

Commentary

by GROMATICUS

Rescue archaeology after the GLC?

HOW WILL RESCUE archaeology in Greater London fare if the Government succeeds in abolishing the GLC next March? Although the Local Government Bill is now passing through the Lords in Committee Stage, the situation is still unclear. The crucial question is what will happen to the annual grant which the GLC now makes available to the Museum of London and the Passmore Edwards Museum to employ the staff engaged in the work.

At least the Government has abandoned its original plan, to leave individual boroughs to decide whether or not to contribute to a London-wide service. A survey of the London boroughs by LAMAS made it abundantly clear that this scheme would be unworkable, and this information was swiftly communicated to ministers. The subsequent idea, that the GLC's Historic Buildings Division, incorporated into the new Historic Buildings and Monuments Commission, would still be able to make the grants to the London museums, has much to commend it.

Indeed the Commons Standing Committee debate during January and February produced some very encouraging responses from the Government. Firstly, Kenneth Baker, the Minister for Local Government, assured us that "the Bill does not seek to discontinue the existing arrangements" for rescue archaeology in Greater London, and that "the Government intends to provide the Commission with the level of resources which will permit it to continue to support financially the Greater London Archaeological Service". And Mr Bob Dunn, the Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Education and Science, was equally positive. "I can", he said, "acknowledge our concern about the archaeological unit because we have been concentrating our minds wonderfully on all the implications ... I can acknowledge our concern about the vital role of that valuable London wide service".

But before we get too carried away by these and other ministerial assurances it might be wise to wait and see what HBMC have to say about all this. There is a certain fear abroad that the Commission, a body funded by, but independent of, Government is not very keen about the arrangements proposed by Ministers. It seems that it believes that under existing Ancient Monuments legislation it is empowered to fund individual projects of national importance but not local archaeological services such as the one that exists for Greater London. What is equally worrying is that it appears to be anxious not to have such power for London because, if it did, the precedent could lead to similar demands from archaeological teams throughout the land now dependent upon the uncertainties of project funding.

If these are problems for the Government and the HBMC they require speedy and effective resolution. One obvious way would be by making the funds directly available from government to the two museums who carry out the work. This would at least remove one layer of bureaucracy!

On the day I write, excavations are taking place in advance of redevelopment in many parts of Greater London. In the grounds of Lambeth Palace, for example, and on the monastic buildings of the Cluniac Abbey at Bermondsey: at Kingston Horsefair, on a Bronze Age urnfield in Acton, in the prehistoric and Roman complex adjacent to the villa at Beddington, on an Iron Age settlement just discovered north of London airport and on the Roman City defences in that curious enclave of Tower Hamlets that comes within *Londinium's* wall.

There are probably others. In all likelihood a similar mixed range of sites will be at risk this time next year. I hope they will not be inadequately recorded or lost entirely because the archaeological teams capable of handling them have been decimated or dissolved in the context of the re-organisation of London's government.

Good news

WE ARE PLEASED to report that *the London Archaeologist* has been awarded £200 from the Lloyds Bank Fund for Independent Archaeologists towards the purchase of the computer program *Typefit*. We are being sponsored for the other £200 needed by Wordsmith Graphics Ltd., who produce the program. We are very grateful to both bodies for their support. The main use of the program will be to reduce the editorial work, but we hope it will prevent those empty spaces and 'squeezes' from which we sometimes suffer, and it should also reduce the cost of producing *the L.A.*. Other awards went to the Croydon Natural History and Scientific Society and the Hendon and District Archaeological Society.

Congratulations too to Bryan Alvey, an author in our Spring issue, for the donation of a Kaypro microcomputer to help his work in Thailand. This machine can run off the mains or batteries, making on-site recording possible in the remotest locations.

Bad news

BETWEEN THE DELIVERY to the printer of the Spring issue, and its publication, the Courages site in Southwark (illustrated on the front cover) was backfilled under the terms of an agreement between the GLC and the London Borough of Southwark. An important Roman excavation was brought to an untimely close. Our sincere apologies to all concerned.