

Mosaic

LLOYDS BANK TO THE RESCUE

FOR SOME TIME, the archaeological team in Staines led by Kevin Crouch, have been hoping to excavate a site on the High Street frontage. Work in garden areas behind the premises have revealed a sequence of Roman buildings from the Flavian period onwards, and the area between that site and the High Street held the promised evidence for early military occupation. Traces of Saxon and early medieval occupation had also been found. When this area—some 3000 square metres in all—became available for excavation recently, as part of the central area redevelopment, it looked as though shortage of funds might seriously curtail archaeological excavation. However, Lloyds bank have stepped in with a donation of £1000 to enable this important excavation to go ahead. They have already helped to finance excavations in York, Lincoln, Warwickshire and Essex, but this is the first contribution they have made in the London area. Especially in the current financial climate, the involvement of local businesses in the archaeology of their area is a welcome development, and we hope other firms will follow Lloyds' example.

It is hoped that this excavation will provide evidence for many aspects of the history of Staines, from the earliest occupation following the Roman conquest to the relationship between the Roman town and the succeeding Saxon settlement.

ARCHAEOLOGICAL AWARDS

IN OUR summer issue we reported the first Rescue/Current Archaeology Independent Archaeology Competition, won by the Offa's Dyke Project Group. Two further awards were made at the prize-giving ceremony at the National Maritime Museum, Greenwich, on 14 September. *The Times* Award for the best contribution to archaeology by a commercial or business firm was won by Lloyds Bank Limited. We congratulate them and are glad to report that they are not resting on their laurels (see above). Awards were also given to the other entrants — Amey Roadstone Corporation Limited, Fisons Limited and Hoveringham Gravels. The *Country Life* Award for the best contribution by a local authority or public body (other than a government department) was won by the West Yorkshire County Council. The other entrants were the Mid-Wales Water Board, Oxfordshire County Council and the Redundant Churches Commission.

Details and entry forms for the 1978 Awards can be obtained from Rescue, 15A Bull Plain, Hertford, Herts, SG14 1DX. The entry date for the B.B.C. 'Chronicle' Award (for volunteer projects) is 1 April. We hope that the London area will again make a good showing in the competitions.

MILK STREET EXCAVATIONS

THE MILK STREET excavation carried out by the D.U.A. has produced a structural sequence from the early Roman period onwards, through late Saxon and Medieval periods to foundations of 17th century and Victorian buildings.

The earliest evidence of human activity on the site consisted of pottery, tile and charcoal flecks mixed up with the natural light tan brickearth. Late in the first century substantial wooden buildings were set out with concrete floors, or, in one case, traces of a tessellated pavement and painted wall or ceiling plaster. These had a wooden beam set in slots in the ground with probably a superstructure of either wattle and daub or mud bricks.

Later, possibly in about 100 A.D., these buildings were dismantled and an extensive foundational slab of brick-

earth was laid. Above this was evidence of very fragmentary wooden structures, with no architectural pretensions, probably lean-to's or sheds. In the early second century a second foundation of brickearth covers these structures and further wooden buildings of a similar nature were constructed. These seem to have had a short life, being destroyed by a fire which swept across the whole of the site in c. 130 A.D.

Short-term occupation of the area took place immediately after the fire in the form of a building of sleeper-beam construction, soon replaced by gravel metalling in the north associating with a wooden structure to the south, containing a mosaic of the mid-second century. It was bounded by brickearth sills for horizontal timbers, with painted wall plaster and quarter-round mouldings at the base topped by wattle and daub. This structure was the latest surviving of the Roman period. All structures of the Roman period are on virtually the same alignment, that of the street grid in the area.

During the Saxon period, or possibly earlier, large amounts of black soil were imported into the area and preliminary analysis of this deposit suggests that it could have been used for cultivation. The contemporary structural evidence consists of a 9th century hut situated at the western edge of the Roman Street (again showing the continuing relevance of this topographical feature). The surviving wooden superstructure yielded information on building techniques, carpentry, etc. whilst the seeds and animal bones have equally interesting implications for diet, standard of living, etc. To the north of the hut, contemporary cess and rubbish pits give similar information.

In the north of the site a series of early Medieval pits were excavated. Three were particularly interesting, containing a well-presented wattle lining with cross-members, probably to hold it in place. Dated to the 12th century, they suggest a primary usage of a rather more long-term nature than mere rubbish or cess, possibly of an industrial character, e.g. connected with leather-working.

In the south-west corner, running back from Milk Street (first documented c. 1140, but thought to be much older possibly laid out as part of the grid of streets around Cheapside probably instituted by King Alfred in 886), a stone house was found. This dates provisionally from the 11th century, and is the first secular stone structure of the period to be excavated in the City. It comprised at basement level one large room and some kind of antechamber or staircase at the back. The walls of chalk and rag blocks (including some re-used Roman masonry), were founded upon piles, most of which had disintegrated. The building seemed to determine modern property boundaries (especially Robinson's Court), and this would indicate that the old house was broken up into tenements before its probable destruction in the Great Fire of 1666.

Fragments of other medieval buildings were found: two wardrobes, including one with several complete pots and a group of ten wooden vessels, a second, late medieval cellar with the base of a staircase communicating with Milk Street, and finally it should be noted that No. 4 Russia Court was one of the few remaining 17th century houses, though much altered. We hope to have a brief look at its foundations, and thus, with the G.L.C. Historic Buildings Board report on the standing house before its demolition, provide a history of the site over the last two thousand years.