Roman Canterbury, A journey into the past by Andy Harnsworthy.

Why be interested in a book about Roman Canterbury if you live in, say, Newcastle or Turin? My answer would be that here is a well-written resource for pupils (especially at Key Stage 2) studying the Romans as part of the history curriculum. The book can be used in class as a case study of the Romans, wherever you teach.

You might say that there are lots of books on the Romans. There are – but so many, especially from publishers of school ‘textbooks’, containing glaring errors or full of taut, outdated theories. You need not be afraid to give this book to your pupils or use it as a resource to teach from. The author is a head of history and has worked with education staff and archaeologists at the Canterbury Archaeological Trust – the experts responsible for researching, excavating and publishing the evidence for the past in Canterbury. The book is based on real evidence and, on almost every page, the author explains answers to the question ‘How do we know what we know?’. The book is clearly designed and prefaced with diagrams and black and white drawings of objects and artefact impressions of how parts of Roman Canterbury might have looked. It comes with four pages of ‘very useful teachers’ notes which not only give ideas for using Roman Canterbury as part of any National Curriculum subjects but look at the Key Elements in history in some detail. Buy this book and you will not be afraid to ‘do’ the Romans, wherever you teach.

Available from Canterbury Archaeological Trust Ltd, 52a Bond Street, Canterbury, Kent CT1 2LL. Please add £1.50 for p&p.

Mike Corkhill, Head of Education, English Heritage

The English Parish Church Wallchart, The Open Churches Trust £18.99

The Open Churches Trust ensures that as many as possible of the best English parish churches are open to the public. This 24 x 34 colour wallchart educates both young and old, so that their visits to churches will have more meaning. A great deal of information is arranged under boxed headings such as ‘Towers and Stipes’, ‘Carving – in Wood and Stone’ and ‘Church Furniture’. The sheet is bordered with views of 37 churches from around the whole country, demonstrating how varied parish churches are.

Although famous buildings such as Boston and Warwick are included, the majority are less well-known, further emphasising the riches available. The largest and most informative illustration is a coloured line drawing giving a bird’s eye view of a big, late-medieval church, with cut-aways, the key identifying 33 features. A slice through the west tower allows the visitor to see the ground to link visible bell ropes to the invisible bell chamber above. Better links between the illustrated box and the border photographs might have prompted better identification. Beside the central drawing is a box showing the development of the parish church in four stages, from Anglo-Saxon to Decorated.

Unfortunately, no dates are given and the reader has to go to the Windows and Arches sections to find them. This lack of correlation is a drawback of the poster, as is the surprising omission of the Victorian period. Two Victorian churches appear in the border photographs, but given the huge impact of the 19th century on our churches, the Victorian period should definitely have been included. There is a box for modern churches, where new uses are emphasised, and the 16th to 18th centuries are briefly covered in a box somewhat curiously entitled Renaissance, which summarises the effects of the Reformation on parish churches in a refreshingly non-judgemental language.

The short texts are well written and easy to understand. Teachers should find the posters a good classroom aid, although younger pupils will be challenged by the sheer quantity of detail. The posters deserve careful scrutiny – it does pack in a lot of information, it has crisp photographs and clear line drawings and should achieve its aim of explaining some of the variations in styles of parish churches.

Please make cheques payable to The Open Churches Trust, and order c/o Original Wallcharts, Wyke Lodge, London Road, Ryeham, Kent, ME19 5AS.

Richard Holmes, Director, Conservation East and South West Region, English Heritage

Looking at Buildings: The East Riding is a new highly illustrated 35 page book by Hazel Mifflin and David Navey, produced in association with the Pictorial Charts Educational Trust. It is at Dows Castle, showing preparations for the impending French invasion and siege of 1216. It has beautiful manuscript separate teacher’s notes written by Paul Jaynes, and the poster is available as an A4 poster (product code X10812) or in a special 36 page Medieval Castle Pack (product code X10813) containing the poster and notes, all 36 pages being Castles poster pack (six A4 posters illustrating aspects of castle development, normally £5.95). All for £1.95, a saving of almost 50 per cent on the separate selling prices.

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