

Commentary

By GROMATICUS

A Step Forward

THE LONG-RUNNING attempt to ensure adequate professional archaeological coverage for Greater London (see *Gromaticus*, Vol. 3, no. 16 and Vol. 4 no. 2) outside the City took a step nearer fruition in April. Backed by an annual grant of £200,000 from the G.L.C., the Museum of London has expanded its Greater London Archaeology Department to form part of a new London Archaeological Service. The new service includes the former Southwark and Lambeth Unit, the Inner London Unit, the South West London Unit and the West London team (already part of the Museum) which all now become regional teams, responsible for groups of London Boroughs. A further £50,000 has been granted to the Passmore Edwards Museum for work east of the Lea, and separate agency arrangements are to be made through the Museum of London for four south-east London Boroughs.

The responsibilities of the teams are as follows:

Southwark and Lambeth: Southwark, Lambeth.

Inner London: Camden, Islington, Hackney, Tower Hamlets, Haringey, Kensington, Westminster, Enfield, Barnet, Harrow.

South West London: Richmond, Kingston, Wandsworth, Merton, Sutton, Croydon.

West London: Hammersmith, Hounslow, Ealing, Brent, Hillingdon.

Passmore Edwards Museum: Barking, Redbridge, Waltham Forest, Havering, Newham.

The new service should give a much-needed element of continuity — essential for both staff and the archaeology — while enabling D.o.E. 'project' money (which will continue at the same level as in previous years) to be used more flexibly to meet the apparently resurgent threat to London's buried past. Indeed, it seems that if destruction of archaeological deposits is a measure of economic activity, we may have already passed the bottom of the current recession.

At the same time, the maintenance of detailed local between areas that were at best a historical accident and at worst arbitrary should enable archaeologists to exploit more fully the evidence wrested from the ground, by moving towards compatible methods of recording and common terminology. For example, two similar mediaeval manor sites, actually under the same ownership in the mediaeval

period, have recently been excavated by different units at Tottenham Court and West Drayton: comparison of the two may prove instructive. Also, two of the few known early-mid Saxon settlement sites in our area, Battersea and Clapham, although close geographically, have until now come under two different Units. These and other examples may well be best studied together rather than separately. At the same time, the maintenance of detailed local knowledge is very important, and for this reason the decision to maintain the identity of the existing Units within the new structure is to be welcomed.

A further gain is the access of the incoming teams to the specialist services of the Museum of London — the Conservation and Photographic Departments and the specialist knowledge of the various period departments. Of course such links have existed in the past, but they will now be strengthened and all should benefit.

However, not all is gain. There is considerable loss of local control over the Units — the London and Middlesex and Surrey Archaeological Society have lost 'their' units, and the Southwark and Lambeth Unit has lost its unique and wide-ranging management structure. But it is likely that a system of Area Advisory Committees will be set up to represent local interests.

Now that all Boroughs have professional coverage, local societies finding they have a professional archaeologist for their area for the first time may possibly feel threatened. Any such fears would be groundless: London's archaeology needs its amateur wing as much as ever, and I hope the professionals will be both sensitive to the needs, and aware of the potential, of the amateurs in their areas. Outside central London, professional archaeologists will still be very thin on the ground — less than one per Borough in some areas. Nevertheless, the G.L.C. is to be applauded for its action, and the Museum of London must be thanked for shouldering the burden of administration.

Price increase

WE REGRET THAT from the Winter 1983 issue (Vol. 4, no. 13) it will be necessary to increase the price of *the London Archaeologist* to 90p per copy (£3.60 for an annual subscription). The price has been kept stable for three years, and we had hoped to complete this volume at this price, but the combined effects of inflation and recession have defeated us. The overseas rate will remain at \$8, but the air-mail rate will be increased to \$12.