

Commentary

By GROMATICUS

Everyone likes to talk

IT IS SAID of our curate, that when he has nothing else to preach about, he preaches about death. I suspect that readers may be saying the same about me and publication. Perhaps that's not so surprising: we are both talking about the ultimate reality in our respective fields, the point towards which we are all moving, and, dare I say it, about judgment.

Archaeology is suffering from a surfeit of conference proceedings: I am told that they are being published at a rate of one and a half per week, or seventy per year. They place a burden on the archaeologist of scanning all this literature to see if it contains anything relevant to his speciality (and this is much more difficult for proceedings than books or journals), and on libraries in the purchasing and indexing of it all. I'm not against conferences, which are essential for getting people together, for exchanging information and ideas, for trying out new theories on a critical and informed audience, and for getting the feedback that will guide future work. But as much of this takes place in the bar as in the conference hall, and is scarcely reflected in the published proceedings. It might be more illuminating to publish transcripts of those late-night conversations than the measured prose delivered from the platform.

So what are proceedings for? Well, of course, there are all those people who would have come, but couldn't, and who want to be kept informed.

There must be something for them. But the value of a conference is its immediacy, which is lost if the outcome is not published for a year or even two, perhaps because one tardy author fails to meet his deadlines. The new ideas will be old hat, or possibly even discarded, by the time they appear in print. It's worth looking at the sort of papers that appear. As a typology, we have the Re-hash (work already — or to be — published elsewhere, given a different slant to suit the title of the conference), the Pot-boiler (I haven't much to say, but don't like to say so), the Big Cheese (we couldn't hold a conference without asking *him*), the Opening Bid (I've got to get into print somehow) and the Significant Contribution. The refereeing often seems far less thorough than that of the journals (I've one or two real horror stories, but space and delicacy prevent me describing them here), and the editing, in the sense of knitting the individual contributions into a coherent whole, is often undetectable.

What can I say? Firstly, to authors: be honest. Do go, do give your talk, but unless it adds significantly to published knowledge, don't submit a written paper (and there *are* good reasons for giving a talk that doesn't meet this criterion). Secondly, to conference organisers: be tough. Chop out authors who don't meet deadlines, cut out repetition (e.g. identical introductions to all your contributions), weed out the superfluous and impose some coherence on the whole.

A.G.M. of the London Archaeologist

THE THIRTEENTH A.G.M. of *the London Archaeologist* was held on 7 May in the Education Department of the Museum of London. The following officers were elected: Editor, Clive Orton; Assistant Editors, Rhoda Edwards and Beth Richardson; Secretary, Nesta Caiger; Advertising and Promotion, Betsey Kentish; Subscriptions, Shiela Broomfield; Managing Editor, Nicholas Fuentes — and the auditors were elected. Representatives to serve on the Publication Committee were elected from the following bodies: Kent Archaeolo-

gical Society, London Kiln Study Group, Museum of London, Richmond Society Archaeology Section, and Woolwich and District Antiquarian Society. The basis of the accounts had been changed slightly in that stock of binders was valued at cost, so the figures were not directly comparable with previous years. Nevertheless, there appeared to be a deficit of £140 on the year. Following the close of business, Dominic Perring spoke on 'Early Roman houses in London'.