

Commentary

by Gromaticus

Whose hand on the tiller?

FOR MANY years, the main factor in the choice of sites for archaeological investigation has been the demand for development sites. Archaeologists have competed for the pickings, glad to excavate whatever came their way, almost regardless of its potential. Of course, it is important to know whether those blanks on the map are real blanks, or signs of a lack of archaeological activity, which may help explain why 70% of the sites in our *Fieldwork Round-up* each year are "negatives". Attempts to control the situation by introducing, through PPG 16, the idea that preservation *in situ* should be the favoured solution for the most important sites, has had strange consequences. In a series of *causes célèbres*, English Heritage have tried to ensure the long-term preservation of sites through new and unproven techniques, turning important sites into large and unpredictable experiments. They have put these experiments in place by persuading developers to spend more on non-excavation than they would have on excavation, for example on lawyers' fees at Croydon, or on expensive redesign at the Rose theatre.

The latest such case is the Globe theatre site, where English Heritage and the Department of National Heritage have approved development above this Scheduled Ancient Monument, which will remain cocooned below for decades to come. Opposition has come from those who would like to see the whole site cleared and excavated, as well as from those who would like to undertake more tactical excavations beneath the listed buildings that are to be refurbished. Whatever view one may hold, it is sad that no-one seems to be listening to anyone else, and there is no forum in which they could.

1. To make a donation, contact the City of London Archaeological Trust, Museum of London, London Wall, London EC2Y 5HN.

The position could easily become worse with the appearance of new, or revitalised, paymasters. The National Heritage Act allows National Lottery money to be spent on projects which "are important to the national heritage and have clear public benefit". Privately-owned historic buildings, as well as schemes to support access and education, will benefit. This sounds splendid, but I guess it will not be long before conflicts of interest appear, as large sums are disbursed on a new set of criteria.

The City of London Archaeological Trust, which has been quietly funding archaeological projects since 1974, is relaunching itself with a campaign to raise funds for six projects¹, some of which look suspiciously like picking up the pieces after a developer-funded project has run out of money. They also include the City defences and the medieval waterfront, and I'm pleased to see two finds-based topics amongst them. But again, we see new agendas, new criteria and, we hope, new money.

What is missing from this mix of developer funding, National Lottery handouts and charitable trusts doing their bit, is a way of discussing and trying to agree what is important in London's archaeology. The CBA might take such a role if it were a mass-membership organisation like the National Trust, while the Standing Conference on London Archaeology lacks clout (and individual members). Who can accommodate the dissenting voices and speak with authority for archaeology?

Congratulations

THE NEW Director of the Museum of London, to succeed Max Hebditch, is to be Simon Thurley, currently Curator of the Historic Royal Palaces.

Peter Hinton, for many years a senior manager of MOLAS, is to become the first Director of the Institute of Field Archaeologists.

Annual Lecture and Meeting

THE ANNUAL Lecture and Meeting of the London Archaeologist will be held at 7 p.m. on Tuesday 20 May in the Lecture Theatre of the Institute of Archaeology, 31-34 Gordon Square, London WC1. A team of speakers will give short talks on aspects of the Thames Archaeological Project. Before the talks, 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 nomination 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. Refreshments will be served from 6.30 p.m.