

Commentary

By GROMATICUS

RESCUE

THE FIRST A.G.M. of RESCUE showed that the organisation had wide-spread backing with particular concentrations in the south. A substantial membership figure has been built up, the organisation has been registered as a charity and 'official' recognition has been accorded it by Mr. Julian Amery, Minister of Housing and Construction, who has received a deputation.

The membership figure of over 2,300 for the first year shows points of both strength and weakness. As RESCUE themselves have pointed out, this makes the organisation the largest archaeological body in the country. However, if the figure is compared with, say, the circulation of just under 2,000 for *the London Archaeologist*, then it is quite clear that only a small percentage of the so-called 'archaeologically committed' are as yet actively supporting RESCUE.

On the local front RESCUE announced at a press conference last January that it was to commission a survey of the City of London's archaeology to put before the Department of the Environment. This much needed action is something which all readers of *the London Archaeologist* will approve and what better way could there be of showing approval of the survey (and providing for its implementation) than by subscribing to RESCUE — minimum subscription £1 to 25a The Tything, Worcester.

BAYNARD'S CASTLE

THERE HAS BEEN a large amount of press publicity following the emergency excavation on the Castle site at Eastertide. Discussion will undoubtedly continue for sometime and, in particular, it will be interesting to hear what is said at the forthcoming C.B.A. conference on 'The Erosion of History — Archaeology and Planning in Towns.'

The episode of Baynard's Castle is only a further chapter in the story of post-war archaeology in the City which it littered with lost opportunities. For this state of affairs to occur anywhere would be bad enough, but for it to happen in the historical capital of the country is appalling. Recent public expressions by the City Corporation suggest that it is not as Philistine as most people tend to assume it to be. Certainly at the moment there is much to its credit — the new Museum of London is at last going up because the Corporation apart from providing its own one-third share of construction costs, is also, to put it euphemistically, making other facilities available; the west wall of the Cripplegate fort is to be suitably preserved; and much of the Roman town-house at Billingsgate is also being preserved. Perhaps it is only a matter of the right approach to the

right person. Perhaps the public and archaeologists attribute too much to the utterances of transient Lord Mayors!

ARCHAEOLOGICAL PROBLEMS IN THE CITY

IT IS NOW beginning to emerge that one of the two main underlying problems has been the lack of communication between the City Corporation and the archaeologists, both inside and outside of the Guildhall Museum. The second problem has been the lack of application of available resources to rescue archaeology.

Rescue work demands a completely different approach from research work. Only once have excavators actually worked alongside contractors in the City — in 1968 Brian Philp excavated the south-east corner of the Roman forum. Asked to withdraw by the contractors on the ninth day, his team stayed for 90 days — without delaying development. Similar cases to this can be quoted from all over the country but this is the only instance of it happening in the City.

Another peculiarity of excavation work in the City has been its use, or rather misuse, of volunteers. The disparate contributions to local archaeology being made by the West London Archaeological Field Group and the City of London Archaeological Society show the difference in outlook between the two associated museums.

The authorities are fully aware of all the shortcomings in the City's archaeology, which obviously can not be overcome in an instant. Mr. Max Hebditch, Director of Guildhall Museum, feels that the answer lies in the creation of a well-funded special research unit devoted to rescue archaeology in the City. Prior to the Baynard's Castle furore he had already allocated one of his assistants, Hugh Chapman, to direct the coming summer excavation at Aldgate.

If the sad episode of Baynard's Castle produces the positive action required, then all will not have been in vain. The Guildhall Museum at last appears to be heading in the right direction and the survey of the City is about to start.

If archaeology in the City is now pursued with vigour and enthusiasm coupled with foresight and adequate finance, then it should be possible to save some of Ralph Merrifield's Siblyline Books.

SUBSCRIPTIONS

As a number of subscribers have expressed a wish to pay their subscriptions by Post Office Giro, an account has now been opened with the following number — 37 392 4003.