

BEGINNING ARCHAEOLOGY IN LONDON—1

By FRANCIS CELORIA

IT IS possible to get much satisfaction by concentrating on a hobby, whether it is stamp-collecting or astronomy, or karate. But few activities can offer so much all-round interest and satisfaction as archaeology. Every aspect of man's life and environment is touched on: crafts, beliefs, building history, economics, dietetics history, geology, geography, botany, zoology, pottery.

In addition you can have the excitement of being a detective, an explorer, a pioneer, a publisher, a researcher, a member of a team of friends, as well as becoming a person who is "with it" in many aspects of modern techniques relating to raw materials, analysis and organisation. Only archaeology can offer the amateur some professional participation almost immediately. Archaeology is moreover one of the few activities that are attractive to young and old, to male and female.

While archaeological work is so rewarding to you personally, there is a better reason for you to engage in it because London archaeology is in a state of emergency that is beyond belief. While many of you have sat watching television views of Egyptian temples being rescued from rising waters, acres of buried London are being swept away by building and other operations. Since the war much Roman, medieval, post-medieval and even prehistoric material has been lost without being seen by archaeologists. A casually recognised piece of pot noticed near new concrete foundations is all that is seen of an ancient site that has been bulldozed to pieces.

Before America and Australia were populated, before the English Channel was cut, before Neanderthal Man learned to bury his dead, there were early men making and using their tools at most places in the London area. For example they were at work at a spot which was to become Glasshouse Street, Picadilly; at Hyde Park Corner; near Ealing Common; in Clapton or Hackney or Swanscombe or West Drayton and in many other spots— all this more than a quarter of a million years ago.

However grim was the Ice Age, the glaciers managed to stop at Finchley, causing the Thames to flow at some queer levels (e.g. by Pentonville) and in some odd directions. Man succeeded in surviving and made the most of the warm intervals of the ice age. Even when

the ice retreated and the Thames (no longer a tributary of the Rhine!) flowed soggy down to what is now the North Sea, hunters managed to find a good living. Their antler harpoons, flint blades and picks are often found in or near the Thames, off Wandsworth for example.

Between 4000 and 3000 B.C. the first farmers came into the London area choosing the well drained gravels and brickearths of Middlesex for their settlements. Hundreds of their polished stone axes have been found in the Thames. The slight evidence of their settlements has been covered by 19th century houses. Even more plentiful than the stone axes are the subsequent Bronze Age weapons and tools found in the Thames. Few places in Europe have produced as many bronze spearheads, swords and dirks as has the Thames. Oddly enough we have found few Bronze Age sites in the Greater London area.

Lost irrevocably

During the Iron Age—which we'll accept as running from about 500 B.C. to the middle of the 1st century A.D. when the Romans came to stay—Middlesex went on being an attractive area for settlers and traders. Iron Age coins have turned up in several places as well as fine artwork as sophisticated as any in Europe. The Thames at Brentford was a famous find-place of such art treasures.

After A.D. 43 the Romans established themselves quickly, in the City, in Southwark, Putney, Enfield, Edmonton, in Harrow, and at several spots in what was west Middlesex but is now Greater London.

Much of the story of prehistoric, Roman and late Londoners has been lost irrevocably for lack of archaeologists. *You* can help fill the gap doing whatever is within your capabilities.

The Spring Issue of
the London Archaeologist

will include articles by

A. E. BROWN and H. L. SHELDON on Roman Pottery Kilns at Highgate Woods.

RALPH MERRIFIELD on Folk Lore in London's Archaeology.

BRIAN SPENCER on a Medieval Find.