

# Book reviews

**L'artisanat romain: évolutions, continuités et ruptures (Italie et provinces occidentales)** edited by M Polfer. *Éditions monique mergoil, Montagnac (monographies instrumentum 20)*, 2001. A4. ISBN 2-907303-61-9. Euro 36.

This publication is the product of a colloquium held in Luxembourg in October 2001 as part of an international research project on crafts in the Roman empire, supported by the European Union's Culture 2000 programme. The truly international nature of the meeting is reflected in the 20 papers by authors working in nine different countries which are published in five languages. Some papers deal with specific crafts: metalworking, pottery production, glassworking and the working of wood, bone and leather; while others take a broader, economic view or focus on production in particular towns or areas.

The metallurgical papers are Justine Bayley: Non-ferrous metal technology in Britain in the earlier first millennium AD (69–77) and Marc Leroy: La production sidérurgique en Gaule: changements et mutations perceptibles entre le Haut Empire et les débuts du haut Moyen Age (79–95) while other papers with varying proportions of metallurgical content are Ken Dark: Proto-industrialization and the economy of the Roman Empire (19–29), Jeanne-Marie Demarolle: Un corpus en question, l'iconographie lapidaire des métiers en Gaule Belgique (31–42), Frédéric Loridant: Artisanat en milieu urbain: l'exemple des villes et des agglomérations secondaires du nord de la Gaule Belgique (185–193), Günther Moosbauer: Brüche und Kontinuitäten im Handwerk zwischen römischer Kaiserzeit und Frühmittelalter im oberen Donaauraum (207–214), Alain Trintignac: Évolution de l'artisanat dans la cité des Gabales (Lozère) du haut-Empire à l'Antiquité tardive (221–242) and Nadine Dieudonné-Glad: Continuité et ruptures dans les activités artisanales d'une agglomération secondaire d'Aquitaine: *Rauranum* (Rom, Deux-Sèvres) entre le Ier et le Ve siècle ap. J.-C. (243–260).

Bayley's paper identifies the main classes of non-ferrous metalworking finds known from Iron Age, Roman and Early Saxon Britain and discusses reasons for their relative frequencies and distribution. Leroy maps the

areas of Gaul where iron was worked in pre-Roman, Roman and post-Roman times, and for the Roman period indicates the relative scale of production of each. His discussion covers all areas, not only the major ones, and considers changes in the scale of production in the post-Roman period. Metalworking is the trade most frequently represented on the funerary monuments considered by Demarolle while Loridant suggests that in Gallia Belgica, it is only at Baudécet, Liberchies and Tirmont that metalworking is on a scale to meet more than local needs. Dieudonné-Glad describes a group of workshops used by a butcher and for leather, ferrous and non-ferrous metalworking. The forge was established in the later 2nd century and continued in use until at least the end of the 4th century. It is at this late period there is evidence for the working of copper alloy sheet associated with a hemispherical hearth.

Justine Bayley

**Medieval Decorative Ironwork in England** by Jane Geddes. *The Society of Antiquaries of London, London, 1999. 411pp, 584 figs, 6 maps, 19 tables. ISBN 0 85431 273 0 £75*

A century ago, J Starkie Gardner, Keeper of Metalwork at the Victoria and Albert Museum, published his *Ironwork I: From the earliest times to the end of the mediaeval period* (London, 1892). Last revised in 1927, and reprinted in 1978, this remained the principal general survey of its subject until the publication of Jane Geddes' *Medieval Decorative Ironwork in England*, which must now, deservedly, be regarded as the standard work. This book, which is based on an impressive first-hand study of the majority of surviving decorative ironwork in England dating from c1050 to 1500, is arranged in six main parts with a supporting catalogue. The first two parts deal with the technical background, including basic principles of dating, techniques of ironworking, and the construction of medieval doors and chests, while the third part addresses the liturgical and symbolic importance of church doors. The last three parts, which contain the bulk of the argument of the book, present the ironwork in visually related groups, setting them in a chronological and stylistic context. The ironwork, it must be noted, is overwhelmingly from

churches, principally on doors, chests and tombs, in the form of hinges, handles, lock plates, grilles and railings. The analysis is handled masterfully, and with a clarity which belies the range and variety of what was, of course, the product of hand forging by individual smiths, each with his own whims and insights. The analysis seeks general trends, and is not side-tracked by minutiae, with the result that broad and usable typologies, with realistic dating, are established. The text is not overwhelmed by descriptive or other detail, since this is provided in the comprehensive and clearly laid out 94-page catalogue with its succinct descriptions of the ironwork and its context. It is particularly satisfying that the majority of the ironwork discussed is also illustrated, usually by photographs, sometimes by antiquarian drawings. These illustrations have been skilfully placed within the appropriate chapters where, as the author rightly observes, they emphasise the visual connection between items.

The problem of establishing a chronology for the ironwork had to be overcome. Little is dated securely – even that associated with documented tombs, for example, need not be what it seems. The conservatism of some medieval smiths, and the continuity of some designs, make stylistic evidence alone very misleading, and ultimately dating depends on the cumulative evidence in which the setting, carpentry and design of the iron all create a general impression of date. Not infrequently the author uses the wider context of a church to indicate the reuse of ironwork or the resetting of doors and grilles. Even with ironwork of the standing of that commissioned by Edward IV for St George's Chapel, Windsor, she was forced to confront the problem that despite their long historiographical pedigree, hardly anything was known about the items, and that most of the commentators recycled each others' descriptions and myths. This book recycles no myths. It offers a well-founded, thoroughly-researched and well-illustrated national record of its subject, and it is also a worthy celebration of the craft of the blacksmith whose skills are amply demonstrated by the range of ironwork which it documents.

Ian Goodall

**The Historical Archaeology of Britain c.1540-1900** by Richard Newman with David Cranstone and Christine Howard-Davis. *Sutton Publishing, Stroud, 2001. vi + 249 pp, 82 illus, ISBN 0 7509 1335 5. £25.00 (hb).*

The wording on the dust-cover of this ambitiously-titled book states that it sets out to provide a 'much-needed

overview of the increasingly important field of post-medieval archaeology in England, Wales and Scotland'. The enormity of this task is duly acknowledged in the introduction, where a hasty retreat is sounded. The authors, we are told, wanted to provide an update on David Crossley's *Post-Medieval Archaeology in Britain* (1990). Unfortunately the sheer weight of new work undertaken in the 1990s, mostly as a result of PPG16 interventions, meant that it was impossible to cover 'all or even most of the aspects of the period 1540–1900 in anything other than a summary manner' (p.1).

The detail, and in some cases the significance, that is missed by the need for compression in the present volume is excused by the claim that the book has a different geographical coverage to conventional archaeological reviews, with an emphasis on the north and west of Britain, rather than the south and east of England. Although I agree that there is a need to move beyond the predominantly southern and anglocentric interpretation of British post-medieval culture(s), it is noticeable that the book is in essence a series of extended essays on subjects and geographical areas that are familiar to Newman. Gaps are filled by contributions from David Cranstone and from Christine Howard-Davis.

The book is divided into four sections: buildings archaeology, landscape archaeology, industrial archaeology, and artefacts. There are six chapters, including the introduction, and their length varies considerably. Newman's contributions include the introduction (9pp), along with chapters on Landscape Archaeology (83pp), House and Home (57pp), and Buildings of Secular and Spiritual Authority (33pp). David Cranstone's chapter, Industrial Archaeology: Manufacturing a New Society, is limited to 28 pages, and Artefacts, by Christine Howard-Davis is a mere 14 pages long.

In surveying the period 1540–1900 three major cultural trends are identified as having transformed British material life: capitalism, consumerism and colonialism. Within this proposed theoretical framework two fundamental assumptions are offered to guide discussion. First, that 'changes in material culture occur at different times in different places, dependent upon social circumstances' and, second, that 'the relationship between these elements is not linear but dynamic and iterative' (p.9). These significant insights into the nature of material culture offer the promise of a work which will move beyond the frequently object-fixated world of British post-medieval studies. The theme of the active

role played by material culture is developed further by the assertion that 'The very concepts of trickle-down and class emulation of material culture are questioned by the ensuing study, and an alternative thesis begins to emerge of a triumphant middle class, who come to share power with the landed elite and whose values are imposed through material culture of the poor'. The lack of a clear narrative thread obscures the proof of this thesis. To take just one example, urban housing and living conditions are described in detail in Chapter 3. A further 32 pages on urban archaeology are included in the following chapter on Landscape, with inevitable overlap.

It is instructive to compare coverage of metals and metal working in this volume with that presented by Crossley eleven years earlier, who highlighted the fact that archaeo-metallurgical studies of post-medieval iron working were largely unconnected with the wider study of technology and artefacts. He also drew attention to the inadequacy of research on non-ferrous metals. Cranstone makes a conscious effort at redress. The introduction and spread of the charcoal blast furnace and finery forge within England is re-assessed as being less abrupt than previously supposed. The role of capital in the development of the early iron industry and the relationship with possible continental European technologies are also highlighted. Also, Cranstone's discussion includes a useful overview of the mining and working of lead, copper and tin.

Overall, the volume lacks the clarity and logical structure of Crossley's book, which had been shaped by an empiricist stance and an ability to synthesise detail gained from university teaching. It does however contain many useful pieces of information, and will no doubt find a use as a student text when read in conjunction with the earlier book.

James Symonds

**Furness Iron: the physical remains of the iron industry and related woodland industries of Furness and Southern Lakeland** edited by Mark Bowden. *English Heritage, Swindon, 2000. x + 90pp, 64 figs. ISBN 1 873592 47 7. £9.95.*

Furness and the southern part of the Lake District have provided the resources for a charcoal-fuelled iron industry which, from medieval origins, grew to national significance in the eighteenth century. The bloomeries of the middle ages and the sixteenth-seventeenth centuries made iron on a scale sufficient for local needs, based on bog ores and, for higher-quality output, on the

hematites of south-west Furness. It was the eighteenth-century national market for the highest qualities of pig iron which led to a remarkably closely-dated sequence of blast-furnace construction between 1711 and 1748, accompanied by the conversion of water-powered bloomeries to finery forges, where pig iron which was not shipped coastwise was converted to bar iron.

The middle of the eighteenth century was the heyday of the industry, but three furnaces, Backbarrow, Duddon and Newland remained in use through much of the nineteenth century, with Backbarrow only closing in 1966, having used coke for only its final 40 years. Charcoal supplies were ample, from the coppice-woods of the district, which were also used for industries such as bobbin-turning for the textile industry.

The outline history of the Furness industry has long been known, set out by Alfred Fell in 1908 and developed by the descriptions of standing structures by John Marshall and Michael Davies-Shiel in their *Industrial Archaeology of the Lake Counties* (1969). The book under review is the first examination of the industry to be based on detailed survey of its buildings in their landscape context. There are four main sections: the introduction covers the geology and topography of the region and outlines the history of the industry. The two survey-based sections cover respectively the provision of materials and the processes and sites of iron production. There are two brief concluding sections, one a summary, the other a note on conservation issues by John Hodgson, the Lake District National Park archaeologist. The surveys on which the book is based were carried out by the former Royal Commission on the Historical Monuments of England between 1994 and 1999, one of the last projects before the amalgamation with English Heritage. The survey programme was selective in its coverage of bloomeries, to whose numbers new sites are still being added. The blast furnaces and finery forges present less of a problem. There were only ever eight furnaces, of which four survive in substantial form, and seven forges, of which four can be identified by traces of structures. References to these can be traced through the index, but the lack of a gazetteer makes the book less usable than it might have been. There is excellent coverage of the archaeological indications of exploitation of the woodlands.

The book is illustrated to a high standard, the photography, maps and building-surveys being all that one expected of RCHME. There are signs of hurried production, with wrongly-numbered scales (pp.55-6), missing text (p.30) and pagination at odds with the

contents list (pp.34ff). Some copies have been sold with erratum sheets to cover the omission on p.30. In essentials, however, this is an important and very reasonably priced contribution to the history of the British charcoal iron industry.

David Crossley

**Houses for Steam Driven Blowing Engines in North East England** by J K Harrison. *The Cleveland Industrial Archaeologist Research Report No 8, 2001. 49pp, 57 figs. Available from T T Hay, Grindstone Garth, Dalton, Richmond, North Yorks DL11 7HX. ISBN 0-905728-05-X. No price stated.*

For many years the Cleveland Industrial Archaeology Society has been producing excellent publications in which the iron industry has featured strongly; this monograph continues the tradition. Large engines and their houses dating from the 19th century have fascinated later generations, and a substantial number have survived, from mining, water supply and, thanks especially to Coalbrookdale, the iron industry. Although it has proved possible for the other industries to preserve outstanding examples of the largest of their genre, no example of either blast furnace or blowing engine survives from the truly heroic age of iron smelting, the 1860s and 1870s, when 'Cleveland practice' led the world. It is fortunate that a century later, at the time of their final demise, John Harrison, David Tomkins and a succession of willing grammar school pupils and a few others, set about drawing and photographing what remains were still to be seen.

Smelting of low grade ironstone, from what were then considered huge deposits in the North Yorkshire moors,

was made economic by the increase in the size of blast furnaces. Volumes grew from around 126 cubic metres in the 1850s to 1100 cubic metres by the 1870s and heights from around 13 to 35 metres. The changes much reduced the ratio of coal to ore (or to iron output) and much greater quantities of air were required, against greater pressures. The beam engines, despite their size, as illustrated by Percy in his *Metallurgy of Iron* (1864), and those initially used at Middlesborough, were replaced, first by the direct-acting vertical engines designed and patented by Archibald Slate. These were lighter and smaller, working at much higher speeds, with two, three or four engines operating separately or coupled together at a flywheel. But Slate's design proved less successful with larger engines, and it was John Gjers' 'Cleveland' design which became standard, until overtaken by American innovations.

Harrison briefly describes the major developments, and the different designs of these engines, with contemporary illustrations, then presents and comments on a series of architectural and engineering elevations and photographs of seven houses on five sites. These vary from those he refers to as having 'few concessions to ornamental detailing' (has he looked at modern warehousing?) to the delightful design (the author leaves the viewer to decide) built at Port Clarence, partly based on St Peter's Church, Barton-on-Humber. The design, by Philip Webb, the contemporary and colleague of William Morris, was probably wasted on a site where change and grime soon detracted from its architectural merit. The monograph is well produced internally, but it may be time for the Society to change its covers, which nowadays appear somewhat drab.

Lynn Willies