

# Book reviews

**Ethnoarchaeology in Action** by Nicholas David and Carol Kramer. *Cambridge University Press (World Archaeology Series), Cambridge, 2001. xxvi + 476pp, 97 figs, 33 tables, 1 map. ISBN 0-521-66105-6 (cloth) and ISBN 0-521-66779-8 (paper). No price stated.*

*Ethnoarchaeology in Action* is a welcome departure from the usual format of the Cambridge World Archaeology series. The series has hitherto produced a series of volumes, each of which presents a survey of the archaeology of a region of the world. Departing from the regional survey, *Ethnoarchaeology in Action* takes a thematic approach to archaeology, drawing on numerous case studies. Perhaps of most relevance to archaeometallurgists is the excellent overview of iron smelting in Africa, in which the history of ethnoarchaeological research is succinctly summarised. In an account beginning with the work of Bellamy (1904) and including, amongst others, Cline (1937), Todd (1979), Moñino (1983), Gardi (1954) and Killick (1991), the authors neatly set the scene for three detailed case studies.

The first of these is van der Merwe and Avery's (1987) study of the relationship between the technical and magical aspects of iron production among the Cewa and Phoka of Malawi. They give a detailed description of the smelting cycle, coupled to an account of ritual and magic, which is linked to the medication of both smelters and furnace.

The second, one of David's (David *et al* 1989) own studies, is of smelting in the northern Mandara Mountains of Cameroon. In this he highlights the difficulty of attempting to use the *chaîne opératoire* as an analytical tool, and offers as an alternative a comparative analysis of technological behaviour. He suggests that this approach can go some way towards providing an account of the culturally embedded nature of technologies sought by the anthropology of technique.

The final case study is that of Schmidt, Childs and Avery's (Schmidt 1997) long term research amongst the Haya of Tanzania. This multi-disciplinary work adopts a reflexive approach, in which the artificial nature of the metalworking re-enactment, and cultural and linguistic barriers, between researcher and smelter, are

acknowledged. This neatly makes the point made by David and Kramer that '*no ethnoarchaeologist has ever observed a smelt carried out in earnest to obtain iron, but only ones arranged for the benefit of Western researchers or as semi-folkloric attractions*' (authors' own emphasis). The smelting case studies are supplemented by discussion of blacksmiths and brass-casters, again using detailed case studies to expand upon the general overview of the history of ethnoarchaeological research. This time the case studies are taken from the work of David and Robertson (1996) in Cameroon, and Home's (1983) study of brass-casters in West Bengal.

Few authors could range over such a diverse range of case studies as Nicholas David and Carol Kramer, with such aplomb and good grace toward their subject. Nicholas David's passion and enthusiasm for his work is what is most striking about the man. He has worked in both Europe and Africa, and since 1984 has directed the Mandara Archaeological Project (1992), upon which he leans for many an example. Despite its name, it is primarily ethnoarchaeological in nature, focusing on the material signatures of practice and agency, to study the world view of the chiefly residences located in the Mandara Mountains of Cameroon.

Carol Kramer was a pioneer in the development of ethnoarchaeology, having excavated Iron Age levels at Dinkha Tepe in Iran, as well as at other sites in Iran, Guatemala and Turkey. Sadly she died in December 2002. Her research on household patterns in an Iranian village (1982), and on the production and distribution of pottery in Rajasthan, India (1997), of which examples are offered in this volume, will surely be a lasting testament to her considerable methodological and theoretical contributions to ethnoarchaeology,

The avowed aim of the book is to avoid producing an encyclopaedia which simply catalogues 'all we know' about ethnoarchaeology. Instead, the authors aim to act as guides through what remains, for many students and practitioners, a poorly understood, if not misunderstood, sub-discipline. On route they challenge the reader to a critical analysis of case studies through which to lead the non-specialist towards an informed understanding

of theoretical, methodological and substantive issues in ethnoarchaeology.

The underlying thesis of their book is that 'archaeological interpretation is founded and ultimately depends upon analogy' (2001: 1). The origin and *raison d'être* of ethnoarchaeology is the recognition of the need for ethnographic material on which to base analogies. Ethnoarchaeology is defined by the authors as the study of living culture from archaeological perspectives. Conceived of in this way it is neither a theory, nor a method, but a research strategy. It embodies a range of approaches to understanding the relationships of material culture to culture as a whole. It acknowledges both contexts of material culture, among the living and as it enters the archaeological record. This understanding is exploited in order to inform archaeological concepts, and to improve interpretation. David and Kramer argue that ethnoarchaeology is therefore of equal interest to both processualist and post- or anti-processualist archaeologists.

The authors present an excellent review of the scope and relevance of the discipline, of what has been achieved, most notably in the theoretical approaches of the 1980s and 1990s, and what is left to be done. The range and approaches to problems that can be accommodated under the banner of ethnoarchaeology is very large, as it draws upon science, social science and the humanities. Adopting a topical approach to the material by subject area, case-studies are offered which include artefacts and style, craft production, trade and exchange. They also manage to maintain an emphasis on the interrelationships between, and the embeddedness of, material culture in peoples' economies, social lives and systems of thought.

*Ethnoarchaeology in Action* represents an optimistic, if not upbeat, take on ethnoarchaeology and its contribution to how archaeologists research and interpret the past. Furnished with examples from around the world, including case studies of particular interest to the archaeometallurgist, this is a useful reference book for both student and non-specialist practitioner wishing to develop an interest in the subject.

David A Barrowclough

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**Churnet Valley iron: the mills and the mines** by Herbert A Chester. *Landmark Publishing, Ashbourne, 2nd edition 2002. 96pp, A5, 38 illus. ISBN 1 84306 011 6. £7.95.*

Published privately in 1979 as *The Iron Valley*, this is a diligent and detailed study of a little-known area of north Staffordshire. The author pursues the history of iron making and ironstone mining in the Churnet valley from Consall to Oakamoor, through the medieval period with major and well documented bloomery sites, past the hey-day of Oakamoor furnace and the Middleton manuscripts, the input of the Foleys at the Moorland works, to tin-plate making at Oakamoor, and on to the heady days of large-scale mining in the mid-to-late 19th century and the complexities of local land ownership. Making copious use of the original sources, he explores the interplay of the people and the resources needed for iron smelting, how far they were carried, and under what conditions, drawing on aural history and a knowledge of the local topography to give substance to his tale. The original edition was poorly illustrated, a shortfall well remedied by the present publisher. Related work by Smith (PhD thesis, Nottingham, 1964) on the Willoughbys of Wollaton has been ignored, as has any wider context, both geographically and in

references. Recent work in adjacent areas (Cleverdon, PhD thesis, Sheffield, 2002) goes some way to providing a broader picture of the bloomery process in North Staffordshire, in the period before iron working drifted to the south of the county. Essentially a local study by a local historian, Herbert's work is none-the-less a useful and modestly priced addition to the available literature on the area.

Faith Cleverdon

**The Birmingham Jewellery Quarter: an Introduction and Guide** by John Cattell and Bob Hawkins. *English Heritage, London, 2000. 56pp, 51 figs. ISBN 185074 777 6. £7.50 (pbk).*

**One Great Workshop: The Buildings of the Sheffield Metal Trades** by Nicola Wray, Bob Hawkins and Colum Giles. *English Heritage, London, 2001. 54pp, 83 figs. ISBN 1 873592 66 3. £5.00 (pbk).*

**Sheffield Industries: Cutlery, Silver and Edge Tools** by Joan Unwin and Ken Hawley. *Tempus, Stroud, 1999. 128pp, 157 figs. ISBN 0 7524 1658 8. £9.99 (pbk).*

The former Royal Commission on the Historical Monuments of England initiated thematic studies of industrial buildings in Birmingham and Sheffield, following its earlier survey of the Potteries. The amalgamation of RCHME and English Heritage gave new impetus to this work, seen as part of the new organisation's commitment to the regeneration of historic urban areas. Both the Birmingham and Sheffield books support planning initiatives to retain and enhance the appearance and vitality of districts which give a distinctive character to their cities. Each is published with the collaboration of the respective local authorities.

The Birmingham study comprises an outline of the evolution of the Jewellery Quarter and its characteristic trades, the types of buildings, both industrial and domestic, the processes used and the wares made. A welcome feature is the 16-page tour guide, to be used with the robust fold-out map incorporated in the cover. The standard of photography is excellent, and the book as a whole, clearly written and laid out, serves as an invitation to visit and appreciate the Quarter. It foreshadows the more substantial study published by English Heritage (Cattell *et al* 2002).

The Sheffield book is in a similar format, with a substantial essay on the Sheffield trades, from the light traditional manufacture of cutlery and tools, to the heavy forging end, developed in the nineteenth century. Buildings and landscapes are surveyed, in a district

where the survivors are more widely spread than in Birmingham. There are some minor misunderstandings of details and terminology of processes. As with the Birmingham study, there is a clear objective, of guidance in planning and conservation. The lack of a tour-guide is partly explained by the dispersal of key sites; there is a sketch-map of the wider area, with some inaccuracies of location, and a key map of the city, with significant buildings numbered. The standard of production is, again, good: the photographs are of high quality (apart from the reversed printing of the otherwise fine shot of the interior of Wortley Top Forge), and Allan Adams' drawings are, as ever, a delight.

It is fortunate that Tempus commissioned the Unwin and Hawley compilation of historic illustrations of practices and personalities of the Sheffield trades soon before the publication of the English Heritage study. This assemblage can profitably be used as a companion, expanding and explaining processes and terms, for the authors have an unrivalled knowledge of the metal industries of Sheffield and Hallamshire. Many of the images, instructive and atmospheric, are from the Hawley Tool Collection at Sheffield University, which contains an important archive as well as its widely-known artefacts. Production, while not quite of the standard of the English Heritage guides, is adequate, and the photographs are as clear as the originals allow. The captions are full and informative.

David Crossley

#### Reference

Cattell J, Ely S and Jones B 2002, *The Birmingham Jewellery Quarter: an architectural survey of the manufactories* (London).

**Images of Cornish Tin** by Alan Stoyel and Peter Williams. *Landmark Publishing in association with English Heritage, 2001. 192 pp, 276 x 219mm, c.260 illustrations. ISBN 1-84306-020-5. Price £29.50.*

On Friday, 6 March 1998, Cornwall's last deep tin mine closed. The closure of South Crofty was not unexpected, it came at the end of a short but well defined crisis in tin mining with the price of the metal falling to less than 30% of its peak value. With the inevitable approaching, the Royal Commission on the Historical Monuments of England, as it then was, grasped the opportunity to record the industry before some elements were lost altogether. It was not going to record an industry in full production, for that one must look back over the last century to classic work like that of Thomas

and Burrows, and its ability to portray work underground was limited. *Images of Cornish Tin* has, nevertheless, captured all aspects of an industry which, despite renewed efforts to reopen South Crofty, will be swept away as the tin mining heritage is sanitised for the benefit of the tourist industry. It is not, and was never intended to be, a pictorial history of tin mining.

The work is certainly well presented, from the dust cover through to the supporting text, with an infectious appeal which had me picking it up frequently to browse through its pages. By treating the landscape of mining first then focusing on the detail of its infrastructure, the shafts and engine houses, and its techniques both underground and at surface before examining the social aspect of the industry in the associated settlements, the book is following well established archaeological practice. This is not without its problems. The historic landscapes of the granite uplands are portrayed with little reference to their origins. Ruins of blowing houses have little relevance if not linked to an early industry largely based on rich placer deposits when deep mining for tin was in its infancy. The uninformed reader might also be forgiven for believing that 'tin streaming' was confined to the treatment of mine wastes. Nor are the origins of modern deep tin mining and its links to copper mining given full credit. As is to be expected, images of the Cornish beam engine and its associated house feature frequently, yet there is no reference to its development as a means of draining deep copper mines.

In providing a 'snapshot' of South-West England's tin industry in what were probably its final productive years this book portrays many aspects of mining not normally presented to the general public. It goes without saying

that few would have the opportunity to see underground working at first hand, but how many pay any consideration to the processing of the ore once mined. Here we have images of ball mills and the flotation process alongside those of the earlier gravity separation processes, with much of the former having probably already been cleared away and the land reclaimed for other uses. Headframes and engine houses tend to fascinate anyone with an interest in mining, and they appear in profusion in this book, but the reality of mining is to be seen in the images of apparent dereliction typified in the dumps at Wheal Jane or the assortment of abandoned machinery and rusting shed roofs.

The images are all of high quality and range from the artistic to the explanatory. Some may be subjective, and not everyone will grasp the subterranean struggle in Phil Whiting's painting of Wheal Jane, although they might appreciate the poignancy of the Cook's Shaft headframe photographed, highlighted by the sun, against a dark sky with the hint of a rainbow. Stamp battery operations, be they Cornish or Californian, do not translate easily into words but a few photographs can do it with ease. The vast majority of the images are however a record, illustrating an essential part of the archaeological remains of an industry fast disappearing from the landscape. Some elements will survive although in general they will be out of context, denuded of their associated features. Some illustrations do touch on that subject but the reader is left to search out earlier images to make the comparison. A book like this cannot be all things to all men. It does however achieve what it set out to do in providing an image of Cornish, and West Devon, tin in its closing years.

Peter Claughton