

M. O. H. Carver, S. Donaghey and A. B. Sumpter, *Riverside Structures and a Well in Skeldergate and Buildings in Bishophill*. The Archaeology of York 4. The Colonia 1. Council for British Archaeology, London 1978. 54 pages, 19 figures and 20 plates.

Arthur MacGregor, *Roman Finds from Skeldergate and Bishophill*. The Archaeology of York 17. The Small Finds 2. Council for British Archaeology, London 1978. 34 pages, 32 figures.

Publication by fascicule seems now generally accepted as the most efficient method of making readily available the results of long-term urban excavation. The advantages are obvious: speedy publication with the facility for thematic selection of information. There are, however, disadvantages. The cost, although spread over a period, is proportionately greater than for a single volume. The two fascicules under consideration represent only half of the full report on the excavations at Skeldergate and Bishophill at a cost of £ 7.25. At the time of writing (September 1979) the remaining 2 fascicules containing the pottery report and the environmental evidence were not available in print. This hints at what is by far the most dangerous disadvantage of this method of publication. The production of an excavation report in separate parts is even more likely than is normally the case to result in consideration of those parts as entities in themselves rather than as part of a greater whole. How can the definitive report be written if half the evidence has not been sufficiently digested for it to appear in print? Even these two fascicules, published together, seem to have been conceived almost in isolation for, as the post-script on p. 40 makes clear, the main body of the structural report was written without reference to the coin evidence.

The structural report is something of a hotch-potch. The two sites involved are not directly related except by general proximity within the colonia. Neither site could be considered to be of great importance. At Bishophill the Roman levels had suffered considerably at the hands of the medieval pit digger and stone robber so that 'the interpretation and dating of the sequence were seriously impaired'. At Skeldergate the examination of Roman levels was confined to one long section across the site and an excellently preserved well nearby, though even that was not completely excavated. The well is the most interesting feature in the report with three different methods of construction in evidence. It is one of the finest examples of a Roman timber-lined well known to the reviewer and deserves the detailed treatment which it receives. The C<sup>14</sup> dates and the dendrochronological analysis indicate the re-use of timber within the well, though no structural indications of re-use in the form of superfluous joints were discerned or apparently looked for. Finds from the well included a wooden bucket and a number of leather shoes which are well illustrated in the Small Finds report.

In terms of presentation the report is not easy to use. It is difficult to work from the finds or from the section drawings back to the layer descriptions since these do not follow any obvious numerical sequence. Surely it should be a prerequisite of all excavation reports that the reader can readily discern what finds came from each context and from which context each find came. In fact, not all the context numbers referred to in the text appear on the plans and sections or vice versa. Nor was there much by way of cross-referencing between the main body of the structural report and the appendices on building stone, mortars and wall plaster. The reviewer sympathises with the problem of publishing two unrelated minor excavations, but the end result in this case lacks clarity and coherence and seems little more than a compilation of disparate evidence.

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