

Commentary

by Gromaticus

Compare and contrast

IN THE SPACE of two weeks, I have been fortunate enough to visit two major new building projects -- the Great Court at the British Museum (before the official opening) and the Guildhall Art Gallery (about a year after it was opened). The preview of the Great Court was like holding a party on a building site -- but what a building site! The great courtyard, so quickly filled with clutter after it was built, is now cleared but roofed over, creating a space which is both 'outside' and 'inside' at the same time. It is a wonderful place just to be, and to relax in after viewing some galleries, though some seats would be useful (but might perhaps reduce the custom in the cafés). Forget the row about the South Portico; I defy anyone except an expert geologist to tell the difference.

The renovated Reading Room is a revelation, with new windows let into its vast dome to illuminate the amazing papier-mâché decor. I'm less sure about the new library, donated by the Hamlyn Foundation and reflecting the work of authors who have used the Reading Room. Presumably one can't borrow them, one is unlikely to want to sit and read them, so what are they for other than fancy wallpaper?

With the new space comes new opening hours: the museum itself will stay open until 8.30 p.m. on Thursdays and Fridays, while the Great Court will be open until 11 p.m. Thursday to Saturday and 9 p.m. Monday to Wednesday. Obviously a whole new market is being created here, with the possibility of shopping and eating out after work in a brand new ambience.

We shall have to wait until the technology is in place before we can judge the success of the whole project (see *Gromaticus* in vol. 9, no. 3 (1999)). How will visitors use the computer terminals which will give them access to the *Compass* database of the Museum's collections? How will the much-needed Education Centre meet the needs of the younger visitor? Only time will tell (weather and Railtrack permitting). Above all, will the change in emphasis for the whole Museum that these innovations undoubtedly represent, benefit its life and work in the long run? The jury is likely to be out for some time.

Soon after, I visited the Guildhall Art Gallery in the City of London to celebrate the launch of MoLAS' new book, *Gladiators at the Guildhall* (which we hope to review shortly). This was a very appropriate venue, since it was the preparatory works for this building that led to the discovery of London's Roman amphitheatre in 1987/88 (see Nick Bateman 'The discovery of Londinium's amphitheatre: excavations at the Old Art Gallery site 1987-88 and 1990' *London Archaeol* 6, no. 9 (1990) 232-241). Once past the airport-style metal detectors, I was suitably impressed by the sheer 'oomph' of the new building. Art Gallery it may be called, but expression of civic pride and power is what it is. It simply exudes power and intimidates the visitor. But in the basement are the remains of the Roman amphitheatre, still exactly *in situ* but boxed up, awaiting conservation and display. Something for us all to look forward to in a year or two.

Fieldwork Round-up 2000

CONTRIBUTIONS to the 2000 *Fieldwork Round-up* should be sent to Cath Maloney, Museum of London Specialist Services, 46 Eagle Wharf Road, London N1 7EE. They should be modelled on the ones in the 1999 *Round-up* and if possible should be sent in on a floppy disk as well as on paper.

Advance notice

THE ANNUAL LECTURE and meeting of the *London Archaeologist* will be held at 7 p.m. on Tuesday 15 May in Room 612 of the Institute of Archaeology, 31-34 Gordon Square, London WC1. A formal announcement, including the name of the speaker, will be made in the next issue, but meanwhile please make a note in your diaries.

On the Web

WE ARE PLEASED to announce that our website has the new address of www.londonarchaeologist.org.uk, making us easier to find than ever before.

Congratulations

FOLLOWING ON from our editorial about the Portable Antiquities Scheme in our previous issue, we are pleased to hear that the Scheme has won the Silver Trowel Award in the British Archaeological Awards.