

Commentary

by Gromaticus

The funds and the finds

THERE HAVE been indications recently that *English Heritage* may be about to change its thinking on the funding of rescue archaeology. The current approach is one of preservation, and 'preservation by record' (i.e. excavation) is seen as second-best, if physical preservation cannot be secured. Ideally, excavation and post-excavation work should be paid for by the developer (who made it necessary in the first place); if a site is of national importance and developer-funding is inadequate, then *English Heritage* can help with excavation and/or post-excavation costs. The problem comes with the level of post-excavation costs: until very recently developers have been expected only to pay for a basic archive of site information. Also, funding is usually provided on a site-by-site basis.

Until now, finds work has not been well served by this system. Basic catalogues have been made, and site finds (e.g. pottery) have been slotted into local typologies (if such exist), but anything more ambitious has been difficult to fund (but not impossible, as the excellent *Dated Type-series* from London show). This has led to two related difficulties which have reinforced each other: (i) finds have not been seen to be 'pulling their weight' in contributing to site reports, by archaeological managers who are almost always promoted 'diggers', (ii) finds workers have been under-trained, under-paid and under-valued, with poor career prospects. Finds have been seen as a source of dating evidence, but no more. Part of the cause is the fragmented nature of British archaeology: to make their full contribution, finds need to be compared with those from other sites and other regions, but the differing typologies and terminologies of different Units make such comparisons difficult if not impossible, and where it is possible the money is not usually available.

This may be about to change. There are hints that the futility of piling up more and more incompatible catalogues has been recognised, together with the need for syntheses across areas larger than the territory of a single Unit. The 'buzz' term is 'Regional research centres': exactly how they might operate is not clear, but there is much scope for teams of specialists looking at (for example) pottery distributions in their regions. Training will be all-important, not only in the archaeological expertise but also in the use of the tools needed – large-scale computer databases and specialised statistical and spatial analyses. Standards must be maintained and improved: the newly-founded Finds Group of the Institute of Field Archaeologists may play a key role.

The approach has its dangers – the finds must not be divorced from their contexts, and if diggers and finds workers find it difficult to talk to each other within a Unit, how much more difficult will it be if they belong to different organisations? Hopefully, the prestige of having useful information generated from their finds will encourage fieldworkers into dialogue. But equally, there are dangers in not taking such an approach. The stagnation apparent in finds work at site and local level may well lead to its virtual abandonment unless teams of trained regional specialists can begin to make sense of it.

A.G.M.

THE TWENTY-FIRST A.G.M. of the *London Archaeologist* was held on Wednesday 23 May at 7 p.m. in the Lecture Theatre of the Institute of Archaeology. The following officers were elected – Editor, Clive Orton; Assistant Editors, Barbara Davis, Rhoda Edwards; Secretary, Nesta Caiger; Advertising and Promotion, Betsey Kentish; Subscriptions, Sheila Broomfield; Managing Editor, Nicholas Fuentes – and Denis Ballard was re-elected as auditor. Representatives to serve on the Publication Committee were elected from the Hendon & District Archaeological Society, London & Middlesex Archaeological Society, Passmore Edwards Museum, Ruislip, Northwood & Pinner Local History Society, Shooters Hill Local History Group and Woolwich & District Antiquarian Society. The accounts showed a very good year, leaving a surplus of about £1500 – the first surplus after many years of accumulated deficit. After the close of business Julian Bowsher spoke on 'The Rose Theatre'.

Local Societies

SOME SUGGESTIONS were made at the A.G.M., concerning the Diary of events, which we should pass on to local societies. The first was that notices of speaker meetings should be accompanied by a contact name and 'phone number, to help anyone wishing to enquire about the meeting (or perhaps book the speaker for *their* meeting). The second is that events should be notified well in advance; some events are not publicised because we do not hear in time.

We are about to start revising our list of local societies, which has in part become very out of date. Would all societies who would like to be included please send a contact name, address and 'phone number to the Editor (c/o Institute of Archaeology, 31-34 Gordon Square, London WC1H 0PY).