The London Temple of Mithras

PAYE Conservation are reconstructing this wonderful example of Roman antiquity discovered in 1954 in the foundations of a prime Central London location. The site was excavated by the then Director of the Museum of London; W. F. Grimes. Its discovery captured the heart of the nation post War, became a headline news item and attracted a purported 400,000 visitors over a 2 week period.

It dates from the mid 3rd Century and is considered to be one of the most complete examples of a Mithraic temple in existence and certainly the most exciting Roman discovery in England in the 20th Century. Mithraism was a mysterious pagan religion practiced in the Roman Empire between the 1st to 4th centuries AD. Mithras (the Persian sun god) was a popular deity worshipped predominantly by Roman soldiers. Mithraeums were typically built partly or totally underground, as they were intended to symbolise the cave where Mithras killed the primordial bull and released powers of life and creativity to the world.
The London Temple of Mithras (cont’d.)

Following its discovery and in advance of the new building development to the site, the temple was documented in graphic archaeological detail and then dismantled. It was put into storage for the first time from the mid-50s until 1962, when some of the remains were reconstructed rather poorly 100 metres or so from the primary site, nine metres above the original level and set in a modern hard cement mortar. This bastardised version offered very little by way of a reconstruction and was considered by many to be somewhat of an embarrassment. In 2010 this incarnation was dismantled (with the help of diamond tipped chainsaw’s) palletised and taken into storage once again.

In the summer of 2015, PAYE Conservation took receipt of approximately x130 pallets of mixed material and started the long and arduous task of cleaning, sorting and cataloguing each of the 5000 elements identifying (where possible) the exact location for reinstatement from the archaeological records. Once sorted, catalogued and recorded in conservation quality detail, we will start the complex process of reconstructing this building back to almost its exact original location integrating a number of modern services into the construction which will enrich the visitor experience. This unusual project requires a range of skills to be employed from both Conservation and Restoration disciplines, being neither a purist example of one or other.

The Temple will once again open to the public in 2016

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L0tBB9W506g