

Commentary

by Gromaticus

So long, and thanks for all the pots

This is my last Gromaticus as Editor, but not, I hope, my last one ever. I'd like to thank everyone who came to the AGM, and also those who couldn't come but sent good wishes, for their support over many years and especially for the gifts of the replica decorated Cheam white ware rounded jug and a magnificent inscribed Staffordshire slipware posset pot. Together with the replica pots that I was given when I retired from UCL Institute of Archaeology, I now have enough pots for a small museum.



At the AGM, Jacqui Pearce quoted from my first Gromaticus piece, which inevitably set me thinking about how London's archaeology has changed over the forty years of my editorship. The 1970s were a time of transition, from the dedicated but sometimes desperate amateurs of the 1960s to the nascent professionals of the 1980s. In the 1960s the extent of the threat to the survival of Britain's buried historic environment was becoming widely recognised by archaeologists and brought to the public's attention. The increasing scale of post-war

development was leading to the unrecorded destruction of historic urban townscapes and landscapes without the possibility of an adequate archaeological response. As a result of public pressure on government, limited funds, from both national and local government sources, were becoming available in London. Although by the late 1960s both the London and the Guildhall Museum had Field Officers securely in post, it was the voluntary bodies, including LAMAS, SLAEC and the Surrey Archaeological Society, that had to take the lead in taking the initial measures to remedy the crisis. LAMAS and SLAEC were crucially supported by the commitment and financial expertise of their treasurer at this time, Allan Tribe (see p. 252). The method they adopted to put London archaeology on a more secure footing during the 1970s was to employ small teams of archaeologists to initiate and carry out the investigations needed within specific areas of Greater London. These archaeological teams became more securely based within the Museum of London's Department of Greater London Archaeology, as components of a London-wide Archaeological Service established through a Greater London Council initiative in 1983.

During the 1990s one aspect of the controversial proposals to build a fifth Terminal at Heathrow was the fate of the archaeological sites that would be removed during its construction. Jon Finney (see p. 252) ensured that the

evidence highlighting the importance of the multi-period landscape was brought before the Public Enquiry established to determine the planning application. The Inspector's acceptance of this evidence must have been a major factor in persuading the British Airports Authority to provide the resources for large-scale investigations to take place successfully, once permission to build the terminal was given.

One of the major news items early in my editorship was the opening of the new Museum of London by H.M. Queen Elizabeth II in December 1976. I can remember some of the urban myths that circulated (at least, I hope they were myths): that the tiles would fall off the outside walls, that the fumes from the conservation lab would attack the roofing, and that the concrete of the building was harmful to the costumes in store and on display. Certainly, it was an unusual building, shoe-horned into a strangely-shaped site, but I don't think it was *that* odd. But now there are ideas for a new museum building (p. 251).

What's in the Queen's Speech?

Archaeologists are expressing serious concerns about the Neighbourhood and Infrastructure Bill proposed in the recent Queen's Speech. It will abolish the requirement that developers should carry out archaeological and wildlife surveys before starting housing projects. We hope to go into detail in our next issue, but meanwhile see petition.parliament.uk/petitions/130783.

Annual Lecture and General Meeting

London Archaeologist's 47th AGM was held on Thursday 12th May at UCL Institute of Archaeology.

Standing down after 40 years as editor, Clive Orton was recognised for his contribution to both the magazine and archaeology and received a gift of replica pots.

The Constitution was amended as notified in the last issue to enable joint editors to be elected in future.

The following officers were elected:

Managing Editor, Peter Rowsome; Joint Editors, Jenny Hall and Diana Briscoe; Secretary, Becky Wallower; Treasurer, Alastair Ainsworth; Membership Secretary, Jo Udall. Re-elected to the Publication Committee were Les Capon, Chris Jarrett, Colin Bowlt and Kevin Hayward, and Victoria Ridgeway was also elected. After the AGM, Alison Telfer of MOLA presented *From the banks of the Walbrook to the Bedlam fields: 1600 years of death, disease and*

decapitation. In a very well received lecture, she reviewed the unusual and significant finds, including more than 60 skulls, from five years of excavations at the Broadgate ticket office site for Crossrail. Managing the Walbrook stream had affected both the landscape and land use since a Roman road and cemetery had first been built. She described the many unique episodes that continued through the 16th-century Bedlam burial grounds and beyond.