Books

The Rebirth of Towns in the West, Richard Hodges and Brian Hobley (eds.). *C.B.A. Research Report no. 68*, 1988. 135 pp., 69 figs., bibliogs., index. £29 paperback.

THIS IS A review of current research into how, when and why there was a rebirth of towns between 700 and 1050, based on papers presented to an international conference held at the Museum of London in March 1986. It contains 17 papers in five parts: Europe, Italy, Gaul, Scandinavia and Britain, the authors being from Germany, Sweden, Italy, France, Netherlands, the USA and Britain. Each paper ends with a useful bibliography making the whole work a very good reference aid.

With the enormous growth of excavations in the post-war years, archaeology constitutes a substantive resource for re-examining the history of this enigmatic period. Ten years ago the historic importance of Ipswich, for example, was barely known, but systematic rescue excavation has revealed that Ipswich was founded in the early 7th century with a street system that has largely survived to the present day. Similarly, due to excavations since 1946, it has been

shown that the origin of Hamwic (Southampton) began around the start of the 8th century on the west bank of the River Itchen downstream from its Roman predecessor of *Clausentum*.

In Chester, excavation has revealed a vivid picture of widespread survival of Roman buildings and their influence on the development and plan of the medieval city. The street pattern and principal elements of the present city considerably reflect the influence of its origins.

In Italy evidence from two cities, Rome and Naples, is discussed and suggests that the pattern of events in Rome consisted of an irregular decline in the 5th and 6th centuries, leaving only about 10% of its population, followed by a period of stagnation in the 7th and 8th centuries. A revival occurred, gaining momentum in the last quarter of the 8th century, but the difference between the Imperial metropolis and its Dark Age successor could hardly have been greater. The case of Naples is less clear, and until more evidence from archaeology is available, it may be thought that it was a predominantly agricultural community.

55-57 Marylebone High Street TQ 2836 8200 DGLA (Bruno Barber) MAY90

A test pit revealed a wall, which may well be part of the 13th c Marylebone Manor House, or one of its post-medieval rebuilds. Demolition debris from the soil layers shows that medieval and post-medieval structures stood on, or close to, the site.

Paddington Goods Yard, W2 TQ 2260 8140 DGLA (Jim Hunter) PGY90

Excavation revealed only 19th c pottery dumps.

Apartment 29, St James Palace, SW1 TQ 2936 8100 DGLA (Carol Williams) HRH90

Two areas were examined in Apartment 29, the location of an excavation in 1989. In the cloakroom a sleeper wall was removed from the fireplace in the SE corner to reveal the original palace brickwork. A larger area was examined in the kitchen; about 4.0m (13ft) square was cleared for the insertion of a drain. Under the modern floor the joists had been laid on a flagstone pavement which seemed to have been re-laid. Several of the flagstones were removed, enabling the underlying stratigraphy to be recorded. A posthole and demolition debris were removed from the drain trench including greensand fragments which are thought to be rubble from the medieval hospital that stood on the site before the palace.

406-408 Strand, WC2 TQ 3038 8071 DGLA (Chris Thomas) STR90

No archaeological survival.

36-48 Wigmore Street, W1 TQ 2855 8137 DGLA (Gordon Malcolm) WOT90

Undated archaeological deposits were observed undisturbed under basement slab. 16th c pottery was identified.

ESSEX

Abbey Church, Waltham Abbey TL 3814 0065 Waltham Abbey Historical Society & West Essex Archaeological Group (Peter Huggins)

An excavation to establish the form of the E ends of the two pre-Conquest stone churches. The E end of church 2 (of Brixworth type) ended in a rectangular chancel/sanctuary. Church 3, that of Harold and dedicated *c* 1060, had transepts and crossing but no E extension. The internal details of church 2 were presumably altered to a simple nave arcade, the old foundations being used where possible. The chancel and altar of church 2 could have remained in use while church 3 was being built around it.

Abbey Gardens, Waltham Abbey TL 382 007 WAHS (Ken Bascombe)

Examination of parchmarks in the scheduled AM during the latter part of the hot summer (the culmination of many months of dry weather) enabled an addition to be made to the E end of the Abbey church as planned by Charlton and Borenius in 1938 (VCH Essex V, 172). A retrochoir 10.7m (35ft) E to W, with a possible chapel and tomb at the N end, and an E chapel 13m (42ft) long and (if symmetrical about the central axis of the church) 4.2m (14ft) wide, with a probable chapel or vestry on the N side, were indicated. The retrochoir may have been part of the original building begun in 1177 and dedicated in 1242, since the N wall of the retrochoir ran on as the N wall of the presbytery for about 30m (100ft). In addition, the E walls of the choir aisles in the published plan have very narrow foundations. The foundation published as the E wall of the presbytery is now seen as that of an altar or reredos. The chapel was presumably a Lady Chapel and may be a later addition. Its discovery extends the overall length of the medieval church to *c* 151m (495ft).

Baptist Church, Waltham Abbey TL 3810 0050 WAHS/WEAG (Peter Huggins)

An excavation to check the line of a ditch surrounding *Eldeworth*, the old enclosure, of 4 acres (1½ha), mentioned in 1235. A C14 date for vegetation, just to the N at Church Street, calibrated to the Middle Bronze Age. A ditch was found where expected, but it had been dug out in medieval times. A piece of stamped Saxon pottery of Briscoe type A 5ai may date to the Pagan period.

A though-provoking discussion comments that 'we have tended to give primacy to England rather than setting it in its European context'. That this is not a purely English failing is noted by citing French and German historians who even ignore the evidence of parts of their respective countries.

There are four papers in regard to Gaul, the first discussing the continuity of Roman *civitates* as illustrated by the interrelation of cathedral and *palatium*, sets out three aspects of urban topography, i.e. the walls, the *praetoria* and the churches. The others deal with (a) the rebirth of towns in the Rhineland, (b) ten years of excavation in Dorestad and (c) the early medieval town of Tours.

A single paper presents current research into Swedish proto-towns, settlements from the period before the development of towns in the high Middle Ages, and concludes with the comment that research into Sweden's earliest towns and specialised communities is continuing with the processing and publication of the results from early excavations, but the time has now come for a new input in the form of new excavation.

The book provides a wealth of information over a wide spectrum in a readily accessible form.

Marsden Anderson

Saxon Secrets in Surrey, by Rob Poulton. *Peter E. Firth and Co. on behalf of Esso*, 1990. 20pp., 5 maps, many illus.
THIS POPULAR booklet has been produced by Esso to publicise the discoveries made during the excavations which preceded work on their new offices at Leatherhead. An Anglo-Saxon cemetery was first discovered and excavated here by Lowther in 1927. The site is generally known as the Goblin Works after the former vacuum cleaner factory. A spearhead from an Early Anglo-Saxon burial was found in 1974 and excavations by Rob Poulton for Surrey County Council before construction work in 1985 and 1989 located 47 more burials.

The idea of a popular publication to explain the excavations is particularly praiseworthy. The dramatic title, the use of colour photographs, illustrations and plans make it immediately accessible. The text describing Saxon Surrey makes more demands on readers not conversant with archaeological thinking. It is derived in part from Poulton's contribution to *The Archaeology of Surrey to 1540* with only a few concessions to the wider audience it is addressing.

The second half of the booklet concentrates on the discoveries made in the cemetery. Two groups of burials were found – Early Anglo-Saxon inhumations

generally aligned east-west and others attributed to the Saxo-Norman period. The latter burials are considered to be execution victims and one of the features is interpreted as a post-hole for the gallows tree. Poulton points out that there are interesting parallels here with the Galley Hills barrow in Banstead, dug in 1972. That too was the site of an Early Anglo-Saxon burial and around it were later inhumations which had very likely been executed at a gibbet standing on the barrow.

The range of parallels can be extended beyond the county. Warner (in *Anglo-Saxon Settlements*, ed. Della Hooke) has recently drawn attention to the site of a gallows at Wilford in Suffolk close to the meeting point of the Hundred. The gallows were situated at a place called in the 16th century 'Harrough pightle'. The 'harrow' place-name suggests that this was a pagan temple or shrine and possibly a burial site. A number of other Hundred meeting places were located at heathen sites or those associated with gallows. In Surrey, it is necessary to look no further than Effingham, where the Hundred may originally met at the barrow destroyed in 1758. The date of the burials was not determined. As Poulton points out, it was considered appropriate to hang and bury criminals at sites with heathen associations, often Early Anglo-Saxon cemeteries. Execution, presumably, was carried out rapidly after judgement in the Hundredal Court at the nearby gallows. It may also be speculated that the authority of the Hundred Court was legitimated by sitting at a site with ancient associations.

In the present Esso-sponsored publication it is not too fanciful to see the past again being used to support the present order. Here an economically-powerful company is referring back to the archaeological remains to locate itself in the historical process, a point made explicitly in the Chairman's introduction. The implicit message is that change, in this case death, and renewal are a natural process. Esso's office development is represented as part of that scheme of events. This booklet seeks to convey a number of messages, and the news of an archaeological excavation is only one of them.

Mark Gardiner

The white cutter, by David Pownall. *Sphere*, 1990. 320 pp., £4.50 paperback. ISBN 0-349-10117-5.
IN ANY historical novel there must be a necessary tension between the authentic detail and the plausible characterisation. When the narrative is in the first person there is an even greater onus upon the author to convince us that his protagonist is both a true child of the chosen epoch and at the same time a credible human being.

David Pownall's white cutter (= a skilled stone mason) is one Herbert of Garstang. His son, who touchingly calls his father "Bert" throughout, is Hedric Herbertson; and it is the latter who relates their picaresque life together as he spends his childhood and youth being dragged from one twelfth century building site to the next. As an inducement to us to read on, young Hedric confides that he is relating the story as a penance for causing his father's death but the accurate account of this incident is deferred to the end of the book.

En route we are presented with two linked theories: one is about the 'true nature' of Robin Hood (no shades of the Green Man here!) and the other that the great Gothic cathedrals of Europe, although paid for by good Christian men, were actually designed and built by masons who are Cathar heretics – Manichees all, and as near pagans as makes no odds. This latter proposition is made all the more convincing by the happy accident that every conventional Christian whom Hedric encounters is either a fool, a neurotic or corrupt; or, if an honest man, turns out to be a crypto-Cathar in disguise; and one moreover who is hatching a plan to turn Hedric into a professor of Cathar theology.

This reviewer would be the first to admit that the Christian church does, and always has, consisted of a congregation of miserable sinners, but Hedric's vanity and tunnel vision defy the suspension of disbelief. Indeed, his philosophical viewpoint seems so post-Freudian, post-Marxist and post-Existentialist that one is ultimately surprised to learn that he is NOT a Time Traveller or at any rate someone who has experienced reincarnation in inverse chronological order. David Pawnall is a vivid stylist but a strong whiff of a jakes is no compensation for an apparently wilful failure to get inside a mediaeval skull.

In 1989 Ken Follett, a thriller writer, tried his hand at an historical novel set in roughly the same milieu: *The pillars of the earth*. This book is more than three times the length of *The white cutter* and consists of a spanking adventure story plotted over three generations with simple characters and one modest historical theory. In spite of the occasional howler, it succeeds in being what it sets out to be: a good read in a historical setting. By aiming lower, it succeeds. David Pownall has aimed at being literary but in *The white cutter* he succeeds only in being pretentious. It is a disappointing offering from the witty and inventive mind who wrote *Music to murder by*.

Brenda Cook

Images of Prehistory, by Peter Fowler and Mick Sharp. *Cambridge University Press*, 1990. 224 pp.,

numerous black-and-white plates, index. £19.50 hardback.

THE BLACK AND white photography of Mick Sharp provides the focal point of this reasonably-priced book (8.7p per page), with a short text and extended captions by Peter Fowler. After a foreword and introductory text, there are two main sections which develop the themes of life in prehistory and landscapes in Britain. A final section is a view of the presentation of prehistory and modern attitudes towards saving and utilising sites.

There are over 200 photographs, most of which are of the finest quality, some of them projecting a dramatic atmosphere (such as p. 44-5, p. 170) and some with an atmosphere of monuments enduring through time as clouds pass by and trees sway around the static remains (such as p. 89, p. 200 top right).

Reference to the photographs is made difficult by their lack of figure numbers, and there are a few photographs where the quality seems dubious (such as p. 109, p. 187), which should have been filtered out. Generally, though, there is little fault to find with the photographs or the text: the main negative feature is the design of the book itself. Nearly one-sixth of the book is blank space (often in the form of large white spaces such as p. 69), and there are badly-positioned captions, with few directionals (such as p. 32, p. 191). Several photographs are reproduced too small, and some captions appear as big as the photographs (such as p. 152 left).

The curious design is regrettable, but should not be a deterrent to the reader. Although it covers mainly west and north Britain where the survival of sites is better, a photographic book of this quality should heighten everyone's awareness of the beauty as well as the importance of these monuments. This can only help to polarise public opinion in favour of preserving monuments and landscapes for all to enjoy, and there should be similar books on Roman and later monuments.

Of all the many reasons for buying this book, perhaps the most melancholy may be that of possessing such a fine pictorial record which, in years to come, could provide a reminder of landscapes that have been blighted and monuments that have been damaged, or even have been, as the euphemism has it, 'preserved by record'.

Lesley & Roy Adkins

The Stonehenge People – an exploration of life in Neolithic Britain 4700-2000BC, by Rodney Castleden. *Routledge*, 1990. 282 pp., 42 pl., 76 figs., bibliog., index. £8.95 paperback.

THE HARDBACK edition was reviewed by Lesley and Roy Adkins in *London Archaeol* **5** no. 15 (Summer 1988) 417.

Clive Orton