

Mosaic

Haberdashers' Arms

A NEW exhibition in the crypt below St Bride's church Fleet Street opened earlier this year. In addition to the remains of a Roman building, a Saxo-Norman church and a Medieval crypt, an important group of architectural fragments is displayed. They were recovered from Professor Grimes' excavations of 1952-4 within the shell of the blitzed church. The item shown on the front cover portrays the arms of the Haberdashers' Company, as designed after the merger of the Hatters and Hurers Companies with the Haberdashers in 1502. It incorporates a wavy field, representing the sea (and therefore their mercantile interests) upon which is a lion passant (signifying Royal patronage) to which a crest in the form of a garland has been added. It is probably of 17th-century date and may be the earliest surviving representation of the company's arms cut in stone.

The British Museum 'discovers' America

ON 15 NOVEMBER Princess Margaret launched the British Museum's 250th Anniversary Development Programme. She is Honorary President of the British Museum Development Trust which aims to raise £100 million to fund the Development Programme. The intention is to complete this programme by the year 2003 to celebrate the Museum's 250th anniversary.

The departure of the British Library to its new premises at St Pancras releases 40% of the Museum building, and provides the Museum with a unique opportunity for expansion and renewal, costing £100 million in all. The centrepiece will be Sir Norman Foster's plan for the Great Court, which, at a cost of £50 million, will open up the inner courtyard and create one of the most innovative and exciting public buildings in London. It will house a new Centre for Education, ethnographic galleries and catering and retail areas. The Round Reading Room will become permanently accessible to all visitors for the first time: part of it will house an Information Centre where the public will be able to discover more about the collections. The King's Library, Manuscript Saloon, Grenville Library, Front Hall and Staircase will be refurbished and redecorated, and there will be a programme of gallery renewal throughout the Museum.

The ethnographic collections will return from Museum of Mankind in Burlington Gardens, where they were sent in 1970 to relieve congestion in the main building. The opening of the new Mexican Gallery on 5 November marks the first stage of Ethnography's return. It provides the first permanent exhibition of the Museum's Mexican collections, including sculpture, mosaics and ceramics. Despite the fact that Britain has long-standing historical ties with the Americas, very little of that has been reflected in the display policy of one of the world's premier museums. Thanks to interest in the Quincentenary of Columbus' voyage of exploration in 1492 and the involvement of the Mexican president, His Excellency Carlos Salinas de Gortari, and His Royal Highness the Prince of Wales, the Old World-centrism of the British Museum has finally been breached. In parallel with the new gallery, the British Museum has loaned the Mexican National Museum a collection of Assyrian artefacts.

Although the new gallery is small (a mere 600m²), the design, by the Mexican architect Arquitecto Teodoro González de León, is both stunning and a departure from the normal policy of in-house design. The small size of the gallery is more than compensated for by the quality of the artefacts displayed. They have been chosen with empathy for Mexico's position as one of the world's centres where ancient "high culture" (however one defines that concept) developed.

Among the pieces on display are Olmec ceremonial jades, ritual vessels from the Isla de Sacrificios, large stone sculptures from the Huastec and carved lintels from the Mayan site of Yaxchilan. The Mixtec and Aztec turquoise mosaics include masks of Quetzalcoatl and a flint-bladed sacrificial knife with mosaic handle. The Aztecs recorded their histories, wars and accessions in now extremely rare books: an example on display is the *Codex Zouche*, one of the finest to survive from prehispanic Mexico. The new gallery (room 33c) is located at the north end of the King's Library (room 32). It is accompanied by an illustrated book, *Ancient Mexico in the British Museum*, by Colin McEwan, available from the Museum bookshops price £6.95.

The second stage, due for completion in 1997, will consist of a new North American Gallery. It will be funded by the Chase Manhattan Bank to the tune of £1m over the next five years. The British Museum has one of the most important collections of North American archaeology and ethnography outside the United States and Canada, but restrictions on space means that much of it has never been properly displayed.

Perhaps it is fitting that the impetus for the new Mexican gallery rises from the Columbus Quincentenary. Maybe the new Mexican Gallery will help to put paid to the Eurocentric popular misconception that Columbus "discovered" the New World. In the same light, it is hoped that the proposed South American Gallery at the British Museum finds funding and space, so that all the "high civilisations" of the ancient world at last find a home in one of the world's pre-eminent museums.

Mike Czwarno and Clive Orton

Bravo for the Bronze Age

THE CULTURAL Heritage Division of the Council of Europe is mounting a public awareness campaign to promote the European Archaeological Heritage, on the theme *The Bronze Age: the first golden age of Europe*. It was chosen because of the vast number of relevant archaeological sites and finds, thus encouraging reflection on European integration in the past.

The first major event of the campaign was hosted by the British Museum on 27-29 October: an international conference 'The Identity of Bronze Age Europe'. Particular themes of the conference were the identity of the individual within society, the identity of the kinship group, and the nature of these interactions. A panel exhibition on the British Bronze Age opened at the British Museum immediately after the conference, and will remain open for three months. Thirty panels, assembled by the Council for British Archaeology, were contributed by many organisations. Their subjects range from ancient landscapes to excavated sites, and regional patterns to artefact studies.

People before London

THE MUSEUM of London's new prehistoric gallery, People before London, was opened to the public on 22 November. We hope to carry a review in a future issue.

Tebbutt Research Fund

THIS FUND was established as a tribute to the life and work of the late CF Tebbutt; applications are invited, from individuals and groups, for grants towards research, including associated expenses, into any aspect of the Wealden Iron Industry. It is anticipated that about £200 will be available from the fund, and any interested person should write a suitable letter of application giving details of themselves together with relevant information concerning the envisaged research. Applications should be sent to Shiela Broomfield, 8 Woodview Crescent, Hildenborough, Kent TN11 9HD, not later than 31 March.