

# Editorial

John Gillam's death on New Year's Eve 1986 deprives Romano-British studies of its most practised exponent of the archaeology of ceramics in all its aspects. No scholar has done more than Gillam to establish the chronology of Romano-British pottery on a reliable foundation and thus to clarify the dating of a wide variety of sites, especially within the northern frontier areas. So cogent and influential was his *Types of Roman Coarse Pottery Vessels in North Britain* for so long that it could frequently be cited by scholars in Germany and Central Europe as a guide to the dating of non-British wares. John Gillam was, of course, very much more than a mere pottery specialist. He made substantial contributions to frontier studies as excavator, notably at Corbridge, and as interpreter. In the latter role, his friends and colleagues may perhaps lament that he committed too little to paper. He was, however, ever generous in giving time to discussing ideas and new evidence and to encouraging younger scholars. He was an entertaining, often hilarious, companion and raconteur whose humour was never biting nor bitter. His shrewdness and percipience will be missed, along with his abundant humane qualities.

This is a larger number of *Britannia* than has been issued for some years. This is partly due to the inclusion of several long papers, two of which merit special comment. It is now ten years since Professor St. Joseph reported on discoveries from the air in our sister-journal. In the meantime there has been a notable crop of new sites and major additions to those already known, particularly in the dry seasons of 1983 and 1984. *Britannia* now seems to all concerned to be the appropriate vehicle for publication of this material and we are grateful to D.R. Wilson and G.S. Maxwell for their joint paper. As they comment in their text, there is now a wider regional spread of aerial archaeologists than ever before, the increased involvement of the three Royal Commissions being a significant new factor. The second contribution to this issue which requires brief comment is the paper by A. Bowman and J.D. Thomas on the new texts on writing tablets from Vindolanda. A brief account of these appeared in the *Journal of Roman Studies* lxxxvi (1986). A much fuller study is given here. Documents with the immediacy and directness of these records from the northern frontier about AD 100 are clearly of much more than passing interest. Aside from their content, they contain important palaeographical details and shed unexpectedly clear light upon frontier society and manners. The hope of recovering much more material of this kind, not only from Vindolanda but also from waterlogged sites elsewhere, is obviously very real.

Alongside these additions to the record of Roman Britain, it may be that we must set a loss. In the *Archäologischer Anzeiger* for 1985 it is argued that the striking and somewhat unconventional figurine of Hercules, said to have been found near Birdoswald, is a nineteenth century forgery. It is true that the entry of this object into the record was made under rather shady circumstances. Its condition, too, is unusually fine if it had indeed remained in the ground at its find-spot. There is a strong case for placing it among the *dubia*.

In the editorial of *Britannia* xvii for 1986 reference was made to the increasing use of microfiche in excavation reports and the lowering of academic standards which appeared to be the general result. Correspondence received in the meantime suggests that there is widespread misgiving over the use of microfiche for the publication of crucial primary evidence. Within strict limits, microfiche does have a role to play in the storage of data, almost certainly a temporary role until more convenient means of mass storage become

widespread. But official and learned bodies which have a duty to publish excavation reports should urgently review their policy towards the relegation of vital information to this clumsy and increasingly outmoded medium.

Microfiche is not the only feature of learned publication at present which seems destined for early obsolescence. The practice of publishing excavated data in fascicules, always a very dubious undertaking on academic grounds, seems increasingly indefensible as quicker and cheaper modes of publication become available. Those bodies which have espoused fascicules might now usefully think again. The success of several series of monographs, not least that initiated by this Society in 1981, and the relative speed with which several volumes have appeared point to a far more satisfactory strategy for publication of archaeological reports. Aside from *Britannia* Monographs we now have series from the Council for British Archaeology, English Heritage, the Society of Antiquaries of Scotland, the Society of Antiquaries of Newcastle, Cadw and the National Museum of Wales in addition to the long established *Research Reports of the Society of Antiquaries of London*. There are dangers ahead for such enterprises at a time when institutional libraries are being compelled to cut their subscription lists. Not all, perhaps, will prosper or even survive. But at least the aim of coherent publication seems to be correct.