

# Commentary

by Gromaticus

## The wind of change

As I seek to gather my thoughts on the eve of the Copenhagen Climate Conference, I can't help wondering what the effects of climate change, both the direct and the indirect, will be on archaeology. In this, I could be accused of ivory-tower thinking; surely archaeology comes well down the list in comparison to floods, droughts, sea-level rise, and so on? Yes, that's quite true, and I hope we will all try to inform ourselves about the issues, and take whatever steps we think are appropriate. But still, from way down the pile, a little voice says "what about the archaeology?", so let's listen to it for a few moments.

The potential direct effects come readily to mind. Both inland flooding and sea-level rises will erode large areas of coasts and floodplains, destroying the archaeology along with homes, livelihoods and infrastructure. One has only to look at the work of the Thames Discovery Programme on 'ordinary' erosion by the Thames to see what damage could be done by 'extraordinary' erosion.<sup>1</sup> Drought, by contrast, could dry out fens and wetlands, and destroy organic remains.

The indirect effects may be more diverse and more subtle. For example, wind-farms and their associated access roads are mostly situated in remote upland areas, where archaeological remains have (until now) been relatively unthreatened. At the other end of the scale, marine barrages can radically change patterns of erosion and deposition, altering our foreshore archaeology almost before we know what's there. I'm not opposing either sort of development, but just pointing out that adequate mitigation must be part of the package.

Further 'downstream', so to speak, come efforts to reduce the 'carbon footprint' through the use of planning

legislation. There were heavy hints in this direction in the recent PPS consultation,<sup>2</sup> and I hope that climate change will not be used to trump other considerations when it comes to the historic environment. There was a foretaste of this on the radio today, when it was suggested that the introduction of 80-foot-long lorries would be beneficial because they would reduce our collective carbon footprint. Never mind the effect on roads, townscapes and the historic environment generally, if they reduce the carbon footprint then they are a good thing. Yes, I know it's not strictly a planning issue, but it shows the way in which legitimate climate change concerns could be used to further undesirable outcomes. It seems to me that this is deliberately missing the point; either climate change is a serious issue, in which case massive changes in life-style are called for and a relatively small amount of carbon is neither here nor there, or it isn't, in which case such opportunistic moves are unnecessary.

It is often said that one of the benefits of studying the past (whether through archaeology or history) is so that we can learn from it, and particularly from its mistakes. Is that the case here? Coincidentally (honestly), two of our current articles touch on this theme. The discovery of the Battersea Channel<sup>3</sup> highlights an area that might be at risk from flooding (along with other well-known areas), while work in the Wandle Valley<sup>4</sup> shows just how much a small river can change its landscape as the climate changes. Perhaps the ground beneath our feet is not quite as firm as we thought.

## London Archaeological Prize 2010

When the Standing Conference on London Archaeology was disbanded in 2009, there was some concern that the biennial London Archaeological Prize,

which had been supported jointly by SCOLA and this magazine since 2004, might be lost. We are happy to report that this is not the case; with the aid of a generous grant (or should it be a legacy?) from SCOLA, *London Archaeologist* will continue to award the prize. Details of eligibility and how to nominate entries can be found on the back cover, and a judging panel has already been appointed. We look forward to seeing your entries.

## Publication grants

The Publication Committee has decided to continue to make some of its funds available each year to enable authors to bring projects to successful publication. The grants are being administered by the City of London Archaeological Trust's existing scheme. This year's awards have been made for five projects: Roman water supply on Cornhill, Water flow in the Walbrook, Friend or foe? The deposition of human skulls at 80 London Wall, Late medieval and Tudor footwear from London, and Skeletal treponematoses at St Mary Spital.

## Advance notice

The Annual Lecture and Meeting of the *London Archaeologist* will be held at 7 p.m. on Tuesday 18 May at the Institute of Archaeology, 31–34 Gordon Square, London WC1. A formal announcement will be made in the next issue, but please make a note in your diaries now.

## Fieldwork Round-up 2009

Contributions to the *Fieldwork Round-up* for 2009 should be sent to Cath Maloney, Museum of London, 46 Eagle Wharf Road, London N1 7EE. They should be modelled on the ones in the 2008 *Round-up*, and should be sent on a CD or floppy disk as well as on paper.

1. See, for example, F. Haughey 'The future is . . . wet' *London Archaeol* 11 no. 11 (2007) 283–286; N. Cohen 'FROGS on the foreshore' *London Archaeol* 12 no. 6 (2009) 170–171.

2. Discussed by Gromaticus in *London Archaeol* 12 no. 6 (2009) 146.

3. M. Morley 'The Battersea Channel: a former course of the River Thames?' *London Archaeol* 12 no. 7 (2009)

175–181.

4. C.J. Halsey and R. Scaife 'The Mesolithic landscape in the Wandle Valley' *London Archaeol* 12 no. 7 (2009) 191–196.