

Letters

CROYDON N.H. & S. SOCIETY

I HOPE Mrs. Thornhill will forgive me if I add a little more to her description of the Croydon Natural History and Scientific Society (Winter 72, Vol. 2, No. 1) as she rather gives the impression that the only archaeological excavation done by members, prior to 1967, was in 1921 and 1953.

There was very little archaeology in Croydon after the Second World War but in 1949, Alan B. Reid, an amateur archaeologist who lived at West Wickham, formed a mobile excavation group around him and for the next few years this team was transported all over Surrey and West Kent to help on digs where a labour force was urgently needed. Some of the team even travelled as far afield as Scotland and Yorkshire to give assistance to various directors.

In 1950 or 51 he became the Secretary of the then moribund Archaeological Section of the C.N.H. & S.S. and many of his group joined the society also. I was one of the original members and took part in a great number of digs during the time of his secretaryship. We all underwent a rigorous training and were obliged also to have some other talent, either in photography, surveying, draughtsmanship, etc. Because of its wide interests the Croydon society had many experts for the archaeologist to call upon: geologists, palaeontologists, doctors, a dentist, professional potter, photographer (who allowed us unrestricted processing facilities) and a never-ending supply of brawny Sixth Formers from the Stanley Technical School. Thus our group was able to supply everything, from navvying to expertise in the most obscure fields. We were pioneers in our approach to archaeology, watching new roadworks, pipelines and organising 'Archaeological Rambles' (now known as 'field walks').

Except for perhaps a brief footnote in published archaeological reports our work went unacknowledged. It is a great pity in these days when the word 'Rescue!' is constantly ringing in our ears that the man who organised the first archaeological rescue team has been forgotten by all but a few. His moving away from Surrey was a great loss to the Croydon society and for a few years the archaeological section reverted to its former inactivity until the vast rebuilding programme in Croydon galvanized it into life again.

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MORE ON SULLONIACAE

MR. J. E. AYTO must be thanked for bringing to the attention of this magazine and myself additional information about excavations and finds at Brockley Hill in his article 'Sulloniacae — some further work'.¹

Who directed the series of excavations between 1957/63 on behalf of the North Middlesex Archaeological Research

Committee? May I suggest that the results of this series of excavations, if felt so important, should have been published in the *Transactions of the London and Middlesex Archaeological Society*. Previous excavations at Brockley Hill, 1954, were published in these transactions. There is simply no point in such excavation if the results are not published in a respectable archaeological journal. This is a matter of courtesy to future researchers. Instead, we have a cyclo-styled report on the excavations in 1960-61 which has succeeded in concealing itself from the uninformed.²

I am a little puzzled by the comment "Mr. Castle's conclusions about the course of the Roman road up the south side of Brockley Hill." The 1968 evidence, as stressed by "Suspected line of Roman Watling Street" on the map, is inconclusive! Furthermore note, "The road with side ditches is clearly earlier than the hollow way and would seem to be of Roman date. If so, then it must surely be Roman Watling Street. Furthermore a trench cut for a drain in 1953, near the transport cafe, disclosed a pit containing Samian ware, actually beneath the eastern half of the present road." It will be obvious from footnote 4 of this article, that it is not a final report on the excavations conducted in 1968. Due to problems of finance the report on these excavations is not yet published. Clearly Mr. Ayto's comments are invalid since he does not yet know full details of the evidence obtained from the 1968 excavations. It is unwise, indeed dangerous, to draw conclusions from the inadequate trenches (Trench A not completed) cut in 1960-61. However, it is now clear that the gravel capped bank revealed in Trench B, 1961,³ (partly sectioned) is in fact a continuation of the road found in 1952⁴ and at Sites C, E and F in 1968. The made-up clay bank found in 1952 and 1968 is comprised of dirty clay, containing charcoal fragments, and is not natural clay as such.

Observation and excavation in the areas of Trenches A and B (1960-61) and Sites C, D, E and F in 1968, provided evidence of severe destruction by robbing and ploughing. Between the presumed Roman road and the modern road was a hollow way. In conclusion it should be stressed that the inconclusive results obtained in 1960-61 do not invalidate the existence of the Roman (?) road on the west side of modern Watling Street. Moreover, the 1960-61 trenches do not provide sufficient evidence to indicate that the Roman road lies beneath the modern road. With regard to Mr. Ayto's personal observations at Pipers Green, the scatter of gravel in a garden of a house there, is almost certainly from the 18th century gravel road discovered a little to the north in 1955 on the east side of modern Watling Street.⁵

Lastly, in order to keep the record straight, the excavations by Dr. J. P. C. Kent on the lynchet in Field 413, on the east side of modern Watling Street, were conducted in 1959 and not 1958 as stated. The finds from these excavations are housed in the London Museum.

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1. *London Archaeol.* 1 No. 16 (1972) 379.
2. No mention of this report in W. Bonser, *Romano-British Bibliography* (1964).
3. *Report of the Excavation carried out in Field 157 to the West of the modern A5 over Brockley Hill 1960/1961.* N.M.A.R.C. April 1961.
4. P. G. Suggett, 'Excavations at Brockley Hill, Middlesex 1952-53.' *Trans London and Middlesex Archaeol. Soc.* (1954) Site D.
5. Information from Mr. P. G. Suggett, who conducted excavations here in 1955.