

# Commentary

By GROMATICUS

## TRANSISTORISED MUDLARK

THE TRANSISTORISED Thames mudlark in mid-February (p.48) attracted wide press coverage and doubtless caused the hearts of many riverine archaeologists to sink to the bottom of their dukes — the mass of archaeological material recovered from the Thames and now in museums is well-known.

Archaeology has been much troubled these past two or three years by the growth in electronic treasure hunting, which has been highlighted by certain acts of wanton pillage. However in the main, the addicts of treasure hunting have been concentrating their activities on public ground, be it commons, beaches or river foreshores. When doing this they break no laws and should they find items of interest, then it is basically a matter of accident which could happen to anyone — the detector is but an aid to the scuffling boot or probing stick. Of course, of the archaeological material found in this manner, very little is reported to local museums or societies; the great majority of it is either retained on mantlepieces or appears in dealers' shops. For example, one treasure hunter of the Thames foreshore was recently quoted in the national press as saying ". . . I also found ten Celtic coins dating from between 50 B.C. and 50 A.D. I keep most of my coins, but I sold eight of the Celtic ones. They were valued at £20 each."

## SPOILATION

A number of irregular visits to excavations and scheduled sites have received wide-spread publicity and condemnation in archaeological circles. Plundering of archaeological sites is, of course, nothing new but the advent of electronically equipped treasure hunters creates a different situation inasmuch the ordinary man in the street is being encouraged to go forth and find "treasure" for himself; it is probably a matter of luck whether he ends up on an archaeologically significant site or not.

Although the objects found by transistorised treasure hunters are normally of metal, it must be remembered that they are well aware that other material has monetary value, for example Victorian glass bottles and stoneware containers can be sold for anything from a £1 upwards — "How can I price my finds? I have seen the same bottle selling for £1.50; £2.50; and £3.50 in different dealers' catalogues during the past few weeks." (*Bottles & Relics News* No.3 p.6).

## THE IMPORTANCE OF RECORDING

Dealing in antiques of all descriptions has been going on for centuries and it is obviously impossible for everything old to find a place in a museum. The general policy of museums is to obtain sample items of the more commonplace objects and to try to acquire all the rarer objects which pertain to their collections.

The archaeologist, as opposed to the museum curator, is to some degree little worried as to the final resting place of an object — providing that a full and adequate record of the object has been made together with the circumstances of its discovery. For example, a stray Roman coin may be indicative of nothing at its time of discovery, but providing it is properly recorded, in due course it may gain significance should subsequent stray finds occur nearby. Collated together the various jigsaw pieces of evidence could point to a Roman settlement.

## MODUS VIVENDI

While virtually all archaeologists are wary of treasure hunters, the latter tend to be open minded and often feel that they are misunderstood by the former. The Amateur Treasure Hunters Code of Conduct is quite explicit when it refers to archaeology — "Don't interfere with archaeological sites or ancient monuments," "Report all unusual historical finds to your local museum and get expert help if you accidentally discover a site of archaeological interest" and finally "Don't give us a bad name." The fact that some treasure hunters break this code should not alienate archaeologists from the group as a whole.

There seems to be no valid reason why treasure hunters and archaeologists should not establish a *modus vivendi*; after all the past-time is there and can not be ignored. Perhaps as a start the British Amateur Treasure Hunting Club who organised the Thames mudlark in February, could ask its members to report with full description and exact location the discovery of any object they find in the London area of the medieval period or earlier. Such co-operation would provide archaeologists with much needed information and treasure hunters with an additional and worthwhile incentive in their hobby.

## SUBSCRIPTIONS RENEWALS

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