

Commentary by Gromaticus

Resurgam

'The report of my death was exaggerated', Mark Twain once mailed to the Associated Press. The same might be said of amateur field archaeology. For years, writers have bemoaned the difficulties facing amateurs who want to take part in archaeological excavations: the impossibility of working on a 'professional' excavation (health and safety, attitudes of developers, issues of competition), the lack of amateur excavations and the high cost of 'training' excavations. It looked as though, over most of the country, amateur archaeology was in serious decline and heading for extinction except as 'meetings and visits' societies. There were exceptions, of course, for example where local societies with a long-term project were able to return year after year.

Recently, however, a whole new genre of archaeological fieldwork seems to have emerged – what might loosely be called 'community archaeology'. Here the aim is to include local people in the study of their own neighbourhood, asking questions which may not seem important on a national scale, but which are of interest to them. Examples from London in 2004 include Lesley Smith's work at the Brixton Windmill, and Andy Agate's at Kingsbury High School (see this issue, pp. 3–8), to which must be added this year the Museum of London's project at Shoreditch Park, conveniently close to the LAARC, and John Phillips' project for Sutton Heritage Service at Stone Court, Carshalton. Shoreditch Park has a particular fascination for me, as I spent part of my childhood just over the

road, when the area of the park was still occupied by prefabs, and I've had my eye on Stone Court as a potential site for years. Common to them all is an injection of professional or academic assistance (often a welcome relief from more routine archaeological work), an external source of funding (e.g. a Lottery grant) and the serious involvement of young people.

No doubt to some this may represent a 'dumming down' of archaeology to some sort of lowest common denominator. On the other hand, archaeology has been advocated for years on the grounds of 'social benefit': the contribution that it makes to the common good of the people of a country, region or town. But this link can appear attenuated or even tenuous. Just how does knowledge of (for example) the location of London's Roman amphitheatre enhance the life of the ordinary Londoner? First they must hear about it, then they must make a personal link to it – it's not that easy. But knowledge of the way of life of people down their street even 100 years ago may make a more immediate and lasting impact. Then may come an interest in the deeper past. Archaeology cannot survive in the long term without popular support; it may be that such support is best cultivated at the grass roots level.

Notes for Contributors

On advice from our printers, we have modified our *Notes for Contributors* slightly. The changes concern the resolution at which digital images should be submitted. Please contact the Editor if you would like a copy.

Annual Lecture and Meeting

The thirty-sixth AGM of the *London Archaeologist* was held on Monday 24 May at the Institute of Archaeology, 31–34 Gordon Square, WC1. The following officers were elected: Editor, Clive Orton; Assistant Editor, Marit Gaimster; Secretary, Becky Wallower; Subscriptions, Shiela Broomfield; Managing Editor, David Gaimster. The post of Advertising and Promotions remained vacant. Three members

(Jane Esden, Pat Nicolaysen and Rosemary Yeaxlee) retired from the Publication Committee, having served for three years. Stuart Brookes, Tim Carew, Richard Gilpin and Odette Nelson were elected to serve on the Committee. After the close of business, John Clark spoke on the history of the London and Middlesex Archaeological Society, which this year celebrates its 150th anniversary.