

Letters

GREATER LONDON ARCHAEOLOGY

IT IS A CHARACTERISTIC of politicians arguing a weak case that they sink to personal attacks on the integrity of their opponents. Nevertheless it is particularly distressing that Andrew Selkirk should stoop this low in his article on archaeology in London (*LA*, Spring 1984). The establishment of the Greater London Archaeological Service has already generated a great deal of controversy, but at the risk of boring your readers I should like to take up a couple of points in Mr. Selkirk's article. Perhaps I should stress that I am not an employee of an archaeological unit!

First, he still seems to believe that there is a shortage of sites in London, on the basis that relatively little has been so far discovered outside the Cities of London and Westminster and the Borough of Southwark. This theory was exploded elsewhere in the country by the site surveys and excavations carried out in the path of motorway construction, which revealed very high levels of settlement in many supposedly sterile areas. Now that we have a properly funded full time unit in London, rather than the sparser coverage that existed in the past, I see no reason to doubt that the number of known sites in the Greater London area will also increase substantially.

Whether or not this happens, Mr. Selkirk's suggestion that available sites should be "divvied up" between the units and the societies smacks of the philosophy of the treasure hunter, not that of the professional (whether paid or voluntary) archaeologist. Sites are not goodies to be given away to anyone professing an interest; they are a rapidly wasting resource. In the nature of things judgments have to be made about research priorities and the deployment of finances, and it must be better for this to be done within a London-wide framework rather than haphazardly as a consequence of the strength or weakness of local societies in particular areas. Of course, many societies are perfectly competent to carry out excavations; of course there will always be a great need for voluntary workers, both on sites run by units and those run by societies. Mr. Selkirk should be aware of the excellent work that has already been done by the forerunners of the GLAS to foster local involvement, in West London, for example, in Merton and Wandsworth, and, last but certainly not least, by Clive Orton in Sutton.

Archaeology in London has already suffered too long from a non-comprehensive approach; the GLAS gives us a chance at the eleventh hour to deal with things whole-heartedly. It is tragic that Mr. Selkirk should choose to stab in the back the most important development ever in London's archaeology; tragic because if archaeology in London falls, then his favoured areas will become the next targets.

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ANDREW SELKIRK asks to be criticised for what he says, not what he does not say. I shall try to comply with that request.

In his letter that appeared in your Spring issue he persistently describes the Greater London Archaeological Service as the new London "Suburban Unit". That is not its name and does not define its purpose. The Service covers the whole of Greater London outside the City, including north Southwark, Westminster and the monastic fringes that lie outside the City – areas that Mr. Selkirk says he is happy should be the responsibility of the professionals. As he is well aware, there is no possibility of active local societies taking over in Inner London, where the residential population tends to be elderly or transitory. Understandably,

also, those who live or work there prefer to spend their leisure elsewhere. In the outer leafy suburbs, such as Barnet, conditions are very different, and there can be an active role for the local society, if it has the experienced and dedicated leadership that is able to see a project through to its conclusion, including publication. Even in outer suburbs where there is a local archaeological society with members eager to use their leisure for this purpose, however, that leadership may not be available when it is needed. What happens then, if there is no full-time professional to step into the breach? For we are talking about *rescue* archaeology, work that has to be undertaken when it is available, or not at all. In the case of the Outer London sites mentioned by Mr. Selkirk, it would be interesting to know the names of the local amateurs who were available to direct this work, and would have been prepared to take responsibility for it.

Finally, may I take up Mr. Selkirk's plea to L.A.M.A.S. and Surrey Archaeological Society to "get together and work something out" once the G.L.C. is abolished? The two Societies have been doing precisely that in their Joint Working Party on London Archaeology for many years, since long before there was any political threat to the G.L.C. Dissatisfaction with the incomplete archaeological cover of London, and the great difficulty in maintaining even that, led the Working Party to support proposals for a unified service, which has at last been achieved. The Working Party will do everything in its power to ensure the continued existence of that service after the abolition of the G.L.C. It is not helped by the totally unrealistic claims for the potential of amateur societies in urban rescue archaeology.

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BOUDICCA RE-VISITED

AFTER READING Nicholas Fuentes' *Boudicca re-visited*, which suggests a logical site for the defeat of Boudicca, I would like to supplement his ideas by suggesting a possible site for the defeat of the Ninth Legion.

I suggest that Boudicca made use of the Icknield Way on her right flank thrusting towards Verulamium while her left flank (or broad front) attacked Camulodunum. If so, a possible intercept point would have been where the road from Lincoln, Longthorpe *et al* cuts the Icknield Way, either at Sawston (SE of Cambridge) or at Royston.

Careful reading of Tacitus states that "Cerialis escaped to the Legionary Camp and took shelter behind its walls" – this implies that if cavalry had to take shelter from hoards of infantry (Cerialis' infantry must have been defeated mainly by infantry) then the enemy were very close on Cerialis' heels. The only camp within a radius of nearly 40 miles was Great Chesterton (6 miles from Sawston and 9 from Royston).

Great Chesterton is assumed to be immediately post-rebellion, but I can find no convincing evidence to prove that it did not already exist (not necessarily as a permanent camp) before the rebellion.

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Excavations & Post-Excavation Work

City, by Museum of London, Department of Urban Archaeology. A series of long term excavations. Enquiries to DUA, Museum of London, London Wall, E.C.2 (01-600 3699).

Croydon & District. Processing and cataloguing of excavated and museum collection every Tuesday throughout the year. Archaeological reference collection of fabric types, domestic animal bones, clay tobacco pipes and glass ware also available for comparative work. Hon. Curator, Croydon Natural History & Scientific Society Ltd., Museum Building, Croydon Biology Centre, Chipstead Valley Road, Coulsdon, Surrey. (01-660 3841 or 22 43727).

Hammersmith & Fulham, by Fulham Archaeological Rescue Group. Processing of material from Sandford Manor and Fulham High Street. Tuesdays, 7.45 p.m.-10 p.m. at Fulham Palace, Bishop's Avenue, Fulham Palace Road, S.W.6. Contact Keith Whitehouse, 86 Clancarty Road, S.W.6. (01-731 0338).

Inner and North London Boroughs, by the Museum of London, Department of Greater London Archaeology (Inner/North London). Several rescue sites in various areas. (01-242 6620).

Kingston, by Kingston upon Thames Archaeological Society. Rescue sites in the town centre. Enquiries to Marion Hinton, Kingston Heritage Centre, Fairfield Road, Kingston. (01-546 5386).

North-East London Boroughs, by Passmore Edwards Museum. Enquiries to Pat Wilkinson, Passmore Edwards Museum, Romford Road, E.15. (01-534 4545).

South-West London Boroughs, by Museum of London, Department of Greater London Archaeology (South-West London). Excavations and processing. Enquiries to Scott McCracken, St. Luke's House, Sandycombe Road, Kew. (01-940 5989).

Southwark and Lambeth, by Museum of London, Department of Greater London Archaeology (Southwark and Lambeth). Several sites from the Roman period onwards. Enquiries to Derek Seeley, Port Medical Centre, English Grounds, Morgan's Lane, SE1 2HT. (01-407 1989).

Surrey, by Surrey Archaeological Unit. Enquiries to David Bird, County Archaeological Officer, Planning Department, County Hall, Kingston, Surrey. (01-546 1050 x3665).

Vauxhall Pottery, by Southwark and Lambeth Archaeological Society. Processing of excavated material continues three nights a week. Enquiries to S.L.A.S., c/o Cuming Museum, 155 Walworth Road, S.E.17 (01-703 3324).

West London Boroughs, by West London Archaeological Field Group. Enquiries to 273A Brentford High Street, Brentford, Middlesex. (01-560 3880).

The Council for British Archaeology produces a monthly Calendar of Excavations from March to September, with an extra issue in November and a final issue in January summarising the main results of field work. The Calendar gives details of extra-mural courses, summer schools, training excavations and sites where volunteers are needed. The annual subscription is £5.50 post-free, which should be made payable to C.B.A., 112 Kennington Road, S.E. 11. (01-582 0494).

MERTON AND BEDDINGTON

I NOTE FROM Mosaic (*L.A.* Spring 1984) that Mr. Andrew Selkirk seems to think that there is overmuch professionalism in London's archaeology. While I do not wish to become involved in any dispute between Mr. Selkirk and Mr. Orton over what has or has not been said by either party, I do think that I am possibly uniquely placed to respond to Mr. Selkirk's points concerning Merton and Beddington.

In the early 1960s I directed excavations adjacent to the site of Merton Priory on a voluntary society basis. These excavations were modest both in scale and in results but took a long time both to do and to report upon. Later in the same decade and in the early '70s, I was on more than one occasion urged to tackle the chapter house and infirmary site but was in no doubt that these needed resources well beyond those available to amateur societies and spare-time directors.

Soon after this, I was instrumental in establishing the Surrey Archaeological Society's South West London Team of professional archaeologists at a time when neither government nor local authorities were prepared to initiate such a proposal although the Department of the Environment - all credit to them - were prepared to back us with funds. Eventually the Greater London Council and some (but not all) boroughs joined in. The G.L.C. became commendably enthusiastic.

One of the many valuable projects undertaken by the SW London Team under Scott McCracken's wholly admirable dir-

ection was the work at Merton. This was greatly assisted by voluntary helpers and has produced many important results. Scott estimates that the professional directing staff spent some 24 months of six-day weeks on site and I know of no amateur who could have devoted that much time to the work, let alone have coped with the post-excavation load.

I was also involved in the 1960s in encouraging amateur work at the Beddington villa site. This work was not a success and died a natural death. The excavation undertaken by Roy and Lesley Adkins here (again fully supported by voluntary labour) would have been *totally* impossible without G.L.C. funds. For various reasons that I am not competent to explain, it is highly unlikely that any of the money spent on excavation at Beddington could have been available for archaeology elsewhere had the Beddington villa not been dug by the professionals. Once again both the effort involved and the skill employed would have been quite impossible for amateurs to provide.

I cannot understand Andrew Selkirk's view that professional units are taking all the sites, even in London. Certainly outside London there are far far more threatened sites and research sites in need of attention than there is archaeological effort available, professional or amateur.

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