



# *The Archaeological Journal*

## **Book Reviews**



**INDUSTRIAL ARCHAEOLOGY: A HANDBOOK.** By Marilyn Palmer, Michael Nevell and Mark Sissons. Pp. xvii and 326, Illus 121. Council of British Archaeology (Practical Handbook, **21**), 2012. Price: £20.00. ISBN 978 190277 192 2.

This volume announces itself as a ‘practical handbook’ to industrial archaeology; the front cover is adorned with a photograph of a flour mill at York, whilst, in the foreground, archaeologists work in what were once evidently the cellars of workers’ housing. It promises, by statement and by implication, a comprehensive reference work which includes standing building recording, traditional excavation, the archaeology of production and the archaeology of consumption. Does it deliver?

In the main, yes it does. There has been a clear need for a focused study such as this, which sets out, clearly and methodically, how the discipline has developed, what its priorities are, and how to set about doing it. It has much to offer both the undergraduate and professional looking for a base-line starting point: the young archaeological practitioner who may not be familiar with the remains of the recent past and unsure how to contextualize them; and the established professional who will be interested in some of the broader comparisons and in the authors’ view on where we are now with industrial archaeology. For example, Chapter 10 usefully sets out the stark challenges which the profession faces in dealing with Britain’s industrial archaeology in straightened times. The authors are also very well aware of the valuable role played by the enthusiastic and informed amateur, and of the contribution of community archaeology.

In so fact-rich a book as this, there will inevitably be simplifications and there will be errors. Where the authors’ very considerable erudition overlaps with this reviewer’s knowledge, one does occasionally come across statements that are not exactly wrong but are not entirely right either. In the section on the slate industry, I was not quite sure what is meant by the assertion that the ‘vast slate quarries of North Wales still contain many open-sided sheds for manual splitting of slates, although later water-powered saws were used for the initial shaping of the rock and large mills were constructed in the valleys’ (p. 124): why ‘in the valleys’, and in what way are water-powered saws different from the ‘large mills’? The description of early rails on page 244 might equally confuse; figure 7.4 is an example of the first-generation all-wood system, as are the other instances noted here, not of a Shropshire cast-iron railway. Another example of a statement that misleads is the caption to the Derby Number 1 Roundhouse, which is now a student refectory; this is described as ‘originally for the construction and repair of locomotives’ (p. 41). In fact, it was simply a locomotive shed when it was built, though it was used for repairs (never for construction) by 1890, and ended its railway days as a crane repair shop. None of the

The final version of this review will appear in *The Archaeological Journal* 170 for 2013.

above issues are very serious, but they prompt one to wonder whether there are other misconceptions that the knowledge of other specialists might identify.

I never felt entirely sure whether Ireland is ‘in’ or ‘out’ of this study. The extremely useful summary of statutory protection presented in Chapter 1 encompasses Northern Ireland but not the Republic. Some key sites from south of the border are mentioned — Ardnacrusha, Allihies, Cork city — yet the treatment of Ulster is patchy; the Laggan flax mills are mentioned, but not Belfast’s ship-building yards. Likewise, port and harbour facilities anywhere in the United Kingdom are barely mentioned in the volume.

So there are some criticisms, which could perhaps be addressed in a reprinting. It is nonetheless a useful, readable and attractively presented approach to an archaeological resource that is very extensive, and for which very little training is available in universities.

DAVID GWYN