

MUSEUM OF LONDON



Archaeology Matters
Southwark Special, Summer 2005

Archaeology in Southwark

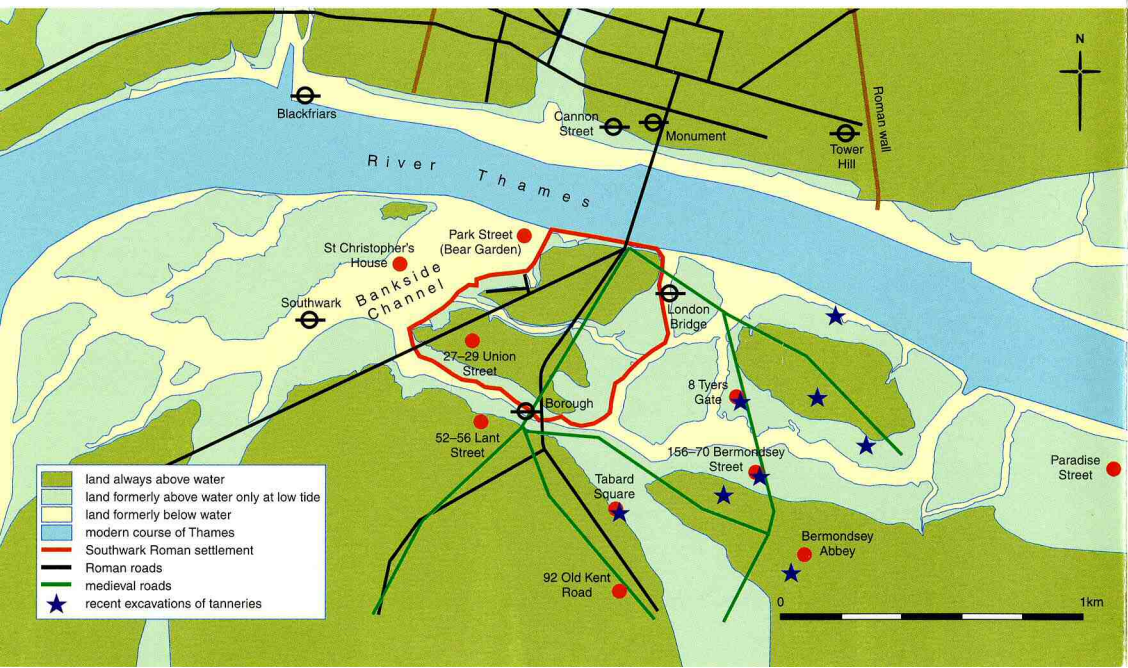
Southwark's archaeological heritage is one of the richest in London. New discoveries are constantly being made, for example, at Bermondsey Square where the medieval Abbey is currently being investigated prior to redevelopment. Part of the cloister and the south transept of the monks' church have been exposed, along with other buildings within the complex. Meanwhile, at Paradise Street in Rotherhithe further evidence has come to light of late medieval occupation there, and of the 17th-century pottery industry located on the nearby site of Edward III's moated manor house.

The earliest human inhabitation of Southwark can be traced back to 8000 BC. The accumulated evidence from numerous digs has enabled us to glimpse beneath the modern conurbation a landscape of rivers and islands, and is rapidly changing our perception of prehistoric occupation. So too for the Roman period. The discovery at 92 Old Kent Road of the roadside ditch for Watling Street and of a robbed-out masonry funerary structure, with a

cremation buried in a pit, is only the latest in a series of discoveries that have revised our view of the extent and purpose of Londinium south of the Thames.

Making this information available both to local people and to a wider public is essential. Several reports and popular publications have appeared recently (see back cover), and the latest discoveries are posted on the Council's website. An education project aimed at Key Stage II pupils, enables primary schoolchildren from Southwark to get involved in the archaeology of the borough where they live. With regeneration continuing apace, protecting the archaeological heritage rests with the Council through the implementation of its Development Plan and archaeology policies. The new Southwark Plan is currently going through public enquiry, but will hopefully be adopted later this year. The archaeology policy is already available online at www.southwark.gov.uk/Uploads/File_4634.pdf

Sarah Gibson
Southwark Council, Regeneration Department



St Christopher's House

Our knowledge of prehistoric Southwark has been transformed by the discovery of two timber platforms, one of middle Bronze Age (1400–1000 BC), the other of early Iron Age date (700–400 BC), immediately behind Tate Modern. Part of a Bronze Age brushwood trackway was also found. The later platform measured over 5m by 10m and had been constructed from alder logs bedded on twigs and branches. A top layer of moss, twigs and reeds made a level, non-slip surface.

St Christopher's House lies some 500m west of the Roman and later conurbation on the approach to London Bridge, and a similar distance east of a sandy island at the Blackfriars Bridge approach that was cultivated in prehistory but not in Roman times. The wetland between these two areas of higher ground, the 'Bankside Channel', extended as far as Waterloo. The site, almost 200m across, spanned nearly the full width of the 'Channel' and produced many surprises.

Right at the bottom of the sequence were found truncated trees and soil layers. In the Mesolithic and Neolithic there must have been dry land here, with just a narrow stream skirting the island to the west. Laminated clay in the deepest part of the site showed that this dry ground lay at the edge of a lake. The Bronze Age platforms belonged to a later phase, when tidal inlets had cut their way into the former land surface. Unlike timber structures recorded in east London, the platforms lay right at the water's edge, rather than on the marshland now fringing the island to the west. By early Roman times, the area had dried out and was used for coppicing, until it was devastated by flash flooding. Ground was washed away and a landslip tore the now-buried platform into segments, which collapsed into the void.

Jane Corcoran
Museum of London Archaeology Service



Lant Street Roman Burials

Five years ago, *The Archaeology of Greater London* (Museum of London, 2000) could report fewer than a hundred Roman cremations or inhumations from south of the Thames, compared with well over a thousand from the north. Now, thanks to the discovery of several important cemeteries, the number of known Roman burials in Southwark has quadrupled, to nearly four hundred.

During the most recent excavations, in November and December 2004 at 52–56 Lant Street, SE1, approximately 88 inhumations and two cremations were discovered. The majority of the burials were within coffins, the iron nails of which survived. A number of high status burials were found. Most notable of these was an adult female in a chalk-packed coffin buried with two unusual glass vessels: a copper alloy box with bone inlay panels and a key on a silver necklace. Other grave goods found on the site included gold earrings, copper alloy jewellery, jet, coral and glass bead necklaces, hobnails, several complete ceramic vessels and coins.

Several of the inhumations appeared to be in earth-cut graves without a coffin. The most interesting of these was a ditch that contained four individuals, three adults and a child, buried with some care and with ceramic vessel grave goods. A most unusual discovery, and we think unique in Britain, is a cat that was buried in its own grave with an ornate copper alloy and glass necklace.

Preliminary dating of the finds and the presence of several chalk-packed graves suggests the cemetery was in use from the 2nd to 4th centuries. Its position raises important questions about the layout of Roman Southwark. Whereas the other cemeteries lie on approach roads – Watling Street in the south or the road from Lambeth in the west – this is more central, away from roads and near the banks of an east-west watercourse.

Melissa Melikian
AOC Archaeology Group

Photo: AOC Archaeology Group



The Bear Garden



The cruel entertainment of bear- and bull-baiting, which had been banned during the Commonwealth period, was revived soon after the restoration of Charles II. In 1662, one James Davies, 'Master of His Majesty's said Game', paid £2,000 to build a 'theatre, dwelling house with stable, a Barne and other places fitt for Beares, Bulls, Doggs and other conveniences'. Last August, with the refurbishment of a small factory (itself a Listed Building) in Park Street, Southwark, the opportunity came to confirm the position of Davies's Bear Garden, the last of several such arenas to have stood on Bankside.

Parts of both the north and south inner walls of the arena, each around 5m long, were discovered. Constructed of brick, they were just 48cm wide and 38cm high, surmounted by a row of tiles to support a timber gallery. The distance separating these walls, some 19m, gives an approximate diameter for the arena.

Gallery included, the Bear Garden probably measured around 27m across overall, but the outer walls have not yet been located. The arena surface comprised black silt with gravel and pebbles, below a layer of ash and clinker containing numerous clay tobacco pipes of the period 1660–80. One of the most evocative discoveries was the mandible of an adult bear, probably a brown bear transported from the forests of Germany or eastern Europe.

The Bear Garden had many notable visitors, including Pepys, who watched a fencing bout there in 1667. Just as one of the fighters was getting the upper hand, the supporters waded in, 'knocking down and cutting many of each side'. Pepys found it 'pleasant to see' but a little scary. The arena was pulled down in 1682, and a glassworks was later built on the site.

Evaluation by MoLAS for CgMS Consulting. Information from the supervisor, David Saxby.

Glass mosaic puzzle

An extraordinary assemblage of 1,267 glass tesserae was found during a dig in 2003 at 27–29 Union Street (generously funded by Mr Stephen Litchfield). With the possible exception of a mosaic found in Leadenhall Street in 1803, which includes many green and blue glass tesserae in the figure of the god Bacchus riding a tiger, this is by far the largest number from a single site in London. Indeed, though glass appears in floor, wall or ceiling mosaics throughout the Roman empire, there are only a handful of examples from Britain – invariably in work of outstanding quality. In London, interestingly, far more loose glass tesserae have been found south than north of the Thames, though fewer sites have been excavated.

The 1st to 3rd-century Roman sequence at Union Street included the south-west corner of a masonry building, pits, ditches, a box-lined well and a grave. The tesserae were mostly translucent dark or light blue, with smaller numbers of opaque green, turquoise or other colours. Each tessera typically measures about

10mm and is irregular in shape. Two-thirds came from a gravel or mortar floor, the remainder were found scattered throughout a number of later Roman deposits. Pre-Construct Archaeology also found large numbers of tesserae when digging the nearly adjacent site of 33 Union Street in 2003.

The absence of any bonded examples, or of traces of mortar backing, suggests that these tesserae were never used. If so, they probably represent manufacturing debris from a mosaicist's workshop rather than waste glass collected for recycling – for use in enamelling, for example, or bead or jewellery manufacture. Other significant finds from the dig include chippings from stone tesserae and a few imported marble veneers. This strengthens the suggestion that a workshop specialising in luxury building-materials once existed on, or close to the site.

Ian Blair and Angela Wardle
MoLAS/MoLSS



Bermondsey tanneries



The magnificent, recently-restored 1833 Leather Market on Weston Street reminds us that much of Southwark between Bermondsey Abbey and the Thames was once given over to the tanning and dressing of leather. This industry is particularly obnoxious, the hides themselves and the time-consuming processes of soaking them in liquors made of urine and dog dung contributing equally to the unpleasant stink.

In 1392 the butchers of the City of London were ordered to take hides and offal to Bermondsey for disposal. This was sensible, as here was marginal land within easy reach, with an abundant water supply – a resource essential for tanning. In 1703 Queen Anne granted a charter to the leather workers of Bermondsey. Horwood's map, around 1800, shows a densely packed network of tanning yards and carriers' workshops, with glue works between Long Lane and Bermondsey Street. The industry remained important to the end of the 19th century.

Recent archaeology has confirmed and amplified these historical records (see map). Numerous sites have been dug along Bermondsey Street: from 156–170 at the southern end to 8 Tyers Gate about half way along; also along the streets to the west, where a knuckle-bone floor has been discovered. A wide range of pits, tanks and vats (see picture) illustrate the various processes of soaking, liming, tanning, dressing and dyeing skins. Offcuts and finished articles reveal the end-products.

Evidence for waste-recycling has also been widespread. Cattle horns were often used to line pits or drains, and the Tabard Square site has produced an early 17th-century path surface or floor made of horse and cattle long bones. Both here and at 8 Tyers Gate have been found fragments of decorative floor mosaics made from sheep metapodials. All in all, the archaeological material is of very high quality and, mercifully, no longer smells too bad.

Frank Meddens
Pre-Construct Archaeology

ARCHAEOLOGY OF THE BLITZ

We are commemorating the 60th anniversary of the end of the Second World War in dramatic fashion: by digging up a bomb site in East London. This poignant attempt to rediscover a street destroyed and never rebuilt after an air raid will be accompanied by a wide range of activities involving schools and community groups.

The Shoreditch Park Dig

Daily, Monday 4 – Sunday 24 July

Site tours at 1pm every day; no booking required.

For further information about the project and how to get involved email shoreditchpark@museumoflondon.org.uk or telephone 0207 814 5733

Lunchtime talks (1.10pm, 50 minutes):

Monday 18 July – Discover the story behind the Shoreditch Park Dig

Wednesday 20 July – Gustav Milne explains how the Blitz has influenced London's archaeology

TIME TEAM 'BIG ROMAN DIG' WEEK

We are contributing to Channel 4 Time Team's 'Big Roman Dig' project with two big events of our own.

Roman make-up

Sunday 3 July, 1.30pm and 3pm

Cosmetics expert, Sally Pointer, will be demonstrating some ancient beauty treatments, using reproductions of the unique Roman face cream that was found in London two years ago.

Working Water

Demonstrations: Monday – Friday 4–8 July, 12noon & 12.30pm;

Saturday 9 July, 12noon, 1.30pm & 3.30pm

Presentation and film: Saturday 9 July, 12.30pm & 2.30pm

Take your turn on our reconstruction of a massive Roman water lifting machine that was discovered, perfectly preserved, at the foot of a deep well in the heart of the City. On 9 July meet Ian Blair, the archaeologist who excavated it.

Excavations at Winchester Palace: Roman

Brian Yule

Definitive report on one of London's most important sites: bath-house, wall-plaster (on show in the Roman Gallery) and monumental military inscription. MoLAS Monograph Series 23, £16.95 (to be published July 2005)

Material culture in London in an age of transition

Geoff Egan

Tudor and Stuart period finds c 1450 – c 1700 from excavations at riverside sites in Southwark.

MoLAS Monograph Series 19, £17.95 (to be published July 2005)

Excavations at Hunt's House, Guy's Hospital, London Borough of Southwark

Robin Taylor-Wilson

PCA Monograph 1, 2002, £7.00

Old London Bridge lost and found

Bruce Watson

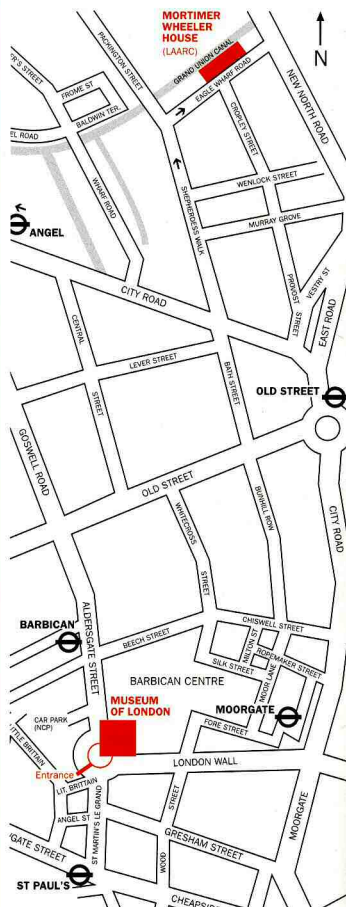
MoLAS, 2004, £7.99

Toys, trifles and trinkets

Hazel Forsyth with Geoff Egan

Lavish publication of the Museum's collection of 1800 pewter toys and miniatures, probably the largest and most important of its kind in the world. Unicorn Press, 2005, £45.00

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: The Peckham Community Dig, 2004, part of Southwark Council's Archaeology and Education project. Photo: Pre-Construct Archaeology