

REVIEWS

Norman McCord, *North East History from the Air*, Phillimore & Co., Chichester 1991. p. 98, plates 129, map 1. ISBN 0 85033 787 9, £11.95.

The author, primarily a modern historian, has produced in his aerial photography the key to unlock much of the Region's prehistory. Before the advent of aerial photography it was a curious observation that our prehistoric ancestors preferred to live on bleak hilltops and avoided the forested boggy lowlands. This view began to change with the aerial sorties of Professor St. Joseph in the nineteen-forties and now flying has become a commonplace tool of the professional archaeologist.

Norman McCord was the premier flyer in our region in the fifties and sixties and from his discoveries Professor G. Jobey was able to select and investigate some of these newly found sites and change forever our views on prehistoric society. Publications in *Archaeologia Aeliana* in 1968 and 1971 detailed their co-operation in listing sites discovered by aerial photography.

This book gives a taste of the results of these flights. The full record is available at the University of Newcastle upon Tyne in the Archaeology Department. The high quality photographs cover all periods from the bronze age to 1973 and the text is written in a narrative manner with a comment on each photograph. There are splendid views e.g. prehistoric earthworks, the major discovery of the Washing Wells Roman fort at Whickham, the deserted medieval village of Garmondsway in County Durham, Elsdon Motte, Dunstanburgh Castle, Seaton Delaval Hall, Kilhope Wheel, Albert Edward Dock and Consett Iron Works.

Many of the photographs record a landscape

which has disappeared in the last twenty years e.g. wartime installations on the Spanish Battery at Tynemouth, Consett Iron Works, while No. 9 not only records Washing Wells Roman Fort, but in the distance shows the smoking chimney of Dunston Power Station, now removed, and the open site of our Region's latest monument, the Metro Centre.

Inevitably a book of this type can only show a fraction of the collection to be found at Newcastle University. My only criticism is that not all the photographs are dated. This is no problem to the serious student who will find that the originals on deposit are dated.

The book is well laid out with a map indicating the location of each picture for quick reference. It should make a useful introduction to anyone beginning a study of the Region's history or archaeology and I could recommend it for both coffee table and bookshelf.

D. PEEL

Paul S. Austen: *Bewcastle and Old Penrith; a Roman Outpost Fort and a Frontier Vicus; Excavations 1977-78*. Cumberland and Westmorland Antiquarian and Archaeological Society Research Series No. 6 1991. xvi+236.

This is an account of two rescue excavations, one on the fort of Bewcastle, one in the *vicus* of the fort of Old Penrith, the former directed by the author, the latter directed by another but all the post-excavation work being carried out by the author. The Old Penrith excavation was rich in finds, half the volume being taken up by reports on them. Without minimizing the importance of other aspects, in this short review attention will be concentrated on the

contribution made by structures and finds to our understanding of the history of the sites and of the Roman North generally. Bewcastle has known earlier excavations, but this was the first at Old Penrith.

At Bewcastle four structural periods were found, as by Richmond and by Gillam and MacIvor, the previous excavators. These had been assimilated to the four Wall periods by Richmond, with the important variation that as there was no post-367 pottery and Period II appeared to end with the 296 "disaster", as evidenced by coins sealed by debris on the strong-room floor, III and IV must be fitted in between that date and 367. The present report shows that that link does not exist, and that the evidence fits better Period III beginning in the late second or early third century, with Period II therefore, for which the evidence is less abundant, being in the second century, most plausibly beginning c. 163, on the return from Scotland. This incidentally preserves Richmond's linking of the Period with the abandonment of the Antonine Wall, adjusted for the re-dating of that event now generally accepted. The coins on the strong-room floor need not be dated as late as 296, as a careful coin report by John Casey shows, nor is the context necessarily a "disaster". The final period does not extend till 367, but probably ends c. 312, as at High Rochester, the coin evidence as interpreted by John Casey being again decisive. This in its turn means that the dating of coarse pottery of the late third and fourth century may need drastic revision, as it has been based so much on an extension of the life of the outpost forts to 343 or 367. To recapitulate: Period I Hadrian, abandoned while the Antonine Wall is held; Period II c. 163 to late second/early third (no destruction); Period III late second/early third to 273+; Period IV 273+ to c. 312.

At Old Penrith there is a pre-Hadrianic occupation, as argued by Eric Birley, Flavian but later than Agricola, perhaps c. 90–100, with many phases, as elsewhere, e.g. Corbridge, Vindolanda, then an abandonment under Hadrian till perhaps c. 163, when the fort was rebuilt further to the north. Some *vicus* buildings were reconstructed in a com-

mon style c. A.D. 180–210, but c. A.D. 250+ the *vicus* declined sharply, possibly because the unit had been moved away. The site was re-occupied, possibly by a different type of unit, similar to those recorded in the *Notitia* for the hinterland forts, c. 270/320 to c. 350/410. This last wide spread of dates is occasioned by the coins ending in 346–8. The sample is admittedly small, but as the dating of both early and late fourth century coarse pottery is brought into question by the re-dating of High Rochester and Bewcastle caution is clearly necessary.

Both sites have thus been brought more into line with the orthodoxies of the 1990s, with some interesting variations, such as Old Penrith being empty under Hadrian, unlike some other north-west forts. The need for a thorough re-examination of the dating of coarse pottery for the late third century and fourth century has been made abundantly clear. There are still large areas of uncertainty, and it is difficult to give the archaeological periods precise dating without associating them with historical events, in the same way that has led sometimes to error in the past. It may be unwise, in this report and elsewhere, to link the abandonment of High Rochester and Bewcastle too specifically with the visit of Constantine in 312. It is still more unwise perhaps to make the manning of the outpost forts by *cohortes milliariae equitatae* "a major contributory factor to the apparently peaceful conditions in Britain during the third century", and their removal, at a time when their effective strength was probably greatly diminished, highly significant, when we know so little of the overall history of Rome's relations with the tribes of the north. But the overall impression from reading this report is of respect for those who labour on rescue excavations and admiration for the results that have been achieved in working under unfavourable conditions in limited areas. Mr. Austen and his collaborators have made a major contribution to our knowledge of the Roman North. Dorothy Charlesworth, who did so much rescue work herself, would have appreciated the dedication of this volume to her memory.

B. DOBSON

Painted Red; A Social History of Consett 1840–1990 by Tony Kearney—Published by O.C.A. Old Miners Hall, Delves Lane, Consett, 1990. ISBN 0 9516829 0 3, x+117pp., £7–50 post free.

For some years in the twenties the reviewer's parents took their family for the summer to a cottage at Baybridge near Blanchland. One night I was roused from sleep by my father to see the sky painted red by the opening of the blast furnaces at Consett on the horizon. Thus early did I become conscious of the dominance of Consett in the barren moorlands of north-west Durham. The lead miners had not been forgotten there; the remains of the workings and their dwellings still lay about us on moorland walks, and the gooseberries still fruited in their abandoned gardens; but their place as an attraction for immigrant labour and as a source of alternative non-agricultural employment had been taken by Consett. The majestic display in the night-sky could be regarded as symbolic of its social significance then in a thinly-populated countryside.

In *Painted Red* Mr. Kearney has written a history of Consett from the discovery of ironstone deposits about 1839, through the formation initially of a partnership in 1840, to become the following year the Derwent Iron Company. The development of Consett and a substantial immigration of English and Irish workers followed and with them considerable social problems of which Mr. Kearney gives a lively account. The Derwent Iron Company presently ran into financial problems and in 1864 they were succeeded by The Consett Iron Company, though Mr. Kearney does not make it quite clear how they acquired the assets. In describing the better fortunes of the Company in the remaining years of the century and its more varying fortunes in the present century ending ultimately in closure, Mr. Kearney is particularly concerned with the people of Consett, with in effect the evolution of a community. This account must be seen as a *social* history.

An academic historian might be troubled by the presentation of this history. The album

format, the scrapbook structure, the wealth of illustration, the argument of modern witness in the foreword and in the final chapter present the appearance of a social document, almost a manifesto, the material rather than the achievement of history. It is not to be taken as showing any lack of sympathy with the problems of the community of Consett if we posit that this aspect is not our present concern. The title might be taken to imply a political bias, but, while it needs little discernment to see that the author is no supporter of the policies of the Thatcher years, he is quite even-handed in giving credit to the employers when this is due. This in sum is a fair and lively account of a chapter in our history of great current and local relevance, written with a high degree of commitment. It would have been the better for one or two maps.

JOHN PHILIPSON

W. R. Childs & J. Taylor, *The Anonimalle Chronicle, 1307 to 1334* (Yorkshire Archaeological Society, Record Series CXLVII, 1991), xii, 185.

The text of this latest volume in the YAS Record Series provides a vivid thumbnail sketch of notable events and personalities during its brief period of reference and is well worth reading in the original Anglo-French, even if using the parallel translation for the occasional crib. The translation is a fair, if free, version of the text, rendering people and places in their modern form.

The 45 pages of text are preceded by 77 pages of introduction explaining the significance of the fragment and its relationship to the longer texts of the Continuation of the *Brut* chronicle. The editors argue that the MS, part of MS 29 in the Brotherton Library, University of Leeds, was composed at York, possibly by a royal clerk, while part of the Exchequer was based there in the 1330s. The author was knowledgeable about national events and also events with a particular interest for Londoners. He also was in a position to record information about northern happenings ranging from flood

damage to the Franciscan friary at York in 1315 to the Scottish battle formation at Halidon Hill in 1333.

The editors appraise the value of their fragment, pointing out the occasional inaccuracies but concluding that it deserved publication alongside its own continuation, the *Anonimale Chronicle, 1333–81* of St. Mary's Abbey, York, previously edited by Professor V. H. Galbraith (Manchester, 1927, reprinted 1970). The editors also promise unique information on occupants of northern peels, although this proves disappointing. Certainly the word "peel" is frequently used, the town of Perth being provided with one in 1332, but after a double check on this point I could find the only "occupant" named was Sir Robert Colville, and this reference so vague that G. Ridpath in his *Border History* thought Colville was a prisoner there rather than castellan. Dr. Nicholson in *Edward III and the Scots, 1327 to 1335* (1965) interpreted the unspecified location as Oxnam in Berwickshire, and states that Colville transferred his allegiance to the English king after the surrender.

C. M. FRASER

Mathematical Tradition in the north of England, Peter & Ruth Wallis, Peter Ransom, and John Fauvel, Newcastle 1991, A4, ii+66pp. ISBN 0 9517323 0 7. £5 postfree obtainable from NEBMA, 12 Annaside Mews, Leadgate, Consett DH8 6HL.

This booklet stems from an exhibition organized by the authors on the occasion of the annual conference in Newcastle in 1991 of the Mathematical Association. One consequence is that it relies heavily on the visual element and the text is as much a running commentary on the illustrations as a continuous narrative history. This is however done skilfully and the result is a masterly work of exposition.

There is no need to pass this book by as likely to be too technical for the common reader. A great deal of it is about people and all of it is readily readable. It touches upon almanacs, schooling, women and school exer-

cise books as well as institutions and academics. In effect it is as much a social history as an account of a specialist field.

I thought at first the authors were guilty of an oversight in missing out James Cook, most distinguished of navigators, but realized he falls just outside their geographical limits. They might however have noted *Reeds Nautical Almanac* produced in Sunderland for generations. An appropriate exhibit in the exhibition might have been the copper medal of Charles Hutton presented to the Newcastle Museum by the Lit. & Phil. in (about) 1826.¹ Where is it now? The cut-off date is undefined, so it is unclear whether there should have been included Lewis F. Richardson FRS, a notable meteorologist who proposed the brilliant theory of numerical modelling of the atmosphere which foreshadowed the practice of weather forecasting now in use. Richardson was a Newcastle man, though much of his work was done elsewhere.

These questions are not intended to diminish the value and interest of the present book, rather to encourage the authors to consider the production of an augmented volume in a less occasional form. Meanwhile let us be grateful for a work in a specialized field that can be enjoyed by the common reader.

JOHN PHILIPSON

¹Fox, *Synopsis of the Newcastle Museum*, 311–12. Mr. A. E. Gilmour informs the reviewer that General Hutton, the son of Charles Hutton, presented another copy of the medal to our Society on 3 September 1823. The index card survives, but Mr. Gilmour was unable to trace the medal. See AA¹ II (1832), Donations, p. 3.

Meaden, G. T. (ed.), *Circles from the Sky: Proceedings of the First International Conference on the Circles Effect at Oxford*. London; Souvenir Press, 1991. 208pp., with numerous figures and monochrome plates. £14.99.

Meaden, G. T. (with foreword by Gimbutas, M.), *Goddess of the Stones: the Language of the Megaliths*. London; Souvenir Press, 1991. 224pp., with numerous figures and

monochrome plates, and 18 colour plates. £18.99.

Corn circles are like an unsolved crossword clue. Many explanations seem possible, if not always plausible, and there is a nagging feeling that the solution, when found, should have been obvious all the time. This analogy is not necessarily inappropriate, for one school of thought considers the entire crop circle phenomenon to be an elaborate puzzle of deliberate human manufacture. Terence Meaden is the leading crop circle researcher, and the amount of publicity associated with the subject in the national press results in part from his determination that they deserve serious scientific investigation.

Much more is at stake over the issue of the authenticity of crop circles than meteorology. When Meaden's deeper ideas begin to be revealed on p. 177 of *Circles from the Sky* they have direct archaeological implications: "Our ancestors found simple circles and rings in their crops and in the grass, and they worshipped them." Furthermore, it is claimed that *Goddess of the Stones* "provides the missing archaeological link between the ancient circles of stone, timber and earth, and the ancient and modern views of crop circles" (203).

Just over half of *Circles from the Sky* comprises papers delivered at a conference held in Oxford in 1990; the remainder consists of "post-conference papers and other additions" designed to bring the subject fully up-to-date for publication in 1991. Many of the papers are scholarly presentations of experimental data, others contribute further observations of crop circle formation; it would have been helpful if they had been grouped under common themes. Since I possess no expertise in the science of atmospheric electrical disturbances, I can only present my general impressions of the crop circle phenomenon. There is sufficient evidence, dating back to the seventeenth century and reinforced by eye-witness reports predating their current popularity, to support the proposition that some crop circles have a natural origin associated with atmospheric disturbances; Meaden's introductory paper provides a

clear statement of the evidence (11-52). Conversely, intuition suggests that many recent crop circles are fakes; it would require a considerable amount of evidence to persuade me that multiple circles combined with intricate geometric appendages (156-73) are not the result of an elaborate hoax.

Crop circle studies certainly generate strongly held views. The authors of a paper entitled "Crop circles: a scientific answer to the UFO mystery?" (92-121) state "*Quite simply, we suggest UFO research in its own right is now dead and has become of a part of meteorology!*" (108); their preferred explanation is Meaden's Vortex Mechanism. This statement should be read in conjunction with Meaden's annotated bibliography (202-4), where a book by crop circle publicists Delgado and Andrews is described as "A biased, paranormal-flavoured overview of the circles effect written by opportunist non-scientists taking an anti-scientific stance and who had previously written chiefly for *Flying Saucer Review*".

Goddess of the Stones is an attractive well-illustrated book that should sell very well. It begins with a rather thin overview of British prehistory, and outlines the crop circle phenomenon and its meteorological origin. Archaeologists would do well to read chapters 3-5 with an open mind, and subject Meaden's hypothesis to careful scrutiny. He proposes that the subtle oval and elliptical forms of many megalithic stone "circles" result from marking out the limits of a crop circle, rather than use of Thom's complex mathematical designs. By extension, round barrows are envisaged as sites of crop circles chosen as special places for burials (chapter 6).

Goddess of the Stones contains a remarkable assertion in its preface: "We can begin to retrieve the outline of a religion and perception of life which is appropriate to the British and Irish Neolithic and Bronze Ages. A window opens on the harmonious world of the Great Goddess, a world of peaceful coexistence which lasted for thousands of years until it was overthrown by sword-wielding invaders who devised, for the purposes of self-respect and the exploitation of the female half of the

population, the unforgiving gods of war, and thereby initiated a warrior age ruled by male gods, which has lasted to this day." (14). The whole book must be read in the light of this assertion, for which the ideas of Marija Gimbutas clearly provided inspiration (she even wrote a foreword to this book). In the place of the apparent scientific objectivity of *Circles from the Sky*, we have an attempt to subsume virtually everything that is known about prehistoric "ritual" sites and artefacts to a single religious cult, and a proposal that whirlwinds and crop circles were seen as the physical manifestation of the deities involved: "The phallus-like column can be equated with the circle making vortex which is centred on the womb-opening of the spiral-circle, itself an integral part of the body of the Earth Mother—Ceres herself." (51).

Once this monocausal thesis has been proposed, everything is thrown into the discussion, from cup and ring marks, which indicate the number of children in families (189–91) to corn dollies (pl. 16, facing p. 129), and from trepanned skulls (194–6) to spirals in Celtic art of various dates (chapter 14). Even a snail enjoying a crawl on Silbury Hill is said to bear Goddess symbolism and to epitomize birth and life (pl. 12). Although we may make observations about the location of ceremonial and funerary monuments, nothing certain can be said about the spiritual side of Britain's prehistoric religions until literary evidence begins to appear at the end of the Iron Age. What *can* be studied is the notion that "sword-wielding invaders" (14) or "God-dominated warrior groups" (214) transformed prehistoric Britain; I am not aware of any archaeological evidence from metal artefacts or sites that reveals a clear break between the Bronze and Iron Ages.

In conclusion, it must be said that *Goddess of the Stones* is a disappointment, in which Meaden has abandoned scientific methodology in favour of a monocausal explanation of prehistoric sites and religion that pays no attention

to the enormous critical literature that surrounds their study. This is unfortunate because most archaeologists will not read a book presented in this way; as a result, Meaden's intriguing suggestions about the origin of "megalithic mathematics" will fail to reach the audience they deserve.

KEVIN GREENE

BOOKS RECEIVED

The Archaeology of York, Vol. 15, fasc. 4: Bones from 46–54 Fishergate, T. P. O'Connor (C.B.A. 1991), £12.

This report describes bone assemblages recovered from 8th–9th century deposits of Anglian occupation and from a medieval priory of the Gilbertine order at 46–54 Fishergate, York. The discussion is of particular interest in relation to the Anglian occupation which may have been a specialized trading settlement.

The Archaeology of York, Vol. 14, The Past Environment of York Fasc. 6: Environmental Evidence from the Colonia (C.B.A. 1990), £18.

This fascicule records and discusses analyses of a wide variety of animal and plant remains from Roman and medieval deposits from excavations at the General Accident and Rougier Street sites in the city of York.

Prehistoric Rock Motifs of Northumberland, Volume 1, Ford to Old Bewick, Stan Beckensall, 4 Leazes Crescent, Hexham, ISBN 0 9517590 1 9. Price £3.30.

In this booklet Mr. Beckensall sets out to record all the rock motifs in the north of Northumberland. A second volume will record all the sites from Beanley to the Tyne.