

Commentary

By GROMATICUS

SITE PRESERVATION

THE NEWS THAT the Department of Housing and Construction have changed their minds and decided to raise the level of the new Dover ring road high enough to preserve the walls of the Roman forts found there, is very welcome indeed. The result is yet another example that an unpopular decision by a public body can often be upset provided that a vigorous and capable campaign is mounted. This lesson of the Dover protest is one which should be studied by all archaeologists.

There is another point which arises from the incident, namely that on certain sites there is often an excellent case for neither undertaking a complete excavation nor for having a costly preservation exercise. If the archaeological remains can be submerged intact under a new development, then the time, money and goodwill saved can be utilised to meet rescue conditions elsewhere. In due course when the next generation of buildings and roads comes along, the planners will be in a position to make allowances for archaeological excavations and preservation.

Of course there is nothing new in this line of thought — in 1848 during the building of the Coal Exchange at Billingsgate, part of a Roman bath house was discovered and one room was preserved by the City Corporation. Eleven years later when some warehouses were built on the adjacent site, much more of the bath house was found and was carefully covered up again beneath the basement floors until the Guildhall Museum excavation in 1968.

This far-sighted outlook of the Victorians is something which we can emulate today when occasion arises!

HUGGIN HILL

DURING THE 1964 excavation on the Roman public baths at Huggin Hill in the City a heated apsidal room 27 feet wide was found built on a terrace dug into the hillside. By pure chance the re-

mains of this room with extant wall six feet high now lie under a service road safely awaiting, along with the Dover forts, the next generation of rebuilding.

However the top three feet of the Roman wall retaining the terrace behind the baths can still be seen today on the weed-ridden derelict site rising up towards Queen Victoria Street. Despite seven years of weathering the wall still retains patches of plaster in places. The apparent course of action would be for the wall to be cleaned up and suitably labelled; apart from the city walls it would be the only part of Roman London *in situ* and permanently visible. Unfortunately the access road is private property and the wall is on a site belonging to another owner.

Perhaps when the derelict site is developed, it will be possible for something to be done to the wall. Meanwhile one wonders whether the wall could not be reburied to prevent further deterioration.

THE DARKNESS DESCENDS

THE REVERSION to Greenwich Mean Time while delighting traditionalists such as myself, does unfortunately mean that the time available on a weekend rescue excavation is shortened by an hour a day. Without the discipline of a billeted full-time site, volunteers show a marked reluctance to appear an hour earlier — indeed, most directors seem to suffer from the same disability.

However, it is an ill wind that blows no good and some local societies are making the best of the enforced curtailment of their fieldwork by having apres-dig processing activities. This is an excellent idea as so very often even the keenest of volunteers has only a hazy inkling of the after-work. By having a follow-through on the same day these Societies stand to benefit not only from the speeding-up of the processing procedures, but also from the new interest aroused amongst the average member to whom such work sometimes seems to be part of a closed shop.