

# Commentary

by Gromaticus

## London on the Agenda

ONE OF THE fears that have haunted London's archaeology in the 1990s is that the great increase in fieldwork brought about by PPG 16 would result in the subject becoming 'developer-led'. In other words, archaeological sites would be chosen, not on their archaeological merits or their potential for answering questions, but simply because someone with no interest in archaeology has decided they are 'ripe for development'. For some years, archaeologists have concentrated on coming to terms with the new regime -- learning how to work in it and to operate in a new and competitive environment. This year, however, there have been significant developments that suggest that archaeologists are regaining their confidence and are trying to see how, within the present regime, things might be organised for the benefit of archaeological research and the enlightenment of the interested public.

To be fair, serious thought had been given since the early 1990s, with the commissioning by English Heritage of the *London Assessment Document* in 1992, but it has only really surfaced this year. To understand what is happening, we first need to understand the new language coming into use, the main components of which are:

*resource assessment*: the current state of knowledge and a description of the archaeological resource;  
*research agenda*: a list of the gaps in knowledge, work that could be done in future and the potential of the resource to answer questions;  
*research strategy*: statement setting out priorities and method.

Early this year, the Museum of London announced itself as a major player in this game, and, with support from English Heritage, organised two broadly-based consultation meetings, in March

and November. These meetings were accompanied by a wide range of documentation; although the *London Assessment Document* itself has not yet appeared (publication of this very substantial document is expected in 1999), John Schofield has produced a consultation draft of a much shorter, but nevertheless very useful, *London Archaeological Resource Assessment*, summarising briefly (but still in over 80 pages!) what is known about London's archaeology, both by period and thematically.

November also saw the launch of the *London Archaeology Gazetteer* series, with the publication of the first three volumes: *Archaeology in the City of London, 1907-91* edited by John Schofield with Cath Maloney, *Archaeology in Greater London, 1965-90* edited by Alan Thompson, Andrew Westman and Tony Dyson, and *Post-War Archaeology in the City of London 1946-72* edited by John Shepard.

After assessment comes the agenda and the strategy, and to this end Francis Grew, Ellen McAdam and Hedley Swain produced a paper *Planning a Research Agenda for London Archaeology*, which was discussed at the November meeting. It is good to see it taking an inclusive approach to the ownership of London's past: "creating a research agenda for London archaeology is no less a task than finding a way of articulating the desires and needs ... about the past through the academic research of London's archaeology".

This has been a very brief summary of an exciting year. We hope that this momentum can be maintained, and that it will lead, not only to the desired agenda and strategy, but also to their implementation for the benefit of all who are interested, or who might become interested, in London's past. We intend to play our part by reporting these developments fully in the coming year.

## Annual Lecture and Meeting

THE ANNUAL Lecture and Meeting of the *London Archaeologist* will be held at 7 p.m. on Tuesday 18 May in Room 612 of the Institute of Archaeology, 31-34 Gordon Square, London WC1. There will be a talk on the Museum of London and the future of London's archaeology. Before the talk, the annual reports and accounts will be presented. The proceedings will include the election of officers

(the post of Secretary will 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 8 Woodview Crescent, Hildenborough, Tonbridge TN11 9HD. All are welcome to attend; local societies are invited to send one member with voting powers. Refreshments will be served from 6.30 p.m.