

## Reviews

*The Archaeology of Wessex.* By L. V. Grinsell. Pp. xvi+384. Price 42s.

In this book L. V. Grinsell sets down facts and impressions about the field monuments of Wessex which have been accumulated during more than two decades of study in this part of England. The chapter or two in *Ancient Burial Mounds of England* became totally inadequate after so much time had been spent documenting the sites and artifacts in Wiltshire for Volume 1 of the *Victoria County History*. A gazetteer of the barrows of Dorset and residence on the western fringe of Wessex has allowed him to fill out his knowledge of this all-important area. *The Archaeology of Wessex* is the fruit of his immense labours; for us it is an invaluable source for further study and a production of much charm.

The author begins with a description of the geology of Wessex. Then he peoples it with the succession of communities and cultures, remains of which can be found on the ground and in museum show-cases. The picture is extended from the first farmers with their causewayed camps and long barrows, through to the Saxon invasion and the building of Wansdyke and Bokerley.

The field monuments of each period are Grinsell's primary interest and upon them he concentrates. He does not, however, isolate earthworks from peoples and things; material cultures are described in some detail and at the end of the book there is a valuable list of museums in the counties embraced by Wessex and reference to others further afield, which possess Wessex material. There are six period maps with sites plotted upon a geological base. Though they contain so many different symbols that no very precise pictures are obtained, they nevertheless present an overall pattern of occupation which will be of interest to those unfamiliar with the region. There are fifteen half-tone illustrations, most of them aerial photographs. A number of these are unfamiliar, for instance the astounding settlement on Gussage Hill. It is a pity, however, that we have to see too many illustrations of places which have been published before, when air-photographs of sites like the Knowlton Circles or the Normanton barrow cemetery have not yet been successfully reproduced. It is misleading to show the Fyfield Down fields when it is now generally believed that this system is a palimpsest of many periods.

Essentially, this book is a guide for those who wish to study monuments in the field. Index I is a Gazetteer of nearly 1,000 sites, with map references to two figures, arranged alphabetically in counties.

There is an immense amount of valuable material in this book. The list (with bibliographies) of Romano-British lead pigs recorded in Wessex, of potteries and tile kilns, strip lynchets, field systems, enclosures and other features will light the way for research workers who come after Mr. Grinsell. And all will take delight at the scraps of more extraneous information which are so characteristic of this author. How many of us knew that a full-size Edwardian reproduction of the pediment from the temple of Sul Minerva is to be seen near the Holburne of Menstrie Museum; that there is a track metalled with wasters from the Alice Holt potteries—or that Pitt-Rivers had built the six-sided enclosure surrounding the Giant at Cerne Abbas.

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When a book is written primarily for those who are not professional archaeologists, it is perhaps a pity that jargon like 'a slightly belgicized development of the Southern Third B Culture' is allowed to appear. Apart from a few blemishes like this, and details of opinion, *The Archaeology of Wessex* is to be welcomed as an introduction to the monuments and museum antiquities of this region.

NICHOLAS THOMAS.

*Old Banbury.* By E. R. C. Brinkworth. Banbury Historical Society, 1958. Pp. 25; 9 illustrations and 3 plans. Price 3s. 6d.

This booklet gives a short introduction to the history of Banbury down to 1835 and is based partly on the consideration of new material which has been worked upon during the last ten years, and partly on the labours of the past local historians, Beesley, Braithwaite and Potts.

There are chapters on Early History, the Middle Ages, the Tudor and Stuart periods and the 18th and early 19th centuries; included are plans of the parish in medieval times and in about 1440 and of the site of Banbury Castle. There are eight well-produced photographs of buildings taken by V. Bromley and a reproduction of an engraving of the old parish church pulled down in 1790.

The text is well written in an attractive style; it deals mainly with the social history and the topographical evolution of Banbury. The omission of even a list of houses of architectural or historical interest and their contents may be regretted by some. Perhaps this is to be remedied in the full-scale book which the Banbury Historical Society expect to publish in 1960.

In the meantime the Society is to be congratulated on the production of this short and efficient popular history.

P. S. SPOKES.

*Journey into Roman Britain.* By G. M. Durant. London: G. Bell & Sons Ltd., 1957. Pp. vi+264, 16 plates and 23 text figures. Price 20s.

The author describes his book as originally intended for adolescents interested in the ruins of Roman Britain, but later was developed for 'people of all ages and indeed of all walks of life [who] would welcome an opportunity of learning, in a simple way, the meaning of 'the surviving remains of the Roman Empire. This is the most difficult kind of book to write. Simplicity is the product of deep and wide knowledge and without such knowledge the right background cannot be portrayed nor the right facts selected nor their significance shown. Mr. Durant, though obviously he has read much and travelled widely in Britain, makes no pretension to scholarship. His approach is that of the journalist, making sweeping generalizations and attempting to create atmosphere. Too many words, however, produce a dull effect and make no lasting impression. Nevertheless it is a brave attempt to combine a history of Roman Britain with a topographical description of the antiquities arranged in categories. The Prologue, based on *Beowulf*, *The Ruin*, and *The Shropshire Lad*, was a good idea; it is followed by brief descriptions apparently meant to be guides to Maiden Castle, Colchester, Verulamium and London, woven in with an account of the Conquest and the rebellion of the Iceni; this is followed by visits to the three legionary fortresses at York, Caerleon and Chester, but here more

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precise directions to enable the stranger to find his way should have been substituted for the 'rolling clouds' and 'twittering birds'. Strangers indeed would do much better with the general background given by I. A. Richmond in his *Roman Britain* (Penguin Books), and with the Caerleon and Chester guides by the late V. E. Nash Williams and Mr. Graham Webster respectively, or with the eleventh edition of the *Handbook to the Roman Wall*, the use of all of which has been acknowledged by Mr. Durant. In the last, for instance, he would find a proper account of the 'Vallum' (p. 72). Yet thanks to the last book, the description of the Wall on those rare fine June days when clouds do roll and cast shadows and the wind does sigh in the grass, provides some useful, practical hints. The description of the classes of towns, self-governing *colonia*, tribal *chef-lieux*, trading centres and spas, forms the best part of the book, though it contains statements that need correction, as do historical statements such as those on pp. 115-7 which telescope events too violently, events which occurred over a long period of years and thus gives a false impression. It is not at all certain that any Roman town was *continuously* occupied after the Roman period except as a refuge; it was some centuries after A.D. 400-50, before even Colchester, Exeter or Winchester were re-established as urban settlements in the proper sense of the term.

The work indeed seems to fail whether as an historical account or a guide, the latter because the arrangement by classes of sites takes the reader from York to Verulamium, from Aldburgh to Norwich, etc., and on a 'Journey' could only be used as a reference book, and for that it is insufficiently detailed.

'The Tale of the Museums' might seem a useful exercise of the imagination, but without many pictures or without reference to the museums containing the objects the imagination is not stirred. The plates indeed are well reproduced, but apart from the excellent photograph of the Chester quay (but not that where the lead pig was lost) they are well known. The maps are useful and more should have been added. The other drawings are inadequate and sometimes incomprehensible, e.g. the hypocaust on p. 49, the working of which is nowhere properly explained; and the absence of a scale is to be deplored: e.g. on p. 215, the relief of the dog from Caerwent might be the same size as the lamp or the ladder shown on the same page.

Some readers may find useful this 'Journey' and be inspired by it to go and explore for themselves, and if interest is thus aroused the book was well worth writing.

M. V. TAYLOR.