

Commentary

By GROMATICUS

Diploma in Archaeological Practice

THE COUNCIL for British Archaeology has just published the syllabus of its Diploma in Archaeological Practice, in an attempt to meet the need it sees for a recognised qualification for field archaeologists. Their response is a Diploma, consisting of seven Certificates, which are listed below with the examinations and other assessments required for them: I Introduction to archaeology: the history and nature of archaeology and outlines of British archaeology in its European setting (two 3 hour papers), II Field archaeology (excluding excavation) (folio of personal work, two weeks successful training in fieldwork, written examination, interview if necessary), III Excavation techniques (one 3 hour paper, on-site assessment), IV Identification of artifacts and history of technology (oral and written tests in identification of objects, one 2 hour paper), V Archaeological evidence (two 3 hour papers), VI Post-excavation handling of material and production of archaeological reports (one 3 hour paper, folio of person work), VII The present structure and administration of archaeology in Britain (one 3 hour paper). Certificates can be taken in any order and any number at a time. The CBA hopes that the necessary training will be provided by Extra-Mural Departments, Adult Education Colleges, etc., and add that eventually students holding extra-mural diplomas, certificates, etc., may be able to claim exemption from some or some parts of the Certificates.

It is difficult to judge either the market at which the CBA are aiming or the possible value of the Diploma. It is hardly likely to appeal to the busy professional, who probably spends much of his "spare" time lecturing to augment his meagre salary, repairing the run-down accommodation that is all he can afford to buy or rent, or pursuing some particular and fascinating bee in his archaeological bonnet. He will probably feel, too, that having acquired a degree in archaeology or considerable experience as an amateur before "turning pro", the time really has come to stop taking exams and get down to business. The amateur, at least in London, is already well catered for by the Extra-Mural Diploma and Certificate courses, and will probably only be confused by the appearance of a rival and unknown qualification. The only type of person to whom it seems likely to appeal is the perpetual student or compulsive exam-taker, anxious to add another scalp to his belt. The people most likely to obtain this qualifica-

tion seem to be the people who are good at, and enjoy, taking exams, and I doubt whether this is good for archaeology.

The CBA appears to have succumbed to the well-known British (European?) obsession with academic examinations and paper qualifications. I accept that some mechanism is needed to ensure that the right archaeologist gets into the right job, but I cannot see that this scheme is it. This tired and unimaginative response to the problem stems from the fundamental mistake of treating the practice of archaeology as an academic discipline, while in fact it lies somewhere between a craft and a social service. Academic abilities and skills are not enough—no mention is made, for example, of the crucial task of relating to the general public, through talks, site tours, exhibitions, etc., which is an essential part of the work of any archaeologist who is paid from public funds.

The whole approach is to me typified by Certificate VI, with its stated aim "to show that the candidate has a sound grasp of the post-excavation processes which lead to the production of archaeological reports, and that he has the ability to produce such reports". Two points: the concern should not be whether he *can* produce reports but whether he *does*, and secondly this ability is surely best demonstrated by a harvest of real archaeological reports, not by performance in the hot-house of examination conditions. "By their fruits ye shall know them". What archaeology needs is people who can both produce reports and communicate their results to the general public (who are after all paying them and expect some return for their money), not necessarily people who are good at passing examinations. If it is wished to judge and grade archaeologists, a "performance rating" might be more useful. Perhaps the Consumers' Association could produce a "Which Archaeologist?" report for the benefit of prospective employers?

One cannot help wondering where all this is supposed to lead. Are the CBA casting envious eyes at the great closed shop of the legal profession, and looking forward to the day when only CBA-accredited archaeologists are allowed to practice? I sincerely hope not, but it would be nice to know. Nevertheless, the feeling persists that the scheme is political rather than practical. My advice is to approach it with caution.