

BOOK NOTICES

Roman Bath. By Barry Cunliffe. (Research Reports of the Society of Antiquaries of London, no. XXIV). Pp. xxii+218, with 72 figs. and 84 plates. Oxford: University Press. 1969. Price not stated.

This volume, which is dedicated to the memory of the late Sir Ian Richmond, owes much to his skilled and perspicacious investigation of the Roman city. His own researches were centred on the Baths and sections of the report on this complex are published as he left them at his death in 1965. Professor Cunliffe and his colleagues of the Bath Excavation Committee, the foundation of which was inspired and guided by Sir Ian, have not only completed this unfinished report, but have presented their own researches on the other elements of the monumental centre. In addition the volume includes a summary of work in other parts of the city and a most valuable gazeteer of all Roman discoveries in Bath and its neighbourhood. The result is a survey of the Roman city, which for completeness and skilled interpretation can be equalled for few comparable sites in Roman Britain or indeed in the Roman west.

The Roman Baths of Aquae Sulis have long attracted the attention of scholars, notably, in the present century, of Frances Haverfield and W. H. Knowles. The present publication is mainly concerned with the amplification of their records and the reinterpretation of their results in the light of more recent discoveries and of wider comparative material. The account of the Temple of Sulis Minerva breaks new ground with its careful archaeological examination of such areas as were available and its detailed record of the architectural and epigraphic elements that have been found at different times. The reconstruction of the great Gorgon pediment of the Temple largely vindicates those proposed by earlier scholars, including the pioneer publication by Lysons in 1813 (here reproduced as Plate I). It also demonstrates how a careful study of the less regarded architectural fragments can lead to significant modifications of detail, such as the high podium, which can be justified both by the surviving elements and by analogy. Wider interest probably attaches to Professor Cunliffe's assessment of the date of the Temple. Professor Richmond and Professor Toynbee are quoted as advocating, though with proper reservations, a date in the third century; their opinion was based on art historical grounds. The present reports argues strongly for the first century, to which the historical and archaeological evidence points; many, like the present reviewer, will find these arguments convincing.

The Temple and the Baths of Aquae Sulis form so important a part of our Romano-British heritage that these sections of the book naturally make a first call on the attention. But it would be wrong to give the impression that the report is confined to a study of these two buildings. The altar and the monuments which adorned the temple precinct are fully considered, together with such portable objects as the votives from the Reservoir and a group of thirty-four gems from the main drain. The list of inscribed and carved stones covers not only the city but the cemeteries outside the walls, the discovery of which can be followed in the Gazeteer.

Outside the monumental centre there are admirably lucid summaries of a number of small scale excavations carried out in recent years. These are gradually adding to our knowledge of other parts of the Roman city and it is much to be hoped that this book will act as a stimulus to further research. New evidence concerning the defences is much

needed. The cautious and suitably qualified summary here given (p. 168) suggests that the defensive bank dates from the second half of the second century and was improved in the early third by the addition of a masonry wall, so that 'the defences of Bath would seem to follow the pattern of those elsewhere in western Britain.'

Finally a word must be said about the end of the Temple precinct, a subject here dispassionately examined in the light of silt analyses. At 'some time, probably towards the end of the fourth century or after, the precinct was allowed to become waterlogged, resulting in the formation of two feet of black peaty mud. During this time fragments of roofing slabs . . . fell into the swamp, together with surprisingly large quantities of animal bones and late Roman pottery, the latter clearly implying that the temple was abandoned before late Roman-style pottery had gone out of use . . . Later . . . mud . . . continued to be deposited, burying the rubble and lapping those parts of the structure which were still standing. This time no pottery or household rubbish was thrown into the bog, indicating that the spring and its surrounding marsh lay isolated in the centre of the sub-Roman or Saxon settlement.' The succinct and carefully phrased summary should be carefully considered by all concerned with the transition from Roman Britain to the succeeding age.

C.A.R-R.

Patrick Cowley, *The Church House*, S.P.C.K. for the Alcuin Club, 1970, pp. 92, 14s.

In this long essay Prebendary Cowley sees the establishment and the later closure of church houses as part of a gradual process during which the sacred and secular aspects of life in this country have converged. The medieval layman, no longer able to use the nave of his church for community activity was driven, says Mr. Cowley, first to the churchyard, and then to a building, very often not far distant, known as the church house. There, under the direction of churchwardens, church ales and other jollifications, very often held to raise money for the fabric fund, provided a focal point for social activity in many parishes until the 17th century. As supposed occasions for immorality, church ales were then banned under Puritan pressures, and the houses themselves were abandoned, often to become inns under private auspices, or schools or poor houses under parish officers.

The chronology of these church houses is difficult. The impression that they were born in the middle years of the 15th century is perhaps likely to be because churchwardens accounts, in which they are mentioned, begin to survive from about that time. Certainly the church brewhouse and bakehouse were often its direct antecedents. Equally, the point is made that the secularising process is shown in the fact that most such houses were the property of secular lords of manors. They were, of course, the likeliest to provide either a house, or manorial waste on which to build one in the centre of villages where the accommodation was required.

A third and most intriguing problem is the apparent popularity of church houses in the West Country. Only those in Devon have yet found their historian, and until more documentary and topographical evidence has been systematically collected, generalisations are likely to be unsafe. Certainly they occur very frequently in Somerset: out of fifteen parishes so far completed for the first volume of the *Victoria History*, nine definitely possessed church houses and one house — the Fleur de Lys at Stoke-sub-Hamdon — still remains.

R.W.D.

M. Q. Smith, *The Medieval Churches of Bristol*, Bristol Branch of the Historical Association, Local History Pamphlets, 1970; 24 pp. 4s.

The modern city of Bristol, despite the ravages of time and war and the enthusiasm of the rebuilders, the restorers and the developers, still possesses a wealth of medieval ecclesiastical architecture to the discerning eye. From documentary evidence as well as from surviving masonry Dr. Smith traces the development of style in church building not only within the medieval city and its suburbs, but also in three former country parishes now within the limits of the modern city. This method is both refreshing and enlightening; but medieval Bristol has to be sought carefully, and words alone are perhaps not enough. This series is not right for a heavily illustrated work; but such a work, along the lines of this pamphlet but with many more illustrations, is certainly needed.

R.W.D.

Geological Highlights of the West Country. A Nature Conservancy Handbook. By W. A. Macfadyan, with contributions by Dr. A. W. G. Kingsbury. Pp. 296 (Butterworths: London, 1970). £3.00.

It is, perhaps, not generally known that, as well as the conservation of habitats of plants and animals, the Nature Conservancy is responsible for the maintenance of certain sites of geological interest and importance. The publication of the Nature Conservancy's first geological handbook is therefore timely, and it is particularly appropriate that it should cover the West of England. This, as the Director of the Nature Conservancy remarks in his preface, is "classic ground", for it was here that William Smith, between 1791 and 1805, laid the foundations of stratigraphical geology. Upon these foundations a relative geochronology, of increasing refinement, has since been erected and, in recent years, this has been fitted into a calendrical framework by means of radioisotopic dating. Moreover, William Smith's principles were applied during the last century to archaeology by Schliemann and, more scientifically, by Pitt-Rivers, and are now, with radio-carbon dating, taken for granted by modern archaeologists.

Dr. Macfadyan, formerly Chief Geologist to the Nature Conservancy, has produced a scholarly account of ninety sites of geological interest in Cornwall, Devon, Dorset, Gloucestershire and Somerset, which have been notified as Sites of Special Scientific Interest or as National Nature Reserves. Twenty-three of these are in Somerset, and include the textbook example of an unconformity between Palaeozoic and Mesozoic rocks at Vallis Vale near Frome, the finest sections of the Rhaetic in the west of England in the cliffs and foreshore at Lilstock and Blue Anchor, the classic section of Carboniferous Limestone in the Avon Gorge, and caves on Mendip and Quantock. Descriptions of a number of sites of mineralogical importance have been contributed by the late Dr. A. W. G. Kingsbury, who was for many years a member of this Society. There is a detailed description of each site, often accompanied by a clear, well-drawn section (the standard of reproduction of the half-tone plates is deplorable and quite unworthy of the text); there are notes on conditions of deposition, on fossil fauna and flora, and, in the case of caves, on living animals peculiar to this environment. In addition, reasons are given why the site is considered to be worthy of preservation. For those readers who wish to enlarge their knowledge of the region there is a full and up-to-date bibliography.

And, most important, the author includes a code of conduct for visitors to geological sites: important because, while damage to wild-life habitats can, in some cases, recover through careful conservation, mutilation of a geological section is irreversible. As a bonus Dr. Macfadyan instructs the reader how to imitate in his bath the sinister noises heard in Wookey Hole.

For those interested in Geology this is a most readable book, eminently suitable for dipping into or for taking on holiday to the West Country; but one wonders how intelligible it would be to a reader devoid of geological training, even with the help of the seven-page glossary.

A. D. HALLAM.

P. J. Fowler, K. S. Gardiner, and P. A. Rahtz. *Cadbury, Congresbury, Somerset, 1968, An Introductory Report*. (Department of Extra-Mural Studies, Bristol University, 1970). 48 pp., 15 illustrations and 4 plates, 10s.

This report of the excavations in 1959 and 1968 sets a high standard in the publication of archaeological investigation and should be consulted by those preparing their own work for the press. The excavations showed that the hill had been occupied, discontinuously, from Mesolithic (or even Palaeolithic) times until the 6th century A.D., with structures dating from the E.P.R.I.A. and post-Roman periods, the last being the most interesting, in view of the comparative rarity of sites of that period. The report includes a discussion relating the small amount of material available at the time to the pattern of I.A. and Roman occupation in the area, and, most usefully, full descriptions of the pottery fabric types of the P.R.I.A., Roman and post-Roman sherds that occur on the site. This catalogue will be a great help to other people working in Somerset, especially for the post-Roman period, in which the pottery types, both imported and locally-made, are not well-known. One disadvantage of publishing a detailed report in the early stages of a long excavation is that the interpretations are bound to change (see p. 101); it is to be hoped that an equally high standard will be maintained in subsequent reports.

N.L.

John Campbell, David Elkington, Peter Fowler and Leslie Grinsell. *The Mendip Hills in Prehistoric and Roman Times*. (Bristol Archaeological Research Group, 1970). 36 pp., 6 illustrations, 5s.

This booklet, following the B.A.R.G. Field Guides, provides a useful summary of the present state of knowledge of the Prehistoric and Roman periods on the Mendip Hills, and provides a sound introduction to this important region. The Mendips form a compact block of hills, which has produced distinct variations of more widespread cultures in most of the periods under consideration, and has some aspects that are of national, as well as local, importance, particularly the Cheddar deposits of the Upper Palaeolithic and the evidence of Roman lead-mining activity. The chapters are individual contributions from the four authors, and vary considerably in style and approach, but, as a whole, the text is lively and informative. The book also includes an inventory of sites, a brief bibliography and a list of museums with material from the Mendips.

N.L.

Leslie Grinsell. *Prehistoric Sites in the Mendip, South Cotswold, Wye Valley and Bristol Region*. (Bristol Archaeological Research Group, 1970), 32 pp., 3s. 6d.

This is a revised edition of the B.A.R.G. Field Guide No. 1, including now the Wye valley, easily accessible from Bristol since the opening of the Severn Bridge. It lists under periods the main visible sites in the area, with notes on what can be seen, if and where the site is published, and in which museum material from the site can be seen. This, like the other Field Guides, would be a useful addition to one's 'car library', when travelling in the areas covered.

Max Hebditch. *Guide Catalogue to the Roman Collections from South Western Britain, Part 1: The Guide*. (The City Museum, Bristol, 1970), 48 pp., 12 Plates, 1 map, no price quoted.

This Guide is closely related to the arrangement of the material in the new Roman Gallery in Bristol City Museum. Unfortunately, its title is misleading, as the collection comes almost entirely from North Somerset and South Gloucestershire, but, within those geographical limits, it gives a useful outline of the Roman occupation in the Bristol region. It is illustrated with a map and twelve plates of the most important objects, and is to be followed soon by a selective catalogue.

A Register of Environmental Research on the Mendip Hills, Somerset. By S. T. Trudgill and F. M. Courtney.

This is a list of all the individuals and organisations known to be involved in environmental research on the Mendips. The register covers a wide range of topics, including archaeology, botany, spelaeology, geology, zoology and climate, and will be kept up to date. A copy has been deposited with the Society and can be consulted at Taunton Castle.