

Commentary

By GROMATICUS

LONDON'S FIRST TOWN HALL

IN A LETTER to *The Times* on the 12th August under this heading Professor Grimes, Director of the Institute of Archaeology, warmly commended the City Corporation for its enlightened policy with regard to archaeology, particularly in connection with the proposed preservation of the Roman town-house on the Coal Exchange site.

He continued — "Preservation is of course a costly process which adds also to the problems of architects and builders. One hesitates to ask for more. The fact remains that there is another Roman building which in due time may be a worthy candidate for preservation. This is the Roman basilica complex, part of which underlies Leadenhall Market, at nearly 500 feet in length one of the most impressive structures of its kind in the western Empire.

"If and when this area comes to be redeveloped, adequate opportunity should be provided for its archaeological investigation, for it undoubtedly has great relevance to the City's early history. But it may be also that the quality of the remains may justify preservation *in situ* — a course which should be practicable if notice is taken of them at the right time. Archaeologists and lay public alike will be put further in the Corporation's debt if the present enlightened policy is extended to London's first town hall."

A SPANISH PARALLEL

LONDON'S DEARTH of visible remains of Roman buildings compares most unfavourably with, for example, the towns of Provence. Therefore Professor Grimes' appeal for an attempt to preserve *in situ* part of the basilica complex should be very carefully considered.

When Leadenhall Market was built in 1881, drawings were made of the monumental remains found, much of which still exists reburied under the present buildings — the Roman floor level is some 13 feet beneath Gracechurch Street.

An example of what has been done in somewhat similar circumstances occurs in Barcelona where some of the Roman remains have been preserved beneath the city of today in a huge concrete cavern.

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several hundred feet long. Here it is possible to walk along the ancient streets and past houses and shops — something akin to an underground Pompei!

Through the foresight of the Victorians and the generosity of the City Corporation it has been possible to preserve the Roman town-house on the Coal Exchange site. It would be a pity if the same combination could not come together again to save something of the grander and much earlier basilica building.

WINTER EVENINGS

AS THE EXCAVATIONS start to die out, thoughts automatically turn towards armchair archaeology. True, there will always be a site somewhere tucked away behind its corrugated iron fence, but for many people the winter months provide an opportunity to deepen their knowledge of archaeology through study.

London University's Department of Extra-Mural Studies will again be offering a wide variety of subjects throughout the London region (see inside front cover), whilst in most Adult Education Institute areas there will be at least one course relating to archaeology.

A particular item for the post-medieval enthusiast will be the two-day seminar on English delftware being held in November (see inside back cover). Over the last ten years a very large amount of information on the subject has been uncovered, culminating with the two kilns at the present being excavated by London Bridge.

DR. HARDEN

AFTER BEING DIRECTOR of London Museum for 14 years, Dr. Donald Harden retired in June. He is perhaps best known for his study of glass, in which he was tremendously interested and it was justly appropriate that the last exhibition under his directorship should have been "Glass in London."

Dr. Harden also spent much time and effort in planning the ill-starred new Museum of London which according to the original intentions should have been built and open well before now; however, he is probably heartened to see the project currently breaking into a trot. He also took a keen interest in archaeological field work and was President of the Thames Basin Archaeological Observers Group throughout its 12 years of existence.

The good wishes of all of London's archaeologists will follow Dr. Harden into his retirement—which one suspects, rather than being a rest will prove to be merely a change in his place of work.