



Fig. 1: reconstruction drawing of the 2nd century *forum* and *basilica* on Cornhill.
(R. Embleton)

Roman Basilica on view in Leadenhall Street

CLIVE ORTON

EVIDENCE OF THE Roman *forum* and *basilica* on Cornhill has accumulated over at least the last 100 years, since Henry Hodges recorded parts of it during the construction of Leadenhall Market in the 1880s. As a result, we know that the 1st century *basilica* was replaced in the 2nd century by a much larger building, the largest known Roman civic building north of the Alps. Nevertheless, despite all efforts to piece together this evidence, many questions remain unanswered. Now, the best and quite possibly the last chance to make sense of this uniquely important area of Roman London has been presented by a large development in Leadenhall Street.

This opportunity is the Leadenhall Court site, which is being developed by Legal and General for offices and shops. It will destroy the last substantial surviving part of the *basilica*, but fortunately time (and money) have been made available for the Museum of London's Department of Urban Archaeology to investigate it in their *Roman Civic Centre Project*. The cost of the excavation is expected to be nearly £500,000: English Heritage and

Legal and General are putting up £150,000 each, and L. & G. is also providing equipment and labour. The City of London Archaeological Trust is launching a public appeal to raise the £140,000 which is still needed.

In January 1985 preliminary investigations showed that Roman deposits survived to a depth of over 3m (10ft) in part of the site. They revealed traces of earlier Roman buildings, both houses and workshops, which had been demolished to make way for the *basilica*. The floor of the nave of the *basilica* had been replaced on two occasions, suggesting faults in the original workmanship. In Phase One of the project, archaeologists directed by Simon O'Connor-Thompson are currently examining the road and buildings on the northern side of the *basilica* in a trench 25m × 8m (82ft × 30ft). A public viewing gallery and exhibition are open from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. on weekdays. Later in the year more trenches will be opened to the south, in the *basilica* itself. We hope to carry reports on the excavations as work progresses.