

London's Archaeological Societies — 9

WANDSWORTH HISTORICAL SOCIETY

AT THE TIME of its foundation in 1953 practical archaeology was not considered by the group of enthusiasts who came together to launch the Wandsworth Historical Society. Their interests were almost exclusively confined to the recording of local history through documentation, research and photography. In this field the Society has a record of achievement during the comparatively short period of its existence. None of the ancient parishes which formed the Borough of Wandsworth at that time — Clapham, Putney, Streatham, Tooting and Wandsworth — could boast a reliable or comprehensive history later than Lysons' work of 1792, augmented to some extent by the Victoria County History.

Through the work of a Research Group much additional material on local topics was unearthed and published in the Society's bi-monthly News Sheets, and from the beginning of this year a more ambitious publication, *The Wandsworth Historian* has been produced, for circulation to members three times a year. This has enabled selected topics to be dealt with at much greater length than was possible in the News Sheet, and will, it is hoped, form a basis for even more ambitious productions in the future.

One activity of the Research Group which has achieved a measure of fame, is the Street Survey, a sterling effort by a small group of members which has put on record in compact form every one of the streets in the borough. The methods adopted for the survey were described by Keith Bailey to the London and Middlesex Archaeological Society's fifth Local History Conference last year, as a result of which several other societies have launched similar surveys.

Practical archaeology first came to the fore in 1962, with the unearthing by a Putney householder of a series of Roman burial urns. These were rescued with the aid of Dr. Francis Celoria, then Field Officer of the London Museum. The interest aroused by this find led in a very short time to the formation of an Archaeological Group.

From the Group's activities in its first year it became apparent that there was undoubtedly a Romano-British settlement in Putney lasting from about A.D. 70 to the 4th century though its extent was not yet determined. At this early period of its existence the Group was greatly helped and encouraged by the Guildhall Museum staff, who were always ready to offer expert guidance: a happy state of affairs which we are glad to say still continues. Excavations in subsequent years have produced a large quantity of datable material, indicating that the settlement persisted until at least A.D. 400, but that it was of limited extent, almost certainly associated with a river crossing. Of equal importance has been the discovery of a site with stratified Neolithic material also at Putney (see p. 276).

Fieldwork has been carried out as opportunity offers on a number of sites in various parts of the borough, but none has yet yielded results comparable with the Putney sites described above.

Following the discovery of a Roman bath house at Huggin Hill in the City in August 1964, the Society was able to some extent to repay its early debt to Guildhall Museum by helping with a rescue excavation. As a result of this experience the Museum decided that the formation of

an excavation group to work in the City was essential, and once again Wandsworth Historical Society was able to help, by providing site supervisors, diggers and equipment until such time as the City of London Excavation Group became self-sufficient.

Besides the City, the Society has been able to assist in quite a number of rescue excavations outside its own area, at Marble Arch, Southwark, Godalming and London Airport, to name a few, as well as lending equipment for other rescue operations including the current London and Middlesex Archaeological Society dig at Bedfont which incidentally is by way of repaying another debt from the Society's early days when L.A.M.A.S. made a cash grant for the purchase of equipment.

The Society is building up a large collection of material which it is hoped will eventually find a home in a Borough Museum. One of the most noteworthy acquisitions is a late Iron Age sword which is presently undergoing conservation at London Museum.

With the recasting of borough boundaries in April 1965 the London Borough of Wandsworth lost Clapham and most of Streatham, and incorporated the old Borough of Battersea. This has added an area rich in Industrial Archaeology, a facet of local history which will demand much closer attention in the future.

While realising that high membership rates do not necessarily reflect the activity of a society, Wandsworth Historical Society feels certain that in its case at least its growing numbers do indicate a growing participation by the local community. (Inquiries to D. R. Pollock, Hon. Secretary, 102 Disraeli Road, S.W.15.)

D. R. POLLOCK

Current Excavations

Brentford, by London Museum and West London Archaeological Group. Site at Brentford High Street between St. Paul's Road and the County Court access in St. Paul's Road. A large ditch and other traces of Roman occupation. Excavation takes place on Fridays and Sundays. Inquiries to Roy Canham, London Museum, W.8. (937 9816).

Fulham, by Fulham and Hammersmith Historical Society. Excavation of famous Fulham Pottery site under the direction of Vaughan Christophers. Inquiries to Dennis Haselgrove, 10 Church Gate, S.W.6. (736 5213).

Mucking, by the Department of the Environment. Ranges from a ditch of the Bronze Age to Saxon huts. Excavation takes place seven days a week. Inquiries to Excavation Supervisor, Mucking Excavations, Stanford-le-Hope, Essex.

Southwark, by Southwark Archaeological Excavation Committee. Site at Toppings Wharf, Tooley Street by London Bridge. Roman and medieval riverside buildings. Excavation under the direction of Harvey Sheldon takes place every day except for Mondays and Tuesday. Inquiries to Graham Dawson, Cuming Museum, Walworth Road, S.E.17. (703 6514).