

Almost 50,000

At 'Chester

Pavement

Tired, soaked to the skin, and covered with a layer of mud, stewards closed the entrance gate at the Woodchester Roman Pavement on Sunday night after a rewarding month's opening period which created a record attendance of almost 50,000.

Instead of the hoped-for sun bathed grand slam finish, there was nothing but rain and mud on Sunday and the only consolation for the loyal band of workers was that had the weather been as bad earlier in the period, serious difficulties would have had to be overcome.

Not only has this opening been a success from the attendance point of view, but it has done much to re-vitalise the social life of the village. As one visitor put it, "I expect you have got people who are firm friends now who were not speaking a few months ago".

As the gates were closed on Sunday, the chairman of the organising committee, churchwarden, Mr. L. A. Hygate praised the efforts of the large band of volunteers from both the village and surrounding districts who have worked so hard.

"WONDERFUL EFFORT"

"I think it has been a wonderful effort," he said, adding his praise for the many members of the younger generation without whose support the opening would not have gone off so smoothly.

It was one of these young workers who was the last paying visitor to the pavement.

Andrew Fletcher (15), of Southbank, who had spent the complete period as one of the helpers at the entrance was determined to be the last person in.

As darkness fell, and the approach road was clear, he went forward and paid his sixpence. That made him the 49,230th visitor.

The pavement had been open officially for just over a month and the attendance compared very favourably with the 1951 six-week period when 41,500 paid.

Throughout the period a team of amateur guides has been on duty continually and it is their proud boast that not one visitor left without either hearing a talk or being offered a full explanation.

The ladies of the village also made a very useful contribution and staffed a well-equipped refreshment tent for the whole period.

Asked if he noticed any essential difference in the last two openings, a member of the committee said that there appeared this time to be a much deeper public interest with many more questions asked.

And now the villagers have several weeks of equally hard work ahead. As the proposed repair work cannot be carried out this year—the expert is holidaying in his native Italy until later in the year—the pavement will now be covered with a layer of waxed paper on top of which will be placed many tons of soil topped by a layer of building paper.

It is expected that following a careful inspection of the bad sections of the mosaics this week, these will be marked and exposed next year for repair.

Soon this wonderful remain of the Roman occupation will lie hidden from human gaze for at least another 10 years.

STILL ARRIVING

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People have continued to visit the Woodchester Roman Pavement at the rate of 100 a day during this week despite the fact that Sunday saw the end of the recent month's viewing period. Today (Friday) a mosaic expert will conduct a careful survey of the pavement to decide the extent of the repair work to be done next year. Although the organisers are not going out of their way to attract visitors now that the pavement is closed, while there are volunteers available no one anxious to see the pavement will be turned away.