INTO THE JAWS OF DEATH . . . WALKED ONE

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'Now is the time for archaeologists to prepare the organization for dealing with the flood of rebuilding which will shortly burst the sluice gates'; so wrote Adrian Oswald in the summer of 1949.[1] But the City of London was then no better prepared to defend its threatened antiquities than it had been to protect itself ten years earlier, and Oswald's warning was to go unheeded. Indeed, the Library Committee of the Corporation of London, which controlled the City's Guildhall Museum, was seriously considering backing away from any responsibility by dispensing with the museum altogether, and giving its space to the library.

Thanks to the high-explosive and incendiary attentions of the Luftwaffe, London had been presented with the finest opportunity to study its archaeological roots since the Great Fire of 1666. The price had been high, for in addition to the destruction of hundreds of historically and, by current standards, architecturally unimportant office and shop buildings, the City had lost the interiors of many of Sir Christopher Wren's churches and numerous secular buildings of great cultural value. Among them were the halls of the Barbers, Merchant Taylors, Mercers, Haberdashers, Salters, the Master's House at the Temple, Gray's Inn Hall, Serjeant's Inn, Trinity House, Charterhouse, and Guildhall itself. A slice had been cut through the heart of the City from Aldersgate on the west to Moorgate at the east, and from the Barbican to the Thames. Along the river front, destroyed warehouses had left a large gap east of Puddle Dock, and another stretching from Southwark Bridge to London Bridge which embraced the mouth of the ancient river Walbrook and the Roman city wall through which, presumably, it had passed. Other major sections of the Roman wall lay in devastated acres around Cripplegate and on both sides of Aldgate. Yet another area of great archaeological importance extended from Leadenhall Street flanked by Mincing and Mark Lanes and running south to Lower Thames Street and Tower Hill, while another, smaller but of no less importance, took in a block embraced by Queen Street, Queen Victoria Street, Budge Row (once the west end of Cannon Street and now eliminated), and St. Swithin's Lane. The street called Walbrook passed through the middle of that block, and it was between Walbrook and St. Swithin's Lane that the City's first major post-war building project was to begin.

The City's corporate responsibilities were not confined to wards within the walls, but extended to those without, to the areas of the Inns of Court, and across the river to the Borough of Southwark, and it was there that the City's Guildhall Museum fought its first major battle in the war of urban reconstruction. In the spring and summer of 1949, a large area east of Blackfriars Bridge and Gravel Lane was being cleared to build the Bankside

power station. Although largely uninhabited until the 16th century, the area became an important potting and glass-making centre in the 18th century, and thus was of special interest to post-medievalists — or it would have been had they existed at that time.

The history of archaeology in the City of London before the Second World War was chequered at best, and its museum more often asked 'what?' than 'why?' or 'when?', the acquisition of objects being sufficient enough goal. Thus, visits to building sites by Guildhall's Museum Clerk, Quintin Waddington, were limited to purchasing whatever artifacts the builder's labourers might be willing to sell. Since the mid 19th century when Charles Roach Smith was collecting in the City, a keen sense of competition had developed, and choice items were liable to be kept back for sale to more generous customers. It mattered little, of course, that these antiquities belonged to the landowner and were never the finders' to sell. Foremost among the buyers in the years between the wars was G. F. Lawrence, known to every labourer as 'Stony Jack', who for many years held the title of Inspector of Excavations for the London Museum. Because he also sold artifacts to museums and collectors, Lawrence was able to spread 'beer money' fairly liberally about the City, and the legacy of his generosity lived on to make life difficult for the impecunious Guildhall Museum in the immediate post-war years.

Although Museum Clerk Frank Lambert had made some valiant attempts at archaeological salvage in the years both before and after the First World War,[2] his successor was less vigorous in this respect, and responsibility for watching London building sites fell by default to the Society of Antiquaries who appointed an Investigator of Building Excavations, a position held successively by three experienced archaeologists, Eric Birley, Gerald Dunning, and Frank Cottrill. In 1926, two years before Birley's work began, R. E. M. Wheeler had been appointed Keeper of the London Museum. Although he was not personally involved in fieldwork within the City, the Roman, Viking, and Saxon catalogues produced by him, for the first time put the museum's unstratified collections to work to show both the chronological evolution of artifacts and what they had to say about the London to which they had belonged.[3] Later, J. B. Ward Perkins was to do the same for the museum's medieval collections in a catalogue that was on its way into print as the lights of London went out in 1939.[4] It was the interest shown by Ward Perkins and Gerald Dunning in medieval pottery that did so much to make their fellow antiquaries aware of the cultural importance of the City's post-Saxon remains. That they could not stretch that interest on into the post-medieval centuries is hardly surprising.

In 1939, Adrian Oswald joined Museum Clerk Waddington as his assistant, and was responsible for the partial recovery of the Gracechurch Street hoard of mid 17th-century glass, the most important associated group to enter the museum before the war.[5] When Oswald returned in 1946, he found the museum boxed and unbeloved, and with the help of his friend G. Wilson Lawrence (a onetime dentist and numismatist, now appointed as technical assistant), he began the unenviable task of unpacking the museum's collections, and mounting its first post-war exhibition, a presentation devoted to 'Bygone London'. Because the museum's pre-war gallery space in the basement below the library had been usurped by the latter's staff and books, the once prestigious Guildhall Museum had to make do with a corridor leading to the library's lavatory. It was the first exhibition to open in London after the war, and despite its modest location and limited space, it attracted queues in its first year — largely because of press and television coverage, which followed the first announcement of the museum's reopening.[6]

In an article published in *Antiquity* in 1944, R. E. M. Wheeler declared that the nation's antiquaries were about to be afforded a never-to-be-repeated opportunity to study the accumulated detritus of 2,000 years of London life and history.[7] Heeding his call to arms, the Society of Antiquaries set up a committee to enlist the support of the Corporation of London. In keeping with the Fellows' principle interests and supposed priorities, the group was first named the 'Roman London Excavation Committee'. Shortly thereafter, however, the committee became a council and the word 'mediaeval' was inserted. That was 1945. Today period limitations would, one hopes, be omitted.

In November, the then Director of the London Museum, W. F. Grimes, was appointed to superintend excavations on the City's bombed sites, the aim being to dig properly controlled test trenches across every available open space.[8] Adrian Oswald had the responsibility of acting as Secretary to the Council, raising the funds and negotiating the permissions to dig. It was an enormous project, incapable of achievement without vast expenditure of time, labour, and money. Even if time and labour were available, the money was not. Throughout its excavating life (1945-62), the Council was compelled to dig for funds as busily as it cut trenches through the City, and it is ironic that in all those years the Corporation whose history was being saved, contributed only 1.3 % of the cost.[9]

Because the work of the Roman and Mediaeval London Excavation Council (RMLEC) was directed by a distinguished prehistorian and Romanist, Guildhall's accomplishments are often dismissed on the grounds that those responsible for them lacked professional training. Said 'Rescue' director Martin Biddle, 'the observation and recording of the fragmentary evidence revealed on building sites requires a high degree of knowledge, skill, and experience. Only those who have been trained over several years on major excavations dealing with a wide variety of sites and covering the main historical periods should be entrusted with this work'.[10] He is absolutely right — in principle. But in 1949, no one with those qualifications was on hand to do the work at the salary the City Fathers were prepared to pay. Five pounds sixteen shillings for a seven day week was four shillings less than the RMLEC paid its labourers. Furthermore, just as Mortimer Wheeler had foretold, the City building sites were to yield cultural material covering 2,000 years, and no one (with the exception of Adrian Oswald), possessed so catholic a background. One must remember, too, that while the evolution of Roman, Saxon, and medieval artifacts had been previously studied and published, those of the 16th to 19th centuries had enjoyed no comparable scholarly attention. Consequently, the would-be student intent on a crash course had virtually no literature to which to turn. The Roman and Mediaeval London Excavation Council had no such problems, for its title permitted the last four centuries of London's history to be ignored; but the Guildhall staff had no such 'out'. Everything clamoured for and deserved attention.

Although the City showed little corporate interest in the work of the RMLEC (beyond permitting Librarian-Curator Raymond Smith to serve on the Council), Adrian Oswald agreed to let Guildhall Museum shoulder the logical and essential responsibility of processing and housing the artifacts. To that end a lab was set up on the fourth storey of Guildhall's surviving Dance front, a large room possessing three gas radiators to dry washed pottery, but barely sufficient to prevent the staff from freezing in winter. A sink fed with cold water provided the only other laboratory equipment. A door through the south wall had once connected to the top floor of the art gallery, but as that had been destroyed in the war, it opened into space. A sign on the door saying 'Messengers Only'

had been amended to read 'Heavenly Messengers Only'. Designed as an interior partition, the laboratory's south wall now took whatever weather heaven cared to throw at it, and rain seeped through both it and the roof. The best that could be said of the lab was that in summer, with the messengers' door open, one had a splendid view of what was left of the City.

The proposed division of responsibility between Oswald and Grimes was theoretically sound. W. F. Grimes' supervision of the City excavations was an honorary position; his paid job was to direct the rebirth of the London Museum. Describing the problems of rescue archaeology, Adrian Oswald wisely observed that 'a building site under observation is like a baby; it cannot be left for long without something going wrong'.[11] The same is true of controlled excavations when a field crew, made up entirely of hired labourers, relies solely on a director who at best can visit the site two or three times a week. With Adrian Oswald closer at hand, some additional help was available, though his main role was not to tell the men what to do next, but to deal with their finds.

Accepting responsibility for the artifacts, and actually fulfilling that obligation, were horses of different hues, for although Oswald had space to process the finds, he had no staff to wash, number, or restore. Nevertheless, between 1946 and 1950 the bags kept rolling in, many of them to remain for years unwashed and unstudied. Although Oswald attempted to do some of the washing himself, the flow was overwhelming. Besides, in spite of his old fashioned title of 'Museum Clerk', Oswald was *de facto* director of the museum and was supposed to be available to the public in his cramped office under the stairs at the Basinghall Street entrance to the Guildhall Library. That the office and the laboratory were as far apart as was possible to get while still remaining on Guildhall premises, made the task even more difficult. In addition, Oswald was doing his best to keep watch on the few small building sites being developed in the late 1940s. With only one assistant to fulfil the Corporation's requirement that the office be manned throughout the Library's open hours, Oswald was unable to keep up with his own job, let alone keep pace with the RMLEC's incoming artifacts.

The injection of personalities into allegedly academic studies tends to be frowned upon as unscholarly or unprofessional, but history would lack its principle ingredient if shorn of its participants. Because archaeologists tend to be more colourful than bank clerks (and only slightly less volatile than operatic divas), limiting objectivity to objects serves no historical purpose. The chronicle of the archaeology of the City of London in the early post-war years is the product of the individuals involved. A different cast might have led to a different scenario; but my task is to summarise what happened and why, and as I was one of the principal players, there is no way to coyly step aside. For better or worse, rescue archaeology in the City was in my hands for seven years beginning in December 1949.

My qualifications for the job were farcical. I was an unsuccessful playwright and would-be radio scriptwriter; I had a public school education and an uneducated interest in archaeology and antiquities (having once emptied a bucket at Sutton Hoo), and while waiting for someone to recognise my literary prowess I had passed the spring and early summer of 1949 picking up artifacts on the foreshore of the Thames and taking them to Adrian Oswald for identification. He proved to be both generous and patient, devoting time he could ill afford to teaching a persistent and tiresome young man with everything to learn and no apparent reason for doing so. As the summer progressed, so did I, and before long I had won the post of honorary part-time potwasher. It was but a short step

thence to volunteer shovel-carrier for Oswald on his sorties onto City building sites, first at the Southwark power station, and then on a small but productive site at 11 Ironmonger Lane.

The Selborne House (Ironmonger Lane) project was a model of its kind; it was a small site being excavated by labourers working almost exclusively by hand, and Adrian Oswald enjoyed the full co-operation of owners, architect and contractor. The site yielded part of a large four-colour mosaic pavement of the 3rd century, which the owners agreed to preserve *in situ* in their basement.[12] Not content with that major contribution to the history of their property, Messrs. Peat, Marwick, Mitchell and Co. sponsored a history of 11 Ironmonger Lane to be written by Guildhall Library staff member Donovan Dawe with the archaeological evidence presented by Adrian Oswald.[13] It proved a most felicitous partnership, and the resulting volume graphically demonstrated what could be achieved by the marriage of documentary and archaeological history. Alas, it was an achievement destined to stand alone. For this young volunteer, however, the lessons of Ironmonger Lane endured, and ranged from section and pottery drawing to laying cement and preserving a dirt-bedded Roman pavement.

On 5 December 1949 I was appointed to the rather vague position of 'temporary whole-time assistant in the Museum of the Corporation of London',[14] to continue the work I had been doing for nothing as field assistant to Adrian Oswald. Still waiting for my literary career to catch fire, I had no intention of staying long in the arduous and grimy vortex of building-site archaeology. Nevertheless, working with Oswald was stimulating and exciting, and I supposed that after six or eight months I should have learned enough from him to be able to work alone when he could not be there. Unfortunately, the six months shrank to six days; Oswald caught pneumonia and did not return. Wearied by the Corporation's unwillingness to recognise that the City's museum deserved better monetary and moral support than it was getting (and that its director/curator was something more than a 'Museum Clerk'), Oswald accepted the position of Keeper for Birmingham City Museum's newly constituted department of archaeology. Within weeks of his departure, Oswald's assistant G. W. Lawrence also resigned, leaving me as the museum's sole employee.

That trauma was simultaneously matched by another. Work was beginning on the City's first massive post-war building operation, a site stretching from St. Swithin's Lane to Walbrook, and potentially one of the City's most important Roman areas. Unlike the Ironmonger Lane project, this was a massive, mechanised undertaking, involving several drag-lines, scores of labourers and timbermen, and a site foreman who was happiest when I was absent. I did not need to be told that I had bitten off far more than I could chew (though critics were quick to do so); but I had a job to do, and I intended to do it as best I could.

Within days of Oswald's departure, City Librarian Raymond Smith called me to his office and told me some hitherto unsuspected facts of life. The Library Committee, he said, had no love for the museum and was under pressure to surrender what little space it now enjoyed to the library. The 'Bygone London' exhibit was no longer attracting much popular interest, and there would be little objection to closing it and later transferring the Guildhall collections to the London Museum. But attractive as that proposition might seem now, Smith told me, it would not ultimately be in the best interests of the City. If the demise of the Guildhall Museum was to be prevented, the Library Committee had to be

made constantly aware that it was successfully fulfilling a public function. At the same time, the Committee needed to be reminded that public attention was focused on the museum's work, so that its closure would provoke adverse reaction in the press. My work on the building sites was to serve both ends. At its monthly meetings the Library Committee was to be shown as many new finds as was possible; but as the members would not respond readily to fragments, the objects should be complete, or at least restored. As for the public exposure, I was to secure that by keeping the press apprised of each major find as it came along. Knowing no one in the archaeological profession besides Adrian Oswald, it never occurred to me that in fulfilling Raymond Smith's second instruction I would be cutting my own throat.

The need to feed the Library Committee with a monthly supply of eye-catching artifacts imposed an added burden of monumental proportions. As very little was found intact, broken pottery had to be repaired and restored within thirty days of its recovery, and before that could be done, it had to be washed, numbered and sorted. Having never previously restored a pot in my life, and being unacquainted with the ethics of restoration, the rush to repair resulted in some highly questionable vessels — some of which may still lurk in the Museum of London's collection to confound the unwary. When insufficient readily restorable specimens were available for the next showing, an old gramophone turntable and aluminium templates enabled samian and other Roman wares to be restored to a degree that served no other useful purpose than to satisfy the Library Committee that new acquisitions were flooding into the museum's collections. In some instances, those objects were not destined to be permanent acquisitions, but instead were to be returned to the landowners whose legal property they were. Thus, for example, at the St. Swithin's House project, artifacts from the eastern side of the site belonged to the Salters' Company, while those from the rich, Walbrook, side were in the fee of the property owner Mr. R. Palumbo who was not above visiting the site to be sure which finds came from his sector, a distinction that became difficult to define as work progressed and the site dissolved into a single enormous hole.

Raymond Smith's directive to encourage press interest in the finds was easily complied with, for very rarely did a week go by without the St. Swithin's House site yielding something of consequence. In retrospect, of course, unstratified fibulae, writing tablets, stili, strigils and the like, were not all that remarkable and certainly not very informative; but one must remember that this was the winter of 1949-50 and that for more than ten years the press had been starved of 'Roman London stories'. Thus William Thompson Hill, the *Times* archaeological correspondent, could be relied on to make well-rounded mountains from our Walbrook molehills, and the same was true of the *Illustrated London News'* fine photographer William Gordon Davis, to both of whom I had been introduced by Adrian Oswald who had frequently impressed upon me the need to cultivate friends among the responsible members of the press. Any archaeologist who has had dealings with the gentlemen of the fourth estate will know that once unleashed the 'source' quickly loses control. Where the *Times* goes, *Reveille* is sure to follow, and before long my activities at St. Swithin's House were being monitored, not only by reporters from individual newspapers and the wire service, but by stringers and freelancers of every stripe.

Fearful of alienating the people whose help the museum needed, I refused interviews to no one, regardless of the fact that both questions and answers were often drowned amid

the roar of mechanical excavators. It was small wonder, therefore, that the results were sometimes of a kind to draw the wrathful disdain of older and wiser antiquaries. I shall always remember my embarrassment at being quoted by the *Daily Herald* as having found a 1st-century amphora of such rarity that 'there are only four others in existence'.[15] What I may have said was that I believed that there were only four other intact examples in British museums — even so, a singularly dumb claim in view of the fact that there were at least two in the London Museum and another (restored) in the Guildhall collection. Whether I actually said that or whether something like it got carried away in the roar of the machinery, I shall never know. One thing was certain, however; all this publicity may have been gaining popular (and Library Committee) support for the languishing Guildhall Museum, but it was building an insurmountable wall between my efforts and those of the Roman and Mediaeval London Excavation Council.

One may ask why dubious press reports of 30 years ago should have any place in the story of archaeological salvage in the City. Surely it was a very secondary factor having little lasting impact or importance? Under normal circumstances it would have been; but those where strange and tense times. The RMLEC was desperately short of money; it had an honorary director who could not devote sufficient time to the project, no funds for a full-time qualified field supervisor, and only enough to pay a four or five man labouring crew. In short, the Council was as much in need of popular support as was the Guildhall Museum.

In October 1949, I had stood in a small crowd lining College Hill as a procession of City dignitaries made its way to the church of St. Michael Paternoster Royal. Led by trumpeters in mediaeval costume, cassocked clerics and the banners and staff-bearers of the Mercers' Company, these black-coated and sober worthies were assembling for a dedicatory service and ceremonial sod-turning by the Master of the Mercers to inaugurate the RMLEC's search for the burial place of Sir Richard Whittington. As a mere bystander member of a somewhat puzzled proletariat who knew nothing of the Council and its work, I naïvely supposed that it always launched its projects with such civic pomp. I had no idea that in reality I was witnessing what has since come to be known as a 'media event', a ploy to attract popular attention. It is, however, in the nature of media events that they be shallow and short-lived. The 'Search for Dick Whittington's Tomb' as *The Sphere* described it,[16] would only qualify as a genuine event if Whittington was found — and the chances of that were remote. The body had twice been moved in the 16th century, and the church in which he lay had been destroyed in the Great Fire of 1666 and replaced by another designed by Sir Christopher Wren. Thus, well into the winter of 1949-50, the RMLEC paid the price of its initial publicity — bogged down in a fourteen-foot shaft in the south-east corner of the church packed with 18th- and 19th-century coffin burials, all demanding careful and reverential excavation. Another shaft dug in the north-east corner fared no better, running as it did into an 18th-century family vault.

So it was that in the months when my work was beginning at St. Swithin's House, and when the speed of the largely mechanical excavation was daily turning up artifacts and Roman structural features of real popular interest, the Council had taken itself out of the publicity stakes to pursue a hare of no archaeological value to the City, and one which, even if Whittington were found, could not guarantee expanded Corporation support. Furthermore, the publicity being obtained by my efforts on behalf of the City's own museum, may have been working more, albeit unintentionally, against expanded City support for the work of the Council.

On the credit side, the Walbrook discoveries and their attendant publicity ensured the survival of the Guildhall Museum and led to the appointment of Ralph Merrifield as Assistant Keeper in April 1950 and Norman Cook as Keeper some months later, a dramatic upgrading of the museum from its long-time role as a clerk-maintained appendage to the library. On the debit side, however, loomed the barrier that had been built between myself and W. F. Grimes which prevented me from benefiting from his instruction and advice, both of which I badly needed after Oswald left the scene. Thus, for example, it was not until Grimes' book was published nearly 20 years later that I discovered that he had cut a 40 foot trench through the courtyard of the bombed Salters' Hall, an area whose chronology I was soon to be trying to untangle. Professor Grimes recalls finding post holes for timber framed buildings, 'but, as always,' he adds, 'there was no possibility of recovering even a partial plan'.[17] That was true of any excavation limited to test trenches, but it need not have been the case at Salters' Hall had I known what I should be seeking, for that end of the site was excavated largely by hand and allowed time for better quality salvage archaeology. Indeed, it was there that I found evidence not only of the Boudiccan and Hadrianic fires but also that of 1666, providing my first post-medieval stratigraphic control.[18] I am convinced, therefore, that had I not given Grimes cause to condemn me as 'a menace',[19] co-operation between us would have expanded the knowledge obtained from his test trenches, while at the same time helping me to determine how my work should be focused.

Although my lack of archaeological knowledge was rightly considered a major limiting factor, in reality it was no more important than several practical shortcomings, the most serious being my possession of but a single pair of hands. Thus my ability to hold only one end of a tape-measure made section drawing desperately slow at times when speed was of the essence. The museum camera was equally hard to handle, a heavy folding Kodak of 118 gauge, which Adrian Oswald had dropped shortly before he left, and whose back henceforth had to be light-sealed with sticky tape, an on-site procedure that often led to leaks and fogged film. We had no light meter, and therefore exposures were arrived at by what professional photographers call 'experience' but which, in my case, was neophytic guesswork.

Just as isolated test trenches were unable to provide plans of buildings, so the butchered foundations revealed by fast-moving mechanical excavation could rarely do more than add isolated fragments to the map. As many Roman structures enjoyed extended lives and many changes along the way, rarely was it possible to determine anything more than structural chronologies. In short, the sequential factor became my only reachable goal: I would concentrate on recording stratigraphic sections and try to study and salvage small units in their entirety, rather than pursue questions I had no hope of answering. For the same reason, rather than devoting my full attention to the artifact-laden, silted east bank of the Walbrook where well preserved metal and organic artifacts abounded, I spent more of my time excavating wells and rubbish pits whose information was attainable within the limitations of my resources.

Two of those pits yielded groups of Roman domestic objects of major importance. One contained evidence of looting and destruction associated with the Boudiccan rebellion (and included the amphora that got me into trouble), while the other pit was of Flavian date and contained a wide range of *terra sigillata* and several glass objects of great importance. I was well aware, however, that nothing was of importance until it was

written up and published. So in addition to the washing, numbering and restoring needed to keep the Library Committee happy, I began the slow job of drawing the finds and preparing them for publication. The Walbrook 'amphora pit' group was reported on and accepted for publication by the London and Middlesex Archaeological Society early in 1950,[20] and the report on the 'glass pit' was in typescript and waiting for submission the following year. Also completed was a popular booklet illustrating the principle finds from both pits, as well as several other sealed deposits ranging from a wattle and daub building burnt in the early 2nd century (Hadrianic fire?) to a well-preserved timber-lined well of the 3rd century.[21] Enhanced by an encouragingly supportive foreword by Librarian and Curator, Raymond Smith, the booklet sold well and should have done something to offset the double-edged publicity. That publication was already in print when Norman Cook was appointed Keeper of Guildhall Museum. Thereafter, I was instructed to shun the press and spend no more time on writing reports.[22] The need for the next decade, so I was told, was to work on the building sites and leave writing up the material until construction in the City declined. In retrospect, I believe this to have been one of the most unfortunate decisions ever made by a London museum, for it consigned nine-tenths of seven years' work to limbo.

I remain firmly convinced that unless an archaeologist converts field notes into at least the skeleton of a report while the circumstances of the discovery are fresh in his mind, key data will be distorted or lost. Thus it would have been far better to have let some site work go and to have used the time to write reports on the principle discoveries. But that was not to be, and although the Walbrook 'glass pit' was ready for publication it was destined never to be submitted to the editors of the London and Middlesex Archaeological Society. That is not to say that an account of the ensuing years' work failed to be published; in 1952 a slim new Guildhall Museum booklet described the continuing work on the building sites, this time from the pen of the Keeper.[23] Although duplicating much of the previous publication, it avoided the wearying repetition of the names of the small band of volunteers who had made so many of the finds possible.

Because archaeology is one of those professions that attract public attention, it follows that a disproportionate amount of recognition falls on the leader. No matter how hard he or she may try to share the credit, the press invariably wants its story from the horse's mouth. Consequently, the assistants are relegated to kneeling positions of no great elegance in distant photographs of the site. More often than not, however, it is they who have been responsible for the hard work and may even have made the key finds. This was often the case during my years at Guildhall when most weekends, wet or shine, my long-suffering troops turned out to do battle in defence of the City's antiquities.[24] They were as disparate a group as any novelist could conceive of: Douglas Walton a City timberbroker, Charles Lefevre a meatpacker, Lord Noel-Buxton dubbed by the press the 'wading peer', civil servant H. E. 'Skip' Allen, printer's apprentice Peter Clarke, architect Peter DeBrant, H. Sibson Drury a medical draughtsman, library assistant Donald Bailey (who went on to a career in the British Museum), Johnny Johnson whose profession I forget, and Audrey Baines a student at the Institute of Archaeology who found herself with nothing to do while her professor was absent in India. When he returned, she did not.

Although construction on most building sites was halted at weekends allowing time for the Guildhall team to excavate features free from harassment, most of the builders' destruction was wrought from Monday to midday Saturday when volunteer help was

hard to find. My gratitude to Audrey Baines was therefore unrestrained, for she volunteered to work daily and, in April 1950, agreed to join the staff as my assistant. Not only had she studied Romano-British archaeology at Bristol University, she had also worked as a volunteer for W. F. Grimes. Thanks to Raymond Smith's support I was also able to borrow one his library attendants, Ted Doyle, and even the Keeper of the Monument, Lawrence Bentley, for the several months while his charge was shut for repairs. It was with their help that Audrey Baines and I were able to keep pace with the constant flood of artifacts into the museum.

Before work on the St. Swithin's House site had ended, several other major building licences were issued, and it quickly became apparent that I was incapable of being everywhere at once. Between 1949 and 1952, the sites were scattered from one end of the City (Serjeant's Inn) to the other (Trinity House), and I could do no better than to concentrate on major projects with obvious potential. One of these was Lloyd's new building on Lime Street and Billiter Street. There we were able to excavate a Roman hypocaust and several walls and areas of coarse tessellated pavements associated with an evolving structural complex beginning in the post-Flavian years and ending in the 4th century.[25] Other finds from the site included a small coin hoard of *c.* A.D. 260-275,[26] a complicated barrel-lined well of 2nd-century date,[27] and numerous rich rubbish pits.

There were several other equally rewarding sites on which I focused in the ensuing years, the two most important being the Sun Life Assurance building site on Cheapside, and the Bank of London and South America's building at the junction of Queen Street and Queen Victoria Street where no fewer than fourteen Roman wells were found. One of them yielded some of the most important organic artifacts retrieved from post-war London. They included an eight-rung ladder (it had been longer but a central section of uncertain length was inadvertently destroyed by the builders in my absence), a large, handled skillet, a long-bowled spoon, a pair of goat-skin 'bikini' trunks, and a human skull impaled by a large wooden post.[28] Other wells yielded a splendidly preserved bronze flagon and many not so well preserved pieces of very thin wooden tablets with carbon ink writing which were excavated from the soles of my boots.[29] The other key site, the Sun Life building, was less rich in spectacular artifacts, but revealed much of the ground plan of a substantially-built bath building whose life span stretched from the late 1st to the 3rd century.[30]

It is not my purpose (nor have I the space) to enumerate the principle discoveries from each site monitored between 1949 and 1956. In his invaluable book *The Roman City of London*, Ralph Merrifield has catalogued the most important structural evidence retrieved and has published several drawings which would not otherwise have seen the light of day. My aim is only to recall (before it is lost), something of the circumstances and climate in which the work was done.

Although helped at weekends by staunch volunteers, and during the week by the people already mentioned, archaeological salvage in London in the early 1950s was largely a one-man operation. Although my beat stretched from one end of the City to the other and extended across the river into the Borough, the Corporation provided no transportation. Tools, therefore, were limited to those that one could carry on a London Transport bus: trowel, brush, an army entrenching pick, and short-handled spade. Finds, if few enough (and they rarely were), had to be carried back on the bus in, by then, damp-bottomed paper bags — there were no plastic bags in those days — often with predictable results.

When finds were plentiful they were carried through the street to Guildhall on one's back in hundredweight coal sacks or, if the builders were helpful, in a wheelbarrow borrowed from the site. On the day that the St. Swithin's House 'amphora pit' was excavated, a procession of cement-spattered wheelbarrows laden with pottery trundled up to the front of Guildhall while the City Fathers and cuirassed trumpeters lined the entrance waiting for the arrival of a foreign dignitary. It was the only occasion that the Corporation ever gave us the red carpet treatment.

Comical though some of these events appear in retrospect, at the time they generated bitterness, despair in the realisation of what was being lost, and frustration at one's inability to do more. The museum which, under Adrian Oswald, had been ready to focus its wholehearted attention on the needs of the building sites, shifted its priorities and was content to leave the salvage archaeology to me — while rightly agreeing with my critics that I lacked the necessary experience. I shall remain ever grateful to Ralph Merrifield, therefore, who, on several critical occasions, donned his boots and boiler suit and came to my rescue, notably during the excavation of the Roman ladder.

Success or failure depended on the interest shown by the foremen and clerks of works on each of the sites, and that in turn depended in large measure on the construction progress schedule. When the builders were ahead, or held up for reasons unrelated to archaeology, the site supervisors could afford to accommodate the archaeologist, but when they fell behind they could not. The City Corporation included no protective clauses in building licences and no provision calling for co-operation with its archaeologist. Access to the site depended on the co-operation and goodwill of owners, architects, clerks of works, engineers, and contractors.

Fostering and then retaining that goodwill was akin to walking a tightrope, for in the final analysis the goals of the builder and archaeologist were diametrically opposed, one always needing to move quickly forward and to shift only the minimal amount of soil, and the other hoping that the job would be slowed down and that significant archaeological features could be pursued beyond the planned foundation excavation. For anyone who has never worked on a building site, it may appear greedy that the archaeologist should be asking for more ground disturbance in the midst of an already extensive area of digging. The explanation is simply that modern mechanical excavation ensures that little is available for study save in the walls of the machine-dug holes. In short, the archaeologist is forced to begin when the contractor ends; but when the contractor stops digging he does so for the very good reason that he wants the hole extended no further. Thus, anything the archaeologist does threatens to weaken edges that need to be kept trim to receive poured concrete, to make banks unsafe or create holes that the contractor will have to fill at his own expense. Thus the urge to 'go just a little further' in pursuit of a potentially significant artifact had to be resisted, for only by doing so could we retain the clerk of works' good will and, equally importantly, his co-operation on his *next* London assignment.

Several clerks of works not only allowed me as much latitude as they dared, but one even personally cleaned skeletons for me during the building of the rectory beside the church of St. Olave, Hart Street.[31] Another, Mr. A. R. 'Tony' Donovan helped me measure the Roman bath in Cheapside, and a much appreciated letter from him 20 years later shows that he is still directing building in the City and still co-operating with the Corporation's archaeological representatives. Yet another clerk of works, Mr. N. V. Riley, went so far as to submit an article to the *Institute of Clerks of Works Journal* urging

his colleagues to co-operate in the preservation of London's past. In a covering letter to the editor, Mr. Riley noted that 'a telephone call to any of the museums, brings an observer very quickly, and those who have visited this site have been most interesting people, and they have certainly not been any trouble to the Contractor'.[32] Alas, not all clerks of works shared that view — and often with good reason.

As public interest in archaeology and antiquities grew (a process fostered in large measure by the success of such television programmes as 'Animal, Vegetable or Mineral'), the quest for antiquities on London building sites was no longer limited to Guildhall Museum's archaeological assistant, his volunteers, and a handful of City businessmen who bought curiosities from workmen at prices far above those I could secure from our pitiful supply of petty cash. As I have indicated earlier, the purchase of any artifact from the workmen was illegal, for the City's archaeologist had no more business buying artifacts than the finders had to sell them. They all belonged to the landowners, and if, as sometimes happened, they had assigned ownership to the City, we were simply buying what we already owned. But law and logic can be uneasy bedfellows; the fact remained that for more than a century London labourers had augmented their pay by selling whatever they found to anyone who would pay for it. By 1955, however, a new enemy entered the lists — the secret, dark and midnight looters who, by the light of electric torches, invaded the sites where I was working, to rob pits and wells already in the process of archaeological excavation.

The new vandals were of all ages from boyhood to late middle-age, but they had one thing in common: the lure of the artifact, and they dug wherever they chose, unfettered by the rules laid down by the site's clerk of works. Although, in most instances, builders were aware that the damage was not being done by the Guildhall team, they were becoming disenchanted with archaeology. Fear that something important might be found and that a newspaper would report it, and thus draw down a plague of looters upon the site, tended to make them wary and less inclined to co-operate. Nothing contributed more to that cooling of relations than did the great Mithras circus in 1954.

If the Roman and Mediaeval London Excavation Council still wanted to make a splash, it succeeded beyond all imagining when a routine trench running west from Walbrook cut into the apsidal-ended, ragstone structure which later turned out to be a mithraeum. Not until site clearance for the construction of Bucklersbury House began could the RMLEC expand its trenches to expose the rest of the building. What happened then has been faithfully chronicled by Professor Grimes,[33] and the archives of every London newspaper are rich in stories under such headlines as '10,000 Queue up to see God of Light', 'Roman Temple Crowd Clash with Police', and 'One Grab Ends a Roman Temple'.[34]

Neither the owners of the Bucklersbury House property, the Legenland Trust, nor Humphreys and Co., the builders, realised what they were getting into when they co-operated with the Council by enabling the Mithraeum excavation to be expanded, and it is everlastingly to the credit of all concerned that the work was allowed to go on. The fate of the temple foundations became a national *cause célèbre*. Questions were asked in the House, Minister of Works Sir David Eccles and Lord Mayor Sir Noel Bowater visited the site, cartoonists had a field day — and throughout the City and across the nation, building contractors prayed that it would never happen to them. It was small wonder, therefore, that once the Mithras matter had been resolved (by piling its stones and tiles in

a mountainous heap on an adjacent site for 'reconstruction' at a later date), the Bucklersbury House builders wanted to get on with their already delayed job and be rid of archaeologists and the ghosts of Roman London.

That was easier said than done. Much of the silted stream and flood plain of the river Walbrook meandered down the eastern third of the site from the National Safe Deposit Company building at the north to Cannon Street at the south, all of it literally bristling with Roman artifacts and structural remains preserved in immaculate condition. Roman oak pilings for revetments and 'floating' foundations were everywhere,[35] while the peatlike silt around them contained stratified deposits of artifacts capable of identifying and dating the timber structures, thus providing answers to questions probing to the very heart of Roman London. That such evidence would be revealed, need have suprised no one. In 1873, John E. Price published his report on his discoveries from the National Safe Deposit Company's site, and in it he expressed regret that so much had been swept away unrecorded — that at a time when the digging was done by hand. Price ended his report with these words:

> 'With the rapidity with which such a large quantity of earth has to be excavated and removed, and the dangers consequent on delay, there must naturally be a large number of objects which escape detection, besides those which find their way into other hands. Such are conditions which must ever exist unless an excavation in the city be undertaken *solely* on antiquarian grounds. This has never yet been done. We institute researches abroad, sometimes on doubtful sites, and critically examine every shovel-full of earth, often with no certain prospect of reward; but in a comparatively small space situate at home, and illustrative alike of the origin and progressive growth of this the chief city of the empire, sufficient interest has not yet been manifested to induce a properly organized investigation of any given site'.[36]

Nothing can detract from the importance of the Walbrook Mithraeum or dim the credit due to the RMLEC for its achievement, but the fact remains that failure to properly excavate and study the Walbrook valley while it still survived, robbed the City of a priceless chapter of its cultural history. One is tempted to describe it as a lost opportunity, but, in reality, it was no opportunity at all. Most of the relevant area was covered by the footings and rubble-filled basements of bombed buildings, ruins whose removal only became economically feasible when work began to erect a new building. The Corporation, whose niggardly support for the RMLEC from 1949 to 1962 amounted to only £550,[37] was unlikely to provide the several thousand pounds needed to clear the site. Without the degree of public funding that became possible in the early 1970s (which led to the successful and prolonged excavations on the Thames waterfront in the vicinity of Baynard's Castle, and on the General Post Office site), neither the work force nor the laboratory facilities could be realised. Thus, Price's dream of a large-scale area excavation for the purpose of studying London's Roman roots, was no more practical in 1954 than it had been in 1873.

Even as the temple foundations were being recorded and dismantled, the builders' draglines were cutting through the Walbrook silt and hauling Roman oak piles and planking out of the ground in their teeth.[38] Rarely was it possible to do more than photograph the destruction and to salvage individual artifacts as they spilled out of the loosened and dropped silt. On the afternoon of 2 April 1955, however, I was able to work for several hours alongside a Roman timber revetment, and from a stratum of black gravel beneath sealing layers of peat and sand came a vast quantity of Roman metal objects apparently deposited in the Trajan-Antonine period. The Excavation Register summary included the following: 'hooks, linch pin, keys, chape, bronze needles, punches,

an iron pin with brass face terminal, bronze wire chain, other chains, decorated bronze studs, *phalerae,* two trumpet brooches decorated with applied pewter and tinning in centre, *as* of Domitian, unfinished tools, iron needles, *as* of Claudius, various knife blades, iron spatula, iron buckle, decorative hinges for chests (ivy leaf terminals), latch hooks, 3 goads iron, various stili, iron brackets, ties, etc. Pockets in gravel around piles yielded stili, bronze needles and a stamp of ELVILLI (Elvillus — Lezoux, Antonine)'.[39] The list does not mention the vast quantities of iron nails which, if my memory is correct, filled three hundredweight sacks — and this was what was retrieved by one archaeologist (with help from Ralph Merrifield) limited by the contractors' insistence that no digging should be allowed beyond a line against which their concrete was to be poured.

That night the looters who had plagued the site since the Mithras story broke, continued where we had left off, cutting deep holes into the sacrosanct banks, and when fatigue or an inability to haul away the spoils caused them to desist, they left the excavation walls pitted like an artillery firing range. The contractors blamed me, and the Guildhall archaeologists were subsequently barred from the site, thus ending any supervision of the destruction process. Nevertheless, the nocturnal looting went on, and, in an ultimate irony, some of the artifacts whose recovery had cost us so dearly, were later presented to the museum (after their novelty had worn off) and were accepted by the Corporation with expressions of effusive, if inappropriate gratitude.[40]

The Bucklersbury House site had been the only occasion on which I had worked simultaneously with the staff of the RMLEC, and arriving as I did in the wake of the enormous press publicity, and in the presence of many people young or old who might or might not have been legitimate volunteers or visitors, it was impossible for me to exercise the kind of control that had kept me in good grace with contractors on other sites. The resulting frustration, bordering on despair, lingers in the pages of the Excavation Register: 'E.R.222. Bucklersbury House. Small, timber-lined well "excavated" by unescorted boy with a coal hammer as his principle instrument. The deposit cannot be considered to be of any value'.[41]

With nothing getting published and no time to learn from what was being found, one might be forgiven for questioning whether the battle was worth fighting. 'We are in a very difficult position', I explained in a letter to A. W. G. Lowther, 'in that the builders are digging, and while they continue to do so we should be watching them, and while we are doing that it is very difficult to be writing reports on the last site but one. The only way to catch up would be to abandon the excavations for a season. That is not the museum's present policy, and I expect it is right — yet I cannot help wondering whether, if we don't publish the back material soon, we shall ever publish it at all — in which case all these years of hard work will have been wasted'.[42] It is true that the museum collections were being enriched as never before, but little was being learned from these acquisitions. Then, too, I was alone in my concern for the wasted medieval and post-medieval opportunities. Indeed, it is some measure of the validity of my concern that both Norman Cook's 1952 booklet and Ralph Merrifield's fine book in 1965 concerned themselves only with the archaeology of Roman London. Perhaps as a sop to me, however, there was talk of an eventual volume devoted to London domestic pottery 1500-1750; but, as I explained to Anthony Lowther, 'There does not seem to be much likelihood of anything moving in the near future. In the meantime much of the evidence has been split up — returned to the owners, and so forth'.[43]

Unable to foretell the remarkable improvements ten or twelve years down the road, I left the Guildhall Museum early in 1957 with only brief field notes and a mass of artifacts as my legacy. In my letter of resignation I tried to explain what the job of rescue archaeologist for the Corporation of London involved, in the hope that the then Librarian-Curator Arthur Hall would 'be able to make my shoes more comfortable for my successor'.

> 'I have found through experience that the role of archaeological assistant in London is not an enviable one', I wrote, 'for it is the duty of that person to spend much time on building sites where his presence can offer nothing but the prospect of delay, irritation and inconvenience to the builders. Without any official authority from the Corporation he must rely on tact, cunning, and self-effacement to achieve the results for which he is employed. He must frequently make personal contact with owners, architects and builders, and take immediate and independent decisions for which the Corporation will be responsible — thus bearing on his own shoulders a weight of responsibility far greater than is warranted by his status.
>
> 'The assistant must be prepared to excavate pits, wells, *etc.*, under conditions which sometimes threaten personal danger. This work must often be carried on alone, for he has no one to whom he can turn for labouring assistance when it is needed. The present staff of the museum is in no position to supply this need, nor, indeed, is it seemly that it should be so. Furthermore, the archaeological assistant has no means of transporting his equipment to and from the building sites nor of bringing back the quantities of resulting finds. He must be prepared to be a navvy who will work in all weathers and under any conditions however little they may befit the dignity of an officer of the Corporation. On the sites he will be torn between his duty to fulfil his paid purpose of recovering information and antiquities and his desire to avoid giving the builders cause to complain'.[44]

In 1978, the annals of those distant days have an almost Dickensian quality about them: the poverty of those on the bottom rungs of the Corporation ladder; the power-plays and jockeying for preferment further up; and the shadow of a lone figure trudging up King Street through swirling yellow fog with a sack on his back, staggering up endless flights of narrow Guildhall stairs (warmed by the smell of turtle soup being readied for a Lord Mayor's banquet), to the bitter cold of an attic laboratory. Alas, it was no Christmas tale with goose and plum pudding at the end, and there might be cogent reasons for letting it remain interred with Marley's bones were it not for the fact that this was a page from London's past that may one day be of documentary value.

NOTES

[1] Adrian Oswald 'On watching a building site' *Archaeol. News Letter* 2 no. 4 (August 1949) 57–58.
[2] Frank Lambert 'Recent Roman discoveries in London' *Archaeologia* 66 (1914-15) 225–274; also 'Some recent excavations in London' *Archaeologia* 71 (1921) 55–112.
[3] London Museum Catalogue: No. 1 *London and the Vikings* (London, 1927); *ibid.* No. 3 *London in Roman Times* (London, 1930); *ibid.* No. 6 R. E. M. Wheeler *London and the Saxons* (London, 1935).
[4] London Museum Catalogue: No. 7 *Medieval Catalogue* (London, 1940).
[5] Adrian Oswald and Howard Phillips 'A Restoration glass hoard from Gracechurch Street, London' *The Connoisseur* 124 no. 513 (September 1949) 30–36.
[6] *Archaeol. News Letter* 2 no. 1 (May 1949) 6.
[7] R. E. M. Wheeler 'The rebuilding of London' *Antiquity* 18 (1944) 152.
[8] Martin Biddle *et al. The Future of London's Past* Rescue Publication No. 4 (Worcester, 1973) 7.
[9] *Ibid.* 6.
[10] *Ibid.* 7.
[11] Oswald *op. cit.* in note 1, 58.
[12] *The Illustrated London News* (8 October 1949) 557.
[13] Donovan Dawe and Adrian Oswald *11 Ironmonger Lane* (London, 1952).
[14] Raymond Smith to I.N.H., formal communication, 25 November 1949.
[15] 'Two-Pot Luck found on bombed site' *Daily Herald* (6 March 1950). Variations on the same statement appeared in several other papers indicating that, one way or another, the fault indeed was mine.
[16] 'Digging up the City of London's Past' *The Sphere* (15 October 1949) 83.
[17] W. F. Grimes *The Excavation of Roman and Mediaeval London* (London, 1968) 128–129.
[18] Ralph Merrifield *The Roman City of London* (London, 1965) following 164, Pl. 15.
[19] Adrian Oswald to I.N.H., personal communication, 21 March 1950.

[20] I. Noël Hume and A. Noël Hume 'A mid-first century pit near Walbrook' *Trans. London Middlesex Archaeol. Soc.* 11 pt. 3 (1954) 249–258.
[21] Ivor Noël Hume *Discoveries on Walbrook 1949-50* (Guildhall Museum, London, 1950).
[22] That injunction did not mean that no records were to be kept. On the contrary, it was after the arrival of Norman Cook that the museum's Excavation Register system was established to preserve the field notes and to create a numbering system that did not require an identifying site prefix.
[23] Norman C. Cook *Finds in Roman London 1949–52* (Guildhall Museum, London, 1953).
[24] Ivor Noël Hume 'Digging up the history of London' *London Calling* (British Broadcasting Corporation, London, 16 March 1950) 8–9.
[25] Ivor Noël Hume, Summary reports in *Lloyd's Log* (December 1951) 6; (January 1952) 5 & 7; (March 1952) 5 & 7; additional pictures of the site appeared in *Lloyd's Log* (February 1952) 8 & 10. The plan of the Roman structural remains was reprinted by Ralph Merrifield *op. cit.* in note 18, 55.
[26] Merrifield *ibid.* 54; also *Numismatic Chronicle* 6 ser. 15 (1955) 113 ff.
[27] Merrifield *ibid.* following 164, 111.
[28] *Ibid.* P1.112–116.
[29] *Ibid.* P1.110; and for recently excavated writing tablets of the same type from Vindolanda see A. Bowman 'Roman Military Records from Vindolanda' *Britannia* 5 (1974) 360 ff.
[30] Ivor Noël Hume *A Roman Bath-Building in Cheapside* (privately printed for the Sun Life Assurance Company, June 1956). The plan was reprinted by Merrifield *ibid.* 139, Fig. 25. More recently Peter Marsden has attempted the unenviable but courageous task of reassessing the Cheapside bath building on the basis of my incomplete notes and drawings, see P. Marsden 'Two Roman Public Baths in London' *Trans. London Middlesex Archaeol. Soc.* 27 (1976) 30 ff.
[31] Ivor Noël Hume 'Relics from the Wine Trade's own church' *Wine & Spirit Trade Record* (17 February 1958) 158–164.
[32] An undated draft, *c.* April 1954.
[33] Grimes *op. cit.* in note 17, 92–117, 237.
[34] *Daily Express* (22 September 1954); *Daily Sketch* (22 September 1954); *Daily Mail* (24 September 1954).
[35] Merrifield *op. cit.* in note 18, Pl. 21, 23–24.
[36] John E. Price *Roman Antiquities Illustrated by Remains Recently Discovered on the Site of The National Safe Deposit Company's Premises, Mansion House, London* (London, 1873) 78–79.
[37] Grimes *op. cit.* in note 17, 245.
[38] See note 35.
[39] Guildhall Museum Excavation Register No. 268. Some of these finds are illustrated by Merrifield *op. cit.* in note 18, Pl. 126–127, 129, 132–133, 139.
[40] *Sunday Times* (14 April 1957).
[41] The *Daily Express* described the boy's equipment differently, and had him 'grubbing around on the site each evening after school, using a cycle lamp, his mother's poker, and a small trowel' (7 October 1954).
[42] I.N.H. to A. W. G. Lowther, personal communication, 11 January 1955.
[43] *Ibid.*
[44] I.N.H. to Arthur H. Hall, formal communication, 17 January 1957.