

REVIEWS

PREHISTORIC BRITAIN - AN ILLUSTRATED SURVEY. Keith Branigan. Spur Books (1976) 144 pp. £5.00.

This well-illustrated work by an author with many local connections, covers the 250,000 years man has roamed these islands up to the time of the Roman Claudian Invasion. The scanty information available means that much of this huge time span is dealt with in summary, 15 pages serving to bring us to 4,000 B.C., which is the beginning of an era when knowledge of our predecessors becomes more abundant. From this point, each succeeding age or culture is clearly described in chronological order, the more usual terminology of Palaeolithic, Mesolithic and Neolithic being deliberately omitted.

The author states in the preface that the book is intended to serve a dual purpose, to provide an overall framework from which the student can fit in his more detailed studies, and for the general reader to obtain an appreciation of British prehistory. It may prove to have insufficient depth to fulfil the former context, but this very fact, the combination of a straight-forward and readable text, devoid of a great deal of technical argument, should make it a popular work with the general public.

E.J.B.

VICTORIAN AND EDWARDIAN BUCKINGHAMSHIRE. Margaret Lawson and Ivan Sparkes, Batsford (1976), 161 photographs. £4.45.

Current interest in old photographs gives rise to a steady stream of new books; this one, part of a series, is one of the better examples. The frontispiece is an excellent picture of Disraeli playing the country squire at Hughenden in 1870 but it is rivalled both by the High Wycombe muffin man and a pair of gypsies near Chesham. Mrs. Lawson has clearly found some collections hitherto unknown such as those contributed by the Purefoy family at Shalstone; her selection has been carefully done and for once the north of the county has not been neglected, although it would be interesting to know which village is shown in plate 7.

The introduction and captions are generally informative, but there are some annoying and unnecessary mistakes. Buckingham Old Gaol was built in 1748 not 1798, Hambledon should be Hambleton, County Hall at Aylesbury has not been 'attributed' to Sir John Vanbrugh since 1924 when the builder-architect was shown to be Thomas Harris; it is also misleading to write of Buckingham that 'signs of the supposed castle were discovered in 1877'; there is no doubt whatsoever of the existence of a mediaeval castle, the last remains of which were demolished to make way for the new parish church built in 1777-80. However these few errors will not seriously detract from the pleasure this book will undoubtedly give.

E.V.

BUCKINGHAM THE LOYAL AND ANCIENT BOROUGH. Douglas J. Elliott, Phillimore (1975), 263 pp. £4.95.

Mr. Elliott wisely refrains from calling this book a history of Buckingham: it is rather a collection of materials which will prove useful to a future historian of the borough. Many have been quarried out of the surviving borough records, now in the County Record Office; he has also made use of Silvester's MS history, kept in the Society's muniment room. It is, however, a very great pity that most of his references to this unprinted material are imprecise and useless, with no indication which of the scores of items which the borough records comprise is drawn upon. This is the criticism of a specialist reader, but the general reader will find much that is interesting and entertaining.

G.R.E.

A HISTORY OF CHESHAM BOIS. L. Elgar Pike. 24 pp., 10 plates (sold out).

This is a short, lively account of a small parish. Mr. Pike has lived in Chesham Bois for forty years, and is able to trace old roads and other lost features. He has collected information from older inhabitants and makes good use of the church records.

E.M.E.

SMOCKS IN THE BUCKINGHAMSHIRE COUNTY MUSEUM. Naomi Tarrant. B.C.M. (1976). 12 pp. 22 plates. 25p. postage 25p.

Miss Tarrant gives a short account of smocks and their wearers in 19th-century Buckinghamshire. A detailed catalogue of the Museum's collection of smocks follows, together with excellent photographs. This delightful and instructive booklet should stimulate interest in smocks and in the history of the countryside.