

Amphitheatre re-opens after 1800 years

Closed to the public for 1800 years, and taking fifteen years to preserve, London's Roman amphitheatre is now once again open to the public. The curving wall of ragstone foundations that has slowly emerged in 1988 Museum of London excavations and finally ended hundreds of years of speculation and searching is now on display for all to see.

The display, which cost the Corporation of London £1.3m, is clearly designed to impress. The remains described by Professor Nigel Coates, from Branson Coates Architecture Ltd, as being relatively modest, appear as nothing but in this imaginative design.

The *in situ* remains, which include a portion of curving walls and most of the east gate foundations, are set within low platforms. This allows visitors a close look at the masonry, but also dissuades visitors from walking over and damaging the fragile remains. Lit by low-level spotlighting, the structure retains its enigmatic and mysterious qualities -- although this does make close examination of the masonry difficult. However, this display is not designed with small detail in mind; what is clear from the moment you enter this space is the scale and grandeur of what must have been a truly overwhelming experience. You take the place of a gladiator as you walk through the remains of the east gate and are confronted with a digitised computer projection of the 'missing' walls and banked seating of the arena. Depicted in a minimal skeletal wire-frame style, the scale and perspective of this virtual amphitheatre allow the visitor to experience the spatial context of the real amphitheatre without hindering any personal imaginative reconstructions visitors form in their own minds. Depicted in the same 'frame' style, life-size gladiators decorate some of the pile supports, carefully disguising their true purpose as well as bringing to life the human nature of the ritual displays that would have featured in the arena.

Entry to the amphitheatre is through the Guildhall Art Gallery, Guildhall Yard, London EC2, and cost is £2.50 for adults and concessions £1.00. There is no charge for children and entry is free to everyone on Fridays. Opening hours are Monday to Saturday 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. and

Sunday 12 to 4 p.m. Group bookings and tours are available, organised through the Museum of London Box Office on (020) 7814 5777.

Lesley Smith

Community Archaeologist at the Museum of London

English Heritage and the Museum of London recently announced the appointment of a new Community Archaeologist to boost public participation in London's archaeological projects. English Heritage has funded the post, based at the Museum of London, for one year. Vanessa Bunton, who was appointed at the end of June, will be exploring ways to help local archaeological societies in Greater London become more active and improve access to archaeology for members of the public.

Vanessa's first task is to make contact with all the active archaeological societies in Greater London and discover their needs and overall aims. She then hopes to attract Heritage Lottery Fund support for valuable work currently being undertaken by local societies, for developing new projects and for making the archaeological world more accessible in a local setting.

Vanessa is based at the London Archaeological Archive and Research Centre (LAARC) at Mortimer Wheeler House, Eagle Wharf Road, London N1 7ED, and can be contacted on (020) 7566 9310 or by email vbunton@museumoflondon.org.uk.

New Director for the Museum of London

The new Director of the Museum of London is Professor Jack Lohman, formerly Chief Executive Officer of South Africa's Iziko museums. He succeeds Dr Simon Thurley, who was recently appointed Chief Executive of English Heritage.

Archaeological Archives Forum

English Heritage has announced the foundation of a new Archaeological Archives Forum, which aims to open up generations of invaluable research to a wider public. High on the Forum's agenda are the provision of archaeological resource centres, digital access and archiving, and training in post-excavation archiving. The Forum Chair is Hedley Swain of the Museum of London, and further information can be found on the Forum web site at www.britarch.ac.uk/archives/index.html.