

The Dissolution of SCOLA – the final AGM

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On 16th March 2009 the Standing Conference On London Archaeology had its final AGM in the Meeting Room of the Society of Antiquaries of London under the chairmanship of Shiela Broomfield. The principal business was to agree its dissolution – now that a London Group of the Council for British Archaeology (CBA) has been established with similar aims. About forty members, and guests with interests in SCOLA going back to its early days, were there. Apart from 1 abstention, 9 institutions and 24 individuals voted in favour of dissolution.

SCOLA was formed in 1992 in the wake of several high-profile archaeological projects including the Rose Theatre, and the transfer of the responsibility for providing archaeological planning advice to the majority of London boroughs (the Greater London Council having been abolished in 1986) from the Museum of London to English Heritage. SCOLA was intended to be a formal, pan-London forum with a solid constitution where issues of importance to the conduct of archaeology could be discussed, problems raised, and solutions found. It was originally sponsored by the CBA, the Society of Antiquaries of London and the London & Middlesex and Surrey county archaeological societies; Pat Wilkinson was its Secretary.

Its membership included local archaeological societies, some local authorities and individuals. Its Chairman was not elected by the membership, but nominated alternately by the Society of Antiquaries and the CBA; several very eminent people have become Chairman, including Barry Cunliffe, Michael Robbins, Martin Millett and Peter Addyman (twice).

In its earlier years it ran several conferences with a general appeal, starting in October 1994 with the “Future of Archaeology in London and the role of Amateurs” at Burlington

House. The “Prehistory of London” followed in January 1995, and revisiting Martin Biddle’s seminal “The Future of London’s Past” in December 1997, at the Museum of London. It was one of the organising bodies for a conference on “Post-Medieval London” in November 1999.

SCOLA took a great interest from the beginning in the way in which developer-funded archaeology under the Government’s Planning Policy Guidance 16 (PPG16) was working in London. It financed and published research into this and in 2002 held a conference with particular emphasis on borough planning.

Much of SCOLA’s effort was spent on trying to ensure that the powers that be took account of archaeology, and the historic environment generally. This was not easy – despite efforts from 1999 (a year before London’s first Mayor was elected) to encourage the Greater London Authority to include archaeology in its cultural strategy – it was, at least under Ken Livingstone, a great disappointment. Another disappointment was the Government’s decision last year to drop the Heritage Protection Bill from its legislative programme. Borough councils have not supported SCOLA as was hoped, and two borough museums have been closed, though there is some better news: Havering is to open a new one.

SCOLA also took up some special cases where it believed that the system was not working well – for instance the decision to “preserve *in situ*” under a car park rather than excavate properly an Anglo-Saxon cemetery in Croydon; and the failure to impose an adequate archaeological condition on some redevelopment along the line of the Roman road in Bow. More recently, we pressed for proper excavation and recording before the Olympic facilities were built; this seems to be proceeding satisfactorily, though there remain concerns about aspects of the post-

excavation work and the effect of the equestrian events on Greenwich Park.

Although providing finance was not among its primary purposes, SCOLA did on a few occasions grant-aid the publication of excavations and other projects. In furtherance of its aim to inform the public, in 2004, 2006 and 2008 SCOLA, in conjunction with *London Archaeologist* magazine, offered a prize for the best publication relating to the archaeology of Greater London that had appeared over the previous two years.

Throughout, SCOLA was anxious to inform and involve local societies, who in turn supported SCOLA through subscriptions. In the early days SCOLA organised an annual meeting for local societies to share information and views. In 2002 they were subsumed in the London Archaeological Forum, under the aegis of the Museum of London.

SCOLA: from Barry Cunliffe to Shiela Broomfield

To mark the occasion Dennis Turner gave the valedictory address. First he mused on why he should have been asked – was he being asked to play Cassandra or even Mark Anthony? There had been an obvious Cassius and several candidates for Brutus. But no, he had been asked to fill the role of Methuselah, having been around even before Biddle. He apologised if his memory was not what it was.

He remembered the discovery of the Cripplegate Fort by Grimes, and working with the Thames Basin Archaeological Observers Group. Most of the archaeology then being done in London was under the Guildhall Museum, or the London Museum where Francis Celoria was active. He and John Ashdown had been key figures in CBA Group 10, covering London, which collapsed when they departed elsewhere. In 1960s the Southwark Archaeological Excavation Committee

was set up, mainly working with volunteers – eventually it set up a full-time Unit, under Harvey Sheldon, now incorporated into Museum of London Archaeology. Area-based archaeological liaison committees and the Joint Working Party on London Archaeology were formed to help communication between interested parties.

In 1970s, when Ted Heath (the last Prime Minister to have an interest in heritage) was in power, RESCUE was established, Dennis Turner even finding himself drafting a speech for the House of Lords. Money was forthcoming for archaeology on projects such as the M1 motorway. Manpower Services Commission (unemployed) labour was very helpful to archaeology at this time, but left a large post-excavation backlog without visible funding.

The CBA reorganised itself but failed to revive a separate London group – a meeting called by Rosemary Cramp and Henry Cleere to this end was attended by only six people including themselves. The informal working party was not interested in expanding its role: London was divided along the Thames between CBA Mid-Anglia and CBA South-East. Members of the CBA Policy & Coordination Board tended to be anti-London, thinking that the capital got too large a share of the archaeological cake.

PPG16 came out in a (bad) draft – the Department of the Environment were worried about paying compensation on sites that turned out to have important archaeology, such as Huggin Hill and the Rose Theatre. Geoff Wainwright, now President of the Society of Antiquaries of London, did much to improve PPG16. However, it did lead to the extension of commercial units (in Thatcher's Britain) paid by developers whose interests were not in archaeological outcomes. This meant that budgets were trimmed and there has often been inadequate provision for post-excavation and publication. Dennis Turner warned that the current revision of PPG15/16 was unlikely to be favourable to archaeology.

During the fuss over the Rose Theatre and the controversial reorganisation of archaeology at the Museum of London the working party decided that a more formal body was urgently needed. SCOLA was formed in

this room in Autumn 1992, and was addressed by Simon Hughes MP. It made two mistakes: Chairmen were to be appointed alternately by the CBA and the Society of Antiquaries; and it overestimated its likely income. English Heritage sent Dominic Perring as their representative on the committee.

On income, Dennis Turner said initial funding was good, with substantial pump-priming grants from the Society of Antiquaries of London and the Museum of London. It was felt that a £100 subscription would be negligible in terms of Borough expenditure (without realising that it would have to come from the limited budget of a librarian), £25 reasonable for a Unit (the units were competing for work with very tight margins) and £5 for individuals. In the event Havering Borough joined (and has stayed ever since), Merton was a member until a particularly interested officer retired, and Croydon did while they were at the centre of an archaeological storm (relating to the “preservation *in situ*” of a cemetery site). The Units stayed away and few individuals joined. SCOLA initially employed Scott McCracken as a part-time ‘director’, with a remit to raise funds to cover his salary, and to act as assistant secretary – it never worked. Scott started work on a study of the effectiveness of PPG16, but received an offer from Sweden he couldn't refuse. Chris Phillpotts completed the PPG16 study and the City of London Archaeological Trust supported its publication. Jo Udall was employed in the assistant secretary role, but this proved unsustainable, and SCOLA switched to voluntary effort – being exceptionally fortunate in finding Peter Pickering to do the task.

A Chairman who is appointed is in danger of working for two masters – furthermore the appointing body can have a different agenda from that of the committee being chaired; and London is only understood by a Chairman from London. Barry Cunliffe was an excellent first chairman – but had three diaries (professional, domestic and his secretary's) not always kept in sync – he could be where he was supposed to be according to one, but absent elsewhere. Peter Addyman (who was present at the meeting) was Chairman twice – he once gave a talk on the “Archaeology of

London as seen from York” – wherein London was treated as a larger version of York: it isn't. York is a comprehensible city; London is a mess, made worse when the GLC was abolished in favour of individual Boroughs. With funding constraints and no statutory requirement the Passmore Edwards Museum was closed (in a Labour Borough) and, recently, the Wandsworth Museum (Conservative). English Heritage's Greater London Archaeological Advisory Service is a pan-London body, but its advice is given locally. The Museum of London has problems. Another indicator of the influence one might have is the make up of bodies such as SCOLA, and indeed of those present at the meeting: everyone is white, Caucasian, and few are below middle age.

Things have now gone full circle, with the establishment of CBA London, for which the CBA has been manoeuvring for several years. As well as avoiding the two mistakes SCOLA made at the outset, Dennis Turner gave some pointers that the new Group might ponder:

- Be a Voice
- React to local and national Government papers;
- Museum of London
- Keep encouraging them to support their archaeological activities, curators and archaeologists;
- Contact the Mayor
- SCOLA failed on this;
- Heritage Bill
- Chase the Government, speak for London to CBA Central;
- Olympics
- Fight the diversion of money from archaeology;
- Commercial Units
- Some may go broke – watch that their archives do not just go in a skip;
- Local Museums
- Need all the help they can get – there is no statutory requirement for Boroughs to run them;
- London Address
- Use a London address – or the letter will not get past the underling who opens the envelope.

Dennis Turner's final suggestion related to the relative population of London vis-à-vis Wales or Scotland. How about calling it the **Council for London's Archaeology**?