

Commentary

By GROMATICUS

I HAVE just completed my first "level 4" excavation report. This is, I hope, neither a boast nor a moan, but a lead into some thoughts that this happy state has provoked. But first, for those who have so far avoided the terminology that the Frere Report (1975) sprang upon us, what is a "level 4" report? The Frere Report was reviewed in *the London Archaeologist* by Harvey Sheldon (Vol. 2, No. 16 (Autumn 1976), 414) but for those whose back numbers do not stretch that far, the relevant points are that the report recommends that publication in the usually accepted sense should be limited to what is called "level 4" data, i.e. "synthesised descriptions with supporting data" for the site and "selected finds and specialist reports relevant to synthesis" for the finds. The fuller data and reports on the site and finds are called "level 3", and, the report suggests, should be readily available for examination, preferably in some cheaply reproducible form.

What, then, are my thoughts on reaching this happy state. Firstly, that except for the illustrations, the level 4 report bears a strange, if superficial, resemblance to the interim report published three years ago. Many of the conclusions have been changed, but the structure is much the same. This suggests that it would have been quite possible to cheat, i.e. to write the level 4 report without first producing level 3, thus avoiding much detailed work, particularly on the finds. It would also have been possible to cover my tracks so that this was not apparent. Indeed, it would appear to me virtually impossible for an editor to assess a level 4 report *without also having seen the level 3*, both in order to check that there is one, and to assess the weight of evidence supporting the assertions made in the publication

report.

But, I can hear you say, is that relevant? Are we not honest? Who would cheat anyway? This is fair comment for the Units, where managerial control can be exercised to ensure that the level 3 reports are written, but what about smaller organisations? Imagine a small local society, trying desperately to keep publication abreast of excavation. There is really very little incentive to write the level 3 report, and perhaps no one will read it, so why not just skip it? The temptation and opportunity are both present, and could together be an intolerable pressure on a hard-pressed excavator.

Two firm points seem to emerge from this rambling. Firstly, editors should insist on seeing the level 3 report before accepting a level 4 report for publication. Secondly, there should be a coherent way of producing, archiving and circulating level 3 reports (particularly from local societies) within the Greater London area. Clearly, local societies will want to deposit copies in different places (e.g. their own library, the local Museum) but there should be one central archive into which everyone deposits a copy (preferably the master), so that a researcher can have all the information relating to his topic readily available, and would not have to traipse round half a dozen local museums (and still perhaps miss some reports). Ideally, I think these reports should be on microfiche, since once a master is made the costs of reproduction are very low. Most large public libraries now have microfiche readers, and the day of the home microfiche reader is surely only a few years away. Experiments in this area are in fact already in progress (so I can't claim any credit for them) and we hope to be able to report on them shortly.

Annual Lecture and General Meeting

THE ANNUAL Meeting of *The London Archaeologist* will take place on Friday May 30 at 7 p.m. in the Education Department of the Museum of London.

This year the lecture (open to the public) will be "The Vikings" by Mr Kenneth Whitehorn of the British Museum. Before the lecture, the annual report and accounts will be presented. The proceedings will include the election of officers and the election

to the Publication Committee of the six local society representatives, whose nomination should be made in writing not less than 14 days before the AGM to the Chairman, c/o 7 Coalcroft Road, S.W.15.

Local societies are invited to send one representative with voting powers to the AGM; individual subscribers to the magazine and their friends will also be welcome to attend.