

Introducing *Archaeology International*

Archaeology International (*AI*) is a new venture for the Institute of Archaeology. Since its foundation in the 1930s the Institute has publicized its academic activities. From 1944 to 1985 it did so regularly in formal *Annual Reports* to the Senate of the University of London, and in 1958 its annual *Bulletin* was started, devoted mainly to publishing research papers and reviews, particularly by staff and students of the Institute. In 1977 a series of Occasional Publications began also to be published, a list of which is given at the end of this issue of *AI*.

The incorporation of the Institute into UCL in 1986 radically changed the context of its administration, teaching and research, and has led to changes in our publications policy. The *Annual Report*, which while we were a "Senate Institute" had been formally required by the University, had no longer to be produced and changes in departmental funding made it increasingly difficult to sustain annual publication of the *Bulletin*. Following a review of publication policy in 1990–91, it was decided to close the *Bulletin* and to replace it with an annual publication that would combine short research reports with news of other research-related activities at the Institute. We hoped that it would interest Institute alumni, visitors, and prospective students, as well as our academic colleagues in Britain and abroad. But first it was necessary to fulfil our existing commitments to contributors to the *Bulletin*. Under the editorship of Professor John Wilkes, this was accomplished by publication of the final two issues (numbers 30 and 31) in 1994.

Now we are launching *AI* as a new in-house publication that combines the former roles of the *Bulletin* and the *Annual Report* in an updated and, we hope, attractive format. Nor is *AI* the only new publishing initiative to be taken by the Institute. In 1990 a group of postgraduates produced the first issue of *Papers from the Institute of Archaeology (PIA)* as an outlet particularly for papers, conference reports and reviews written by Institute research students. Since then *PIA* has gone from strength to strength, as its senior editor explains on p. 52 in this issue of *AI*.

Our intention is that each year *AI* will feature a selection of articles and short reports on research being carried out by Institute staff and research students. In this first issue we emphasize field projects in a wide range of locations in Europe, Asia, Africa and the Americas. Thus, ten of the twelve articles on current research report on projects in England, Spain, Greece, Turkmenistan, Bahrain, Mali and the Caribbean, whereas only two – both concerned with conservation – feature projects that are primarily laboratory based. In future issues the balance is likely to change, with more emphasis on laboratory and other "in-house" projects, as well as further reports from other field projects not featured this time. In this way, and by providing summary information on staff research interests and research students' theses (in this first issue, for the decade 1988–97), *AI* will aim to keep its readers up to date with the Institute's diverse research activities, as they develop year by year.

David R. Harris

A note on radiocarbon dates

Since the first radiocarbon (^{14}C) dates were published in the 1950s, the technique has become highly sophisticated and the maximum age of samples that can be dated has been pushed back to approximately 40,000 years ago. Laboratory measurements of carbon in samples of excavated organic materials (wood, charcoal, bone, etc.) produce dates in what are described as "conventional radiocarbon years" which are published as numerical ages (subject to probabilistic errors the likely size of which is denoted by \pm) e.g. 5200 ± 90 .

Conventional radiocarbon dating is based on the assumption that the ratio of carbon-14 to carbon-12 in the atmosphere has remained constant through time, but this assumption is only approximately true. Thus radiocarbon years are not the same as calendar years. The difference between them is determined by reference to calibration curves that are obtained by radiocarbon-dating samples of known calendar age, mainly wood from long-lived trees independently dated by counting their annual growth rings.

The difference between radiocarbon and calendar dates varies as one goes back in time, and beyond about 500 BC conventional radiocarbon dates progressively underestimate the "real" (calendric) age of the materials that are dated. This problem is gradually being overcome by the substitution of "calibrated" for "conventional" radiocarbon dates. At the Twelfth International Radiocarbon Conference, held in 1985, it was recommended that calibrated dates should be indicated by the prefix "cal". Thus a calibrated date is followed by "cal AD", "cal BC" or "cal BP" (BP = before present, with "present" defined as AD 1950). Many uncalibrated radiocarbon dates have been and still are being published, and they are now frequently designated by lower case "ad", "bc" and "bp". In *Archaeology International* the following typographical conventions are used for dates in:

- calendar years – AD, BC, BP
- conventional radiocarbon years – ad, bc, bp
- calibrated radiocarbon years – cal AD, cal BC, cal BP.

The Editor