

REVIEW OF ROMAN BATH BY PETER DAVENPORT

This recently published book is the up-to-date record of the understanding of Roman Bath and is written by someone who has been involved in much of the actual excavation.

Built upon the published work of twenty years ago, it brings together all the more recent reports of excavations in and around the city and explores the various speculative views upon life in the Roman city and the use of the buildings so far recorded. It also mourns the disastrous impact of rapacious property developers.

Davenport has written this book to be approachable by the lay as well as the expert reader and it is certainly a necessary read for anyone with more than a passing interest in Bath.

In a curious way, it is almost better for those who have not previously read about Roman Bath to start by reading the 'Afterword' at the end of the book and then start again at the beginning of the foreword and main text. That way an enthralling thumbnail sketch of the history of excavation in the city is revealed before the reader embarks upon the wonderful detail of the main body of the work.

A good spatial and visual memory and acute sense of compass orientation are a help as the story of the different layers of Bath unfolds. Even then repeated back reference to certain key illustrations will be needed for many readers. The book is rich in photographs, drawings and plans although one or two of them might have been printed in a larger format for ease of interpretation.

No one is better placed than Davenport to undertake the task of bringing what he calls 'The three-hundred-year dig' to public attention but he does so with admirable modesty and with proper credit to those who have contributed to the accumulation of the body of knowledge over the years.

This much needed book is to be firmly recommended and as I have already discovered makes a very welcome gift to friends and family.