

Commentary

by Gromaticus

Publish while you can?

'The report of my death was an exaggeration'. This quote from Mark Twain came into my mind as I settled down to read yet another book nominated for this year's London Archaeological Prize. For some time, we've been hearing reports about the death of the book, or rather of the printed book. With the arrival of the e-book and of devices capable of storing hundreds of books in the space of a paperback, the future of the printed book is said to look bleak. Even if this is so, the trend does not appear to have reached archaeology. The short-list for the 2012 Prize (works published in 2010 and 2011) is the longest yet, and includes several books which could have won a prize in a different year, alongside only one electronic publication. What is more, there are 80 publications in our Bibliography for 2011, and I am already reading a book published in 2012 which I hope will be nominated for the 2014 Prize.

So what's going on? Various reasons have been put forward, from the benefit of a book to an author's *curriculum vitae* to the satisfying feeling created by rows of volumes on a reader's shelves (though I'm beginning to feel that I have

books the way some people have mice). There is a debate about the value of the annual publication to the member of a county or local archaeological society – would they still subscribe if the journal was only available online, and could something more useful be done with the money that would be saved? The jury is still out on that one. It's also been pointed out that while the e-book may be excellent for presenting text, it would be problematic for a typical archaeological publication, where one needs to refer to text and one or more illustrations simultaneously (which raises the question "how many thumbs do you need to read an archaeological report?"). So maybe the printed volume will be with us for longer than some pundits predict.

Where the electronic version really scores is in the storage and retrieval of historical publications. For example, who would want a 150-year run of a county society journal on their shelves (even if they could find one and afford it)? It's much easier to search for a particular topic or author electronically, rather than thumbing through stacks of dusty volumes, even with the aid of an index. That's why it was such good news that LAMAS has digitised its

Transactions from 1885 to 2005, and has made them freely available online at www.lamas.org.uk/archives/index.html. Many other societies are doing the same. At the moment, we can get the best of both worlds.

And what about the Prize? Well, you will have to wait until the next issue to find out. The judges are still reading their way through that long short-list. I am very grateful to them, but you will have to wait for their decision.

Fieldwork Round-up

The Fieldwork and Publication Round-up for 2011 is being distributed with this issue. If you have not received your copy, please contact the Membership Secretary (address on p. 141). Our thanks go to Cath Malony for collating the Fieldwork Round-up. Please let us know of any omissions from either section.

Apology

We apologise to the City of London Archaeological Trust (CoLAT) for the failure to acknowledge their grant of £3008 towards the Highgate Pottery Kiln Experiment 2010 in the article about that project published in the previous issue.

Pat Wilkinson, 1947–2012

We regret to report Pat Wilkinson's death in July. After studying classics with archaeology at Durham University, Pat took up a post at the Passmore Edwards Museum in Stratford in 1970, and in 1975 she was promoted to head the Archaeology and Local History section. From 1975 to 1985 the museum grew, and under an agency agreement with English Heritage, the museum provided an archaeological service for the five London Boroughs east of the River Lea, and the section expanded to some forty staff. Excavations included Stratford Langthorne Abbey, Barking Abbey, and the abbey grounds at Waltham Abbey,

the latter in association with WEAG (the West Essex Archaeological Group).

Pat was also involved in the acquisition and restoration of the Tidal Mill at the Three Mills site by Bow, of the refurbishment of Webs old dispensary in Stratford, the opening and running of the North Woolwich Railway Museum, the acquisition of the nine-acre churchyard of St Mary Magdalene in East Ham, which was converted into a nature reserve and a local history resource for Newham, and the restoration of the abandoned Teulon church of St Mark's, Silvertown.

In 1985, the Passmore Edwards Museum (which previously came under

Newham's Education Department) was transferred to the newly-created Leisure Services Department, which did not support the need for a museum service in the borough and closed down the service. Pat was granted early retirement in 1997, and spent a number of years looking after her mother who suffered from Alzheimer's disease, to which she was also to fall victim in 2006.

Pat may be best known to London archaeologists for her involvement in the establishment of the Standing Conference on London Archaeology (SCOLA) and for her work as its Secretary for many years.