

# Commentary

By GROMATICUS

ANYONE WHO READ my previous *Commentary*, on the re-organisation of professional archaeology in Greater London, and who also read the editorial comment on it in *Current Archaeology*, could be forgiven for wondering if they referred to the same event.

Although Mr Selkirk accepts the need for professional teams in the City and in Southwark, he says that elsewhere "archaeology in London is remarkably scarce", the G.L.C. — "the last of the big spenders" — is to amalgamate small teams "into one big London unit" at a "vast cost". The lesson for the amateurs is clear: "archaeology in the City of London has long been taken over by the professionals", though there are a number of "flourishing societies" in Greater London which "tend to be concentrated" in areas which "have hitherto escaped the professionals' net". It is these societies which should be "encouraged to expand" to deal with the threat of development. If they don't — so the logic goes — the sites should be lost, for if the amateurs cannot record them can archaeology "really have any justification to continue to make its very considerable demands on the tax-payer?"

Let's look at these points. The archaeological potential of Greater London was clearly presented *Time on our Side?* — the dense prehistoric and Roman landscapes which are fast being destroyed east of the Lea and in west Middlesex; the Roman roadside settlements ringing *Londinium* (for example, Old Ford, Brentford and Enfield), without which we cannot hope to understand the functioning of that city; the great mediaeval religious houses at, for example, Clerkenwell, the Royal Mint, Bermondsey and Merton — all under imminent threat from redevelopment; and a substantial mediaeval town in Kingston, to name but the most obvious examples.

The idea of one big London unit, although administratively correct in that three previously independent units now join a fourth within the Museum of London's Department of Greater London Archaeology, is misleading in that their identity is maintained as "area teams" in the Department. The

Department. The "vast cost" — £250,000 for the whole of Greater London including Southwark, the case for which has been accepted — represents less than 4p a year per head to London's population.

What is the reality of Mr Selkirk's emotive comment that archaeology in the City "has long been taken over by the professionals?" Surely the City of London Archaeological Society was founded in the 1960s to assist the then small professional presence there, and still provides much valuable help.

The proposed solution — that "flourishing" societies should be "encouraged to expand" to deal with the threat of development — is no solution at all. To suppose that any of the problems mentioned above could be tackled solely by amateur effort is unrealistic and flies in the face of experience. The place of professionals and amateurs is together, and there is a history of good co-operation in the area. More formal relationships exist through various liaison groups, on which amateurs and professionals, as well as local authorities, are represented, and this network is being expanded.

One can only conclude that either Mr Selkirk is completely out of touch with the realities of urban rescue archaeology, which is hard to believe, or that he does not consider the facts of the situation to be important. The clue is provided by studying earlier editorial comment. Mr Selkirk clearly believes that professional teams are profligate, bureaucratic, inflexible and destructive of that very "independent" amateur effort which holds out the best hope for dealing with sites threatened by redevelopment. The situation in London must be made to appear to fit this preconceived mould, irrespective of the realities. Behind this lies the idea, stemming from monetarist ideology, that it is bad *per se* to spend public money on rescue archaeology, despite the large volume of economic activity dependent on the destruction of the archaeological record. Mr Selkirk has allowed his archaeological judgement to become clouded by passing ideological fashion; we expect better of the editor of a national archaeological magazine.

## Excavation Round-up 1983

DIRECTORS, secretaries and other people concerned with excavations carried out during 1983 are asked to send a short report to the co-ordinator, Beth Richardson, D.U.A. Museum of London

E.C.2, for inclusion in the Spring issue. It would be appreciated if they could be modelled on the ones in Vol. 4, No. 10 and if they could be sent in by 31 December.