

Editorial

The editor has invited Professor J. S. Wacher as Chairman of the Roman Society English Heritage Advisory Committee to write on its function and aims.

In 1975, the Department of the Environment invited the President of the Society to form a committee to advise on academic priorities with respect to the rescue archaeology of the Roman period. The committee was duly formed under the chairmanship of Professor Frere, whom I succeeded in 1977.

The Committee saw its first function, along with the other period societies and the area advisory committees, to lay down certain guide-lines for the Ancient Monuments Inspectorate by which it could gauge the relative importance of the many different classes of sites of Roman Britain. Its first attempts were not entirely successful, as the Committee felt overwhelmed by the sheer weight of material, and the paper it produced was considered too general for use by the Inspectorate. Then followed the abolition of the area advisory committees in 1979, which threw almost the entire weight of specialist period advice onto the relevant committees of the principal societies.

The Society's Committee then began the laborious process of preparing a more substantial advisory paper: a process intended to be exhaustive which also proved exhausting. Expert opinions were sought on all the different categories of Roman site, which, after much digestion, revision, consultation and editing, produced a document of reasonable length which is just about to be accepted by the Inspectorate.

But while this was going on, there came the change to project-funding. In consequence, the Committee was asked to give its advice each year on the several hundred applications submitted to the Inspectorate for grant aid. Increasing importance is being attached to the Committee's recommendations which now play a major part in deciding priorities for the excavation and survey of threatened sites.

Although the Committee's prescribed area of competence is strictly England, it has always seen Wales and Scotland as equally important for the period, and it has from time-to-time tendered unofficial suggestions to both the Welsh Office and the Scottish Development Department. As a result, the Committee keeps both Cardiff and Edinburgh informed about its activities, and tries to maintain representatives of each country in its membership. The remaining members are, as far as possible, selected to represent the different geographical areas of England as well as to provide some specialist knowledge of a particular type of site or artefact: urban, military, rural, pottery, etc. The present membership is:

Professor J. S. Wacher	Leicester (Chairman)
Dr Graham Webster	Birmingham
Mr John Casey	Durham
Dr L. A. S. Keppie	Glasgow
Dr Valerie Maxfield	Exeter
Mr Mark Hassall	London
Dr Roger Leach	Southampton

Professor W. H. Manning	Cardiff
Dr C. J. Young	London (HBMC Representative)
Professor B. W. Cunliffe	Oxford
Mr D. S. Neal	London
Dr M. Fulford	Reading

The transfer of the Ancient Monuments Inspectorate to the Historic Buildings and Monuments Commission with its new functions will probably lead to a more critical role for the Committee, which has been invited to continue its advisory service; it is bound to be needed when the promotion of display sites has to be matched against adequate conservation. For the time being though, the Committee's main functions remain threefold: to lay down general principles, and revise them as need be, with respect to academic priorities in rescue excavations; to advise each year on the projects submitted to the Inspectorate for grant aid; and to provide support and assistance both to the Inspectorate and to field units when emergencies, or unexpected but important discoveries are made, or when it is necessary to revise assessments between already-approved projects.

In this, all members of the Society can provide important help, by observing and reporting any new, but previously unrecorded discoveries, or damage to the known sites and monuments of Roman Britain, either direct to me, to one of the nearer members, or to the local museum or archaeological unit.