

Editorial

For some time now concern has been growing as to future participation of so called 'amateurs' in archaeological excavations. Local Authority views have been largely coloured by the current Government attitudes that Archaeological 'digs' can be funded mainly by Developers. That Developers, as the price of their gaining Planning Consent, will be required, to put up the money to pay for Professional Archaeologists to carry out all necessary prior excavation - and hence save Grant money.

All very fine if there are Developers lining up, in a healthy market, ready willing and able to stump up the money as a share of the handsome profits to be secured. Such of course is not the present state of the building market, and whilst the development sites can sleep safely untouched, what about all the other physical works that still go on anyway, to threaten archaeological remains, such as road schemes? These have usually to be funded for rescue excavation out of the ever decreasing County funds. Whilst County Archaeologists do still, to a degree, welcome 'amateur' assistance to eke out funding, particularly where a specialist skill such as Industrial Archaeology is available, they do naturally insist that works on land acquired by their Authority are always under the direct supervision and control of their own paid on-site professional. If nothing else they do have to be very careful under increasingly tight 'safety at work' legislation and questions of public liability.

That an unreasonable 'Catch 22' situation can arise from all these quite reasonable viewpoints has recently been demonstrated at an Avon County dig at Stonehill, Warmley. Being in the line of the intended Bristol Ring Road, a traditional style excavation was mounted last December to uncover Roman remains disclosed, by trial trenching. These excavation also uncovered the tops of some very early 'Bell Pit' coal workings.

BIAS members and other volunteers from Kingswood History Society came on site, by invitation, to see if anything could be learnt from excavating

the top of one of these pits - particularly to try and find dateable remains and resolve the question as to how such shafts were originally lined, leaving the professional team to concentrate their very limited time on the rest of the site. Work on the Pit continued for several week-ends until the professional team had run out of their funded period.

Without allocated funds, Avon County Council cannot employ a site archaeologist. Without a site archaeologist all volunteer work on County Council land has to stop. The day when the road goes through gets ever closer; when it does there will be a rush to recover details of any uncovered remains - not the best of times to do so with men and bulldozers impatiently waiting.

Oh, there is just one other point that I omitted to mention. On site are outcrops of very good Haematite iron ore and many traces of Bloomery Slag - somewhere very close, probably in the line of the Ring Road, must be the remains of one or more Medieval bloomery smelting furnaces, possibly of National importance - certainly of great local historic interest. The trouble is no one can be permitted to look for it. Just before Christmas a meeting was held with Officers of Avon County Council, who have undertaken to see if there are any ways and means of getting around this illogical impasse. We must all hope that they do.

This edition of the Journal concentrates on the Golden Valley Colliery site at Bitton. As excavation work there is now coming to an end, the culmination of eight years of unpaid weekend site work by BIAS members, it is thought an appropriate time to publish an account of, and the results from, all those efforts. This is something of which BIAS can be justly proud and no other IA Society can match it in terms of devoted physical endeavour all achieved without recourse (so far) to public funds. Work will continue on site for the more 'greener' aspects and those of long term preservation. Needless to say further volunteers for this are always welcome, even for a short time - just 'phone up John Cornwall .