

The City of London Unit: first year of operations

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MANY DIFFICULT problems faced the Department of Urban Archaeology, Guildhall Museum (D.U.A.) when it was formed in December 1973; not least was the backlog of sites requiring immediate excavation. The New Fresh Wharf excavation at Billingsgate was started within the first week of operations, and the St. Mildred's Bread Street site excavated over Christmas and the New Year. Staffing was a major consideration during most of 1974, as was the related problem of limited accommodation for processing finds and publication. In retrospect, it seems quite remarkable that so many worthwhile results were achieved and other objectives recognised, though not satisfactorily resolved.

The D.U.A., as any other organisation, relies heavily upon the quality, integrity and dedication of its staff. During 1974, it is these characteristics that have produced satisfactory results against very frustrating working conditions. From the beginning staff organisation has been based on a system of corporate management working towards agreed and defined objectives. All staff from the trainee digger to the Chief Urban Archaeologist have had to ensure that each day's work sees a contribution towards these objectives. If this is not recognised, the challenge of an answer to rescue archaeology in the City will not be met by the limited resources available. Many of the temporary staff have now been with the D.U.A. since 1973, being paid on a fee and subsistence basis. During the current year it is hoped that a more satisfactory method of employment will be agreed.

The major problem of 1974, and to a lesser extent 1975, is that of adequate working space for the Finds Section. The number of objects recovered from City excavations is quite remarkable and the D.U.A. can only work in a cost effective manner if there is an adequate long term storage capacity. At the present time negotiations are at an advanced stage to acquire the old Guildhall Library basement (and the first City museum) in Basinghall Street. This building's geographical position and its vast areas of book racking makes it an invaluable inheritance from the Corporation of London. Its occupation by the D.U.A. is vital to the 1975 works programme.

Excavation during 1974 was mainly on the waterfront, where the outstanding results have more than justified this priority. Outstanding even among these was the discovery of a section of Roman riverside wall under Upper Thames Street east of the Mermaid Theatre (see p.260). Roman, Saxon and medieval

timber waterfronts have been uncovered in a remarkable state of preservation, with much environmental material also recovered. During 1975 the site east and south of St. Magnus the Martyr, Lower Thames Street, will be trenched to seek the much sought after Roman bridge. At the time of writing a decision is imminent from the developers.

During 1975 the field research policy will concentrate once more on the waterfront sites, especially those which could further the understanding of post-Roman to pre-Conquest occupation. Early in 1974, the second D.U.A. site to be excavated, that of St. Mildred's, revealed evidence of Saxon house structures. The first new site of 1975 at Newgate Street, just north of St. Paul's, has already produced pre-Conquest pottery.

Working conditions on sites have gradually improved and during 1975 Polyspan shelters will ensure both drier working conditions and continuous use of labour. The Newgate Street excavation now provides ideal staff hutting facilities which will now become standard on all sites.

One of the more encouraging signs for the future programme of excavations has been the friendly and co-operative response of developers, architects, site engineers, etc., both on private and City Corporation sites. There have been several modest financial contributions towards the work by companies who have already made their sites available for excavation. In addition, contractors have provided very valuable material help in the removal of spoil heaps, loan of plant and technical advice. During the Christmas period in 1974 the Baynard's Castle site was made available for a salvage excavation but once the "professionalism" of the team of both full-time and week-end volunteer diggers had impressed the contractors, they allowed sufficient weekly extensions to produce a more exact research type examination. The ensuing publicity on television and in the Press reflected highly on the contractor's attitude which was a model of what can be achieved, there being the right spirit of mutual co-operation and respect for the other man's job.

Good progress is being made on completing the reports on sites excavated before 1974. The Roman Palace site will be published during 1975 and the Basilica Forum will follow in 1976. Preliminary work has commenced on Baynard's Castle, another major site, and the report should be published by 1980. Other lesser sites will be published before that

date and the total backlog of some seventy-four sites completed within a period in excess of ten years.

The publication of sites excavated since the inception of the Department of Urban Archaeology has already been programmed but with some twelve or so sites excavated in the first year, more and more labour resources are having to be made available to both processing the finds and completing the archival documentation. However, the present programme for 1975 should see the final reports on St. Mildred's (1974) with the New Fresh Wharf/Billingsgate, and Angel Court (1974) following in 1976. Interim reports are due or promised in the *London Archaeologist* and *Current Archaeology* on the Minorities (1974), Ludgate (1974), River Wall (1975) and Seal House (1974). Summary reports on all sites will appear in *Britannia* and *Medieval Archaeology* and in the D.U.A.'s own annual reports, the first of which is now due to be circulated. The writer has publicly stated that there will not be "excavation without publication" in the D.U.A. and it is hoped the first year's work reflects this philosophy, though this is stated without any sense of complacency.

The D.U.A. attempted in the Autumn of 1974 a joint public relations exercise with RESCUE on the Trig Lane site. However, due to the remoteness of the location, difficulty of access and continuous bad weather, public response was not as great as was expected. During 1975 the long-term G.P.O. site in Newgate Street will become the major publicity outlet for the D.U.A. Already the call for volunteers has been nobly met by employees of the G.P.O. In the following months as more and more structural features appear, the general public will be encouraged to inspect the work on all working days. Special "Citydig" posters will be seen on the hoarding protecting the site and these will appear during 1975 on all D.U.A. sites.

The City of London Archaeological Society has through the good offices of its chairman (a supervisor with the D.U.A.) become more and more active in week-end digging. This has been reflected in an increase in membership for the Society and during 1975 the G.P.O. dig will have posters encouraging visitors to join the Society. The D.U.A. is very anxious to involve volunteers in its work both on the excavations and in processing the finds.

The D.U.A. is the only major archaeological unit in Britain which is a department of a museum. Before 1974 there were many critics of such an arrangement, when independent units alone seemed to have the freedom of action to produce worthwhile results. Now, after its first year of operation the D.U.A. should have allayed any fears regarding London and demonstrated to the museum world the need for action in rescue archaeology. As Chief Urban Archaeologist of the City of London, the writer strongly holds the view that the D.U.A. has (and gives) an ideal support organisation in the Guildhall Museum and Museum of London, which independent units should envy; the D.U.A. is greatly enriching the museum display, teaching and reference collections. During 1974 the Finds Section established a documentary procedure which records the finds from the site to eventual museum accessioning. Considerable interest has been shown both by units and museums and it is quite clear that the Section is carrying valuable work in procedures which others may wish to adopt.

In sum: during the first year the D.U.A. had to establish a basic organisation which was capable of producing worthwhile archaeological results in excavation, finds processing and publication. This has been achieved. The major challenge of 1975 will be to improve and refine the methods and organisation, especially in staff working conditions, recruitment and training. If these too are achieved, the D.U.A. will be poised in 1976 for a year when today's potential will be fully realised.

Annual General Meeting

The London Archaeologist Association

THIS WILL take place at 6.30 p.m. on Friday, 16th May, in the Concert Hall of the City Literary Institute, Stukeley Street, off Drury Lane.

The annual report and accounts will be presented. The proceedings will include the election of officers and also the election to the Publication Committee of the six local society representatives whose nominations should be made in writing not less than 14 days before the A.G.M. to the Chairman, Montague

Chambers, Montague Close, S.E.1.

Local Societies are invited to send one representative with voting powers to the A.G.M.; individual subscribers to the magazine and their friends will also be welcome to attend. A copy of the agenda has been circulated to all societies known to be interested in the *London Archaeologist*.

Following the A.G.M. Mr. Anthony Legge, staff tutor in archaeology at London University, will talk on "Environmental Archaeology in London".