

Archaeology in Kingston-upon-Thames

RALPH MERRIFIELD

THOSE OF US who are concerned with the massive destruction of unrecorded archaeological evidence in Greater London, for which our generation will not easily be forgiven, have always regarded Kingston-upon-Thames as one of the brighter spots in a scene of general gloom. With a keen and active local archaeological society and an able professional archaeologist in permanent residence at its Museum, it could be compared favourably with most other Boroughs of London, both Outer and Inner. In accomplishing a succession of week-end excavations during the last three or four years, it shone particularly brightly against the Stygian gloom of its neighbour Richmond-upon-Thames, where local archaeological activity is non-existent. Nevertheless, as *Archaeology and Development in the Royal Borough of Kingston Upon Thames* (1973) makes clear, it was a feeble and flickering light, which was totally inadequate to illuminate the vast areas of destruction, and the tiny samples of evidence that were retrieved can only make us more conscious of the riches that have been lost.

The report is a valiant effort by the Kingston-upon-Thames Archaeological Society to bring home to the Borough Council and to the public the full effect of the development that is planned for the near future. It includes the historic town centre of Kingston, which has been approved as a Comprehensive Development Area, and comprises 187 acres. In addition, there are four other major development schemes, concerning areas ranging from 14 to 15 acres in size, to say nothing of the numerous individual sites for which authority for development is being obtained at an ever-increasing rate.

To cope with all this there is "no single officer or institution whose recognised concern is to consult with planners and developers in the archaeological interest; to watch sites where development is to take place; to initiate emergency archaeological excavations; to record what is being destroyed; to co-ordinate amateur work; and to be available to collate, give and receive information and to accept and care for casual finds." This is clearly a full-time job—not something that a museum curator, however able and enthusiastic, can fit in with other duties, which are much more onerous and time-consuming than is usually realised outside the profession.

The report points out that ideally archaeological

needs should be taken into account at an early stage of the planning process, and that machinery to do this does not yet exist in Kingston. The Borough itself could do much more to provide opportunities for archaeological work in its own development schemes, as is now the accepted policy in other historic towns, such as Winchester, Oxford, Abingdon and the City of London.

The arguments advanced here are not new, and one has a certain sense of *déjà vu* in reading this report. This is in no way a criticism, for the same case has to be presented again and again, spelling out to unconcerned local authorities what seem to be self-evident facts to any archaeologist.

The recommendations, which were also predictable, are that vastly improved communications are required between development and archaeological interests; that adequate space and storage accommodation for post-excavation work and basic conservation are essential; and that additional funds are needed if work is to be undertaken on the scale required. No specific proposals are made, except for the first need, which, it is suggested, might be met either by the appointment of a borough archaeological liaison officer, and/or the setting up of a liaison committee, or alternatively by the appointment of additional qualified staff to the Museum. It is not, however, considered practicable to provide the necessary accommodation for processing at the Museum without sacrificing its other functions, and the question of staff for this side of the work is glossed over. Nor is it clear where the archaeologists for full-time excavation on the scale required would be found. The use of amateurs is an admirable and very British expedient, but in urgent rescue work it has the great disadvantage that few amateurs are available at short notice during week-days, or for a sustained effort lasting several weeks.

Obviously more could be done with more money, more space, and a full-time archaeological officer, whether he be attached to the Museum or not, but would this be sufficient to cope with the situation presented here? Experience in the City of London suggests that it would not, although useful work could undoubtedly be done. A single professional archaeologist working alone is handicapped all along the line. Even if he can call on amateur assist-

ance, this is seldom available at the moment when it is most needed. Two full-time archaeologists working together can in fact do considerably more than twice the work of one, and this extra potential is multiplied to a surprising extent when a small team is working together, so that there is some scope for the development of specialised skills. It is for this reason that archaeological salvation is being sought increasingly by the creation of units, as such professional teams have come to be called. There is no mention of such a possibility in this report, although the Kingston situation clearly demands the service of a full archaeological unit. It is not mentioned presumably because the authors considered that its cost would be so much greater than present expenditure that it would be quite unacceptable.

There are in fact only two professional archaeological units working at present in the whole of London. One of these, the City of London Unit, has only just been formed, but has already added considerably to our knowledge of early London. Administered by the City Corporation, its main difficulties are not financial, but arise from the nature of the territory in which it has to work—an area of phenomenally high land values, where time and opportunities for work are yielded grudgingly. Then there is the Southwark Unit; administered by the Southwark Archaeological Excavation Committee, and run on the proverbial shoe-string, it is gradually piecing together a picture of the early topography and history of Southwark that should soon solve the hoary problem of the position of the Roman bridge, and in the longer term is as likely to produce evidence on the origins of London and its fate in the Dark Ages as is the City itself.

The City and the historic "Borough" are of course both large and concentrated archaeological sites of national importance. Yet there are important archaeological sites that are known throughout Greater London as well as others that must exist but have not yet been discovered. Where in West London for example, was the flourishing industrial centre that was apparently manufacturing and exporting distinctive local weapons in the late Bronze Age? The archaeological needs of Greater London are not

less than its historic centre, but its sites are scattered over a wide area, much of which is unexplored territory. There is no reason to suppose, however, that the unit system would not be equally effective there. Nevertheless, as the Kingston report tacitly accepts, the individual London Borough probably cannot be expected to maintain its own complete archaeological unit. Is there any reason, however, why Kingston and Richmond should not maintain a unit between them? Both contain historic towns and are also rich in prehistory; they could confidently expect substantial financial assistance from the Department of the Environment. If the burden of a complete unit is considered too great for even two boroughs to bear, a more expanded territory, involving other boroughs of South-West London would provide more broadly based financial support. With a share in such a unit, Kingston might fare better than by spending the same money on a smaller staff for itself.

Southwark and Lambeth have set an example for inter-borough co-operation of this kind, and help to maintain the highly efficient unit employed by the Southwark Archaeological Excavation Committee. The London and Middlesex Archaeological Society is organising a new unit, which is intended to cover no fewer than seven boroughs of Inner London, north of the Thames—the five boroughs ringing the City, with Kensington and Chelsea and Hammersmith added for good measure. Surrey Archaeological Society might perhaps consider a similar initiative to meet the pressing needs of the south-west. Alternatively, in this instance, a joint approach by the Surrey Archaeological Society and the London and Middlesex Archaeological Society might be possible. (For the benefit of the ever vigilant hawks of S.A.S. it should perhaps be mentioned that the Borough of Richmond includes Twickenham in Middlesex.)

In whatever way salvation comes to Kingston-upon-Thames—and it must not be long delayed—one certainty must be faced; the Borough's financial contribution towards archaeological excavation must be multiplied many times from the miserable figure of £75 quoted for the year 1971-2 in this Report.

A.G.M OF THE LONDON ARCHAEOLOGIST

THE A.G.M. WAS HELD on the 3rd May at Church House, Dean's Yard. The annual reports and accounts were read and accepted. The six serving officers and the auditors were re-elected. Representatives to serve on the Publication Committee were elected from the following societies—City of London, Enfield, Hendon, London and Middlesex, Nonsuch and Surrey.

Following the close of business Brian Hobley gave a talk on the state of archaeology in the City and the way in which he expected it to develop with the Guildhall Museum's Department of Urban Archaeology.

Barbican Restoration of Bastions

A section of the north-west part of the Roman and medieval City wall has been restored with the missing portions being demarcated in yellow brick and the ditch being replaced by an ornamental canal. Prominent is Bastion 11A (centre-ground on front cover) which lies half-way between Cripplegate and Bastion 12 (north-west corner of the Roman fort) and which when excavated by Professor Grimes in 1965, was found to be post-13th century in date.