

A REVIEW OF THE 55th LAMAS CONFERENCE OF LONDON ARCHAEOLOGISTS HELD AT THE MUSEUM OF LONDON ON 10 MARCH 2018

Compiled by Richard Gilpin and Bruce Watson

PREHISTORIC ACTIVITY AND A LARGE ROMAN BUILDING IN WALTHAMSTOW VILLAGE

Shane Maher (Pre-Construct Archaeology Ltd – PCA)

Today Walthamstow is part of the London Borough of Walton Forest, reflecting its absorption into Greater London, but it started life as a small medieval village in rural Essex. The site had formerly been occupied by playing fields of Holy Family Technology College and is to be developed as a new sports hall and classrooms. It is located to the north-east of the graveyard of St Mary's, the village's medieval parish church. Fieldwork took place between February and July 2017 and revealed a surprising quantity of prehistoric activity ranging in date from the Late Bronze Age (*c.*1000–*c.*800 BC) to the Early Iron Age (*c.*800–*c.*400 BC). The most prominent feature was a Late Bronze Age penannular ring ditch containing postholes. Early Iron Age features dug within the ring ditch apparently included quarry pits, containing charcoal-rich deposits, calcined/flint-gritted pottery and burnt flints. To the west and south of the ring ditch were three large Early Iron Age pits, the largest of which measured 2.85m x 2.75m x 1.4m deep. The deepest of these (depth 1.9m), may have been used for water storage.

The site was reoccupied during the late Roman period (AD 200–400). There was evidence of timber beam slots and brickearth wall foundations; traces of at least two substantial buildings were discovered, apparently set within ditched enclosures. Roman finds included: a single-handled flagon in Much Hadham Red Slipped ware; Nene Valley ware sherds; late 4th-century coins and ceramic building material manufactured in the Eccles area of north-west Kent, including a large brick. The Roman finds assemblage suggests that the buildings were residential and judging by the presence of Eccles ceramic building material they were relatively high status.

SAXONS IN BOW STREET, LUNDENWIC

James Aaronson (Compass Archaeology)

The former Bow Street Magistrates Court and Police Station in Covent Garden is being redeveloped as a boutique hotel, which involved constructing a new double basement, necessitating archaeological investigation. The site is situated within the Middle Saxon settlement known as *Lundenwic*, which was established during the early 7th century AD as a trading settlement and river port centred on the modern Strand area; it was

abandoned during the mid-9th century when the downstream derelict Roman city was reoccupied. The main phase of excavation took place between May and August 2015 and covered an area of 395m². The final phase of fieldwork took place during February 2018, when the concrete basement slab covering the remainder of the site was removed. Finds from the final phase of fieldwork included bone comb plates and a bone pin recovered from a pit. The fieldwork as a whole produced an extensive Middle Saxon finds assemblage comprising: 265 sherds of pottery; over 18,000 animal bones fragments; 45kg of burnt daub; 54 pieces of worked antler; 39 loom weights; 25 pieces of worked animal bone; 12kg of slag; eight rotary quern fragments; seven coins; seven sherds of vessel glass and two whetstones. In addition there were 19 residual prehistoric struck flints.

The first phase of Middle Saxon activity at Bow Street consisted of an inhumation cemetery dated to the late 6th to early 7th century AD. Grave goods included: multi-coloured glass beads; a pin and a 'P' rune sceatta found within the mouth of one skull. The second phase of activity dated to early 7th to early 8th century, representing the abandonment of the cemetery and subsequent use of the site to dispose of organic rubbish produced by the nearby settlement of *Lundenwic*. Associated ceramics included chaff-tempered ware (c. AD 450–750). Phase 3 dated to the late 7th to early 8th century; it was marked by the digging of pits possibly for gravel extraction and the dumping of large quantities of animal bones, many of which showed evidence of butchery. The fourth phase dated to the early 8th century and marked the incorporation of the site into the settled area of *Lundenwic*. Initial activity consisted of the construction of a north–south aligned gravel road, which was periodically resurfaced. Subsequently, along the eastern side of this road a sequence of timber buildings was constructed. These short-lived posthole construction buildings underwent various alterations and replacements. The phase 5 buildings included an oven lined with reused Roman tiles. Associated ceramics included Ipswich and chaff-tempered wares. The buildings of phase 6 were associated with large amounts of worked animal bone, a knife blade and a

copper-alloy hinge (possibly from a casket). Phase 7 marked the abandonment of the settlement, the latest activity consisted of the digging of a well during the mid to late 9th century AD. Associated pottery included Late Saxon shelly ware. By the late 9th to early 10th century (phase 8), the whole site had reverted to unoccupied open space.

THE LOST FERRY CROSSING AT PUTNEY BRIDGE

David Saxby (Museum of London Archaeology – MOLA)

For centuries the Thames was not only London's maritime link, it was also an important inland routeway linking the capital with southern England. However, in addition to serving as a routeway, the Thames was also a barrier to road traffic; historically the Thames was crisscrossed by ferries, but since the 18th century they have been largely superseded by bridges. Centuries of riverside activity have resulted in the Thames foreshore being littered with a great variety of transport related structures.

In July 2017 an archaeological survey and investigation was undertaken of the structures on the southern Thames foreshore near Putney Bridge in the London Borough of Wandsworth. The most prominent of these were barge beds (areas of masonry hardstanding retained by timber revetments). However, the most significant discovery was a series of masonry and timber foundations interpreted as part of the 18th-century timber bridge and one of its toll houses. Putney Bridge was constructed in 1727–9 by the master carpenter Thomas Phillips to the design of Sir Jacob Ackworth, modified by William Cheseldon. It was a toll bridge until 1879–80, when the tolls were abolished and the toll houses demolished (Fig 1). In 1881 it was discovered that the pile foundations of the 26-span bridge (234m long) were badly rotted, so it was decided to demolish it and replace it with the present 5-arch masonry bridge, which was opened in 1886. Working conditions on the foreshore were difficult due to the constant tides, so there was only a 20-minute interval at each low tide to uncover the timbers before the river level became too

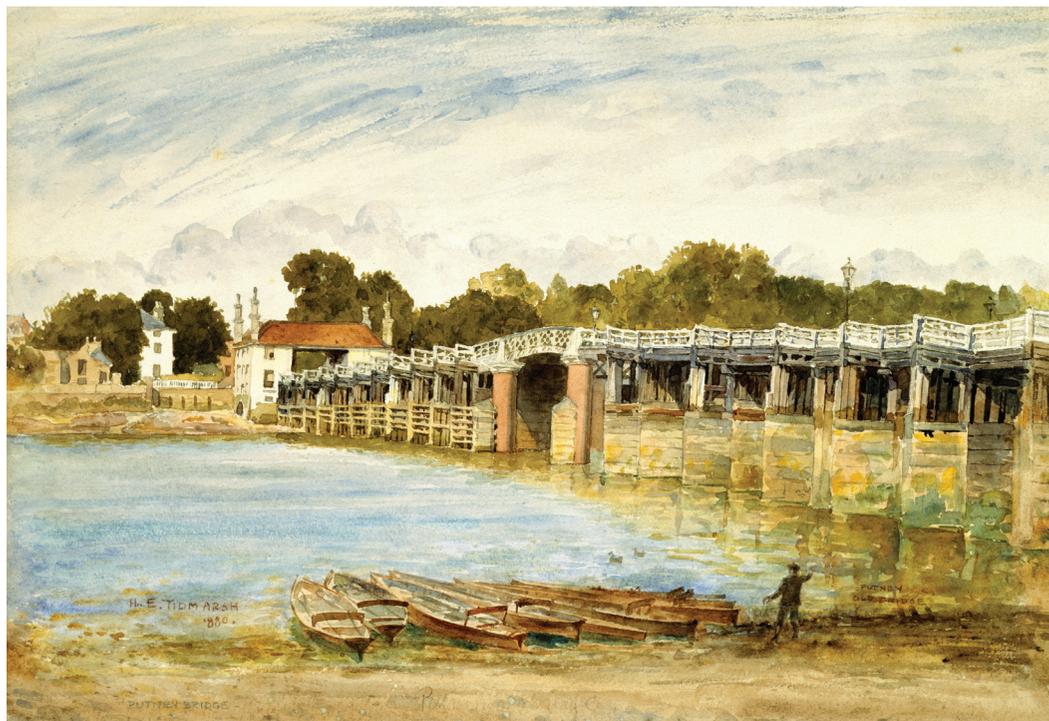


Fig 1. A view of Old Putney Bridge from Fulham by H.E. Tidmarsh (© Museum of London)

high. Partial excavation of an area of chalk hardstanding revealed that it was part of a substantial structure interlaced with timbers, but there was no clue to either its date or function. However, on the opposite bank a similar area of chalk hardstanding was spotted and subsequently investigated. Both structures are interpreted as the landing areas of the ferry that formerly operated from *The Swan* on the Putney bank, to the end of Brewhouse Lane on the Putney bank, a short distance downstream of the present bridge. After 1729 the ferry ceased as a commercial venture, but it carried on as a recreational service until the 1950s. The next objective of the survey will be to carry out more detailed work on the Fulham side of the river.

ARCHAEOLOGICAL WORKS AT CHAMBERS WHARF FORESHORE

Jessica Bryan and Stella Bickelmann (MOLA)

This fieldwork was necessitated by the construction of the new Thames Tideway Tunnel

for a major new sewer; this starts in west London and mainly follows the route of the River Thames to Limehouse, where it then continues north-east to Abbey Mills Pumping Station near Stratford. It will then connect to the Lee Tunnel, which will transfer the sewage to Beckton Sewage Treatment Works. This scheme replaces Sir Joseph Bazalgette's ground-breaking sewage system, constructed during 1859–75.

Initial archaeological information about Chambers Wharf foreshore in the London Borough of Southwark came from the Thames Discovery Programme survey and a Wessex Archaeology foreshore survey. Historical research established that the medieval flood defences constructed by Bermondsey Abbey followed the line of Bermondsey Wall Road, so all the land to the north of this road has been reclaimed. During 2014–15 there was a land-side evaluation by MOLA. Subsequently, there was another foreshore survey and the architectural recording of the river wall, and monitoring of the Tideway installation of a cofferdam in 2016. This cofferdam

created a two-part site: river-side and land-side. MOLA monitored land-side clearance in 2017 and in 2018 started excavating the main shaft. Fieldwork to date at Chambers Wharf has found evidence of Saxon activity and timber structures, possibly including part of a tidal mill. There was a 17th-century timber revetment, demonstrating systematic reclamation and management of the river as part of the development of the port facility. More revetments were constructed during the 18th century as the pace of reclamation accelerated. There were signs of moorings and evidence of ship breaking or dismantling in the form of reused timbers, including parts of a ship's belfry. Other discoveries included an east-west aligned hollowed elm log water pipe, probably of 18th-century date. There were also barge beds and a mooring stone (dated 1799). Finds from the land-side included post-medieval tokens, lead weights and belt buckles. During the 19th century the site was occupied by warehouses and granaries. Contemporary structures included the base of a steam pump.

A SARCOPHAGUS AND A ROMAN ROAD IN SOUTHWARK: EXCAVATION AT 25–29 HARPER ROAD

Ireneo Grosso (PCA)

A number of recent archaeological investigations have established that Roman Southwark was much more than a bridgehead suburb: it had its own temple complex, road network, high status buildings and its own extra-mural cemetery.

Fieldwork started with four evaluation trenches distributed across the development site, and all of them produced positive results. Subsequent excavation concentrated on two areas. The northern area of excavation revealed Roman road metalling. The road was at least 7m wide and over 40.28m long. Its discovery poses the question: how did it relate to Stane Street, believed to be located to the west and to Watling Street to the north-east? Beyond the road were various Roman linear ditches, some of which were flanked by lines of postholes representing fence lines, implying property boundaries. Set within the chalk foundations of a substantial Roman building, presumably a mausoleum,

was a stone sarcophagus. It had cracked into two fragments, but was lifted as a single block thanks to a supporting timber structure and was then transported to Mortimer Wheeler House for post-excavation analysis. Sadly, the sarcophagus appears to have been opened or disturbed during the 17th century.

AFTERNOON SESSION: THE BLOOMBERG SITE

At the start of the conference, Bloomberg were presented with the 2017 Ralph Merrifield Award for their support of MOLA's fieldwork on the former site of Bucklersbury House and their innovative re-display of the London Mithraeum. Therefore, it was decided to devote the afternoon session to aspects of this project, which has literally rewritten aspects of the capital's early history.

On the Walbrook Banks: New Evidence from the Centre of Londinium

Sadie Watson (MOLA)

While the construction of the double basement under Bucklersbury House during 1954–5 entailed the removal of a vast amount of deeply stratified archaeological deposits without adequate archaeological investigation, amazingly there was significant survival of deposits around the perimeter, while within the north-east corner of the site a complete transect of waterlogged Middle Walbrook deposits up to 7.0m deep was preserved by chance. Previous fieldwork in 1954 by the late Professor Grimes uncovered the 3rd-century Mithraeum and its amazing sculptures, but his fieldwork also established the site was located on the eastern edge of the Walbrook channel (Grimes 1968, 92–117). The 1954–5 watching brief carried out during ground reduction confirmed there was excellent organic preservation; during the watching brief various fragmentary timber revetments and other structures were recorded. Fieldwork also produced a vast collection of well-preserved (but unstratified) Roman metalwork (Wilmott 1991, 19–24, 118–38). Therefore, the 2010–14 fieldwork was a unique opportunity to put the Mithraeum in its contemporary setting and understand the previous development



Fig 2. Rare examples of in-situ early Roman wooden palisade fencing uncovered at Bloomberg (© MOLA)

of its environs.

In fact the excavations exceeded all expectations in terms of the archaeological sequence and its associated finds. The primary activity on site is dated to *c.*AD 43–60/61, with earthen banks and ditched enclosures constructed along the western edge of the Walbrook channel. By *c.*AD 62–5/70, a phase of external dumping had raised the ground level prior to the construction of the first buildings. Subsequently the site was occupied by a complex sequence of clay and timber buildings fronting onto a gravel roadway, with evidence of external boardwalks. To the rear of the buildings were external yards bounded by wooden fences (Fig 2). Linked with this development was the construction of a series of terraces and channel side revetments. There were many timber lined box drains, and a 1st-century AD circular baker's oven was identified, together with the earliest evidence of cockroaches in London. Many complete vessels were discovered, including a hoard of pewter vessels found within a well (Brayn *et al* forthcoming).

Where there's Walbrook Muck, there's Roman Brass: The Early Roman Artefacts from Bloomberg

Michael Marshall (MOLA)

One important objective of the study of the Roman artefacts from the site was to provide a context for the large assemblage of metalwork recovered during the 1954–5 watching brief (see above). The quantity and range of finds recovered during the 2010–14 fieldwork was phenomenal, even compared with other MOLA sites investigated during the past twenty years. The waterlogged contexts, while making for difficult working conditions on site, provided the right conditions for exceptional preservation and establishing the spatial position of finds had been vital in determining how and when they had been used. The most important assemblage came from the late 1st-century deposits and included a huge numbers of items of cavalry equipment, representing the largest military assemblage recovered to date



Fig 3. Tiny amber amulet (1.5cm high) in the form of a gladiator's helmet (© MOLA)

from any London site. Many of these finds date to the immediate post-Boudican period, when the army constructed a fort and a port facility in Londinium.

Many brooches were found; examples included British, Romano-British and continental styles, the latter being much more prevalent than usual. There were large copper-alloy and iron bracelets with a much larger internal dimension than those found in the eastern cemetery, toilet sets, boxwood combs, lamps, panelled furniture, amulets and apotropaic jewellery intended to ward off evil influences, including an amber amulet in the form of a gladiator's helmet and a bone drug box (Fig 3). Much of this material had been imported, including strainer bowls, luxury glass vessels and North African stone mortars. The presence of over 400 writing tablets and styli, plus other writing equipment such as ceramic inkwells showed that some Londoners were literate (see below) (Marshall & Wardle forthcoming). In conclusion, the Bloomberg excavation had provided a dramatic window yet into the material culture of early Roman London, revealing a dynamic and rapidly developing urban community with international commercial connections.

The Bloomberg Writing-Tablets: Roman London's First Voices

Roger Tomlin (Emeritus Fellow Wolfson College, Oxford University)

Roger Tomlin is one of the world's experts in palaeography. He explained how Roman wax writing tablets were intended as a reusable substitute for papyrus and they could have been used for correspondence, accounts, contracts and delivery records. When the writer pressed hard on the stylus, it would sometimes have gone right through the layer of wax and into the wooden base of the tablet, leaving a permanent mark. When flooded again with wax, that would not have been a problem. What is a problem for palaeographers today is that most such tablets have lost their wax, and the wood underneath has been inscribed many times, leaving a confusing palimpsest of words and letters to be analysed, deciphered and transcribed. Sometimes it would be difficult to tell which words had been engraved earlier, and which ones later.

The Bloomberg tablets after conservation were photographed by Andy Chopping of MOLA in detail to maximise the visibility of the handwriting incisions that Roger decoded into recognisable words. Then using his knowledge of Latin, he worked out the meaning of the various words and phrases, many of which were fragmentary. As the result of his work, it had become clear that the tablets demonstrate that the 1st-century AD Roman city was already a centre for commercial and legal activity. This unique collection of texts also includes the earliest reference to 'London' in a tablet dated to AD 65/70–80 (Tomlin 2016).

London's Roman Temple of Mithras, 1952–2017: a Reconstruction

Mike Tetreau (MOLA)

The saga of the Mithraeum started in 1952, when excavations on a bomb site by the Roman and Mediaeval London Excavation Council (RMLEC), directed by the late Professor Grimes, tried to locate and investigate the Walbrook stream channel, but on the edge of the channel they un-

expectedly discovered substantial masonry foundations. Further investigation in 1954 immediately prior to redevelopment of the site confirmed that this was the location of a Mithraeum. Its discovery was front page news and people queued to visit the excavations. As a result there was considerable public pressure for the preservation of the temple's remains, but this was deemed impractical and prohibitively expensive. Therefore, a compromise was agreed whereby the temple's foundations were dismantled and reconstructed nearby. So in 1962 the stone work was returned to the site and incorporated into a reconstruction (along the site's Queen Victoria Street frontage some distance from its findspot) at modern ground level and on the wrong alignment. Grimes (1968, 92–117) published an interim account of his excavation and subsequently the sculptures from the Mithraeum were also published (Toynbee 1986). Final publication of Grimes's fieldwork was only achieved 44 years after its completion (Shepherd 1998). This confirmed that the temple was constructed in *c.*AD 240–50 and that during early 4th century it was rededicated to the god Bacchus. This adaptation entailed burying the sculptures associated with Mithras beneath the temple floor and removing its internal columns. The temple continued in use until *c.*AD 380, when it was abandoned.

In 2004 when the redevelopment of Bucklersbury House was first considered, the Corporation of London wanted the temple's remains redisplayed in a more appropriate setting in a new visitor centre in the site's original location and to provide free public access to the monument. In other words the brief was to provide an evocation of a Mithraeum as it might have been used. In 2005 evaluation trenches exposed surviving masonry foundations, and more *in-situ* structural remains at the eastern end of the temple representing a narthex or anteroom were uncovered in 2011. Between 2011 and 2012 the 1960s reconstruction was carefully dismantled using diamond tipped chainsaws to cut the masonry up into blocks which were then moved into storage. The next step was to research the cult of Mithras to understand how the temple functioned; particularly important was the tauroctony relief (recov-

ered from the site in 1889), which depicts Mithras slaughtering the primordial bull (Toynbee 1986, 29). The meaning of this scene is open to interpretation, but it probably represents an act of creation and fertility. Mithraism was a mystery cult, popular with soldiers and soldiers, merchants and civil servants.

So when Bloomberg acquired the site in 2010, they were well aware of their responsibilities concerning the temple and in 2013 they appointed the New York based exhibition designers Local Projects to undertake the public presentation of the temple. By November 2017 the new reconstruction of the temple and associated displays was complete (see below) and will be the subject of a future publication (Bryan *et al* forthcoming).

Londinium in a New Light: the Making of the London Mithraeum/Bloomberg SPACE

Louise Fowler (MOLA)

It was a great challenge to relocate the *ex-situ* remains of the Mithraeum back to their original spatial context and then to present this monument to the public in an understandable and imaginative manner. Everyone agreed that the 1962 reconstruction was unsatisfactory (see above), and the monument deserved a much more authentic and dynamic setting. However, it was the Bloomberg redevelopment which provided the opportunity to realise this goal. It was a great help that Bloomberg were really keen to return the Mithraeum to its original level and location within their new building. Their architects made the necessary space available and stairs were built going from the present ground level 'down through time' to the new display area. A mezzanine space was created, with interactive screens for visitors to discover more information about the monument. From here, a short staircase leads down into the actual remains of the temple. The presentation of the new reconstruction of the Mithraeum was greatly enhanced by sophisticated and evocative lighting, designed by the light artist Matthew Schreiber (Fig 4). As a result, the missing stone columns of the temple nave have been recreated as columns of light and, to



Fig 4. The London Mithraeum in its new setting (© MOLA)

complete the experience, sound recordings – as authentic as possible – have been added. Meanwhile, at ground level, some 600 of the 14,000 registered finds from the 2010–14 fieldwork are on display and there is an interactive element to viewing: visitors can use Bloomberg-provided tablets (how appropriate!) to access detailed information about the artefacts. There is also an online visitor guide (MOLA 2017).

At ground level is Bloomberg SPACE, which is available for contemporary art installations. Currently it is showcasing an installation by Isabel Nolan entitled: ‘Another View from Nowhen’, it includes a huge (19.45m long) and vibrant tapestry, which was inspired by the 1954 excavation of the Mithraeum and poses questions about how we perceive the past. Outside, at the corners of the Bloomberg building, there are three water features and sculptures designed by Cristina Iglesias, inspired by the Walbrook. Throughout the whole project

Bloomberg had been incredible, embracing every aspect of it, in order successfully to communicate the importance and grandeur of the site.

The London Mithraeum and Bloomberg SPACE are open to the public (free admission) from Tuesday to Sunday, but visitors need to pre-book online.

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