

# Commentary

by Gromaticus

## **Publish and be read!**

For as long as I can remember, and probably for longer, archaeologists have repeated the saying that an archaeological discovery dates from its publication, not from its original finding. I'd like to take that a step further, and to suggest that it dates from the time that its publication is read. That may sound drastic, but in what sense is an unread report part of the sum of human knowledge until someone reads it. That rather depressing thought came to me as I sat at my desk, looking for inspiration from the bookshelves opposite, and wondering which of the many books there I had actually read, and if I had, what could I remember about them. That in turn reminded me that I had read somewhere that about 80,000 books had been published in the UK in the past year (not all archaeological, obviously). Why? Who reads them all? Is publishing getting out of hand? Recent experience tells me that it has never been easier, and probably never cheaper (in real terms) to publish a book. The real problem comes with marketing it – how do you shift all those copies that you have paid for and have to store somewhere? In September I attended a 'Local Authors' event, at which I managed to sell two books (one on the way in, and one on the way out, but none actually in the event itself), but I had some interesting chats with other authors. None of them seemed to sell many books either (although I bought one), but they didn't seem surprised or upset. What's it all about, I wondered, contemplating self-publication, as I had never before written a book except to a contract. But I digress; let's get back to the subject of publication in general, and archaeological publication in particular. Is there perhaps a calculation for the value of a publication, possibly combining its intrinsic value (if such a thing can be measured) with the number of its readers? Sheer number of readers alone is clearly not the answer – some of the most widely-read

archaeological books are also among the worst (no need to mention names, you can supply them for yourselves). In academic circles, what counts used to be the number of other people who reference your publication in theirs, while referencing your own publication, although necessary at times, is rather frowned upon. A more recent and sophisticated measure is what is called 'impact'. Don't ask me how it's measured, but I think that the general idea is clear enough. Some books clearly have 'impact', in the sense of changing something (possibly quite small) in readers' lives, while others clearly don't. Can you remember a book that first aroused your interest in archaeology? For me it was *Gods, Graves and Scholars*, by C.W. Ceram. Evidence for impact can come from responses like "I had no idea about . . . until I read your book". Not all books, however valuable, are likely to elucidate such a response, so perhaps we should also think about what footballers call 'assists': moves which do not themselves score, but which contribute materially to the goal. So let's try to achieve impact in our writing, or as least to contribute 'assists' to other authors.

## **The Priory, Orpington**

Following our news item on the future of The Priory, Orpington (Vol. 14, no. 6 (Autumn 2015) 168), I have received a letter from Tim Tatton-Brown, the architectural historian, enclosing more information about this important building. He describes the Priory as "an important survival from the end of the Middle Ages of a 'modern' house built for the Lord Prior of Canterbury Cathedral Cathedral Priory at his great manor of Orpington. It is, in effect, a miniature Eltham Palace, which lies six miles away to the north-west. Ten miles west of Orpington was the great archiepiscopal residence at Croydon... this trio of residences of the king, archbishop and prior of Canterbury are a remarkable survival". He explains that the great hall and its neighbouring

chambers appear to have been built between 1472 and 1530, although there is evidence that part of the service block could date to 1290–92. Although part of the complex was 'mutilated' (Tim's word) in 1959 when it was rebuilt to house the fine collections of Bromley Museum, and a large library was added to its southern side on the site of the former service wing, the site remains a hugely important part of the historical landscape of south-east London. Bromley Council should not be allowed to sell it off; other councils in similar positions have made use of HLF funds, and so should they.

## **London Archaeological Prize 2016**

This issue sees the launch of the London Archaeological Prize for 2016, for publications in 2014 and 2015 relating to London's archaeology. Information on nominations can be found on the back cover, with full details available on the website. A judging panel is being appointed. They will look forward to seeing your entries.

## **Advance notice**

The Annual Lecture and Meeting of the *London Archaeologist* will be held at 7 p.m. on Thursday 12th May at UCL Institute of Archaeology, 31–34 Gordon Square, London WC1. Al Telfer will present the Annual Lecture on the Crossrail Liverpool Street excavations, which revealed the Walbrook stream and an East-West Roman Road, Roman burials and 60 skulls, remains from the cemetery for Bedlam and much more. A formal announcement will be made in the next issue, but please make a note in your diaries now.

## **Fieldwork and Publication Round-up**

Contributions to the *Fieldwork Round-up* for 2015 should be sent to [archaeologicalarchive@museumoflondon.org.uk](mailto:archaeologicalarchive@museumoflondon.org.uk), clearly titled London Archaeologist Round-up 2015. They should be modelled on the ones in the 2014 Round-up. Details of archaeological publications by local societies should also be sent.