sample buildings and the implications for the development of London are considered.

The excavations produced few complete building plans. Either later activity had destroyed the structures, the earliest post-Roman buildings within the City, of their full extent lay outside the excavated areas. The importance of the discoveries lies not in individual structures, but in the cumulative results. Some of the details found were, however, particularly exciting. The door from Pudding Lane surviving as a woodstain and corroded iron fittings, and the oven in a building from Well Court surrounded by scorched

brickearth, both very effectively illustrated in colour, added important information to the understanding of the houses.

The model for the DUA volume is a catalogue and discussion of Viking and early medieval buildings from Dublin. The water-logged conditions in the Irish capital allowed much better preservation than in London, and the DUA team draw on the results from excavations elsewhere to fill in some details. There is an important contrast between the relative uniformity of buildings in Dublin and the variety of building types and methods used in London. The English capital did not have a building tradition of its own, but drew on outside influences in an eclectic manner. The expansion of London during the Saxo-Norman period drew in newcomers who brought with them regional traditions and building techniques contributing to the variety of building types.

This volume is a major contribution to our understanding of the buildings of Domesday England. It provides vindication for the DUA approach to publication, bringing together a comparative group of sites and structures with a well-balanced discussion. It is, however, a book that demands, and will repay, critical usage, especially as the results of further excavations in London and elsewhere are brought to publication.

Mark Gardiner

**Principles of archaeological stratigraphy**, by Ed Harris. *Academic Press* 1989 (2nd edition). 170 pp., 68 figs., bibliog., index. £17.50.

IN READING this second edition, it came as a surprise to be reminded that the first edition was published as recently as 1979. Harris matrices have become such an intrinsic part of archaeology that it is already hard to remember a time when we did not have them. It seems, however, that elsewhere there has been ignorance of, and resistance and reaction to, the stratigraphic methods proposed, and the book has been re-written in part to counter these views.

The author has also taken the opportunity to re-organise his material, bringing together related topics (e.g. the Laws of Archaeological Stratigraphy), thus giving a more structured feel to the book. Some additional material describes applications of Harris' stratigraphical approach since the first edition was published, although much more is promised in *Practices of Archaeological Stratigraphy*, which must be eagerly awaited.

To someone with a mathematical background, the principles involved are simply common sense, and criticism of this book must be directed at what it does not say. More discussion of the practical difficulties

encountered in the field would have been useful for, as Martin Carver has said "not all sites consist of neat sequences of stratigraphic boxes", and guidance on coping with indistinct edges to contexts would have been valuable. Another useful addition would have been some consideration of site formation processes, which might lead to another type of context, the 'in situ transformation' (creating a new context *in situ*, e.g. by ploughing).

However, one can appreciate the author's wish to keep the book short and the price down, and maybe such problems will be discussed in *Practices*. The publisher seems to have carried this wish rather too far, by printing on very thin paper, so that diagrams frequently 'show through'. Misprints are few, but I relished the 'eavesdrop gully' (p. 86) – every site should have one. To sum up, this book is a classic and indispensable to the excavator. If you didn't buy the first edition, buy this one.

Clive Orton

**Science-based dating in archaeology**, by M J Aitken. *Longman Group UK Ltd.*, 1989. 274 pp., 90 illus., bibliog., index. £22 (hardback), £12 (paperback).

UNTIL NOW, if you wanted to read about scientific dating techniques, you had to track down a whole series of publications, one for each topic. Tony Clark had published an excellent introduction as an *IFA Special Paper*, but for the detail one had to search topic by topic.

This book certainly meets a need and fills a gap in the market. It has chapters on climatic frameworks (rather oddly including dendrochronology); radiocarbon (2); potassium-argon, uranium series and fission tracks; luminescence; electron spin resonance; amino acid racemization and 'other chemical methods'; and magnetic dating. There is a three-level approach: a general text, more detailed points in notes at the end of each chapter, and very full references. Even the general parts do not pull their scientific punches, and the general reader may find them heavy going, but rewarding. Although written by a scientist, this book should give archaeologists a healthy scepticism about their 'scientific' dates, as there are full accounts of the 'wrinkles' likely to be encountered in each technique.

It would be impertinent to comment on the purely scientific aspects, which carry a heavy responsibility as they are bound to be taken as 'gospel' by archaeologists. The presentation is generally very good, although the use of a large typeface for equations is intrusive and unnecessary, tending to divorce them from their textual context. One could quibble about the balance of the book (e.g. 12 pages on dendrochronology and 60+ on radiocarbon; and between

scientific and archaeological problems), but there is no doubt that this book will be essential for many classes of reader – students, field archaeologists, dating specialists – and an fascinating read for those with just a general interest in the subject.

Clive Orton

**Catus: a child in Roman Britain AD 80**, by T. Woodbridge. *Tempus Reparatum Archaeological and Historical Associates Ltd.*, 1989. 28pp, illus., £5.95.

THIS BOOK is the second in a series written for children of primary school age, in which fiction and archaeological findings are interestingly blended together. It introduces the reader to Britain not long after the conquest by the Romans in AD 43. Catus, a young British boy, becomes a slave in the household of one of the first Roman clients, King Cogidubnus. Through his eyes we see the impact of the Roman higher standard of living and way of life on the less sophisticated British.

The Roman story begins in what we now call Fishbourne Palace. The illustrations draw very strongly on the archaeological excavations undertaken

by Professor Cunliffe in the 1960s – including the gardens, mosaics, plan of the palace and even a little ring found during the digging. When the action moves to Bath, it is no surprise to find that the beautiful head of Sulis Minerva is also featured. The Romans are portrayed as kind and tolerant and the British (through Catus' eyes) as amazed, entranced and overwhelmed. This must prejudice the reader in the academic debate of how the Romans were perceived by the British: whether as invaders and exploiters or as settlers and partners. However, this picture might be refined further by later books in the series.

All the eight-to-ten year old children that read the book enjoyed it, and when told that such a "palace" existed, were eager to visit it and see it for themselves. The illustrations were good and enhanced the story, though the print was small and would prove a difficulty for poorer readers. Such considerations are important if the editors wish the series to be widely used in schools. Otherwise it is a splendid book that fills a gap for archaeological books in schools.

Dodie Brooks

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## Letter

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### Lighthouses

NICHOLAS FUENTES' article 'A lighthouse for Roman London?' (*LA* 6 no. 8) contains a number of very misleading statements about the Bell and Lanthorn Towers at the Tower of London which cannot go unchallenged.

The Bell Tower is a formidable structure whose construction is reasonably well documented to the beginning of the reign of Richard I, when the Pipe Roll of 1190 records the expenditure of no less than £2881 1s 10d on works at the Tower. It has long been suggested that the position of the tower corresponds to that of a Roman riverside bastion; more recently I have indicated that there is a build-up of material immediately to the north, which apparently pre-dates the extant structure and which may, therefore, account for the abnormally high level at which the ground floor chamber is found. Before rushing to compare the situation with Roman lighthouses at Leptis Magna and Alexandria, however, more attention should be paid to the extant fabric. The putlog holes which run through the walling of the ground floor chamber are clearly integral with the medieval masonry, and it is difficult to see how the external offsets at this level could be Roman. As for the fact that the lower part of the tower is polygonal, while the upper is circular, I suggest this has more to do with the introduction of cylindrical forms into military architecture during the late 12th century, rather than the silly idea that the medieval builders were trying to imitate the design of a Roman lighthouse.

In an effort to wring a *pharos* out of the unsuspecting 13th-century Lanthorn Tower, Mr Fuentes makes much of the fact that it boasted a polygonal stair turret, which he calls a 'vice' (the vice, in fact, is the newel staircase within the turret). Gleaning information from a single plan of the Tower dated 1682, a totally spurious argument

is concocted whereby the turret is treated as a structurally separate element with suggested Roman lighthouse ancestry.

Mr Fuentes describes the turret as having enormous dimensions – 'some 23ft (7m) across' – whereas a plan and profile prepared in 1715 (*PRO WORKS* 31/69) shows that it was in fact 9ft 6in wide and contained a vice some 6ft in diameter. Moreover, detailed Ordnance plans dating from the 18th century, in particular a survey by the eminent draughtsman Clement Lemprière dated December 1731 (*PRO WORKS* 31/182 & 183), demonstrate that the turret itself was only to be found above the roof level of the contemporary, and adjoining, medieval chamber block on the west side of the tower. Thus there exists no evidence for an octagonal feature, Roman or medieval, at ground level on the site from the early 13th century onwards.

Finally, the height of the Lanthorn Tower was greatly over-emphasised, solely on the basis of Wyngaerde's mid 16th-century panorama. Although Wyngaerde's view is unquestionably a valuable historical document, the accuracy of its scale and proportions needs to be treated with caution (note the turrets of St Thomas' Tower are depicted as larger than the twin towers of the Byward Gate, whereas in reality they are only about a third of the size). The Lanthorn Tower was indeed tall, 63ft to the battlements, but to claim that it 'strongly' challenged the height of the White Tower is plainly absurd.

In short, Mr Fuentes has not provided a molecule of evidence that either the Bell or Lanthorn Towers originated as Roman *pharoi*, and he would do well to remember that hypotheses, like lighthouses, need foundations if they are to stand.

Geoffrey Parnell

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