

## NEW DIRECTIONS

### The Director Writes

In the last issue I asked some questions about what sort of institution the University Museum ought to be. In future issues of *Expedition* I shall take a look at how our activities fit into overall concepts of our actual and potential role.

The last *Expedition* focused on the Museum's work at Ur, and Robert Dyson made revealing use of the Museum's archives in his account of the background and conditions of the work from 1920 to 1926. Ur, of course, is published. The Museum's archives contain, however, vast collections relating to excavations and other field work either wholly unpublished or published only in a preliminary form. Nippur, where the Museum excavated from 1888 to 1900, is a prime example. The excavations were never scientifically published; the archives are immense and many are in a parlous state. We hope to have an article by Diane Taylor in a future *Expedition* describing her ten-year search for the Nippur papers and their recovery from across the country to the safety of the Museum.

The Museum's archives—scholarly, curatorial, administrative—are our institutional memory. They are also a resource of outstanding importance for research on sites, artifacts, and the history of archaeology and of the Museum itself. The archives have a home of sorts, but they need to be stored, cared for, indexed and made available in an altogether more systematic, more archivally professional, way.

Here we have an opportunity to solve two problems at once. The old library of the Museum, donated by William L. Elkins in 1897, has long been an empty, echoing and much abused room. Now under the sympathetic care of Alan Cook, Keeper of Publications Services, and himself an historic buildings architect, the Elkins Library is being rehabilitated as the Museum Archives, with the aim of restoring this fine room as far as possible to its original state. 'Excavations' in the Museum basements by Christopher Conyers, the Building Superintendent, have led to the recovery of many of the old fittings—lamps, furniture, cornice fragments—and these have been refurbished and installed by his staff, so that now already the Elkins Library is beginning to look cared for. The archives will be moved in shortly.

So two areas of our responsibility—to the Museum building itself, and to the scholarly potential of the archives—are beginning to be met. These are two aspects of how we see ourselves and what we ought to be and do as a center of research and scholarship.

MARTIN BIDDLE