

Books

William Morris at Merton, by David Saxby. *Museum of London Archaeology Service for the London Borough of Merton*, 1995. 24 pp., many illus., £4.95.

THIS IS A popular book in the best sense of the word. It is not often that archaeologists have an opportunity to excavate a location with such historical, literary and artistic connotations as presented by the site of William Morris' works at Merton. To the purist this site, dug on the fringes of a Savacentre development in 1992, would not be exciting — some peripheral features of Merton Priory, with post-medieval industrial buildings to follow. In conventional terms, a sequence of foundations, cess pits and channels, with some re-used stonework from the Priory, significant pottery assemblages and some unusual small finds (e.g. paint brushes).

What really brings this site to life is the wealth of other evidence that can be brought to bear. First there are contemporary and modern photographs of Morris' buildings and industrial processes, supplemented by contemporary paintings and maps. The industrial history of the site is interwoven with a brief account of the life and career of William Morris. They are illustrated by examples of the products of Morris & Co. — chintzes, wallpapers, carpets, furniture — and by accounts from visitors to his works.

The whole is an imaginative contribution to the life of this part of London, already gaining an 'arts and crafts' cachet through the resurgence of Merton Abbey Mills as a sort of suburban Covent Garden, and the creation of craft workshops in Morden Hall Park nearby. The Museum of London Archaeology Service is to be congratulated on this departure from its usual output of academic reports and syntheses, and the London Borough of Merton for its support for this venture.

The Penguin Historical Atlas of North America, by Eric Homberger; **The Penguin Historical Atlas of the Vikings**, by John Haywood; **The Penguin Historical Atlas of Russia**, by John Channon with Robert Hudson, *Penguin Books Ltd.*, 1995. All are 144 pp., many illus., bib., index, £13. Also **The Penguin Atlas of World History**, vol. 2, by Herman Kinder and Werner Hilgemann, *Penguin Books Ltd.*, 1995. 353 pp., many illus., index, £8.99, and **The State of the World Atlas** (5th edn.), by Michael Kishon and Ronald Segal. *Penguin Books Ltd.*, 1995. 160 pp., many illus., bib., index, £11.

THERE SEEMS to be a fashion for publishing atlases recently — perhaps it's connected with the availability of new computer software which makes it much easier to produce and update attractive and readable maps. These five have all arrived from Penguin in the last few months, and are well worth the attention of students, however casual, of the periods or regions that they cover. The term 'atlas' may give the wrong impression — these all (especially the historical atlases) contain a significant amount of very informative text, as well as photographs of sites, artefacts and contemporary illustrations. It would take an army of specialists to comment in detail on the accuracy or otherwise of the vast amount of information encapsulated in the maps, and most of us will have to take it on trust. Personally, I would be more prepared to trust the 'point' data (site locations and distribution maps) than the 'line' data (routes of voyages, frontiers of sometimes rather nebulous territories), but the critical reader should be able to form their own opinions.

The quality of illustrations of all types, and the overall presentation, make these books useful introductions to their subjects, and bargains at these prices.

Clive Orton

Also received

WE HAVE received some new editions of old favourites recently. Field archaeologists will probably be most interested in the new (1993) edition of Philip Barker's *Techniques of Archaeological Excavation* from B. T. Batsford Ltd., while those more interested in artefacts may prefer the first (1995) paperback edition of Hugh Tait's classic *Five thousand years of Glass* (the hardback edition was published in 1991), from the British Museum Press at £16.99.

Two recent works from a new (to us) publisher, Helicon Publishing Ltd., are *The Hutchinson Dictionary of World History* and J. M. Roberts' *Shorter Illustrated History of the World*, both published in 1993 at £20 each. Both are well worth dipping into, for detailed (and cross-referenced) information or for succinct essays on topics from early hominids to the end of the USSR, respectively, but both suffer from the lack of a bibliography, making it difficult to follow up interesting topics.