

Commentary

by Gromaticus

Where's it all going?

We have been pleased to report a growing number of successful community archaeology projects in recent years, and we are aware of more that appear in the pages of our annual *Fieldwork Round-up*. They must be counted as one of archaeology's successes: a resurgence of local activity reaching out to bring their past into the lives of local people. But before we get too carried away, I would like to highlight some issues that will need attention over the coming years, based partly on the experiences of my own *Time Cheam* project. They can be summed up in the question "where does it all go?" We are all well aware of the effort that has to go into the post-excavation stages of a project (often more, I suspect, than went into the fieldwork itself), and across London sites which were dug many years ago are now receiving the post-excavation attention that they deserve. But – what then? What happens to the archive, the final record of the site, its finds, and what we have learnt from them? Let's break the question into three parts: the physical archive, the paper archive, and the digital archive, not forgetting the relationships between them.

First, the physical archive. Where do all the finds go? Into the local museum, perhaps, if there is one. But local and borough museums have been closing recently, and more may be under threat. If it still exists, does the museum have the room to store our finds in adequate conditions? Or perhaps we could store them with the LAARC, ensuring a safe home and suitable environmental conditions, but

at the cost of removing them some distance from their origins, thus making them less accessible to the people for whom they may be of most concern.

And will they be stored in such a way that someone looking for the answer to a particular question can find what they need, whether it be the finds from a particular context, or a certain class of artefact? Which brings us to the perennial topic of how to structure the storage – by context or by category of find. My preference is for the former, but many archaeologists would argue for the latter as a way of answering the types of question that are most likely to be asked.

Which raises the next point: how does the researcher of the future discover (i) whether the site has anything of interest to them, and (ii) where in the store can they find it? This information may be found in either the paper or the digital archive (or, I hope, both). Let's first think about the paper version. Does the local museum have the facility to store it safely and to flag it up to potential users? Perhaps the Local Studies Library (or its equivalent) would be the obvious first point of enquiry, so perhaps they should have a copy too (or maybe even the original). Remember that the records of a project are likely to contain a lot of social history, over and above the details of the site and its finds. For example, information about the recruitment and training of volunteers, and their social backgrounds, may be of potential interest to future researchers, along with the budget and the costs of various equipment and supplies. They may also be useful to someone planning a similar

project elsewhere. The project is as much a field of study as the site itself, so put it all in.

The digital archive may be the most difficult to think about, because it is the newest technology. At first sight, it looks easy – just put everything on a DVD (text files, spreadsheets, databases, images, the lot), make a few copies and distribute them to local museums, libraries and societies. What could be simpler? Unfortunately, this just raises more questions: will they be accessible to the 'right' person? What is the shelf-life of the chosen medium, and for how long will there be the equipment that can still read it, and software that can unlock its formats? We probably all have horror stories about unreadable files (particularly proprietary graphics), and I can remember excavating 8-in floppy disks and idly wondering what was on them. Clearly, the data, whatever its format, will need to be 'refreshed' from time to time, but who will do it? The specialists in this field are the Archaeology Data Service in York, who publish an excellent series of *Guides to Good Practice*, which can be found at <http://guides.archaeologydataservice.ac.uk>, and which give advice about the practicalities of digital archiving, as well as suggestions as to where your archive should be deposited. In London we have the GLHER (Greater London Historic Environment Record) who should have a copy.

Finally, remember above all that publication and archiving are not the last word, but one stage in a cycle of information-gathering and reuse.

Annual Lecture and General Meeting

London Archaeologist's 44th AGM was held on Tuesday 14th May at UCL Institute of Archaeology.

The following officers were elected: Managing Editor, Peter Rowsome; Editor, Clive Orton; Secretary, Becky Wallower; Treasurer, Alastair Ainsworth; Membership Secretary, Jo

Udall. Victoria Donnelly, Dominic Perring, Victoria Ridgeway and Joanna Taylor were re-elected, and Amelia Fairman and Alison Telfer were elected to the Publication Committee. Richard Gilpin and Lucy Whittingham were thanked for their service on the Committee.

After the AGM, Joanna Taylor, James Langthorne and Amelia Fairman, Senior Archaeologists at Pre-Construct Archaeology, presented *Archaeology of the Borough: latest results from the Thameslink excavations around London Bridge*.