

London's Archaeological Societies—8

WALTHAM ABBEY HISTORICAL SOCIETY

A TOWN named from one of the greatest monasteries of England must be a focus of historic interest. When the Waltham Abbey Historical Society was founded in 1952 its first chairman emphasised the need for study and research, and we have, in fact, always been active in this field. Excavation in the Abbey area has proved very fruitful; in 1959 the apsidal east end of the Norman church was discovered; between 1955 and 1962, and again in 1967, many details of the cloister area were recorded, while in 1969 a series of 14th-century rooms at the western end of the north claustral range was discovered. In 1954 an unexpected cemetery was revealed in a garden in Sun Street, while in the outer precincts remains of a medieval bridge were recorded in 1968, and extensive work during 1970-1, in advance of road construction, revealed no less than ten medieval buildings, eight of them previously unsuspected. The town has not been neglected; our first excavation (1953) investigated the site of the water-mill, while in 1966 a rescue excavation in Sewardstone Street produced (*inter alia*) a fine group of 17th-century finds which were subsequently placed in a satisfactory documentary context. During the 1955 cloister site excavations, mesolithic flints and neolithic pottery were discovered, and these early occupations accord well with the town's position at an ancient crossing of the Lea and on a gravel terrace between the river marshes and the clay soils of the Forest of Essex. In 1969 and 1970 remains of a Saxon hall, incorporating reused Roman material, were discovered in the Abbey area, and are to be further investigated this year. In recent years, under the energetic directorship of P. J. Huggins, an active publishing policy has been pursued.

Although the role of excavation is important it is far from the whole of the Society's activities. Documentary research is pursued and, in particular a translation into English of the Latin 12th-century tract "*De Inventione Sanctae Crucis*," which is the original source of the traditional account of the foundation of Waltham, has been prepared. Waltham Abbey is, so far, without a professionally staffed museum, and we have been steadily adding to the collection built up over many years by Mr. S. F. Puddephatt—pictures, papers, documents and material objects of all kinds, providing they have some local association, are collected. Storage can be a problem! We try to bring

before the local people and our numerous visitors something of the history and heritage of our area—a major exhibition was held in 1955; since 1960, through the generosity of successive vicars, we have had the use of the Abbey church, crypt, while from 1964-9 we were allowed to use the timber-framed Lichgate House in the churchyard as a headquarters. Recently a generous gift of a library of some 250 books of historical interest, with maps and pamphlets, was made to the Society in memory of the late Mr. H. S. Crocker, hon. secretary 1953-66.

We have, on occasion, made our voice heard on conservation issues. In 1966-8 we joined forces with other local organisations in opposing an over-ambitious town centre redevelopment scheme, which was rejected after a public inquiry. Following the subsequent designation of the town centre and Abbey precincts as a Conservation Area, recommendations of buildings for listing as of architectural or historic interest were made to the Essex County Council, which endorsed most of them.

The Society maintains a full programme of meetings with speakers during the winter months, with members' meetings, social events—including an annual dinner for the past four years—and excursions, both locally and further afield. Liaison is maintained with other societies and groups through the Forest Group for Local History and the Essex Archaeological and Historical Congress, among others. We are participating in the survey of the Industrial Archaeology of Essex, organised by the Essex Record Office. Many members of course, pursue their individual interests—the study of pottery, clay pipes, coins, heraldry, and early church music, to name a few—but the only qualification for membership is interest and/or goodwill towards a Society that sees itself as part of the local community with its own role to play, but at the same time tries not to be parochial in its outlook.

With a membership at its highest ever level of 95 in 1970, the Society, though much smaller than those in the populous London districts, faces the future with confidence. (Inquiries to: K. N. Bascombe, Hon. Secretary, 25 Monkswood Avenue, Waltham Abbey, Essex).

K. N. BASCOMBE

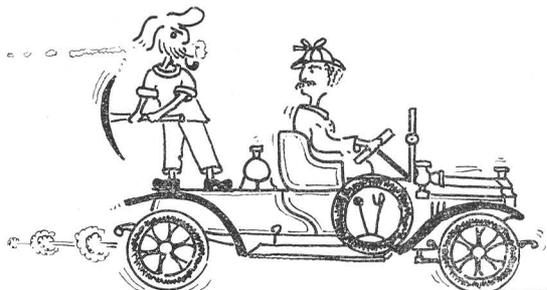
Annual General Meeting

The A.G.M. of *The London Archaeologist* was held on Saturday, 1st May, at the Institute of Archaeology by kind permission of the Director; 30 people attended.

The audited accounts which showed a small excess of income over expenditure, were accepted; copies may be obtained from the Secretary to the Publishing Committee, 3 St. John's Avenue, S.W.15. The draft constitution was at last approved, making it possible to apply for charitable status. The following were elected Trustees — Dr. K. N. Bascombe, Mr. Paul Carter, Dr. John Morris and Mr. Andrew Selkirk. All the officers were re-elected, as were the local society representatives — Croydon, Enfield, Fulham, Lewisham, Southwark and Lambeth.

Following the A.G.M. Dr. John Morris read a paper "Arthurian London" in which he suggested, *inter alia*, by using continental sources in particular that there was a British enclave in the London area in the late 5th century.

IN A HOLE



"An industrial what?"