

Nigel Baker, Jonathan Brett and Robert Jones, *Bristol, an Archaeological Assessment: a worshipful town and famous city* (Oxford, Oxbow Books/Historic England 2018). xviii + 573 pp., 342 figs., 2 tabs., 17 plans. Hardback, £40 [ISBN: 9781785708770]. **Reviewed 07.2018**

This is the long-awaited bible of Bristol archaeology; a narrative which describes and discusses every archaeological excavation whether published or not, and every notable historic building whether extant or destroyed. Massively detailed, encyclopaedic and well referenced, it is an ideal springboard for research; lavishly illustrated and well written, it even goes well on the coffee-table. Its ultimate purpose, however, is to determine which sites merit fuller publication, and to help the city's planners ensure that archaeology is not unwittingly destroyed. The area covered extends roughly one kilometre from the high cross and approximates to that built up c. 1750 except Bedminster and Clifton.

Opening chapters survey Bristol's geology, its archaeologists, painters, photographers and map-makers, and its prehistoric and Roman antecedents. At the core of the work are four broadly chronological chapters detailing the historical geography of the town and city from its enigmatic beginnings c. 950 to 1900. In the eleventh and twelfth centuries we read of a defended town at the gate of a castle founded by Geoffrey bishop of Coutances. In the twelfth and thirteenth centuries Robert earl of Gloucester, Robert Fitzharding, the Knights Templar and others developed walled or gated suburbs at Redcliffe with Temple, the Marsh, Lewins Mead, Broadmead and Old Market, with a fringe of eight religious houses to the north-east and north-west. Those developments secured Bristol's place as England's first county borough in 1373, and its second most populous provincial town (after York) in 1377. In the sixteenth century the borough became a city, St Augustine's Abbey became a cathedral and other religious houses became mansions. The seventeenth century saw the castle re-developed for commerce, together with a general rebuilding and a sprinkling of garden houses in St. Michael's Hill and Kingsdown. Rebuilding continued in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, when the Floating Harbour was created and different uses were segregated; commerce in the historic core, industry and poor dwellings in the inner suburbs and fine houses around Queen Square, St James's Square, Brunswick Square, Portland Square, Kingsdown and King Square.

The treatment is generally topographical, with supporting sections on Bristol's place in history and its trades and industries, including the transatlantic trade. Topics covered in detail range from almshouses to glasshouses and from shipbuilding to butchery. The text switches seamlessly between excavation reports and the evidence of maps, drawings, photographs, St Augustine's cartulary, William Worcester's itinerary and countless other sources. The medieval chapters demonstrate how widely explored, and how rich, is Bristol's medieval archaeology. The eighteenth and nineteenth century chapter, on the other hand, is basically documentary history in the manner of the *Victoria County History*, culminating in a street-by-street guide to manufacturing companies; archaeology is still important but supplies supporting details of for instance diet, health and the layout of industrial plant.

Ten maps, specially drawn for the volume, show the topography of the medieval town. Most of the other illustrations are culled from existing sources; consequently we have good plans of St Augustine's Abbey, the Templar preceptory, Blackfriars and Greyfriars but not of other major sites. There is no plan of St James's priory because Jackson's monograph did not plot

the extant nave beside the excavated choir. There is no plan of all known remains of the castle because Good did not plot Ponsford's discoveries alongside his own, or plot the extant porch and anteroom in the same detail as the excavated keep. There is no plan of the Royal Fort to show the bastions plotted by King in relation to those extant or known from maps and property records. The authors have tried to remedy these omissions by including tiny plans within their maps, but they in turn have failed to plot the full extent of medieval religious precincts. The Templars' precinct should extend north to Water Lane as on pp. 113 and 212-3; the Black Friars' precinct should extend east beyond Penn Street to include their great orchard as on p. 202; the precinct of St James's Priory should extend east to include its barns in St James's Barton as on p. 190; and the precinct of St Augustine's Abbey should extend west to include the Bishop's Park as in our *Transactions*, vol. 124 p. 67.

Inevitably in a book of this size, there are inconsistencies. In the deposit model on p. 34 the cathedral stands low in an alluvial plain, but in the geological map on p. 24 it stands high on a sandstone bluff. The thirteenth-century main road to Gloucester heads westwards through Lawford's Gate on p. 101 but northwards through Broadmead Bars on p. 104. The inner north porch of St Mary Redcliffe is treated as twelfth century work on p. 108 but illustrated as thirteenth century work on p. 183.

At the end is a valuable digest of Bristol's Historic Environment Record telling briefly what has been found on each site, when and by whom, and where it has been mentioned in print. This could have been a key to the whole volume, but it is not indexed or cross-referenced to the text. Indeed the domestic, industrial and commercial sites which are the staple content of the book are not indexed at all, nor does the table of contents show subject headings within chapters. The rush to publish has made this a reference book which cannot be referred to, a treasure-chest forever locked. To navigate much of the volume the reader has to rely on the internal structure of the text, which ironically was perfected through eight years' deliberation, from 2002 when the first draft was finished to 2010 when the final draft was begun. Despite blemishes, this is a brilliant exposition of thousands of sources hitherto inaccessible or scattered through the literature. It is a monument to the enlightened patronage of Historic England, the teamwork of 33 collaborators and the high scholarship, sound judgement and literary skill of Nigel Baker, Jonathan Brett and Robert Jones.

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