

Commentary

by Gromaticus

On the move

FOR MANY years, we have commented on the unfortunate state of London's archaeological archive, culminating in 1996 in the decision to close it to material from future sites, and restrict access to researchers (*Gromaticus*, g, no 1 (Summer 1996)). The Museum of London, under its new Director Simon Thurley, has unveiled plans to make the archive the core of an Archaeological Resource Centre of unparalleled size and scope.

Looked at as a problem, London's archaeological archive is daunting – 7000 cu.m. of material (mostly finds and environmental samples) in the Museum of London, plus over half as much still held by MOLAS, and more continually being generated by MOLAS and the many other archaeological units now operating in Greater London. This is a national problem on a grand scale – all over the country, museum stores are either full or nearly so, but none comes near to the Museum of London in size. York has less than one-third as much, and nowhere else has as much as one tenth. Like almost all such archives, London's is understaffed and under-used, by both the Museum and external users.

The plan is to move this huge collection from its present cramped store at Lever Street to a specially converted warehouse at Eagle Wharf Road, Hackney, part of which presently houses the Museum's social history collection. The cost of further alterations is estimated to be between £15 and £1.8m. Over half of the material at Lever Street will go to Eagle Wharf Road; the rest (building material and animal bones) will go into temporary storage until it can be 'edited'. Of course, moving finds from one store to another is not progress; what is really exciting is that Eagle Wharf Road will also have

space (for research, seminars and events), and, above all, it will have staff. About thirty finds and post-excavation staff will be transferred from molas to the Curatorial Division to staff Eagle Wharf Road and create a London Archaeological Archive and Research Centre. Their services will be available to others as well as MOLAS.

Thus equipped, the archive can be opened up to researchers, university students and the general public, making it an unparalleled public resource. The idea is to give Londoners access to their own past, and enable individuals and bodies interested in London's past to fulfil their own aims.

Such a positive response to an apparently intractable problem must be welcomed and applauded. But it must also be supported. Letters of support (particularly from organisations) should be sent to Mr. Peter Revell-Smith, The Chairman, Board of Governors, Museum of London, London Wall, London EC2Y 5HN. Above all, it must be clear that there is a demand for the services that will be offered by the Centre. So start thinking about the research that you or your Society could do if the resources were available.

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Annual Lecture and Meeting

THE ANNUAL Lecture and Meeting of the *London Archaeologist* will be held at 7 p.m. on Tuesday 12 May in Room 612 (note change of venue) of the Institute of Archaeology, 31-34 Gordon Square, London WC1. Dr. Edward Impey will speak on recent archaeological work at the Tower of London. Before the talk, the annual reports and accounts will be presented. The proceedings will include the election of officers (note that several

posts have become vacant this year) 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. All are welcome to attend; local societies are invited to send one member with voting powers. Refreshments will be served in the 6th floor Common Room from 6.30 p.m.