



A REVIEW OF THE 49th LAMAS SPRING CONFERENCE OF LONDON ARCHAEOLOGISTS HELD AT THE MUSEUM OF LONDON ON 24 MARCH 2012

Compiled by Bruce Watson

AN EAST END OPPORTUNITY: INSIGHTS FROM A PAWNBROKER'S BURIAL GROUND IN BETHNAL GREEN

Rachel Ives (AOC Archaeology Group)

The rapid increase of London's population during the 19th century resulted in many people living in overcrowded and insanitary conditions, which caused a high mortality rate, which in turn necessitated the creation of new burial grounds, some of which were private speculative developments. One of these private developments in Bethnal Green was opened in 1840 by a local pawnbroker, John Kilday. It is estimated that 20,000 people were interred here before it was shut in 1855, when public health reforms closed many overcrowded and insanitary urban burial grounds. To maximise profits the coffins were stacked on top of each other within 97 closely spaced grave-shafts, some measuring up to 7.5m deep (Fig 1). Due to damp conditions there was excellent preservation of wood, metal and skeletal remains. Only part of the burial ground was examined, where new foundations were required, resulting in the recovery of 1,033

individuals. All the burials were interred in coffins, nearly 400 of which possessed coffin-plates, providing an important opportunity to link the osteological data with a named population that is precisely aged. One brick burial vault contained a number of wooden grave-markers, rare survivals of once common funerary monuments. There was a wide variety of grave goods, including leather shoes, clothing, finger-rings, and even two Pacific Cowrie shells. The poor living conditions of the population were demonstrated by the fact that the vast majority of the deceased were juveniles (71%). There was also evidence of rickets, scurvy and tuberculosis, together with more general degenerative conditions such as joint diseases, including rheumatoid arthritis. There were two individuals who appeared to have died shortly after having limbs amputated and others had badly set fractures. Research to date indicates that some of these adults were skilled workers employed in local industries such as weaving, but a number of completely plain wooden coffins may represent the burials of paupers, possibly from the nearby union workhouse.



Fig 1. View of the dense arrangement of coffins at Bethnal Green, showing the waterlogged ground conditions (AOC Archaeology Group)

‘AN IMMENSE AND EXCEEDINGLY COMMODIOUS GOODS STATION’: THE ARCHAEOLOGY OF GREAT NORTHERN RAILWAY GOODS YARD AT KING’S CROSS

Guy Thompson (Pre-Construct Archaeology)

The redevelopment of the redundant Victorian Goods Yard designed by Lewis Cubbitt has been an opportunity to examine its structural development and compare it with the detailed documentary record. Construction started in 1849 when the Great Northern Railway Company decided to build a goods depot next to the passenger terminus of their new London to York railway. Previously the area had been used for clay quarrying and brickmaking, so extensive levelling and terracing was undertaken using waste clay. By March 1850 the two huge transit sheds were under construction, one handled ‘incoming’ goods and the other ‘outgoing’ material. These sheds were separated by a block of 12 sidings, but linked by the Granary Warehouse. Each of these sheds was served by

a platform and a siding. Under the platforms at basement level were stables for the cart-horses used for road deliveries. There were also basement level quays for the narrow boats coming from the adjoining Regent’s Canal (constructed 1812–20). Therefore the depot served as a hub for an integrated transport and distribution system. The level of design sophistication is best illustrated by the numerous turntables installed to allow the redirection of individual freight cars (see Fig 2). The station opened in 1851, but some features like the hydraulic cranes were not operational until 1852.

THE LONDON WATERFRONT AT THREE QUAYS HOUSE, CITY OF LONDON

Malcolm McKenzie (Museum of London Archaeology)

A series of deep small trenches was excavated across this riverside site, producing fragmentary plans of the various waterfronts. Currently the available dating evidence is



Fig 2. Overhead view of one of the turntables under excavation at King's Cross Goods Yard (Strephton Duckering, Pre-Construct Archaeology)

limited and the Roman quays or waterfronts are provisionally dated by correlation with those excavated further west at Custom House in 1973 (see reports in *Trans London Middlesex Archaeol Soc* 25 (1974), 117–219; 26 (1975), 103–70). The reclamation of the Thames foreshore started when the first phase of Roman timber quay was constructed in the north-west corner of the site during the mid-2nd century AD. It was replaced during the late 2nd century by another quay

constructed some 7m south of its predecessor. This was a substantial structure consisting of two rows of timber boxes constructed of tiers of beams. Its front face consisted of a single tier of massive squared oak beams up to 6m long (see Fig 3). During the early 3rd century this quay was largely dismantled and replaced by one of post and plank construction. The dumping behind this new phase of waterfront contained a large amount of decorated Central Gaulish samian of mid-



Fig 3. The basal tier of the baulks of the second phase of the Late Roman quay, view looking west. There are driven piles to the south of the quay baulk (Maggie Cox, MOLA)

3rd-century date and a dump of charred grain. The construction of the masonry river wall during the late 3rd century (one pile from under the wall has been tree-ring dated to AD 251–87) is believed to have marked the closure of the Roman port facility. It appears that the site was then abandoned until the 12th century, when the port facility was rebuilt. The earliest medieval post and plank waterfront has been tree-ring dated to c.1190. It was superseded by several later phases of waterfront apparently constructed on a piecemeal basis, perhaps linked with the development of individual properties; these structures contained a number of reused boat timbers. The rubbish dumps behind these medieval waterfronts contained a large number of metal objects, including jewellery, keys, pilgrim badges and tools. In the south-west corner of site was a series of substantial

masonry foundations, perhaps part of the Watergate serving the nearby Custom House (in existence next door at Wool Wharf by 1376–7). By the 16th century the site was a series of small ‘keys’, hence its present name. Parts of the 17th- and 18th-century masonry riverside walls were uncovered.

THE THAMESLINK PROJECT IN NORTH SOUTHWARK: RECENT WORK

Joanna Taylor (Oxford Archaeology and Pre-Construct Archaeology)

These on-going excavations (see 2011 review) are gradually providing a fascinating transect across north Southwark. There has been further work in the back garden of the former Wheatsheaf public house in Stoney Street. The latest remains excavated consisted of brick-built cellars of 18th-century date under which were brick-lined cesspits. These were preceded by a long succession of unlined cesspits probably spanning the 11th to 16th centuries, which had removed most of the Roman deposits. Excavations along the south side of Bedale Street revealed a short length of a large infilled ditch, some 7m wide, aligned north-west to south-east. The earliest phase of this ditch is not yet dated, but it may be part of the Saxo-Norman burh defences. A recut of this ditch is provisionally dated to the 12th or 13th century; its upper fills contained a series of collapsed timbers, perhaps derived from either an internal palisade or a rampart revetment. Excavations at 11–15 Borough High Street revealed elements of a badly truncated Roman masonry building possessing what appears to be a circular, tile-lined plunge bath, implying that it was a bath-house. Medieval masonry pier and relieving arch foundations found here are probably part of St Thomas’s Hospital (established 1213–15).

THE TEMPLE OF MITHRAS 1954–2012: THERE AND BACK AGAIN

John Shepherd

The discovery, during 1954, of the mid-3rd-century Temple of Mithras on the edge of the Walbrook channel in the City of London and its assemblage of cult sculpture was the

high point of the late Professor Grimes' long campaign of rescue excavations on war damaged sites (see J Toynbee 'The Roman art treasures from the Temple of Mithras' *London Middlesex Archaeol Soc Special Paper* 7 (1986); and J Shepherd *The Temple of Mithras, London: Excavations by WF Grimes and A Williams at the Walbrook* English Heritage Archaeol Report 12 (1998)). When the temple foundations were faced with destruction in 1954, the huge level of public interest in their discovery encouraged the developer to dismantle them and, in the 1960s, rebuild them at a different location (Queen Victoria Street) on a different alignment and at a much higher level, so the end result was unsatisfactory in terms of public presentation. The present redevelopment of the temple site has presented a unique opportunity to re-examine part of its foundations (which survive below the existing basement) and also to clarify points of architectural detail in the partly explored narthex (it extends eastwards under Walbrook). The new development is also a wonderful opportunity to redisplay the reconstructed remains of the temple at basement level on their correct alignment, close to their original location, with a comprehensive presentation to explain how it functioned and the vanished religion it served.

AFTERNOON SESSION: ROMAN GREATER LONDON

PUTTING THE FOUNDATION OF LONDINIUM IN CONTEXT: THE VIEW FROM THE NORTH

Isobel Thompson

The striking thing about the distribution of Late Iron Age (*c.*100 BC–AD 43) sites in Hertfordshire is the fact that they are so much more numerous than Middle Iron Age (*c.*400–100 BC) sites. This rapid expansion of settlement is believed to be connected with the exploitation and control of the supplies of bog ore (a type of iron ore which forms by precipitation in freshwater environments) in the western part of the county. During the Late Iron Age certain Hertfordshire settlements known as *oppida* acquired a number of the characteristics of urban centres. The best

known of these new centres is *Verulamium*, which during *c.*AD 40–55 (contemporary with the foundation of *Londinium*) acquired an incipient street grid and a bath-house. At the same time its inhabitants were buying lots of Roman fine ware ceramics and amphora. The impression is that this was the capital of a highly Romanised client ruler. A cremation burial at Folly Lane, *Verulamium* dated to *c.*AD 55–60 was accompanied by a rich collection of pyre goods, including chain mail and fragments of harness mounts, implying that this individual had served in the Roman army as a cavalry officer. The impression across the region is that there was a long process of transition from what is defined as Iron Age material culture to what is recognised as Roman. The role that the foundation of *Londinium* played in this process of Romanisation can be likened 'to dropping a stone in pond'.

THE ROMAN POTTERY MANUFACTURING SITE IN HIGHGATE WOOD: ARCHAEOLOGY AND EXPERIMENT

Harvey Sheldon

Trial excavations in 1966 within this area of ancient woodland revealed Roman activity and subsequent work established that there were a number of pottery kilns. From *c.*AD 50–60 until *c.*AD 140–60 a variety of bead rim jars, poppy head beakers, bowls and dishes were produced here on a commercial scale using local clay. During the early 1970s a number of replica kilns were built and fired using pots manufactured from local clay. Publication of these important excavations is forthcoming in the *Transactions of the London & Middlesex Archaeological Society*.

ROMAN ENFIELD: FIRST STOP NORTH OF LONDINIUM

Martin Dearne

It is believed that Roman Enfield started as a roadside settlement along Ermine Street which probably developed around an undiscovered civic building, such as a *mansio*. Almost all the fieldwork in Enfield has been small-scale investigations carried out by Enfield Archaeological Society in the back

gardens of suburban houses. The impression is that by AD 70–90 an agrarian settlement defined by an enclosure ditch was established here. It reached its zenith during the 2nd century, but continued until the late 4th century. The presence of several clusters of high status Roman burials in the locality of the settlement implies the existence of at least two unlocated villa-style farmsteads in Enfield.

THE ENIGMA OF ROMAN SHADWELL

Alistair Douglas (Pre-Construct Archaeology)

Excavations 1.25km east of *Londinium* at Shadwell during 1974 discovered the truncated masonry foundations of a large tower, originally interpreted as a Roman military signal station, but now re-interpreted as a mausoleum. One unusual aspect of this site is its large early 3rd-century samian assemblage, something which is rarely found in *Londinium* (see D Lakin *The Roman Tower at Shadwell, London; a Reappraisal* MOLA Archaeol Studies Series No. 8 (2002)). Subsequent fieldwork has established that during the 3rd century a settlement was established here; this included a large masonry public bath-house with more than 16 rooms (see A Douglas *et al A Roman Settlement and Bath House at Shadwell: Excavations at Tobacco Dock* London PCA Monograph 12 (2011)). Around the bath-house were clustered clay and timber buildings, which remained in use until the late 4th century. The question is why was this settlement suddenly established here during the early 3rd century? The answer may be its proximity to the Wapping Channel which

would have allowed it to function as a port, perhaps serving as a downstream replacement for *Londinium*, where the construction of the defensive river wall during *c.* AD 255–75 (see Three Quays report above) is believed to have marked the closure of the Roman port.

RECENT EXCAVATIONS AT ASHTEAD, SURREY, VILLA AND TILEWORKS, AND THEIR IMPLICATIONS

David Bird

The 2nd-century corridor villa and its separate bath-house were extensively excavated during 1924–29, and in the 1960s there was a landscape survey of the surrounding clay pits. Since 2006 Surrey Archaeological Society has been undertaking a programme of reassessment, survey and excavation of the sites within this area of historic woodland. This work has already revealed that the triangular hilltop earthworks are a hillfort of Iron Age date. It has also been established that the villa possesses three phases of masonry foundations, so its unusual plan is a composite entity. Architectural details include semi-circular, tile-built pilaster columns and tessellated herring-bone floors. There were several heated rooms lined with roller-stamped box-flue tiles, which were locally made judging by the abundant presence of wasters. The recent discovery and excavation of a well-preserved tile kiln implies that the villa was built here to oversee tile production which was carried out on a commercial scale. Archaeomagnetic dating confirms that this kiln was last used during the early 3rd century.