

Letters

EXCAVATION AND THE PUBLIC

IN YOUR LAST issue *Gromaticus* takes London archaeologists to task for their reluctance to admit the public to excavation sites. In nineteen cases out of twenty they are not allowed to do so — and for very good reasons. London is a built-up area, so that excavations are normally of two kinds; hasty rescue operations on large sites cleared for redevelopment, and more leisurely work in small restricted areas, such as yards and gardens.

In the former case, permission to work on the site is usually obtained with difficulty from site-owners and contractors, who will almost certainly be working in the near vicinity. It is always subject to the conditions that the contractor's work shall not be delayed and that the limited number of archaeological workers admitted to the site shall be fully covered by insurance against injury. The Forum site in Gracechurch Street was a typical recent example of this kind of site. Danger is always present on a large building-site, and the contractors rightly forbade the entrance of any unauthorised visitors. Any attempt by the archaeologists to welcome them would have brought the archaeological work to a very rapid conclusion.

The one occasion when the great interest of the finds on such a site stimulated public demand for access to the point where it could no longer be resisted, was the discovery of the Temple of Mithras in Walbrook sixteen years ago. The tribulations of the site-developer and contractors of the Bucklersbury House site are still remembered with horror by those with similar interests, and for several years aroused intense hostility towards any kind of archaeological investigation. It has to be recognised that a second occurrence of this kind could effectively wreck the frail structure of goodwill and tolerance on which we depend.

On the more peaceful kind of site, nearly all the available space is usually taken up by the excavation itself and the spoil dump from it, and there is no room for visitors in quantity. One of the most striking and important finds of the last year was the impressive Roman road section found by the Southwark and Lambeth Archaeological Society just north of Southwark Cathedral. Many people would no doubt have liked to see it, but I doubt whether more than twenty visitors could have been accommodated at a time in comfort, and probably even fewer while the work was actually proceeding. What would have happened if visits had been invited?

It has been estimated that 60,000 people were admitted to the Temple of Mithras during the three days in which it was accessible to the public. This was admittedly a site of exceptional interest that had been widely publicised, but it gives some indication of the magnitude of the problem. Nearly 8,000,000 people live within about half-an-hour's journey of most sites in Central London, and to these must be added the vast army of commuters from farther afield and visitors in London. Interest in archaeology has increased, rather than declined, since 1954, and it would be surprising if there were less than 1,000,000 people with some interest in the subject who would consider that they could

easily reach any site in the City, Southwark, Lambeth or Westminster. If only 10% actually tried to do so at any one time, they would of course encounter transport difficulties; but how many sites would be able to receive even 1% of this number (10,000 people) spread over a period of days? If time for visiting were restricted, as would almost certainly be necessary, the difficulty would be further aggravated.

Visiting South Cadbury — and most country sites — is of course a very different proposition. A major excursion is required to get there, so that the numbers arriving at any one time are not likely to be excessive. If they are — as on a fine week-end — there is plenty of room to accommodate them while they are waiting their turn.

On the rare occasions when it has been possible to welcome visitors to London excavations, I do not think that the opportunity has been missed. I recall, for example, the admirable arrangements made by Mr. Martin Biddle in his excavations at Nonsuch Palace in 1959-60. The site was not in Central London, however, and there was plenty of space in the Park.

Guildhall Museum,
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55 Basinghall Street,
E.C.2.

RALPH MERRIFIELD,
Chairman, Research Committee,
London & Middlesex
Archaeological Society.

C.B.A. GROUPS

I RECENTLY read that it has been suggested that C.B.A. Group 10 (Essex, Herts, London and Middlesex) should be resurrected. There seems to be a certain amount of opposition to this idea from the Counties concerned. It has been further suggested that yet another C.B.A. regional group should be formed to combine Essex, Kent and Surrey.

The formation some years ago of C.B.A. Group 11A (Kent and Surrey) was a mistake as both counties were and are adequately supplied in terms of organised archaeology. In Kent the lead is taken by the Council for Kentish Archaeology (formerly K.A.R.G.C.) and in Surrey the County society has an effective system.

At the resurrection of C.B.A. 11A about five years ago a large committee was formed with equal representation from both counties. The committee then wondered what it should do! To justify its existence the committee decided to organise an annual afternoon of lectures. This is the only contribution to archaeology that C.B.A. 11A has made.

C.B.A. as a national body should be in touch with what is happening in different areas, but why can it not work through the organisations that already exist; there are enough of them. The difficulties of trying to co-ordinate archaeology over wide areas are numerous and the idea of Essex, Kent and Surrey combining to form another ineffective organisation is unthinkable. Co-ordination of activities will only really work on a more local basis.

Perhaps someone could answer this letter by saying what purpose would be served by the resurrection of either C.B.A. Group 10 or the formation of a new regional group combining Essex, Kent and Surrey.

2 South Park Hill Road,
South Croydon,
Surrey.

J. K. HORNE
(past-Treasurer C.B.A. 11A.)

NONSUCH PALACE

THE ARTICLE on Nonsuch in the Winter 1969 issue by Philippa Glanville contains several errors. The first and most serious is the assertion that the palace site was lost until John Dent and Martin Biddle worked out its location from documentary sources. The truth is that there has always been a good strand of tradition as to the site of the palace and really enquiring minds could always find it.

The 25 in. and 50 in. O.S. sheets show the Nonsuch Palace site correctly just after the Avenue from Cheam turns northwards the Ewell Gate, although they do not show how its ground plan was related to the avenue or other field features.

Then C. A. Willis on page 62/3 of his *Short History of Ewell and Nonsuch* (1931) says, "Nonsuch was built round two courts, which, as Sir Alfred Clapman has shown, were of nearly equal size; the Outward Court which began about half way down the avenue, and was paved with stone setts, some of which still remain; and beyond it the Inner Court, 137 feet by 116, which extended so that there was only a short space of garden between it and the existing high field path to Ewell". He also mentions the extent of the Privy garden and that part of its wall is still visible.

So in 1931 he was in little doubt where the palace was sited and in his second editions of 1948 gave in an appendix some field notes of which John Dent made excellent use to get an almost exact layout of the palace on the ground.

On page 19 of his book, *History of Sutton and Cheam* (1931) C. J. Marshall writes "It (the palace) stood where the present road through Nonsuch Park turns at right angles towards the London Road. This present road runs right through the centre of the two court-yards, and a depression in the road marks the gateway between the two courts". So in 1936 he was in no doubt where the palace stood and was able to guess that the north/south avenue was on the central line of the palace and the dip in it was the point at which one passed from one court to the other.

The second error is in the penultimate paragraph which implies that the chalk pit near Nonsuch House is the only field indication of the site, although the later reference to "a grass covered ruin" is ambiguous and in fact misleading. The main field indications are the north/south avenue which runs a few feet off the centre line of the palace, the high footpath on the south which runs on the privy garden wall and some distance to the west the brick revetted podium on which the banquetting house stood.

Thirdly there is not now and never has been such a body as the Nonsuch Park Excavation Committee; what is meant is surely the Nonsuch Park Joint Management Committee.

123 Hookfield,
Epsom,
Surrey.

N. H. NAIL

Philippa Glanville writes:

I have replied privately to Mr. Nail and will not therefore take up much valuable space here.

Mr. Nail is right to correct me on one point; the Nonsuch Park Management Committee gave the finds to the London Museum on the recommendation of the Nonsuch Palace Excavation Committee.

Until new evidence appeared a few weeks before excavation began in 1959, no one, including the excavator, could place the walls of the palace to within 3 or 4

yards. Only a tiny minority, of whom Willis was undoubtedly one, combined the exceptional knowledge of local topography and the familiarity with relevant documentary material required to point to the approximate site of the palace on the ground. The O.S. maps do not, as Mr. Nail himself says, relate the palace to any existing feature. To the general public, the palace was lost.

My account was a general one and necessarily simplified: those interested to pursue this further can read the chapter called "Whereabouts Unknown" in John Dent's *The Quest for Nonsuch*, in which he discusses in some detail the evidence available before the excavations.

FOLK-LORE ARTICLE

PROFESSOR GRIMES has drawn my attention to an error in my article, *Folk-lore in London Archaeology*, in your last number.

The tripod pot from St. Mary Aldermanbury illustrated on p.101 was not found under the foundations of the Wren tower, which were in part of earlier dates, but in the upper filling of soil and stony rubble of Wren or post-Wren date at the base of the tower. The broken pieces of pot were in close association, though not certainly registering, and there were no indications of careful placing and burial. Professor Grimes points out that although the pot appears to have been complete when discarded, there is nothing to show that it was not cracked and therefore useless. Its further damage could have been received either at the moment it was discarded or subsequently.

These circumstances do not, in my view, rule out the possibility of the use of the pot in some form of builder's sacrifice, although the term "foundation deposit" is not strictly applicable. The fact that the pieces were all together might suggest that the pot was laid rather than thrown where it was found, and it would not necessarily have been treated with care subsequently.

An interesting account of a builder's sacrifice in Cambridge in 1897 throws some light on this. The foundations were being laid out for a Methodist Chapel, and in this case a horse's head from a knacker's yard was used. The head was placed in the bottom of a trench and a glass of beer was poured on it. The workmen drank the rest of the beer and then shovelled bricks and mortar on top of the head. A pot receiving this kind of treatment could hardly have remained intact!

A further correction must also be made. The possible bellarmine witch-bottle said to have come from Chelsea Reach (p. 102) was in fact found at Chiswick Eyot.

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RALPH MERRIFIELD

I. E. Porter, *Cambridgeshire Customs and Folklore* (1969) 181.

ARCHAEOLOGY IN FULHAM

THE FULHAM History Society, founded in 1934, is considering founding an archaeological group.

There will be a meeting at Fulham Library, 598 Fulham Road, S.W.6. on Thursday the 30th April at 7.30 p.m. to discuss the formation of the proposed group; anyone interested is invited to attend the meeting. Further information may be obtained from me.

56 Tamworth Street,
S.W.6.

KEITH WHITEHOUSE