

Editorial

It is sad to see how quickly inflation has eroded the great gains to British Archaeology won by Government recognition a few years ago of the importance of a higher level of finance for rescue excavation. For a brief period a good deal got rescued much of it of high importance. At present, however, there is a powerful movement in favour of making lists of categories, and of priorities for excavation within them, so that (in theory) a fair sample is recovered—and the rest of necessity left to perdition. Yet with discovery, even now, in their thousands of new, previously unknown, sites in a good year by aerial photography, who can possibly judge correctly the priority that sites should receive, or can properly take responsibility for denying excavation in so wholesale a manner to others? Only this year a choice was thought to be necessary between the *vici* of Old Penrith and of Wallsend: Old Penrith lost, but subsequently had to be excavated nonetheless, in the midst of building-operations and at vast cost, when 6 ft. of stratification appeared and an unexpected early fort: while at Wallsend nothing worth mentioning was found.

Whatever may be the situation with remains of others periods, so much is already known about the archaeology of the Roman period that the desiderata are correspondingly vast and complex, extending through complicated patterns of military or social history to art-historical, economic and industrial problems—all at any level ranging from the imperial to the provincial, regional or merely local. No committee, however wise, can possibly produce a comprehensive policy of selection which will stand the test of even 20 years.

The fallacy in all this is to confuse Rescue with Research. It is fashionable, nevertheless, to do so, and DoE papers are circulating which attempt the equation and even advocate it. The idea being that, once research-policy has been established, economies will prove possible in the excavation of sites. All experience shows that this is lunacy. Man is fallible, and officialdom, even with the best advice, yet more so. It will be a disastrous day when archaeological sites of largely unknown potential are abandoned to destruction because they do not fit some established research-policy laid down by authority, however prestigious.

What are the alternatives? The most obvious is to wrest more money from the Government and from developers. This is clearly the first priority, for today's crisis is almost as serious as that which faced the founders of the Rescue movement in 1971. Another is to organise our Rescue services less luxuriously, so that the money yields more plentiful results: the best is the enemy of the good. If our national resources cannot indeed support the standards which we have attempted to establish (with their full-time staffs each expecting annual increments), then it may be necessary to return to a greater reliance upon part-time and amateur effort, and reluctantly also to recognise that environmental and even conservation

laboratories are often luxuries rather than necessities. Not every rescue excavation need necessarily aspire to the full range of scientific back-up. Much vital historical and architectural information can be won without providing the full treatment, either scientific or technical. If professionalism, in other words, is really found to be beyond our means, let us restrict or even eradicate its youthful growth before it strangles Rescue archaeology. A less drastic remedy, which should be tried first, is to recognise the Utopianism of the attempt to publish one excavation before starting another. This is obviously an admirable ideal. In practice it means that half our rescue archaeologists work indoors. The proportion could well be reduced without serious harm.

Distasteful as all of these alternatives are except the first, it is surely of paramount importance that, by whatever means, we should maintain and increase the collection and recording of data by field-work and by excavation. This should be the primary task of Government-financed archaeology. The time is not ripe for the constraint of official research-policies; any attempt to introduce them must surely reduce the basis of genuine research by constricting the availability of data.

In all this there is at least one ray of light. That is the growing recognition by private firms of the duty of archaeological patronage. An outstanding example is the Amey Roadstone Corporation which for several years has contributed to the Oxford Unit's programme on an extremely generous scale. Another is the donation of £1,000 by Lloyd's Bank to the excavation in the centre of Staines—not that Bank's only contribution to rescue archaeology.

It is not the Society's policy to review the journals of sister bodies; but mention must be made of the handsome volume of their *Journal* (Vol. iv, 1976) which the Glasgow Archaeological Society has dedicated to Professor Anne S. Robertson, until recently Keeper of the Cultural and Roman Collections and of the Coin Cabinet in the Hunterian Museum, in gratitude for her outstanding services to scholarship. It contains 13 contributions on various aspects of Roman Scotland, as well as a bibliography of Professor Robertson's publications. Outstanding or of more than local interest are papers by J. K. St Joseph on 'Air Reconnaissance of Roman Scotland 1939-75' (containing some remarkable photographs and plans as well as a most interesting history of discovery); by J. P. Gillam on 'Coarse Fumed Ware in N. Britain and Beyond' (a magisterial and fully illustrated discussion of BB 1); by K. F. Hartley on 'Were mortaria made in Roman Scotland?' (yes); D. J. Breeze and B. Dobson on 'A View of Roman Scotland in 1975' (a full discussion of military history written with these authors' usual facility to provoke thought, though sometimes their efforts to take an original line lead to undetected self-contradictions); together with three papers on inscriptions by L. F. J. Keppie, R. W. Davies and E. Birley. The price of this volume is only £3.75.