

Commentary

By GROMATICUS

The blinking cursor

THE HIGH STREET shops will probably remember 1983 as the Year of the Computer: archaeologists in London may well remember it for the same reason. Although microcomputers had been in use in the Museum of London, and especially in the D.U.A., since 1981 (see Paul Tyers' and Alan Vince's article in Vol. 4, No. 11), they had made little impact in London outside the City until the purchase of one by the Inner London Unit early in 1983, and another by the Southwark and Lambeth team towards the end of the year. These machines (Shelton Sig/nets to those who know about such things) are compatible with those already in the Museum, so that information can be exchanged between Departments, and programs written for use in the Museum can be used by the various teams.

The main uses of these machines are in the cataloguing of finds — small finds, pottery and 'bulk' finds, in simple statistical analyses, especially of pottery, and in word processing. In addition to the benefits described by Paul Tyers and Alan Vince, it's worth mentioning the freedom given in the analysis and presentation of information. Working manually, one often only has time to carry out one analysis, and to present one's results in a particular way, which has to be chosen at the outset. If that turns out not to be useful, or not the best way, one is stuck with it. Using a computer, however, one can analyse data in several different ways, and choose the one which seems most informative. Word processing can revolutionise the business of report-writing, by eliminating the need to re-type whenever there are significant changes in a draft report. It's not all sweetness and light, of course: the computer

seems to take a malicious delight in twisting one's intentions at times.

All this leads me to wonder whether we are nearing the time when microcomputers will have a role to play in local societies, as well as Museums and Units. I'm not thinking of 'commercial' machines costing £2-3,000, but of home computers costing a few hundred, and not necessarily of outright purchase by a society, but perhaps either shared use of a member's own home computer, or liaison with a local computer club. Several possible uses come to mind, such as keeping a mailing list of members' names and addresses, producing newsletters and small publications, maintaining sites and finds records, and pursuit of a particular piece of research involving heavy calculations or extensive searching of records.

It may be that I'm preaching to the converted, and computers are doing their bit for archaeology all across London: if so, I'd be very glad to hear of your experiences, especially if you write something that we can pass on to other societies.

Now you see him . . .

THE EDITOR has had one or two complaints recently about the difficulty of contacting him during office hours. He apologises for this, and offers the following explanation. Although now working for the Museum of London, Department of Greater London Archaeology, he is still based at the Institute of Archaeology (31-34 Gordon Square, tel. 01-387 6052). He may also be found (in descending order of probability) at Southwark and Lambeth (407 1989), the Museum of London (600 3699, Ert. 241), Inner/North London (242 6620), West London 560 3880) or South-west London (940 5989).

Annual Lecture and General Meeting

THE ANNUAL MEETING of the *London Archaeologist* will take place on Friday, May 18th at 7 p.m. in Room G.6, Institute of Archaeology, 31-34 Gordon Square, London W.C.1. Refreshments will be provided (from 10.00 p.m.). This year the lecture (open to the public) will be 'Jorvik Viking Centre — passing on the past to the future,' by Peter Addyman, Director of the York Archaeological Trust. We are very fortunate to have such a distinguished speaker on this topical subject. 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 A.G.M. to the Chairman, c/o 7 Coalecroft Road, S.W. 15.

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