

Editorial

Much of this volume of *Britannia* consists of two groups of papers each internally linked by their evidence types and approaches but the two at first sight apparently not having that much in common. The first group comprises the papers by Williams, Holder, Mullen, and Ling (and the note by Speidel might be added), having in common the epigraphic and numismatic evidence for writing and its uses in Roman (and pre-Roman) Britain. The second group consists of the papers by Locker, van der Veen *et al.*, and Lockyear dealing with the present state and future directions of particular types of archaeological evidence from the Roman period in Britain. But in fact the two groups of papers do have one important feature in common; they are both founded on or relate to the creation and curation of corpora of evidence for their particular specialisms that can allow for comprehensive and authoritative treatments.

The first group, dealing with written evidence, is in large measure a testament to *The Roman Inscriptions of Britain (RIB)* Volumes I and II (in its many fascicules), as well as to the continuing annual recension of new epigraphic discoveries in this journal. It also attests to the impact of the publication of the written material from Bath and Vindolanda and to the resource represented by the collation over time of the Celtic Coin Index in Oxford. The second group, dealing with particular types of archaeological evidence, depends on the appropriate data being available, in the case of Locker and van der Veen *et al.* often unpublished and concealed in the 'grey literature'. All of these are, of course, the product of data-collection and analysis over the long term, be it over the course of a professional career or over the course of several overlapping professional careers. *RIB* Volume I was started by R.G. Collingwood in 1921, taken up by R.P. Wright in 1941, and published in 1965. It will be apparent that this is a time-scale unlikely to commend itself to the cycles of funding which rule so much of professional archaeology, be it the academic cycle of the Research Assessment Exercise or the cycle of developer-funded excavation and publication consequent upon the implementation of Planning Policy Guidance Note 16 (PPG 16). *RIB* I is nevertheless a *monumentum aeRAE perennius* and the sort of fundamental and indispensable systematic catalogue upon which much other research will, as here, be based. The worrying question is whether the project could or would now ever have been conceived and brought to fruition starting from scratch: Volume I Part 2, a supplement presenting inscriptions on stone discovered since the compilation of *RIB* I, has also been in preparation for more than a single RAE cycle.

Potentially more pernicious still is the present state and future prospects of the data-bases of specialist evidence coming from developer-funded evaluations and excavations. Excavations on Roman-period sites are well-known for their propensity to produce large quantities of artefacts and environmental evidence; the proper study of these by competent, trained specialists is increasingly difficult to ensure. In part this is because of the constraints of developer funding being tied to individual projects, thus making surveys across a specialism unjustifiable in strict financial terms. In part it is because there is no body that any longer regards this sort of long-term investment as part of its remit. In part it is because of the increasing difficulty in the PPG 16 context or in the context of time-pressured universities of committing the time required to train up new specialists. The paper on the evidence for fish in Roman Britain by Locker represents many years of patient accumulation of data by a single worker, and the cumulative value of those data is readily apparent. But as van der Veen *et al.* comment, this sort of accumulation is increasingly the result of happenstance and the dedication of particular specialists over and above their strict employment remit, rather than of forethought and the provision of the appropriate infrastructure to ensure the availability of trained specialists to generate publicly accessible databases. The risk is that over time these personal data-banks will become unavailable and all the information, analysis, and synthesis they represent will likewise be lost.

It is a truism of modern archaeology that data-bases allowing for the quantified study of classes of material at ranges from the individual site upwards are fundamental to the discipline, otherwise subjectivity reigns. The question that presents itself is how such data-bases are to be compiled and curated, long-term activities requiring the formation and employment of dedicated specialists allowed to operate over the course of a career at the general level of their specialism as well as at the day-to-day level of the individual project, recognising that such general expertise inevitably enhances the particular project. Allied to this is the problem of the 'grey literature' and the huge amount of information this contains. Both the Locker and the van der Veen *et al.* papers testify to their good fortune in having been able to consult with colleagues who could point to what is in that literature for the relevant specialisms. Again the risk is that such expertise will cease to be formed and therefore that the data recovered, at some expense, will be wasted because nobody knows they are there. It is encouraging to hear that Professor Mike Fulford of the University of Reading and Neil Holbrook of Cotswold Archaeology have been awarded a grant to undertake a pilot study of the 'grey literature' for the Roman period as a preliminary to considering ways in which the data it contains might be exploited to enhance our knowledge and understanding of the period. But the very fact that such a project has to be undertaken is itself an indictment of the present system within which archaeology is undertaken, for built into a system for 'preservation' is paradoxically the capacity for large quantities of information effectively to be lost, either because the purposes for which they were gathered mean that they remain under-exploited, or because the platform for such dissemination remains to be devised. A review such as this may be the occasion on which to demonstrate the extent of the potential of the data locked away in the 'grey literature' for informing and expanding our knowledge of Roman Britain, and also of pointing out that it will continue to be a depreciating asset (recovered at public- and private-sector expense) unless the structures and personnel are put in place for it to be catalogued, systematised, analysed, and synthesised over the long term. That putting in place the systems of funding to deliver such structures and personnel will be difficult is not a reason not to articulate the arguments in their favour; if you don't ask you certainly won't get. The contribution such resources can make to the development of the discipline is readily apparent from many of the papers in this volume.

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