

# Excavations at 25-26 Lime Street

TIM WILLIAMS

EXCAVATIONS IN THE Spring of 1982 on the site of Nos. 25 and 26 Lime Street (TQ 3309 8096) took place over a four month period in advance of redevelopment (Fig. 1). The excavations were conducted by the Department of Urban Archaeology (Museum of London) and were generously funded by the developers, Hunting Gate Developments Ltd.

The area investigated covered some 20×4m (66×13ft) with additional limited excavation and watching-brief facilities over the remaining area of the development. It was hoped that the excavation would elucidate the character of the Roman development along the east side of the Forum and throw further light on the initial development of the area. An additional priority was the nature of the early medieval occupation, with particular regard to the question of continuity of both individual property boundaries and the Roman north-south street which lay immediately to the west of the site, under the present Lime Street<sup>1</sup>.

The excavation of 25-26 Lime Street was only part of a wider programme of observations in the vicinity (Fig. 1), the latest of these being the excavation of the adjoining site, 27-30 Lime Street, which is currently in progress. Wider topographic considerations will therefore be more appropriately presented in the near future and this article will concentrate on the structural sequence observed on site.

## Roman

The earliest activity on the site (Period I) was an extensive redeposited brickearth slab suggesting widespread preparation of the area. At the extreme western limit of the site a north-south ditch was excavated, possibly acting as a boundary/marker for the street which lay immediately to the west of the site<sup>2</sup>. Cut through the brickearth dumping were a number of gravel quarrying pits, possibly for material for the initial layout of the street. No associated surfacing was encountered and it is suggested that these activities occurred over a relatively short

period of time, dated to the mid-1st century on finds evidence.

Sealing these features were extensive make-up dumps for the first structural activity (Period II). This consisted of a building (Building A), aligned east-west, incorporating a variety of structural components. Principally it consisted of brickearth sills with a daub superstructure, although it incorporated traces of post and stake construction. The internal surfaces were of brickearth with the exception of one room which had plank flooring. The structure had subsided into the Period I features and in some cases had been repaired or levelled on a number of occasions. Directly to the east was an area of

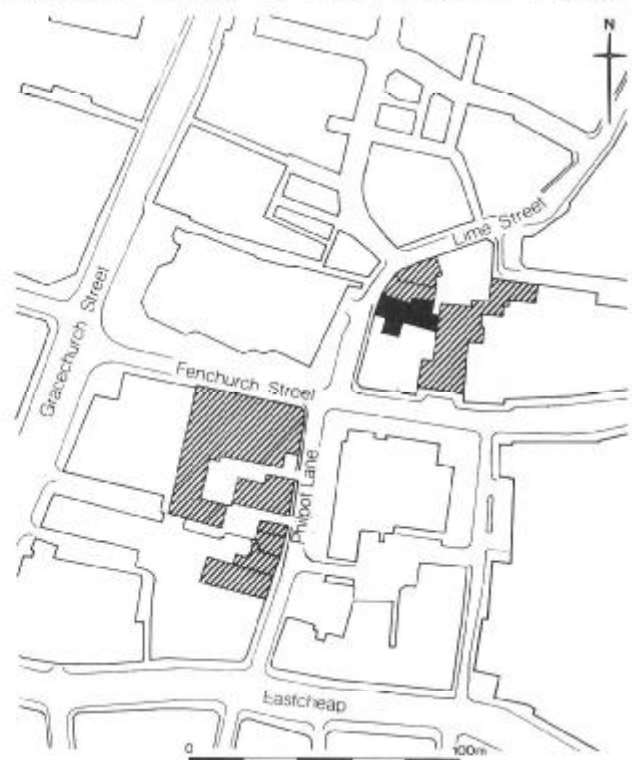


Fig. 1: Location of the site (blocked out) with relation to the surrounding recent excavations (hatched). (P. Durnford and R. Lee)

1. R. Merrifield, *The Roman City of London* (1965) 259.
2. P. Marsden, *Roman London* (1980) 21-23.

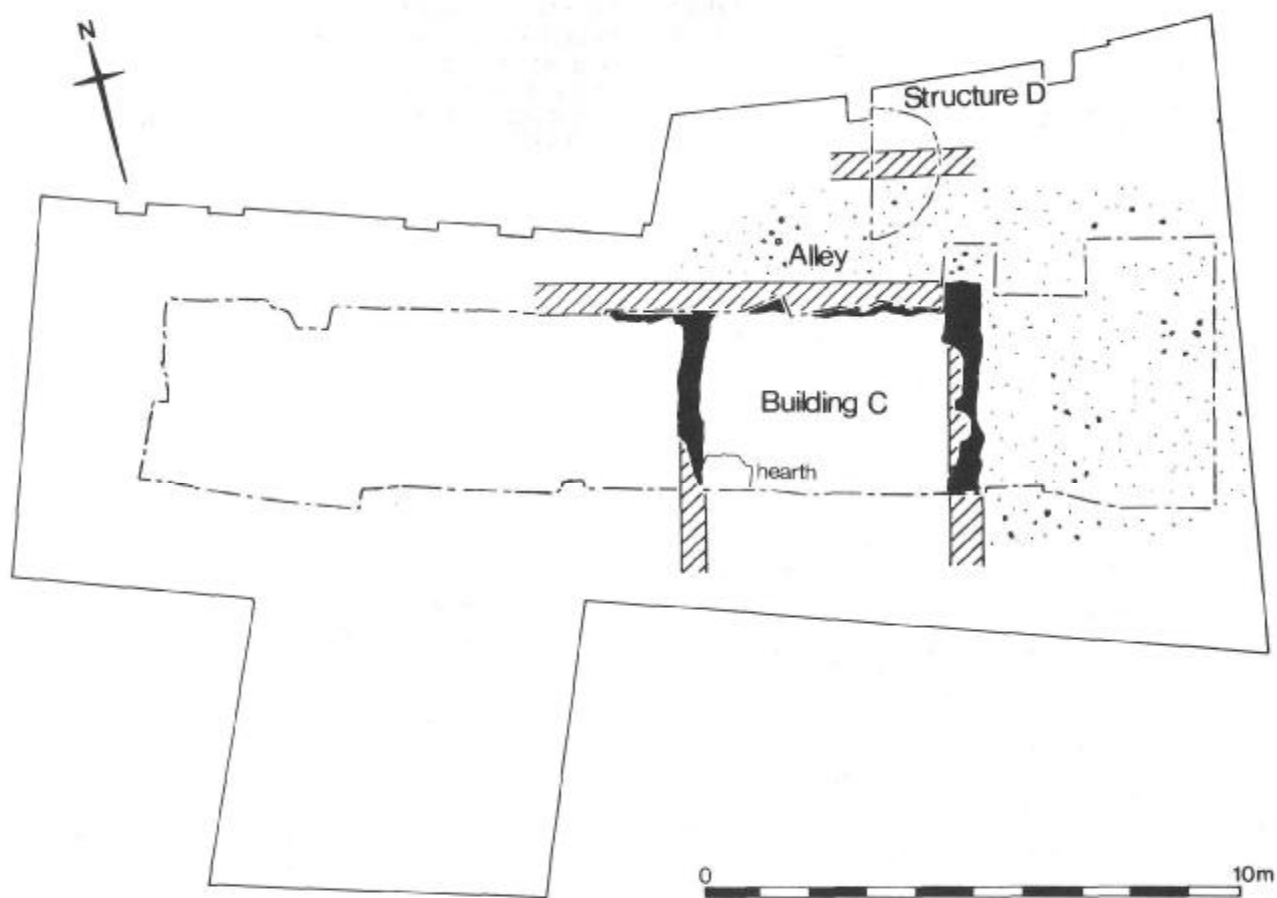


Fig. 2: Period IV. Pre-Hadrianic buildings and external areas.

(Drawn by F. Kiely)

external metalling, the character of which suggested a yard. It would seem likely that the building was similar in form to the classic strip-building, with a narrow street frontage to the west. It was destroyed and sealed by a major fire horizon, including large quantities of daub and mudbrick, which contained sufficient finds evidence to suggest a Boudican date.

Parts of Building A were robbed prior to further dumping of redeposited fire debris. This was in turn cut by a sequence of rubbish pits which were sealed by a number of 'external' surfaces with a single masonry pier base, which had no apparent structural associations. These deposits were sealed by further dumped deposits which were in turn cut by another phase of pitting (all Period III). This sequence suggests a hiatus in structural activity on the site, with the two pitting horizons representing transient events within the sequence (since no associated surfaces developed) interspersed with a phase of metalling indicating that the area was an open space. The latter is particularly important as it suggests that

the area was not redeveloped immediately after the Boudican fire.

Pottery from Period III proffers a post-A.D. 80 date and this is corroborated by a coin of A.D. 77-78 from the latest phase of dumping. This supports the hypothesis that the area remained open for some time after the Period II fire horizon.

Structural activity was resumed with a series of make-up dumps, containing pottery post-dating A.D. 120, which provided the basis for a well preserved brickearth-silled building (Building C, Fig. 2). The internal surfaces were mainly of brickearth with one planked floor. The walls had a variety of painted plaster decorations, some small fragments of which remained *in situ*, on a wattle and daub framework. Like Building A, Building C had a yard at the extreme eastern limit of the site. To the north of Building C was a gravelled alleyway separating it from an east-west robber trench, which is assumed to represent the southernmost extent of a masonry building (Structure D). South of Building C

further 'internal' surfacing was encountered during the watching-brief, although it was not clear whether these represented the same or an adjoining building.

Although Building C was truncated to the west by later activity this period clearly demonstrates further building activity of a high quality fronting onto the street to the west. It is particularly interesting to note the mix between masonry and brickearth/daub/timber structures.

All this sequence was sealed by another fire horizon, which was succeeded by further dumping, both of which contained pottery dating to the second quarter of the second century (?Hadrianic fire). It was at that level that the stratigraphy was truncated by the modern basement level, all further activity being intrusive.

**Late Roman**

Two major structures post-dated the mid-2nd century dumping, a masonry cellar (Building G) at the western end of the site and an apsidal pile

foundation building (Building F), to the east (Fig. 3 Period V). The latter consisted of a pile foundation (Fig. 4) with alternate courses of chalk and ragstone, only a small portion of which survived. It was robbed in the early medieval period (pottery dating A.D. 1000-1150) but no closer date could be assigned to its construction. It formed part of a larger building running northward. The cellared Building G was remarkably well preserved (Fig. 5). It stood to a height of some 2.2m (7ft 3in) and was constructed of roughly coursed ragstone blocks with tile string courses and was rendered with a coarse mortar finish. The level of the rendering implied that the original floor surface was in excess of 1.75m (5ft 9in) below the contemporary ground surface. The room was entered by a doorway in the southern wall, probably leading to a stairway turning westward. In the west wall two alcoves were recessed, just above the original floor level.

The range, of which the cellar was the most northerly element, continued southward beyond the

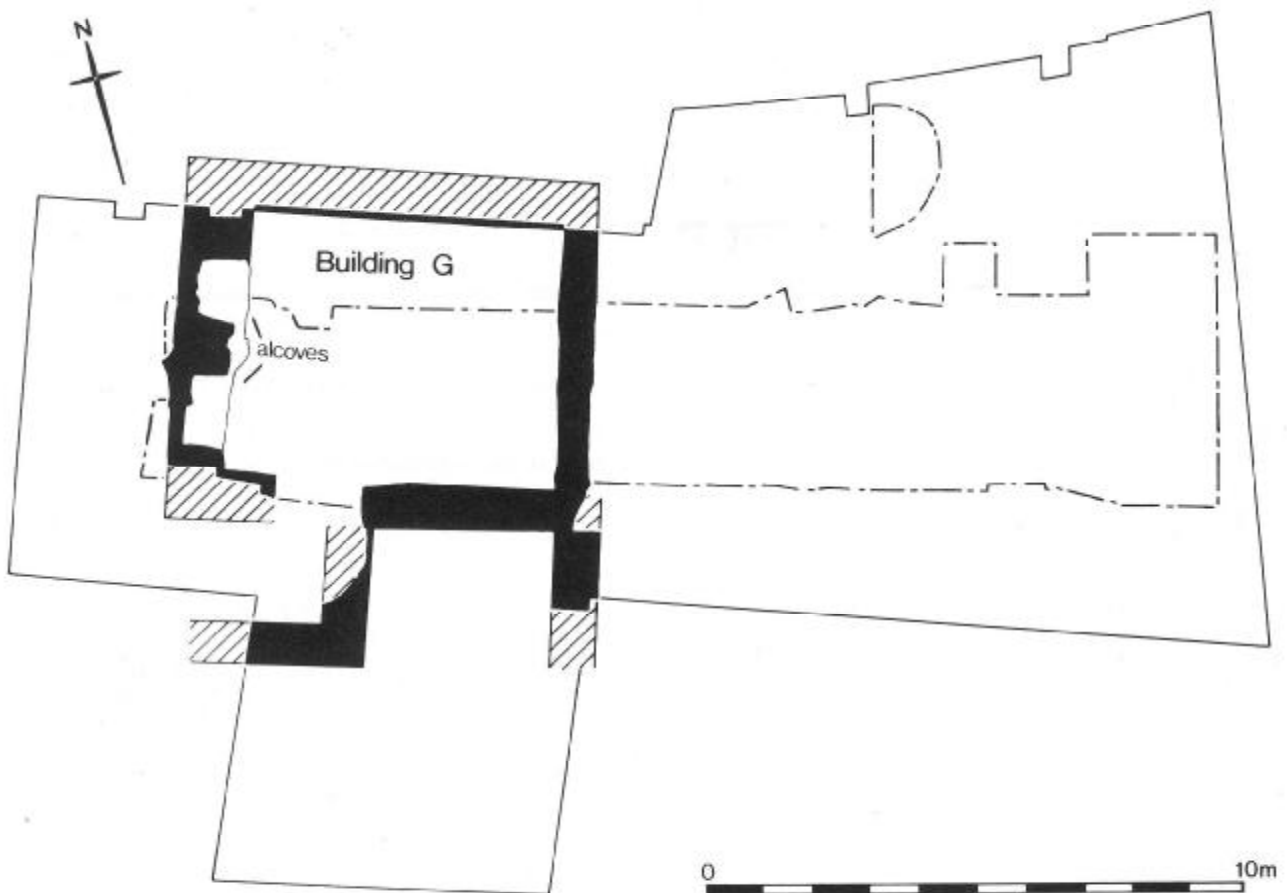


Fig. 3: Period V. Cellared Building G.

(F. Kiely and R. Lee)

limits of the site. The rest of the building was not cellared.

The relationship between Buildings G and F was unclear. The latter exactly overlay the east-west division of the Period IV building which may imply a continuity of property boundary. If so it might suggest that it was laid out in the immediate post-fire period. Building G exhibited no such characteristic; however they may have, at some time, been in contemporary use.

The original surface(s) of the cellared area were truncated to some 0.10m (4in) below the base of the rendering and replaced with a sequence of 'trampled' floors, timber slots for internal partitioning and make-up dumps (Period VI). The pottery from these deposits has a date range A.D 350-400 giving a late 4th century or later use for the structure.

#### Early Medieval-Medieval

The cellared area continued in use for a considerable period of time. The late Roman sequence of surfaces was overlain by 1m (3ft) of horizontal stratigraphy, including a variety of surfaces and structural features acting as partitioning and/or ground floor supports (including in the 14th century masonry pier bases). No stratigraphic horizons could be defined to indicate any truncation but the pottery suggests a break within the sequence between the late Roman and the overlying deposits which were dated to A.D. 1000-1150 (still Period VI). The implication is that the cellar was 'cleared out' in the early medieval period, unfortunately removing any potential later Roman and post-Roman deposits.

*continued on p.430*

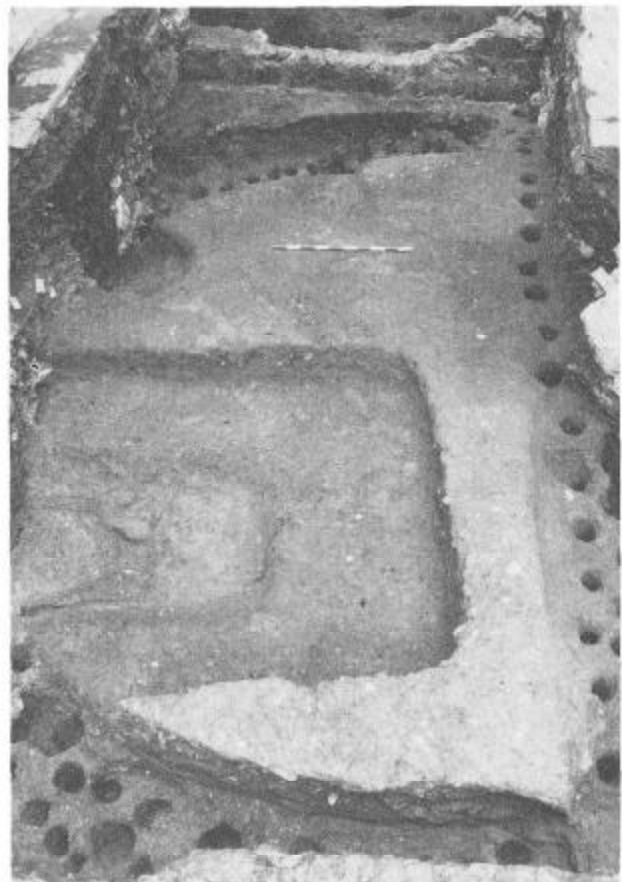


Fig. 4: Building F showing robbed pile foundation. Looking west.  
(Photo: J. Bailey)

## Medieval London Bridge

GEORGE DENNIS

THE SITE OF Fennings Wharf is on the south bank of the Thames, against London Bridge on the downstream side. Since April 1984 excavation during redevelopment has been in progress on the medieval bridge, some 20m (66ft) from the modern one, and the area immediately to the south of it.

The landward abutment of the medieval bridge, surviving as high as the base of the arch vaulting, has been located behind the modern river wall, and partially excavated within the contractors' coffer dams, at depths up to 8m (26ft) below modern ground level.

The abutment seems to have started life as a free-standing pier of Peter of Colechurch's twelfth century bridge, with pointed cutwaters but standing close to the bank. The core, of ragstone and chalk rubble, was contained within a good-quality ashlar

facing resting upon substantial oak sills and protected externally by rows of elm piles. Several later phases of repair and rebuilding were present. It appears that the original pier was engulfed as the bank was extended outwards into the river and that it was converted into a solid buttress by the blocking off and infilling of the landward arch. The chronology of the bridge will rely heavily upon tree-ring dating, a Herculean task undertaken by Ian Tyers who has so far chain-sawed over 600 wood samples on site, mainly waterlogged oak (see front cover).

A number of other features have been excavated, the most interesting being earlier timber waterfront structures under the medieval bridge, and a quite unexpected prehistoric ring ditch containing cremations. The latter has yet to be dated but is thought to have been a barrow.

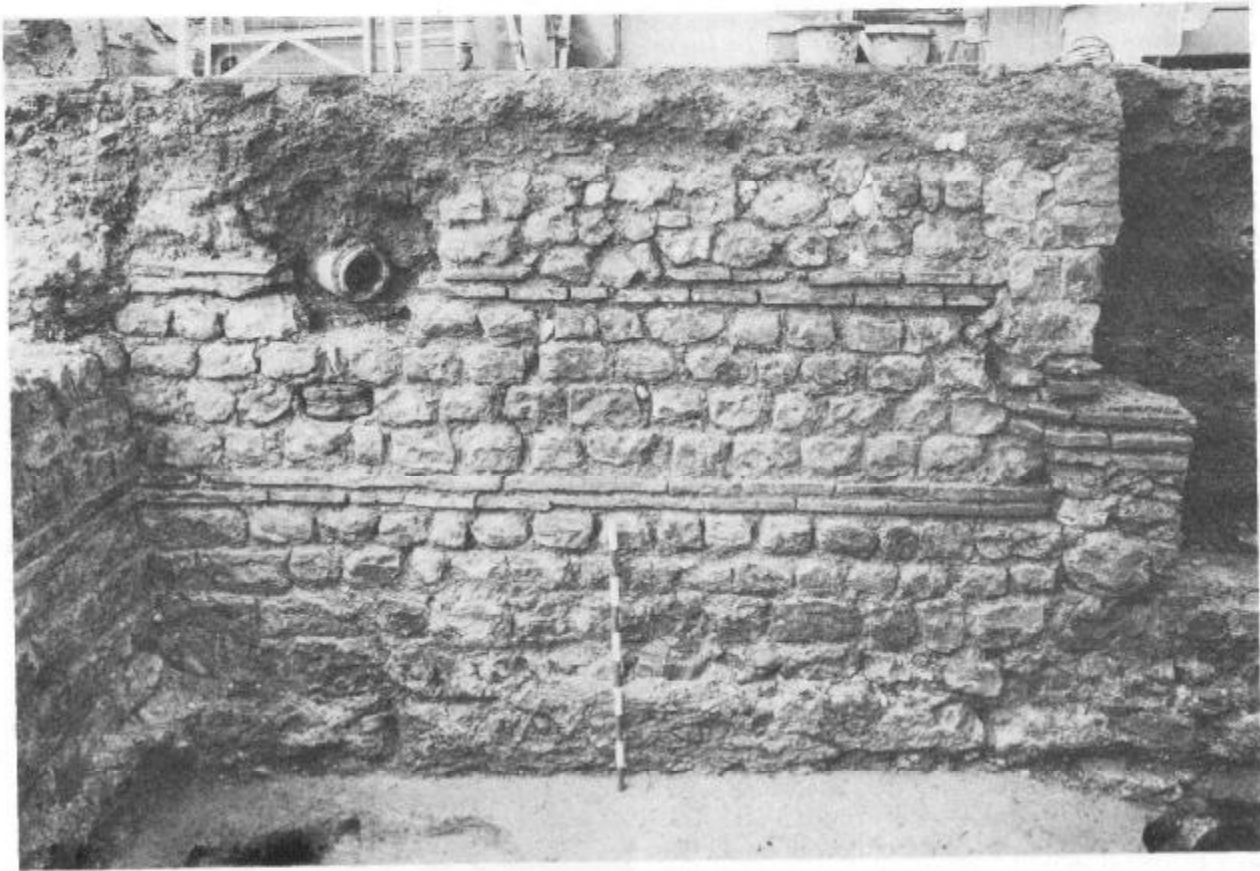


Fig. 5: Building G, late Roman cellar, showing doorway. Looking south-east.  
(Photo: J. Bailey)

*continued from p.429*

The Roman cellar was therefore exerting a considerable influence on the development of the medieval and later properties, laying the foundations, literally, for the modern divisions.

No medieval structural activity survived in the eastern half of the site with the exception of a 14/15th century cess-pit. The lack of pitting throughout the medieval and early post-medieval periods strongly suggests that the eastern part of the site was within the building area. The property boundaries may have already closely resembled the modern ones, as we have already seen to be the case in the western area, which may account for the poor survival of medieval walls.

#### **Post-Medieval and Modern**

The cellared area continued in use until the Great

Fire when it was backfilled (Period VII). Even after that event the Roman cellar (Building G) influenced the property boundaries; to the north its wall provided, with 0.3m (1ft) of concrete, the southern foundation of 27 Lime Street (Period VIII).

#### **Conclusions**

The excavation of this site provided an important structural sequence, although it was clear that the area was not purely structural in character. The use of the site as an open area may prove to be at least as significant as the structural activities. The functions of the structures was often unclear although a dramatic change appears to have occurred in the late Roman period with the introduction of the large masonry buildings F and G which replaced a number of smaller properties. The former may have formed part of a 'public building' project although further topographic and functional implications are best left to the integration of the surrounding sites.