

# Commentary

by Gromaticus

An aspect of London's archaeology that has so far received no more than a passing mention in our pages is the *Bibliography of the Archaeology of Greater London* (BAGL) (see *LA* 5, no. 2 (1985) 39 and 5, no. 7 (1987) 280). It was set up in 1982 to provide an index to publications on London's archaeology, which can be found in a very wide range of journals, books, reports, etc. Staff at the Museum of London, particularly those writing reports on excavations, needed access to this information so that previous work would not be overlooked in assessing current projects, and it seemed sensible to have one central index rather than several individual ones. Outside bodies such as English Heritage, the CBA, the Society of Antiquaries and RCHM, were involved through a Steering Committee, and funds came from several sources including foundations.

It was soon found that what was needed was much more detailed information, on both structures and portable finds, that might relate to (i) earlier work on the same site, (ii) work on nearby sites, (iii) distributions of types of artefacts or structures across London. The BAGL's database was accordingly designed to meet these needs, and eventually came to include some 4700 articles from periodicals, covering some 11,000 locations and providing information on over 41,500 finds (structural and artefacts), published between the 17th century and the end of 1989.

The BAGL is by no means complete: it covers only periodicals up to 1989, it needs to be fully cross-referenced to the Greater London Sites and Monuments Record (SMR), and it does not include the 'generic' subject-groups that would be so useful for searching (e.g. 'religion', 'military', 'domestic'). Nevertheless, it is a model for how this sort of task should be done, and its computer system has been copied for use in the new *British Archaeological Bibliography*. Even in its present state, it is (or should be, see below) an indispensable tool for anyone working on, or writing about, London's archaeology. At one end of the spectrum, it can greatly enhance the information held in the SMR, enabling better-informed decisions to be made when sites are considered for planning permission. At the other end, it can help researchers to build on the results of past work, and avoid the embarrassing and wasteful 'rediscovering the wheel' to which archaeology seems so prone.

So far, this might sound like a success story. An innovative research tool, created from the needs of workers in the field, coming to fruition despite problems, mainly of funding. If only life were so simple. The BAGL has not been updated since 1989, and although it became usable in July 1991, recent changes in the Museum's computer system seem to have disabled it. A problem seems to be that because it was so useful to so many people, no organisation wants the sole responsibility of funding it. Its value to the SMR has been proved beyond doubt (for example, a search of the records for the Borough of Ealing revealed 12 sites not in the SMR), but the SMR itself is in limbo. When, in March 1992, English Heritage stopped funding the SMR within the Museum, on the grounds that it would do the job itself, the staff were made redundant. As I write, the arrangements for their replacement remain obscure.

How we interpret these events depends on our viewpoint. Is it just an administrative glitch or something more sinister? Surely by now the importance of reliable and comprehensive information, for both planning and research purposes, is fully recognised? Or are archaeologists on the way to being reduced to the status of jobbing builders, with no responsibility beyond their current site?

## Apologies

WE APOLOGISE for the late delivery of the previous issue, which was due in part to the failure of a courier service to deliver the magazine to the printer. We also apologise to the writers of a letter and several book reviews, which have been carried over to the next issue for reasons of space.

## A.G.M.

THE TWENTY-THIRD A.G.M. of the *London Archaeologist* was held on Tuesday 19 May in the Lecture Theatre of the Institute of Archaeology. The following officers were elected – Editor, Clive Orton; Secretary, Nesta Caiger; Advertising and Promotions, 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 Publications Committee. The accounts for the year were roughly in balance. After the close of business Tim Tatton-Brown spoke on 'Medieval Building Stone in London'.