

Books and CDs

Stone Circles: A Photographic Tour, by Tom Bullock. CD-ROM beplus@ix.netcom.com. Preview at www.megalithic.co.uk/shop. Price £20 plus p&p.

THIS IS essentially a picture book in CD format. The topic is those enigmatic settings of stone from the British and Irish Neolithic and Bronze Ages. Although mainly stone circles, it also includes stone rows, and puts them in a very wide context both chronological and geographical. A time chart enables links to photos of contemporary monuments around the world from the pyramids to Xia Dynasty stone statutes in China. The core of the CD is however a collection of brilliant photographs of stone circles and rows in their landscape context. To the right of each photo is a brief description of the monuments but with elements not often seen in archaeological guides like ambience ('excellent' at Avebury) and ease of access ('difficult' at North Strone). The tour is based on a map of the British Isles and Ireland divided into grid squares. By clicking onto a grid square a detailed location map with nearby towns appears. Click on the monument and the photograph with details appears.

For those who want more than just the tour there is a hyperlinked alphabetical listing of stone circles, distributions by characteristic and features as well as a clear glossary of all jargon used. Lists can be searched by characteristics and features.

This is exactly the type of topic that comes into its own in CD format. Whatever your interest in stone circles, whether archaeological, tourist or New Age there is something here for you with fine photographs and easy access.

Peter Drewett

London. The Biography, by Peter Ackroyd. *Chatto & Windus* 2000. 822pp., illus., index, £25 hardback, £12.99 paperback.

THIS IS A very strange book in that it comprises a mixture of approaches, drifting in and out of myth, folk-tales and fact but marching steadfastly from early prehistoric to today in its coverage. It is a very personal look at London by the author and seems to have been written in a series of what might be called 'soundbites' – short(ish) chapters which may be read over a cup of tea or last thing at night and then put down until another occasion. Some of the 79 chapters link with others but all may be considered in isolation. While the concept of London as a 'body' and therefore worthy of a

biography is an interesting point of view, the idea that this volume might constitute the biography is somewhat high-handed. Many people have been the subject of a number of biographies and to imply that this venture can be or is the only one possible oversteps the boundary. Ackroyd would have been on safer ground to suggest that this was one particular and personal viewpoint rather than a definitive one.

Having stated that the biography 'defies chronology', Ackroyd then discusses London beginning with the prehistorical evidence and working his way through subsequent periods until he reaches the Tudor era. The centre part of the volume explores a number of themes encompassing the following four hundred years before returning to linear history and the post-Great War period. Intermingled are a number of location 'case studies' such as St Giles, Fetter Lane, Newgate and Clerkenwell. Themes include theatres, sex, eating, drinking, tobacco, the weather, crime, punishment, plagues – to name but a few. These are very entertaining reading and give a good taste of what it was like to live and experience life in London. It is interesting that the river Thames, the original reason for settlement in the area, is relegated for the most part to a theme discussed along with the other 'lost rivers' within three short chapters. There is also a certain amount of repetition in the chapters, which would have benefited from tighter editing. Violence for example is discussed within a number of chapters and has a section all of its own as does noise within the city.

The unevenness in discussion is very noticeable. Ackroyd's treatment of the prehistoric period is contained within twelve pages, and centres a great deal on myth and legend. Given the amount of information now available on this period within the pages of *London Archaeologist* which he singles out on p. 784 as his 'major source of archaeological information', this is a surprising emphasis. The Romans fare somewhat better but all the early periods up to AD 1066 are dealt with in the first three chapters of the book, i.e. 36 pages. This, then, is mainly a discussion of life in London during the past millennium and while it is full of interesting information presented in an absorbing way it is scarcely a full biography. Given that this is what may be considered a popular rather than a serious academic book and therefore not replete with multitudinous references, it is still difficult to

understand why Ackroyd has not included more information on his background material. He does have what he calls his 'essay on sources' but this does not greatly help those wanting to chase a particular train of thought to its origin.

Notwithstanding the above reservations it is a worthwhile read. Its size means that it is probably not likely to be seen on the tube or the beach, for example, but its price brings it within the range of most pockets. For those not daunted by its number of pages, it could well introduce London as a vibrant entity to those for whom history is seen as a dry and dusty subject. It can be found in most bookstores but listed under 'history' rather than 'biography'.

Fiona Haughey

London bridge 2000 years of a river crossing, by Bruce Watson, Trevor Brigham and Tony Dyson. *MoLAS Monograph 8*, 2001. 258 pp., 157 illus., bib., index. £22 from Gary Warr, Finance Department, MoLAS (add 20% UK postage., 30% overseas)

THIS IS THE eighth of a fast-growing series, which provides a welcome additional outlet for the publication of London excavations. We are told (p. 1) that 'almost all the archaeological data ... derives from ..one area of the London Borough of Southwark .formerly occupied by the warehouses of Fennings and Toppings Wharves', excavated in 1970 and 1983-4. The aim is to provide a 'single chronological narrative, with reference to specialist data' (p 2-3). In fact, much of the archaeological evidence is from the northern (City) end of London Bridge, together with wide-ranging parallels for bridge-building techniques, and much documentary evidence, including some fascinating extracts from the extensive Bridge House accounts. What we have is a slightly awkward mixture of the site-specific and the thematic. For example, is this the best place to publish the Bronze Age features from Fennings Wharf? and should not some non-MoLAS work in the immediate vicinity (such as the Foreshore Survey and the SLAEC excavations on the London Bridge approach in the 1960s) at least have been mentioned?

These points do not detract from the fascination of the story told here. We have a current view of the succession of Roman bridges (three in all, the last possibly going out of use in the mid 4th century), which sees the crossing as slightly oblique to the modern bridge (from the same point at the south end to one slightly to the east at the north end), resolving difficulties that had arisen from the unwritten assumption that all London Bridges were parallel to each other. What little is

known about the Saxo-Norman timber bridge(s) and the impact of the Vikings is carefully discussed, before we move on to the medieval stone bridge. Using detailed documentary evidence to supplement the rather scanty archaeology, we understand better the problems of continual maintenance (and occasional collapse), and the many uses to which a medieval bridge was put. Many of the problems arose from erosion, particularly of the south bank, for which the archaeological evidence is presented. The last part of the story is an account of the building of the 1830s London Bridge just to the west of the medieval one, and a survey of parts of the old bridge still to be found in and around London. The important dendrochronological data, and the finds, constitute the final (14th) chapter.

As a serious archaeological report, this is a surprisingly good read. Considering the many contributors, the continuity is good, overlaps few and conflicts rare. There is a glossary of unfamiliar terms, but it seems to be used rather erratically. The writing style is generally good, though someone must tell MoLAS that *in situ* and *ex situ* are not adjectives. If you have an interest in London Bridge, or in bridges in general, this is essential reading.

Clive Orton

Also received

Aviation Archaeology in Britain, by Guy de la Bédoyère. *Shire Archaeology*, 2001. 64 pp., 54 illus., bib., index. £4.99

Illustrated History of Europe, by Frederic Delouche (ed). *Cassell & Co.*, 2001. 416 pp., many illus., index. £18.99

Past Lives, by Ian Wilson. *Cassell & Co.*, 2001. 216 pp., many illus., bib., index. £20

AA Command Britain's anti-aircraft defences of World War II, by Colin Dobinson. *English Heritage*, 2001. 614 pp., 42 figs., bib., index. £25

A Century of Troubles England 1600-1700, by Stevie Davies. *Channel 4 Books*, 2001. 192 pp., many illus., index. £18.99

Post-Medieval Pottery 1650-1850, by Jo Draper. *Shire Archaeology*, 2001 (reprint; first published 1984). 64 pp., 113 illus., bib., index. £4.99

Towns in Roman Britain, by Julian Bennett. *Shire Archaeology*, 2001 (3rd edition; first published 1980). 80 pp., 16 pl., 22 figs., bib., index. £4.99

The Private Lives of the Pharaohs, by Joyce Tildesley. *Channel 4 Books*, 2002. 192 pp., many illus., bib., index. £9.99