

Commentary

by GROMATICUS

Hold the front page!

IT HAS already been an exciting year for archaeology in London, and we are only half-way through it. First came the discovery by the DUA of the Roman amphitheatre at the Guildhall, followed by the unique Roman timber-built warehouse on the DGLA's Courage Brewery site on the south bank, and properties relating to Edward II and Sir John Fastolf further down-river. Even more surprising was the discovery at Kew Gardens of botanical remains from Tutankhamun's tomb, made by a student from the Institute of Archaeology. London's archaeologists may be permitted to congratulate themselves on the headlines they have made.

Before euphoria carries us away, we should remember that London is not the whole country. Outside 'the great Wen' things are different. Developer funding, which has fuelled the explosion of archaeology in and around the City, is much less common, although the principle is gradually gaining acceptance. This leaves a triple basis for funding – *English Heritage*, local authorities and the Manpower Services Commission. The latest news from *English Heritage* shows an increase in grants for 1988/89 below the level of inflation (about 2%) and a fall in the number of projects supported. On the positive side, both the number of excavations to be funded and the amount allocated to them are up (by 5 sites and £50,000), and we shall not know the whole story until the reserve is allocated. Concern is being expressed about proposed changes to the rules for MSC schemes, with greater emphasis on training and less on 'public gain', which are likely to make archaeology less attractive to sponsors. The provision made by the Ministry of Transport for the archaeological implications of its schemes remains inadequate. Recent remarks about the need for more housing in south-east England make me wonder whether this will be the next archaeological

crisis. A multiplicity of relatively small developments in towns and villages, about many of which little is yet known archaeologically, could pose as great a threat as large projects like Stansted and the Channel Tunnel, and be far harder to tackle.

Even in London, funding still depends on factors unconnected with archaeological importance, chiefly the nature of the site developer. Private developers, anticipating a good return on their investment in a site, can in many cases see the case for paying for the recording of any evidence they may destroy. Local authorities, trying to develop scarce land with no hope of profit, cannot be expected to look so favourably on archaeology. Also, as in the Home Counties, we can expect to see a flood of planning applications for 'in-fill' housing developments, replacing (e.g.) 1930s semis with large gardens by blocks of flats, which could overwhelm those checking them against existing archaeological knowledge (which is often far from adequate).

One area where London may lag behind the rest of the country, probably because of the pressure of work, is in display of results to the public. As I said in the Spring issue (p. 392), I was saddened that the finalists for the Hepworth Heritage Communication Award were all from well outside London. This highlights the danger that as rescue archaeology becomes part of the 'official' development process, it could easily lose its roots of public support.

Two conclusions emerge. We must all do what we can to ensure that archaeological aspects are fully taken into account in the planning process, and that wherever necessary archaeological conditions are attached to planning permissions. Those of us who are actively involved must continue to do all we can to convey our enthusiasm, and the importance and meaning of our discoveries, to the public, who ultimately are our paymasters.

A.G.M. of the London Archaeologist

THE NINETEENTH A.G.M. of the *London Archaeologist* was held on 26 May in the Lecture Theatre of the Institute of Archaeology. The following officers were elected – Editor, Clive Orton; Assistant Editors, Barbara Davis and Rhoda Edwards; Secretary, Nesta Caiger; Advertising and Promotion, Betsey Kentish; Subscriptions, Shiela Broomfield; Managing Editor, Nicholas Fuentes – and the auditors were re-elected. Patricia Clarke, the retiring Chairman of the Publication Committee, was thanked for her work over the past year.

Representatives to serve on the Publication Committee were elected from the City of London Archaeological Society, Croydon & District Natural History Society, Ruislip Northwood & Eastcote Local History Society and the West London Archaeological Field Group. The accounts showed a surplus on the year of about £280, going some way to reduce the large accumulated deficit. After the close of business, David Gaimster spoke on 'Renaissance culture in London: an archaeological perspective'.