

A C.B.A. Group for London

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AS MANY readers will already know, in 1973, the Department of the Environment embarked on a course of regional (now called 'area') arrangements for rescue excavation and archaeological surveys. The original idea was that each region of three or four counties would have its own archaeological unit.

Regional Advisory Committees

The concept of a regional archaeological unit has not proved to be altogether practicable. The present evolution of ideas has led to the establishment of an advisory Committee of the Ancient Monuments Board for England and thirteen Area Advisory Committees whose function will be to advise the Department of the Environment on all aspects of local rescue archaeology including the allocation of grants, on policies for surveys and excavations, and on facilities in the area to ensure the completion and publication of archaeological reports. Grants will not be made through these Committees but will be paid direct to the recipients by the most appropriate means, the Committees will not have any executive functions.

It is envisaged that the members of the Advisory Committees will have a thorough knowledge of the archaeology of their own areas. Membership, which will be on a personal, rather than a representative basis, will be for a three-year term, but some arrangement will be made initially to ensure an orderly rotation of members. The chairmen of the regional Committees will not be ex-officio members of the Committee of the Ancient Monuments Board.

An officer of the Department will be appointed as Committee Secretary, and clerical assistance will be arranged if necessary, for such tasks as circulating papers. Premises for Committee meetings will be provided by the Department or arranged otherwise as is convenient. Members will be able to claim appropriate travel and subsistence allowances.

The Council for British Archaeology has expressed its wholehearted approval for this regional structure for archaeology since it believes that "this represents the most effective and academically justifiable basis for dealing with the crisis that confronts British archaeology, and for the expenditure of Government money. The C.B.A.'s own regional organisation, which corresponds broadly with the DoE areas will co-operate with the new Advisory Committees in every way possible."

The London Region

From the beginning Greater London was, exceptionally, to be an area on its own, thus not only breaking it away from the traditional C.B.A. Group 10, but also firmly and finally combining areas covered by four county societies.

Essex and Hertfordshire, once linked with 'London' in Group 10, are to join Cambridgeshire in the new Group 7, while Surrey and Kent (Group 11A) are to be reunited with (East and West) Sussex (Group 11B) to form the new Group 11.

Attempts are currently being made to find a chairman for the Greater London Advisory Committee. When a suitable candidate has been found, the Committee should come into being shortly afterwards.

Past History of the London Group

The old C.B.A. Group 10 included 'London' (or more — or less — precisely that undefined area covered by the London and Middlesex Archaeological Society), Hertfordshire and Essex. The original Group had its heyday in a quiet sort of way but it eventually collapsed as its meetings became too unwieldy and because of the lack of common interest among its urban and rural members. The final blow was the emigration of its secretary up north. As Dr. John Kent once wrote, "Few really mourned its passing; few desired its resuscitation."

Nevertheless in 1969 C.B.A. did try to resuscitate the Group in its old form. However determined opposition from the three county organisations who saw the Group as yet another unnecessary committee, ensured that its organisation was kept skeletal: a representative in rotation from each body was annually elected to serve of the C.B.A. Executive Committee and to compile a suitable entry for the C.B.A.

Annual Report.

The general reorganisation of C.B.A. Groups throughout the country is presenting another chance for Greater London which is to be called Group 8. Sometime in the future a meeting will be held to see what local societies feel and want.

Apart from having a measure of representation on the Executive Committee, a C.B.A. Group for Greater London seems completely unnecessary. LAMAS already organises the annual local history and archaeological conferences; the London Archaeologist publishes an annual round-up of excavations;

the county societies currently administer DoE grants — which the C.B.A. is not allowed to handle as it is itself in receipt of government money. So what is there left for a Greater London Group to do?

In other parts of England a C.B.A. Group may have its uses in pulling together an area, but in London the situation is unique — there is a one-county area. Who wants “yet another unnecessary committee?”

The Role of the County Societies

The administrative region of Greater London contains areas covered by four ‘county’ organisations — London and Middlesex Archaeological Society (which operates mainly north of the Thames), Surrey Archaeological Society (south of the Thames), Kent Archaeological Society (south-east outer London) and Essex Archaeological Society (east of the River Lea); in the case of the last two societies there is a slight complication as each has in its own area what may be termed an ‘umbrella’ organisation, viz, Council for Kentish Archaeology and the Essex Archaeological and Historical Congress to which the two county societies respectively belong.

The advantage of an Advisory Committee covering the whole of Greater London are plain enough, particularly now that the G.L.C. has at last been empowered to make grants towards archaeology.

On the other hand there are a number of disadvantages — the involvement of four different county organisations means that differing viewpoints and methods are likely to be put to the G.L.C. and other

bodies covering the same area. However, there is already a Joint Working Party on which serve representatives from the four societies — it was from this fairly informal group that the new Inner London Archaeological Unit has emerged.

What London needs . . .

The City and nine of the 32 London boroughs have units of their own; another three to seven boroughs in the south-west may shortly have a unit. That still leaves sixteen to twenty boroughs yet to have units.

The DoE seems to be returning towards the concept of an all-London regional group but such an organisation would be unwieldy. It would be far more practical to first of all divide the remaining boroughs into potential unit-groupings; on this point the DoE should either take the lead or exhort the four county societies to work out a suitable plan. Such an allocation should not necessarily group boroughs within the old county boundaries, nor, even worse, within the confines of rivers. It is a well-worn phrase, but worth repeating — ‘Rivers are basically lines of communication and not frontiers.’

The second object must be to turn the Joint Working Party into a formal organisation which can act in an executive capacity for the whole of Greater London and which can receive DoE grants. In addition, this organisation, using some suitable ploy, could as occasion demands put on a C.B.A. Group hat for sending a representative to Executive Council meetings.

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