

# “First Slide Please!” –

## or, looking after your lecturer

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“Will that one sharpen up a bit?”



THE CHAIRMAN introduces the well-known speaker in glowing terms; unfortunately he doesn't *quite* get the name right, and can't remember the title of the lecture. The speaker, a rather nervous young lady, rises to her feet; her notes fall on the floor. Apologising from a crouching position she grabs the pieces of paper up piecemeal into a bundle, and squeaks "First slide please!" "Just a moment!" from the hall, where two men are causing a major upheaval; one is frantically unscrewing the plug for the projector with a borrowed nailfile, while the other is going round the hall with a pole, stringing the cable onto the tops of the curtain rails. The speaker realises that this is going to take some time, and begins, just a little too high-pitched, and a little too fast, with an extempore introduction.

Suddenly the hall is plunged into darkness, and behind (and on) the dazzled speaker, who is in line of fire from the projector, appears a brightly coloured picture, so out of focus that only horizon and blue sky are distinguished. The speaker continues her introduction, with a slight increase in pitch and speed of delivery. With agonising slowness, the picture crawls into focus, the audience holding their breath as if they can help it by sheer willpower. With sudden clarity they can see what it is: a picture of a new housing estate; they exhale as one man. The speaker turns to face the screen. "That's not one of mine," she says, weakly.

The housing estate disappears, and is replaced by a map of a well-known peninsula. It is marked with small red dots. The East appears on the left hand side, the west on the right. The speaker looks at it, and squeaks "It's only a distribution map, don't worry!" With signs of mounting hysteria she launches

into an explanation of the map, reading her notes by the light reflected from the screen (no lectern or reading light being provided) only to discover that she cannot reach the top of the screen because she has no pointer; she waves vaguely in the right direction. At this point the projectionist sees his mistake, and the slide disappears, leaving the screen a blinding white; the audience gasp. The slide reappears. This time the west is on the left, the east is on the right, but . . . the north is at the bottom. The lecturer tries to pick up the thread of her discussion in this new Looking-glass Land; she finds it, and the slide disappears; blinding light; it reappears with the north to the left. Almost in tears, the speaker stands dumbly while the projectionist tries the other five configurations. From the back of the hall someone starts fighting his way through the audience with a broomhandle to act as a pointer . . .

This is not part of the scenario for a new film called "Carry On Lecturing." Nearly all these things actually happened at the same lecture.

I am a chairman at a number of lectures each winter, and furthermore, I find myself lecturing at least once a week during the winter to all sorts of organisations, from Housebound Wives to County Archaeological Societies. It's all part of the price I pay, part of the public relations exercise that makes local archaeology tick. This article is written as a stern warning to you all, speaker and spoken-to alike. Things can, and do, go wrong. But you (the audience) and I (the speaker) owe it to one another to minimise the risks, and to anticipate the mishaps. The events I shall describe have happened; most of them have happened to me. I shall name no names. See if you can recognise your own organisation.

**Booking the Speaker.** Believe it or not, it is best to book speakers over the telephone. Speakers tend to put letters to one side while they decide which day will suit them best. Sometimes it means no reply, and always it means it takes several days for you to make one booking. If the answer is “no” you may have to try another date, and with the average speaker this takes two weeks, and costs a small fortune in stamps (yours and his). When I acted as programme secretary, I found I could spend the entire summer writing letters and awaiting replies, and finally not have time to get the programme printed before the first meeting.

Don't ask casually whether I think I might be able to come at some time in the distant future when you happen to meet me in a pub. For all you know I may not be sober. One Society had me on their programme for a schools' conference. The first I knew of it was when I read the programme the day before. “Oh, don't you remember? You told me on the dig last summer that you always had a free period on Wednesday afternoons!”

Confirm all bookings in writing at the time (and keep a copy yourself!) and send a reminder with full details of the meeting a week before. One Society confirmed the booking six months before in a letter which ended “. . . further details will be sent to you nearer the date.” They forgot, but luckily I didn't. I looked in *the London Archaeologist* for the details, to find another speaker and another subject advertised. This was the day before the meeting. None of the committee members whose names appeared on the letterhead had telephone numbers. It took me all evening to find out that none of them were on the phone. I went to the meeting and discovered that they did expect me, and didn't appear at all surprised that I had travelled twenty five miles to find out!

Oh! Don't forget to give the speaker some idea what sort of people you are, and how many. I will talk to almost anyone, but it is rather disconcerting, if I've included slides of one of the diggers demonstrating the *caldarium*, full frontal archaeology, to find that the audience consists of half a dozen elderly ladies, clashing knitting pins.

**Projectors.** Some speakers provide their own projectors; it's safer, but a lot of trouble. If you provide the projector, several points need checking. Can you black the hall out sufficiently? Does the projector frizzle valuable slides? (I've had thirty slides ruined this way.) Does the plug fit the socket? Do you have a spare fuse and a spare bulb (they often “go” together)? If you turn the projector upside down to change the bulb, as someone did for me a short while ago, do you drop all the speaker's carefully arranged slides onto the floor?

Is the focal length of the projector suitable for

the hall, and can the speaker communicate with the projectionist? At the first meeting in a new hall, Professor Hawkes had to send runners off through echoing corridors and up clattering stairs to get the slides focussed. The picture was then so big relative to the screen that the audience learnt “During the period swords became longer—you can see neither the handle nor the point.”

**Hospitality.** Don't forget that the speaker is giving up some of his time for you, and that he may have travelled a long way just for the pleasure of telling you something about which he happens to be enthusiastic. It isn't really fair to say to him “We just have to arrange our mandate for the Delegate Conference at the Albert Hall,” and then have an undisciplined debate about unmarried mothers for an hour while the speaker waits about. The longest I've ever been kept like this was one-and-a-half hours by a Women's Institute in a country district (I couldn't run away in a huff—no buses.) Mind you, they did ask me to lead a singing of *Jerusalem* and judge the best flower arrangement in an eggcup competition, so my wait was justified!

This year I went to talk to something that called itself a County Archaeological Society. My wife came with me, and we arrived ten minutes early. The place was completely deserted and bare, and we amused ourselves by arranging the chairs. The audience came in one or two at a time; none of them seemed to know any of the others. Quarter of an hour after the advertised time of the meeting we had no chairman, no screen, and no projector. After a brief search of the premises I appealed to the audience, and one member went home to fetch his equipment. I introduced myself, and gave an informal talk on some research I was currently doing. The screen and projector were brought, and then I gave the advertised lecture three quarters of an hour late. At the end I apologised to the audience for the delay there had been, and remarked that although I felt qualified to move furniture, arrange the equipment, introduce the speaker and give two talks one after another, I felt it would be a little infra dig for me to propose a vote of thanks. A rather sheepish gentleman rose in the far corner of the hall and said a few inaudible words. I discovered afterwards that he was the treasurer of the so-called Society (*not* because he came and offered me anything for my trouble, I might add.)

Some years ago, a lady archaeologist of my acquaintance, asked to speak to something calling itself a Craftworkers' Guild, on Roman Art, requested that I should accompany her to show her the hall and work the projector. When we arrived the place was in darkness. With the screen in one hand and the projector in the other I shouldered open a door. On the other side was a stage; a red-faced tenor was just starting “BECAUSE . . .” We retreated, and found

the only possible venue, a side hall. We set up the screen and projector, and put out the chairs. The first member of the guild arrived five minutes after the advertised time; within half an hour we had a chairman and the meeting started. When it was all over, I had some difficulty getting away from the hall. A very hairy artist blocked my way with a plate full of half crowns in his hand. "Come on; you can't expect us to organise a meeting like this for nothing, you know!"

We retired to the car, only to find that the tenor's audience had now arrived in force. Our little vehicle was completely hemmed in on all sides. We sat in the car for an hour waiting for the final curtain to come. The windows steamed up. At intervals a suspicious policeman shone his torch in.

If the speaker has come a long way on a cold night, there are other little details which might help to make him comfortable. I know one museum at which the lecture hall is isolated from the lavatory

for security reasons. The speaker has to manage as best he can in the car park nearby.

**Payment.** Many speakers, I am one of them, will talk for nothing if it can be considered as "casting bread upon the waters." There is a lot that archaeology can gain from keeping people informed, and listening. But if you don't want to pay, it's only fair to say so at the outset. It saves a lot of embarrassment. You should *always* offer to pay the speaker's expenses, even if he does seem well heeled. I shall never forget the Young Conservative club. They asked me after I arrived if I would mind leading a debate on comprehensive education before I spoke about archaeology. After the meeting they told me they had no funds for paying speakers' expenses. Their pint tankards had never been empty for more than a few seconds the whole evening. Nor can I forget that other lot who (this is quite true) asked me half-way through my talk if I would mind having a short break because Harold Wilson was on television at nine o' clock!

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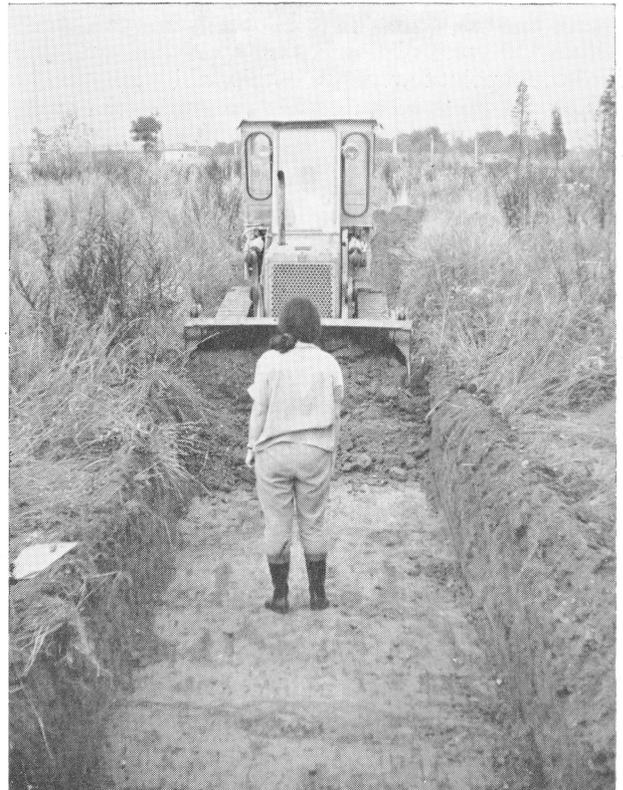
## Rescue Excavation at Bedfont

TO INVESTIGATE some crop marks on a site between East and West Bedfont (just south of London Airport), London and Middlesex Archaeological Society are sponsoring a rescue excavation on an area at Esso's West London Terminal where some further oil tanks are shortly to be erected. Other portions of the crop mark site outside of Esso's compound are threatened by a number of proposed projects.

The crop marks on the Esso site include a ring ditch, three boundary ditches and some possible pits. On the adjoining land besides further ring and boundary ditches there is also a Neolithic causewayed camp (see *Antiquity* Vol. 40 plate 25 — June 1966).

Because of security and fire precautions the number of diggers has had to be limited. However with the help of a grant from the Department of the Environment, a Drott is being used to clear the overburden which includes dumped material from the site of the adjacent existing oil tanks.

Early results have been the location of the ring ditch, two boundary ditches and some pits. In addition, an Iron Age hut circle 32 feet in diameter is being exposed; it has a very close parallel with those excavated in 1940 by Professor Grimes on the Heathrow site (2 miles away). It is hoped that a report will appear in the next issue of the *London Archaeologist*.



The Drott cleaning a trench to pick up a boundary ditch