

AT THE time of going to press urgent emergency excavations are being completed on a large and important site close to Gracechurch Street. Here in what was the very centre of Roman London dramatic evidence has unfolded the story of 1st century Londinium.

The potential of this building site had been realized months before and arrangements were then made with the developers for an excavation following demolition. This highly satisfactory arrangement was due almost entirely to the foresight and enthusiasm of Ralph Merrifield. The sponsors of the work, the Guildhall Museum, invited the CIB Group to undertake the excavation following its experience of rapid mechanical excavation on similar sites under development in Kent. Although only three days eventually elapsed between the end of demolition and the beginning of construction of a multi-storied office block, a large area was excavated. By overlapping both demolition and construction, with the ready co-operation of all parties concerned, it has been possible to work throughout November, December and January.

The initial area excavation lasted for three weeks and involved the use of mechanical excavators, bulldozers and cranes and more than 60 hand-picked volunteers drawn from the CIB and associated groups. Subsequently, attention has been turned to rescue-work and recording of the builders excavations and included a short excavation in severe conditions over the Christmas holiday.

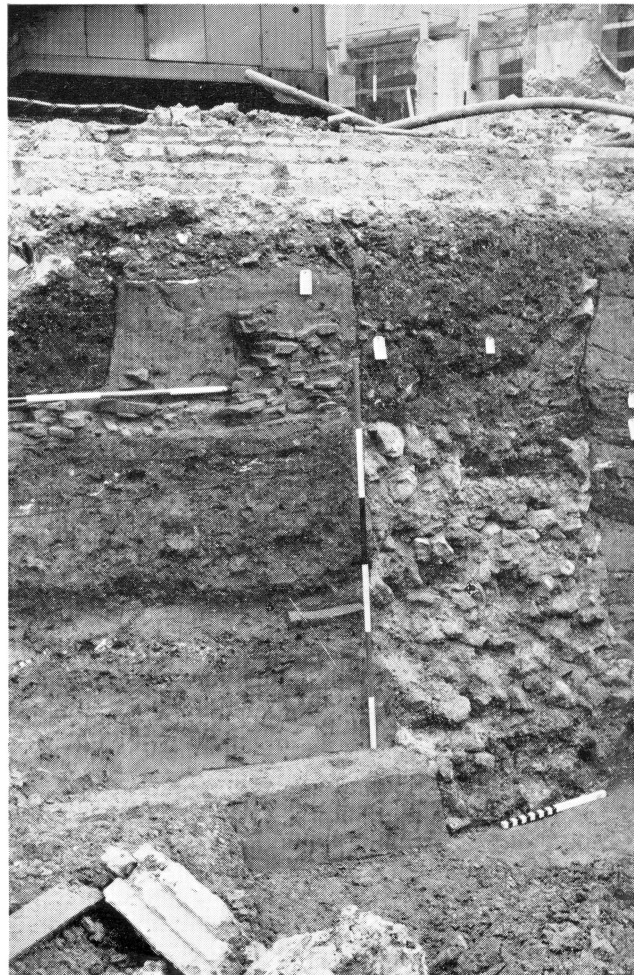
For the first time clear evidence has been found of a number of wooden buildings and roads laid down in the area between A.D. 43 and 60. So far no plans of these buildings have been recovered owing to the deep and dangerous nature of the excavations, but it is hoped that further rescue work may provide details. Far more dramatic is the evidence of the first Great Fire of London, dating to A.D.60. It was in that year Boudicca is recorded as having burned London to the ground during the British revolt against Roman rule. On this site, as elsewhere in the City, a thick band of burnt clay, wood and tiles has been found and traced across much of the site. The walls can be seen in their tumbled state and the rafters lie charred and carbonised upon the clay floors. Here and there small pieces of painted wall plaster show how some of the internal walls were treated.

It must have taken several years for Roman London to rise from the ashes. On this site two buildings were erected. The first was a palatial masonry structure no doubt the principal building in London for much of the 1st century A.D. Traces of this building are known from other sites in the Gracechurch Street area. A large part of this building is being exposed on this site and indicates an overall size of about 340 feet by 180 feet. The impression given is that

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By BRIA

of a multi-roomed building with corridors and perhaps courtyards. In date and size the structure approaches the scale of the great palace at Fishbourne in Sussex, though the refinements of that building are here lacking. It has been suggested that this was a major government building and it seems probable that the notable Julius Classicianus may have lived or worked in this building. He died about A.D. 70 and his tombstone found in 1852 and 1935, at Tower Hill



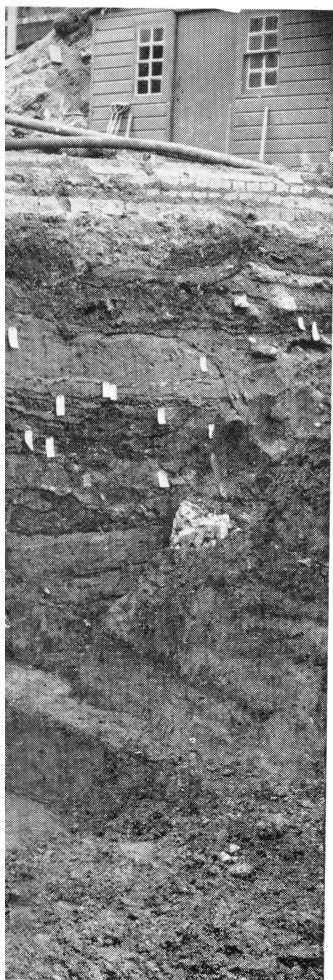
EXCAVATIONS RUM AREA

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records that he was "The Procurator of the Province of Britain.

This palatial building was flanked by a narrow road and on the other side of this road was a bakehouse. Its plan could not be recovered, but it was found to contain two almost complete ovens (see cover picture).

Both buildings were deliberately demolished and



Section showing the 10ft. deep foundations of the south range of the forum, cutting through the 1st century layers and into the natural brick-earth.

this surely implies replanning on a vast scale. The only scheme which could have involved such drastic replanning was when the forum complex was laid out at about A.D. 100. Then an area of at least eight acres in the centre of London was levelled and developed. The position of the basilica and the approximate positions of the south, east and west ranges of the forum had already been fixed and it seemed clear that a major part of the south range was on this site. This proves to be the case. The foundations, ten feet deep and four feet wide, of really massive masonry walls have been found cutting through the earlier structures and levels and are associated with stone and brick piers. The exact relationship of all these has yet to be worked out in detail, but clearly the evidence of this site will allow a substantial part of the forum plan to be completed. (See plate).

The finds recovered during the initial area excavation include a large amount of Roman material from stratified levels. This, including coins and quantities of samian, should provide detailed dating evidence for the various phases. In addition material recovered from medieval and later pits, wells and cess-pits is of considerable interest and includes some important groups of pottery and glass.

The project is being supported by grants from the Ministry of Public Building and Works and the Society of Antiquaries. The Kent Archaeological Research Groups' Council has loaned its Dumpy Level and other equipment.

