

A fire at the church of St. Magnus the Martyr, City of London

DURING THE early hours of the morning of 4th November 1995, a passer-by spotted a small fire within the church of St. Magnus, Lower Thames Street. This observant person called the fire brigade and the fire was promptly extinguished. If the fire had not been spotted for another five or ten minutes, it would have become large enough to break or melt the adjoining windows — creating a rush of air to feed the flames, which would have resulted in the whole church being gutted. The cause of the fire has yet to be determined; it started within the south-west portion of the church, close to the organ. One panel on the west wall was destroyed and a second panel badly damaged by heat. The southern stairs up to the 18th century organ (with later additions) was destroyed. The organ appears to be undamaged. The greatest damage was to the recently decorated and restored interior, which was badly blackened by smoke. The church is still open daily and the interior and windows are now being cleaned.

It is pleasing to report that the fire was spotted and extinguished before it gutted this historic Wren church, but this small fire is a reminder of how vulnerable are historic churches to fire damage. For instance, in May 1988 the nearby Wren church of St. Mary-at-Hill was gutted by fire. To safeguard the City of London's remaining historic churches from fire would it not be possible to have a system of smoke detectors/fire alarms in every church, all wired to the nearby fire station in Upper Thames Street, rather than rely on the present system of observant members of the public calling the fire brigade.

Bruce Watson

The Survey of London gets up-to-date

FOR THE first time, the Royal Commission on the Historical Monuments of England's Survey of London has published a detailed account of a contemporary development. Its new volume, *Docklands in the Making: the Redevelopment of the Isle of Dogs 1981-1995* (by Alan Cox, published by the Athlone Press, 112 pp., 86 illus., price £12.95) was published in October. The Survey hope that this topical and accessible book will reach a wider audience than its standard works of reference.

Centre for archaeomagnetic dating in London

THE MUSEUM of London Archaeology Service has recently established a laboratory for the provision of archaeomagnetic dating. The Clark Laboratory, as it is called, has been set up in conjunction with the pioneer in archaeological prospection and dating, A. J. (Tony) Clark. A group of MoLAS staff are being specially trained for the work, and the laboratory will provide facilities for MoLAS itself and a service for other archaeological organisations. For information, contact Dr. Bill McCann at MoLAS, 1 London Wall, London EC2Y 5EA, tel. 0171 972 9111, fax 0171 972 9112, email ajclark@molas.demon.co.uk.

Citisights out of sight

WE HAVE been told that Citisights of London, who for many years ran regular thematic walks in London, are no longer doing so. However, walks are still offered to groups booking in advance: contact Cultural Heritage Resources, 213 Brooke Road, London E5 8AB, tel. 0181 806 4325.

New Roman gallery at the Museum of London

FOLLOWING the success of its refurbished Prehistoric gallery, the Museum of London opened its new Roman London gallery on 30 January. Since the Museum was opened in 1976, many excavations in the City and around have greatly ex-

panded our knowledge of Roman London — both in terms of public and private buildings, and of the many 'small finds' that give such a personal insight into life of the period. We hope to review the new gallery in a later issue.

Royal Commission on the Net

THE ROYAL Commission on the Historical Monuments for England (RCHME) launched a news and information service on the World Wide Web in October 1995. The service, which can be found at the site <http://www.rchme.gov.uk>, carries details of current survey projects and examples of recently-acquired drawings and photographs. There is also a catalogue of Commission publications, information on using the National Monuments Records, and links to other heritage-related sites. There are also plans to carry information about other organisations, such as the National Maritime Museum and the Civic Trust.

British Archaeological Awards

THIS YEAR, there will be 14 awards in a wide variety of categories: from best presentation of an archaeological project to the public (the Virgin Group Award) to the best student dissertation (the RAI Dissertation Prize). The deadline for entries is 30 June 1996; details can be obtained from Juliet Mather, British Archaeological Awards, c/o Council from British Archaeology, Bowes Morrell House, 111 Walmgate, York YO1 2UA.

Discussion on portable antiquities

THE DEPARTMENT of National Heritage has recently issued a discussion document on portable antiquities. Its purpose is to "seek views on possible measures to improve the recording of all archaeological objects, not just those covered by the law of Treasure Trove or its proposed replacement in the belief that current arrangements are not working well, except in one or two areas."

It starts with a summary of the new Treasure Bill, the main points of which are to introduce a more rational definition of treasure and to end the criterion of intentional concealment. It makes the important distinction between the public acquisition of finds (the Treasure Bill) and the recording of finds.

The spur to the proposals seems to be a survey¹ which suggests that perhaps 400,000 archaeological objects are found by metal-detector users each year. The reaction is that "this represents a considerable loss to the nation's heritage. Archaeological objects presently buried in the soil of this country are a non-renewable resource. Once an object has left the ground and lost its provenance, a large part of its archaeological value is lost. The result is loss of information about the past which is irreplaceable."

The Government is now seeking views on two options: (a) a voluntary Code of Practice on the recording of archaeological objects and (b) for legislation requiring the reporting of such objects, with a provisional preference for the former.

Anyone wishing to comment should contact the Heritage Division, Department of National Heritage, 2-4 Cockspur Street, London SW1Y 5DH; the deadline for comments is 28 June 1996.

Whichever option one favours, this document represents a considerable advance in Government thinking. Only a few years ago, this problem was simply not recognised as such. The Department of National Heritage is to be congratulated on progressing beyond the blinkered thinking of its predecessors.

1. Colin Dobinson and Simon Denison *Metal Detecting and Archaeology in England* (1995) English Heritage and Council for British Archaeology.