



About History ? Ancient and Natural

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Created *Oct '09*

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A selection from recently published non-fiction.

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Discovering the Past

The shift in the study of history from kings and queens, battles and dates to the investigation of how people lived, using documents and artefacts, is now well established in many schools. The very distant past, ancient and classical civilisations can be brought to life by visits to museums and historical sites. Books obviously have an important part to play. One publisher well in tune with this move is Kingfisher whose **History as Evidence** series tells not only what we know but how we found it out. Mike Corbishley's **The Romans** (0 86272 065 6) was runner-up for the TES Information Book Award for 1983 and the two newest titles in the series are well up to standard.

Ancient Egypt, Rosalie and Antony E. David, 0 86272 091 5;

Prehistory, Keith Branigan, 0 86272 090 7

Illustrated by David Salariya and Shirley Willis, £3.95 each.

In both books illustrations reconstruct scenes which are explained and amplified in text, photographs and diagrams. **Ancient Egypt** includes evidence from Tutankhamun's tomb, from the less frequently referred to pyramid of King Salure at Abusir, and from Petrie's excavations at Kahun, a town built to house the families of the workmen and officials engaged in the building of the pyramid of King Sesostris. There's also a fascinating section on mummification and what has been learned from the most up-to-date methods of investigating mummies. Most Egyptian teenagers and adults it seems suffered severe toothache because the bread contained a great deal of grit and sand which wore away the protective outer layer of the teeth. The diet of ordinary people consisted of bread, beer and onions. Just the sort of thing to bring the past alive, especially when it's based on evidence and not just speculation.

Keith Branigan's **Prehistory** features evidence from ten prehistoric sites all over Europe (four in England). He writes in a clear accessible style, always with careful reference to the sources that surround the text, and with a tentativeness that makes clear to the reader the proper nature of archaeological interpretation. 'We do not know whether each family had its own fields'; 'This is roughly what seems to have happened at Maiden Castle'; 'Understanding the religion of prehistoric peoples is particularly difficult.'

Good stuff. A useful time chart completes this excellent book. Most obviously of use in the Middle/Secondary range but could be used by older children alone or younger ones with adult help.

Useful as a complement to these is Macdonald's **In Search Of** series. In these translations of books first published in Italy, Gian Paolo Cesarini tells the story of famous archaeological investigations: Howard Carter and Tutankhamun, Sir Arthur Evans and Crete, Heinrich Schliemann and Troy, Pompeii since it was first unearthed by a peasant farmer in the mid-eighteenth century. Events, methods, evidence are evaluated, and well illustrated in Piero Ventura's large detailed and informative pictures. Very readable text; no index.

In Search of Tutankhamun, 0 356 11235 7;

In Search of Ancient Crete, 0 356 11232 2;

In Search of Troy, 0 356 11234 9;

In Search of Pompeii, 0 356 11233 0,

£3.95 each.

Informative Stories

A Pterodactyl, the story of a flying reptile, Beverly Halstead, pictures by Jenny Halstead, Collins, 0 00 10412 X, £4.50

Another way of dealing with evidence in an imaginative reconstruction of the brief and precarious life of Rostri, a pterodactyl who lived 150 million years ago and shared the land and the sky with an amazing variety of other creatures. The story is accompanied by bold and graphic pictures which leave nothing to the imagination and should satisfy any dinosaur-crazed reader, and, boxed off on each page spread, is a summary of the fossil evidence used as the basis for the story. It's a formula the Halsteads have used successfully before in **A Brontosaur, Terrible Claw** and **A Sea Serpent**. On the title page of this one appears a photograph of the fossil flying reptile, found in what is now Southern Germany, which inspired the story.

Darwin and the Voyage of the Beagle, Felicia Law, illustrated by Judy Brook, Deutsch, 0 233 97482 2, £6.95.

Described as a fictional account of Charles Darwin's work and adventures during his five year voyage, this fascinating oversize book has the same scrupulous basis in fact as the Halsteads'. A cabin boy, 12 year old Ben Sweet, befriended by Darwin, is Felicia Law's only invention and Judy Brook's black and white pictures which occupy more than half the book are equally carefully researched.

Joyce Pope's **Animals in Town** series from Hamish Hamilton contains a wealth of interesting facts woven into a story which tells how different creatures live, breed and survive in towns. Well observed and informative pictures by Elizabeth Gross.

The Duck, 0 241 11466 7; **The Hedgehog**, 0 241 11467 5; **The Starling**, 0 241 11469 1, £3.95 each.

Also in story form but dealing with animals not likely to be seen first hand are two titles by Margaret Davidson in paperback from Hippo.

Dolphins, illustrated by Ian Andrew, 0 590 70356 0, £1.75.

Sea Otters, illustrated by Meryl Meisler, 0 590 70355 2, £1.50.

Dolphins, in slightly larger format, has a simple text, divided into chapters. It is set in large type size, well spaced to make it accessible to less experienced readers. Evocative, blue-toned pictures spread across the pages and show dolphins

in every kind of beautiful movement.

Sea Otters, the smallest sea mammal of all, live off the coast of California and 'look like giant teddy bears'. The sea otter 'drifts from place to place on its back. It even sleeps on its back (if it slept face down it would drown) ... On a sunny day .. it simply shades its eyes with its paws.' I defy you not to succumb to their charms especially as drawn by Meryl Meisler. A longer text but also divided into chapters and like *Dolphins*, suitable for reading aloud or alone.

The Natural World

Good information books for Infants and young Juniors in this popular area are hard to find. If the presentation is accessible the information is often inadequate, failing to stimulate interest or answer questions. Often it seems preferable to use good adult books in a joint adult and child investigation. But there are some exceptions, notably where the information is contained in high quality illustration which can be 'read' by young enquirers.

Like the four titles in Mary Hoffman's excellent **Animals in the Wild** series for Belitha/Methuen.

Zebra, 0 416 53340 X; **Lion**, 0 416 53330 2; **Gorilla**, 0 416 53310 8; **Hippo**, 0 416 53320 5, £2.50 each.

A combination of colour photographs and simple text which invites the reader to look is the recipe. Of these **Zebra** is particularly well put together. The Zebra is not an animal that gets a lot of attention in books; here we see how its hair grows, discover different patterns of stripes and different sorts of zebra. Watch them having a dust bath, and 'helping each other with itches'.

All the books have a short index and list of 'Useful Words'.

Stunning colour photography of a quite amazing quality is a feature of the **Stopwatch** series from A and C Black.

Chicken and Egg, Christine Back and Jens Olesen, Photographs by Bo Jarner, 0 7136 2425 6; **Broad Bean**, 0 7136 2427 2; **Spider's Web**, 0 7136 2428 0; **Tadpole and Frog**, 0 7136 2426 4.

All by Christine Back, photographs by Barrie Watts, £3.50 each.

Close-up photographs, beautifully lit, show the bean growing, the chicken hatching, the tadpole becoming a frog and the spider spinning its web. Simple text with additional photographs and line drawings or diagrams on the left hand page draw attention to and amplify different stages in the processes which the photographs record. Simple index. Throughout the tone of the writing is exactly right; the design works and involvement of a realistic kind is invited. A model of its kind. Highly recommended.

Use Your Eyes, a new series from Wayland also uses a combination of photographs and coloured drawings. Easy to use, easy to read, with glossary, index and suggestions for things to do. Just what's needed for 6-7s investigating the environment. First two titles by Sarah McKenzie.

In the Woods, 85078 502 2; **In the Pond**, 85078 503 0, £3.75 each.

Discovering Science

Examples from History, ancient and natural, form part of the lively approach to understanding science found in

Let's Imagine: Water, Tom Johnston illustrated by Sarah Pooley, Bodley Head, 0 376 30867 0, £4.95

This is the first book in the new series from Bodley Head which takes as its keynote Einstein's phrase, 'To imagine is everything. The content is not very different from that found in many books dealing with science for the primary/lower secondary level.

What makes this book different and highly recommendable is the total integration between Tom Johnston's text and Sarah Pooley's illustrations which makes for extremely entertaining reading and learning about water. Where possible Tom Johnston combines facts with discovery and experiment and Sarah Pooley's humorous and inventive use of speech bubbles makes the book look inviting and accessible.

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