

Principles of Publication in Rescue Archaeology

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IT HAS for some time seemed to me that a study, following up the publishing history of British excavations undertaken between say, 1960 and 1969, would be an instructive exercise. How many of those completed could be shown to have been published in anything approaching an acceptable final form? Not many, would be my guess.

Certainly that would be the case for London: perhaps as many as 50 excavations and observations undertaken in the City before the 1970's await publication, and none of the first 10 SAEC excavations of Roman sites undertaken between 1962 and 1969 has been fully reported on.

The reasons for failing to publish are no doubt complex. Much must stem from the past failure to provide funds adequate to allow post-excavation work to take place — something now being remedied by the Department of the Environment. Other reasons may have included lack of expertise, dedication, time or interest. Certainly the idea that post-excavation work requires resources at least comparable to those provided for digging was either not accepted or not acted on by those responsible for providing funds.

Equally seriously, this has continued into the 1970's. The vastly increased DoE expenditure on rescue archaeology — from £200,000 in 1970/71 to £1,536,000 in 1975/76 in England — seems to have gone largely into excavation. According to figures made available by the Department, only 5% went into post-excavation work in 1973/74, 15% in 1974/75 and 22% in 1975/76. No doubt these and earlier figures were reflected in the low proportion of DoE funds which went into publications: 1% in 1973/74 and 2% in both 1974/75 and 1975/76.

It is obviously accepted that publication is one of the major end products of the archaeological process and the belief that "a crisis in publication is now apparent" embodies the findings of the Ancient Monuments Board for England's Committee for Rescue Archaeology in their *Principles of Publication in Rescue Archaeology*. Essentially the Board is concerned not only with publication but with an area where further problems lie — the storage of the non-published information and the finds.

The Board accepts that what is needed is full but concise publication. It breaks down the archaeological "data" into four levels, and suggests that the publication should be confined largely to that from Level IV. This would include for the site "synthesised descriptions with supporting data" and for the objects "selected finds and specialist reports relevant to synthesis." However as a proviso it insists that the Level III data, which is basically the fuller data and reports on the site and finds, is readily available for examination. For Level III data which may require circulation it suggests that the DoE publishes that seen as more significant in a new periodical or series of occasional papers.

The reports also recommends that all the lower level data, including the finds, should be lodged in an archive.

It sensibly concludes that local museums should get the finds only if they are prepared to maintain the archive and do the necessary circulation of Level III data. It also suggests that the National Monuments Record should run a national archive, and that much quantitative information should be stored in computers.

Apart from defining what is necessary to publish, the Board also examines problems of editing, publication costs, and available media, which they see as major obstacles to production.

They advise the establishment of editorial committees — to examine style and content (with the DoE paying consultancy fees) and they make it clear that the DoE's publication grant of up to ⅓rds to journals should be extended and raised.

Amongst publishing developments, they suggest grant-aided reports by independent publishers and the establishment of series of national society monographs. Although generally against the substitution of offset-litho for conventional printing methods, both on the grounds of cost and editorial control, they would encourage the proposed CBA series for smaller excavation reports.

Certainly what the Board writes is sensible. There will be little historical advance if the facts, and the observations and conclusions which are based on them, are not published. What has been worked on but not published, as well as the actual records, must be adequately stored for future re-interpretation. Local museums may have a right to the local material but this must be accompanied by appropriate expenditure to ensure proper archives.

Yet has the Board correctly or fully diagnosed the cause of the publishing problem? Though few would doubt that not enough is published, the Board does not actually state what is causing the crisis. Is it the lack of reports coming through to journals? Is it their quality? Or is it that the publishers cannot afford to print them? Unfortunately no factual information is presented on this.

Indeed, it could probably be shown by the amount of pre-1970 publication still unpublished that the problem, although exacerbated, has not been created by the provision of the relatively vast funds of the 1970's. It may well be that unless archaeological units, whether within museums or independent, are established on a secure, permanent basis where staff are employed to see the work through, it will not be possible to ensure that reports are made ready for publication. In this case, so long as the Government sees rescue archaeology as a response to "threatened monuments" and not in terms of the creation of proper long term organisations, the problems of publications and archives will be with us.