

# OPT81

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OPT81

2–3 Cross Key Court, Copthall Avenue, EC2  
C Maloney

NGR: TQ 32750 81490

SMR: 043384–96

Excavation here (Fig\*OPT) was funded by Commercial Union Properties Ltd. London Clay was overlaid by fine gravels and silts of a major tributary of the Walbrook stream; some of the silts were eventually colonized by small trees and vegetation. Environmental evidence indicates that the stream was fairly slow-flowing but clean. In the late 1st or early 2nd c the vegetation was cleared away, the stream infilled and a NE-SW road was constructed, with a drainage system laid out on its E side. Alterations to the drainage were undertaken on many occasions as flooding repeatedly occurred and by AD 120–40 the road was completely rebuilt on a foundation of stacked turves above a brushwood raft. The drainage channels and dumps which continually raised the ground level during this period contained quantities of finds, particularly leather shoes, and some indicated industrial processes, including leather-, bone- and glass-working. Environmental evidence suggests that the landscape was still wet, but disturbed and grassy. Drainage seems to have been sufficiently under control by the early-mid 2nd c for the latest channel to be infilled with organic material and a building constructed above. The clay and timber building, 12m long and possibly 4m wide, shared the same alignment as the road and was bordered on its S side by a path. Its external walls were supported on baseplates laid on piles, its internal walls on groundbeams, while evidence survived to suggest that the fabric of the walls had been wattle and daub. Inside the building the arrangement of rooms was frequently modified and clay or brickearth floors regularly relaid: it may have had an industrial function. The building continued, with alterations, into the 3rd c when it was demolished. Environmental evidence reflects the increasing urbanisation of the area that was, nevertheless, still wet. A thick dump then raised the ground level beside the road and a surface was laid, into which a number of large regular pits were cut throughout the 4th c. These pits may have been part of an industrial process; two of them contained a great quantity of furnace lining.

The road continued to be resurfaced throughout this period but it was bordered by a substantial revetted ditch and this, together with successive ground raising dumps and ditches, indicates the resumption of drainage problems. Occupation then ceased in the late 4th c and a peaty deposit gradually formed over the site until the 11th-12th c when the site was re-occupied for a short while and wattle-lined pits and a drainage ditch were cut. The pits had been infilled in the early 12th c with organic material, including numerous leather off-cuts. After their abandonment the marshy formation resumed its deposition; environmental evidence confirms that wetter and more natural conditions prevailed. In approximately the early 12th c the marsh was reclaimed with thick dumps of clay which were cut by a complex of shallow pits or tanks, probably for an industrial usage. This

sequence - of dumping followed by pit cutting - pertained throughout the medieval period; one series of pits, dated to the 15th c, was possibly associated with bronze casting. By the 17th and 18th c the site was in the backyards of properties fronting onto London Wall: the dumped deposits appeared to be garden soil and the pits for rubbish disposal. By the 19th c the alignment of drains indicates their association with properties along Cross Key Court, probably the Coleman Street Ward School, and at the end of the 19th c the gymnasium of this school, within which the excavations took place, was built on the site.

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