

# Commentary

## by Gromaticus

### On the brink . . . of what?

Unusually, I feel a burden of expectation as I sit down to write this column. Mostly, I have a free hand, and can write about what currently interests me, perhaps trying to make links between apparently unconnected topics. This time, however, it's different: the unavoidable topic is the economic crisis and the effects of 'the cuts' on archaeology and heritage at all levels. Claiming no special expertise in this area, I looked for someone who does, and found the publication *Archaeology and the Global Economic Crisis*, and in particular two chapters, dealing with commercial archaeology (by Kenneth Aitchison) and academic archaeology (by Anthony Sinclair) in the UK.

Both authors see the decade 1998–2007 as a 'golden age' for UK archaeology, with unprecedented levels of expenditure and employment. A slow downturn started in 2007, accelerating in 2008 as hundreds of archaeologists lost their jobs and several archaeological companies went out of business. Aitchison estimates that by March 2009 about 650 jobs had been lost (about 10% of all jobs in the entire archaeological sector). With archaeology so inextricably linked to development, the future continues to look bleak, as major projects come to an end and are not replaced, and the level of smaller projects, such as housing, is unlikely to increase. Cuts to local government expenditure will squeeze both the ability to provide archaeological advice to developers and the jobs of those who might provide it, while English Heritage and many museums face severe cuts. The replacement of PPG16 by PPS5 (see *Gromaticus* in Vol. 12, no. 6 and no. 9), though an improvement in itself, has been badly timed, with its implementation likely to fall on reduced and demoralised staff. It is unfortunate that we do not have the *Heritage Protection Bill* that should have accompanied it.

So far, the impact on academic archaeology has been less marked, but the sector faces a double blow, with

planned reductions in government spending and falling numbers of student applications. Will forthcoming increases in student fee levels have a further serious impact on applications, or can archaeology sell itself as a discipline that provides transferable skills and employability? – it's certainly been trying hard to do so. Whatever happens, the competition for students is likely to become fierce. In an extreme case, the number of new archaeology graduates might not even be enough to fill vacancies in a depleted commercial sector, especially if experienced workers leave to try their hand elsewhere.

Much university funding comes from research grants, and the already tough competition can only get worse as the size of grants tends to increase and the overall 'pot' remains the same or shrinks in size. The position in the UK is hindered by a mismatch between the commercial and academic sectors. The commercial sector continues to generate new data at a gratifying but alarming rate (see *Mosaic* for a small example), but much remains relatively inaccessible in the 'grey literature' of short-run reports. The academic sector, on the other hand, tends to look abroad for its research topics, partly because of the need to be seen as 'internationally excellent' or at least 'internationally recognised', but also perhaps because of what has been called the 'frogs round the pond' syndrome (this particular pond being the Mediterranean).

In this small space, I can only scratch the surface of a complicated topic, and I feel unable to do it justice. If you want to follow the debate, worldwide and not just in the UK, I recommend that you download this publication from [ace-archaeology.eu/fichiers/25Archaeology-and-the-crisis.pdf](http://ace-archaeology.eu/fichiers/25Archaeology-and-the-crisis.pdf) and read it for yourself.

Where does this leave those of us who are in the voluntary sector? Even in the 'big society', there is no way that we can pick up all the pieces. But perhaps we can put our own house in order and make a serious effort to clear our own backlogs.

### Publication grants

The Publication Committee has again decided to make some of its funds available to enable authors to bring projects to successful publication. The grants are administered by the City of London Archaeological Trust's existing scheme. This year's awards have been made to three projects:

- The Highgate Wood Roman pottery kilns
- Haringey Potter: Highgate Wood kiln experiment
- Publishing the medieval friaries of London

### London Archaeological Prize 2010

This year there were only six entries: all books, of a very high standard, and all were short-listed. The Judging Panel was unanimous in awarding the first prize to Julian Bowsher and Pat Miller for *The Rose and the Globe – playhouses of Shakespeare's Bankside, Southwark: excavations 1988–91*, published by Museum of London Archaeology in 2009. The Panel also awarded a second prize, to Pre-Construct Archaeology for *Secrets of the Garden*, a popular account of the Drapers' Gardens excavations, which they published in 2009. The Awards were presented to the authors at the meeting of the CBA London Group on 24th November. We intend to award the prize again in 2012.

### Advance notice

The Annual Lecture and Meeting of the *London Archaeologist* will be held at 7 p.m. on Tuesday 24th 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

Contributions to the *Fieldwork Round-up* for 2010 should be sent to Joanna Wylie, Museum of London, 46 Eagle Wharf Road, London N1 7EE. They should be modelled on the ones in the 2009 *Round-up*, and should be sent on a CD as well as on paper.