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CONTRIBUTIONS to Cornish Archaeology should be sent to the Editor, Air Photographs Unit, RCHME, Fortress House, 23 Savile Row, London W1X 2HE.

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CORNISH ARCHAEOLOGY

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Editorial

As promised, this year's issue of *Cornish Archaeology* departs temporarily from its normal format. To celebrate the 25th birthday of the formation of the Cornwall Archaeological Society (from the honoured ashes of the old West Cornwall Field Club, the 50th anniversary of whose foundation we celebrated in 1985) the usual array of excavation and survey reports has been replaced by a series of specially commissioned papers that together review the archaeological achievements of the past quarter century.

That the Society should have chosen to mark its Silver Jubilee in this way is singularly appropriate, for it was in 1958 that the West Cornwall Field Club celebrated its own 25th anniversary with the publication of a similar review under the title 'Archaeology in Cornwall 1933–1958'. (*Proceedings of the West Cornwall Field Club*, Vol.2, No.2). In that slim and now sadly scarce volume, seven authors (amongst them, and as their editor, our current President) provided the first general archaeological account of the county to have appeared since the publication of Hencken's pioneering *Archaeology of Cornwall and Scilly* in 1932. Now, 29 years later, we seek to supplement those two earlier works of synthesis with a further survey, this time focussing on the results and ideas generated between 1958 and the anniversary year of 1986. That this new survey extends to more than 200 pages, compared with the modest 75 pages of its predecessor, is no indictment of its authors. On the contrary, it reflects the extraordinary burst of archaeological activity – both professional and amateur – that has taken place during the lifetime of our still-youthful Society. As a result of sustained programmes of research and rescue excavation, of field survey and documentary research, the past two decades have witnessed an unprecedented explosion in the quantity and variety of archaeological information now available to us. At the same time, new approaches to the interpretation and explanation of that evidence are radically altering the way in which we view the activities of man in both the distant and more recent past.

To bring this very considerable body of new information and ideas together, eight members of the Society, each an authority on one of the principal archaeological periods or areas of Cornwall, were invited to provide a series of papers (or more properly chapters), in which they would review the results of the last quarter century and look ahead to the outstanding archaeological problems that remain to be tackled during the decades to come. At the same time, Nicholas Johnson, as Director of the Cornwall Archaeological Unit, and Professor Charles Thomas were asked to provide two concluding essays of a more wide-ranging nature. In the former, Nick Johnson identifies the many threats that still face Cornwall's unique archaeological heritage and outlines the kinds of conservation, management and educational strategies that will be needed if that heritage is not only to be preserved, but properly and widely appreciated by Cornishmen and visitors alike. In the latter, Professor Thomas, in his unique capacity as the Society's founding father, former Honorary Editor and current President, reviews the past achievements of the Cornwall Archaeological Society and looks forward to the vital rôle that it and its membership must play during what promises to be a no less exciting and eventful second quarter century.

Although all of our authors were free to approach their subject matter in whatever way they chose, each was from the outset urged to respect one simple editorial request: that his or her material should be presented in a form that was at once clear, readable and as free as possible of the wordy technical jargon that unfortunately characterises so many of today's excavation reports and academic papers. Given the sophisticated objectives and techniques of modern archaeology, much of that technicality remains unavoidable at the level of primary publication,

but it does little to assist in the all-important business of practical communication. As the flood of specialist literature increases (as is only too well evidenced by the length of the bibliographies appended to the present collection of papers) we find ourselves in increasing need of more general articles that synthesise and explain the results of research in plain language – not only for the benefit of the informed layman, but equally for those whose specialised interests lie within other areas and archaeological periods. It is articles of just that kind that our present contributors have provided, and we should all be grateful for the time and pains that they have together taken to paint this new and vivid portrait of Cornwall's emerging past. In twenty years time their survey, like those of their predecessors, will almost certainly need to be re-written. But that is as exactly as it should be, for it is the multitude of fresh and fascinating questions raised within these pages that is going to provide the stimulus for a whole new generation of work within the county.

Looking back to Charles Thomas' editorial to the first issue of *Cornish Archaeology* we are reminded that the old West Cornwall Field Club boasted just 50 members at the end of the War. By August 1961 that figure had climbed to 150, and a year later, four months onward from the public launching of the infant Cornwall Archaeological Society, it had reached 250. Today, the number exceeds 700 and bears witness to a sustained and most encouraging growth of interest in the county's unique archaeological heritage. At the same time, the undoubted successes of the past should not allow us to become complacent. In his concluding paper, the Society's President looks in detail at some of the many challenges that lie ahead, but this editorial is perhaps an appropriate place in which to identify one particular issue that we cannot afford to ignore.

Throughout its history, British archaeology has gained immeasurable benefit from the sheer diversity of its amateur practitioners and their backgrounds. The concept of the vocational archaeologist, formally trained in the subject and its practice is very new, but in some parts of the country has already begun to raise difficult and as yet unresolved questions. What part of the business of practical archaeology henceforth becomes the special preserve of those who inhabit the new 'expert' professional sector, and what rôles remain (or should be developed) for the far greater number who wish simply to devote their leisure hours and well-earned retirements to the subject? During the last ten years or so, a national network of professionally-staffed archaeological units and county Sites and Monuments Records has sprung up and might seem, to some eyes, to have taken on many of the tasks that were once the responsibility of local and county societies like our own. In Cornwall the relationship between the CAS and the Cornwall Archaeological Unit, established a decade ago as the Cornwall Committee for Rescue Archaeology, has fortunately proved to be a particularly happy and constructive one. Each has played its own special part in work of investigating and recording the county's distant and not-so-distant past, and we can be optimistic that this healthy interaction will continue far into the future. So much remains to be achieved, and if the CAS can continue to identify projects and activities for which it is uniquely fitted – not only in the traditional business of digging and parish recording, but in newer activities such as the practical conservation and presentation of archaeological sites – the next quarter century will be as exciting and memorable as the last.