

Commentary

by Gromaticus

Taking the pulse

AFTER THE intense local drama of recent months, let's look at the broader picture of British archaeology; firstly, at a recent survey¹, and then at a body that may influence training and qualifications.

The RESCUE survey questionnaire was sent in April 1991 to 137 organisations employing professional field archaeologists. With response rates up to 80%, the results should be reliable. Questions covered the type and role of archaeological organisations, principal sources of funding, numbers of staff and their pay levels, and levels of funding from different sources. Here we can look at only the highlights of the report.

The estimated total number of staff employed in Britain is 2200, of whom about 40% are in 'establishment' posts and most of the rest are on fixed-term contracts. The total is about 25% down on the 1986/7 figure, which was inflated by MSC schemes. The number of 'permanent' posts seems to have risen by about 40%. The regional distribution of staff is uneven, with below-average numbers (in terms of archaeologists per sq. km.) in East Anglia, the South West, Wales and especially Scotland.

The section on pay is gloomy, with about three-quarters of all staff paid less than £12,000 p.a., compared with the national average salary of about £13,200. Established staff are better paid, with less than one-quarter below this level, compared with over 90% of fixed-term staff. Regional comparisons are interesting; pay of established staff in London is generally higher than elsewhere, but in the rest of the South East it is below average. The picture is less clear for staff on fixed-term contracts, but again the South East seems to fare badly.

The questionnaires reveal total funding of £18m, which scaled up for non-response gives an estimate of £31m for 1990/1. The largest share (48%) is from developers, next come the national heritage bodies at 33% and finally local authorities at 17%. As one would expect, developers' money predominates in London (although London also receives more national money than other regions). Local authority support seems strongest in Wessex and the North.

1. **The Structure and Funding of British Archaeology. The RESCUE Questionnaire 1990-91**, by Paul Spoerry. Available from RESCUE, 15A Bull Plain, Hertford, Herts., SG14 1DX, price £2.95 (members), £3.45 (non-members) including postage.

Compared with earlier surveys, the proportion of developer funding has increased greatly since 1978/9, that of 'national' money seems to have stabilised at its 1986/7 level, while the local authority level has remained steady. It is clear that archaeological funding is more dependent than ever on the vagaries of the economy, and that the level of developer funding masks serious problems in rural areas.

The archaeologist's apprentice?

A BODY LIKELY to make its mark on archaeology in the next few years is COSQUEC — the Council for Occupational Standards and Qualifications in Environmental Conservations — which deals with building conservation, landscape and ecosystems, as well as archaeology, and has the task of developing standards, qualifications and assessment procedures. New vocational qualifications in archaeology are to be submitted for approval as National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs) later this year, and meanwhile draft standards are being 'field-tested'. We hope to have more information as the scheme develops.

Subscriptions

AS FROM Volume 7, which starts with next winter's issue, we are increasing the annual subscription to the *London Archaeologist* to £7 a year (£1.75 for single issues), overseas rate \$14, airmail \$20. This reflects increases in production and postal charges since the last price change six years ago. Subscribers who pay by standing order are asked to change their instructions to their banks as soon as possible — it makes a tremendous difference to our income if all standing orders are up to date.

A.G.M.

THE ANNUAL Meeting of the *London Archaeologist* will be held at 7 p.m. on Tuesday 19th May in the Lecture Theatre of the Institute of Archaeology, 31-34 Gordon Square, WC1. The speaker will be Tim Tatton-Brown on 'Medieval Building Stone in London'. Before the lecture, the annual reports and accounts will be presented. The proceedings will include the election of officers and the election to the Publication Committee of the six local society representatives, whose nominations should be made to the Chairman, c/o 7 Coalecroft Road, SW15 6LW. Local societies are invited to send one representative with voting powers; subscribers and their friends will also be welcome.