

MUSEUM OF LONDON



Archaeology Matters

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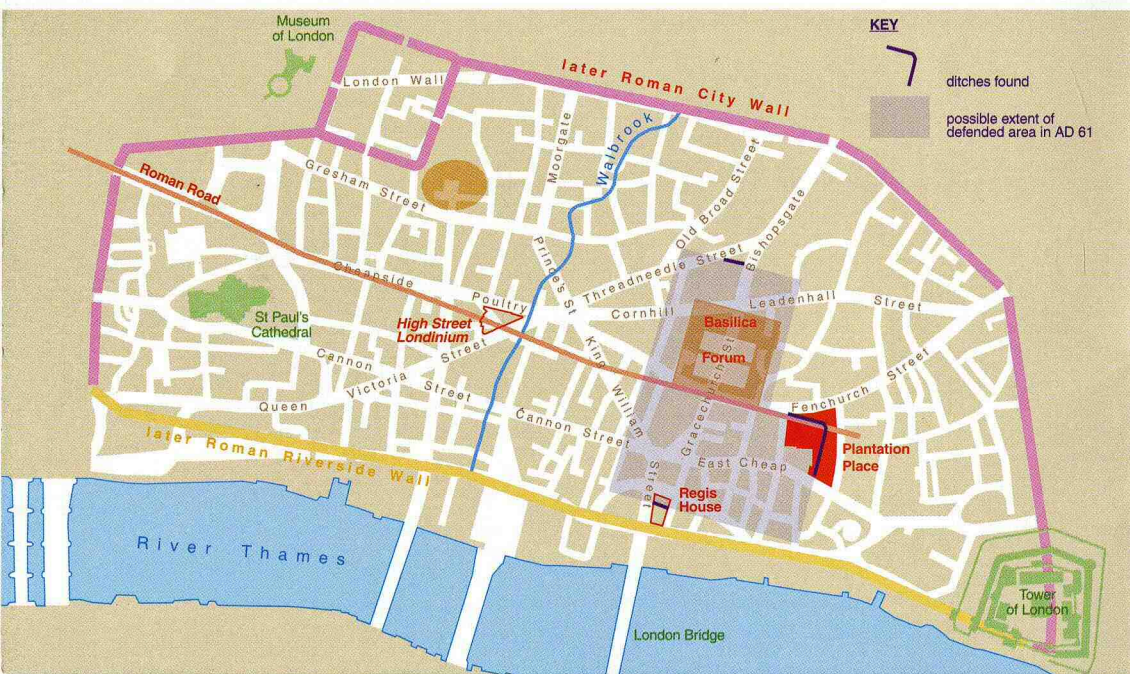
Plantation Place

Nearly a century has passed since the famous statue of Boadicea in her chariot was placed on Westminster Bridge. Today, whether in London or elsewhere, Boudica continues to exert a powerful influence on the imagination – though we can no longer share the romantic visions of the Victorians, who saw her as the stately ancestor of their own Queen.

Last summer, at Plantation Place, important new evidence came to light about the uprising led by Boudica in AD 60-1, when Londinium was completely destroyed. On this site, for the first time, were found defensive ditches and a rampart built directly on the ruins of the devastated city. This indicates that the Roman army was more closely involved with the reconstruction of London than had previously been imagined. Interestingly, it also corroborates a statement by the contemporary historian, Tacitus, that the Roman general Paulinus was an aggressive commander who kept his army on alert in new quarters throughout the winter following the uprising.

The Plantation Place site lies in a key location between London Bridge and the Roman Forum/Basilica. Funded by The British Land Company Plc, the dig covered one of the largest areas to have been excavated in the City of London for several years. It was rich in medieval, as well as Roman remains. Cess-pits contained numbers of complete pots, ranging from locally-produced wares to jars of a type that bore spices from the East – yet more evidence for London's far-flung trading connections. One of the most tantalising discoveries is of a more personal nature, however. A delightful bone figurine (see front cover) dates to Chaucer's time in the 14th century and shows a young knight with fashionably long, curly hair kneeling in supplication. Was he, one wonders, pleading to a saint or – like many heroes of medieval romance – to his lady love?

The figurine will be on display in the Museum until Sunday 7 January, in the exhibition Chaucer's Londoners





Occupation at Plantation Place began less than ten years after the invasion of AD43. The city's main east-west street was laid out across the site – the same street as features in the *High Street Londinium* exhibition – with mudbrick buildings to the south. These structures were ransacked by Boudica's army in AD60/1. Fire debris was clearly visible on excavation, and artefacts reflect the haste with which the town was abandoned. Pots had fallen from a burning shelf and several small turned ivory rods (possibly pens) had been abandoned in their cloth bag.

Thus far, the story repeats one told by many other sites. But whereas we have believed until now that the Roman army operated at some distance from *Londinium*, it now appears that a military base was established here immediately after the uprising. Two parallel V-shaped ditches had been dug about 2.5m apart, with no regard for the position of earlier features, to form the north-east corner of an enclosure. The larger, inner, ditch was some 2.5m wide and 1.5m deep. Behind lay

a turf-faced rampart, with a core of mudbricks stabilised by long, narrow planks (see picture). Some of these materials were burnt, suggesting that they had been salvaged from demolished buildings. The defences were traced for over 70m northwards, before curving diagonally across the former street and heading westwards towards the city centre.

The full extent of the enclosure is unknown. Was the entire core of the city fortified to allow clearance to begin in safety, or was this merely a small, temporary base? Is this defensive system to be associated with a pair of identical ditches found further north in Bishopsgate, or with fragments of tents dumped behind a quay built in AD63-4 at Regis House? The answers to these questions, and understanding of this critical phase in London's history, will come from painstaking re-examination of the records relating to earlier excavations nearby.

Trevor Brigham
Museum of London Archaeology Service

Old Spice

In medieval London the Plantation Place site occupied an important position, not far back from the quays along the Thames and near the thriving market of Eastcheap. Nothing survived of the houses and shops that would have crowded the area in the 13th to 15th centuries, but the artefacts from several deeply-dug cesspits indicate the far-flung trading connections of the city at that time.

By far the rarest finds were two complete 'fritware' drug jars (*albarelli*) made in Syria or Egypt. Sherds from up to seven other jars were also found, together with portions of glass vessels likewise believed to have a Syrian origin. 'Fritware' is the term used for the products of a distinctive and complex manufacturing process. The body of the vessel is formed from a white clay enriched with glass; this is then coated, first, with a finely-ground silica slip and, finally, with a glass-, lead- or lime-based glaze. Workshops making vessels of the Plantation Place type, with blue and black painted decoration in a

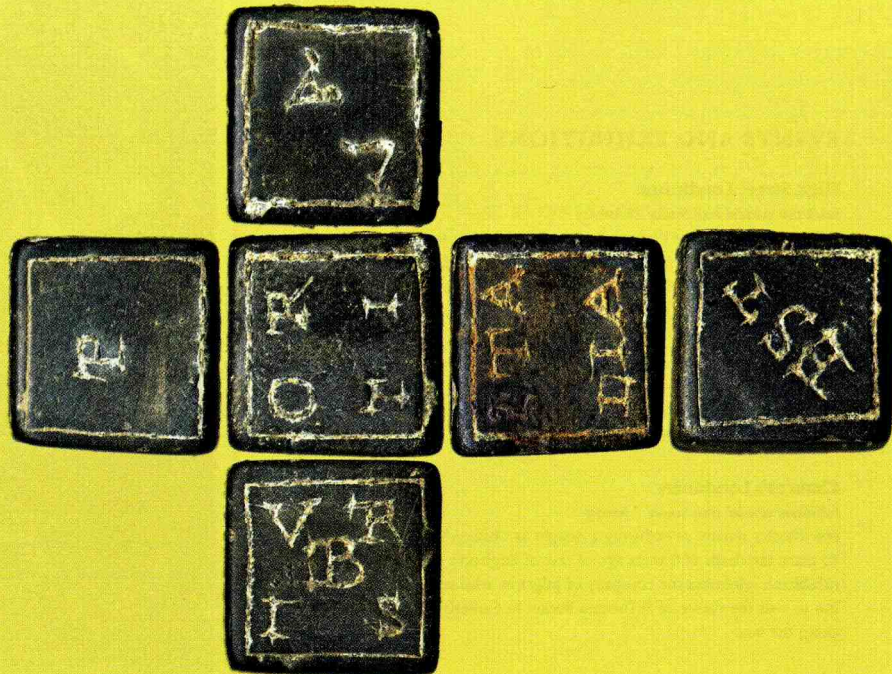
chequered, floral or panel style, have been identified in both Damascus and Cairo. The two centres evidently produced a similar range of standardised wares, and these particular jars can be dated to the first half of the reign of the Mamluk dynasty (c AD1250-1507).

Pottery such as this was not produced anywhere in northern Europe at this time, but it is likely that the jars were imported for what they contained – exotic herbs and spices for use by apothecaries – rather in appreciation of their white-toned, aesthetic qualities. To find such vessels in London should come as no surprise, given the well-documented connections of Genoese or Venetian merchants with Syria and Alexandria. Nevertheless, they represent the largest and most complete group of Near-Eastern pottery of this period ever to have been unearthed in Britain.

Nigel Jeffries
Museum of London Specialist Services



The die is cast



To judge from the number of dice and counters found by archaeologists, the Romans must have whiled away much of their time playing games of chance. The dice were usually carved from bone – or, more rarely, antler or jet – and were marked with spots circled by rings. As in modern times, the values on opposite faces always added up to seven.

A very unusual die has recently been discovered in Southwark, during a dig carried out in advance of construction of the new Wolfson Wing at Guy's Hospital. This die is of stone, and in place of spots it has carved capital letters inlaid apparently with pigment. Nevertheless, as on normal dice, the number of characters on opposing faces still totals seven: **P** opposite **ITALIA**, **VA** opposite **VRBIS**, **EST** opposite **ORTI**. The die was found on a scorched floor beside a small hearth, within a building that may have been a workshop; it contained two large ovens, and this phase of

construction dates to the 2nd century or later.

To our knowledge, this is the first lettered die from Britain, though examples have been found elsewhere in the Roman empire. Unfortunately, no-one has yet worked out how they were used. Some games involved moving pieces around a board, and so were the forerunners of games like backgammon. Others were merely a case of throwing dice and betting on the outcome. Perhaps lettered dice were used in pairs or groups, enabling players to make up words or sentences. At any rate, gambling became so popular in the Roman empire, and resulted in so many bankruptcies, that it had to be banned by the emperor Hadrian.

Jenny Hall
Museum of London
Chris Pickard

Pre-Construct Archaeology

City of the dead

Hundreds of Roman graves have been unearthed in London recently, but rarely does much evidence survive for the appearance of cemeteries above ground. Do we imagine them to have been like English churchyards, with a decaying jumble of modest headstones? Or like Victorian suburban cemeteries, with neat rows of markers and occasional grandiose monuments in a peaceful, garden landscape?

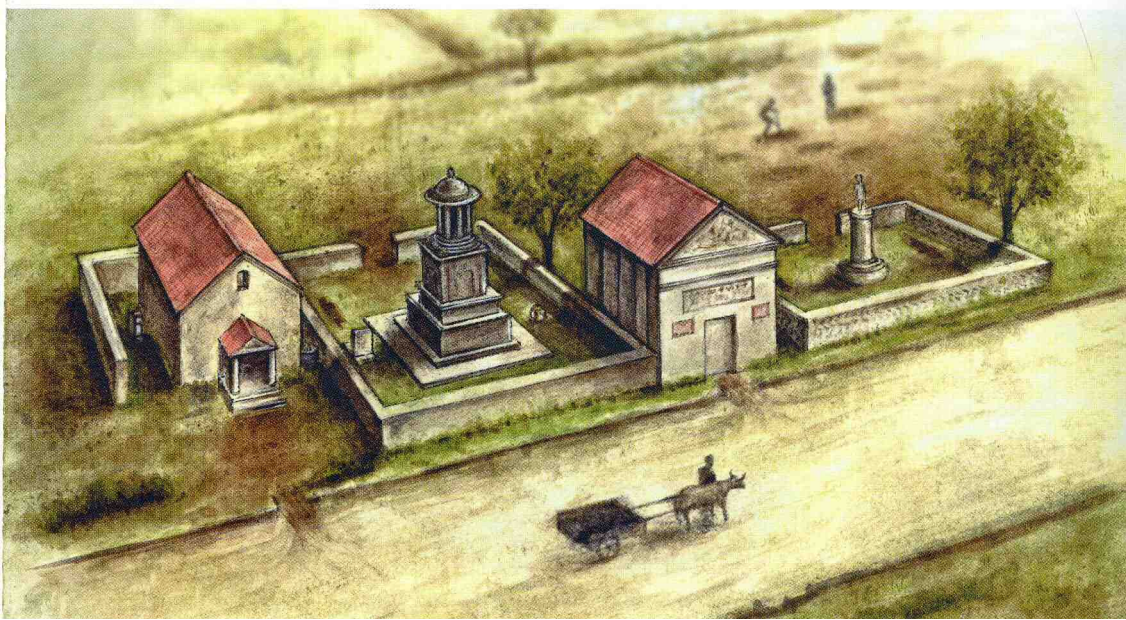
Important, recently published information from Southwark suggests that at least one of *Londinium's* cemeteries was quite unlike these but resembled more the cemeteries still in use in some Mediterranean cities – or even, to cite the most extravagant example of the style, the Recoleta cemetery in Buenos Aires. These are truly ‘cities of the dead’, with paved streets, town planning and a house built by each notable family. The house is both practical, holding the mortal remains of the deceased, and symbolic, expressing in architectural form family traditions and aspirations.

The Roman cemetery discovered at 165 Great Dover Street, Southwark, lay on the west side of

Watling Street, the main road from Canterbury to London. A small temple or mausoleum belonged to an early phase, probably in the 2nd century AD. Contemporary with it was a pit containing debris from a cremation on a funerary pyre: the remains of a young woman with a remarkable assortment of grave-goods, including nine pottery tazze (perhaps incense-burners), eight pottery lamps and foodstuffs imported from the Mediterranean. Later, two small walled enclosures were laid out – each probably for use by a family – and a tomb or mausoleum was erected in the space between them. Fortunately, a few fragments of stone sculpture survive. Though not associated with any particular monument, the head of a bearded god and a finial in the form of a pine cone give us a glimpse of the grandeur with which the cemetery was once elaborated.

The book by Anthony Mackinder, *A Romano-British cemetery on Watling Street* (MoLAS Archaeology Studies Series, 4) is available from the Museum of London shop, price £5.00. The remains from the funerary pyre are on display in the Museum until 28 January 2001.

Reconstruction painting by Kikar Singh



New(t)s from Dollis Hill



London Mayor and local MP, Ken Livingstone, was the surprise visitor to a dig on Dollis Hill last summer. He remembered the site from his childhood as being a place where newts used to breed in an abandoned sand quarry. The newts have now found homes elsewhere – as thorough pre-development surveys of local wildlife revealed – but a new excitement has grown from the discovery of Roman remains, a rare occurrence in this part of London. The dig was funded by Thames Water, who are constructing an essential new reservoir to improve the local water supply system.

The finds were made atop Dollis Hill, not far from the Edgware Road (Roman Watling Street). In Roman times the site would have commanded fine views to the south towards Londinium (some 6 miles away) and to the north towards the settlement on Brockley Hill. Two enclosure- or field-ditches were discovered, together with a series of quarry pits that had been dug to extract gravel –

perhaps for road-building or for use in concrete. For a rural site of this kind, the ditches contained large quantities of 3rd- to 4th-century pottery. There were also parts of a millstone, a flue tile and other building materials, and some burnt grain. Materials such as these are unlikely to have been transported far. Might the tile have come from a corn-drier that overheated occasionally? And if there was a mill, was there also a barn nearby?

The Romans were not the first people to settle here. Early Iron Age finds hint at a settlement dating to as early as 600-400BC. This is the first Iron Age material to have been recorded from Brent, and it adds to a growing body of evidence that some of the predominantly clay uplands of north London began to be farmed before – not after – the Roman conquest.

Dave Sankey
Museum of London Archaeology Service

EVENTS AND EXHIBITIONS

High Street Londinium

Exhibition extended until Sunday 28 January

Take time off from the Christmas shopping to visit a tavern and shops as they would have been nearly 2000 years ago. Painstakingly recreated from evidence dug up in 1994-6, High Street Londinium is lined not with stone buildings and mosaics but with the timber and mudbrick houses where most Romano-Britons lived and worked.

Actors and craft demonstrators are on hand most days. To find out who will be here at the time you visit – or to get a free Events leaflet – please phone 020 7814 5777. Alternatively, look up the High Street Londinium web site (www.museumoflondon.org.uk/londinium.html).

Chaucer's Londoners

Exhibition extended until Sunday 7 January

Few classics remain as enduring a delight as Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*. To mark the death 600 years ago of one of England's greatest poets, this exhibition celebrates the company of pilgrims who set off from the Tabard Inn to visit the shrine of St Thomas Becket in Canterbury, exchanging tales along the way.

Archaeology: Truth about the past or stories reflecting the present?

Lecture by Hedley Swain, Head of the Department of Early London History; 7 March, 6.30pm

Archaeology sets out to find the truth about past peoples, but the study of past archaeologists shows that their theories about the past were heavily influenced by the times in which they lived. This raises a fundamental question: 'Can we ever be objective when we study the past?'

This event is hosted by the Museum of London Friends, but non-members are very welcome. Admission by ticket only: telephone 020 7814 5777

NEW BOOKS

The archaeology of Greater London

It is nearly 25 years since the last major survey of the archaeology of the London region. This book includes 13 large-format maps in full colour and is indispensable reading for everyone with an interest in the history of London.

MoLAS/English Heritage, £26.00

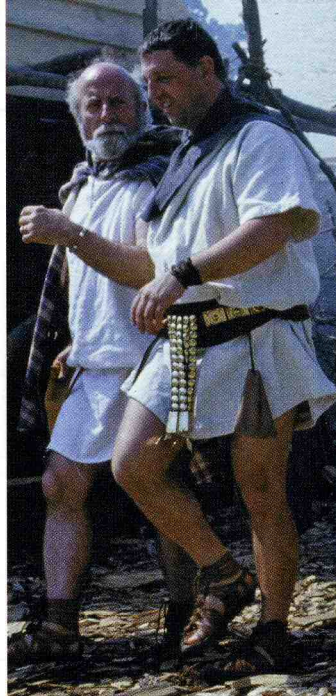
Bankside: excavations at Benbow House, Southwark

By Anthony Mackinder & Simon Blatherwick

On this site were found remains of the 'Bearebayting' arena pictured on late 16th-century maps. In the late 17th to 18th centuries the area was given over to industry, including tin-glazed pottery and glass manufacture.

MoLAS, £5.00

All books mentioned in this leaflet are available from the Museum shop. Telephone orders by credit or debit card: 020 7814 5600. Prices as stated, plus post and packing.



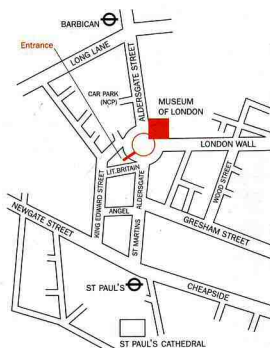
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