

Commentary

by Gromaticus

Archaeology misses out

THE ROLE AND scope of scientific techniques in archaeology has grown enormously over the past 50 years, but archaeology's ability to pay for them has not kept pace, creating a gulf between what is possible and what can actually be achieved. On the one hand, we have topics which are still considered sufficiently 'cutting edge' to be in with a chance of serious funding, for example the exploitation of DNA-based information. Fine if you know of someone who specialises in it, but beware -- in five years or so the scientific fashion will have moved on, and you may be left high and dry. At the other end of the scale are the techniques that have become routine and reasonably cheap, like dendro-dating and geophysical prospection. But in between lies the 'bleeding edge' of research: not innovative enough to secure research funding, but not routine enough to be purchased 'off the shelf'.

Developer funding has not helped as much as might be expected. While a developer may see the logic of paying to record archaeological remains destroyed by a development, to pay extra to answer a general archaeological question (which his site might be able to an answer) is quite another matter. Why should he be penalised because his site happens to have some particularly well-preserved goo, or some unusual bits of pot, he might well ask. Short of a revolution in the administration of developer funding (which does not seem at all likely), the resources must be sought elsewhere.

So how does an archaeological unit, museum or society go about obtaining the scientific analyses that it needs? Several years ago a fund was set up for just this purpose -- the Fund for Applied Science in Archaeology. It quietly folded a few years later, after apparently failing to reach its expected level of demand, and it never made a real

impact on archaeology. This suggests that not only do archaeologists need access to scientific techniques, they also need advice on what is available, and on what is appropriate to their problem.

Which brings us to English Heritage and its predecessors, which for many years maintained a world-famous Ancient Monuments Laboratory (now part of the Centre for Archaeology), as well as sponsoring scientific work in University Departments on behalf of field archaeologists. A recent welcome development was the creation of regional scientific advisor posts, to form a link between the needs of the field units and the resources (both expertise and equipment) of the universities, and to provide much-needed advice. Now, however, we hear that these posts are to be cut back, as part of a large overall reduction in the funding for archaeological science. As has happened in other fields, Britain seems able to carry out leading research, but unable to take it through the development phase that should follow.

MoL, MoLAS, MoLSS

NO, IT'S NOT a new Latin verb, but a reminder that when the rebuilding of 46 Eagle Wharf Road is complete (see *LA* 9, no. 2 (1999) 64), parts of all three organisations will be housed in the same building. The Museum of London will be represented by its Social History Collection and by the London Archaeological Archive, part of the Early London History and Collections Department. Cath Maloney, who collates our *Excavation Round-up*, is one of the team of five who run the Archive, and does not work for MoLSS as we erroneously said in the previous issue. The building also houses the Museum of London Specialist Services, and the Museum of London Archaeology Service will move there shortly. We hope to report the opening of the new facilities later this year.

Annual Lecture and Meeting

THE ANNUAL LECTURE and meeting of the *London Archaeologist* will be held at 7 p.m. on Tuesday 15 May in Room 612 of the Institute of Archaeology, 31-34 Gordon Square, London WC1. Douglas Killock of Pre-Construct Archaeology will talk on 'Narrow Street, Limehouse: pits, privies and privateers'. Before the talk the annual reports and accounts will be presented. The pro-

ceedings 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 8 Woodview Crescent, Hilden-Borough, 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.