

Commentary

by Gromaticus

Anno Domini

A question came into my mind while I was washing up one evening: 'is archaeology a young profession?' Silly question, you may reply – archaeology as a profession has come about within the lifetime of many of us, and it can't compare with the long-established professions, such as law and medicine. But what about the professionals rather than the profession itself? In that sense, are we an old, or perhaps an ageing, profession? So what had been fermenting in the back of my mind to bring this question bubbling to the surface? When I back-tracked from the question, several factors came to light.

The first strand was a letter that I had received not long before, inviting me to join *The Friends of Winchester Studies*, an organisation dedicated to the publication of the series of *Winchester Studies*, the outcomes of the large-scale excavations carried out in Winchester from 1961 to 1971. I was very glad to join, as I had worked on the Winchester excavations from 1963 to 1966 (my undergraduate years), but it made me feel old – I started there fifty years ago! Many archaeologists, from both Britain and abroad, owe much to Winchester for both firing their enthusiasm for archaeology and for giving them the skills to continue with it in later life.

My last visit to Winchester had been to attend Birthe Kjølbbye-Biddle's funeral in the Cathedral in 2010. The memory of that event led me to reflect on the steady stream of obituaries that we have published in *London Archaeologist* in recent years (and also on those archaeologists who probably should have had one, but didn't). Notable London archaeologists seemed to be dying at an alarming rate. But it's not just London, of course, as the recent outpouring of grief over Mick Aston's death has shown. What's happening, of course, is that the generation of archaeologists who entered the discipline in the boom years of the 1960s and 1970s are now reaching the

end of their 'shelf life' and are leaving the scene one by one. That should come as no surprise, however much we may regret the passing of individual archaeologists.

If we are not careful, when an individual dies their accumulated experience and wisdom dies with them, and we are all impoverished. These intangibles are as much part of archaeology as the strata and artefacts that are our bread-and-butter. I'm not alone in thinking this. For example, there has been a resurgence of interest in *Hobley's Heroes*, a sort of in-house comic book from the early days of the Museum of London's Department of Urban Archaeology (DUA) in the 1970s. This was a formative period for urban archaeology, when systems were developed and implemented for dealing with vastly complicated sites and their artefacts. Its importance goes far beyond London, because these methods were carried around the world by a diaspora of ex-DUA workers as the scale of work in London fluctuated according to economic circumstances. Now these workers are feeling their age, and beginning to appreciate the need to record the history of that period before it is lost to memory. We encourage that ambition.

A similar feeling pervades part of the voluntary sector. Many local societies were either set up, or revitalised, in the 1960s, and their (re)founders feel, not surprisingly, that it is time to pass the burden to a new generation. Some are achieving this, but others may not be. Do we need a forum in which advice and encouragement can be shared between societies? It seems to me that some societies may have little idea of what goes on beyond their boundaries, and what they could learn from their neighbours. One might even ask whether the conventional idea of a local archaeological society needs a re-think for the 21st century. One area that desperately needs more resources is the provision of more locally-based Young Archaeologists Clubs (YACs). To

ensure that archaeology in London continues to flourish and to have public support we need to enthuse young people with the idea that their local past matters to them, and that they can contribute to it.

To sum up, we need to capture the memories and experiences of a generation of London's archaeologists while they (most of them) are still with us. Their story is a fascinating one, which is not only valuable in its own right, but also helps to explain present structures and practices in London's archaeology. I'm not sure of the best way to do this – a book, a conference, a series of articles in *London Archaeologist*, or an online resource, to which anyone could contribute. It requires both self-awareness on the part of the contributor and the ability to step back and see how they fit into the bigger picture. Finally, who has the commitment and the resources to undertake such a task – could it be the county societies, CBA London, or perhaps a PhD student funded to research the topic and to provide a 'popular' account alongside an academic thesis?

East Enders

This is a special issue, dedicated to sites in the East End of London, covering periods from the Bronze Age to the 18th century. Also, it has four extra pages, as we are attempting to reduce the length of the publication queue by publishing five articles instead of the usual four. We may repeat this in future, and we hope to publish another special issue, on Southwark, some time in 2014.

Fieldwork and Publication Round-up

The Fieldwork and Publication Round-up for 2012 is being distributed with this issue. If you have not received your copy, please contact the Membership Secretary (address on p. 253). Our thanks go to Cath Malony for collating the Fieldwork Round-up. Please let us know of any omissions from either section.