

Commentary

by Gromaticus

AS SO OFTEN happens, this is a bad time to write a *Commentary*. Many important local issues are unresolved – the future of MOLAS is still uncertain, we await Chris Philpotts' report on the working of PPG16 in London, and ways in which the vast amount of archaeological activity now being written up, can be published, are under discussion. We hope to be able to report on all these, and other important local issues, in the near future.

However, this leaves me free to write about a national issue which will in the long run affect all British archaeologists, if indirectly: the future of the Science-Based Archaeology Committee. Before going further I must declare a personal interest, both as a present member of the Committee and as a past recipient of funding from it. Nevertheless, I think I can give an objective account of the Committee's activities and importance.

For many years, the SBAC was a very small part of the Science and Engineering Research Council. From a budget of less than £2m a year, it made grants to support research into many aspects of science-based archaeology, as well as providing studentships for both PhD and MSc students on approved courses, for example in Archaeological Computing or Bioarchaeology. The activities supported by its research grants were very wide, including dating techniques, prospection, bio- and geoarchaeology, computer techniques, materials analysis and conservation, and most recently the study of ancient DNA through the Ancient Biomolecules Initiative (jointly with the Earth Science part of the Natural Environment Research Council). It has kept the archaeological community informed through its *Science-Based Archaeology Newsletter*, which is widely reported, for example in *Science Diary* in *Current Archaeology*. It has led to British science-based archaeology being widely respected throughout the world, and many of the

techniques on which archaeologists increasingly rely were developed with its support.

In April 1994 the Research Councils were reorganised. The SERC was divided into the Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council and the Particle Physics and Astronomy Research Council, with parts being moved to other organisations, such as the Biotechnology and Biological Sciences Research Council. Although it had been expected that SBAC would become part of EPSRC, it was transferred *en bloc* to NERC. The question is now whether SBAC can maintain its separate identity, as the existence of small committees is not favoured in the new-look streamlined Research Councils. This is a major problem because SBAC does not fit tidily under one scientific heading. It covers topics which could come under earth sciences, biology, physics, computing, only linked by their application to archaeology. If archaeology had to compete for funds within these broad headings, it would be very difficult for its case to be properly understood, and priorities determined. Applications must be judged not only as science, but also as archaeology, and a way must be found for this to continue. Otherwise British archaeology will be impoverished, not only financially but also intellectually.

Apology

We apologise for an error in the advertisement for LAMAS, referring to a Greater London Group of the CBA. This should be the South-east Region; the ad will be corrected as soon as possible.

Fieldwork Round-up 1994

Contributions for the 1994 round-up should be sent to the Editor, c/o Institute of Archaeology, 31-34 Gordon Square, London WC1H 0PY, and should be modelled on the ones in Vol 7, no 8. It would be a great help if they could be sent in on a floppy disk (ASCII text, PC or Mac disk) as well as on paper.

Annual Lecture and Meeting

THE ANNUAL Lecture and Meeting of the *London Archaeologist* will be held at 7 p.m. on Tuesday 16 May in the Lecture Theatre of the Institute of Archaeology, 31-34 Gordon Square, London WC1. The speaker will be Chris Green on John Dwight and the Fulham Pottery. 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, London SW15 6LW. Local societies are invited to send one representative with voting powers; subscribers and their friends will also be welcome. Refreshments will be served from 6.30 p.m.