

Commentary

By GROMATICUS

Time on our side?

I HAVE HAD ON MY DESK for some time the report *Time on our side? A survey of the Archaeological Needs in Greater London*. Although printed late in 1976, this has only recently become available to the public (price £3 from the Museum of London), as it was originally prepared as an information document for local authorities and other bodies. The text falls into five sections—The Archaeology, The Threat, The Resources, The Conclusions, Recommendations. The first is supported by nine maps, eight of which show the known archaeology of a period (Palaeolithic, Mesolithic, Neolithic, Bronze Age, Iron Age, Roman, Saxon and Medieval) and the last—Development—shows the major threats. In short, an attempt to do for Greater London what *The Future of London's Past* did for the City. Unfortunately, it falls far short of the standard set by the earlier work. Partly this is due to the scale of the problem: a map of the City can show the location of sites with some precision, while a similarly sized map of Greater London cannot: partly it is due to the presentation of the maps, which show the sites against a background of present day borough boundaries and geology (classified by geological period, for Heaven's sake). Its use for study or detailed policy formation is therefore extremely limited, although it does of course show the main concentrations of finds, e.g. Palaeolithic in Ealing and Hackney, Mesolithic along the Thames and in Sutton, Croydon and Bromley, and so on.

Moving on to later sections, one soon realises that the purpose of the report is political rather than academic or practical. Having established, in general terms, that *there is lots of archaeology in Greater London*, we then see that "every archaeological site which is not the subject of a specific protection order must be regarded as being at risk in one way or another" (The Threat), that far more resources are needed to face this threat adequately and that the problem is particularly acute in the area of: Sites and Monuments Index, Legislation, Co-ordination and Priorities, Conservation, Archives and dissemination of information, and Training. The recommendations that follow seem like an anti-climax—that the various official bodies concerned should get together and talk about the problem. But in our complicated society nothing can be done without discussion, and if this report establishes in the minds of our political masters (a) that there is a problem and (b) something needs to be done about it, it will have served its

purpose.

I would like to look in more detail at one need highlighted by this report—a central Sites and Monuments Index for Greater London, which could be linked to the planning process. In my innocence I imagined that the Museum of London was the fount of all knowledge in this respect, although other bodies (e.g. SLAEC, ILAU, Passmore Edwards and other Museums) kept similar records for their own areas. While the Museum does possess such a record, it is of a lower standard and of far less use than I had expected. Having accreted over the years, rather than being consciously planned, it has a patchy coverage, sites are badly (sometimes wrongly) located, and the referencing to original reports is often totally inadequate. One example will have to suffice here: the Roman map shows a building in Lambeth, just south of Westminster Bridge. Very interesting in view of the current debate about a possible Roman river crossing at Westminster. But wait—this site is occupied by St Thomas' Hospital, and wasn't a Roman stone building discovered under the other St Thomas' (in Southwark) in the 19th century and . . . oh dear, it's the *same* building! Now I'm not trying to blame anyone for this—the Index has never had the resources it deserves and that's all. But surely now we could afford a year or two's work by one person to bring it up to scratch, and perhaps someone part-time to keep it up to date in the future. After all, how can we plan our priorities, assess threats and generally rescue what's left of London's archaeology if we do not properly know what has been found so far?

Metrication

MR STANTON'S LETTER in our Winter issue provoked more response than any other issue of recent years (six letters so far). The score is four to two in favour of imperial units, but soundings among practising archaeologists reveal a growing trend towards the use of metric units in the field. However, I clearly underestimated the strength of feeling amongst our readers, and feel a need to make a statement of policy which will go some way to satisfying both authors and readers. In future, therefore, we will endeavour to publish reports in the units actually used in the field, but with alternative measurements (imperial or metric, as appropriate) in brackets afterwards, for at least the more important dimensions. Although Gromaticus does have the use of a desk calculator, it would be helpful if authors could perform their own conversions where necessary.