

Putting wheels on the shopping trolley

In these days of development-driven archaeology, it is good to be reminded that progress in archaeology comes through asking questions. So a book that consists mostly of questions¹ is not as strange as it seems. After two introductory chapters explaining the aims of the book and describing the resources, both those *in situ* and those in store, that might help answer questions, the bulk of the book (five chapters; 60 pages) consists of a period-by-period posing of research questions, organised thematically. The next chapter (*The research agenda – major themes*) picks up the themes from earlier chapters and structures them in more detail. The last chapter (*Towards a research strategy for London*) brings together the research themes and the resources to point a way towards implementation. Short summaries are provided in appendices.

The questions range from the extremely general (e.g. ‘Understanding what London’s past environments meant to different groups and individuals’, p. 84) to the very specific (e.g. ‘To establish why TL dating on Ipswichian deposits in London has such problems’, p. 87). Clearly, some questions can only be answered by future fieldwork, which is largely unpredictable as it depends on development. Nevertheless, it is good to have pre-prepared questions which can be addressed as the occasion arises – a sort of planned opportunism.

Many of the questions, the book suggests, can be addressed, if not answered, from records and material that are already ‘in store’, in the products of 5000 plus excavations housed in the Museum of London’s London Archaeological Archive and Research Centre (LAARC). The major discoveries of the future may be made, not in the field, but in the warehouse. And, in principle, anyone can take part; the restrictions on amateur help on site simply do not apply in the archive –

1. *A research framework for London archaeology 2002*, Museum of London. Price £4.95 from MoLAS, 46 Eagle Wharf Road, London N1 7ED.

students, local societies, Joe Public, all are welcome. So far so good, but as the book hints in the final chapter, is isn’t quite that straightforward. Just as excavation and fieldwork techniques have to be learnt (and there are plenty of opportunities to do that, if you can afford them), so the techniques of ‘excavating’ an archive need to be taught, and who will do that? Further, in what state is the archive to be interrogated? Pages 94–5 hint that, although much has been done, much work is still needed to bring it up to a consistent standard that will be able to act as a secure platform for research projects. Until this is done, any research may be at best frustrating, and at worst misleading. It may not be glamorous, but this work is an essential prerequisite. Before we go out with our shopping lists, we need to be sure there are wheels on the trolley.

Apology

We regret that some relevant articles published in *Surrey Archaeological Collections* 89 (2002) were accidentally omitted from the *London Archaeological Bibliography* for 2002. They will be included in the *Bibliography* for 2003.

Fieldwork Round-up 2003

Contributions to the 2003 *Fieldwork Round-up* should be sent to Cath Maloney, Museum of London, 46 Eagle Wharf Road, London N1 7EE. They should be modelled on the ones in the 2002 *Round-up* and if possible should be sent in on a floppy disk as well as on paper.

Advance notice

The Annual Lecture and Meeting of the *London Archaeologist* will be held at 7 p.m. on Monday 24 May in Room 612 of the Institute of Archaeology, 31–34 Gordon Square, London WC1. After the close of business, Tim Carew will speak on Bronze Age Becton. A formal announcement will be made in the next issue, but meanwhile please make a note in your diaries.