

# Letters

## A C.B.A. GROUP FOR LONDON

I READ Nicholas Farrant's article "A CBA Group for London" (Autumn 1974 issue, pp 202-203) with great interest, and I hope you will allow me to offer some comments, designed to elucidate certain on his points.

In his section entitled "The London Region" he refers to the linking of Essex and Hertfordshire with Cambridgeshire and the reuniting of Sussex with Kent and Surrey. I should make it clear that this refers at present to those counties only so far as the DoE Area Advisory Committees are concerned. The CBA Executive Board is indeed recommending that its regional Groups should conform with the DoE areas, but this decision was only taken on 11th October, 1974, and is at present under consideration by the CBA Groups themselves, along with a number of other recommendations designed to improve their effectiveness and establish their role in relation to other bodies.

I would take issue with his statement that "a CBA Group for Greater London seems completely unnecessary." Given that the DoE now recognises the CBA as the main national body with which it wishes to negotiate and consult on matters relating to archaeology, and also that the DoE has opted for regional devolution, it would appear to the CBA Executive Board that it is desirable for the Council to be strongly based and properly representative at both national and regional level. It may well be that the Joint Working Party already performs the function of a CBA Group. Why therefore should that body not form the nucleus of the new CBA Greater London Group? Mr. Farrant appears to feel that "a measure of representation on the CBA Executive Committee" (now the Executive Board, by the way) is the only advantage that might accrue from a Greater London Group; with respect, and perhaps a greater knowledge of the way the CBA is developing, I would suggest that he should defer making a final judgement in this matter. For example, he correctly states that the CBA does not administer DoE grants; however, CRAAGS in Group 13 and WEMRAC in Group 8, the two most successful *executive* committees in the country, are in fact CBA committees. Links of this kind are, moreover, favoured both by the CBA Executive Board and the Ancient Monuments Inspectorate.

Thus, in conclusion, let me urge Greater London societies to give the CBA the benefit of the doubt, at least until they have had a chance to study our new plans, which are currently being discussed. It may prove in the event that a fruitful relationship can be developed, involving more than the mere "ploy" that Mr. Farrant suggests in his final paragraph.

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## CRISIS IN NORTH-WEST MIDDLESEX

THE past few years have witnessed a remarkable awakening of interest in the archaeology and surviving monuments of the London area as a whole. The establishment of the new Inner London Archaeological Unit reported in the last issue of *The London Archaeologist* is evidence of this. Nevertheless activity in some boroughs still lags far behind that in many far less densely populated parts of the country and, if we are not careful, most of the remains from former ages will be swept away: a large percentage of the population will have

lost its roots. Surely it is more important to retain old houses in suburbia than similar buildings in our rural villages where so many survive. No part of our heritage should be abandoned lightly, but planners still have to learn that a minor building in, say, rural Hertfordshire corresponds with a major building in urban Middlesex.

Pevsner's Middlesex volume published some 20 years ago will probably need more extensive revision than most books in the series. In Eastcote, where I spent my youth, the Tudor Manor House was demolished, almost without record as was a remarkable late 17th century house (Haydon Hall) and a number of interesting examples of vernacular architecture. Even as I write the "uncommonly high 16th century barn" at Field End Farm is being allowed to fall into decay. The result of this is that a village which, properly looked after, could have been one of the show-pieces of Greater London is rapidly becoming a place unworthy of a visit, another typical, boring piece of suburb. Although there have been a few losses, the situation in nearby Pinner where the local residents have jealously preserved the High Street from despoilation, is far better; indeed this village is already something of a "lone survival" in north-west Middlesex.

The inertia and ignorance which have destroyed and are destroying our standing buildings, have their counterpart in the lack of excavation. None of the medieval villages now encapsulated in the suburbs has received even a modicum of the attention lavished on the City of London, although London in a very real sense lived off its hinterland; here grew the wood for its buildings, the hay for its horses. Furthermore in some instances, notably at Ruislip, documentation is particularly full. Excavation here might allow archaeologists and archivists to indulge in the sort of fruitful co-operation that has become commonplace in Oxford and Winchester. Only at Northolt, where the site of the Manor House has been the scene of excavations for a number of years, is any serious attempt being made to understand the medieval archaeology of the north-west of the county. The danger is, of course, that in the future too much may be built on the results obtained from a single site.

Does the apparent absence of remains from earlier times mean that Middlesex was not inhabited? Almost certainly not as stray finds are occasionally reported and, of course, a very small Anglo-Saxon cemetery was revealed by the Northolt dig. North-west Middlesex, indeed possesses "the only major pre-Norman monument" in the county, the Pinner Grims Dyke, a section through which was cut in the late 50's although it almost follows from everything I have said that the excavation has not yet been published nor is it likely to be. However, here is a Belgic—perhaps I should say Iron Age C—monument available to inspection by any traveller prepared to take a journey out of town on the Metropolitan railway. Why was this massive work undertaken through such heavy soils? What did it defend or demarcate?

It is time that the archaeology of the outer suburbs came of age. Properly conserved and adequately excavated (and why not taken into guardianship by the Department of the Environment) a section of the Pinner Grims Dyke could be the first introduction of thousands of North London school children to prehistoric Britain. Again could not the ruins of the remarkable Laudian church of St. John the Evangelist, Stanmore which is now in an alarming state of decay, be treated as a major monument of national importance, as indeed

it is, instead of following that other "grade A" treasure of north-west Middlesex, the camera of the Hospitallers at Harefield (Moor Hall chapel) into oblivion?

In other cases, of course, given a little thought buildings can be restored and put to more mundane purposes, as has already happened to Norman Shaw's masterpiece Grims Dyke Harrow Weald—the earthwork mentioned above runs alongside it—and to a few houses beside the church at Ruislip. The lack of local museums in the boroughs of Harrow and Hillingdon remains a disgrace, and it would be very exciting if the establishment of the same could be combined with the restoration of one or two notable buildings.

Finally, even where conservation is not at issue or recently standing structures not involved, I am convinced that there is plenty of scope for rescue excavations. It is high time that all the London boroughs had their archaeologists who by mutual co-operation and with the help of local amateurs can be entrusted with the task of giving us back our history.

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### TROWEL POWER

FOR TOO LONG archaeology has been subjected to a widely expressed view by a few people that there is no place in modern archaeology for the amateur and that 'local societies are a write-off'. It must be born in mind that in many areas there has existed no alternative to the local amateur archaeologist. The introduction, in the last issue of the *London Archaeologist*, to the new Inner London Unit and a C.B.A. Group for London would seem to herald this alternative, but does it?

The local society can offer a focal point for local people who have an interest in local history and archaeology to meet and to promote their interest whilst maybe only being able to spare a few hours in a week. Because of local ties and the limited area of operation, the local society is party to a mass of unwritten knowledge resulting from hearsay and continual fieldwork carried out by its members.

What is the alternative to be provided? In Mr. Farrant's article on the C.B.A. Group proposal, he states 'Sometime in the future a meeting will be held to see what local societies feel and want'. Let us hope that

this is implemented before any discussions are finalised, unlike those societies included within the area covered by the Inner London Unit where liaison has been too little but not, we trust, too late.

From the liaison which has taken place recently, it is learned that the Unit proposes to try to set up local societies in areas where none exist (Bravo to that!); however neither these societies nor those which exist must regard themselves as autonomous groups but rather as part of a unit which will decide where members may dig, whether in their area or not. Towards this local borough councils, who have acted as patrons to local societies in the past, have been asked to support the Unit with a grant which will be supplemented by Central Government. In order not to increase the burden upon the rates, it could be expected that any grants to local societies will be reduced, a deciding factor in the existence of such groups.

The Unit is to have its own full time professional field force where amateurs will presumably be expected to help in lieu of continuing their present activities. Archaeology will therefore gain on certain select sites to the loss of other sites together with personnel not willing to dig outside their area and at an implicit extra cost.

It is interesting to note that only some of the officers controlling the Unit come from or have had experience in the Inner London area. L.A.M.A.S. has, for a number of years, acted as a monitor and catalyst to archaeology in the area, supported by a number of local societies and their members. Is it now intent on the control or suppression of some of these societies?

In my opinion the future of archaeology, whether rescue work or not, lies in the efficient digging and recording of antiquity. We must all be watchful of a situation which leads to the promotion of bureaucratic jobs for the professional boys at the expense of the dedicated amateur. The amateur societies, with all their failings, have proved that they can set a certain standard towards the former goal. Let us trust that the Unit and/or the C.B.A. Group prove that they can do better.

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## Books

**Industrial Archaeology for Schools**, by Geoffrey Starmer, *Heinemann Educational Books/Schools Council* (1973), 44pp., 60p.

IT IS encouraging that industrial archaeology seems to have advanced to the stage where interested folk are asking not "what is it?" but rather "how can I help?" This handbook (although intended principally for schools) is in one way the most valuable of the half-dozen or so introductions to industrial archaeology yet published, inasmuch as it sets out practically to answer the question "how can I help?" with examples to illustrate the achievements of school groups starting from nothing but enthusiasm.

Compiled by the Head of the Education Unit at Lanchester Polytechnic (Rugby), the handbook is

laid out under four headings: industrial archaeology (definition, procedures, and techniques); relationship to school subjects; organisation and approach; and books and films (a list of references). Each section is valuable both to the beginner and to those with some experience but keen to learn more. Even the section on relationship to school subjects, which might appear to interest only school teachers, highlights the interdisciplinary nature of industrial archaeology; while that on organisation and approach is an admirable guide to the sort of questions that a industrial archaeologist should be asking, both of himself and of those he meets. The final section is marred by some minor errors of proof-reading, but altogether this inexpensive publication is an excellent introduction which hopefully will aid and encourage Londoners to study past industries on the ground.

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