

Archaeological Society or Limited Company?

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IN THE SPRING 1974 number of *the London Archaeologist*, the earlier history and recent activities of the Surrey Archaeological Society were outlined by its Honorary Secretary, Dennis Turner. Until 1972, its development ran on similar lines to that of other county societies. Then, after pressure had begun to be put on county councils to appoint archaeological officers, the Surrey authority, instead of appointing an officer attached to the County Planning or some other Department, decided, as Mr. Turner mentioned, to pay an annual grant to the Surrey Society. This was to be re-negotiated each year, subject to the rendering of satisfactory reports, but was given on the understanding that the Society would appoint its own permanent archaeological officer and undertake to supply to the County Council such information as it might require. The duties were defined as:—

To enlarge and develop the Society's inventory of sites and finds, to advise the Society and the County Council on the archaeological aspects of planning applications and proposed developments, to carry out a programme of observation and rescue work in co-operation with the Society's officers and members, and to advise the Society and the County on all aspects of field archaeology.

Surrey is the only County which has so far adopted such a scheme, and the arrangement, with the appointment of David Bird, has worked out very well, despite the complications which have arisen from the new local authority structure — there are eleven new districts in Surrey. Inevitably, the archaeological officer has taken over new duties including liaison with the University of Surrey, lecturing and committee work. From the grant received the Society has needed to provide for secretarial assistance, car and office expenses.

At the same time, the Department of the Environment, faced with a vastly increased load falling on its officers and inspectors, encouraged the Surrey Society to apply for grants, and to undertake to provide for the day-to-day watching of motorway and other road construction work, organising excavations and recording wherever anything noteworthy was found.

While it has been possible in Surrey with the assistance of local societies to recruit volunteers for field-walking, and for week-end and summer ex-

cavations, the employment of professional archaeologists, on a piece-work basis, was found essential to watch construction work and to carry out urgent full-time excavations of certain sites. The administration of the grant, and the general responsibilities which employers incur, put a very heavy load on the honorary officers of the Society, since an excavation committee, meeting infrequently and in the evening, could neither undertake supervision nor make decisions in the field.

While facing these administrative problems, the Society was brought up sharply to consider its own position as a voluntary non-profitmaking organisation with charitable status. Now that it was employing professional archaeologists and organising rescue excavations, its responsibilities increased. With substantial funds in hand, it or its officers or trustees could be vulnerable if substantial claims for compensation were made and sustained. Ordinary risks, accidents and so forth, could be insured against, but in areas of building development or road construction, unforeseeable claims for damage or compensation for failure to complete contracts might be presented at any time. It was not fair that the Society should run these risks.

It was therefore decided that the Society should be reconstructed as a Limited Liability Company. Approval of the Charity Commissioners and of the Department of Trade and Industry was sought and, after long delays, obtained. Finally, on 13th February 1974, the Society was incorporated as a Company limited by guarantee and not having a share capital. This means, in simplest terms, that, in the event of disaster, the liability of each individual member is limited to £1. The use of the word "Limited" in the Society's title has been dispensed with. Only certain formalities remain to be completed at the next Annual General Meeting of the Society, the Rules and Objects of which remain virtually unchanged.

Other advantages, some rather more intangible, others less, are best discussed in general terms. First, however much we may regret it, the archaeological world now divides itself into amateurs and professionals. A business man who has attended archaeological conferences, been on courses, worked full-time without pay on supervised excavations in his holidays or after retirement, remains an amateur, but an unemployed student pushing a wheel-

barrow for a weekly wage is a professional. At a 1972 conference at Fortress House, a delegate roundly asserted that "local societies are a write-off"; his remark was accepted as generally applicable, and was not contradicted. But it will only continue to be accepted so long as local societies are organised as at present with their members as amateurs, only fit for dog's-body work under professional direction.

Secondly, a Society needs to be able to charge against grants, the unassessable cost of time-consuming work done by its honorary officers and other members who receive no remuneration. A county authority making a grant will take the realistic view that if the work were done by contract, overheads of 10 per cent to 12½ per cent would be acceptable. Once a society has become a company it could, as it were, put on a business-man's bowler hat, if its overheads or administrative costs were challenged; it could ask for a written contract, in which the inclusion of overheads should be accepted without question by any auditor.

† To sum up, the conversion of an archaeological society into a company should give it both security

and confidence that any work it undertakes as an agent can be paid for at current rates, and not at a cut price just because its officers happen to be amateurs, unpaid and not accepting honoraria.

To return to Surrey and its future, the normal work and activities of the Society, its services to members, visits and publication of its Journal and Bulletin will continue as at present. But if motorways and road improvements multiply, if the extraction of gravel is increased, if town centres are re-planned, listed sites threatened, prehistoric features on commons eroded, the very volume and extent of all these factors will demand something new. This may be the setting-up of a full-time archaeological unit with field directors, a treasurer or accounting officer, a part-time secretary and ancillary staff. A controlling committee will also be needed, but a less formal one than that adopted for the Oxfordshire unit, since the unit will be set up under the auspices and general responsibility of the Surrey Archaeological Society. So a great advance will have been achieved towards recognising the equal value of amateur and professional work. This should be for the ultimate advantage of archaeology as a whole.

The New Inner London Archaeological Unit

THE INNER London Archaeological Unit will come into being from the 1st October and will initially cover six boroughs: Camden, Hackney, Hammersmith, Islington, Kensington and Chelsea, and Tower Hamlets; it is expected that in the very near future Westminster will also be included.

The Director of the Unit is John Hinchliffe, aged 27, who has served 18 months with the Oxfordshire Archaeological Unit, while the Senior Field Officer is Irene Schwab, formerly of Southwark Archaeological Excavation Committee. In addition, there are initially to be two Field Officers, only one of whom has yet been appointed —

Graham Black who has been working with Tony Johnson's L.A.M.A.S. London Docks' Group.

The London and Middlesex Archaeological Society which is sponsoring the Unit, is still engaged in the formative processes. With the Unit becoming operative, it will shortly be necessary to organise a Steering Committee which will include representatives from the various borough councils.

The first task of the Unit will be to settle into its comparatively spacious premises close to Liverpool Street Station but is actually in Tower Hamlets. The premises have been kindly provided by a City-based property company which is generously allowing the Unit to have them rent-free. There is a storage area on the ground floor and two floors of offices above.

The Unit may take several months to become fully operative as the needs of the area must first be fully assessed. However the recently completed Department of the Environment survey on Greater London and the L.A.M.A.S. research report, shortly to be published, should both be invaluable.



John Hinchliffe