

# Commentary

by Gromaticus

## Squeezing the middle stratum

We've heard a lot lately about the 'squeezed middle', used as an economic term. But I wonder if the term might also be applied to the state in which British archaeology finds itself. Involvement in and knowledge of archaeology comes in a very broad spectrum, from university departments and commercial archaeologists to *Time Team* viewers. Both ends seem to be relatively flourishing, despite the downturn in the economy, but the middle ground worries me. It consists of people who have some knowledge of archaeology (sometimes a great deal of knowledge) but who do not want to take it up full-time. My argument is that this sector is being 'squeezed', in that as people inevitably leave it, for whatever reason, it is becoming increasingly difficult for others to join it, so that over time it must decline. The questions then arise: does this matter, why is it happening, and what can be done about it?

Obviously, I believe that this matters (why else would I be writing about it?), for three main reasons. First is the benefit that the individual gains from an active and increasing involvement in archaeology: the achievement of learning, of discovery (whether in the field, the laboratory or the museum store), the teamwork, and of passing that learning on to others. This in turn can lead on to a greater sense of place, even of self. Second, archaeology in a democratic society needs a groundswell of popular support on which it can rely in times of difficulty and opposition ('how many battalions has the past?')

one might ask). The weight of informed opinion can be very important in ensuring the proper protection of ancient monuments and the proper investigation of threatened sites, for example. Finally, this all feeds through into wider society, influencing the 'feel' of a locality through events, talks, articles in the local press, and so on.

Why is it becoming more difficult for people to move across this spectrum of knowledge, from a passive interest to involved activity? Partly it may be due to increased pressures on their time, but much of it is due, I believe, to the decreasing availability of educational opportunities. I'm not writing here of school or degree courses, but of the adult education movement that stimulated and informed many of us in the 1960s and 1970s. The old Diploma in Archaeology and Certificate in Field Archaeology provided courses which could be stepping stones to higher education for those who missed out the first time around, or foundations for a life-time interest in the practice of archaeology, but such courses are becoming harder to find, and where they still exist they are becoming prohibitively expensive. Perhaps we have the wrong model, and the one-evening-per-week with essays, field trips and a practical requirement, is no longer the route.

Of course, other models are available. I'm experimenting with short (one-week) intensive courses, mainly as a way of dealing with 'legacy' post-excavation work, but incidentally as a way of training people in specific skills. The community archaeology project

has become a popular model recently, with two strands: the top-down (led by professionals) and the 'bottom-up' (driven by community groups, schools, etc.).<sup>1</sup> Funding has often been available through the HLF, but projects have been difficult to sustain after the initial funding runs out. But unless a project can be sustained, there is little opportunity for the individual to grow and to make an impact on their local community. What we need might be a sort of CPD (Continuing Professional Development) without the P – personal development, though without the formal accreditation that could deter both providers and learners. The providers could be professional archaeologists or others with specific skills or knowledge that they are willing to pass on. In my experience, it's not too difficult to book space, advertise and see who turns up. A loose framework might be needed to hold it all together – this could be a task which would enable CBA London to find its feet and do something useful.

## Apology

We apologise for the mess made of Bruce Watson's letter in the previous issue. This was due to a technical error at the printers.

## Reminder

Nominations close in May for the London Archaeological Prize for 2012, for publications in 2010 and 2011 relating London's archaeology. Details can be found on the back cover.

I. G. Moshenska, S. Dhanjal and D. Cooper 'Building sustainability in community archaeology' *Archaeology International* 13/14 (2009–2011) 94–100.

## Annual Lecture and General Meeting

We meet this year at the Institute of Archaeology. Our wine reception at 6.30 pm will be followed at 7 pm by a short AGM and the prestigious annual lecture. In this Jubilee year Professor Warwick Rodwell, Consulatant Archaeologist at Westminster Abbey will review ten years of important

work, up to recent discoveries of Saxon remains, in *The Archaeology of a Royal Peculiar: new light on Westminster Abbey and its furnishings*.

The AGM proceedings will include the election of Officers, and the election to the Publication Committee of six Ordinary Members. There will be two

vacancies to fill, and a new Marketing Manager to elect. Send nominations (and RSVP for the reception please) to the Secretary: email via website or 44 Tantallon Road, London SW12 8DG.

**All welcome: 22 May 2012, UCL Institute of Archaeology, 31–34 Gordon Square, London WC1H 0PY.**