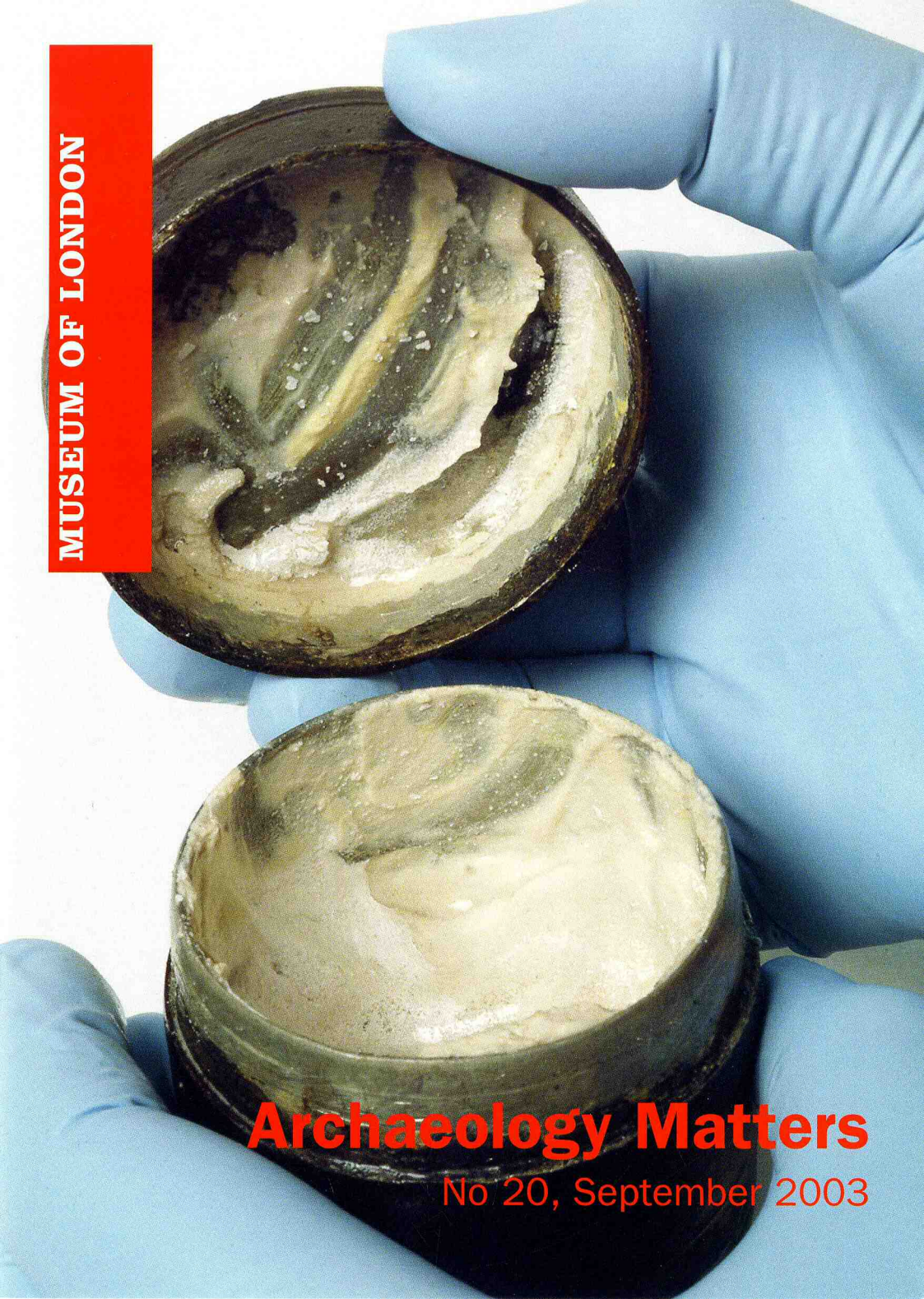
MUSEUM OF LONDON



Archaeology Matters

No 20, September 2003

Photo: Pre-Construct Archaeology

Tabard temples

Roman temples, like London buses, are rare sightings that evidently come in pairs. In this case, an entire sacred precinct – two temples, ancillary buildings and bases for altars or statuary – has been revealed during a year-long dig on a vast 3-acre site at the junction of Long Lane and Tabard Street in Southwark. This is one of the most important Roman discoveries of the past 50 years.

The site was strategic: not far from where Watling Street merged with Stane Street to run the last half-mile to the bridge. The eastern part was marshland; the western, drier ground rising from the flood-plain of the Thames. On the dry ground, some time in the 2nd century AD, residential or commercial timber buildings were cleared away and the surface levelled to become a religious precinct. Two temples were built with a screen wall between them; three square and one circular plinths were laid in the surrounding courtyard; and a 25m-long 'villa' was provided for priests, worshippers or travellers.

The foundations of each temple (see picture) – a pair of stone squares, one inside the other, 11m across overall – are misleadingly slight. The inner square once supported a tower, perhaps 10m high, making the temple visible from a distance and housing a statue of the patron deity. Around it was an enclosed walkway. This design, which was common in southern Britain and France, may have its origins in a Gaulish ritual – observed by the Roman geographer, Strabo – that involved processing round images of the gods.

At the start of the dig a marble tablet was found (see *Archaeology Matters*, March 2003). It had been deliberately buried in the early 4th century, probably when the precinct was deconsecrated. A dedication to Mars Camulus by Tiberinius Celerianus, it surely names the god to whom one of the temples belonged.

The excavation, by Pre-Construct Archaeology, was managed by EC Harris for Berkeley Homes. Information from Gary Brown and Dougie Killock.

Temple treasures

Bounding the Tabard Street temple precinct was a gently meandering ditch nearly 100m long. Running roughly SW to NE, over a metre wide and deep, it seems to have followed the natural edge of the high ground on the western side of the site. Its sides had been strengthened with planking, probably in the late 1st century.

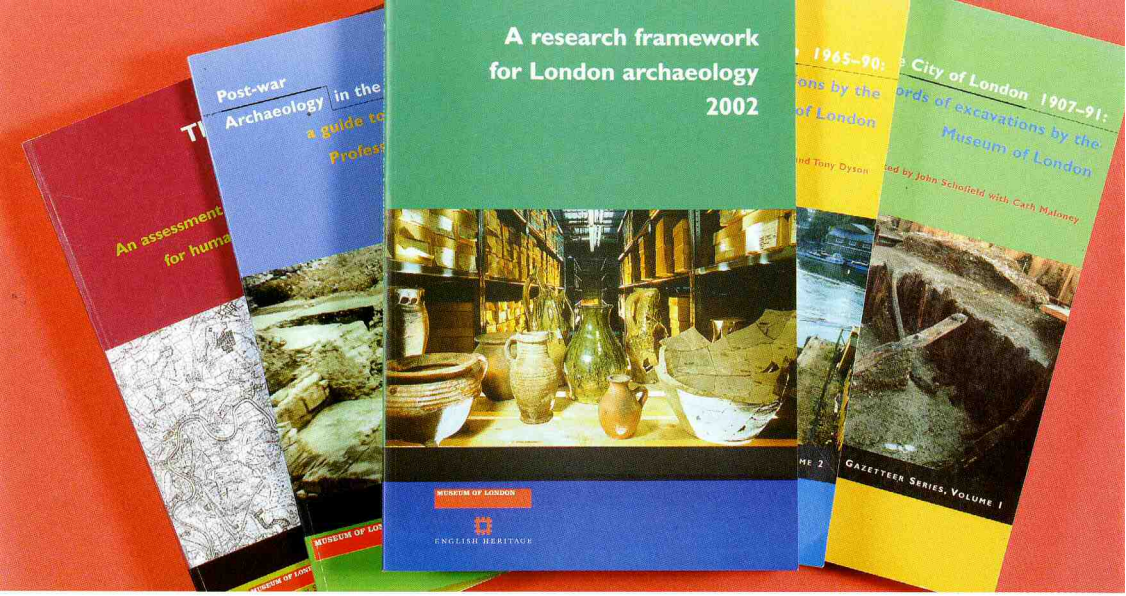
Waterlogged, the ditch contained several layers of deliberate infilling. Many complete or near-complete objects had been placed within it, often in discrete groups. One group, for instance, comprised three leather shoes; another, several pottery flagons. At one point the ditch contained part of a writing tablet; elsewhere an unusually large pewter box. Were these offerings left to the gods? Or consecrated property buried for safe-keeping when it was no longer needed?

The most amazing find was a perfectly preserved cylindrical canister (see front cover). Exquisitely made from almost pure tin, it has several engraved bands around the sides and top. Museum of London conservator, Liz Barham, was responsible for removing the tight-fitting cap. 'The most awful smell hit me', says Liz. 'Sulphurous, like rotten eggs.' The canister contains a thick, slightly granular, off-white paste and – incredibly – inside the cap are marks apparently left by the fingers of the last user. A cosmetic? A ritual paint or medical ointment? Chemical analysis will tell.

The site continued to produce surprises to the end. A life-sized foot in bronze was unearthed on the very last day (see picture). Wearing a sandal fastened with an ornate rosette between the toes, and in fine Graeco-Roman style, this is an almost unique find for Roman Britain. Did it belong to a cult-statue that once stood in the precinct or one of its temples?

The excavation, by Pre-Construct Archaeology, was managed by EC Harris for Berkeley Homes. Information from Gary Brown and Dougie Killock.

Photo: Museum of London, courtesy of Pre-Construct Archaeology



Research framework for London

Long anticipated, and perhaps long overdue, this new publication was launched at the Greater London Authority's headquarters on 29 July. Appropriately, speeches were made by Rupert Hambro, Chair of the Museum of London's Board of Governors, and Simon Thurley, Chief Executive of English Heritage and previous Director of the Museum. English Heritage has been encouraging and supporting financially the creation of regional research frameworks throughout the country, and it was under Simon's guidance that the London framework was developed, with much consultation, at the Museum.

The 120-page document seeks to identify the major research themes for London archaeology over the next few years. As such, it is an essential working tool for all London's archaeologists, both amateur and professional. Hopefully, it will also be one that quickly becomes redundant and needs replacement, as research progresses and new questions pose themselves.

A research framework for London archaeology 2002 follows the publication of the three *Gazetteers*, which summarise the holdings at the Museum's London Archaeological Archive and Research Centre (LAARC), and of *The archaeology of Greater London*, which seeks to summarise present knowledge. Together, these five volumes are a major achievement and testament not only to the vast amount of archaeology that has been undertaken in London over the years but also to the very healthy state in which it is now managed. Several times during the opening speeches LAARC was named as a model for the rest of the country.

The final speaker of the evening was Jenny Jones, Deputy Mayor, and herself a former archaeologist. She welcomed the publication, and promised that archaeology will play an important part in the GLA's strategic thinking for London. So, all in all, an important landmark for London archaeologists to celebrate.

A research framework for London archaeology 2002 (Museum of London, 2002) has been distributed to local societies and other organisations. Additional copies are available from MoLAS, Mortimer Wheeler House, 46, Eagle Wharf Road, London N1 7ED, price £4.95

Headquarters of the 'British Empire'?

In Roman times, the banks of the Thames behind the Millennium Bridge were occupied by monumental buildings almost on the scale of St Paul's Cathedral. They were partly excavated on the City of London Boys' School site in the 1980s. Recently, with the demolition last year of the Salvation Army Headquarters (on the east side of the bridge approach), the opportunity came to re-examine remains first unearthed in the 1960s.

Two massive timber baulks, laid horizontally east-west, were the earliest features. They were part of a 1st-century quay – the first time that the Roman waterfront has been seen in this area. The quay was replaced by a large masonry building with a river frontage of at least 40m. Towards its western end was an apse (see picture) with a domed niche constructed from a light, tufa-like stone. A matching apse was observed to the east. Tree-ring samples from the timber pile foundations should provide the first accurate date for this phase.

By the second half of the 3rd century, the building had subsided, perhaps partly collapsed. Its replacement was immense. Ragstone foundations with tile bonding courses, between 1.5 and 4.25m wide, incorporated huge reused sandstone blocks. They had been laid on a carefully prepared chalk raft, overlying timber piles. Two culverts channelled water from natural springs in the north, through the foundations, into the Thames.

The walls survived to a maximum height of 1.5m, possibly just below the original floor level. At one point, the foundation appeared to have been capped with an *opus signinum* bedding for a pavement above. The walls were traced intermittently for 15m, but the entire development – palace, treasury or supply base? – extended for over 100m westwards. Dated by tree-rings to AD294, it is attributed to Allectus, self-styled Emperor of a short-lived, breakaway 'British Empire'.

The excavation, for Bowmer & Kirkland Ltd, was project-managed by Ove Arup and carried out by Pre-Construct Archaeology. Information from Tim Bradley.

Photo: Pre-Construct Archaeology

Photo: Pre-Construct Archaeology

Romans in Hyde Park

The memorial fountain to Diana, Princess of Wales, which is being constructed to the south of the Serpentine, is now known to lie on the site of a Roman settlement or farm. A Roman ditch, post-holes and 3rd to 4th-century pits first came to light during an evaluation last year for the Royal Parks and Arups, which sought, successfully, to locate the early 18th-century decorative bastion and deep ditch, or 'ha-ha', that separated Hyde Park from the formal Kensington Gardens to the west. Fuller excavation this year revealed a remarkable sequence spanning the entire Roman period.

The earliest features were three large gravel quarries. They had been rapidly back-filled with weathered London Clay and contained a very small amount of 1st-century pottery. A rectangular enclosure had then been laid out across the site with two phases of development. Numerous ditches, pits and post-holes of 1st to 3rd-century date were excavated. The final Roman features were two parallel curving ditches filled with early to mid-4th-century pottery and roof tile in large quantities.

In Roman times the site lay on the east bank of the Westbourne. This lost river, which rises in Hampstead and was dammed in 1730-1 to form the Serpentine lakes, flowed into the Thames at Chelsea and would have been navigable in small boats. About half a mile to the north, underlying the present Bayswater Road, is the Roman highway to Silchester. The area was perfect for farming, and the Romans were probably not the first to recognise its potential. Prehistoric flints and late Iron Age pottery were discovered on the dig, but in residual contexts.

Why have significant prehistoric and Roman remains not been found in the park previously? Probably because the last wholesale landscaping was carried out in the 18th century, and little development or investigation has taken place since.

Peter Moore
Pre-Construct Archaeology

London's archaeological secrets

This lavishly illustrated new book was commissioned to celebrate 30 years of full-time professional archaeology in London and the Silver Jubilee of the Museum of London. It is difficult to imagine those days, 30 years ago, before the excavation of the Roman docks, when Saxon Lundenwic lay undiscovered beneath Covent Garden and unstratified river-finds comprised almost the sum total of our knowledge about prehistory.

Whilst containing material that will be familiar to some – the Roman amphitheatre, or the sarcophagus from Spitalfields – the book also contains much that will be new. In a short retrospective on London's early archaeologists, for instance, we see not only Grimes's discovery of the Mithraeum (see picture) but also his rediscovery of the church of the Carthusians at the Charterhouse – an inspired piece of detective work. Seldom has a year passed since without a major find of some kind: from the Blackfriars boats (1962) or medieval Kingston Bridge (1985) to the medieval manor at Low Hall (1997) or Roman water-lifting equipment (2001).

The book takes a lively, themed approach, with topics as varied as 'London's rivers', 'Shops and markets' or 'Disasters'. Take 'Out on the town', a chapter that deals with the essential but often-forgotten aspect of entertainment. The amphitheatre or the Rose Theatre are familiar enough, and it is well known that public bathing was a central part of Roman daily life. Much less familiar are the artefacts that show us Londoners' pastimes in years gone by: Roman dice bearing letters not dots, Tudor pewter dolls immaculately dressed in the most fashionable costume of the period, or medieval bone skates used when the Thames froze solid in winter.

London's archaeological secrets (edited by Chris Thomas with Andy Chopping and Tracy Wellman and published by Yale University Press, in association with the Museum of London Archaeology Service) is available from the Museum Shop, price £12.95

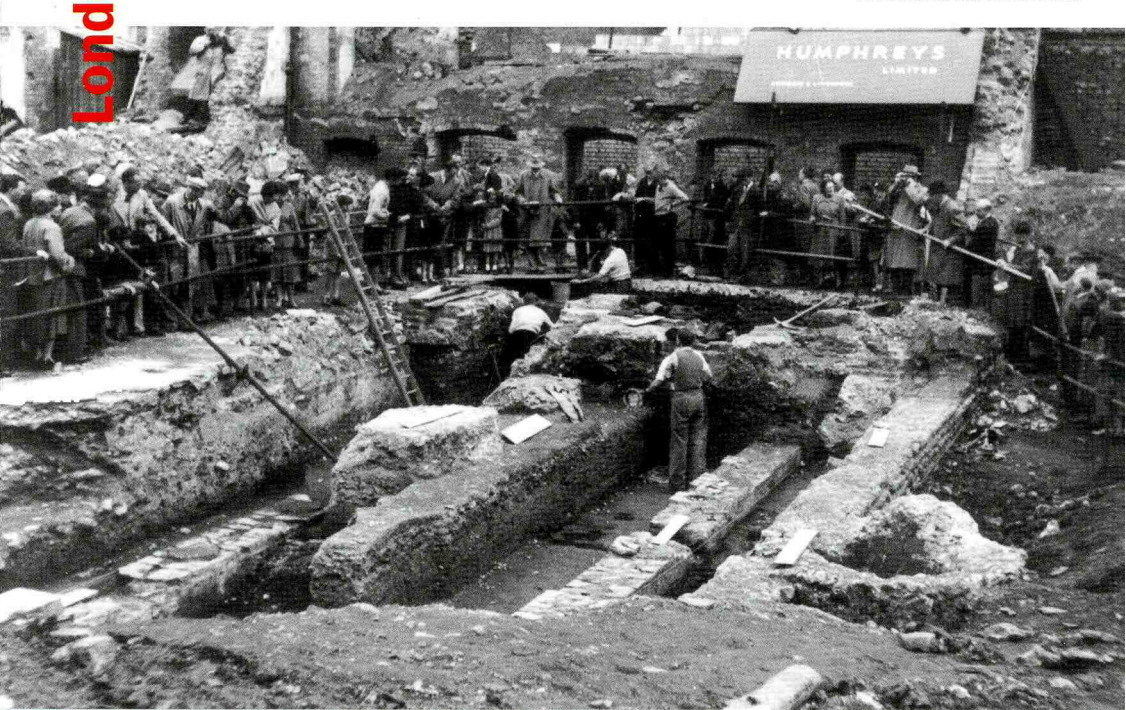


Photo: Grimes collection, Museum of London

Galleries and exhibitions

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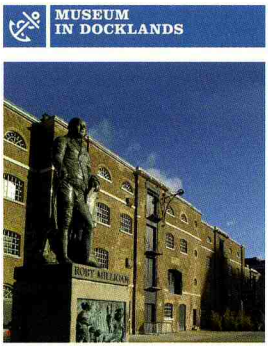


The most exciting new museum project of the millennium so far, **Museum in Docklands** is part of the Museum of London Group. Housed in a spectacular early 19th-century warehouse, its breathtaking displays range from historic rowing-boats to entire dockside workshops.

EXHIBITIONS AT LONDON WALL

Pepys' London

Until Monday 3 November

Celebrating the achievements of Samuel Pepys, on the 300th anniversary of his death, this exhibition unites the famous diarist's words with curiosities and paintings from the Museum of London and other collections.

Urban grime: the state of London's environment

Opens Friday 19 September

Is pollution the inevitable by-product of urban living? This challenging display has exhibits as diverse as a 1950s smog mask and John Evelyn's *Fumifugium* (published in 1661 to inform the public about the 'Aer and Smoak of London').

New publications

The archaeology of medieval London

By Christopher Thomas

Beginning in 1066 and ending at 1540, this entirely new book includes information from many recent excavations. Chris Thomas, director of the Spitalfields project, discusses medieval London in its widest sense: houses, daily life, markets, palaces and religion.
Sutton 2002, £19.99 (hardback)

The port of medieval London

By Gustav Milne

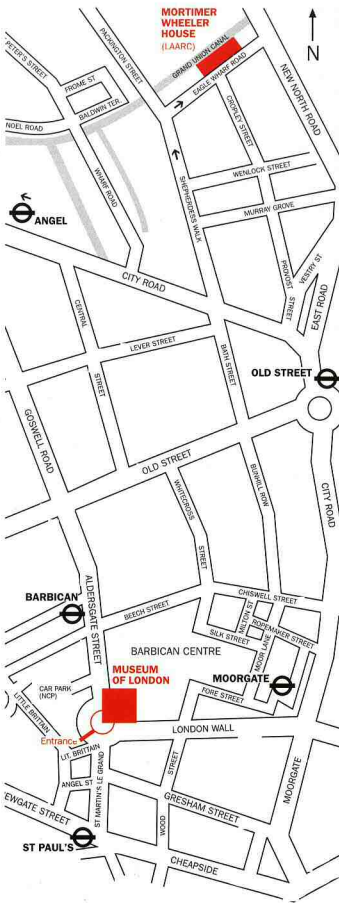
Read about London's development from a 7th-century riverside settlement to the principal port in England in the late Middle Ages. The author, who directed many of the most important waterfront excavations of the 70s and 80s, is uniquely qualified to tell this fascinating story.
Tempus 2003, £17.99

Working Water: Roman technology in action

By Ian Blair and Jenny Hall

You may have seen the reconstructed Roman water-lifting machine at the Museum this year. A new 64-page souvenir booklet describes the amazing discovery of the iron bucket chain, and how archaeologists then collaborated with engineers to produce a fine example of experimental archaeology.
Museum of London 2003, £3.99

Book orders: please phone **020 7814 5600**. Payment by credit or debit card. Prices as stated, plus post and packing.



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Front cover. Conservator, Liz Barham, opens a pot of Roman cream (Photo: Museum of London, courtesy of Pre-Construct Archaeology)