

# Commentary

## by Gromaticus

### Happy birthday to us

This year, as part of the celebrations for the 40th anniversary of *London Archaeologist*, we are organising a special Annual Lecture (see below), and are taking part in National Archaeology Week (see Diary). There will also be special price (£5 each instead of £6) for binders bought at the Annual Lecture.

### CBA London Group

Representatives from across the capital met in January to form a new CBA London Group. For many years London has only been covered by the CBA's neighbouring regions in the south-east and mid Anglia, leaving London issues seriously under-represented in the CBA's portfolio of high-profile activities. Likewise, within the capital, only SCOLA, with limited resources, has had the London-wide remit to represent views to government and decision makers, or to encourage collaboration and participation.

The new CBA London Group will be able to call on the resources of the national CBA and a focused membership to push forward three main aims: to increase participation and diversity in archaeology, to raise its public and political profile and to improve access to information about archaeology in London. Once it is clear that the CBA is functioning well to meet these objectives, it is likely that SCOLA will then disband. The initial trustees of the new body are being drawn from county and local societies, education, community archaeology, the Museum of London and *London Archaeologist*.

Others, involved in professional archaeology and other constituencies, will be added. Having agreed a draft constitution, CBA London will call a public meeting later this year to formally constitute the group. In the meantime, a membership drive is on, and to this end, *London Archaeologist* and the CBA are offering a very special joint membership deal (see below).

### Joint subscription with CBA

The deal is that instead of taking out separate subscriptions of £16 and £32 p.a. to LA and CBA respectively, it will be possible to take out a joint subscription for only £40, a saving of £8 p.a. The offer is available for renewals or new subscriptions to both organisations; there are special transitional arrangements if your current renewal dates do not coincide. See <http://www.britarch.ac.uk/shop/index1.html>.

### Latest news on burial excavation

In view of the continuing uncertainty about the excavation of burial sites (see *LA 11*, no. 8 (Spring 2007) p. 226), English Heritage has made the following update statement.

"The recent article in *The Observer* ('Anger as burial site digs are blocked': 2 March, p. 24) has raised concerns that, following changes introduced last year by the Ministry of Justice in issuing licenses under the Burial Act, excavations of archaeological burial sites are being blocked, and that a new requirement to rebury excavated human remains within two months is causing

large problems for the study of human remains.

One of these concerns is unfounded, the other very overstated. As far as we know, no excavation of an archaeological burial site in this country has been or is being blocked as a result of last year's changes; and the requirement to rebury within two months applies only to a small proportion of burial excavations, and is not new – it goes back to the Disused Burial Grounds (Amendment) Act 1981.

However these changes have created problems and uncertainties. The archaeological and scientific study of human remains is important to our understanding of our past, and archaeologists have a good record in dealing with the ethical issues and human sensitivities involved. Subject to appropriate safeguards, it is important that archaeologists have enough time to study excavated archaeological human remains properly, and it would be regrettable if requirements to rebury made it impossible to apply new techniques such as DNA and stable isotopes to important groups of human remains excavated in the past.

English Heritage has for the last nine months been working with the Ministry of Justice, the Department for Culture, Media and Sport, and sector representatives, including one from the CBA, to try to resolve these problems. They result from a review of laws which are old and unclear, and it will take a little time to find the right way forward; but we are optimistic that a good outcome can be found."

## Annual Lecture and Meeting

The Annual Lecture and Meeting of the *London Archaeologist* will be held at 7 p.m. on Tuesday 20 May at the Institute of Archaeology, 31–34 Gordon Square, London WC1.

The speaker will be Sophie Jackson, senior consultant with the Museum of London Archaeology Service, on 'Interpreting and presenting London's archaeological sites – how we do it and who gets involved'. Sophie will explore

some of the issues raised on recent projects, including the proposed relocation of the Temple of Mithras. This and other projects have raised many questions about the purpose of presentation, the importance of authenticity and the validity of much interpretation.

Before the talk, the Annual Reports and Accounts will be presented. The proceedings will include some

constitutional amendments, the election of Officers, and the election to the Publication Committee of six Ordinary Members. There will be two vacancies to fill. Nominations should be made to the Secretary, 44 Tantallon Road, London SW12 8DG. All are welcome to attend; subscribers are entitled to vote.

Drinks and light refreshments will be available from 6.30 p.m.