

Commentary

by GROMATICUS

Get ready for the Jamboree

WE ARE NOW IN the period of preparation for the World Archaeological Congress, which will be held in London and Southampton in September 1986. The Congress takes place every ten years, moving from country to country, so it is unlikely to come to Britain again in our lifetime. I wonder what picture of British archaeology the visitors will take home with them. How will their programme reflect the scope of archaeological work in Britain?

The HBMC seems to have made up its mind, to judge from the announcement of a show-piece excavation at Maiden Castle. Has it fallen for the lure of the 'sun-soaked hillforts', or the macho-military 1930s Wheelerian image? Or perhaps Maiden Castle is the only site big enough to accommodate several hundred visiting archaeologists? The British Museum will be mounting a major exhibition of *Great British Archaeology*, but has baulked at tackling London, which will therefore be the subject of the Museum of London's *Greater London Archaeology Show*.

There is also likely to be much publicity in the domestic press, radio and television, at least for a short period. This will be a tremendous opportunity to tell the British public what modern archaeology is all about, and why it should matter to it. We need, therefore, to assess carefully where archaeology stands in the public estimation. There is no doubt that archaeology has become popular as a 'spectator sport': witness the thousands who flock, queue and even pay to visit a site like Billingsgate or Coppergate. But could this widespread interest be translated into popular support in the event of a crisis? In the face of opposition from vested interests, it has sometimes only been the threat of

public opinion that has secured access to sites. Although the man in the street, if questioned, might consider archaeology to be 'a good thing', he might be less enthusiastic about the spending of money (public or private) on it, or about the delay to a building project to allow adequate time for archaeological recording. What is needed is far greater awareness of archaeological method and objectives – not just how we excavate, but how we argue and put the pieces together, why certain sites are important even if unimpressive, and what sort of questions we are trying to answer. The Jubilee Hall site (p. 112) is a good example: nothing much for the casual visitor to see, but this and similar sites in the area will be crucial for our understanding of London's development.

The answer, it is often said, lies in education. Firstly, this means more teaching of archaeology in schools – precious little is done at the moment. Secondly, it means archaeologists, amateur and professional, going out, putting on exhibitions, giving talks (not only to archaeological societies) and generally bothering to explain, to adults and children alike, what they are doing. Next year will present the best opportunity we are likely to have to get our message across; it would be a tragedy to waste it.

Index

THE INDEX FOR Volume 4 is being circulated with this issue. It is the first publication we have produced using our new *Typefit* program, which has enabled us to use the eight pages to the full for the first time. The typeface is 25% larger than for previous volumes, improving legibility at no extra cost. Once again, our thanks go to Daphne Brinklow for compiling the index.

A.G.M. of the London Archaeologist

THE SIXTEENTH A.G.M. of the *London Archaeologist* was held on 31 May in the Lecture Theatre of the Institute of Archaeology. The following officers were elected – Editor, Clive Orton; Assistant Editors, Barbara Davis and Rhoda Edwards; Secretary, Nesta Caiger; Advertising and Promotion, Betsey Kentish; Subscriptions, Shiela Broomfield; Managing Editor, Nicholas Fuentes – and the auditors were re-elected. Representatives to serve

on the Publication Committee were elected from the Hendon & District Archaeological Society, Pinner Local History Society, Shooters Hill Historical Society, Waltham Abbey Historical Society and Woolwich & District Antiquarian Society; one place remained vacant. The account showed a deficit on the year of about £530, due mainly to a large forward purchase of stationery. After the close of business, Mr. Peter Curnow spoke on 'Palaces of London'.