

Books

The Tower of London. Past and Present, by Geoffrey Parnell. *Sutton Publishing Limited*, 1998. 126 pp., 170 figs. £9.99.

THE TOWER remains the most complex, the most redeveloped and possibly the most investigated of all archaeological sites in London. Even today it never seems to be out of the news. One minute we are witnessing the departure of the Royal Armouries to Leeds, the next we read in these pages of proposals for the re-flooding of the Tower moat. Any discovery in the buildings or in the moat goes straight on to the front page of national newspapers. For centuries the stage for some of the most momentous events in English history, the Tower remains an enduring focus of public interest. Much of the Tower's fascination lies in its continual redevelopment and its ever-changing purpose. Besides its principal role as a royal fortress and royal residence, the castle has enjoyed numerous functions since its foundation: armoury, mint, record office, prison, museum and zoo to name but the most important. During the last thirty or so years archaeology has made a huge contribution to our understanding of how this site developed, particularly during the Middle Ages. However, today it is difficult for most visitors to appreciate the dramatic changes which occurred on the site during the post-medieval to modern periods. What they see is essentially a Victorian 'remedievalization' of a historic monument. Most of the buildings dating to c. 1500-1850 are now gone, but a wealth of documentation survives to establish their original location, design and function. Among the most valuable in this regard is the remarkable archive of photographs which record the mid-19th to mid-20th-century programme of alteration and demolition of buildings designed to recreate the medieval castle. Dr. Geoffrey Parnell, Keeper of Tower History at the Royal Armouries, has collected the most important images -- around 170 of them -- in this book. Collectively they form an absorbing record of the dramatic transformations which have shaped the Tower of London we all know today.

But this is more than just a compilation of fascinating images. The photographs, many of which date from the early days of the daguerreotype process (the earliest view dates to c. 1850), provide both a record of physical change to the complex architecture of the Tower and an instant social history of this national heritage site. Few transitions from

functional public building to scheduled historic monument have been documented in such a comprehensive, visual way. There is endless fascination for the reader in the combination of 'then and now' images of interiors and exteriors of the castle complex. Of the former category I can not help feeling a profound sense of loss, particularly when viewing the breathtaking melodrama of the Victorian Armoury and Crown Jewels displays (pp. 66-79). Despite the radical changes recorded here, it is also a relief to note that some things at the Tower never change, notably in the dress and demeanour of its unique garrison. Even the ravens look just as menacing in the past as they do now. One obvious contrast though -- a century ago the Tower was a working residential community, almost a village in its own right. Today the castle is host to a very different group of 'professionals'.

Geoffrey Parnell's book is a 'must-have' for all those with an interest in central London's premier archaeological site. It makes an important and timely addition to that excellent Sutton series *Britain in Old Photographs*. As a practical guide to the surviving architecture it will certainly enhance and enrich future visits to the site.

David Gaimster

The Gunpowder Industry, by Glenys Crocker. *Shire Album 160*, 1999 (2nd edition). 32 pp., 33 pl., 8 figs., £2.95.

ALTHOUGH gunpowder was first produced in China in the 9th century AD, it was not until the late medieval period that its use became common in Europe. The development of better cannon in the early post-medieval period saw a dramatic change in warfare, which is reflected in the defensive remains around the country. Gunpowder was first produced in Britain in the 14th century, but it was not until the application of water-power in the 16th century that the level of production rose significantly.

This Shire Album was first published in 1986, and provided the first easily accessible text on this little-studied but important industry. The 2nd edition has seen fairly extensive changes, particularly with regard to the illustrations. The text includes chapters on the invention of gunpowder; its ingredients; the history of the industry and the different processes involved with its manufacture, from the preparation of the ingredients to packing and transport. The text is well written and

readable for both amateurs and professionals alike. Being a small book, it is obviously not exhaustive of the subject, but there is an extensive further reading list at the back along with listings of sites to visit.

The text is lavishly illustrated with plates of contemporary engravings and present-day surviving remains, as well as diagrams explaining the various processes. Shire Albums often provide an excellent introduction to often obscure industries, and this little book is no exception.

Luke Barber

Maiolica in the North: The Archaeology of Tin-glazed Earthenware in North-West Europe c. 1500-1600, edited by David Gaimster. *British Museum Occasional Paper* 122, 1999. 188 pp., many pl. and figs, bibliogs. £25.00.

IN AN AGE when computers are advertised as displaying millions of colours, it is hard to imagine the impact that the arrival of polychrome tin-glazed pottery, with vivid blues, purples, yellows and greens on a bright white background, must have made in north-west Europe in the 16th century. The basics of the story have been known for some time -- the arrival of Italian potters and Italian-style pottery in the south Netherlands (especially Antwerp) c 1500, spreading through the north and into England c 1570, leading eventually to the flourishing of the London tin-glazed ware industry in the 17th and 18th centuries. But many questions have remained -- for example, where were many of the known pots of this type made? This book is the outcome of a conference held in March 1997 to look at questions of the origins, production and distribution of this radically new pottery in north-west Europe.

The conference was timely, because it gave the British Museum an opportunity to present the results of its programme of Neutron Activation Analyses on this sort of pottery, to an informed audience. These studies of the clays from which the pottery was made produced some surprises, but they do give a firm foundation of scientific knowledge, which must underpin further studies. Indeed, several of the papers see the first attempts of practising archaeologists to come to terms with these results.

For Londoners, the highlight will be the long-overdue report on the important group of tin-glazed ware from Holy Trinity Priory, probably the earliest made in London. Although the site was excavated in 1979, Julie Edwards' account here is the first publication to study this material in any

detail. This report also whets the appetite for the final report on this site.

Local interests apart, the main value of this book is to provide a springboard for further research into a fascinating technological development and the impact it made on everyday life. As such, it will be of value to anyone interested in the transition from the medieval to the modern world. It is well illustrated (in colour as well as black and white) and contains extensive bibliographies. It is a little difficult to use, as the cover is too light for the weight of the pages, and it tends to 'flop about' in use. The illustrations are grouped at the end of each paper, which leads to more page-turning than would ideally be necessary. These are however only minor irritations in what is otherwise a very enjoyable and useful publication.

Clive Orton

Exodus to Arthur -- catastrophic encounters, by Mike Baillie. *B. T. Batsford Ltd.*, 1999. 272 pp., many illus., bib., index. £19.99.

FOR ME, this was a classic case of not judging a book by its cover. The title, and the dust-jacket illustration, exude a certain 'New Age' quality which would not normally attract me to such a book, but being familiar with the work of Prof. Baillie, I suspected that getting beyond the cover would be rewarding.

The content are split into two parts by the author, following an overall introduction in which he gives an insight into how and why the book was written. The first part gives a concise introduction to dendrochronology (tree-ring dating), and follows this with some of the history of how widespread synchronous downturns in the growth of trees led to some interesting associations with volcanic histories. We are then shown how these associations do not always have everyone in agreement, and that there may be other explanations for the observed tree-ring phenomena. This first part has a logical build-up of information based on fact.

Baillie then deliberately breaks the flow by making Part II distinct, and introduces a wealth of extraneous information which surrounds the established tree-ring observations. He himself says that many of these are 'almost unbelievable' and that they will 'stretch credulity'. There follows some plain speaking in critically analysing the work of some other workers from a range of disciplines, but the soberly presented prose reveals some fascinating stories. The basic thrust of all this is the presentation of a large amount of good

circumstantial evidence to show that over the last four thousand years the Earth has suffered several episodes of collision with space debris, and that these may well be recorded in what have previously been dismissed as fanciful myths and legends. This is where both the biblical Exodus and Arthurian legend are related to possible real events in environmental history. So as not to break the flow too much, some of the background material is separated out further into appendices.

Certainly anyone who reads this book will have the dates 1628 BC, 1159 BC and AD 540 etched forever in their memory. The deliberate decision to split facts into Part I and other associated material into Part II has many benefits, although it does make reading Part I very frustrating as tit-bits of what is to come keep being dangled in front of the reader's nose, only to be put 'on hold'. After the eloquent case has been made for Baillie's assertion that many of these events are too coincident to be easily

dismissed, he brings us back with a bump to considering what the tree-rings tell us. We are left with the important message that even if tree-rings are not dating the Exodus or King Arthur directly, they are telling us of widespread environmental events that have to be explained somehow.

This is a book with something for most readers: careful logical argument for the sceptical scientist, possible insights into the origins of some of our strongest myths and legends for students of these phenomena, and challenges to some 'established' historical chronologies that require answers. Its contents and extensive bibliography could set many a reader off on years of interesting follow-up material. Some might find the split into two parts and appendices annoying, but for me this underlined the care in presentation of some really fascinating reading.

Martin Bridge

Letters

The Thames in 1957

I UNDERSTAND that, in the recently relaunched London Archaeologist, Fiona Haughey wrote on the changing course of the Thames in relation to archaeological matters.

Interestingly, the late Mr. C. W. Phillips, FSA, who directed the Sutton Hoo ship burial excavation in Suffolk in 1939, in his capacity as Archaeology Officer, Ordnance Survey Office, Chessington, stated "Your letter to the British Museum . . . enquiring about places on the foreshore of the river Thames where Roman and Medieval pottery may be found at low tide has been forwarded here.

"It is difficult to give a satisfactory answer to this question without going into a great deal of detail. There are three areas which should keep you well occupied.

"The first is the foreshore at Brentford, in Middlesex, the second is the foreshore at Tilbury, in Essex, and the third is the whole stretch of tidal marshes at the estuary of the Medway east of Chatham and north of Upchurch.

"This last area was the scene of a large pottery industry in Roman times when nearly the whole of the marshes which are now covered at high tide were dry ground.

"At Brentford and Tilbury no particular success can be guaranteed. All will depend on the present state of the foreshore, the depth of mud, the effect of tidal scour, etc."

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Southwark pottery

CAN I JUST make a small point about the article on pottery recovered in Magdalen Street, Southwark? On p. 26 the author refers to porringers with the initials NRF: surely when there is a pyramidal arrangement of initials like this, the surname is at

the top and the husband's and wife's names below, so that the correct arrangement of letters would read NRF. There is of course ample verification of this arrangement on the 17th-century trade tokens.

This may sound like "nit-picking", but it always amazes me how often this mistake crops up again and again, leading to possible misattribution of ownership. Almost as bad is the habit of assuming that such an arrangement of initials on a piece of delftware invariably relates to a "marriage"!(*pace* the late Frank Britton).

It is also perhaps a pity that this interesting and useful article does not mention where the finds are now to be kept.

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The Spitalfields Roman coffin

ON P. 3 OF THE latest issue of the *LA* are two workers cleaning the coffin lid recently excavated. It says that it is 'Roman'; could it be Romano-Spanish? Would the shell design have any connection with 'Saint James', or Santiago de Compostela, Spain? It is a beautiful overall design. I have not read if the deceased was male or female. Is it possible to date it?

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Blue Plaques

A CORRECTION to *Mosaic* in the latest issue: Wheeler has a blue plaque, at 27 Whitcomb Street, near the National Gallery – chiefly lobbied for by Henry Cleere. I forget when it was installed, but would guess mid- to late 1980s.

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