

# THE LONDON AND MIDDLESEX ARCHAEOLOGICAL SOCIETY

## 1855 — 1955

By Cdr. G. Bridgmore Brown, M.B.E., R.D., R.N.R., F.R.P.S.L.,  
Chairman of Council

Before 1840 the only archæological society outside London and Edinburgh was the Society of Antiquaries of Newcastle-upon-Tyne founded in 1813. The next twenty years, however, witnessed a remarkable growth of public interest in archæological matters, manifested not only in the formation of the British Archæological Association in 1843 and a rival Archæological Institute (now the Royal Archæological Institute) in the following year, but also in the formation of numerous societies, mostly on a county basis, to bring together persons interested in architecture and antiquities and to foster the study of these subjects in greater local detail than could readily be undertaken by the bodies with wider aims. Thus, between 1840 and 1850 societies were formed for Berkshire, Cambridge, Northamptonshire, Hertfordshire, Wales, Dorset, Norfolk, Buckinghamshire, Sussex, Suffolk and Somerset, while Essex followed in 1852, Wiltshire and Oxfordshire in 1853, Surrey and Worcestershire in 1854, and Leicestershire early in 1855.

Many of the reasons which led to the inauguration of these county societies and contributed to their success applied equally to the area immediately surrounding the metropolis, and it is somewhat surprising that a county society for Middlesex—a county rich in historical records and traces of antiquity—did not exist before. Early in 1855, however, a small group of persons, including several Fellows of the Society of Antiquaries of London, discussed the foundation of a Middlesex Archæological Society. A provisional committee was elected and met at 6 Southampton Street, Covent Garden on 30th July, 1855 under the Chairmanship of the Rev. Thomas Hugo, F.S.A., “to consider the propriety of instituting a Society for the purpose of investigating the Antiquities of the County of Middlesex”.

This meeting unanimously resolved “that the formation of such a Society would be highly proper and conducive to the extension of archæological science, and that the parties present would do their utmost to further its success and wellbeing”. The original Provisional Committee was augmented until it consisted of :

Rev. Thomas Hugo, M.A., F.S.A., *Chairman*  
Rev. Charles Boutell, M.A.  
Joshua W. Butterworth, F.S.A.

Rev. Henry Christmas, M.A., F.R.S., F.S.A.

James Crosby, F.S.A.

Rev. O. F. Owen, M.A., F.S.A.

Edward Richardson

George Roots, F.S.A.

Martin J. Routh, M.A.

G. Gilbert Scott, F.R.I.B.A.

C. Roach Smith, F.S.A.

William Taylor, F.S.S.

George Bish Webb, A.R.I.B.A., *Hon. Secretary.*

Advertisements were inserted in *The Times*, *Notes and Queries*, *The Athenæum*, *Literary Gazette* and the *County Chronicle* inviting persons desirous of joining the Society to communicate with the Honorary Secretary, and by December of 1885 the names of 138 applicants had been received.

Meanwhile, the Provisional Committee had approached Lord Londesborough, at that time President of the British Archæological Association, inviting him to accept the Presidency of the Society. In a most warm and sympathetic reply, his Lordship made the important suggestion that the Middlesex Society might also be associated with the City of London, and thus it would appear that we owe to our first President the extension of the original proposal for a Middlesex Society so as to cover the counties of both London and Middlesex.

An inaugural Meeting was then arranged at Crosby Hall in Bishopsgate Street Within on 14th December, 1855. Illness and severe weather prevented Lord Londesborough from attending, and so the Rev. Thomas Hugo presided. The meeting carried unanimously a resolution "That a Society, to be called the London and Middlesex Archæological Society, be now established, and that such society is hereby established". Rules were adopted after what the minutes describe as "a highly interesting conversation . . . upon some matters of detail", and Officers were appointed, the list being headed by the Marquis of Salisbury, K.G., as Patron, Lord Londesborough, K.C.H., F.R.S., F.S.A., as President, and a long list of distinguished persons as Vice Presidents. George Bish Webb was appointed as the first Honorary Secretary.

Thus our Society came into existence one hundred years ago, and this short account of its origin may well conclude with some extracts from the Chairman's closing remarks concerning its objects and its relations with other archæological societies. "Before we part", he said, "I desire to express my entire concurrence with all that has been said in

reference to other archæological societies. We feel no jealousy towards any. We neither desire nor intend to trench upon the province of any . . . The Society of Antiquaries . . . embraces the whole world within its circle of examination and learned study. . . In a kindred, though not co-extensive spirit, the Archæological Institute extends its investigations over the whole of the British Islands . . . Such, however, is neither the scope nor the object of this Society. And therefore, in entering upon our comparatively restricted field of operation, we are and can be actuated only by friendly feelings towards those institutions, and at the same time earnestly hope that they will entertain similar sentiments towards ourselves. We are, indeed, all of us fellow workers: they in their extended sphere of action, we in our grand old City of London and in our noble metropolitan county. With what London and Middlesex have in store for us in the matter of archæology we are, and we may well be, content; we shall find ample occupation for our most earnest devotion and for our most active energies. We have now only to address ourselves to our work—our own work—thoroughly and in earnest”.

Such were the care and foresight of the founders that the Society’s objects as set out in the original rules have remained virtually unchanged to this day. They were sixfold: to collect and publish archæological information; to procure the careful observation and preservation of objects discovered in the course of excavations, etc.; to oppose and as far as possible prevent injury to historical monuments and ancient remains; to found a museum and a library; and to hold periodical meetings of the Members.

Except for the reference to the founding of a museum, these are still the primary objects of the Society as expressed in No. 2 of its current Rules, although they have been somewhat elaborated in the light of experience. A Centenary appears to be an appropriate moment to pause and consider how far these objects have been achieved and how far the Society’s present activities are adapted to the task of continuing and consolidating the achievements of the past hundred years.

From the outset, the Society has devoted by far the largest part of its income to publishing the results of original research and excavation, and has encouraged contributions of high standard, whether from Members or other competent writers, to its *Transactions*. Part 1 of the First Volume of *Transactions* was issued in July, 1856, but the high cost of printing, and especially of illustrating, the valuable contributions that the Council wished to publish soon began to cause difficulty and delay, and Part 3 was not issued to complete the Volume until 1860. The Council Minutes show that there was no lack of material considered

worthy of publication, and that great importance was attached to the issue of *Transactions* as regularly as possible, having regard to the limited funds available. The Annual Subscription was originally fixed at Ten Shillings, and remained at that figure until 1879. Despite these difficulties, however, the publication of *Transactions* continued, helped substantially by subscriptions from authors and others towards the cost of illustrations—which at that time were mainly woodblocks. As the financial position improved, but also in some cases with the assistance of the authors, the Society published, in addition to the *Transactions*, a number of valuable monographs, transcripts of ancient registers and other records, and reproductions of old maps of London. A particularly important and useful example of these extra publications was the Facsimile issued in 1895 of Ogilby and Morgan's Map of London, 1677, with the curious and valuable "Explanation" that accompanied it—both most interesting and useful documents to students of London topography.

About the turn of the last century, a period of over-lavish expenditure on publications and rising general expenditure necessitated drawing in the reins for a time while the financial position was restored. Indeed, in the early years of this century the Society's fortunes reached a dangerously low ebb, owing to heavy commitments and a serious decline in the membership, and hence in income. The situation was retrieved, however, by careful management under the wise and enthusiastic guidance of the then Chairman of Council and Vice President, the late Colonel M. B. Pearson, T.D. Since 1910 the *Transactions* have been issued with reasonable regularity except for the war years, despite steadily mounting costs, although few additional publications have been possible of late. A total issue of 65 Parts making 18 Volumes of *Transactions*, together with some fifteen other publications, constitutes a not unworthy record for the Society's first hundred years. Moreover, throughout this period, the high quality of the papers and other material published has been continuously maintained by a succession of most able and erudite Honorary Editors, and has won wide appreciation.

A word of explanation may be desirable about the numbering of the volumes of *Transactions*. Between 1855 and 1890 six volumes were issued, numbered from I to VI. Then, for reasons which do not appear to be on record, a "New Series" was started with N.S. Volume I, and the earlier six volumes have since been known as "Old Series". Thus the Centenary Volume is N.S. Volume XII. The Council has recently approved, however, a proposal that the Centenary Volume should also be marked "Whole Series, Volume XVIII", as a preliminary to dropping

the distinction between the Old Series and the New Series, which is confusing without appearing to serve any useful purpose.

The Society has always taken a lively interest in excavations for building and other purposes on sites that are likely to yield interesting vestiges of the past, and the City of London in particular long provided a succession of such excavations and sites in the course of rebuilding operations, even before the ravages of war made it necessary to replan and rebuild large areas. At one time it was the practice to appoint a small committee whenever an excavation was reported which it seemed desirable to watch; in later years the Council has often been fortunate in being able to command the services of a competent Member willing to undertake a watching brief and to report on anything found. The *Transactions* contain numerous papers contributed as a result of such watchfulness.

In 1937 the Society initiated a project to explore the site of *Sulloniacæ*, a Roman settlement on Brockley Hill, North Middlesex, and an Excavation Committee was formed with the collaboration of the Stanmore, Edgware and Harrow Historical Society, but after a promising start the work had to be suspended in 1939 owing to the outbreak of war. In 1947, however, the *Sulloniacæ* Excavation Committee was reformed with additional support from the Mill Hill and Hendon Historical Society and the Barnet and District Record Society, and excavations were resumed, the name of the Committee being changed to the North Middlesex Archæological Research Committee in 1950, when the work was extended to include an investigation of the course of Grimm's Dyke. The results of all these operations have been published in the Society's *Transactions*, and the finds have been deposited in Hendon Museum.

When, after war had devastated large areas in the City of London, the Society of Antiquaries of London put forward in 1946 a proposal that these areas should be systematically examined before they were again built upon, the Society warmly welcomed the idea, and appointed a Member of the Council to represent the Society on the Roman and Mediæval London Excavation Council that was formed under the chairmanship of the Lord Mayor. The excavations carried out under the auspices of this Council, with financial support from Livery Companies and other powerful interests in the City as well as from H.M. Government, have been directed by Mr. W. F. Grimes, F.S.A. (our President) and have made outstanding contributions to our knowledge of London in Roman and mediæval times.

Throughout its history the Society has made or supported every effort to prevent or oppose the destruction of buildings and other monuments of real historic or archaeological value within its two counties, and has supported with its influence, and within its means financially, any schemes which the Council considered well conceived for repairing and preserving such monuments. In 1872 the Society presented a Petition to the House of Commons in support of a Bill for the Preservation of Ancient Monuments; that Bill was lost, but, while deploring the losses of and injuries to the nation's heritage of historic buildings since then, all archaeologists can now rejoice that ancient monuments today enjoy a considerable measure of protection under the Acts of 1913 and 1931. On two occasions the Chancellor of the Diocese of London has accepted from the Society memoranda setting out its views on proposals relating to the ancient churches in the City of London: the first occasion was when proposals were put forward to unite certain benefices and to remove certain churches as redundant, and the second was more recent when the Bishop of London's City Churches Commission published its proposals for dealing with the City Churches damaged by enemy bombing in the Second World War. Appeals for funds to repair and preserve ancient buildings are frequently made, and when such an appeal concerns an ancient church or other historic building in London or Middlesex the Society has usually given it support by making a modest donation and by bringing the appeal to the notice of its Members. In this way, the Society has played a part both in important and ambitious schemes like the opening up and restoration of the cloister of St. Bartholomew the Great, West Smithfield, as well as in the carrying out of essential repairs to the churches of small Middlesex communities with extremely limited local resources.

The development of the Guildhall Museum, London Museum and other museums in London and Greater London has rendered unnecessary the project of founding a Society's museum, but that of founding a Society's library has proceeded. From an early date efforts were made to arrange an exchange of publications with other county archaeological societies, and the number of societies in union with our own Society for this purpose has steadily increased with the years until it is now 48 and includes kindred societies in several other European countries. The Society's library has thus become possessed of some fine runs of journals, transactions and proceedings which are of considerable value for reference, because many of them are not easily to be found in other libraries. Books on the antiquities of London and Middlesex have been added

both by gift and by purchase from a small Library Fund. In purchasing books the principal aim has long been to acquire as much material as possible relating to these two counties, but outstanding books on general archæology are also obtained when possible. Today the Society's library, which is kept at the Bishopsgate Institute, contains over 2,500 volumes, and it is constantly growing. It is open to the general public for reference only, but Members of the Society may borrow books from it at any time on application to the official in charge of the Reference Library of the Institute. The bookcases containing the Society's books are also opened for inspection by the Members whenever a meeting of the Society is held at the Bishopsgate Institute.

The Society also possesses a considerable library of lantern slides. The nucleus of the collection was provided by gifts from Members from time to time of slides depicting places of historical or archæological interest in and near London, and notably a handsome gift from Mr. Edgar P. Angus, when he gave up lecturing. Some slides have also been added by the present Honorary Photographer, made from photographs which he has taken at the Society's meetings. Then, in 1948 an opportunity occurred to purchase on favourable terms the extensive collection of lantern slides formed by Mr. Allen S. Walker, formerly a University Extension lecturer, including many hundreds relating to London and Middlesex. Thus, the Society now possesses about 2,000 slides of London and Middlesex subjects, and some 500 others relating to places of outstanding interest outside London and Middlesex. Many of these are of the greatest value as photographic records of buildings that have since been altered, or have even disappeared. The Walker purchase also included a large number of the small booklets that used commonly to be sold in village churches and other places containing a short history and description of the building; these, too, are of value because the high cost of producing such booklets today has resulted in many of them being discontinued and allowed to go out of print.

Lantern slides in the Society's collection are available for loan to Members for the purpose of illustrating lectures, and a list of the subjects available can be seen on application to the Honorary Librarian at the Bishopsgate Institute.

For the first five years of the Society, only four or five General Meetings of the Members were arranged each year, apart from the Annual General Meeting, and the Society was peripatetic in that the meetings were held in various halls and places wherever hospitality could be obtained. Indeed, for some years the Society shared its headquarters with the Surrey Archæological Society at 6 Southampton Street, but

subsequently moved its office to various addresses in the City or the West End, which seem to have been the office of the Honorary Secretary for the time being. About 1900 the Society moved to the London Institution until, on 1st January, 1910 its office and its library were removed to the Bishopsgate Institute, where they have since remained.

In 1860 monthly evening meetings were started "to take notice of any discoveries that may occur in London and the neighbourhood and report upon the same at the next meeting; to exhibit antiquities; to read papers; and to discuss such matters as may be brought under the notice of the meeting." They were held on the third Tuesday in each month at 8 p.m. until 9.30 p.m., when tea and coffee were served. Members attending them paid an additional 5/- per annum, and they were organised and arranged by a separate "Director of Evening Meetings". They appear to have been very successful and continued until 1874. Their discontinuance may well have been due to the beginning of those changes in the domiciliary habits of London's population that have since become so marked.

After the discontinuance of the monthly evening meetings, ordinary General Meetings were arranged more frequently, ten or twelve a year for a good many years, to hear papers read or to visit places of archaeological interest, but it was not until quite recent times that the growth in the membership and the enthusiasm of the Honorary Director of Meetings made possible a programme comprising nine or ten visits as well as eight or nine lecture meetings in a year.

The Stow Commemoration Service, which is now a regular feature of the Society's programme, originated in 1924. In that year the Council approached the Rector of St. Andrew Undershaft with a suggestion that a service might be held in that church to commemorate the memory of John Stow, the historian of London, who lived in the parish and whose memorial is affixed to the North wall of the church. The proposal commended itself to the Rector. A Commemoration Service was arranged, the Rt. Hon. the Lord Mayor and the Sheriffs of the City of London consented to attend in state, and the Society arranged for a short Address to be delivered on the life and work of John Stow, while in the course of the Service a pleasing little ceremony was enacted in which the Lord Mayor renewed the quill pen in the hand of Stow's effigy. The Service has been held annually, with the approval and co-operation of successive Rectors and Lord Mayors, ever since. The presentation of the Prize (a bound copy of Stow's *Survey of London*) in the London Schools Prize Essay Competition was later added to the proceedings.



The Pepys Memorial Service dates from 1927, when at the suggestion of the late W. H. Whitear, a distinguished member both of our Society and of the Samuel Pepys Club, the Society agreed to collaborate with that club and the Rector and Churchwardens of St. Olave's, Hart Street (where Samuel Pepys is buried) in a special service to honour the memory of the great diarist. This also has become an annual event, in which the Society continues to participate.

The whole-day visit to some place of archæological interest *outside* London and Middlesex, which is regarded by many as the highlight of the summer programme, also originated in 1927 with a day at Stratford-on-Avon arranged by the late Charles W. F. Goss, F.S.A., at that time Joint Honorary Secretary. It was so successful that similar visits were arranged each summer until the series was interrupted by the outbreak of war in 1939. In those halcyon days of cheap railway travel it was possible, with the co-operation of certain kindred societies, to secure large attendances, and to use the railways in order to explore places some considerable distance from London. Thus, most enjoyable and successful visits were paid to places as far away as Bath, Gloucester, Wells and Glastonbury, as well as to several nearer objectives, but perhaps the most memorable, and certainly the most ambitious, of these pre-war visits was that of 1930, the Society's Seventy-Fifth year, to Stonehenge, Old Sarum and Salisbury.

After the war, the delay in restoring excursion facilities on the railways made it impossible to resume summer visits to distant objectives, while some of the societies that used to co-operate had ceased to exist. Nevertheless, a half-day visit to St. Albans and Verulamium was arranged in 1945, and since 1948 the whole-day excursion has been restored to its place in the summer programme by making use of road transport instead of rail.

Among other memorable meetings which some of the present generation of Members may recall with special pleasure was the series of visits organised between 1928 and 1935 to the Halls of the City Livery Companies. Members were privileged to visit twenty-six Halls in turn and to see the ancient records, plate and other treasures of each Company, while in nearly every case they were hospitably entertained by the Court. Alas, several of the Halls then visited suffered severely during the war of 1939-1945 and some exist no longer. If for no other reason, this series of visits will long be remembered by those who took part in them.

This short survey of the Society's activities over the past hundred years in relation to the objectives formulated by its founders leads, it

is thought, to three conclusions. Firstly, despite the many changes that time has brought about in habits, thoughts and manner of life during the past century, the Society has remained true to its original objects. Secondly, though the aspirations and hopes of the founders may not all have been realised or may not have been realised as fully as they envisaged, the Society has nevertheless achieved a great deal in its own particular field. Thirdly, while the Society's fortunes have fluctuated from time to time, it is today stronger in membership, more virile and enjoys a higher prestige than at any previous period in its history.

The Society's fortunes have certainly fluctuated, and it is not very surprising to find that these fluctuations correspond, broadly speaking, to the rather remarkable fluctuations in its membership. Accurate statistics do not appear to have been kept during the early years, but some idea of the membership at particular times can be deduced from the published Lists of Members and the amount of the annual subscriptions brought to account. By 1860 there were 455 names on the Register (although probably not all were paid-up Members), and a membership around 400 seems to have been maintained for the next fifteen or twenty years. Then the membership started to decline, and in 1891 it was recorded as 277. The raising of the Annual Subscription from ten shillings to one guinea in 1879 may have had some depressing effect, but it is suggested that another important cause was the formation of other societies to promote specialised branches of archaeological science or to foster interest in other aspects of London life, with the result that some of the persons who at an earlier date would have joined our Society were attracted to these other societies. The Monumental Brass Society, for instance, was formed in 1887. At any rate, our Society's membership continued to decline, and at its Jubilee in 1905 had fallen to 163. The delay in the issue of *Transactions* and the financial difficulties about this time have already been mentioned.

From 1905 onwards reliable membership statistics are available. The Reports of the Council for 1910 and 1911 recorded the membership as 132, and it may be taken that this figure represents the actual number of paid-up members plus Honorary Members. From that time, however, apart from some minor fluctuations and some inevitable losses in the war years, the trend of the Society's membership has been steadily upward. From the low ebb of 1910 and 1911 it rose slowly until it reached 232 immediately before the outbreak of the war in 1939. When the Society resumed its full activities in 1945, it had just under 200 active Members, and since then it has achieved almost spectacular progress, reaching 350 in 1950, and at the time of writing this survey a

total of nearly 500. This increase of membership is a source of satisfaction as well as greatly increased strength, and it has enabled the Society to continue its activities, including the issue of its *Transactions*, despite steeply rising costs, without any increase in the Annual Subscription. Nevertheless, rising costs, and particularly the enormous increase in recent years in the cost of printing and binding, are a matter of serious concern to all societies such as ours, and not least to the Council of our Society. It is hardly too much to say that, if the Society is to maintain its present high standard among archæological societies and to maintain the volume and quality of its publications, a rising income will be essential, and, since its main source of income is Annual Subscriptions, the maintenance of the Annual Subscription at its present modest figure, unaltered since 1879, is likely to be dependent on maintaining a steady rise in the membership.

From the outset, corporate bodies and institutions such as libraries have been eligible for membership as well as individuals, while certain schools in London and Middlesex which have a historical or archæological society were made eligible under a special scheme in 1937. At the present time nearly 100 City Livery Companies, university and public libraries, and schools are subscribing members, including some libraries in the United States of America. Surely, it is not unreasonable to suggest that *every* public library in London and Middlesex should have the County Archæological Society's *Transactions* on its shelves, and individual members could well use their influence as local ratepayers to bring this about where the local library does not already subscribe.

Closely related to the subject of membership is that of Affiliated Local Societies. During the last half century a number of local historical, antiquarian or archæological societies have been formed, especially in Greater London, as well as societies to foster civic pride in local matters of a wider nature but including local antiquities. Some of these have a large membership and have become locally influential, but even the small ones with limited interests and membership have filled a local need and achieved a considerable measure of success. Our Society followed these developments with interest and approval, and built up close relations with several local societies. Co-operation with local societies in the excavations at Brockley Hill, North Middlesex, is one example of these good relations. In 1954, therefore, the Society sought to place its relations with the local societies within its area on a still closer footing, and initiated a scheme under which any local society in London or Middlesex that includes among its objects the study of local history and antiquities can become an "Affiliated Local

Society” and receive the *Transactions* and other benefits in return for a small annual affiliation fee based upon the number of its members.

This scheme has proved remarkably successful, and sixteen local societies now describe themselves as “Affiliated to the London and Middlesex Archæological Society”. Under the auspices of the Society, several informal conferences of society secretaries and treasurers have been arranged to exchange information about programme plans and to discuss matters of common interest on a mutual help basis. It is considered that these meetings have served a very useful purpose, and they will be continued.

Finally, what of the future? We can certainly say that the Society enters its second century in good fettle, its machinery in the persons of its officers as efficient as, if not more efficient than at any previous time and its strength in terms of its membership higher than ever before. We are greatly heartened by the interest shown in the Society by persons eminent in the life of the Metropolis and the County of Middlesex—notably by the Lord Mayor in graciously permitting us to hold our Centenary Dinner at the Mansion House and consenting to preside, and by the Lord Lieutenant of the County of Middlesex in undertaking to preside at a special Centenary meeting to be held at Middlesex Guildhall. These and other proofs of approval from high quarters should stimulate us to new and even greater efforts in the future. That there is still much to be done in elucidating the history and antiquities of “our grand old City of London” and “our noble metropolitan county” needs no proof, and we must continue “to address ourselves to our work.”

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#### APPENDIX

#### LIST OF PRESIDENTS

1855—1860	Rt. Hon. the Lord Londesborough, K.C.H., F.R.S., F.S.A.
1860—1883	Rt. Hon. the Lord Talbot de Malahide, F.R.S., F.S.A.
1883—1885	General A. L. F. Pitt-Rivers, F.R.S., V.P.S.A.
1885—1910	Edwin Freshfield, LL.D., F.S.A.
1910—1930	Sir Edward W. Brabrook, C.B., Dir.S.A.
1930—1942	Sir Montagu Sharpe, K.C., D.L.
1943—1946	Rt. Hon. the Earl of Strafford, J.P.
1947—1949	Col. the Rt. Hon. Lord Nathan of Churt, F.S.A.
1950—	William F. Grimes, C.B.E., M.A., F.S.A.