

Commentary

By GROMATICUS

Those pink forms

I HAVE BEEN ASKED to write a Commentary about 'Project Funding,' the DoE's latest scheme for paying for rescue archaeology, and have found it extraordinarily difficult. Requests for information from archaeologists receive the answer "Well, you spend all your time filling in these pink forms," followed by a confused silence.

The underlying philosophy appears to be that archaeology consists of distinct and definable 'projects,' rather like a pile of stones, each project being (for example) a site, a group of sites, a batch of unpublished material, or an area of landscape. The theoretical aim is to build a house from the stones (*Chez Nous*, perhaps, or "man's view of his past") while at the same time someone else (developers, farmers, etc.) is throwing them away as fast as can. Anyone (as far as I can see) can apply to move a stone of his choice from the pile to the house, and if it is considered suitable the funds will be provided. The DoE has the task of deciding which stones are important, so worth saving, and who should save them.

The practical aim seems to be to avoid commitment as far as possible, and especially in the longer term. By definition, a project has a finite life and a certain end, so that the scale of funded archaeological activity can be controlled by the number of new projects that are allowed to come into being each year. Awkward questions about the employment (or not) of staff do not arise, since they are just a consequence of the project. Now this is not all bad — archaeology needs to be accountable since it spends public money, and people should not be kept in jobs if the work is not there, or if they could be employed on more urgent tasks. But there must be doubts as to whether the DoE is really able to decide

between projects on their merits, and whether archaeology is best served by a system in which the overall level of funding is based on criteria which have nothing to do with archaeology.

What is needed is an assured level of funding for the archaeological needs, based on those needs rather than overall financial policy. The first solution that comes to mind is a simple percentage levy on site value or development gain, to fund the recording and publication of any archaeology that might be destroyed. All sites should be included not just 'key' ones as in Archaeological Areas; obviously some are more important than others but one cannot construct a house entirely of key-stones. The trouble is that there is no direct correlation between the value of a site and the cost of recording its archaeology properly. Some archaeologists could grow fat digging valuable site on which little survives, while others might starve on important sites of low (financial) value. More equitable might be a system of archaeological insurance; developers would pay premiums into a fund, on which they could claim both to pay archaeologists to excavate their sites, and also for compensation for any delay so caused. This would ensure that in the broad picture the recording of archaeological evidence would be paid for by those forces responsible for its destruction, while in the particular no developer need fear an archaeological discovery on his land. There would be a marginal increase in the cost of new buildings, but this would simply reflect the true (but hidden) cost of development.

In return for assured funding, archaeologists would have to give 'value for money' in both academic and social terms. This would involve working to agreed standards of recording and publication, and finding ways of measuring the efficiency with which they work. Are they ready for this this?

Excavation Round - up 1981

DIRECTORS, Secretaries and other people concerned with excavations carried out during 1981 are asked to send a short report to the co-ordinator, Beth Richardson, D.U.A., Museum of London,

London Wall, E.C.2. (01-600 3699, ext. 246) for inclusion in the Spring issue. It would be appreciated if these could be modelled on the ones in Vol. 4, No. 2 and if they could be sent in by 31 December.