

# Letters

## ENVIRONMENTAL ARCHAEOLOGY: A POLICY FOR LONDON?

THE AUTHORS are right in bringing to the attention of readers in the last issue of *the London Archaeologist* the need for more funds and effort to be channeled into the scientific examination of archaeological deposits in the London area. However their analysis of the "demand for environmental work" and "information required" exhibits a basic misunderstanding of the empirical approach which researchers would have to adopt. Experience has shown, both from my work in the City and of my colleagues elsewhere that it is not possible to make *a priori* assumptions based on data from analysis or organic remains from archaeological excavations. Results turn up more questions, which in turn require answers — simple interpretations are rarely possible. Research into London's natural history does not merely require "collection (sampling) sorting, liaison with specialists and interpretation" as is suggested, but rather a full research programme should be undertaken. This would involve the building up of reference collections of both modern and ancient specimens, as I have started in the case of seeds. Much information is required on modern ecology and microhabitats of organisms in urban and other environment, to aid interpretation. Systematic records must be kept and experiments carried out on sampling techniques, rather than standardizing present methods.

A research programme of this kind could not operate on a basis of the organisation proposed in the article. The prestructuring of an organisation of this kind is always dangerous, however, since each area of study is essentially dependent on information from other areas for interpretation. I suggest a team approach with minimum use of external specialists. Four or five researchers in a flexible organisation should be able to cover most of the topics which a multidisciplinary approach of this kind demands, with two, preferably three, technicians and if possible a historian. To employ a "general environmentalist" — a species which I have yet to meet — two specialists and five (!) technicians would produce little more in terms of output than we see at present.

Much of the information retrieved from a study of this kind will be of little direct use to the archaeologist; this is by no means to invalidate it, for the organic remains are of as much part of the finds from an excavation as the pottery. But more important, where relevant information is recovered, it can be of extreme importance to the archaeologist in building up an accurate picture of past communities.

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(continued from p.24)

CBA regional group.

### The Vote

When the vote is finally held on whether there is to be a full-scale regional group for Greater London, I hope that if the decision goes against CBA's proposals, that body will have the grace to accept a democratic response and tailor its policies accordingly. Likewise, if the vote were to go the other way, I hope that all dissidents, including myself, would accept the decision and strive for a successful group.

## GALLIPOTS

THE WORD "gallipot" has a long, if not always entirely clear, history of usage as a ceramics term. The *OED* defines a gallipot as "A small earthen glazed pot, esp. one used by apothecaries for ointments and medicines", and instances various 19th-century uses of the term, citing Dickens in *Little Dorrit* (1855) referring to a fly-trap of vinegar and sugar in gallipots, E. H. Patterson's *A Glossary of Words in Use in the Counties of Antrim and Down* of 1880 defining "Gaily pot" as a jam pot, and Stevenson in *Treasure Island* (1883) using the word metaphorically when referring to a "little gallipot of a boat" (though one wonders if he was not subconsciously associating the word with "galliot.") The latest (6th ed, 1976) *Concise Oxford Dictionary* includes gallipot with no indication of its being obsolete or obsolescent and gives the same meaning as above — "Small earthen glazed pot used for ointments etc."

Arthur Morrison, who wrote a famous trilogy in the 1890's on East London working-class life — *Tales of Mean Streets* (1894), *A Child of the Jago* (1896), and *To London Town* (1899) — refers in one of the stories in the first-named book, "All That Message," to "an unsuspected twelve and sixpence [found in] a gallipot on the kitchen dresser." The reference to the gallipot is quite incidental, and there is no suggestion that the term was in any way unusual, at least among the class the story describes; in another of the stories in the same book, "On the Stairs," there is a reference to money being kept in a teapot.

Morrison was an acute observer of the East London working classes — although little is known of his life despite the fact he lived until 1945, he was born in Poplar, the son of an engine-fitter, possibly lived at least part of his childhood and youth in East London (with which he was certainly familiar as a child), and was involved in the administration of the People's Palace from 1886 to 1890, shortly after which he became a freelance writer (of his other writings, four of his detective stories have reappeared in "The Rivals of Sherlock Holmes" series). It seems probably that in using the term gallipot, and in citing its use as a receptacle for money and its being kept on the kitchen dresser, Morrison was describing a scene that he knew and in terms which were in familiar use. The term gallipot was therefore presumably in common use at least in an East London working-class environment at the end of the 19th century. If, however, it was the sort of object commonly used to hold coins — to the bulk of at least 12s 6d, no doubt with many pennies and half-pennies — it is perhaps unlikely that it was an ointment- or medicine-jar: it is more likely to have been something like a jam jar (cf the Irish meaning cited by the *OED*) or something of similar size; one thinks of the glazed Keiller marmalade jars, for example.

Are any of your readers familiar with the term gallipot in common domestic usage at the present or in the fairly recent past in East London?

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