

SPIITALFIELDS SITE

EXCAVATIONS, directed by Irene Schwab for the Inner London Unit, have recently taken place at Artillery Lane, E.1., within the Roman cemetery area of Spitalfields.

Deep Victorian basements had removed the original ground surfaces, but below the cellar floor was found a number of pits, apparently dug for the extraction of gravel. Most of these were backfilled in the early Roman period, probably in the mid 2nd century. One pit contained a fragment of a lead-glazed pottery unguent flask in the shape of a cow's head. These vessels, imported from central Gaul in the mid 1st century, are very rare on British sites. The Unit is grateful to Paul Arthur for his comments on the sherd.

The largest pit, which had a diameter of at least 9 metres, was backfilled in the 14th-15th century and contained a rich group of bones, including several human bones, relating to at least three individuals.

It seems probable that Roman burials existed here and had been disturbed by later gravel diggings.

Other work in Spitalfields this autumn has included the recording of a plague pit under the Unit's former offices at 1-2 Steward Street/37-39 Artillery Lane. A sample of the bones was taken for specialist examination.

The Spitalfields area is one that is very directly threatened by redevelopment. This winter the Unit intends to trench two unbasamented sites in the vicinity, in the hope of finding the ground surfaces associated with the Roman and Medieval activity here.

L.A.M.A.S. YOUTH SECTION

AFTER a year in limbo, the Youth Section of L.A.M.A.S. has been revived by Elizabeth Newbery. Membership is open to anyone under 18 years of age, and for a subscription of 50p per annum members receive a newsletter and the opportunity to attend talks, meetings and some outings. The first issue of the Newsletter contains an account of the Section's recent visit to the Tower of London, where they were given a conducted tour of the current excavations, details of their next visit (to the new Museum of London on 3 January), and lists of books to read, exhibitions to see and excavations to visit. Future issues will keep members up-to-date on archaeological activities in London, and it is hoped that members themselves will contribute to it.

The London Archaeologist wishes this new venture every success, and encourages its younger readers to join, and older readers to tell younger friends and relatives who might be interested. We see one of the main advantages of membership as the ability to "get behind the scenes" on visits and outings, to be more than "just another tourist." If you are interested, the Honorary Secretary of the Youth Section, Elizabeth Newbery, 17 Tudor Road, Hampton, Middlesex, will be pleased to hear from you.

IT'S AN ILL WIND

READERS may remember the opening of the Waltham Abbey Museum, reported in Mosaic in the Summer issue. Since then the Museum has been threatened by closure because the redevelopment of the surrounding area would

have made access impossible. However, the economic crisis has forced the indefinite postponement of the proposed redevelopment, and the Museum will stay open over the winter (see Diary).

NEW DIRECTOR OF THE BRITISH MUSEUM

IT HAS recently been announced that the new Director of the British Museum will be David Wilson, Professor of Scandinavian Studies at University College, London. He is the leading Anglo-Saxon archaeologist in the country, and will be well-known to many readers for his excellent and popular books, eg *The Anglo-Saxons* (Thames and Hudson; Pelican paperback). We welcome the appointment of such an eminent archaeologist to this key post.

NEWS FROM SOUTHWARK

SINCE its inception in 1962, the Southwark Archaeological Excavation Committee (SAEC) has conducted excavations both in Southwark and the neighbouring borough of Lambeth. This year the Committee has been revising its constitution to bring it in line with its changed circumstances — the organisation of London archaeology has changed radically since 1962 — and has taken the opportunity to change its name to the Southwark and Lambeth Archaeological Excavation Committee (SLAEC) to reflect its wider interests. Representation on the Committee has been widened to include more organisations than before. The address of the Committee and its staff remains the same: Montague Chambers, Montague Close, London Bridge, S.E.1.

MERTON PRIORY

THE South West London Team, Surrey Archaeological Society, is currently excavating, with the help of volunteers from a number of local archaeological societies in south west London, the southern half of the Austin Priory of St Mary, Merton. Much of the site now lies under the disused railway line and platform of Merton Abbey Station. The whole area is due for redevelopment by British Rail in the near future.

The eastern wall of the Chapter House has been located and, although damaged by recent drainage ditches, much of this chalk and flint wall stands to a height of some 60cm. A thick deposit of demolition rubble (c. 1538) has been uncovered within the Chapter House and there are indications of at least one floor level being preserved. The walls appear to have been levelled to the original ground surface and then left undisturbed.

Outside the Chapter House between its eastern end and the southern side of the Church proper, a great spread of demolition rubble has been traced for at least 20m. This rubble is producing a number of plain, mosaic and printed glazed floor tiles as well as fragments of stained glass, window leading and worked stone.

The excavation will be confined to the Chapter House and the Cloister area; once development of the station platforms begins it may be possible to excavate the entire south transept.

The work has been made possible by the kind permission of British Rail Property Board and the enthusiastic response of local volunteers.