

London's Archaeological Societies — 2

THE MERTON HISTORICAL SOCIETY

THE FOUNDING of Merton and Morden Historical Society in March 1951 coincided with, and in fact owed much to, the growth of interest in local history stimulated by the publication of Miss E. M. Jowett's "History of Merton and Morden" by the Festival of Britain local committee. Probably for the first time in its brief existence, residents of the Urban District became fully aware of the richness of a heritage predating by some two millennia the establishment of local government boundaries of the twentieth century.

The aspirations of the new society reflected the breadth of interest of its founders; it sought "to institute, promote and encourage the study of local history, topography, architecture, archaeology, natural history, dialect, manners and customs, folklore and other similar objects relating to Merton and Morden and surrounding districts; to search for, record and preserve historical records and other material; to arrange lectures, debates, exhibitions and tours, to engage in field work and diggings for local remains, and to purchase or otherwise acquire any object or article which may be of historical interest."

A real interest in the district was, and still is, the only necessary qualification for membership, although specialised knowledge is of course doubly welcome. The society has always endeavoured to help those with little or no special knowledge of the locality to improve or acquire it, and has become a focal point for all who appreciate or feel curious about their surroundings and are interested in maintaining the historical associations of a district which since April 1965 has been known as the London Borough of Merton.

With the good fortune to have within its territory a three mile stretch of Stane Street, Merton Historical Society, like many similar societies, cut its archaeological teeth on the local Roman road. Under the directorship of Dennis Turner, and in collaboration with the London Natural History Society, five sections were dug in 1958/59 across the assumed course of the road through Morden Park, four of which provided confirmation of the route of the

road northwards from Stonecot Hill towards Morden Church. (*The London Naturalist* No. 39, 130-2).

Three years later members of the society joined forces once again with the London Natural History Society under the directorship of Dennis Turner to undertake what was to be two seasons' work near the site of Merton Priory, recently reported in *Surrey Archaeological Collections* Vol. 64 (1967) 35-70.

The discovery of two inhumation burials at Short Batsworth, Mitcham, during the preliminary stages of the erection of the Phipps Bridge Primary School in October 1966, provided the next challenge to the society's limited force of trained diggers. Fortunately invaluable help was provided by members of the Surrey Archaeological Society and the Beddington, Carshalton and Wallington Archaeological Society, and under the guidance of Dennis Turner one further inhumation of undetermined date, two ditches and a quantity of occupational debris, including Romano-British pottery of the late 1st/early 2nd century, was recovered before the site was overtaken by building operations.

The society's most recent archaeological venture, a small scale excavation on the site of the medieval manor house of "Hall Place" Mitcham, conducted under the direction of the writer in the summer of 1968, has provided evidence of continuous occupation since the early 13th century, and a range of ceramic material having close affinities with that recovered from the Merton Priory site. It is hoped to continue work at "Hall Place" during the coming Spring.

The experience of Merton Historical Society's small archaeological group has shown the difficulties of undertaking even a small excavation with limited skilled labour, and the necessity for close collaboration between neighbouring societies if worthwhile results are to be achieved.

(Inquiries to Miss E. M. Jowett, Hon. Secretary, 12 Cranleigh Road, S.W.19).

E. N. MONTAGUE

London St. Albans Return

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REFERENCES

1. For an account of the subject see "Medieval Pilgrim Badges" by B. W. Spencer in *Rotterdam Papers: A Contribution to Medieval Archaeology*. Rotterdam (1968), 137-153.
2. All the specimens illustrated are in the British Museum (Dept. of Brit. & Med. Antiquities) and are here reproduced by courtesy of the Trustees. The illustrations are actual size.
3. *J. Brit. Archaeol. Assoc.*, xxiv (1868), 223.
4. *Collectanea Antiqua* i (1848), 90.
5. *Catalogue of the Museum of London Antiquities* (1854), 140.
6. Trinity College, Dublin MS.E. i 40, f 38.
7. *Trans. St. Albans & Herts. Archit. & Arch. Soc.*, 1929 (1930), pls. iv, 2; v.1; xi, 1. *Ibid.*, 1930 (1931), pl. iii, 3.
8. C. C. Oman, "The Goldsmiths at St. Albans Abbey during the 12th and 13th Centuries" in *ibid.*, 1932 (1933), 215-33.

Current Excavations

City, Lower Thames St., opposite Billingsgate Market by Guildhall Museum and City of London Archaeological Society. Site of Roman town-house and baths (see *The London Archaeologist*, Winter, 1968) on alternate week-ends, the next one is March 15/16. Due to site limitations no further volunteers can be accommodated at present. Inquiries to Mrs. M. Smith, 26A Noel Road, N.1. (01-359 2078).

Carshalton, High Street by Beddington, Carshalton and Wallington Archaeological Society. Traces of Medieval foundations have been noted in a vacant site behind the car park in the High Street. Inquiries to Miss E. Fox, 156 Park Lane, Carshalton, Surrey (01-647 1847).

Mucking by the Ministry of Public Building and Works. Ranges from a ditch of the late Bronze Age to Saxon graves (see *The London Archaeologist*, Winter, 1968). Excavation takes place seven days a week. Inquiries to Excavation Supervisor for M.P.B.W., Mucking Excavation, Mucking, Stanford le Hope, Essex.