

# Commentary

by Gromaticus

## For everything, there is a season . . .

Several months into the pandemic, it's time to look at how our local archaeological and historical societies are faring. First, I reflected on what my local society has been doing (and not doing), and then I looked at the websites of a sample of local societies. This was not a strictly random sample, but a 'grab sample' (I just grabbed what I could).

So what did I find? Obviously, there was a massive cancellation of events. Every society had cancelled its speaker meetings; most of them 'until further notice', but a few until the end of 2020. By now, I expect they have extended that until March or April 2021. Not all was lost, however. About one-quarter of my sample have put their winter lecture series online – most by using Zoom, but one by using YouTube.

I don't feel qualified to argue the pros and cons, but it seems to me that YouTube has the benefit of being available at any time, while everyone has to 'attend' a Zoom meeting at the same time. Some societies are making them 'members-only', which may be missing a way to recruit new members.

Some other activities have survived – I was pleased to see that a socially-distanced open weekend had taken place in September, for example. Visits and excavations appear to have all been cancelled in summer 2020, and plans for summer 2021 seem to be 'in the air'.

## How to communicate?

The uncertainties that I have outlined here make it more important than ever for societies to communicate effectively with their memberships. The most common means of communication is by a newsletter, typically issued three or four times a year. In the past, they would have been delivered through the post, but today delivery by email must be more common.

I wondered whether any societies had given up 'hard copy' delivery altogether, or whether, like for mine, they use a hybrid system to cater for members who are not online. For larger societies, pressure must come from the

difficulty of packing and posting many newsletters in a socially-distanced setting (something *London Archaeologist* has thankfully managed to achieve). Is my society alone in trying to discover all of its members who are capable of receiving newsletters online? Are some societies more technologically advanced, making use of media such as Facebook and Twitter?

It may be, and I sincerely hope that it is, likely that this hiatus in our usual activities has given us time to pursue other aspects of our agenda. Here I'm thinking about writing-up and publishing old excavations and other fieldwork projects which may have been 'on the back burner' (or, as an Irish colleague put it, 'on the long finger') for some time. Will 2021 see a flowering of reports as backlogs are cleared across London? I hope so. We might even see the fruit of this activity in submissions for the London Archaeological Prize of 2022.

One idea that I have seen recently, which I heartily endorse, is that of writing coronavirus diaries of our activities throughout the year. They should be subjective personal accounts from individuals, not formal reports of a committee or organisation. Such documents could become important contributions to social history, telling future generations what it felt like to live through these peculiar times, and how we each found our way through them.

## Reach out to your community

My last point is that of outreach. I believe that many local societies, like mine, are looking for some sort of renewal. Perhaps renewal of an old and tired membership, or of an old and tired *modus operandi*, or whatever. Perhaps you feel a need to increase the diversity of your membership. This pause could give us all time to stop and think, and to plan how we may emerge from the crisis with new ideas and energy to reach out into our communities.

As a small example, I shall revive my plan for a Heritage Treasure Hunt quiz for the people of our catchment area, to open eyes to the heritage

around them, to enthuse them to value and study it, and to join a body of like-minded people. What could you plan in this space we have been given?

## The Cosmatesque mosaics of Westminster Abbey monograph wins 2020 London Archaeological Prize

At a virtual meeting of the London Archaeological Forum in November, Prize Administrator Al Telfer announced that one publication stood out from all others, winning high praise from all the judges: *The Cosmatesque mosaics of Westminster Abbey* by Warwick Rodwell and David Neal.

A certificate and cheque for £250 was 'presented' virtually to the authors. For full details and judges' comments on all nine shortlisted entries, see the news page on our website: [www.londonarchaeologist.org.uk/news.html](http://www.londonarchaeologist.org.uk/news.html).

## Fieldwork & Bibliography Round-up

The Fieldwork and Publication Round-ups for 2019 (Volume 16, Supplement 1) will be distributed with the Winter 2021 issue. If you have not received your copy, please contact the Membership Secretary (see the Contents page).

## Advance notice

We hope that it will be possible to hold the Annual Lecture and AGM of *London Archaeologist* at the UCL Institute of Archaeology, 31–34 Gordon Square, London WC1, at 7.00 pm on Thursday 20 May 2021. We are currently planning to have a real meeting, but may have to move online, depending on circumstances.

Stephanie Ostrich, leader of the Walworth Heritage Action Zone for Southwark, will be speaking about **Heritage Action Zones: heritage-led regeneration in London's historic high streets**. Sutton was the first Greater London HAZ selected, with Walworth, as the first inner London zone.

A formal announcement will be made in the next issue, but please add the date to your diary now (and keep an eye on our website for updates).