

Commentary

By GROMATICUS

Happy Birthday

SINCE THIS ISSUE marks the 10th anniversary of the *London Archaeologist* some self-congratulation seems appropriate. To have survived for ten years in the hazardous jungle of specialist magazine publication (well, do you remember *Ago*?) is an achievement in itself. There have been disappointments — despite the increased popularity of archaeology, our subscription circulation has hovered around 1500 (more are sold over the counter) for several years. Nevertheless, we have managed to keep the price down: an increase from 3/- in 1968 to 40p in 1978, during which period the value of the £ has decreased to about one-third, means that your *L.A.* is now about 13 per cent cheaper in “real terms” — and it has four more pages.

Plus ça change

IT IS CUSTOMARY on anniversaries to look back at the changes that time has wrought. Looking at this issue, I think the changes speak for themselves: who in 1968 would have envisaged a large team of professional archaeologists excavating the Milk Street site for several months, for example? Instead, I have been looking at the topics that have not changed. As one reads through ten years' *Commentary*, certain topics occur time and time again. After money, the most common (seven mentions) is the problem of ensuring adequate archaeological coverage. Over-reliance by local societies on a few individuals who are prepared to lead, followed by collapse when they die/retire/move/have children, may be a reason. The Certificate in Field Archaeology was hailed as the answer, but although the scheme flourishes, its apparent impact on fieldwork — and certainly on publication — has been minimal.

The second most mentioned problem is that of treasure hunters (five times), reflecting perhaps the view of the seven million or so Londoners who do not read the *L.A.* Third equal (four mentions each) are the lack of post-excavation facilities (coupled with the failure of excavators to publish) and the continuing saga of CBA Group 10, while fifth (three mentions) is the much-discussed Antiquities Bill.

If one tries to extract a common thread from all these themes, a rather depressing picture of archaeology emerges. There is an initial glamour, related to the thrill of excavation and the “antique value” of the nicer portable finds. Interest wanes as the streets of Britannia are found not to be pav-

ed with gold, and the intellectual excitement that could come from the posing and answering of archaeological questions does not take over — perhaps because digging is seen as a welcome relief from thinking, or perhaps because the site director plays his cards too close to his chest and does not let the workers in on the real problems. Soon we back to the faithful few, washing pots, wondering whether they will ever be published and yet curiously afraid to publish, and dreaming of a Unit for their area to solve all their problems.

Obviously, recurrent themes are more likely to be about problems than successes (that's why they recur), and of course there are shining examples (like Waltham Abbey) to prove me wrong, but over Greater London as a whole I don't think this picture is too unfair. And is the root cause the “lure of gold” image of archaeology, coupled with a reluctance to delegate (and to accept delegation) and a rejection of the intellectual challenge that the disciple could provide?

Sally Petchey

THIS ISSUE SEES the end of ten years of service by Sally Petchey as honorary Treasurer and Subscription Secretary — and, sadly, her retirement from that post, as the Petchey family are emigrating to New Zealand early in the new year. Shiela Broomfield (née Wilcox for those who remember her in her COLAS days) has gallantly stepped into the breach.

Sally, who one time was a secretary at the C.B.A., is a remarkable girl — not only has she held her *London Archaeologist* post since the magazine's inception, but also its first publication was closely followed by the birth of her son, and later came a daughter.

During the 40 issue (1,000 pages) of the *London Archaeologist* she has borne the burden with an efficiency and cheerfulness, despite also having to bring up a family, look after two cats, a dalmatian (plus at one time six puppies) and a third of a pony (but that is another story), act as secretary to a local residents group and a local drama group, organise a toy library, and serve as treasurer of Southwark and Lambeth Archaeological Society all this taken in her stride!

Her capabilities in organising an accounting system for the magazine from scratch were essential to its successful launch; meeting the demands and frustrations of a subscription periodical is no easy job. Thank you very much, Sally — you will be much missed.