

Books

Formation processes of the archaeological record, by M B Schiffer. *University of New Mexico Press*, 1987. 428 pp., 70 illus., bibliog., index. \$39.95 (hardback), \$19.95 (paperback).

FOR MANY YEARS, archaeologists have been aware that interpretation must take account of the processes that intervene between, sites structures and artefacts when in use, and their remains when discovered. In 1976 this idea was formalised by Professor Schiffer in his seminal, if oddly-named, book *Behavioural Archaeology*. Here he set out some ideas and terminology about such processes, which he called *transforms*. In the years that followed, the basic ideas were fleshed out in a series of case-studies, and the study of *site formation processes* developed. In this book, Schiffer brings this work, both published and unpublished, together in a coherent and structured whole.

After a short introduction, the book is in three parts: cultural formation processes, environmental formation processes and the study of formation processes. The first deals with the ways in which man creates and modifies archaeological sites – reuse, refuse disposal, treatment of the dead, disturbance and so on. The next looks at the natural processes which modify or even destroys artefacts and sites: agents of decay and soil disturbance, and large-scale processes which can bury or destroy entire sites. The last looks at ways in which the effects of such processes can be studied, concluding with two salutary case studies, one on the interpretation of radiocarbon dates and the ‘old wood’ problem, and one on the re-interpretation of ceramics from the Broken K pueblo.

The whole forms a very useful introduction to a frequently-overlooked topic, with plenty of (too many?) references for those who want to pursue a particular aspect further. It is written in a style which, for an American text-book, is remarkably fresh and jargon-free. Such jargon as there is – inevitable in a new sub-discipline – is carefully defined. British readers may regret the emphasis on ‘dry’ sites (the author is from the University of Arizona), and clearly much work remains to be done in assessing which of the many processes described are important in a wet temperate climate. Nevertheless, the general principles still hold. At the very least, this book would be a valuable check-list for anyone excavating or writing-up a site, or studying the finds from one. At best, it could open eyes to overlooked possibilities and lead to radically different interpretations of sites. I recommend it to anyone involved in excavation or finds work.

Clive Orton

Archaeology in Brent, by the Department of Development, London Borough of Brent, 1988. 70 pp., 46 maps. Price not stated.

THIS IS A report that has been cobbled together by the Borough Council of Brent. It is a get-off-our-backs-we-have-done-our-duty-to-archaeology type of publication. The Borough makes it quite clear at the beginning where it stands: “The Council is unlikely to be in a position to undertake archaeological rescue work or assist financially in such projects but can, and has in the past, given assistance by lending equipment”. Well, there you are. Not much more than a trowel or two from that quarter by the sound of it – but some suggestions: “The initial funding of small scale works may come from the reserves of the Museum of London”, or “In some instances English Heritage is able to offer financial assistance”, or “the Developer may be willing to contribute towards costs”. But if the worst comes to the worst “Voluntary labour from local amenity Societies can also assist” – that puts volunteers in their place, anyway.

This booklet is really just a list of sites in Brent which may contain archaeological material. It is poorly done with no proper appraisal of the possible importance of sites. One yielding two sherds of 13th century white ware gets more mention than one with Lower Palaeolithic flint implements, including two hand axes. The series of old maps superimposed on the modern street plan may be of use to planners, but I doubt if much else will. Some 43 pages of this 70-page booklet are taken up with reproducing reports (mostly descriptions of buildings) all but one of which are available in the Journals of the Wembley History Society and here are nothing but ‘padding’. This publication lacks proper archaeological oversight. It could have been more useful, and slimmer, if the Borough has paid a competent archaeologist to write it for them.

Colin Bowlt

The Roman Villa, by John Percival. *B. T. Batsford Ltd.*, 1988. 231 pp., 59 illus., bibliog. £14.95 paperback.

THIS WAS originally published in hardback in 1976, and in a Book Club Associates edition in 1981. It is a very interesting and informative book which sets the Roman villa in its historical, geographical and socio-economic context as a part and often a representation of the Roman Empire. It begins with a thought-provoking section *Definitions*, which discusses the precise definition of a villa, justifying the use of River’s definition and the consequent occasional deviations from it by explaining that even the

Romans themselves would not have been entirely certain of the precise definition.

A section on sources of evidence evaluates the different types of evidence used in the study of villas, including art as well as archaeology, explaining the advantages and disadvantages of each, and sensibly stressing the dangers of relying too heavily on a small amount of information.

The process of Romanisation, whether gradual or sudden, and the part played by villas in this process, are described in the next section in a clear style which is attractive to the reader and makes information easily digestible. This is followed by a comprehensive study of regional types and distributions of villas, citing examples from many parts of the Empire, discussing their nature, distribution and regional differences. The author devotes particularly large sections to discussions of villas in Gaul and Britain.

A useful section describes the nature of Roman agriculture and highlights the problems of farming in the areas, and the solutions to these problems.

In the sections on villa society and tenure patterns and on villa economy and investment the author tends to concentrate, by his own admission, on Gaul and Britain, as most of the detailed information on these subjects apparently comes from these areas. This specialisation is not a bad feature as it allows the author to concentrate on detailed discussions of the subjects without too much confusion by regional variations, and some examples from the rest of the Empire are used.

The section *The Fourth Century and Beyond* deals with the gradual disintegration of the Roman Empire and its effects on the Western provinces. Here the author sensibly highlights points such as the fact that not all evidence of burning is necessarily evidence of destruction by invading barbarians. He also makes it clear that more research needs to be done in order to discover exactly what happened in this period, and again stresses the importance of artistic and literary sources as well as archaeological ones.

The language and style used throughout the book is simple enough not to put off someone who is relatively ignorant of the subject, but has enough technical detail to satisfy more knowledgeable readers. It seems particularly suitable for students of the Roman Empire, especially those most interested in Roman Gaul and Britain.

Extensive notes and references, housed at the end of the text mean that the main text is left uncluttered while all sources are there if they are needed. The many illustrations are informative and closely-linked in with the text.

Altogether a most enjoyable and useful book which should appeal to a wide range of readers.

Elizabeth J. Broomfield

Fortress into City, the consolidation of Roman Britain, First Century AD, ed. Graham Webster. *B. T. Batsford Ltd.*, 1988. 178 pp., 94 illus., index, bibliogs., £19.95.

AT A TIME when most recent research is contained in accessible, and not-so-accessible archives, there is an increasing need for overviews of recent work, such as this book provides. Taking as its theme the transition of early Roman Britain from occupied and alien territory to civilian settlement, planned or otherwise, the book looks at six Roman towns through the eyes of archaeologists heavily involved in the latest excavation and research of each particular one. There are chapters on Colchester, by Philip Crummy; Gloucester, by Henry Hurst; Cirencester (not originally a fortress, but nevertheless having military antecedents), by Alan McWhirr; Exeter, by Christopher Henderson; Wroxeter, by Graham Webster, who also wrote the introduction.

Being able to compare the accounts of these towns, the reader is struck more by the differences than by the similarities. Most noticeable are the differences in the quality and quantity of evidence that are a result of differential preservation, accidents of discovery, varying opportunities for excavation and research, and so on. The chapters highlight how little is really known about the transition from military sites to civilian urban establishments, and how essential it is for sites due redevelopment to be thoroughly investigated, with adequate time and funding, before the evidence no longer exists.

One weakness is the omission of a chapter giving an overview of the main similarities and differences between the towns being considered; such a summary should perhaps have replaced the very basic introduction. As it is, the reader has to work hard to get the most out of the book.

Nevertheless, even if the pastry on the pie is a bit thin, the meaty individual chapters on specific towns are just as good, and the book will very useful to those interested in early Roman Britain, or as a good starting point for studying the individual towns themselves. The compare-and-contrast recipe of the book is something that we may well see more of in the future, as full publication of excavations seems to be becoming more and more of an exotic dish.

Lesley & Roy Adkins

The Archaeology of Surrey to 1540, (eds.) Joanna Bird and David G. Bird. *Surrey Archaeological Society*, 1987. 289 pp., 127 illus., bibliog. £12 plus £2

postage and packing from Castle Arch, Guildford, Surrey, GU1 3SX.

THE ARCHAEOLOGY of Surrey to 1540 is a most welcome addition to the group of county archaeologies which have appeared during the last 11 years. As with the other county archaeologies, it is a collaborative effort and the end product of a conference (held in October 1983). This is the first general survey of Surrey's archaeology for over 50 years, and it covers the whole of the historic county of Surrey (including the south-west London boroughs) plus the area of the modern Borough of Spelthorne, which is north of the Thames and was formerly in Middlesex. It provides a comprehensive picture of Surrey's past, and helps to correct the too often general impression that the archaeology of Surrey is less significant than that of neighbouring counties. With the exception of an important, but very technical paper on the geophysical and environmental background (which includes a helpful glossary), the volume is divided into very readable chapters on the successive traditional archaeological periods. Each chapter is written by one or more of the leading scholars involved in Surrey archaeology, and it is good to note that these scholars are a mixture of 'amateurs' and 'professionals'.

The book is very well produced, and has a large and varied selection of illustrations including photographs, distribution maps, plans, reconstruction drawings, drawings and photographs of objects, and two foldouts. Many of the line drawings are the work of David Williams, and this has helped to achieve a greater uniformity of style, something which is so often lacking in similar multi-author publications. A very useful innovation with regard to some of the plans/distribution maps is the use of colour (green), either as a border or in the actual drawing itself in combination with black. The 19-page bibliography provides a much-needed basis for future work.

This is a most useful, interesting and attractive book, and excellent value for money! It is dedicated to the late Ivan Margary, who was an outstanding benefactor of the Surrey Archaeological Society.

David Rudling

Wren's London, by Colin Amery. *Lennard Publishing*, 1988. 160 pp., (plates and 8 pp. text), index. £15.95. THE EFFECTIVENESS of Wren's classical City sky-line, with St. Paul's dominating its daughter churches, ranged round the lower slopes of Ludgate and the lesser hill on the other side of the Walbrook, is only known to present-day Londoners through 18th-century panoramas. The removal of churches to suit the decline of a resident population in Victorian times, followed by the destruction of the blitz, has

been compounded by comprehensive modern development, whose high blocks have obscured the towers and spires of the 39 Wren churches which are left (he built 52).

The book aims to restore the lost views by reproducing early photographs (from 1859 onwards) and comparing them with the 1710 *Prospect of the City of London*, sections of which are shown in close-up at the beginning of appropriate chapters. Identification of the individual churches beneath these close-ups would have been helpful, as the key on the endpapers requires a powerful magnifying glass to decipher. However, the author may expect the reader to have the intelligence and perseverance to relate following photographs to the panorama for himself, and the task is indeed made possible by their excellent reproduction. They are monochrome and have such clarity that every word of sale advertisements stuck on the walls of churches and all the information on fascia boards can be easily read – just the sort of thing that pleases local historians. Prints of churches, long since destroyed, supplement the photographs. It is a pity, however, that many of the illustrations are not dated, even approximately, and the fact that they are not listed is a serious shortcoming.

An eight page introduction sketches Wren's development as an architect and mentions his plans for a classical reconstruction of London after the Great Fire, but the book is not intended to be a full-scale guide to his buildings. Colin Amery hopes that by showing the beauty of a city overshadowed by St. Paul's, he might influence architects now preparing for the rebuilding of Paternoster Square. All who care about London must wish him and his book well.

Eileen Bowlt

Religion in Roman Britain, by Martin Henig. *B. T. Batsford Ltd.*, 1988. 263 pp., 109 illus., mostly pl., £14.95 paperback.

THIS BOOK was published in 1984 in hardback only and was reviewed (with praise) by Ralph Merrifield in *the London Archaeologist* (vol. 4, no. 16). As Merrifield pointed out, the book fills a major gap in the bibliography of Roman Britain, and so this reprint (not a revised edition) in paperback is most welcome, since it will allow many more readers access to their own copy of what has surely become one of the standard texts on the subject.

Lesley and Roy Adkins

The Idea of Prehistory, by Glyn Daniel and Colin Renfrew. *Edinburgh University Press*, 1989. 232 pp., £7.50 paperback.

THE HARDBACK edition (1988) was reviewed by Lesley and Roy Adkins in *LA* 5, no. 15 (1988).