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Book Reviews



SALISBURY AND SOUTH WILTSHIRE MUSEUM MEDIEVAL CATALOGUE PART 4. Edited by Peter Saunders. Pp. 352, Illus 118. Salisbury and South Wiltshire Museum, 2012. Price: £25.00. ISBN 978 094753 526 1.

Ten years on from the publication of Part 3 of this catalogue, and four decades on from the original decision to publish the entire Salisbury and South Wiltshire Museum medieval collection, the fourth and final volume in the set has appeared. The same format and style of the previous parts have been used, and in addition to sections on groups of artefacts previously unpublished, the opportunity has been taken to present addenda to classes of object which have already appeared, these primarily being recent acquisitions by the museum. The previously unpublished categories include alabaster, architectural and sculptural stonework, church bells and cast copper alloy vessels, and leather shoes, but there are also chapters on artefacts based upon their materials, such as copper alloy, iron, and wood. This somewhat random grouping echoes that of previous volumes, and is perhaps to be expected in a final part that aims to scoop up groups of material culture that have been left out of earlier parts. But whilst the functional approach works very well, the use of chapters bringing together objects by virtue of their materials does lead to some complications. For example, Alison Goodall explains in her chapter on objects of copper alloy that the non-ferrous keys and fittings from knife handles have been grouped with the more numerous iron keys and knives in the section on iron objects, whilst iron buckles and purse frames appear alongside their copper alloy counterparts in her contribution (p. 90). This could perhaps have been avoided by having one larger section comprising objects of both metals which is arranged by object class or function.

One of the most interesting sections is that on the church bells and cast vessels, presented together in a chapter by David Algar and Peter Saunders which also describes the history of their production in Salisbury. The authors explain the logic of this grouping of objects, as they note that until the later fifteenth century, non-ferrous church bells and domestic vessels, such as skillets and cauldrons, were often made by the same craftsmen known as 'braziers'; the separate trade of 'bell-founder' only appears in the records in the later fifteenth century (p. 67). The museum's collection contains not just the bells and vessels, both complete and fragmentary, but also casting waste and clay mould fragments.

A third of the volume is made up of the addenda, with coins, pilgrim souvenirs and seal matrices comprising the largest groups of extra material. Happily, all the addenda have been numbered sequentially on from the last catalogue numbers in the previous volumes, so citation of these finds will not be a problem.

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Minor gripes about the arrangement of the material aside, the museum, and the editor Peter Saunders, must be congratulated for seeing this unique project through to completion, and for maintaining the high standards they set themselves at the outset; the quality of the illustrations in particular throughout the series has been excellent, with a substantial number of the objects in each volume being illustrated by line drawing or photo, and thankfully, more by the former than by the latter.

NICOLA ROGERS