

Books

The Eastern Cemetery of Roman London. Excavations 1983-1990, by Bruno Barber and David Bowsher. MoLAS Monograph 4. *English Heritage and Museum of London*, 2000. 448pp, tables, 120 figs, bib., index. £30.00 plus 20% if ordered from MoLAS.

PRODUCED AS the result of a joint venture between English Heritage and the Museum of London Archaeology Service to publish backlog sites identified in the London Post-Excavation Review, *The Eastern Cemetery* far surpasses its basic remit. This book is a fascinating read for anyone interested in archaeology or intrigued by London's long and complex history. The foreword by Richard Reece, appointed by English Heritage as academic reader of the draft, invites us to expand the 'London' side of the equation further. Entitled 'My east London Roman cemetery; thoughts of a dutiful nephew', it provokes us to distort time, by re-locating modern images of East End racketeers and gangsters in a Roman context. Spectres of Kray family funerals cannot help but linger in the air from Roman cremation pyres.

The report combines the results of several archaeological excavations in the London Borough of Tower Hamlets to reconstruct a large Roman cemetery of about 12 hectares in size. This roadside cemetery contained 136 cremation burials and 550 inhumation burials. A further 165 features identified as disturbed burials were also located. There is ample evidence for a variety of burial rites including wooden coffins, 'chalk' burials and an unusual tile cist burial, as well as funerary structures, inscriptions, ditches and pits. It has been 'reasonably well dated' from the 1st to the 5th century AD.

It is clear from the beginning that the authors intended the book to be accessible to a wide-ranging audience. As a result, it is sumptuous and detailed, but also easy to read. It is characterised by clarity of layout, structure and terminology. In the absence of clear chronological phasing across all the sites, chapters are thematic; layout and development of the cemetery, funerary practices, burial practices, a catalogue of the finds from the cemetery, 'the dead' -- a detailed forensic examination of the skeletal data and cremated bone -- and a final discussion. This thematic approach works well,

providing a secure framework for both individual details, for example the question of 'handedness' in the cemetery and general trends such as questions of status and plot layout. Textual clarity is further enhanced by the provision of detailed maps, plans and finds drawings, all of the highest quality. One particularly successful feature of the interaction between text and illustration can be found in the catalogue section, where descriptions and drawings of individual artifacts are accompanied by drawings of the relevant grave with the find-spots indicated. This allows the reader to appreciate the significance of the artifact in relation to both the burial rite and the body at a glance. Photographs of finds and excavations are superb. They demonstrate the excellent preservation conditions and the quality of the archaeological remains. Given these efforts towards attracting a wide readership, it is disappointing that the book itself has yet to go on general public release. At present, copies may be obtained through the Museum of London, but in the long term, we must hope it will be marketed more widely to the audience for which it was so clearly written.

The clarity does not detract from the academic significance. Appendices provide 'technical support' for the conclusions and interpretations provided. Careful comparison and contrast with data from other cemeteries in London and Roman Britain is used to gain a better understanding of the cemetery and those buried within it. A wealth of new questions are raised and new ideas proposed. Particular attention should be paid to the rare preservation of pyre residues from a Romano-British cemetery. These residues indicate that, as Classical sources suggest, it was not the grave, but the pyre that was the focus of Roman funeral rites. Some of the rituals identified through excavation seem to have more in common with funerary traditions from mainland Europe than Britain. Yet at the same time, careful analysis of osteology and burial practices suggests that it was a homogenous group of native 'Londoners' buried here. Indications of status are few and the most important feature of the burials seems to have been the overall desire to express a sense of community through the cemetery. This is extremely impor-

tant, as detailed work on ethnicity in Roman Britain has hitherto paid only limited attention to the existence of dynamic urban identities.

In summary, the *East End cemetery* is an essential source for those interested in the development of London and for those interested in archaeology, especially Romano-British archaeology. General conclusions about Romano-British cemeteries, culture and populations are important, but perhaps more fascinating are the hints that London, especially East London, has always been remarkably successful at combining the exotic with the homegrown.

Katie Meheux

Heart of the City: Roman, Medieval and Modern London Revealed by Archaeology at 1 Poultry, by Peter Rowsome. *MoLAS*, 2000. 92 pp., many colourful illustrations, index. £5.99.

MANY READERS of *London Archaeologist* will have visited the atmospheric *High Street Londinium* exhibition at the Museum of London: this review concerns the book of the site excavated from 1994-96, upon which that reconstruction was based. However, this report provides much more than a summary of the now famous Roman houses. At one level, it is an account of one of the largest and most logistically-complex rescue excavations ever conducted in the City. It also summarises the results of that project period by period, with discussions of the well-preserved Roman buildings, initially built in timber, but later in stone. Then there are chapters on the medieval church of St Benet's, complete with graveyard, and on the remarkable Great Conduit constructed between 1236-45 to bring clean water into the City. (Surprisingly, there is no mention in the book of the more detailed accounts of the archaeological work which appeared in e.g. *London Archaeologist* (Vol. 8, no. 5, 127-36 and Vol. 8, no. 11, 283-91), to which new readers could be directed for further information). Discussions follow on diet, Plague and the Great Fire, Mad Hatters and Victorian expansion, and if that were not enough, the focus then turns the battle for planning permission which resulted in the demolition of eight Grade II listed buildings to facilitate the construction of the present building. Although the jury is still out on the merits of the James Stirling masterpiece which currently occupies the site at 1 Poultry, there can be no doubting the merits of this most attractive booklet.

Peter Rowsome, the archaeologist who shouldered the daunting responsibility for the excavation and research programme, deserves praise for this prompt and pleasing summary report: well written, well illustrated and well informed, this is not archaeology dumbing down, but archaeology made accessible.

Gustav Milne

Fields of Deception: Britain's bombing decoys of World War II, by Colin Dobinson. *Methuen*, 2000. 316pp, 42 figs, 25 pl, bib, £25.00.

SIXTY YEARS on from the Battle of Britain and the dark winter of the Blitz, English Heritage have produced the first in a series of books based on their assessment of Second World War military remains. Appropriately, this publication deals with a vital but little-known aspect of Britain's defence against air attack during this period -- the use of decoy targets to lure Luftwaffe night bombers away from towns, factories and military bases.

Using both recent research and documents declassified in the 1970s, Colin Dobinson examines the origins of the campaign of deception, its evolution during the war years and the types of decoys employed. The ingenuity shown by the inventors of devices such as the "Hare and Rabbits" (which used lights on a motorised frame to mimic a taxiing aircraft) or the "Starfish" (containers of burning oil or wood-shavings which simulated the fires of a recently bombed town) makes this a particularly interesting section. The book also assesses the effectiveness of the decoy campaign -- which may have diverted up to 5% of the bombs dropped on Britain -- and considers the extent to which its remains have survived. A comprehensive gazetteer is included and may prove useful to archaeologists encountering these isolated and enigmatic structures in the course of fieldwork or landscape survey.

Fields of Deception deals with a very specialised aspect of military history and will appeal mainly to those interested in air warfare or the defence of Britain during the 20th century. However, it is well written, accessible and uses clear diagrams throughout. By considering military remains in a national context and presenting a systematic study of these sites, this book provides a good outline of the history and purpose of this class of "monument". It is to be hoped that future publications in this series are of an equally high standard.

Vincent Gardiner

A Romano-British cemetery on Watling Street: excavations at 165 Great Dover Street, Southwark, London, by Anthony Mackinder. *MoLAS Archaeological Studies Series 4*, 2000. 74 pp., 44 illus., bib., index, £5.00. Available from Gary Warr, Finance Department, MoLAS; add 20% UK postage, 30% overseas.

THE MoLAS publication machine began work in earnest in 2000, producing important monographs, such as Barber & Bowsher's volume on the eastern cemetery of Roman London. Several reports also appeared in the MoLAS 'Archaeological Studies' series providing accounts of more modest but nonetheless significant projects. One such is reviewed here, Tony Mackinder's report on a roadside cemetery excavated in Southwark in 1996-7. This study of a mere 30 burials looks superficially slight in comparison with Barber and Bowsher's monograph on 851 burials from across the Thames, but remarkably what the Southwark report lacks in quantity is easily balanced by the intrinsic importance of the material. Although the most productive part of the excavations only covered an area of less than 40m by 10m, it produced evidence for the development of the road and ultimately the mid 2nd-century cemetery alongside it, which continued in use into the 3rd century. Some five cremations and twenty-five inhumations were recorded, together with evidence of a funerary pyre, some walled cemetery plots, mausolea and a possible temple. Such a concentration of substantial masonry funerary structures is relatively rare in London, and seems to reflect a status for the Southwark Roman settlement that was by no means inferior to the north-bank settlement.

These important conclusions will no doubt be overshadowed by the suggestion that one of the burials recovered from the site (Burial 1) was that of a female gladiator, a story that captured the imagination of some sections of the popular press last year. The identification is based on the association of a lamp with a depiction of a fallen gladiator buried with the cremated remains of an adult female. The evidence presented here to support that conclusion is less than convincing, as Angela Wardle's discussion of the material (p 28) points out. However, there is no published assessment in this report that clearly establishes that the cremated remains represent either a female burial or even a single individual. Indeed, the recovery of no less than eight lamps (only one of which had a gladiator on it) and eight *tazze* (for burning incense) from the base of the pyre might well imply multiple burial. Unfortunately, a significant por-

tion of the burial pit (*bursum*) lay beyond the limit of excavation.

The report is attractively produced in a clear A4 format, although the site location map (Fig. 1) is not as helpful as it should be; there is no plan showing how the cemetery under discussion relates to the contemporary Roman settlements or to the other cemetery sites mentioned in the text. Chapters two and three describe and discuss the development of the site, the road, the cemetery, its mausolea and related structures. The catalogue of burials and the associated finds is presented in chapter four, while chapter five provides reports on the late Roman pottery, building material and architectural fragments. The latter include the head of a bearded god, possibly a water deity and a carved pine cone finial which, the late Tom Blagg suggested, were often used to decorate the tombs of military personnel (p. 62). In conclusion there is a rather brief summary of the human skeletal material and notes on the animal bone and the plant remains, with the study of the material from the fill of the *bursum* below the pyre associated with Burial 1 being of especial interest. All in all a significant study of the southern cemetery that makes an important contribution to our understanding of *Londinium* and to Roman cemetery studies in general.

Gustav Milne

The Limehouse porcelain manufactory: excavations at 108-116 Narrow Street, London, 1990, by Kieron Tyler and Roy Stephenson. *MoLAS Archaeological Studies Series 6*, 2000. 73 pp., 127 illus., bib., index, £16.50. Available from Gary Warr, Finance Department, MoLAS; add 20% UK postage, 30% overseas.

THE 18TH CENTURY was a period of great innovation and advance for the British pottery industry, from a rather backward state at the start of the century to a world leader and mass exporter by its end. The processes by which this change came about are well documented historically, but are less well known archaeologically, perhaps partly because archaeologists have only recently started to take this period seriously. The chance of being able to pin down a particular innovation to a point in space and time is small, considering the scale of development of our industrial regions since that time. But that is exactly what happened in 1989, when work for a new road (the Limehouse Link) exposed the remains of the famous but poorly understood Limehouse porcelain manufactory. The DGLA responded to the challenge with an eight-week excavation, much of it under 'rescue' condi-

tions. Publication of the report was delayed by staffing problems, allowing prior publication of a ceramicist report (Drakard's *Limehouse ware revealed*, in 1993; see *LA* 7, no. 9 (1994) 244).

The first two chapters follow a conventional pattern: chapter 1, introduction and background, chapter 2, the excavation, period by period. Only four of the twenty pages of this chapter deal with Period 3, the porcelain works, which existed from 1745 to 1748, so the authors have not let its importance bias their account. About half the book consists of a detailed description of the porcelain itself, carefully provenanced and enhanced with illustrations of comparative complete vessels supplied by Phillips Fine Art Auctioneers. The entire assemblage is illustrated by means of high-quality colour photographs (not a line-drawing in sight), which certainly makes the firing outcomes easier to understand, and which is well suited to the often fuzzy nature of the decoration. Trying to draw it would be an illustrator's nightmare! Of course, to assess production from its mistakes is always dangerous, but the authors are well aware of this and give a very balanced account.

What makes this so much more than simply a well-illustrated catalogue is the short (three-page) final chapter, in which the fate of the works is set in the context of some theory about ceramic innovation. Briefly, the Limehouse works is seen as a failure, perhaps lacking the financial backing to weather the early 'research and development' stages of production, but one which nevertheless contributed to the overall progress of British ceramics in the 18th century. Here we have clear evidence that the apparently inexorable progress was more a case of 'two steps forward, one step back', and that the broad sweep of history can miss out on the indi-

vidual struggles and failures so poignantly demonstrated here. I hope that we shall see more reports like this in the future.

Clive Orton

Also received

In the Presence of Dinosaurs, by John Colagrande and Larry Felder. *Time Life Books*, 2000, 189 pp., many illus., bib. £18.99.

GLOSSY, WELL WRITTEN and original -- definitely a cut above the usual dinosaur book.

The Victorian Railway Worker, by Trevor May. *Shire Publications*, 2000. 32 pp., many illus., bib. £3.50.

The Victorian Engineer, by Adrian Jarvis. *Shire Publications*, 2000. 32 pp., many illus., bib. £3.50.

TWO MORE additions to the excellent *Shire Album* series.

A Celebration of the Bourne, by Paul Sowan, Roger Packham and Gwynneth Fookes. *The Bourne Society*, 2000. 52 pp., illus., price not stated.

AN UNFORTUNATELY timely history of flooding in the area south of Croydon.

Teach Yourself Greek Civilisation, by Michael Hutt and Abhi Subedi. *Hodder & Stoughton Educational*, 1999. 148 pp., 28 illus., bib., index. £8.99.

Teach Yourself Eastern philosophy, by Mel Thompson. *Hodder & Stoughton Educational*, 1999. 243 pp., 28 illus., bib., index. £8.99.

(continued from p. 194)

made from the combined evidence that the revetment dumps may represent the waste from this or a similar establishment.

Archaeobotanical samples from medieval dumps and occupation deposits also produced well-preserved plant remains, similar in character to the Saxon assemblages, with charred cereal grains, waterlogged seeds of fruits and wild plants, cereal bran, stem, moss, wood fragments, and occasional mineralised fruit seeds and cereal grains. Fragments of box leaf, recovered from a waterfront dump sample, may represent the residues of garden waste.

Conclusion

As can be seen from these short summaries, there is still a substantial gap in knowledge between the Saxon and medieval periods. This is due to a number of factors, including *Lundenwic* having been identified comparatively recently, the relative 'invisibility' of early Saxon material in London, and a tendency of previous workers to concentrate on the City of London. Yet the Saxon period is an enigmatic and fascinating chapter of London's history and it is to be hoped that in the future more work can be undertaken on its biology to bring out knowledge closer to the large body of information which has been generated for medieval London.