

# Commentary

by Gromaticus

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## Where are you, and does it matter?

BY THE TIME this issue is published, the archaeology section of the Newham Museum Service will have closed, completing the fall of the Passmore Edwards Museum from its position as one of the true 'anchors' of London's archaeology, into oblivion. Its place as an archaeological contractor will be taken by the growing number of regional and small local archaeological units operating in London. This will be another step in the disintegration of London's archaeological record, making it even more difficult to synthesize and present an up-to-date picture of our past.

Help may be on the way from an unlikely source: last November the Archaeological Data Service (ADS) was set up at the University of York, funded initially for three years. Its aim is to create, maintain and make available an archive of digital (i.e. computer-based) archaeological resources. In practice, this is likely to be a 'virtual' archive, providing a standard and friendly entry point to the many archives that already exist around the country (the so-called 'one-stop shop' approach). It will also have to act as an archive of last resort for organisations that are unable to maintain their own archives, such as fixed-term and independent research projects. The resources will be varied, and are likely to include sites and monuments records, geophysical surveys, excavation archives, finds catalogues, scientific analyses. The first (and no small) task is to locate resources, negotiate access and enable users to find their way to the one they want. In the longer term, if funding continues, this could be a way of re-integrating our region's archaeological record. In theory, if the archives are accessible via the ADS, it wouldn't matter who holds

them or where they are, and the possibility of instant comparison would increase the pressure for standardisation of terminology. Utopian may be, but it is one sign of hope in a gloomy future.

Pessimism re-asserts itself by asking "would archaeologists use such a service if it was made available?" The precedents are not good. The British and Irish Archaeological Bibliography (see p. 140), regarded by some as an indispensable source of information at only £45 per annum, has a pitifully low uptake among English archaeologists. Even allowing for those who have access in libraries, it seems that many simply do not want, or can't be bothered, to do a proper literature search when starting work on a new topic or a new area. Admitting that much of the information is still unpublished, this approach would not be tolerated in many other disciplines. How do archaeologists get their information? It seems to come either from personal recollection or from a circle of colleagues. This may have worked in the 1950s, when archaeologists were few and (supposedly) all knew each other, but it is completely inappropriate for the 1990s. Perhaps the problem lies in archaeologists rather than in their circumstances, and perhaps they should come to terms with the Information Society.

## Index

READERS SHOULD by now have received their copy of the Index to Volume 7. If you don't have yours, please contact the Subscriptions Secretary. As usual, our thanks go to Daphne Brinklow for preparing the Index; and a special expression of thanks as this is her last Index for us. She has prepared every index since the *London Archaeologist* started (28 years ago).

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## Annual Lecture and Meeting

THE TWENTY-EIGHTH A.G.M. of the *London Archaeologist* was held on Tuesday 20 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. The auditor, Tony Snitter, was thanked and re-elected. Representatives of the following local

societies were elected to serve on the Publication Committee: Croydon Natural History & Scientific Society, Erith Historical Society, London & Middlesex Archaeological Society, Orpington & District Archaeological Society, Wandsworth Historical Society. The accounts for the year showed a continuing surplus. After the close of business, a team of speakers gave short talks on aspects of the Thames Archaeological Project.