

Bringing the Middle Ages up to date

Over its 30 years existence, the Museum of London has steadily renewed and updated its galleries (some more than once). The Cinderella of this process has been the Medieval Gallery, which until recently has been almost untouched – sad, gloomy and uninviting, conveying a static impression of London. All this is now changing, and a brand new gallery will be unveiled at the end of November. I was fortunate to visit recently and see work in progress: walls being painted, frameworks erected and wiring everywhere. It was hard to imagine both what had been and what was to come.

So what's the thinking behind the new gallery? There is a strong narrative theme, from 410 (the 'departure' of the Romans) to 1558 (the point of no return of the Reformation), interrupted by three traumatic events: the Viking raids and the move back inside the City walls (886), the Black Death (1348) and the Dissolution (1538). This chronological theme will run round the outside wall, with banners illustrating outside influences such as the Vikings, wars with France, and trading contacts. The growth and change of London through this period will be represented by a large horizontal map, projected from the ceiling, showing London developing in its geographical setting over the centuries. There will be free-standing displays on, for example, the Church and the Guilds, and the centrepiece will be a display on the Thames, including massive timbers from the waterfront, not seen in public since the *Capital Gains!* exhibition of 1986. Many new finds will be displayed, including fragments of clothing from waterfront sites, stonework from Merton Abbey and stucco from Nonsuch Palace.

There is also a policy to take children more seriously, with their own special captions and interactive displays. There will be a few computer terminals and perhaps one game, but they will not dominate. Children will also no doubt be attracted to the Black Death audiovisual enclosure (more audio than visual, I was assured), and will

respond to the costumed interpreters who will sometimes be present.

The tremendous changes that took place in London over this period will be represented by two items which (for funding reasons) will not be present as soon as the gallery is open – the Saxon house at the start of the gallery and the Tudor bookshop at the end. Here we will see, not only the obvious changes in building style and techniques, but also the fundamental changes in how Londoners communicated with each other, from stories told round the hearth on dark nights to the printed word purchased and read individually.

By the time our next issue is published, the gallery will be open and the first visits will have been made. We hope to commission a review, but it would also be good if readers could write in and tell us what they think.

Changes at English Heritage

A review at English Heritage has concluded that the Greater London Archaeological Advisory Service (GLAAS), including the Sites and Monuments Record (GLSMR) should remain within the London Region of English Heritage, but that the Archaeology Advisors should be integrated with the multi-disciplinary area teams. This will mean changes in the groups of boroughs for which each advisor is responsible. Robert Whytehead will remain Regional Archaeologist and Head of GLAAS, Barry Taylor as Head of GLSMR, and Steve Ellwood will be SMR Officer.

Fieldwork Round-up

The *Fieldwork and Publication Round-up* for 2004 is being circulated with this issue. Please contact the Subscriptions Secretary if you have not received your copy. Our thanks go to Cath Maloney for collating the Fieldwork Round-up, and to Isabel Holroyd and Gustav Milne for the Publications section. Please let us know if there are any omissions.