

SO, WHAT HAVE YOU DONE FOR US LATELY?

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Chairman of Council

1855–1955

For the Society's *Transactions* in 1955 the then Chairman of Council, Cdr G Bridgmore Brown, wrote an account of the first 100 years of the London and Middlesex Archaeological Society. It falls to me, his successor, to bring the story up to date.

Bridgmore Brown's article is a workmanlike piece, tracing the Society's origins in the establishment of a provisional committee in July 1855 and the inaugural meeting in Crosby Hall on 14 December that same year where it was unanimously agreed 'That a Society, to be called the London and Middlesex Archaeological Society, be now established'. Perhaps he could have made more of the Society's flamboyant early activities: the excursions or 'country meetings' described by Eileen Bowlt elsewhere in these pages, when a train was hired for the journey, and the meeting ended with the serving of a 'collation' at a local hotel or suitable hall — or in the absence of such a convenience in rural Middlesex, on one occasion a large barn; or the 'conversaciones' held in City livery company halls, with music (on one occasion provided by a string band from the Royal Artillery) as well as suitable displays of 'various objects of art and antiquity'. Perhaps he should have drawn attention to the strictly limited social class from which the first members of the Society came — that middle-class 'Victorian establishment' discussed by Sally Brooks in her analysis of the Society's membership published in *Transactions* 36 (1985). He commented that the Society's annual subscription had been maintained at one guinea (£1.05) ever since 1879 (it did not rise (to

two guineas) until 1958) without noting that this — a fall in real terms — might have encouraged a much wider membership. And perhaps he might have noted in passing the whiff of scandal that surrounded the extraordinary dilatoriness of an early Honorary Secretary in paying into the bank subscriptions he had received from members, which resulted in a loss to the Society of 'as far as the Council could ascertain £59 2s 3d' — no small sum in 1857.

Bridgmore Brown recognised that the fortunes of the Society had fluctuated over the years, noting the period in the early 1900s when membership figures had fallen to little more than 100. He himself had joined in 1912, and was one of only two individual members whose membership dated back to before the First World War. He recalled 'the halcyon days of cheap railway travel' between the two World Wars when the Society had once again organised full-day visits to places outside the London area, and regretted that even with the ending of the Second World War 'the delay in restoring excursion facilities on the railways made it impossible to resume summer visits to distant objectives' — but since 1948 visits had been made by coach. Membership figures had risen, he was pleased to report (although it was 1950 before they had again reached a figure, about 350, that approached the 395 reported in 1857) — at the time he wrote, membership stood at nearly 500.

But changes in the Society and its activities reflected much broader changes that had taken place during the years 1855 to 1955. The establishment of the Metropolitan Board of Works, in the same year that LAMAS itself was founded, was the first step towards London-wide

government and to major public improvements that were to entail both the destruction of historic buildings and archaeological discoveries. During the Society's lifetime the first national legislation had been introduced to protect ancient monuments and buildings — a major concern of LAMAS's founders. The Royal Commission on Historical Monuments had published its volumes on London between 1924 and 1930 and on Middlesex in 1937. The London County Council had begun its *Survey of London* series in 1900. The Victoria County Histories had been established, although only one volume on London (in 1909) and one on Middlesex (in 1911) had been published. Local record offices and libraries had become much more accessible for research. One of the Society's stated objectives, the foundation of a museum, had been overtaken by events, with the reopening on a sounder footing of the Guildhall Museum in the 1870s, and the foundation of the London Museum in 1912. LAMAS had been joined in the London area by other local historical and, later, archaeological societies; its Affiliated Local Societies scheme was established in 1954 and by 1955 included 16 societies (from the East London History Group to the Watford and South-West Herts Archaeological Society). Other societies had been formed to campaign for the preservation of ancient buildings, from the Society for the Protection of Ancient Buildings in 1877 to the Georgian Group in 1937. By the time Bridgmore Brown wrote, the days when membership of LAMAS was the only option for those in London or Middlesex who had an interest in and concern for the past of their city and county were long gone.

1955–2005

But what of the broader picture in 1955? To those interested in London's archaeology the first date in the 1950s that springs to mind is probably not 1955 but 1954 — when the discovery of the Temple of Mithras brought to excited public attention the work of the Roman and Mediaeval London Excavation Council on London's bombed sites. When that Council was established in 1946, LAMAS was invited — perhaps out of politeness — to nominate a representative. (The Society did however make a grant, of £10, to the expenses of RMLEC's work.) However, in 1950 the Society invited W F Grimes, Director of both RMLEC and

the London Museum, to become President — the first practising archaeologist to hold that position since the brief tenure of General Pitt-Rivers in the 1880s. It was Grimes who presided over the 1955 centenary celebrations, which included a special viewing of the finds from the Temple of Mithras, on display for the first time in the Guildhall Museum, reopened in 'temporary' quarters in the Royal Exchange.

For local historians 1955 is a significant date for another reason — not mentioned by Bridgmore Brown — the reinvigoration of the Middlesex Victoria County History. The post-War period had seen the establishment of national bodies not just for archaeology — the Council for British Archaeology — but for local history — the Standing Conference for Local History. The latter encouraged the setting up of county committees, and the Middlesex Local History Council was formed in 1951. It does not seem to have been seen as a rival by LAMAS, although when it eventually merged with LAMAS in 1965, becoming the Society's Local History Committee, the marriage at first was not an entirely happy one.

The Middlesex Local History Council took the initiative in trying to revive the abortive Middlesex Victoria County History, of which only one volume had appeared in 1911. A successful approach for funding to local councils led to the establishment of the Middlesex VCH Council in 1955. Since then eleven volumes of painstaking and invaluable research on the historic county have been published. Although, as members of LAMAS will know (our Society is still — as successors of the Middlesex Local History Council — represented on the Middlesex VCH Council), there have lately been very serious financial problems, there is still hope that the project begun so well 50 years ago can be completed.

In 1959, LAMAS attempted to reach a new audience by forming a Schools Section, with membership open to schools, but not to individual schoolchildren, in the London area. With changes both in the educational system and in syllabuses this concept had limited success, but was to lead to the later LAMAS Youth Section (or Young LAMAS), which was very active for several years in the 1980s and 1990s until, for various practical reasons, it closed in 1995.

To those who wish to follow the progress of archaeological investigation in London after the Second World War, volumes of our Society's *Transactions* during the 1950s are disappointing.

It was only in 1960 that the first regular reports 'contributed by staff of the Guildhall Museum' (notably Peter Marsden) began to appear. But an increased pace of archaeological discovery and greater public interest can be seen in the Society's lecture programme, which in 1968 included speakers like Glyn Daniel, Sheppard Frere and Rupert Bruce-Mitford.

The 1960s saw the establishment of the Society's special committees. The Historic Buildings Preservation Committee (now Historic Buildings and Conservation Committee) began the still essential task of considering the impact of planned developments on the built heritage of London and responding with advice on particular cases. The Archaeological Research Committee organised its first annual conference in 1964; the Local History Committee — the now integrated Middlesex Local History Council — soon followed suit. Held on Saturday afternoons in the Livery Hall at Guildhall, these events included tea (with dainty iced cakes). At the archaeological conference of 1968, members paid 5s (25p), non-members 7s 6d (37.5p) and heard reports on excavations by Roy Canham, Nick Farrant, Harvey Sheldon, John Kent and Peter Marsden. (The price had risen to 75p by 1976, the last year that the archaeological conference was held at Guildhall.) 1967 saw the first issue of the Society's *Newsletter* (originally *News-letter*) replacing an earlier *Bulletin*. From the beginning this included notices of the activities of our affiliated societies, still an essential element of the *Newsletter*. But that LAMAS was no longer alone in the field was emphasised in 1968 when a new type of archaeological magazine for London, the *London Archaeologist*, made its appearance — thanks to the enthusiasm of Nick Farrant (Fuentes) — and Londoners could find out about recent and current excavations without joining a society!

In many ways the Guildhall Museum's excavations at Baynard's Castle in 1972 marked a turning point, with wider recognition of the special nature and problems of 'rescue' archaeology. Our Society contributed to the first group of published surveys of London's archaeological knowledge and potential in its first Special Paper *The Archaeology of the London Area: Current Knowledge and Problems* in 1976, alongside Rescue's *The Future of London's Past* and the joint Museum of London/Department of the Environment/Greater London Council publication *Time on Our Side?* In 1975 the Society

took a more active role as local units were established or reconstituted to carry out rescue excavations in London, with the formation of the Inner London (North) Archaeological Unit — the '(North)' seems to have become optional. This was managed by a committee of LAMAS representatives together with representatives of seven inner London boroughs which, with the Department of the Environment, provided funding. In the next few years the unit investigated over a hundred sites, ranging from Westminster Abbey to a sheet iron sentry box at the West India Dock, as well as publishing booklets on the archaeology of the boroughs for which the unit was responsible. For the first time the Society found itself in the position of employing full-time archaeological staff. Only the hard work of the then Honorary Treasurer, Allan Tribe, made this possible. It was, I suspect, with some relief that after long campaigning to win central funding from the Greater London Council (little did we know) we saw 'our' archaeological unit merge with others in the Museum of London's Department of Greater London Archaeology in 1983.

LAMAS had long had informal links with staff of the Guildhall Museum and the London Museum — members of the museums' staff served in a personal capacity on the Society's committees, and Roy Canham and his successor Alison Laws, the London Museum's archaeologists, had organised the annual archaeological conferences. With the establishment of the new Museum of London in 1976 these links were formalised, by an advantageous agreement made with the Museum's Board of Governors (although the suggestion that this made the Society a wholly-owned subsidiary of the Museum is one that should be strongly denied!). The Society's library and its meetings moved from the Bishopsgate Institute, which had been the Society's headquarters since 1911, to the new Museum of London building in London Wall. The archaeological conference in 1977 was one of the first events to be held in the Museum's Lecture Theatre, and took the now familiar form of a full-day meeting. The two annual conferences remain a major feature of our programme — the local history conference in particular, with displays by our Affiliated Societies, is very popular.

For some while after 1976, with myself as Honorary Secretary and the late Hugh Chapman as Honorary Archaeological Editor, much of the

Society's business centred on the Museum. Apart from the annual archaeological conference, the Society's contribution to the growing pace of archaeological work in the London area became chiefly that of publication — particularly that of the work funded by English Heritage (or Department of the Environment) and other public authorities, carried out by the Museum of London's Department of Urban Archaeology and the local units. Reports appeared in *Transactions* and in a greatly expanded series of *Special Papers*. For a while members might receive two or even three publications in a year: in 1979, *Transactions* plus two volumes (these issued jointly with the Surrey Archaeological Society) on excavations in Southwark; in 1980, *Transactions* plus the Special Paper on the *Roman Riverside Walk*; in 1988, *Transactions* plus *St Nicholas Shambles* plus *Surrey Whitewares*. The pace could not be maintained by what remained an essentially amateur society. Publication of *Transactions* began to lag behind, eventually appearing four years in arrears. The last Special Paper of that series was published in 1992, and the decision was taken to concentrate on *Transactions*. The employment after 1992 of a production editor, first Gillian Clegg and more recently Lynn Pitts, took a major burden off the honorary officers, and *Transactions* appeared twice a year until the arrears were made up.

In many ways the 1980s were to all appearances a golden age for LAMAS. The Society's visits programme was flourishing, particularly through the enthusiasm of Edward Biffin, who provided copious historical notes to accompany each visit and organised evermore ambitious excursions. Trips lasting several days to the Welsh Marches, to Hadrian's Wall, to North Yorkshire were followed in 1983 by one to Belgium. Edward Biffin resigned in 1984, and although, thanks to the efforts of Rupert and Natalia Morris, the planned trip to Normandy in that year did take place, nothing so ambitious has been arranged since. Gradually attendances on the traditional full-day coach trips began to fall off; some had to be cancelled for lack of interest. The series came to an end in 1993, and since then — until the special series organised for this year of 2005 — only occasional one-off visits have been organised. Evening lectures held at the Museum of London have similarly sometimes attracted very small audiences — there does seem to have been a welcome upswing recently.

To judge by the membership figures included in our Annual Reports the peak of the golden

age came in 1984, when membership apparently stood at the extraordinary figure of 932. However, it was admitted that many members were in arrears with their subscription — some by several years. Many who should have been struck off long ago were still on the books — the decision by Council to impose the Society's regulations more strictly led to a 'loss' of on-paper members of about 130 over the next two years. But a real fall was to follow. From the 1990s to today membership has remained closer to 600 — although currently rising.

LAMAS's golden age coincided with the last flowering of publicly-funded rescue archaeology. Changes were heralded when hard on the agreement of the GLC to fund archaeology centrally came the news that the GLC itself was under threat. The Society was involved in campaigns to ensure that following the proposed abolition of the GLC there should be adequate provision for London-wide archaeology, for the Greater London Record Office, and indeed for the funding of the Museum of London. Soon the introduction of the PPG16 regime and funding of archaeology by developers, together with competitive tendering by independent archaeological units, changed the archaeological landscape totally. In 1992 LAMAS joined with the Surrey Archaeological Society, the CBA, and the Society of Antiquaries to form the Standing Conference on London Archaeology to represent the interests of London archaeology and to lobby the many public bodies that now were involved.

This is not the place to discuss either the details or the effects of the current system. It has, however, resulted in *more* archaeology requiring publication. Even if it had been suggested, LAMAS would not have had the resources to revive the Special Paper series for this purpose. Our *Transactions* is now just one of a number of media available, alongside the monograph series — not just those of the Museum of London Archaeology Service but of other units working in London — and the *London Archaeologist*. It has never been so difficult to keep up to date with archaeological activity in London. There is no shortage of articles being offered for publication by the archaeological units — these usually come with full funding. It remains a concern that papers on historical topics are not forthcoming, and it is to be hoped that the historical content of *Transactions* can be increased in future.

The years since 1990 have not been without

advances. In 1997, thanks to Francis Grew, our website went live. In the same year the Archaeological Research Committee (now Archaeological Committee — since its brief is far wider than research) introduced the Ralph Merrifield Award, named in honour of our Past-President, to reward contributions to the study or popularisation of London archaeology. The Local History Committee has since taken up the idea of an annual award, by the introduction of a prize for publications by local societies or society members.

The Society's finances are in a good state — the work of our last Honorary Treasurer Rupert Morris has put them on a firm footing. A feature of the Society's activities in recent years has been the selective use of those funds to support external bodies and projects that accord with our objectives and our charitable status. In 1998, like many other groups and individuals, LAMAS contributed towards the costs of the establishment by the Museum of London of the London Archaeological Archive and Research Centre. Recognising the impracticability of reviving our own 'Young LAMAS' organisation we have made a grant towards the Young Archaeologists Club, Central London Branch. We have made grants towards publications — on the Neolithic in South-East England, on London tin-glazed wares, on London coinage (not all yet published). And Council has now decided to reserve funds to support research projects undertaken by LAMAS members on the archaeology or history of our area.

CONCLUSION

In 1955 the then Chairman looked back on a century of fluctuating fortunes and huge changes in the climate within which LAMAS functioned; I look back similarly on 50 years of fluctuating fortunes and climate changes (although my own membership of LAMAS and personal involvement goes back only to 1968!). In the course of this short report I have named a number of individuals — no slight is intended to the work of so many others. The Society has depended and continues to depend on all its officers, its committees, and the unsung contributions of its members at large — not just their subscriptions (though they are vital!) but their presence at our meetings and their wholehearted support for our objectives and our activities.

When LAMAS was founded it was, except for the national archaeological societies based in London and the neighbouring county societies in Surrey and Essex (and later, Kent), the sole society with an interest in the archaeology and local history of the London area. The original constitution set out its interests:

the Ancient Arts and Monuments of the Cities of London and Westminster, and of the County of Middlesex: including Primeval Antiquities; Architecture, Civil, Ecclesiastical, and Military; Sculpture; Works of Art in Metal and Wood; Paintings on Walls, Wood, or Glass; Civil History and Antiquities, comprising Manors, Manorial Rights, Privileges and Customs; Heraldry and Genealogy; Costume; Numismatics; Ecclesiastical History and Endowments, and Charitable Foundations, Records, and all other matters usually comprised under the head of Archaeology.

Now, for Londoners interested in any one or more of these topics (or any embraced by that useful catch-all at the end) there are dozens of national, local, and regional societies, most of them with publications and programmes of lectures, visits, and social activities. There is the CBA and its regional groups. The British Association for Local History. Easily accessible museums, libraries, and record offices. Evening classes and opportunities for on-line study. Young Archaeologists Clubs. The *London Archaeologist* and *Current Archaeology*. Historical and archaeological magazines in the local newsagent. TV programmes for the armchair-bound.

Does LAMAS still serve a useful purpose?

Our Victorian founders defined the Society's objectives (here abbreviated):

1. To collect and publish the best possible information...
2. To procure the careful observation and preservation of antiquities discovered in the progress of works...
3. To make, and to encourage individuals and public bodies in making, researches and excavations...
4. To oppose and prevent, so far as may be practicable, any injuries with which Monuments and Ancient Remains ... may be threatened...
5. To found a Museum and Library...
6. To arrange periodical Meetings...

Well, in the words of the song, 'we're still here' — and with changes in style and now recognising

that we can do these things best in co-operation with other bodies or by supporting directly or indirectly the efforts of others, we can still pursue these objectives. Where we have perhaps enlarged on our ancestors' objectives is by recognising that we must extend our message beyond the safe middle classes of the 'Victorian establishment'. And perhaps like the 'archaeological establishment' in general we have not yet identified quite how to do that. Will the local Hackney kids who participate so enthusiastically in activities at the monthly Saturday meetings of the Young Archaeologists Club at LAARC — or their counterparts at the Rotherhithe YAC — join LAMAS when they grow up? Or any similar traditional archaeological society?

The next 50 years (indeed the next 10 years) may show us.

Like most of us today, I lack that facility for resounding if pompous phraseology that was to Victorian taste, and can be found extensively in the printed accounts of LAMAS's early meetings — taken from shorthand notes, so we can be confident the words were actually spoken. So, as our Society enters its next 50 years, I'll conclude with remarks with which my predecessor the first Chairman of Council, the Rev Thomas Hugo, introduced the first ordinary meeting of the Society in January 1856:

... with consciousness of right motives and a desire of doing good, prepared for any fortune but hopeful of the better, we entrust our bark to the winds and waves, and steer for utility if not for fame.