

# Commentary

By GROMATICUS

## TBAOG

LIKE THE BEST of old soldiers the Thames Basin Archaeological Observers Group is just fading away. The exact hour of its demise will probably not be recorded but it will be in the present calendar year.

For five or six years from its first formation the TBAOG was practically the only active group in field-work in the London region. As its name implies, it did in fact operate over a much wider area than London proper. A singularly high proportion of London archaeologists, both professional and amateur, can claim to have been members.

## A TRIBUTE

THIS ISSUE of the London Archaeologist is designed as a tribute to the Group with the authors of all the main articles being members. The brief history of TBAOG by John Ashdown (p. 56) modestly omits his own role in the Group. He has been a stalwart member from its earliest days and as an officer he has always managed to convey his own enthusiasm to other members, especially in the difficult field of observing. Special mention should also be made of his father who kindly allowed TBAOG to holding meetings in Crossway Hall for many years.

In recent years TBAOG has been much concerned with Industrial Archaeology and it is heartening to see phoenix-fashion a new society, the Greater London Industrial Archaeology Society, emerging in its place (p. 72).

## ANTIQUITIES BILL

A C.B.A. sponsored draft Antiquities Bill was circulated at the end of January to all members asking for their comments. As the covering note explained, the Bill is intended "to require the prompt reporting of archaeological finds, to protect such finds from premature dispersal, to ensure the conservation of exceptional finds and to put a control upon the free export of archaeological material." It was suggested that the practice of the law should be put in the hands of "archaeological agents," who would be, in all probability, museum curators.

The reception for the Bill has been unenthusiastic. There are a number of reasons for this, the most important one being that the museum curator fears that he will be smothered by a long line of people doing their statutory duty by bringing in finds as trivial as clay pipe stems and 20th century pottery—all archaeological finds must be reported and the man on the Clapham omnibus can not be

expected to differentiate. Secondly, many people see that by suitable interpretation the Bill could be used to suppress the amateur. The third important objection is that the Bill seems to confer a degree of ownership in the finder, in defiance of all precedent.

A meeting has been called by C.B.A. for the 14th June to discuss the amended draft of the Bill and it must be sincerely hoped that there will be a successful outcome. A bad Act would be worse than no Act—the British seem to delight in finding legislative loopholes.

## THE FIELD-WORKER PROBLEM

IT IS an indisputable fact that in London archaeological evidence is being destroyed daily by re-development without any record being taken. This sad state of affairs can quite simply be attributed to the dearth of trained archaeologists in the area.

The vast size of this brick and concrete metropolis overwhelms Roy Canham of the London Museum, the sole professional field-worker in Greater London (outside the City). The local archaeological societies and museums strive mightily but it is doubtful whether any one of them can honestly claim to cover their territory in the manner which they would regard as proper.

## A SOLUTION ?

IDEALLY, the problem calls for more professional field-workers, but with the present state of the country's economy demanding a reduction in spending in every direction, funds are just not available. Even if the economic situation were better, the analogy of blood and stone springs to one's mind.

By this default the onus descends upon the amateur archaeologist who can well claim that he spends enough time as it is on his past-time. However, the real requirement is for 'trained time.' It would be possible for many more excavations to take place if only there were more amateurs capable and knowledgeable enough to act in supervisory roles.

With this in mind Dr. John Alexander of London University Extra-Mural Department is running a certificate course 'tailored for London field-workers' (address given in Diary). This is a tremendous chance to make some progress in solving the fieldwork problem and local societies in particular are commended to encourage suitable members to enrol in the course. If the course is a success, the benefit to London's archaeology will be enormous.