

An Archaeological Research Centre for the London Region

JEREMY HASLAM

TWO RECENT conferences at Nottingham and London, on aspects of the crisis facing British archaeology, have highlighted the acute problems faced by archaeologists concerned with the investigation of sites which are being threatened in increasing numbers. I would, therefore, like to put forward some suggestions relating to ideas brought out at these conferences which might lead to a possible solution of the archaeological problems peculiar to the London region.

While working for a year with the Oxford Archaeological Excavation Committee, I became very impressed with the organisation and effort put into the methodical extraction of archaeological and historical information over large areas of the old town, and more importantly, by the facilities for processing and writing up of the information and finds made possible by a centrally organised unit.

Since coming to London I have been struck by the contrast in the archaeological picture between Oxford and here, even allowing for the difference in areas. The archaeological scene here appears so fragmentary that it is difficult to realise at a superficial glance that there is any co-ordination of archaeological work throughout London as a whole, just as it is all too obvious that the number of final reports on excavations conducted in the region (including the City) can be numbered on the fingers of one hand. For instance, as is well known, the many rescue excavations in the City have had to remain unpublished beyond the stage of brief interim reports through lack of time on the part of Guildhall Museum staff; and the work of the Southwark and Lambeth Archaeological Society is

severely restricted by lack of space, time and manpower to process and write up their mountains of finds.

What therefore seems necessary is a body whose concern is with the **whole** of the London region (which one might define as the administrative area of Greater London), and whose responsibility would be, briefly, to co-ordinate and materially assist all the piecemeal and fragmentary archaeological research at present being undertaken in this region.

Without wishing to seem critical of, or wishing to overide, existing arrangements or organisations—many of them long standing—I should like to propose the establishment of a London Archaeological Research Centre (LARC), for the existence of which there are many precedents in provincial towns, such as Winchester, Oxford, Southampton, Exeter, etc. There is at present no organisation in the London region with a sphere of reference wide enough to comprehend the vast problems of the recovery of the patterns of prehistoric and historic settlement in the region as a whole, or to tackle the problems of retrieving and publishing this information on other than a very parochial and unsatisfactory scale. I therefore envisage LARC as having the following aims:

1. To act as a collector, administrator and distributor of funds for emergency excavations in the London region, and for whatever research is necessary for their analysis and proper publication.
2. To realise the full potential of the London region by drawing up a coordinated programme of research priorities which will take into account

Greenwich Palace Excavations—continued

pital is at present unclear. A painting in the Maritime Museum attributed to Vostermann shows the tilt-yard towers partially demolished, and some of the river front of the old palace still standing beside the King's House; the Royal Observatory, which can be seen in the painting, provides a *terminus post quem* of 1676. A plan of c. 1694/5 describes most of the palace site as "the Works." Between 1676 and 1694/5, then, the area excavated in 1970 had been levelled. Above the demolished walls of the palace piles of lime and unused brickbats remained from the building work of the 1690's. In the SE corner of the site a small brick structure had been built on the demolition debris. It consisted of a circular core of brickwork divided into two halves by a vent, with two pairs of screen walls running

from the core. There were traces of charcoal and crushed shell, and it seems most likely that the structure was the lowest part of a kiln for the burning of the lime mortar required for the building of the Hospital.

Further Digging

The excavations have thus achieved their initial object: the alignment of the river front of the palace has been established and we now know the exact location of an important part of the plan, the great tower. It is clear that much of the palace still lies below the Grand Square, and a second season, in which more of the palace may be uncovered, is proposed between 2 April and 22 May 1971. We have urgent need of volunteers, skilled or unskilled, to help with the work. All who wish to join in will be most welcome, and should write to me at New College, Oxford.

long term development projects in this area, including the City.

3. To provide adequate representation of the interests of archaeology to the appropriate planning and development authorities.
4. To assist emergency excavations as required.
5. To provide facilities and experienced personnel for archaeological surveys in advance of redevelopment.
6. To provide for adequate means for historical and topographical research and for the conservation, storage, processing, analysis and eventual publication of finds.
7. To help coordinate the activities of both professional and amateurs engaged in active field-work with these aims in view.

Operating with these aims in mind LARC would therefore function as one centralised unit responsible for all the archaeological work within the London region, and it must in consequence be able to act with the widest possible sphere of reference. I envisage the Research Centre as having a single Director responsible for the overall planning and execution of excavation and research in this area. He would necessarily be assisted by a number of permanent and full time field officers working over areas of greater or lesser extent (depending on the archaeological potential of these areas), as well as one or more professional excavation teams of permanent and full-time supervisors and diggers.

As well as this the excavations must be published fully and promptly—**an aim of the utmost priority**. The Director would therefore be assisted by a number of researchers responsible for draughtsmanship and for analysing and drawing finds. He should also be assisted by a historical researcher whose duty would be to investigate both the documentation of sites and the broader questions of the topography of the several areas arising out of the analysis of the archaeological information.

The Director would be responsible with his field officers and researchers for ensuring the publication of final reports. It is also envisaged that the Director would have at his disposal sufficient funds to acquire a stock of equipment for the use of all the field officers and local groups as needed. It might even be possible to purchase a J.C.B., which could earn its keep by being hired out at commercial rates to excavation contractors. (LARC would also thereby be in a position to tender at favourable rates for the commercial excavation of archaeologically significant sites).

LARC would therefore be able to operate most fully in the interests of London's archaeology as a whole by bringing together the interests of the many separate groups in the London region into an organised unity. To all intents and purposes the structure

of LARC will be very nearly equivalent to the idea of a Regional Antiquities Centre as proposed by Professor Cunliffe in the meeting in London on 23rd January on "The Crisis in Field Archaeology."

It must be emphasised however that LARC would not supersede the existing groups and professionals now digging in London. So much in the London region is achieved by part-time and enthusiastic amateurs (as well as the two dedicated but over-worked professional field officers) that such a research unit would only function by working within the existing framework — and would, it must be hoped, draw on the fund of knowledge and enthusiasm which only they can supply. The function of LARC therefore must be to co-ordinate and assist the activities of these local groups. It would underwrite their efforts by making available:—

1. Funds for surveying and excavating on threatened sites.
2. The help of trained full-time diggers and supervisors to carry out excavations quickly and on more than a week-end basis.
3. The provision of equipment free or at nominal rates.
4. Backing facilities for the storage, processing and analysis of finds with expert assistance in the prompt preparation of reports.

Similarly, LARC must work in the closest possible co-operation with the many museums in London. Indeed the material from excavations conducted by it must eventually be made over to the new Museum of London, as publication, display and education must be regarded as important aims of any archaeological research, as they are of any museum. (It would also be hoped that LARC might eventually be housed in this Museum to the mutual benefit of both).

For all this of course an adequate supply of funds is necessary. This has been achieved elsewhere in other towns and cities and basically there is no reason why London should be unable to raise the money. The very existence of a centralised research unit will itself attract funds from the large number of potential sources, and it will be able to co-ordinate and provide the mouthpiece for the many powerful voices and influential bodies whose interests lie in the recovery of London's past.

I am sure that a large problem can only be tackled by a large organisation with adequate resources; and that a co-ordinated policy for excavation on a large scale would achieve far more than the sum total of the efforts of individuals and comparatively isolated groups of workers.

This organisation will naturally take time to build up but given the maximum co-operation and good will of all, LARC should, for the first time in the London region "set before the eyes of the living the fall and fortunes of the dead."