

REVIEWS

Science and Society in Prehistoric Britain, by Ewen W. Mackie, Paul Elek, London, 1977. £12.50.

THIS BOOK belies its title. Apparently the author feels that the only "science" operating in Late Neolithic Britain was astronomy. This is not the place to discuss the meaning of words but prehistoric astronomy is as much or as little of a science as ceramics, textiles or even metallurgy. The only mention of the latter is on the title page where rather oddly we get a quotation from Wagner's Siegfried.

The book is dedicated to Professor Thom who, with Hoyle, has done much to explain the uses of circles, alignments and such-like. The author takes some British megalithic sites and with great ingenuity shows what they were used for. I am impressed, but as far as I am concerned he is preaching to the converted. I really do believe that a calendar was necessary to prehistoric man and that he had reached a stage where he could lay out a circle—with a megalithic yard—or construct an accurate alignment.

When we come to the social aspects we are on less "scientific" ground. He refers to the economy of Skara Brae and suggests that it was the residence of a "specialist elite" group, "a learned order of religious and wise men". Having built up such a theory from the astronomical evidence of the sites in Wiltshire, which is in itself highly tendentious, he goes on to apply it to all sorts of sites and some of these, like Skara Brae, have no astronomical content.

Where the actual evidence is presented for astronomical uses I found it an intriguing and convincing book. But he carries his theme too far, so that the social implications were received with raised eyebrows.

The book is well printed with clear illustrations and contains few errors.

R. F. TYLECOTE

A century of Anglo-Saxon Sculpture, by R. J. Cramp and J. T. Lang, 39 pages (including 25 plates), Frank Graham, Newcastle upon Tyne, 1977. ISBN 85983 099 3. £1.

The half-centenary of the appearance of W. G. Collingwood's classic study, *Northumbrian Crosses of the pre-Norman Age* (1927), was celebrated by an exhibition of ninth and tenth century sculpture at the D.L.I. Museum in Durham and the Moot

Hall in Hexham. This catalogue by Professor Cramp and Mr. Lang forms an attractive souvenir of an impressive and instructive display. But it is more than just a memento: its brief text is full of new ideas about the interpretation of the carvings and its large-scale photographs are the best published record we now have of many crosses and slabs. The authors, sponsoring bodies, museum curators and publisher are to be congratulated on their initiative.

RICHARD N. BAILEY

BOOKS RECEIVED

Two Centuries of Industrial Welfare: The London (Quaker) Lead Company 1692-1905 by Arthur Raistrick. Moorland Publishing Company, 1977 (168 pages). £3.95

It is good to see that this local classic has been re-printed after thirty-nine years. For those without the first edition its purchase at £3.95 is commended. Those with the first edition may still wish to add to their shelves this neat volume with an additional chapter and revised illustrations.

What the Soldiers wore on Hadrian's Wall by H. Russell Robinson. Frank Graham, 1976 (40 pages). £1.00

With authoritative text by the Keeper of Armour in the Tower of London and colourful illustrations by Ronald Embleton this booklet has great educational value.

The Archaeology of York *The Legionary Fortress Interval Tower SW5 and the South-West Defences: Excavations 1972-75* by A. B. Sumpter and S. Coll. C.B.A. £2.50

A further part from the Council for British Archaeology of the series of excavation reports from the York Archaeological Trust.