

Fig. 1: Plan showing modern streets within line of Roman city wall, and location of Royal Bank of Scotland in relation to forum shown in outline.

Bank deposits with interest

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Photography by Jon Bailey, Museum of London

WHEN IT BECAME known that the Royal Bank of Scotland premises at 3-5 Bishopsgate (Fig. 1) were to be redeveloped, negotiations opened between the developers, London and Edinburgh Securities, and the Museum of London. The site had considerable archaeological potential.

It lay c. 30m (100ft) north of the *basilica* near the highest point of the City's eastern hill, on the

western side of a main road thought to lead north from the central axis of the *forum*. The anticipated Roman sequence – confirmed by trial hole evidence¹ – was of particular importance since a number of recent excavations near the *forum* and along Bishopsgate were transforming our knowledge of

1. Initial site visits by J. Norton, who co-ordinated the negotiations for the site, and M. Nally.

this important area². The archaeological excavation within the basement of the standing building (Fig. 2) in July and August 1983 and the subsequent post-excavation analysis³ conducted by the Department of Urban Archaeology were generously funded by the developer. Trenches were opened in three areas up against the Bishopsgate frontage (G, K, and O), two in the centre (L, M), and one at the rear (D) of the property. With the exception of Area L, all trenches were excavated down to the natural brick-earth, and the results of this work are summarised below⁴.

First and second centuries

A slab of redeposited brickearth seems to have been laid out over the entire site sealing a horizon of

natural brickearth uniformly truncated at c. +12.25m (40ft) O.D. in which few root holes or other disturbances were observed. Since the pre-Roman ground surface had been levelled and the turf and topsoil removed in antiquity, no evidence for activity earlier than the mid 1st century survived.

Building 1 Evidence for at least one building, in the form of scorched brickearth surfaces, was found in Areas M and O overlying the slab at c. +12.5m (41ft) O.D. These surfaces could be contemporary, and may have functioned with external metalling in Area G, implying that a timber building⁵, Building 1, had been laid out in the south of the site. Its destruction by fire is emphasised by the presence of charcoal and ash deposits. There was insufficient

2. See e.g. C. Evans and P. James, 'The Roman Cornhill', *Popular Archaeol* 5 no. 6, 1983, 19-26.
3. Archive report in Museum of London library: site code HOP83.

4. Dates quoted in this report are based on provisional examinations of pottery kindly supplied by Dr. P. Tyers and A. G. Vince.
5. In this report, the term 'timber building' refers to a structure with timber elements in walls, not necessarily a fully-framed building.



Fig. 2: Excavation in progress beneath the strong room floor in the standing building.

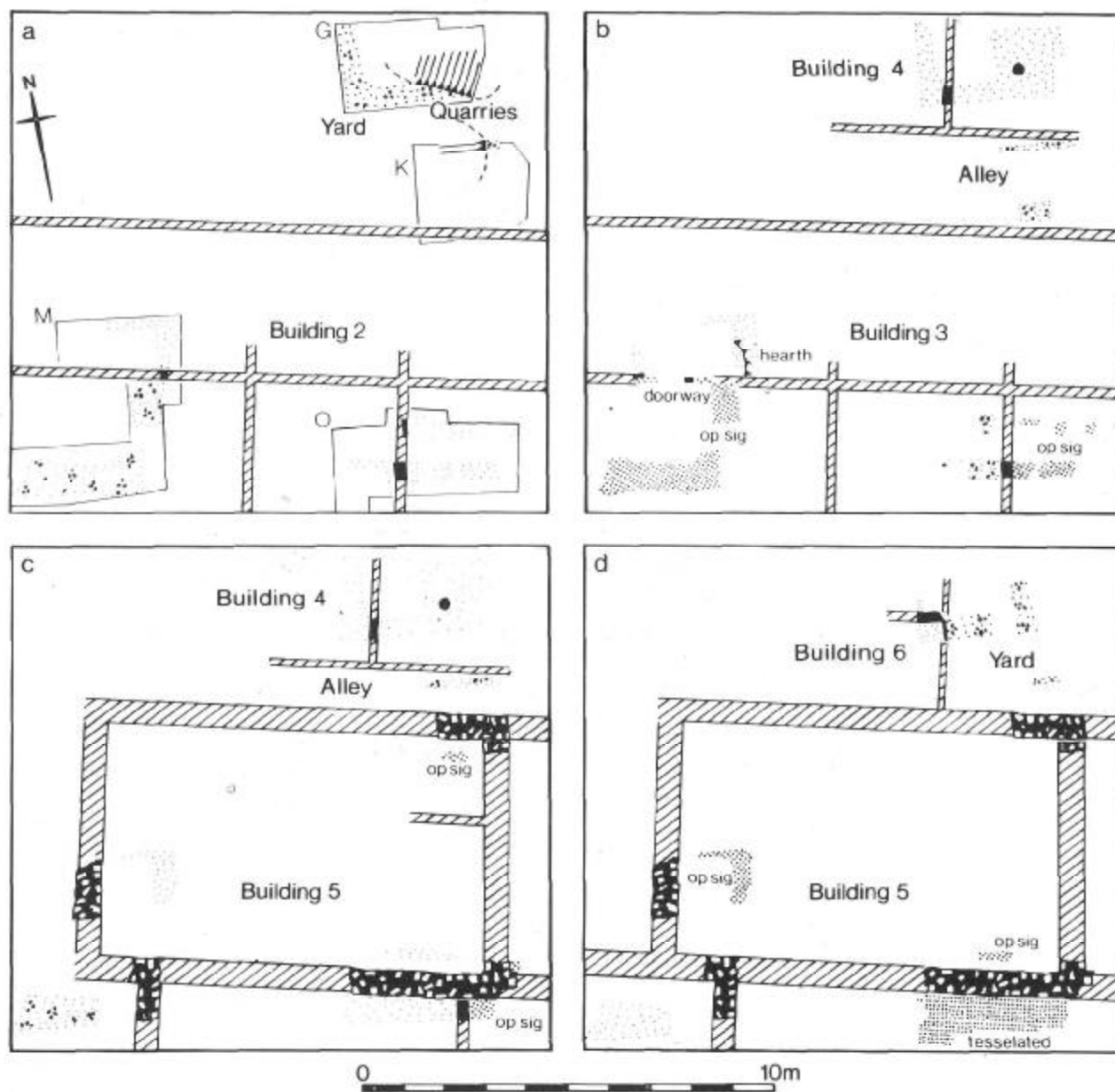


Fig. 3: Plan series showing late 1st and 2nd century development of site and extent of areas excavated. Conjectured wall lines shown hatched; internal brickearth surfaces with light stipple; external surfaces with heavier stipple.

dating evidence to establish whether or not this was the result of the Boudiccan revolt.

Building 2 (Fig. 3a) The building which replaced the burnt structure occupied a similar position to it. Internal brickearth floors and evidence for structural divisions consistent with a timber building were

recorded, as well as a possible external area in the southern part of Area M. The north wall of this complex must have lain south of the brickearth quarries located in Area G.

Building 3 (Fig. 3b) The major phase of activity, which was of late 1st or early 2nd century date,



Fig. 4: Tessellated pavement in Building 5 recorded in Area O, looking east. A 5 by 100mm scale rests on infilled robber trench for east-west wall.

incorporated another timber building laid out over the levelled remains of Building 2. Features such as a hearth and a possible doorway were found, while the *opus signinum* surfaces suggest a relatively prestigious development. This structure was sealed by a deposit of burnt building material.

Building 4 (Fig. 3b & c) It is possible that the timber building in Area G was laid out during the life of Building 3. Alternatively it may have been erected at the same time as, or slightly later than, Building 5 to the south.

Building 5 (Fig. 3c & d) The introduction of Building 5 marks a major replanning of the area. Parts of the north and west walls survived, together with foundations marking the position of east-west and north-south partitions. Given that all these elements are indeed part of the same structure, then a major building with a northern wing at least 6m (20ft) wide is implied. Walls and internal surfaces associated with a range of rooms running south from this northern wing were also recorded. Although it is

possible that the ranges may be parts of separate properties, the nature and level of the internal surfaces suggest that a single substantial development is represented. The internal ground level was raised during the operative life of the building, and the new surfaces which were laid out in the rooms (Fig. 3d), including *opus signinum* and tessellated pavements (Fig. 4), reflect the continuing high status of the property.

Building 6 (Fig. 3d) The external ground surface was also raised, perhaps at the same time, and elements of a brickearth sill structure, Building 6, were established over the site of the levelled Building 4. The gravel and brickearth surfaces recorded in Room D, which lies north-west of the area shown on Fig. 3, suggest that the area continued in use, perhaps as a yard, during the early-mid Roman period.



Fig. 5: Roman floor surfaces exposed in section beneath strong room floor, Area M. Note truncated dark grey silt horizon sealing robbed masonry wall and associated *op.sig.* floor. 5 by 100mm scale.

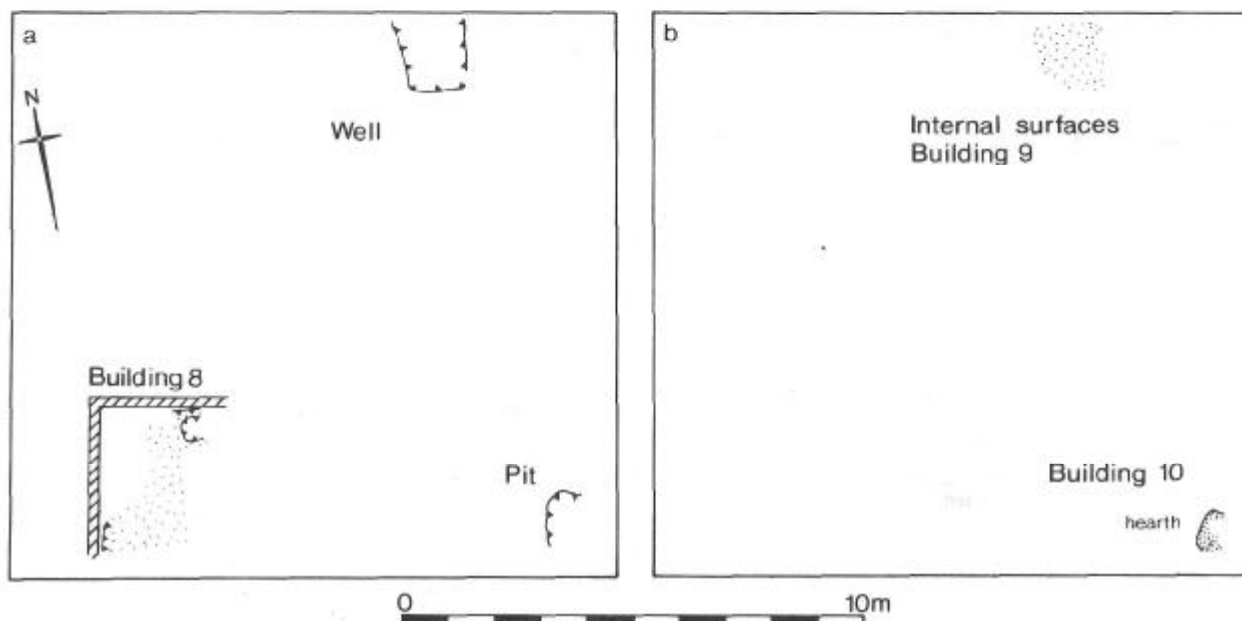


Fig. 6: Plan series showing fragmentary remains of late Saxon features in Areas G, M and O; cf. Fig. 3.

Third and fourth centuries

The ultimate fate of Buildings 5 and 6 was that, after their walls had been systematically demolished, they were sealed beneath a deposit of dark grey silt in which 3rd and 4th century pottery was found (Fig. 5). The little pottery that was recovered beneath this horizon was of 2nd century date.

Building 7 There was some evidence from Areas M and O to suggest that an occupation phase separated the demolition of Building 5 from the introduction of the dark grey silt. In Area O, a possible internal surface sealing the infilled robber trench of Building 5, from which late 2nd century pottery was recovered, constitutes the tentative evidence of Building 7.

In Area G, dark grey silts seemed to seal an eroded or disturbed horizon overlying the levelled remains of Building 6. A similar grey silt deposit has been encountered on many other sites in London, although the activity it represents has not been unequivocally established. The possibility that the horizon appeared on different sites at different times for different reasons must not be discounted. On the Royal Bank of Scotland site the deposit, however it was formed, marks a pronounced change of activity in the late Roman period, a suggestion of considerable significance for the development of the town as a whole, given the proximity of the *basilica* and of the main road leading north from it.

Late Saxon-later medieval

Building 8 (Fig. 6a) Cutting through the truncated horizon of dark grey silts were a number of intrusions, including the north-west corner of a vertically-sided feature with a brickearth surface on its floor. It is interpreted as a late Saxon cellared building at least 2.8m (9ft) north-south by 2.4m (8ft) east-west, and over 1m (3ft) deep. The relationship of the northern edge of the brickearth surface to the northern edge of the feature and an associated post pit suggests that the sides were revetted, although the timber facing had subsequently decayed or been removed.

Although no Saxon pottery was recovered from the infill deposits, fragments of three knives have been provisionally identified by John Clark as being of late Saxon date, while one of these is unlikely to be later than the 11th century. A pit containing late Saxon shelly ware pottery in Area O and a deeply cut square well in Area G may be broadly contemporary. Since such features are often associated with yard areas at the rear of buildings and are less likely to be found on a prestigious frontage, it is suggested that substantial buildings had not at this stage been built up against what later became the Bishopsgate frontage.

Buildings 9 and 10 (Fig. 6b) Both pit and well were cut by features which are thought to represent late Saxon development against the western edge of

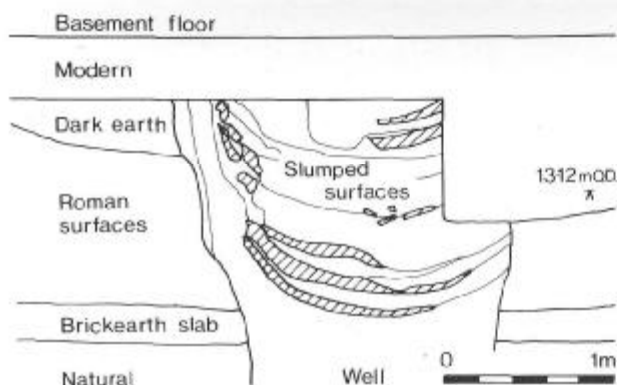


Fig. 7: Composite section showing late Saxon floors in Building 9 slumped into earlier well in Area G; cf. Fig. 8. Ground level on which this building was laid was destroyed when modern basement inserted.

Bishopsgate (*i.e.* the eastern side of Fig. 6b). The evidence for Building 9 comprised a sequence of eleven brickearth floors which had slumped into the backfilled well (Fig. 7 and 8). A quantity of pottery associated with these floors has been dated to the 11th century. Remains of a sub-surface hearth or oven which had been cut into the upper levels of the earlier pit were all that survived of Building 10. Burnt ragstones in the base of the bowl-shaped hearth were sealed by a sequence of burnt and unburnt brickearth layers interleaved with charcoal and grey silt deposits. No trace of metal working residues was recovered.

Later medieval pits were only found in Areas D and M, which implies that the associated contemporary buildings continued to occupy the eastern half of the site. It may therefore be conjectured that the present line of Bishopsgate or, more specifically, its western frontage, was not established before the 11th century.

REMINDER

Subscribers who have not yet increased their bankers' orders to the new rate (£3.60 p.a.), are asked to do so soon as possible.

Conclusions

In spite of the obvious limitations inherent in mounting a thirty-nine day excavation within a standing building, an important sequence of activity was recorded, highlighting the value of such superficially modest exercises. The full significance of the results will only become clear when work on neighbouring sites – in particular the *forum* complex⁶ – is complete. Nevertheless, it is possible to show something of the high status and nature of early-mid Roman occupation in this important area, and that the intensive building development was arrested or substantially modified in the later Roman period. Although not as well preserved as the Roman structures, the remains of the late Saxon buildings were a welcome bonus, and provided tentative evidence to date the establishment of this section of the Bishopsgate frontage to the 11th century.

Acknowledgements

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6. P. Marsden, 'The discovery of the civic centre of Roman London', *Collectanea Londiniensia*, London Middlesex Archaeol Soc Special Paper No. 2, 1978, 89-103.



Fig. 8: Building 9, Area G. One of the eleven superimposed brickearth floors slumped into the subsiding fill of an earlier well. 2 by 100mm scale; cf. Fig. 7.