

# A C.B.A. Group for London?

NICHOLAS FARRANT

A MEETING is to be called in the New Year at which proposals will be made to create a Council for British Archaeology regional group for Greater London. It is expected that invitations will be sent to more than one hundred local archaeological, historical and kindred societies.

Because this proposed re-formation of a CBA group covering London is of wide concern, I have attempted in this article to air the matter in as objective a manner as possible so that local society representatives will have some basis upon which they can formulate their primary views.<sup>1</sup> Thus, I hope, they will be able to weigh up the various arguments postulated at the proposed meeting, unswayed by the oratory and emotion of the moment, and that when the decisive vote is taken, it will produce a fair result which will be in the best interests of London's archaeology.

## The Background

The Council for British Archaeology, as the co-ordinating body for British archaeology, is currently composed of some four hundred archaeological (in the widest sense) organisations, ranging from small local groups to university departments. Matters of local interest are dealt with by regional groups, comprising, in England, various combinations of counties. These groups which have an institutional membership, are all directly represented on the Executive Board of C.B.A. which thus is able to claim to be speaking for the country as a whole.

With the recent formation of new local government administrative areas, the proposed composition of the groups has been varied to reflect the areas covered by the Department of the Environment's thirteen Area Advisory Committees. Currently, the only area where there is no regional group is in Greater London, a situation which has effectively existed since the mid-60's. Admittedly, following an earlier period of pressure from the CBA the three county organisations notionally in the, then, Group 10<sup>2</sup> did compromise by forming a skeleton group which annually elected a representative in rotation from each body to serve on the CBA Executive Committee and to compile a suitable entry for the CBA's Annual Report. With the new proposals for regional groups, this arrangement has come to an end, leaving Greater London in an individual situation.

## What does a C.B.A. Group do?

Obviously the activities of each group vary somewhat, but the following will give some idea of the general pattern:

1. It offers institutional membership to local organisations, who have to pay a levy towards the expenses of the Group, in addition to the subscription paid to central CBA; some groups also offer individual membership.

2. It nominates a representative to serve on the CBA Executive Board and prepares a contribution to the Annual Report.

3. It sometimes administers DoE grants.

4. It produces an annual list of excavations.

5. It organises an annual archaeological conference, together with other special conferences as necessary.

1. Henry Cleere, the Director of the CBA, was invited by the Editor to contribute his views — he declined, preferring to let CBA's case rest upon his letter in Vol 2 No 9 p.234. The CBA has featured many times in *the London Archaeologist*: in particular readers are referred to a

6. It generally co-ordinates the work of local organisations.

7. It encourages the conservation of historic buildings and monuments.

8. It organises rescue excavations.

9. It provides a forum for discussion at one or more meetings a year.

10. It has committee meetings.

Other activities may include running summer schools, general publicity, odd publications, raising funds, etc.

## The Argument for a full-scale Group for London

A study of the ten items will immediately show how important they all are for the archaeological well-being of an area. With regional groups established countrywide it would be unfortunate for Greater London to be the odd man out.

## The Argument against a full-scale Group for London

The basic premise is that seven of the ten points mentioned above are already provided under what appears to be a very workable system; two of the remainder are expensive in monetary or manpower terms without producing any compensating benefit, while there is an easy solution for the last point.

3. DoE grants are already administered by the various county societies.

4. An annual list of excavations is featured in the Spring edition of *the London Archaeologist*.

5. Both an annual archaeological conference and a local history one are already held by LAMAS, while both LAMAS and SAS have produced conferences on specific topics from time to time.

6. The work of local organisations is already brought together through the LAMAS Borough Secretaries Committee.

7. LAMAS Historic Buildings Preservation Committee already covers Greater London with help from other county organisations for the peripheral areas.

8. Rescue is already well looked after by the various units and societies, with help of sundry committees.

9. With the various conferences, committees and *the London Archaeologist*, there seems to be an adequate amount of fora already in existence.

Of the remaining points, no. 1 sounds expensive and unnecessary in London while with no. 2 the existing London Joint Working Party consisting of LAMAS, SAS and organisations covering those parts of Greater London formerly in Essex and Kent could quite easily nominate a representative for Greater London and produce an Annual Report contribution. Lastly, under no. 10 a regional group would need the usual run of officers with the usual run of committees. Of the former the best candidates are already in harness — and of the latter who wants more committee meetings?

The best solution for Greater London seems to be for another coat to be hung over the Joint Working Party suitably dignified when necessary by the appellation of a

(continued on p.25)

general article (Vol 1 No 14 p.320) and one on the subject of a group for London (Vol 2 No 8 p.202).

2. London & Middlesex, Essex and Hertfordshire; the last two are now expected to be in the new Group 7.

# Letters

## ENVIRONMENTAL ARCHAEOLOGY: A POLICY FOR LONDON?

THE AUTHORS are right in bringing to the attention of readers in the last issue of *the London Archaeologist* the need for more funds and effort to be channeled into the scientific examination of archaeological deposits in the London area. However their analysis of the "demand for environmental work" and "information required" exhibits a basic misunderstanding of the empirical approach which researchers would have to adopt. Experience has shown, both from my work in the City and of my colleagues elsewhere that it is not possible to make *a priori* assumptions based on data from analysis or organic remains from archaeological excavations. Results turn up more questions, which in turn require answers — simple interpretations are rarely possible. Research into London's natural history does not merely require "collection (sampling) sorting, liaison with specialists and interpretation" as is suggested, but rather a full research programme should be undertaken. This would involve the building up of reference collections of both modern and ancient specimens, as I have started in the case of seeds. Much information is required on modern ecology and microhabitats of organisms in urban and other environment, to aid interpretation. Systematic records must be kept and experiments carried out on sampling techniques, rather than standardizing present methods.

A research programme of this kind could not operate on a basis of the organisation proposed in the article. The prestructuring of an organisation of this kind is always dangerous, however, since each area of study is essentially dependent on information from other areas for interpretation. I suggest a team approach with minimum use of external specialists. Four or five researchers in a flexible organisation should be able to cover most of the topics which a multidisciplinary approach of this kind demands, with two, preferably three, technicians and if possible a historian. To employ a "general environmentalist" — a species which I have yet to meet — two specialists and five (!) technicians would produce little more in terms of output than we see at present.

Much of the information retrieved from a study of this kind will be of little direct use to the archaeologist; this is by no means to invalidate it, for the organic remains are of as much part of the finds from an excavation as the pottery. But more important, where relevant information is recovered, it can be of extreme importance to the archaeologist in building up an accurate picture of past communities.

GEORGE WILLCOX

D. U. A., Museum of London,  
71 Basinghall Street,  
E.C.2.

(continued from p.24)

CBA regional group.

### The Vote

When the vote is finally held on whether there is to be a full-scale regional group for Greater London, I hope that if the decision goes against CBA's proposals, that body will have the grace to accept a democratic response and tailor its policies accordingly. Likewise, if the vote were to go the other way, I hope that all dissidents, including myself, would accept the decision and strive for a successful group.

## GALLIPOTS

THE WORD "gallipot" has a long, if not always entirely clear, history of usage as a ceramics term. The *OED* defines a gallipot as "A small earthen glazed pot, esp. one used by apothecaries for ointments and medicines", and instances various 19th-century uses of the term, citing Dickens in *Little Dorrit* (1855) referring to a fly-trap of vinegar and sugar in gallipots, E. H. Patterson's *A Glossary of Words in Use in the Counties of Antrim and Down* of 1880 defining "Gaily pot" as a jam pot, and Stevenson in *Treasure Island* (1883) using the word metaphorically when referring to a "little gallipot of a boat" (though one wonders if he was not subconsciously associating the word with "galliot.") The latest (6th ed, 1976) *Concise Oxford Dictionary* includes gallipot with no indication of its being obsolete or obsolescent and gives the same meaning as above — "Small earthen glazed pot used for ointments etc."

Arthur Morrison, who wrote a famous trilogy in the 1890's on East London working-class life — *Tales of Mean Streets* (1894), *A Child of the Jago* (1896), and *To London Town* (1899) — refers in one of the stories in the first-named book, "All That Messuage," to "an unsuspected twelve and sixpence [found in] a gallipot on the kitchen dresser." The reference to the gallipot is quite incidental, and there is no suggestion that the term was in any way unusual, at least among the class the story describes; in another of the stories in the same book, "On the Stairs," there is a reference to money being kept in a teapot.

Morrison was an acute observer of the East London working classes — although little is known of his life despite the fact he lived until 1945, he was born in Poplar, the son of an engine-fitter, possibly lived at least part of his childhood and youth in East London (with which he was certainly familiar as a child), and was involved in the administration of the People's Palace from 1886 to 1890, shortly after which he became a freelance writer (of his other writings, four of his detective stories have reappeared in "The Rivals of Sherlock Holmes" series). It seems probably that in using the term gallipot, and in citing its use as a receptacle for money and its being kept on the kitchen dresser, Morrison was describing a scene that he knew and in terms which were in familiar use. The term gallipot was therefore presumably in common use at least in an East London working-class environment at the end of the 19th century. If, however, it was the sort of object commonly used to hold coins — to the bulk of at least 12s 6d, no doubt with many pennies and half-pennies — it is perhaps unlikely that it was an ointment- or medicine-jar: it is more likely to have been something like a jam jar (cf the Irish meaning cited by the *OED*) or something of similar size; one thinks of the glazed Keiller marmalade jars, for example.

Are any of your readers familiar with the term gallipot in common domestic usage at the present or in the fairly recent past in East London?

P. O. Box 70,  
Creely,  
Ontario,  
Canada  
KOA 1Z0

IAIN C. WALKER