

# Commentary

By GROMATICUS

IN MY RATHER depressing survey—well at least it depressed me!—of London Archaeology last time, I dwelt on what seemed the general failure of local societies to cover their areas adequately and to publish their work, and suggested that one reason might lie in the inability of these organisations to accept the intellectual discipline involved in archaeological work.

What I did not do was to comment much on one of the major changes during the *London Archaeologist's* first decade—the unprecedented growth of professional coverage in London. The need for this growth sprang from the inadequacy of the old system: in London, as in many parts of the Country, it was clear that the few full-timers and the more numerous part-timers—the latter usually working under the aegis of local societies—were unable to handle the vast amount of archaeological 'Rescue' work made necessary by re-development.

Few could argue with the proposition that in London we are in a much better position to deal with the destruction of our buried history than we were 10 years ago. In 1968 there were only two full-time field jobs, one in the City and one in Greater London: now, almost entirely due to increased Central and Local Authority funding, there are more than 50 employed in the former area, and about half that number in the latter. Attitudes too have changed; it is much more difficult now for developers, whether public or private, to prevent archaeologists doing their work.

Yet there is little room for complacency. It cannot be claimed that there is a full coverage throughout London: indeed, it seems probable that a comprehensive archaeological service exists in no more than one third of the Boroughs. Nor are more than a few of the archaeologists in securely established positions. Some might argue that this at least keeps them on their toes, but in reality, a combination of low pay and, for many, annual threats of termination of contract are unwelcome aspects of a system still geared to inadequate grants dependent on annual votes. This is no way to guarantee the development of permanent teams without which archaeological research will prove to be ineffective.

Nor must we forget that this still largely insecure work has its critics within the archaeological profession. Those who suggest that 'much urban Rescue Archaeology is better described as rubbish collection than research' and that of 4 categories of British excavations the 3 largest are 'the totally in-

competent, the largely useless and the quite unnecessary' may be in error but will only be effectively silenced by being proved wrong.

Principally, only publication will provide a safe medium for judging the contribution which these excavations make to our understanding of various aspects of London's history. A full report on the Southwark Excavations 1972-74 has just been published by the London & Middx. Arch. Soc. and the Surrey Arch. Soc. This took some two years to prepare and was nearly two years more with the printers. It is too early as yet to say how it has been received, but it illustrates what may be the minimum delay between the excavation and publication on large sites. How pessimistic the City Unit is in suggesting publication dates for recently dug sites which take us well into the 1990s is a question which needs examining.

Nevertheless, the unwelcome problem of a new generation of 'backlogs' is likely to be an increasing one, as large areas of the City, Southwark and elsewhere in Greater London have not, as yet, been dug in sufficient detail to provide an adequate picture of their development.

The renewed interest in a Celtic Oppidum sited west of the City and the fact that archaeologists are involved in debate based on fresh evidence as to whether Londinium was founded as part of the initial Claudian advance in AD 43 or some years later; and as to whether or not this origin was 'civil' or 'military' clearly demonstrates this.

Whether published or not, the vast amount of material—and the records—derived from the excavations of the 1970's and beyond will require considerable allocation of new resources. They are likely to form an indispensable quarry for future generations of researchers and decisions must soon be made on where they are going to be housed and how they are going to be archived. This is a problem which up to now has been largely neglected, partially perhaps because it involves two separate departments of central government, both of which are going to require considerable prodding. The Department of the Environment may claim that these functions are related to education and research and thus the province of the D.E.S. However the D.E.S. seem to suggest that as the D.O.E. paid largely for the digging, it should also take responsibility for the material. Both departments should now get together with those responsible for archaeology in London and squarely face the issue.