

Commentary

by Gromaticus

It never rains . . .

Sometimes it feels good to say "I told you so". Sometimes it doesn't. Sometimes all one can do is despair. In case you haven't already guessed, I'm referring to the situation at the Museum of London, which I discussed in the previous issue. Now that the fog has lifted, it's clear that out of a total of 11 redundancies, two senior curators have one – Jenny Hall (Roman) and Jon Cotton (prehistory) – to be replaced by one post covering both periods. Technically, they both took voluntary redundancy, but knowing that one job was to go, their only choice was to opt for the better deal in case theirs was the redundant post. No one expected to lose two such key curators. It is some relief to hear that Jon will continue to be active in London's archaeology, and we wish him and Jenny well. On the face of it, the overall cuts are relatively light in percentage terms, but that's a bit like saying that if you cut off a chicken's head, it's not that important because it's only 5% of the chicken (or whatever the figure is). Curators are the lifeblood of any museum, and their loss will be felt cumulatively for years to come. Already, I hear of delays to the proposed refurbishment of the Roman Gallery. Talking about heads, John Clark (recently retired from the MOL) commented on britarch (the British archaeology discussion list) that the MOL senior management team has nine 'Directors', only one of whom has 'Collections' in their title.

As if that wasn't bad enough, news has come (through the *Museums Journal*) that the Museum plans to setup its archaeology service (MOLA) as a independent charity, claiming that it would give it "greater commercial potential". This might not be such a bad thing for MOLA in the long run, but in the short run it is bad for staff and their morale, with serious threats to conditions of employment, for example. However, it is certainly bad for the Museum: to quote the staff union "MOLA contributes to the academic standing of the museum – 80% of the publications detailed in the most recent MOL annual report derive from MOLA or archaeology. At a time of funding cuts, MOLA has the potential to earn hundreds of thousands of pounds for the museum." Meanwhile, the Museum is reviewing the London Archaeological Archive and Research Centre (LAARC).

What this will lead to is not yet clear, but one outcome may well be to charge for the deposit of site archives, which would have long-term effects on the integrity of London's archaeological archive. By an enormous irony, the LAARC received the Educational Initiative Award at the Museums and Heritage Awards for Excellence 2011. Its *Visitor Inclusion Programme* brought volunteers and museum visitors together to work on London's archaeological material. Over 8000 visitors interacted with volunteers with hundreds participating in 'Hands-On Archaeology' sessions where they learnt

how to improve the storage of pottery sherds by carrying out basic collections care work. The *Visitor Inclusion Project* is intended to run again in January 2012 to celebrate the 10th anniversary of LAARC; the next project lined up for volunteers starts this June and involves training them to lead tours of the museum's archaeological stores for the general public. It seems that excellence is not enough to guarantee survival.

Looking at the wider scene, I noticed that the Council of Europe Framework Convention on the Value of Cultural Heritage for Society (the Faro Convention) came into force this June, having been ratified by ten member states (not including the UK). It is based on the idea that knowledge and use of heritage form part of the citizen's right to participate in cultural life as defined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Perhaps someone should remind the Museum.

Tell us about yourself

Following a suggestion from one of our readers, the Publication Committee has agreed that authors should be asked to submit a short biographical paragraph, giving brief details of their affiliations and main interests, with their articles. We are publishing them in this issue for the first time.

Index

An index for Volume 12 is being prepared, and we hope to distribute it with the next issue.

Annual Lecture and General Meeting

London Archaeologist's 42nd AGM was held on Tuesday 18th May at the Institute of Archaeology

The following officers were elected: Managing Editor, Peter Rowsome; Editor, Clive Orton; Assistant Editor, Märit Gaimster; Secretary, Becky Wallower; Treasurer, Alastair Ainsworth; Membership Secretary, Jo Udall; Marketing Manager, Patrizia Pierazzo. Richard

Lock was re-appointed as Independent Examiner. Josephine Brown, Jane Esden and Richard Gilpin were re-elected and Vicky Donnelly, Victoria Ridgeway and Lucy Whittingham elected as Ordinary Members of the Publication Committee. Standing down, Sarah Dhanjal was thanked for the impetus she gave to the charity's upsurge in community activities, Sophie Jackson for her excellent chairmanship and John

Shepherd for his help with local events.

After the close of business, Nick Bateman and Gary Brown reviewed selected results of the work of MOLA and PCA on the Olympic site in the Lower Lea Valley. Discoveries as diverse as a neolithic axe, a much adapted early 19th c. boat and a variety of previously unrecorded WWII defensive installations were revealed.