

Books

Radiocarbon: Calibration and Prehistory, ed. Trevor Watkins. *Edinburgh University Press*, 1975. 147pp, £3.50.

REVOLUTIONS are rarely as simple as they seem at first, and the radiocarbon revolution is no exception. Complication upon complication have been piled upon the original conceptually simple idea, as the technical assumptions upon which it is based have come under critical scrutiny. The subject is now, it is said, in a state of near anarchy, as competing views vie for the understanding and support of the scientific and archaeological communities. The situation is made more difficult by the unavoidably mathematical nature of the argument, which can easily deter the archaeologist from trying to come to grips with it.

What a good idea, then, to ask six acknowledged experts to present various aspects of the problem in a way comprehensible (I hope—but would be interested to hear of readers' reactions) to the average archaeologist, and to publish them in one cover, as Watkins has done here. About half the book is

devoted to papers by Burleigh, Fletcher, Ottaway, Snodgrass and Fleming, dealing with the inherent uncertainties in C-14 dating, dendrochronology, and the implications for archaeological interpretation. There are also appendices on the practical aspects—how to take samples, who to send them to, how much it costs, etc. The rest of the book consists of a contribution by McKerrell to the calibration debate—'smoothies' against 'wiggles' (those who would like to see the calibration curve as smooth as possible and those who see it full of interesting kinks and wiggles—shades of Gulliver)—which comes down strongly on the 'wiggly' side.

The lack of any 'smoothy' contribution inevitably leads to an imbalance in the book as a whole, and reduces its value to the uninvolved reader. McKerrell argues his case well but tends in places to fall into the trap of 'data-snooping' (selecting data most favourable to a particular point of view, and testing it as if it had been randomly chosen) which means that the statistics presented are not as convincing as they might appear. Indeed, the

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statistical problem may be too complex for simple general tests to be applicable at all. One way to resolve the debate might be a Monte Carlo simulation—let the protagonists supply their hypotheses, generate a set of C-14 dates according to each model, and see which best resembles the data.

So, if you are interested in a reasonably up-to-date account of the state of play on C-14, read this book, but be careful and be critical. It is only part of the story.

CLIVE ORTON

Bricks to Build a House, by John Woodforde, *Routledge & Kegan Paul*. 208 + xiii pp., 112 illus., £3.50.

"HE FOUND it brick and left it marble." Thus Augustus improved Rome, and thus the common brick has all too often been dismissed as a dull and inferior material. Those who share this belief should read John Woodforde's book — and be prepared to change their minds!

His story begins with a sun-dried hand-made brick from Jericho, c. 8000 B.C., looking for all the world like a fancy bread loaf, but surely proof of brick's durability. Some 5000 years later came the introduction of kiln-fired bricks, but their sun-dried precursor remains in many hot countries the basic building material where clay and labour are cheap.

In England there was little development of brick after the Romans until the great revival of early medieval times, influenced by contact with the Low Countries. Brick's architectural possibilities were fully exploited by the Tudor and Georgian builders, and several fine examples are illustrated in colour.

The Industrial Revolution produced both the incentive and the means for a massive expansion in brickmaking, as it became the cheap and indispensable material for building canals, railways, factories, and those grim, shoddy rows of terraced housing which probably nourish the prejudice against brick as guilty-by-association with the more squalid aspects of 19th century England. Mr Woodforde does not gloss over the seamier side, and indeed is very informative on the long hard days of the men, women, and children who worked in the brickyards.

Surprisingly, this is the first full-length history of brick for the general reader for many years (apart from Jane Wight's *Brick Building in England*, 1972). With the growing interest in brick studies — witness the existence of a British Brick Society — and increasing activity in both urban and industrial archaeology, this book should find a wide market, and in my view deserves it. It is well produced and copiously illustrated, and (thanks to the generous support of the London Brick Company) its price is less than one might expect these days.

MICHAEL BUSSELL.

Current Journals

Archaeologia Cantiana, Vol. 91 (1975). Editor: A. P. Detsicas. Issued to members of Kent Archaeological Society, c/o Prings Cottage, Pilgrims Way, Upper Halling, Rochester).

VOLUME 90 forms an index to Volumes 65 to 88 and was not issued to members without extra payment. Volume 91, issued in 1976, has 234 pages, comprising 14 articles, many quite short, together with notes and intelligence of investigations and excavation in Kent during 1975. In Greater London Lilian Thornhill reports the excavation of the double-moated site near Elmers End station, Beckenham. Medieval pottery and the remains of a bridge are figured. From the High Weald James Money reports on the excavations at the two Iron Age hill forts on Castle Hill near Tonbridge, and from Canterbury J. H. Williams records excavations in Roman levels in that City in 1967. Palaeolithic and Mesolithic flint industries are described from Dartford and Canterbury, and a late 14th century Chantry Priest's house at Bredgar near Sittingbourne is analysed. Other articles range over heraldic glass, early Royal Saints, the medieval history of Rochester Cathedral and family history.

Transactions of the London and Middlesex Archaeological Society, Vol. 26 (1975). Editors: Lawrence Snell and Hugh Chapman. (Issued to members, c/o Bishopsgate Institute, 230 Bishopsgate, E.C.2). THIS volume, which has some 340 pages, continues the publication of important London excavations. The most substantial is Peter Marsden's detailed report on the investigations of the site of the Flavian Roman Palace. Equally detailed is Tim Tatton-Brown's part 2 of his report on the excavations at the Custom House Site, concerned mainly with the medieval finds. For this James Thorn has provided a detailed assessment of the medieval pottery found. Several other City excavations are reported, but Michael Hammerson's report on the, alas rather limited, excavations at the site of the Tudor and Renaissance palace of Arundel House demonstrates the wide range of current work. Good groups of post-medieval ceramics and fragments from Thomas Howard's early 17th century sculpture collection, known today as the Arundel Marbles, were found and are illustrated.

For a rural contrast, the remains of a linear earthwork at Brockley Hill are discussed by Stephen Castle. In dock-land, a brief note records the incredible chance of the location of a Roman watch tower, on a cleared site in Shadwell. Documentary studies look at Georgian Nurseries in the London Region, railways at Willesden and the brasses of Hendon and Heston.

JOHN ASHDOWN