

# SWA81

Courtesy of LAARC - 1998

SWA81

Swan Lane Car Park, 95–103 Upper Thames Street, EC4  
G Egan

NGR: TQ 32720 80685

SMR: 043802–17

Excavation in the basement of the multi-storey car park at Swan Lane was made possible by a grant from the developers, Edger Investments, and through the cooperation of National Car Parks Ltd.

Some worn timber was found *in situ* at the edge of the River Thames in the Saxon period, immediately to the S of a consolidated surface of gravel and Roman building rubble. These features were overlaid by an eroded late Saxon clay bank which foreshore material had accumulated.

To the S, 12th-13th c dumping reclaimed at least 18m of land from the river, probably in more than one operation, but any revetting structures with the exception of a single cruciform timber back brace, had been removed. The first activity on the newly-made land was represented by a highly complicated series of at least 35 hearths, each constructed with a burning surface of mortar laid over vertically set roof tile fragments, surrounded by a key-hole shaped kerb of ragstone and horizontal roof tile fragments. These hearths included a vertical series of six superimposed burning areas (from which samples were taken for archaeological dating by AML, but without clear result due to slumping), and up to five horizontal rows, though contemporaneity is difficult to demonstrate. The nature of this riverside industrial activity may be clarified by the analysis of samples recovered during excavation; these include some montmorillonite (fuller's earth) identified by the Mineralogy Department of the National History Museum. The hearths were truncated at the N by an early 13th c undercroft, the stone-built entrance of which survived in detail, with the imprints from removed steps that would have led up towards medieval Thames Street to the N. After most of the usable building stone had been removed, the undercroft area had been backfilled with a series of dumps, including some substantial flints and a deposit of fine sandy material, perhaps from stoneworking. To the S the hearths were overlaid by several larger medieval stone, and post-medieval brick foundations. The implied N-S property boundaries seem to have shifted towards the end of the period represented in at least one area. Unusually for this part of London, no evidence of the Great Fire of 1666 was excavated. The latest feature uncovered was a brick-lined cistern, probably from the 18th or 19th c buildings on the site.

A 7-month watching brief on the 4000 sq m site of the former Swan Lane car park took place during the early stages of redevelopment. It was made possible by grants from the City of London Archaeological Trust and the Museum of London Trust Funds, and with the cooperation of the contractor, Sir Robert McAlpine and Sons Ltd. The assistance and

invaluable expertise of members of the Society of Thames Mudlarks and Antiquarians is gratefully acknowledged.

At the N end of the site a well-constructed ? late 2nd c Roman quay, built of large beams, was found to have been partially dismantled. It was succeeded by structures with a different technique of construction - two post and plank revetments, and at least two other riverside structures which made secondary use of very large beams, but employed less sophisticated jointing than that in the earliest revetment. The alignments of these features apparently changed near the middle of the site, at a point where a N-S wooden drain was found. Deposits associated with these structures produced late Roman pottery.

Significant Roman finds from the site include leaden sealings, complete iron shears, fragments of about 100 leather shoes and sandals, and a large late 2nd c - early 3rd c samian group.

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