W. F. GRIMES (1905–1988)

The death of Professor William Francis Grimes, President of the London and Middlesex Archaeological Society from 1950–1959, on 25 December 1988, brought to an end an important era in the history of London's archaeology.

An archaeologist of the old school with an eye for meticulous detail and a flamboyant style of dress of check trousers, waistcoat and a flower in his buttonhole, his prolific career and personal dedication to archaeology have earned him a lasting reputation for being one of London's leading archaeologists.

His first contact with the London area was during the war years when, seconded to the Ministry of Works from Ordnance Survey, he had the task of undertaking rescue archaeology on sites being developed for wartime defences. During this time he excavated the important site at Heathrow in advance of airport construction, where the structural evidence indicated a religious centre of a scattered farming community of *c.* 300–100 BC.

In 1945 he was appointed Director of the London Museum. At that time the Museum was homeless, packed away in wartime storage. During the next six years he acquired a temporary home for the Museum at Kensington Palace and devised new galleries which opened in 1951 to coincide with the Festival of Britain. The galleries were to survive in that form until the creation of the new Museum of London.

Those who worked with Professor Grimes at this time remember not only his high professional skills but his amazing range of talents, and his patience and good humour. Despite the incessant calls on his time, he was always willing—when he was available—to help with all kinds of problems, major and minor: diplomatically settling disputes, devising record systems, sorting out book-keeping difficulties, improving typing layouts. His high speed arrivals and departures were electrifying. One of the abiding memories of the London Museum at Kensington Palace is the sight of Professor Grimes striding rapidly past the windows on his way back to the City, followed by a small, breathless train of people taking down his instructions, while he more or less simultaneously exchanged information and instructions with other members of staff leaning out of the windows.

In 1956 he became Director of the Institute of Archaeology and Professor of Archaeology at the University of London where he was to remain until his retirement in 1973. His vast wealth of experience and his thoroughly professional attitude to archaeological fieldwork enabled him to lead the Institute through a period of growth culminating in the inauguration of honours degrees in archaeology.

His post-war career, based in London, was to bring him into public prominence in a way he would have liked to avoid—preferring to concentrate on the task in hand. While carrying out his duties at both the London Museum and the Institute of Archaeology, he had one of the greatest opportunities for excavation ever afforded to an archaeologist. In 1946 he was appointed Director of Excavations of the Roman and Mediaeval London Excavation Council (RMLEC), an excavation body set up by the Society of Antiquaries

W. F. Grimes

to investigate the bomb sites of the City of London.

Due to the lack of time, money and adequate staffing, full-scale excavations were impossible. Instead, Grimes dug positioned trenches to answer specific questions. To most of us, Grimes's excavations were epitomised by the discovery of the Temple of Mithras in 1954. Grimes himself regarded it as a fluke and indeed almost a nuisance as it intruded on his original intention of finding the position and width of the Walbrook stream at that point. Having hit upon structural remains, he concentrated on his Walbrook stream section and only returned to the building when he had completed his plan. The public imagination ran riot at the discovery of the Temple with 30,000 people queuing to watch the excavations over nine days. The newspaper coverage and discussion on whether to save the remains was not to be matched until the excavations of 1989 heightened public archaeological awareness of the fate of the Rose Theatre in Southwark. There was, however, a down side to the heightened interest. It made negotiations for future excavations more difficult. Developers were wary of archaeological discoveries delaying redevelopment and contemporary cartoons warned of workmen finding anything that might delay building. It is a fear that survives to the present day.

Grimes was later to admit that although the find of the Temple was exciting, his favourite discovery was the Roman fort in the Cripplegate area of the City. In one of the most war–devastated parts of the City and over some four years in the late 1940s, Grimes excavated the scant remains of the twelve-acre Roman fort. A series of trenches showed the construction of the City wall differed from elsewhere. It was found to be of double thickness but it was not until Grimes excavated the wall at Noble Street and found that the outer wall curved unexpectedly at right angles while the inner wall came to an end that he was able to show that the inner wall was merely a thickening added to the north and west walls of the fort when the City wall was built in about AD 200. His wall excavations provided much additional information on the existing upstanding sections of wall and his excavations of the defensive towers (Bastions 13 and 14) beside the Museum of London supported the theory that towers were added to the outside of the western section of wall during the medieval period. All the construction phases, both Roman and medieval, can be seen in the north-west area of the City where Grimes later acted as adviser to the Corporation of London on their preservation.

Both Grimes and the Society of Antiquaries considered the investigation of medieval sites to be just as important as Roman. Grimes provided the first secular evidence for late Saxon London when he excavated sunken Saxon houses on the Financial Times site in Cannon Street, Bucklersbury and Addle Street. In the main, however, he will be remembered in a post-Roman context for his work on the City churches and religious houses such as Charterhouse. The Council excavated several different church sites, all with early origins, and later additional buildings, many rebuilt by Wren after the Great Fire. At St Bride's, Fleet Street, in particular, he was able to do for archaeology what historical records could not—trace the history of the church from the 11th century onwards.

His archaeological work in London continued until the end of 1962. Post-war labour and funding were scarce and his digging team consisted of paid labourers supervised by experienced volunteers who could act in his absence. In 1962 the decision was made to cease excavating and to concentrate upon the publication

of the information accumulated over the previous 15 years. A general survey of the activities of the Council was published in 1968 by Grimes in his book *The Excavation of Roman and Mediaeval London*. Fifteen year's excavation of over 50 sites cost merely £40,000. One wonders what might have been accomplished with the opportunities and resources afforded to archaeologists today.

Whilst Director of the London Museum and of the Roman and Mediaeval London Excavation Council, Grimes also became involved with the London and Middlesex Archaeological Society. He became a member in 1948 and was elected to the Council the next year. In 1949 he was also appointed as the Society's representative on the Sulloniacae Excavation Committee, the group set up in 1937 by LAMAS and three local societies to investigate the Roman potteries site of *Sulloniacae* (Brockley Hill, Middlesex) and which later expanded into the North Middlesex Archaeological Research Committee. He took an active interest in the Committee's excavations and surveys, particularly those at *Sulloniacae* and the Grim's Dyke earthwork, published in *Transactions* in the 1950s, and he remained a member of the Committee until its dissolution in about 1970.

With his close involvement with London's archaeology at this time, he was an ideal choice to become President of the Society in 1950. The annual report for 1950 records his election and commends him for giving up his valuable time to the Society's affairs. To have such an eminent President must have boosted the Society's standing, and for such a busy man he became as active a participant as was possible.

His Presidential Annual Address for that year concentrated on the prehistory of the London area, a subject dear to his heart and, to accompany his talk, an exhibition of items selected from the London Museum's collections was displayed for two days in the Bishopsgate Institute. In 1954, he was able to keep the Society's members abreast of the news by lecturing on the recent discoveries at St Bride's Church, Fleet Street. However, the most important celebration for the Society at this time was its centenary in 1955. There were various events which included an exhibition of London and Middlesex antiquities in the Guildhall Museum, then established in the Royal Exchange. Amongst the exhibits were finds from Grimes's excavations: the celebrated sculptures from the Mithraeum and the pre–Roman temple at Heathrow.

The actual centenary fell on 14 December 1955 and Grimes, in a speech, covered a topic still pertinent to this Society—the financial difficulties faced by such a society. He stressed that the Society's function would become ever more important with the publication of original work anticipating the Society's present importance as a vehicle for publishing reports of archaeological excavations in the London area. He emphasized that the regular investigation and publication of unexciting background information was of the first importance in the advancement of knowledge. With his recent Mithraic experiences in mind he stressed the importance of recognizing the value of the surviving evidence of the past and that organized public opinion should speak up for it. Thirty years on, the situation remains the same.

He returned to the theme of finances in 1957, when the Society, unable to pay fully for *Transactions*, had issued an appeal for funds. He urged first the Council, then the AGM, to raise subscriptions 'to a sum sufficient to enable the Society to maintain a high standard in its *Transactions*, as this was the primary reason for its continued existence'—a view many

members would consider still holds good. A few months later, subscriptions were duly raised.

During his Presidency, Grimes was also actively concerned with the protracted and ultimately unsuccessful struggle to preserve the medieval Moor Hall chapel at Harefield, the preservation of monuments in bomb-damaged churches, and the preservation of 16th-century wall paintings at Knightlands Farm, South Mimms. In 1959 he stepped down from the Presidency, having held the office for three three-year terms, a feat impossible today when the term of office is limited to three years.

He was later to sit on various Society committees, the most important being the Archaeological Research Committee, set up in March 1963. This sub-committee's intention was to formulate and execute a programme of excavations in London, Middlesex and the City. This they did by jointly funding, with Surrey Archaeological Society, excavations in Southwark and providing equipment and support for other archaeological excavation groups operating in the London area. Another enduring legacy of the Committee's early years was the initiation of the Society's annual conference for London archaeologists. Grimes became its first Chairman and continued in the post until 1969.

With all his other commitments, it seems almost miraculous that Professor Grimes was able to give as much attention as he did to LAMAS. It should not be forgotten that, in addition to his other duties, he played a highly important part in the CBA during his years in London, being successively its Secretary, President, Vice-President and Treasurer, and Chairman of its Implement Petrology Committee and of its Industrial Archaeology Research Committee. Nevertheless, when he was re-elected for his third term as LAMAS President in 1956, he was praised for the amount of time and practical help he had given to the Society and for his attendance at Council meetings—evidently something of an innovation at that time.

It is perhaps a fitting epitaph to such an inspirational man that archaeology has reached the heights it has. He was the guiding light in London's archaeology at a time when post-war destruction in the City provided the opportunity of large-scale rebuilding. Grimes's determination to piece together the jig-saw without deviating from his intentions is to be praised when conditions were particularly against him. He was left with an enormous backlog of sites to be published. In 1987/8 the Museum of London and Grimes agreed that the Museum should take into its care all documents and finds relating to the Roman and Mediaeval London Excavation Council's excavations in the City with a view to their publication and arrangement into an organized and accessible archive.

His Presidency of the London and Middlesex Archaeological Society from 1950 to 1959 enhanced the Society's reputation and his active archaeological presence in London was a forerunner to the various excavation groups that have been established since.

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