

# Commentary

by Gromaticus

## Sliding into anarchy?

THE dismemberment of London's archaeological service continues. *English Heritage* has started to implement its proposals by (i) reducing the establishment grant to the Museum of London's Department of Greater London Archaeology, (ii) forbidding the Department to retain a post for exhibitions and education, and (iii) setting up its own section to deal with planning matters, including advice to the London Boroughs. The Board of Governors of the Museum of London, giving in to these pressures, announced that it would restructure the DUA and DGLA into a single, smaller, organisation which will attempt to contract for archaeological projects.

This means that fewer sites will be excavated in London, more will be destroyed unrecorded, and what information is retrieved will be fragmented. No-one believes that *English Heritage* has either the will or the competence to carry out the planning role effectively, and if London becomes a battlefield for competing digging teams, site records and finds will become dispersed, probably irretrievably, over the country. All this in the name of "best practice", as *English Heritage* has called the separation of the planning and excavating roles. You might as well say that the best way to do a jigsaw is to sell the pieces one by one to the highest bidder. This is ideology gone mad (there is a case for competitive tendering, but it could be done under the umbrella of the Museum) or there are even less rational reasons. Either way, it is an unjustified attack on a system which works well and which has widespread support.

The breadth of that support was shown when a group concerned about London's archaeology met on 17 June to brief an all-party group of London MPs. Support for the "integrated service" (planning, excavation, publication and education) came from Local Authority planners, museums, county and local societies, academics, and national bodies like the Society of Museum Archaeologists. There was broad agreement that the service as at present constituted is appropriate for London's requirements, and that pressure needed to be put on *English Heritage* with the utmost urgency.

The MPs Tony Banks, Gerald Bowden and Simon Hughes met the Chairman of the Board and the Director of the Museum of London on 20 June. They reported the breadth and strength of the opposition to *English Heritage's* policy and the Museum's apparent accession to it. They believe that the Museum

will join them in trying to persuade *English Heritage* to change its mind, and hope to meet representatives of *English Heritage* before Parliament rises for the summer recess.

Readers may well want to help in this campaign. I do not know whether this issue of the *London Archaeologist* will be published in time for them to have their say, but in the hope that it is I suggest that all concerned readers (especially those living in London) should write immediately to their MP, asking him/her to help the all-party group to bring pressure to bear on *English Heritage*. The arguments have been developed by *Gromaticus* in Vol. 6, no. 5 (Winter 1989) p. 114, no. 8 (Autumn 1990) p. 198 and no. 9 (Spring 1991) p. 226. Please help if you can.

## A.G.M.

THE twenty-second A.G.M. of the *London Archaeologist* was held on Wednesday 29 May in the Lecture Theatre of the Institute of Archaeology. The following officers were elected – Editor, Clive Orton; Secretary, Nesta Caiger; Advertising and Promotion, Betsey Kentish; Subscriptions, Shiela Broomfield; Managing Editor, Nicholas Fuentes. Dennis Ballard was re-elected as auditor and local society representatives were elected to serve on the Publication Committee. The accounts showed another good year. After the close of business John Maloney spoke on 'Fun and Games in Roman London'.

## Making pages

THE SURPLUS generated in the last few years will enable us to improve the way we produce the *London Archaeologist*. The old *Typefit* system, which has served for five years but which is very time-consuming, will be replaced by a modern *Pagemaker 4* system. We hope that the next issue will be produced on the new system, which will save much time and effort in the production process. It will also be a far more standard and portable system.

Barbara Davies, who apart from the Editor was the only member of the team to really understand *Typefit*, has left London for a new job with the City of Lincoln Archaeological Unit. We wish her every success, and thank her for years of patient support in the problems of page design and the dreaded *intercode*.

There is no connection between the new system and the extra four pages in this issue. They are to provide space for three longer-than-average articles, including a very long *Round-up*. We shall return to 28 pages and shorter articles in future issues.