

# Congress of Independent Archaeologists

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THE THEME *Doubling the output* did not in my opinion catch on with the 143 people present at Wolfson College, Cambridge, on 21-22 September 1985. Independent archaeologists are just that: anxious to be able to avail themselves of any opportunity that may arise, but not, I suspect, anxious to be regimented. What exactly is an independent archaeologist? – the main criterion seemed to be one not in receipt of Government funding. Amongst those present were Peter Addyman, Tim Tatton-Brown and Brian Hobley. The participants came from all corners of the Kingdom, and for those wholly non-professional people the expense must have been high, showing the dedication of many in this field of archaeology.

The congress was organised by Plantagenet Somerset Fry and Andrew Selkirk. In his introduction Andrew Selkirk said that the object was not to set up another society but to point people in the right direction. He hoped also that a number of regional conferences might be generated, based on the existing CBA Groups. In addition there was a real need for advice on how and where to contact various specialists.

Brian Palmer and Keith Hughes set the scene by saying that archaeologists are always short of money and the amount coming from Government funds was diminishing. Money from commercial sources often had strings attached, since archaeology could be a very dull activity as far as sponsors are concerned. The *Mary Rose* was a good example of interesting archaeology, and as such had produced a good response.

Early retirement provided a vast pool of experienced people whose interests could be moulded into the archaeological field. Some ten thousand people retire each week, each of whom could potentially offer three thousand hours a year! Derek Riley emphasised the need to get people to join a local society, but also stressed that they should have a personal project. I felt that this was preaching to the converted.

Henry Cleere, Director of the CBA, gave a potted history of archaeology from the antiquaries to the present day. He felt that the CBA must be the most democratic organisation in the world, and from its

position could see the division which had taken place in the 1970s between two perfectly valid movements in archaeology. This came at the time *Rescue* was formed, which with public demand created the Units. He considered that there was no need for polarisation, and cited as an example of good co-operation the HADAS excavation at West Heath, Hampstead.

Robert Kiln was even more outspoken about the way genuinely interested and enthusiastic amateurs had been treated. It was suggested that his Trust could be used as a clearing house for funds and perhaps knowledge.

Daphne Lorimer talked about how the West Heath dig had been run, and how money had been raised by the efforts of all the members of HADAS. She had found good co-operation from professional quarters when it had been needed. Roy Friendship Taylor dealt in a similar vein on how the Upper Nene society operated and managed to publish. Ewin Moore, under the title *Project Britannia*, put forward a scheme to excavate and afterwards, on an adjoining site, reconstruct a Roman villa as an educational facility, at a cost of at least £4½m.

In much humbler vein, Lady Teresa Briscoe presented the work on which she had been engaged: the collection and indexing of casts of stamps from Saxon pots and the designs of the stamps. Peter Farmer talked about late medieval pottery and the joys of tracing the places to which Scarborough ware had been traded.

Ann Stirland, an independent specialist on human bones, regaled us with stories of her work and the state in which some bones reached her. Regrettably Margaret Ponting was not present to speak on *when the nearest professional is 200 miles away*: her experiences on the Isle of Lewis could have broadened the scope of the congress. John Hadman, a schoolteacher, talked about his use of schoolchildren under careful supervision. Following, Tony Gregory of the Norfolk Archaeological Unit said that in the early '70s there had been a great boom in the sale of metal detectors. Many had predicted it would fade, but today searchers are working with sophisticated equipment and selling their finds. It was however possible to enlist the help of many such

## Books

**English Medieval Tiles**, by Elizabeth Eames. *British Museum Publications*, 1985. 72pp., 36 colour and 50 b&w illus., bibliog., index. £4.95.

BUILDING MATERIALS have long been the poor relation in the study of archaeological finds. That medieval floor tiles have emerged from this obscurity is due largely to the fascination they have exercised on the author of this book. Here she shares with us some of the fascination: those searching for details of particular tiles or designs will need to refer to her monumental *Catalogue*.

The first chapter summarises what we know about the industry that produced these tiles, while the second puts them into context by describing some of the magnificent pavements of which they once

users: for example, he had been able to make a detailed plot of a site using a number of instruments, and thus remove the 'finds' so that others coming would make a low or nil rate of finds.

Brian Hopley talked at length on ways he had raised funds for both his excavation of The Lunt and more recently in London. He brought to our attention the *Directory of Grant Making Trusts* and explained that it would be wise to expect to pick up grants in hundreds of pounds rather than thousands. However, wealthy patrons in general produce more money than do begging letters. Every society should be registered as a Charity since £10 donated was worth £14.29 to a Charity. One should never overlook the monetary savings in borrowing plant and apparatus. In a different vein, he said that as all architects are registered, why should not archaeologists follow suit? Much had been said recently about contract digging: this was undesirable as it could easily lead to a lowering of the high standards needed in modern archaeology.

Peter Addyman gave a blow-by-blow account of Jorvik, one which many of us had heard and admired at a LAMAS conference. Ian Skipper, his entrepreneur, was not able to be present.

Robert Kiln introduced us to Charitable Trusts, adding that submissions must be clear and succinct on the front page. The British Archaeological Awards were now administered by Victor Marchant. He also felt that 5% of *English Heritage* money should be diverted to smaller projects.

The problems which may arise in scheduling were dealt with by Keith Knowles of Brampton, Norwich, and Richard Bellhouse of Cumberland coastal defences of the Roman period. Both had found that it could rebound on them. Tim Tatton-Brown said

formed part. The remaining five chapters describe the main types of tile – plain tile mosaic, decorated tile mosaic, relief and counter-relief decoration, linear decoration and two-colour tiles. A selective bibliography and a list of places where medieval floor tiles can be seen *in situ*, re-set, or in museums, round off the book and lead on to a practical study of the tiles themselves.

The text is in Mrs Eames' usual lucid style and the illustrations are excellent – the quality of the colour plates in particular can rarely have been surpassed in a book of this price. The title might mislead the casual reader, as roof tiles are not dealt with: are they the subject of a further book? The whole forms  
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that in the '70s one got all sites scheduled, but with hindsight this was sometimes a waste of time. In his experience Church Commissioners don't care a damn about it! The rescue crisis had produced a new profession and many amateur archaeologists became professional overnight. He posed the question many local societies are asking "how can we bring the under-50s back into archaeology?" Somehow we need to get back to the enthusiasm of the *Animal, Vegetable and Mineral* period!

In the discussion which followed, Daphne Lorimer suggested that we should base our publicity methods on those of the RSPB, which with 39,000 members was now very wealthy and powerful. Further discussion, on the lines suggested by Robert Kiln, produced a resolution calling for *English Heritage* to set aside a small proportion of its money, say £250,000 in the first instance, for use by independent archaeologists. It was carried with a very large majority. To my mind this could bring form-filling and bureaucracy into the part-time field.

The conference had been described beforehand in some circles as "a week-end of professional-bashing". I thought the attitude, whilst being slightly hurt by some past events, was more one of looking forward to better days and more co-operation. Let us face it we need one another.

One of the aims of the congress was to seek ways of getting co-operation between local societies. This hope still exists: maybe the CBA Groups will take it upon themselves to co-ordinate the effort. In the round-up of CBA Groups I think I detected a comment that Units generally were too busy to bother about their brethren in the field, who in general got better support from their local or County Museum. Finally it was agreed to consider another such Congress in two years time.