

Books

The Encyclopaedia of Precolonial Africa, (ed.) Joseph O. Vogel. *Altamira Press*, 1998. 605 pp., 70 illus., bib., index. £95.

AFRICA THE DARK Continent is illuminated in this prodigious work. Joseph Vogel has provided a tome that will be of immense use to researchers and undergraduates alike. With over 500 pages of information, tables and illustrations, the encyclopedia investigates all aspects of African cultures from the Pleistocene through to the late Iron Age. The encyclopedia is divided into six sections, which are thoroughly discussed and are easily digestible. The subjects follow in logical order, and begin with African environments. Further topics include the histories of research, technology, and people and culture. The concluding section, Pre-history of Africa, looks more closely at these unique cultures, and comments further on the emergence of humanity, foraging, social complexity, food production, rock art, urbanism, trade networks and especially the slave trade.

The format of this work is well constructed and the contributors, experts in their fields of research, provide excellent articles on their chosen subjects. The chapters flow well together and I found I was constantly reading beyond the subject I was investigating. This is a credit to both editor and contributor alike, and if I can level any criticism, it is only that the autochthonous voice is somewhat absent. However, this book is a must for anyone who is studying Africa, and Joseph Vogel has made a reference work that is a credit to the continent that he has studied.

Mark Landymore

An Archaeological Research Framework for the Greater Thames, consultation draft, June 1998

As a draft document this report has not been formally published. It has been prepared by a working group comprising representatives from Essex and Kent County Councils, English Heritage and the RCHME. The report was circulated to interested parties in the summer of 1998. The Greater Thames estuary is defined as the area extending from Tower Bridge east to Clacton in Essex and Whitstable in Kent, including the associated river terraces, estuarine marshes and the inter-tidal zone. In a concise and informative style the document follows three linked themes. First, there is a resource assessment for the Greater Thames area (defined as a summary of current archaeological

knowledge). There is an impressive list of topics including Pleistocene and Holocene palaeo-environmental studies; marine archaeology; intertidal archaeology; sea walls and flood defences; the archaeology of the river terraces from the Palaeolithic to the post-medieval, including Thames-related industries such as fishing and ship building, plus historic defence works including installations from the two World Wars.

Second, there is a research agenda for the Greater Thames (defined as a summary of the gaps in our knowledge of the above topics), which briefly discusses each of the chosen topics. This section lists some thought-provoking questions, such as: was the Thames estuary a barrier or a link in terms of communication between the communities on each side of it? There are marked differences in the pattern of Romano-British settlement on each side of the estuary, but the reasons for them have yet to be explained. The primary aim of the Greater Thames research agenda is to study 'the development of sometimes similar, sometimes varying, social, economic and political frameworks... The central aim of the research agenda must be to explore this intricate network of relationships, as they operated within the Greater Thames and between Britain, Europe and the wider world' (section 3.1.3). For each of the chosen topics there is a list of specific objectives and specific areas of proposed research.

Third, there is research strategy for the Greater Thames area (defined as list of prioritised research topics). This section is largely concerned with the implementation of the research objectives and proposals listed in the research agenda. These proposals are sensibly divided into overall priorities. It would be interesting to see what the ongoing Severn estuary archaeological survey (M. Bell (ed.) 1995 *Archaeology in the Severn Estuary 1994*, Annual Report of the Severn Estuary Levels Research Committee), could contribute to the Greater Thames research strategy in terms of comparative data on topics like sea level change. Appendix 2 in the document is a useful list of 35 initiatives relating to the archaeology of the Greater Thames estuary.

My only criticism of this document is that it should consider closer links with the ongoing Thames Archaeology Survey (which covers the inner estuary) and its proposed research aims and publication proposals -- which were outlined at the

April 1998 conference on the archaeology and ecology of the tidal Thames. In conclusion, this document is a good example of a regional research framework and I look forward to seeing its proposals implemented. It has been written at a time when the archaeology of the Greater Thames estuary faces many threats. For instance, Havering Borough Council wishes to develop 230 acres of Rainham marshes in Essex as an industrial trading estate, while the London Wildlife Trust wishes to transform 1,200 acres of the same marshes into a wildlife reserve (*Times* 24/8/98).

Copies of this document can be obtained from the Director of Strategic Planning, Kent County Council, Invicta House, County Hall, Maidstone, Kent, ME14 1XX.

Bruce Watson

The Royal Castle and Palace at Guildford, by Rob Poulton. *Surrey Archaeology Society* 1998. 15 pp., ISBN 0 9501345 97. £4.95, available from Guildford Museum.

The producers of this publication are be congratulated; it is a successful hybrid between guide book, short history and popular archaeological glossy

report. The springboard for its production was a series of summer seasons of excavation between 1990 and 1994, run primarily as training excavations for the Surrey Archaeology Society. The booklet includes the origins of Guildford, the founding of the castle and the emergence of the Palace, the life of the Royal Palace and its decline and fall. The text is accompanied by a time line that puts events at Guildford in perspective with national events. In addition there are vignettes derived from illuminated manuscripts of everyday medieval life. The volume presents aspects of the discoveries made during the excavations, which include the remains of a tile kiln, a vaulted undercroft and garderobe.

All things considered this a well produced booklet that potentially should fulfil several functions. Other archaeological bodies should take note, because there is an obvious market for this type of publication among the general public. My only quibble being that the front cover photograph of the keep appears with a rather lurid purple sky, giving a feeling of impending doom, and it is a pity that there is a blank page at the back of the booklet that was not utilised.

Roy Stephenson

Letters

The role of volunteers

I READ WITH interest the Commentary in Vol. 8, no. 10 of *London Archaeologist*, concerning the Surrey Archaeological Society Conference and its discussion on the role of volunteers.

Working as a full-time archaeologist and part-time at a local Adult Education college, I have experienced the paradox mentioned in your discussion of increasing public interest in archaeology and the 'dissipation' of volunteers.

You stated that "the importance to people of a local and community 'past' is increasingly recognised". This recognition has not led to an increase in understanding as to why people are drawn to the subject by those in the profession. Which is odd considering the fact that we were all amateurs once.

The interest in the subject will always be there, but moving volunteers from excavation solely to discovery and interpretation will only increase the 'dissipation'.

Amongst the people I have taught, the *majority* are drawn to the subject because of *excavation*. Like myself, they have a background of interest in history. Like myself, that only satisfies our feelings for the past to a limited extent. My students want to touch the past, to come into contact with their ancestors directly, to break new ground (pardon the pun), even if it is on a small scale. To feel that *you* as an individual are contributing to new knowledge. That is why they pay good money to learn more about the subject.

I believe that it is vital that volunteers be given every opportunity to work on site. It's their community, their ancestors, we

are digging up. How can we hold on to these people and attract a new generation?

It was pointed out in your discussion that there are networks of local group and you will find these located in all counties: "Leicestershire and its 'Community Archaeology' scheme... has been running successfully for over 20 years". Also "what is missing... are the skills needed to harness that enthusiasm" for the past. With help from Adult Education colleges, local archaeological societies and local units, that skills shortage can be corrected and *digging* skills can be learnt.

Yes, we all know that excavation has to meet tight deadlines due to 'privatisation' of the profession in 1990. Yes, discovery and interpretation are important. But if every area has a skilled volunteer force ready and willing to take part in helping units on sites, as in the past with no ill effects, they should not be seen as a liability who would get in the way and slow up the project.

Surely it is not beyond the intelligence of the profession to find ways of working with volunteers on site, despite the constraints imposed by PPG6? Time and organisation is all that is needed and the *will* to harness the enthusiasm of those who *do* want to dig and will be *banned* from doing so. For it is *they* who support us in our work and *they* the developers want on their side for their projects. Sideline the volunteers and we will all rue the day as we enter the next millennium and the past has no future.

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