

County Organisations—1

LONDON AND MIDDLESEX ARCHAEOLOGICAL SOCIETY

S. W. HOWARD

PRIOR TO 1840 there was only one archaeological society outside London and Edinburgh, but in the next 25 years eighteen county societies were formed including our own and its inaugural meeting was held at Crosby Hall in Bishopsgate Street Within on 14th December 1855.

It is interesting to note that the care and foresight of the founders was such that the objects have been virtually unchanged to this day. Whilst the provisional committee which met 'to consider the propriety of instituting a Society for the purpose of investigating the Antiquities of the County of Middlesex,' eventually extended the rules to cover the counties of London and Middlesex, the only one of the original objects which was not carried out, was the founding of a museum, but of this more anon.

The centenary dinner was held in the Mansion House on 24th October 1955 by courtesy of the Lord Mayor (Sir Seymour Howard). The Society's President, Professor W. F. Grimes, was in the Chair and was supported by the Lord Mayor and Sheriffs, and a distinguished company.

It is now proposed to take each of the principal functions of the Society in turn:

Archaeology

Throughout its history the Society has taken the keenest interest in this activity but largely by the way of sponsorship rather than in the direct field-work and in supporting activities particularly in the City of London, although in 1971 an excavation at Bedfont was carried out.

When the Roman and Mediaeval London Excavation Council was formed after the Second World War, under the directorship of Mr. (now Prof.) W. F. Grimes, a member of our Council served on this body.

From 1937 until a few years ago the Society was concerned, together with a number of local societies in Middlesex and Hertfordshire, with a series of excavations at Brockley Hill, North Middlesex, South Mimms and Grimm's Dyke. The group was known as the North Middlesex Archaeological Research Committee.

During the past decade all archaeological activities have been conducted by our Archaeological Research Committee which meets regularly to discuss various problems in the area, and which arranges each spring the Annual Conference of

London Archaeologists at the Livery Hall of Guildhall, at which lectures on recent research and excavations are given, and material displayed.

The Society was one of those associated with the establishment in 1962 of the Southwark Archaeological Excavation Committee, on which it is represented.

Help is offered to affiliated societies through the provision of an excavation insurance scheme, the loan of equipment and tools, the making of cash grants and the giving of other forms of assistance. The Research Committee also acts as a useful link between local societies and the Department of Environment, a representative of which usually attends its meetings.

The Archaeological Research Committee which includes representatives from most of the more active groups in London, maintains a site watching and reporting system on a borough basis. Recently as a result of this scheme, the discovery of several of the Arundel Marbles was made during development of the site of Arundel House in the Strand.

Local History

The study of this subject has always been stimulated by lectures, visits to places of historical interest, and by articles in our *Transactions*, but has been given more positive impetus by the incorporation of the Middlesex Local History Council with the Society in 1965. The work is conducted by the Local History Committee which is a member of the Standing Council for Local History.

Under this heading it would be appropriate to mention that largely due to pressure by this Society, the British Airports Authority erected a plaque on the wall of the police station close to the Bath Road entrance to Heathrow Airport to mark the position of the north-west terminal of the first baseline of the triangulation of Great Britain. The baseline was measured in 1784 by Major General Wm. Roy, the father of the Ordnance Survey. The plaque was unveiled by the Director General of the Ordnance Survey on 17th November 1967.

The Local History Committee arranges each autumn the Annual Local History Conference at the Livery Hall of Guildhall, at which lectures are given and displays are exhibited. It also acts as a liaison between the various local history societies affiliated to us.

This committee produces various publications

from time to time, e.g., the recent facsimile reproduction of Rocque's Map of Middlesex, 1754.

Historic Buildings

It is interesting to recall that in 1872 the Society presented a Petition to the House of Commons in support of a Bill for the Preservation of Ancient Monuments; although that Bill was lost, subsequent legislation has ensured a considerable measure of protection.

At all times the Society has made and supported every effort to prevent or oppose the destruction of buildings and other monuments of historic interest within its area, and particularly since the Second World War in the development schemes in the City of London.

The Historic Buildings and Conservation Committee collects information and action is taken to save historic buildings of value threatened with destruction and to preserve the character of historic areas.

Publications

From the outset the Society has devoted by far the largest part of its income to publishing the results of original research and excavations and articles on subjects of historic study and has encouraged contributions of high standard whether from members or other competent writers. Our principal publication is called *Transactions of the London and Middlesex Archaeological Society*. Whilst in the past its publication has not always been regular, it now appears annually in December and from 1973 onwards each issue will be a separate volume.

A *Newsletter* is issued three times a year (January, April and September) and this is concerned with current information about the Society's affairs.

Library

The original rules called for the establishment of a museum and a library. In view of the development of Guildhall Museum, the London Museum and other museums in Greater London, the founding of a museum was rendered unnecessary but the Society did institute a Library. Because the Society has no offices as such, the Library has been located since its establishment in 1911 at the Bishopsgate Institute, 230 Bishopsgate, where the Council meetings and lectures are held. The Library consists of about 2,500 volumes principally on the archaeology, topography and history of the two counties, and the books are available on loan to members.

Lectures and Visits

A lecture is held once a month at the Bishopsgate Institute during the winter months. Visits to various places of interest are made during both winter and summer months. In addition one all-day visit is made each year to a town or area of special interest.

Traditional Ceremonies

The Society supports two of the traditional church services in the City of London, which are attended by the Lord Mayor of London, the Sheriffs and their ladies: (1) The John Stow Commemoration Service which is held annually in April at the Church of St. Andrew Undershaft in St. Mary Axe and this is sponsored by the Society; and (2) The Samuel Pepys Commemoration Service which is held annually in June at the Church of St. Olave, Hart Street and is sponsored by the Society jointly with the Samuel Pepys Club.

Membership

During the past decade there has been a steady increase of membership, which has recently passed the 600 mark. This includes 127 institutional members, comprising City Livery Companies, university and public libraries in all parts of the world, and also 37 affiliated societies in the London area. Additionally we have arrangements for interchange of publications with 49 societies and institutions in this and many overseas countries.

What of the Future

The Society functions as a county society, and as far as conservation is concerned, as an amenity society, and the tendency is that increasing interest encourages amateur archaeologists and historians to want to work in small groups, near their own home areas and to form local societies to this end. The County Society by its system of affiliation continues, however, to play an important part in ensuring the co-operation of these local societies and the co-ordination of their efforts. Its success in doing so is witnessed by the large attendances of members of affiliated societies at its two Annual Conferences. Above all, it provides them with a medium of publication for their work in its *Transactions*.

It is difficult to increase subscriptions, and yet a larger proportion of the income is taken in publications, lectures and administration, so that with increasing costs, it is getting difficult to finance larger excavations from the Society's own funds, and it becomes ever more necessary to seek financial help from the Government or other sources.

Fortunately as a result of radio, television and press coverage public interest has been roused and this influences Government help. Whilst local authorities have in some cases appointed professional archaeologists, these are few in number, and there will always be a place for the amateur who is enthusiastic enough to acquire the necessary training and experience. The Society's work will lie in publication and informing the public of the work done. (Inquiries to the Hon. Secretary, 49 Mayford Road, S.W.12).