

# Commentary

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## SITE SAFETY

THE C.B.A.'s NEW PUBLICATION *Responsibility and Safeguards in Archaeological Excavation* (Council for British Archaeology, 8 St. Andrews Place, London, N.W.1, 15p) which replaces the out of print, and now outdated *Safety Precautions in Archaeological Excavation* (1964), is in some respects a rather disturbing booklet. This is not meant to be a fully comprehensive, detailed safety code, but a guide to provisions for site safety which the C.B.A. consider the minimum requirement.

Nevertheless, there are few sites on which these requirements are fully implemented and many where excavation is carried on in almost total disregard of even this barest minimum. For example, H.M. Factory Inspectorate's *Annual Reports* conclude that excavations more than 1.2m. (4ft.) deep should have shoring or battering. Allowing that differing soil conditions or the onset of wet weather may modify this figure, how many sites have any shoring or intentional batter in their trenches?

It is interesting to attempt to determine the reason for this neglected aspect of site management. Is it a kamikazi attitude of directors and diggers alike, or perhaps some overpowering zealous search for knowledge which brushes aside such mundane considerations as personal safety? Whatever the reason all archaeologists would do well to heed the sensible warnings of this booklet.

## VISITORS TO EXCAVATIONS

THE PUBLIC awareness of matters archaeological, which is so gratifying to all concerned, has raised one or two problems which need some thought and perhaps discussion.

Baynard's Castle, due to its massive exposure in the press, attracted 4,000 visitors at Easter alone. This number of people obviously required special arrangements if the dig was not to be brought to a complete standstill.

To have large numbers of visitors on a site makes it necessary to look at safety measures, insurance policies and, regrettably, security. It is unfortunate that on some sites, and indeed from some site museums, there have been instances of finds disappearing to 'souvenir' hunters. Another point which has been raised, is that in detailing volunteers to give visitors a guided tour round the site, valuable man-

power is being wasted which could be otherwise occupied in more immediately fruitful work.

However, on the credit side, archaeologists must be thankful for the opportunity of explaining their work and aims to a group of people some of whom may even be interested enough to join a local society and, of course, contributions to the 'dig fund' provide a welcome source of income.

A last thought—could it be the public interest in archaeological excavations which is helping to promote the disturbing appearance of 'treasure hunters' armed with metal detectors?

## PUBLICATION OF EXCAVATIONS

IT FOLLOWS from this that when a site is dug, it should of course be excavated by the best possible method, to extract the maximum information, the finds processed, and ultimately a report published. Many archaeologists, even today, do not necessarily comply with all these conditions, particularly with respect to publication. It is an interesting exercise to consider whether pressure could be brought to bear on erring directors, to encourage them to conclude an excavation with a suitable published report.

Perhaps directors could be precluded from directing further sites if a former major work is still unpublished. Alternatively, we could adopt the French system of licensing directors of excavations. Here there are great difficulties, for who can best judge a person's ability to direct, and indeed which parameters with which to gauge this ability. Perhaps the C.B.A. should issue licences renewable at yearly intervals and keep directors up to standard or revoke their licences (automatic disqualification for 3 endorsements?).

More seriously, any form of control can only work when museums and local societies agree to be bound by it. The situation at the moment is that theoretically at least, anyone can form their own society, obtain a grant from somewhere, arrange permission to dig, and set about excavating a site even though they may be completely incompetent to direct that site and have little or no real understanding of what they find.

One feels that the whole problem of a person, or groups suitability to excavation a given site may have to be resolved in the near future, or else we shall be faced with more hopelessly excavated sites where the information we seek has been lost through poor work and even worse interpretation.