

Mosaic

DEVELOPER AIDS ARCHAEOLOGY

A NUMBER OF vital questions about London in the Dark Ages should shortly be answered thanks to the generosity of Guardian Royal Exchange Assurance. The company have now added a further £7,000 to their original contribution of some £27,000 for the archaeological excavation of a site being redeveloped by them at 24/5 Ironmonger Lane in the City of London. Because of the importance of the discoveries made during the first month of excavation Guardian Royal Exchange Assurance have agreed to add the extra £7,000 towards the cost of special shoring required to reach the deepest, most crucial information from the site.

The Museum knew from previous discoveries that, once the Victorian building on the site had been demolished, a Roman road would be found directly beneath the basement. But what archaeologists could only hope for were traces of Saxon buildings. These have now been found on the edge, and occupying part of, this road. What are being interpreted provisionally as two 9th century sunken huts were dug into the gravels of the road. Nearby, possibly at about the same time, a large Roman courtyard or house wall was demolished.

The discoveries raise a number of vital questions about London in the Dark Ages. Do they mean that ruined Roman buildings were still standing in the City, up to 500 years after the Romans had left? Why did the Saxons — as has been found elsewhere — dig their huts, if such they are, in the old roads, when much of the City comprised wasteland? Only by further excavation can these and other questions about this crucial period in London's history be answered. And only by the extra grant of £7,000 by Guardian Royal Exchange Assurance towards the cost of shoring can the remaining layers be excavated.

The Museum welcomes this example of continuing co-operation between developers and archaeologists in the City which is essential both for the rapid redevelopment of sites and for learning more about the early stages of London's development.

ROYAL WESTMINSTER EXHIBITION

HOME OF ROYAL PALACES and of Parliament, the burial place of the Kings and Queens of England — Westminster has always been linked with the Crown. Beginning with Thorney Island, 'a terrible uncultivated place' surrounded by marshland and tangled briars where Westminster Abbey and the Houses of Parliament now stand, this exhibition, which celebrates the charter centenary of The Royal Institution of Chartered Surveyors, tells the fascinating story of Royal Westminster over the centuries.

Beautifully illuminated manuscripts illustrate the legend of St. Peter's visit to the first small wooden church on the Island, the precursor of Westminster Abbey. Archaeological evidence demonstrates the Roman and Anglo-Saxon habitation in the area. Sculpted angels, beasts and corbels rescued from the medieval Abbey give an indication of the excellence of carving and profusion of colour which adorned it. On public view for the first time since it was restored is Sir Christopher Wren's controversial model showing the Abbey with a central spire, which Wren was convinced was originally intended.

Medieval life in the Parish of St. Margaret is realistically portrayed; and a host of familiar figures who lived there are represented, including Geoffrey Chaucer and William Caxton (who printed the first books in

English within the Abbey precinct).

Westminster Palace was abandoned by Henry VIII for Whitehall Palace where the King's amusements of jousting, cockfighting and real tennis were lavishly provided. The visitor can study Inigo Jones' elaborate designs for a royal residence to rival those in Europe, share the delights of Charles II's aviary and menagerie in St. James's Park, and ponder over Nash's extravagant conversion of Buckingham House into the monarch's principal residence — Buckingham Palace.

The Palace of Westminster, burnt down in 1834, is brought back to life by means of paintings and artefacts, and a selection of surviving designs for the rebuilding of the House of Parliament are compared with what we have now.

Information about advance booking for day and evening visits may be obtained from the Exhibition Office, 12 Great George Street, Parliament Square, London SW1P 3AD (telephone 01-222 7000 ext 283). It is hoped to provide special facilities for pre-booked school parties, as well as for group and individual bookings.

PEASANTS REVOLT AGAIN

WE HEAR ON the grapevine (otherwise known as the London Archaeologist Publication Committee) that plans are in hand for celebrations to mark the 600th anniversary of the Peasants Revolt of 1381. An organisation called COPRA (Commemoration of the Peasants' Revolt Anniversary) is planning a week of festivities in June, culminating in something spectacular over the weekend 12-13 June. More details will be available later, but meanwhile watch out for those Peasants if you're passing through Blackheath.

HERITAGE CENTRE AT CRYSTAL PALACE

WORK HAS JUST STARTED on an ambitious scheme to convert much of British Rail's Crystal Palace station and associated buildings into a Railway Heritage Centre. The firm involved, Railway Heritage Centres Ltd., hopes that by the end of 1985 work will be completed and the Centre will be receiving around 500,000 visitors a year. The attractions will include a restored Victorian Station and Goods Shed, a miniature railway (7½in gauge) running through a nature reserve, a Victorian Street with 20 shops and a working tramway, as well as a more conventional exhibition hall, lecture theatres and cinema. To make a day out for the whole family there will be a Victorian restaurant, a cafeteria and shops, picnic areas and a creche. The listed buildings at the high level will be restored for use as offices, library and staff accommodation. The whole is seen as a commercial venture, with share capital providing the initial investment and future developments being funded largely out of revenue. We wish the organisers every success.

HOME FOR THE SOUTH-WEST LONDON UNIT

FOR SEVERAL MONTHS the South-West London Archaeological Unit has been without premises, ever since they had to leave their previous 'office' — a condemned terraced house in Battersea. Now at last they have a new address — St. Luke's House, Sandycombe Road, Kew. Apparently they have to share it with a playgroup, dancing classes, yoga and an arts studio, but at least it's a roof over their heads. *The London Archaeologist* wishes them a long and successful occupation. tw