

Commentary

By GROMATICUS

IT SEEMS TRADITIONAL to indulge in editorial introspection at either the end of a volume of *the London Archaeologist* or at the beginning of the next. After three volumes and twelve years' publication, a look at the question "what is the *L.A.* for?" might be appropriate. In the first issue its objects were set out as "to publish interim excavation reports and other suitable papers on the archaeology and allied history of the London region, to promote co-operation between societies, to provide an independent forum for discussion and to attract more of London's population towards having an interest in the past."

The objects are the same today, although they must be seen in the light of much changed circumstances. Because of the greatly increased amount of excavation being done (mainly by the Units, which did not exist in 1968), interim reports are more important than ever. The growing number and sophistication of post-excavation analyses that are needed to fully exploit the information from a site means that the delay between excavation and final publication is likely to grow rather than shrink, and the public who supported the excavation (through taxes, and possibly donations or labour) has a right to know of the main results within a reasonable time. The *L.A.* is a cheap way of ensuring that the results reach their audience.

Another type of report that we encourage is the study of a particular class of artefact — for example, wig curlers or lead weights, articles on which were published in Volume 3. This is an area where the amateur can still make a valuable contribution, by work carried out at his own pace and when it suits him best.

Co-operation between societies is catered for by our regular 'Excavations and Post Excavation Work' feature, though I see that at one time we used to publish a list of equipment that could be borrowed or hired — would readers be interested in a revival

of this list? Practical co-operation seems to be becoming more difficult, as transport costs rise and the standards of public transport appear to decline. I feel that people are less prepared to travel, say, 10-15 miles to take part in a 'dig' than they once were, but perhaps I am wrong (or just getting older?). One point worth considering is the sharing of specialist skills between neighbouring societies — drawings from Society A's draughtsman in exchange for a report from Society B's pottery expert, for example. Would a 'Skills available and wanted' column be useful, or is this too far-fetched?

There seems to have been relatively little discussion in our "independent forum" recently, to judge from the dearth of Letters to the Editor. Are there no burning issues of the day, or have we achieved an amazing unanimity? I doubt it. Perhaps it does not feel useful to indulge in this sort of discussion.

It is on the last object that I feel conscious of a degree of failure. Despite strenuous efforts of promotion, and despite the apparently growing interest in archaeology, the circulation of *the L.A.* has remained fairly level for many years. Why? Is this interest totally passive (or even mythical?). Do people who are "interested" simply not know that we exist? In which case, is archaeology in London too inbred? Or are we all too polite to sell ourselves and our subject? I hope we shall be increasing our promotional effort in the 1980's but you can all help. Encourage your friends, relatives, members of your local Society, evening class colleagues and anyone you know who would be interested, to subscribe to *the L.A.* And if you have any ideas for increasing circulation, do let us know. We cannot achieve our objects without the help of our readers.

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AN INDEX for Volume 3 is being prepared and will be circulated to subscribers with a future issue.

Annual Lecture and General Meeting

THE ANNUAL MEETING of *the London Archaeologist* will take place on Friday, May 15, at 7 p.m. in the Education Department of the Museum of London.

This year the lecture (open to the public) will be "Antiquaries of London" by Hugh Chapman. 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 Com-

mittee 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 Coalecroft 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.