

## BOOK REVIEWS

JOHN COLES, *Field Archaeology in Britain*, London (Methuen), 1972, 267 pp., 78 figs., 8 pls. Price (paperback) £1.75; also available hardbound.

This excellent book fulfills one of the greatest needs of present-day archaeology in Britain; an authoritative, readable manual and reference book for 'those who may wish to understand the techniques of archaeology, and the reason behind them, who will on occasions assist in small or large scale excavations and field projects, or who will sometimes undertake their own fieldwork in the discovery and explanation of ancient features'. Although primarily concerned with prehistoric archaeology, the book's principles and wisdom are relevant to all periods, superseding R. J. C. Atkinson's *Field Archaeology*, whose last edition of 1953 has long been out of date and out of print.

The book is divided into six main sections, dealing with the nature of prehistoric archaeology, the discovery, recording and excavation of sites, the interpretation of evidence, and the organization of prehistoric archaeology in Britain. There is sensible discussion of such questions as the role of the amateur, the ownership of finds and private collecting, and sound guidance of methods of field-walking and the use of maps. The section on elementary surveying includes valuable practical information for those without access to expensive equipment. Excavation and its many difficulties are fully described, with comments on attitudes and techniques current among archaeologists, and useful information and advice for those who wish to participate. The author draws upon his own extensive field experience, and the book gains energy and appeal as a result.

The illustrations are excellent and plentiful. Mistakes and misprints are very few, although it should be noted (pp. 126 and 249) that the address of the Council for British Archaeology, which issues lists of excavations needing volunteer helpers, is 8 St. Andrew's Place, London NW1 4LB.

This book is highly recommended, and ought to be purchased by anyone interested in acquiring or improving his ability to make a useful contribution to field archaeology.

J.M.

BARRY M. MARSDEN, *Discovering Regional Archaeology: Central England*, Shire Publications 1970; 64 pp., 7 × 4½ in., 12 maps, site plans and time chart, 28 photographs; price 30p.

One of a series of regional guide-booklets, *Central England* covers 11 Midland counties (Cheshire, Derbyshire, Herefordshire, Leicestershire, Northamptonshire, Nottinghamshire, Rutland, Shropshire, Staffordshire, Warwickshire, Worcestershire) and briefly describes 93 sites of prehistoric, Roman and Dark Age date. The 17 Derbyshire entries range from Creswell Crags to Repton Church. Barrows are given good measure, but space ought to have been found for such outstanding sites as Minninglow and Brough. Directions for access should prove useful, but needed more detail in several cases, for example the Bull Ring, where private property has to be negotiated between the main road and the site. The site descriptions are generally good; those unfamiliar with archaeological terms are referred to the key booklet in the series, *Discovering Archaeology in England and Wales* by James Dyer. The illustrations are adequate, but the photographs of Aldwark and Eyam Cross are badly out of focus. The pages in the review copy have already begun to fall out, and the publishers must remedy this serious fault in future editions if the booklet is to have any practical use.

J.M.

WILLIAM OSWALD SKEAT, B.Sc., F.K.C., C.Eng., F.I.Mech.E., *George Stephenson: The Engineer and his letters*, 267 pp., 10 × 7½ in.; published by the Institution of Mechanical Engineers, 1973.

Mr. Skeat has chosen a difficult task in attempting to present the 'father of railways' through his letters. Born at Wylam, Northumberland, on 9th June 1781, it was not until he attended night school between the ages of 18 and 20 that the budding engineer learned to read and write. In later years he employed 'scribes', dictating as many as 37 letters in a single day and, as Samuel Smiles commented: 'This great mass of correspondence, although bearing on the subjects under discussion, was not, however, of a kind to supply the biographer with matter for quotation, or give that insight into the life and character of the writer which the letters of literary men so often furnish. They were, for the most part, letters of mere business, relating to works in progress, Parliamentary contests, new surveys, estimates of cost, and railway policy—curt, and to the point; in short, the letters of a man every moment of whose time is precious.'

Mr. Skeat therefore leans heavily on his connecting narrative, giving the background (intended to be always subservient to the letters) against which the letters were written and taken from standard and often comparatively recent biographies and other popular histories. Most of the letters have been published before in one place or another, though the precise source is not always clear from the text. Some appear for the first time, reflecting credit upon both author and the sometimes unidentified donors.

Two gems stand out: Stephenson's graphic description of a coaching accident in which he was involved during 1835—'I saw she was going to upset and being inside made use of a little science, which brought me off safe. I never saw such a sight before, passengers like dead pigs in every direction: and the road a sheet of blood, two I apprehend will die.'—and his opinion on coal leases—'It is impossible for a Lawyer to go through the different clauses required in the Lease of a Colliery, without having the assistance of some one conversant with the working of a Colliery, by his side.'

The illustrations are drawn from a rather wide spectrum, including a variety of medallions and stamps, etc., issued in commemoration of various anniversaries, in addition to the usual contemporary prints, etc. The result is, however, a creditable evaluation of Stephenson's contribution to mechanical engineering, chiefly of course in the field of railways. It is laid out lavishly and, by modern standards, is reasonably priced at £4.50.

P.S.