

Eric S. Wood, F.S.A.

THOSE WHO knew Eric Wood will have been greatly saddened by the news of his death on May 21st at the age of 83. Eric was quiet and unassuming, attributes which masked a character of great strength and determination, kindness and loyalty.

Eric was President of the Surrey Archaeological Society from 1980 to 1984, and his achievements there have been described by Rosamond Hanworth in the SAS Bulletin for July/August 1996. He was well known to a wider public through his successful *Collin's Field Guide to Archaeology in Britain*, first published in 1963.

His most important role in London's archaeology was as Chairman of the Southwark (later the Southwark and Lambeth) Archaeological Excavation Committee between 1967 and 1981.

SAEC was established at the beginning of the 1960s to provide a link and common platform for the various bodies concerned to further archaeology in the two boroughs at a time when redevelopment was beginning to threaten sites on a large scale. The danger was most obvious in north Southwark's ancient 'Borough'. SAEC therefore needed to bring together the London Museum, Guildhall Museum and Cuming Museum with their growing archaeological expertise and interest in the area. It also needed to ensure close cooperation between the London and Middlesex and the Surrey Archaeological Societies, both of which could claim that the two boroughs lay within their defined territories.

All these bodies were represented on the Committee, and by the time Eric took over the Chair it was becoming increasingly clear that, in order to stand a chance of keeping up with commercial redevelopment, more than just a voluntary committee promoting or coordinating excavation was required. Consequently, under Eric's leadership efforts were made successfully to extract financial assistance from the Department of Environment and the London Borough of Southwark. This made it possible for the Committee to employ a full-time field officer from April 1972 onwards.

SAEC thus became the first voluntary body in London with a full-time archaeologist, and, even more significantly, from the summer of 1972 onwards, a field team was in place. This was a far more difficult task for Eric to achieve, for not all the Committee shared the view that the creation of an archaeological 'unit' was appropriate. But Eric, con-



vinced that this was the right way forward, patiently and resolutely steered the scheme through.

Thus the staff of SAEC, under Eric's chairmanship, became the first archaeological unit in London, with the employing Committee guiding their work until 1983, when the team was merged into the Museum of London's DGLA as part of the Greater London Archaeological Service.

During the 1970s and 1980s Eric also served on the Working Party on London Archaeology, the body which helped secure the shape of the Greater London Archaeological Service. With the changes made in 1992 to London's archaeology, he became a firm supporter of the establishment of SCOLA to monitor the effectiveness of the new arrangements.

Eric bore with much fortitude both the tragic accidental death in 1970 of his gifted younger daughter Julia, who had shared his interest in archaeology, and then the loss of his devoted wife Marion in 1979. He was fortunate enough to find contentment and domestic happiness with his second wife Pam, and the encouragement to produce late in 1995 another major work, *Historical Britain* (a comprehensive account of the development of rural life and landscape from prehistory to the present day).

With his wisdom, farsightedness and commitment, Eric made an invaluable contribution to the development of post-war rescue archaeology in London, though his modesty would I'm sure have made him reluctant to accept any such accolade.

I am grateful to Torla Evans for preparing the photograph from a slide provided by Peter Addyman.

Harvey Sheldon