The Origin of Londinium

Bridge-building was a particular accomplishment of Roman military engineers, and the main roads that were soon to be centred on the first London Bridge were almost certainly laid out by the surveyors of the Roman army primarily for a military purpose—the subjugation and control of the new province. It was the army therefore that provided the conditions from which London was born. Can we go further, and suggest that Londinium itself was a creation of the Roman army? A centre of land communications that could also be reached by large sea-going ships, taking advantage of the tides that probably then just reached the bridge, would have been an obvious site for a major supply base. We have learnt that many—perhaps most—towns of Roman Britain originated as military sites, and it would be surprising if the most important strategic centre of all did not fall into this category. Some support is given to the hypothesis of a military origin for London by the existence from the beginning of a planned street layout with an east-west street remarkably like the via principalis of a fort underlying the western end of Fenchurch Street, particularly now that we know there were open gravelled areas immediately to the north of this in the earliest phase of regular occupation. 1

Nevertheless, no military equipment has been found associated with the earliest occupation of the central nucleus of Londinium on Cornhill, and the one undoubted early military structure lay away to the east on a completely different alignment. This was a V-shaped ditch found near Aldgate in 1972. It contained a sword-grip in its till, and appears to have been part of the northern defences of a short-lived fort, 2 which may have ceased to exist before the construction of London Bridge gave birth to Londinium.

Precisely when this occurred it has so far been impossible to determine. Archaeology cannot help very much; pottery and coins from early contexts may suggest a Claudian date, but give no indication when in the first ten years or so after the invasion of AD 43 they are likely to have been deposited. 3 History is equally inconclusive. Cassius Dio, writing more than 150 years after the event, informs us that the initial pursuit of the enemy took place at a difficult ford, near where the river empties into the ocean and at flood-tide forms a lake—presumably not far from the site of London. Since they were unfamiliar with the ford they were obliged to swim, but some others got over by a bridge a little way upstream. 4 It seems likely that this was a temporary military bridge hastily thrown across the river by an army that had come prepared to deal with this obstacle. If so, it is likely to have been a floating bridge, and it was not necessarily on the same site as the later permanent bridge, which was presumably a piled structure. Recent work in Southwark suggests that the south bank opposite the Roman city was by no means an obvious place to select as a bridgehead. It is true that sandy gravels here rose a few feet above the less stable silts on either side, but they were intersected by creeks and river-channels, forming a series of islets which themselves had to be linked by small bridges. Moreover, no evidence of any occupation beside the approach roads of the southern bridgehead has been found that is likely to be earlier than about AD 50. 5 This raises the question whether the Roman London Bridge and Londinium itself originated during the earlier phase of the conquest or several years later.

It is inconceivable that a regular crossing-place of the Thames was not maintained by the Romans from the beginning; indeed, the continued use of the Richborough base implies also a regular use by the military of the land route through Kent, probably mainly for personnel travelling by the short sea passage and for the imperial post. It is therefore reasonable to assume that Watling Street south of the river was one of the first permanent roads to be constructed. The old argument based on the alignment of Watling Street north and south of the river on a putative crossing at Westminster is therefore revived, and is considerably strengthened by the discovery in Southwark of a pre-Flavian roadway aligned as if to link the London Bridge crossing with that of Westminster. 6 The existence of a Roman crossing-place, perhaps a ford, between Lambeth and Westminster, must therefore now be considered probable. Was this the first regular crossing-place, which was supplanted by a permanent bridge in Southwark only after several years had elapsed? If so, it can hardly have remained unprotected, and a garrisoned staging-post at least would be expected in Westminster. We have as yet no evidence of this, though negative evidence means little in the City of Westminster, where archaeology has until recently been sadly neglected. The other question arising from this hypothesis is why Westminster did not develop into the Roman city. Given the normal human resistance to

1 Cassius Dio, History, Loeb edn. (1914), vii. 419.
2 London Excavations 1970-72 (1975), 1-34. 7
unnecessary change, why was the permanent bridge not built in Lambeth, and why did Westminster not become the centre of the Roman road system? Answers can probably be found to this question in the relative instability of the Lambeth and Westminster banks, and in the need to develop a port further downstream at the tidal limit.

In our present state of knowledge we must therefore reserve judgement concerning the exact date of the building of the first London Bridge and the beginning of London. Although events at the south end of the bridge may be expected to mirror those at the north end, we clearly need much more dating and other evidence of the first phases of Londinium from the City itself. Moreover, it is necessary to be wary of all attempts at precision from purely archaeological dating; it is always subject to revision.

**Londinium before AD 60**

Fortunately we have in the City of London one early archaeological horizon that does seem to be given a fixed date by history. East of the stream of Walbrook, which bisects the later Roman city, is a fairly concentrated area south of Cornhill in which a layer of burnt daub datable to the mid-first century is found. It also occurs in scattered areas to the west of the Walbrook, especially in the neighbourhood of the main Roman roadway to the west. There is little doubt that this was produced by the first great fire of London—a deliberate act of arson perpetrated in AD 60 by the rebel Icenii and Trinovantes under the leadership of Queen Boudica. It has been shown that immediately east of Gracechurch Street and north of Fenchurch Street there were two distinct phases of settled occupation before the destruction. The first included the major east—west gravelled road underlining Fenchurch Street, to which reference has already been made: a minor north—south gravelled road: a gravelled area in the west part of the site: traces of two wooden buildings and a partition wall. The second phase involved major replanning, although the east—west road continued as a constant feature—as it apparently did throughout the Roman period.

New and more massive wooden buildings were constructed across the line of the former north—south roadway, and a new east—west roadway was laid 28.5 m. (96 pedes, or 4½ actus) to the north of the main east—west road and parallel with it. The west part of the site bordering on Gracechurch Street continued to be a gravelled area as before. The buildings of this phase do not support the idea that the central part of pre-Boudican London was still a military base, although the east-west road continued as a constant feature throughout the Roman period. If its main purpose was the economic exploitation of the west side of the city, it was insufficiently developed.

**The Roman Road System in and around London**

The only historical evidence we have of the nature of pre-Boudican London is a brief and ambiguous phrase from Tacitus, whose father-in-law, Agricola, was serving in Britain at the time. He tells us that the governor, Suetonius Paulinus, learning of the revolt while campaigning in North Wales, pressed on with his cavalry to Londinium—"a place not indeed distinguished by the title of colonia—sed optima negotiatorum et commercium maxime celebre." The last phrase is often translated 'crowded with merchants and filled with merchandise', evoking an image of retail trading that may be misleading. Tacitus significantly does not use the commoner word mercator, but negotiator, which primarily means a banker or wholesale dealer. In London the negotiators were probably mainly concerned with the financing of import and export business on a large scale. Certainly goods from overseas, such as fine pottery from southern Gaul, were already coming into the port of Londinium, and were reaching inland towns such as Verulamium, no doubt by road traffic along Watling Street.

The need for such a port may well have been the reason for the creation of Londinium and the centring of the road system upon it, subsequent to the building of the first London Bridge. This can now be located with fair confidence at the foot of Fish Street Hill, where a rectangular timber pier found in 1981 may be part of an early bridge. Adjacent to the north side of this, and of later construction, was the western end of a substantial wooden quay, which had been built about AD 90 on the site of an earlier quay or landing-stage, which had been erected in the open river, well to the south of its original north bank (marked by a double row of piles) but 100 m. north of the present river-side. Contemporary stone buildings, believed to be warehouses, apparently with an open frontage, stood north of the late first-century quayside. A long stretch of a similar quay of the later first century, with associated buildings, was found further west, west of King William Street, indicating that the port facilities of Londinium extended on both sides of the bridge.

The massive engineering work required for the port and bridge, together with the planned layout of the centre, indicate that Londinium was the deliberate creation of the Roman administration, making full use of the skills of the army. If its main purpose was the economic exploitation of the new province, this was very much the concern of the procurator, who was probably based at Londinium from its beginning. We know that Decianus Catus, holder of this office in AD 60, was not at the capital, Camulodunum, at the time of Boudica's revolt, since he sent two hundred soldiers there from elsewhere; and was later able to escape by ship. His immediate successor, C. Julius Classicianus, died in office in Londinium—as we know from the discovery of fragments of his tombstone, reused as building material in a bastion of the clay walls had been decorated and redecorated with painted wall-plaster no fewer than four times. This suggests a life-span of at least five years, and ten would perhaps be a more likely estimate. The earlier phase, which might be military, is itself likely to have lasted for some time, so that a date not later than about AD 50 for the origin of London seems likely.
the city wall near Tower Hill. The continued presence of this branch of the provincial administration, probably at a somewhat later date, is indicated by a wooden writing-tablet from the Walbrook, with a branded stamp showing that it was an official issue to the procurator's staff.

The early timber-framed and clay-walled buildings on the east side of Gracechurch Street did not extend to its west side, where there is clear evidence of a very early building of quite a different character, with ragstone walls and tile courses. Unfortunately there is no dating evidence for it, but it is stratigraphically earlier than a great ragstone building which succeeds the pre-Boudican buildings east of Gracechurch Street, and it no longer existed when this was built in the earlier Flavian period. Unless, therefore, it had a very brief life indeed, it may well be pre-Boudican. The discovery of a massive ragstone base surmounted by a squared ragstone block underlying Boudican fire debris east of Gracechurch Street clearly indicates that the Kentish quarries were already in operation before AD 60. It might be expected, however, that this building material would then have been the near monopoly of officialdom. The early building of stone and tiles is therefore likely to have been for some public purpose, and the hand of the procurator may be suspected.

Post-Boudican London

There is no doubt about the public character of the great building that succeeded both the burnt timber buildings east of Gracechurch Street and the stone building to the west of it. This consisted of four ranges of rooms about a central courtyard, oblong in shape, with ragstone walls on a mortared flint foundation. The external north, east, and west walls were buttressed at the base as if to support applied columns. A recently revised plan gives a north-south length of 104.4 m. (343 ft.) and an east-west width of 52.7 m. (172 ft.). The northern range is wider than the others, but is shorter than the overall width. A small contemporary building to the west of it, with walls constructed of roof-tiles, is almost certainly a temple. The identification of the large ragstone block underlying Boudican fire debris east of Gracechurch Street is therefore likely to have been for some public purpose, and the hand of the procurator may be suspected.

Londinium as the Capital

In the Flavian period, Londinium was not only rapidly expanding but also probably approaching its zenith of prosperity. It was also, it seems, being transformed into the capital of the province. In the last decade or so of the first century a great complex of public buildings was constructed on terraces of the steep slope rising from the Thames just east of the mouth of the Walbrook, a site more than 112 m. (350 ft.) wide, of which the western portion is now occupied by Cannon Street Station. It was curiously irregular in shape, probably because of the difficulty of the terrain, and its appearance was enhanced by the construction of a number of public buildings on terraces. The rooms included great reception halls and suites of smaller rooms that may have been offices or staff quarters.

The rooms included great reception halls and suites of smaller rooms that may have been offices or staff quarters. As at Verulamium and Camulodunum, there seems to have been a considerable delay before re-building after the Boudican destruction. At Verulamium, there was considerable coin and pottery evidence to suggest a lapse of about fifteen years before re-building in Insula XIV, and the forum could be dated epigraphically to AD 79. A similar date in the earlier Flavian period might be expected for the London structure. Marsden has argued for a date about ten years later, on the grounds that the adjacent north-south roadway to the east is likely to be contemporary with the new building, and this over a deposit of rubbish which seems to have accumulated until about AD 85-90. Philp, however, has pointed out that these deposits did not extend to the western part of the site below the new building, and it is more credible that the construction of a minor roadway was delayed than that this whole site in the heart of Londinium was abandoned for a quarter of a century, at a time when all other evidence points to rapid growth.

There are also problems arising from the identification of this structure as a basilica and forum, for it is tiny compared with all others in Britain. The basilica, in particular, supposed the centre of local government in what was rapidly becoming the largest and most important city in the province, is only 44.5 m. (146 ft.) long, and is not even extended to occupy the entire north side of the structure. This may be contrasted with Verulamium, about 122 m. (400 ft.) wide. Cirencester, 100 m. (328 ft.); Silchester, 85 m. (280 ft.); Wroxeter, 74 m. (245 ft.); and even Caerwent, 56 m. (182 ft.). If the London building is in fact a basilica and forum, it should therefore be of an earlier date, before Verulamium set the proper standard in AD 79. It seems unlikely that a governor of the 80s, such as Agricola, who was endeavouring to persuade local authorities to invest in adequate fora as a measure of Romanization, could have permitted such a bad example to be set by London.
date. The governor would certainly have had a headquarters in the capital, and the Cannon Street building is as yet the only possibility.

Other major public buildings were being constructed about this time; a public bath-house on the slope above Upper Thames Street and, at last, a great basilica that was worthy of Londinium. This was an exceptionally large aisled building of ragstone and brick, with an eastern apse which marks the position of the tribune. On the northern side was a double row of square rooms, presumably offices. It lay to the north of the supposed earlier basilica, and in marked contrast with it was more than 160 m. (500 ft.) long, extending between Whittington Avenue in the east and St Michael's Alley in the west. It formed the north sector of a square forum occupying a new insula about 170 m. (560 ft.) square, which was laid out around the earlier structure, the main east–west road remaining its southern limit as before. The earlier structure probably continued in use while the new building was laid out around it, but was eventually demolished, and a levelling operation took place over the whole site by dumping great quantities of brick-earth and other material over the demolished walls. There can be no doubt that the status of Londinium as a city had now been defined, and that it had received its charter, almost certainly as a colonia. The date at which this occurred is best indicated by the date of the basilica, the seat of local government, for which good evidence was found by G. C. Dunning beneath the western part of the building in 1929. Its floor overlay brick-earth from the foundation trenches of the walls and rubbish including pottery, all of the Flavian period. This admittedly only gives us a terminus post quem, as is usual with archaeological evidence, but the cumulative evidence of the absence of second-century material antedating this and other parts of the new basilica/forum complex, except perhaps in the south-western area, remains convincing. Similar evidence in fact comes from beneath both of the new north–south flanking roads east and west of the forum, and from the make-up over the demolished earlier building in the south-eastern part of the forum. Only from one site, in the southern range of forum buildings west of Gracechurch Street, is there evidence of second-century construction that may be Hadrianic. Marsden has closely re-examined the entire dating evidence and concludes that the great second forum and basilica complex as a whole was built "within a few years either side of AD 100." There seems little doubt that the new insula was laid out, the basilica begun and most of the site levelled for the new forum by about AD 100. Moreover, the small first forum is unlikely to have been demolished until sufficient of the east and west ranges of the second forum had been completed to take its place. The south range, however, may have been occupied by an open colonnade or arcade resting on piers until a more enclosed structure was built much later in the second century.

To the early second century rather than the end of it can be attributed the construction of a fort with ragstone walls, covering an area of nearly twelve acres in a hitherto undeveloped district to the north-west of the city, on the west side of the Walbrook. It was to have a lasting effect upon the shape of London, and its via praetoria and via principali were to survive in the medieval street-plan; while its north gateway survived as Cripplegate—the only early medieval city gate that did not lead to a major road, since it owed its origin not to the need for access to a Roman road, but merely to the convention that a Roman fort had a gate in each of its four sides. Part of its west gate has been preserved as excavated beneath the modern roadway of London Wall, and its south-west corner with corner turret can be seen west of Noble Street, where it was excavated beneath the shallow basements of buildings destroyed by bombing.

There is little doubt that, in spite of its conventional defensive adjuncts of ditch and turrets, the prime purpose of the fort was as a barracks rather than a stronghold for the defence of London. The provision of this accommodation for troops seems to mark the achievement of status as the provincial capital almost as certainly as the construction of the great basilica marks self-governing status as a major city—although both were doubtless achieved before these were actually built. Auxiliary troops were required in the capital for guard, escort, and ceremonial duties, and for work as grooms and orderlies in the governor's household. There were also legionaries who were seconded for special duties to the headquarters' staff, though these are perhaps more likely to have been accommodated in the riverside palace. One of these, of a later date, was a legionario of the Second Legio Augustus, named Celsus, who was seconded as a speculator, a staff officer concerned with the execution of justice. He died in London, where his tombstone was set up by three of his comrades, who were also speculatores.

There is a strong indication that the provincial government was closely involved with the impressive developments that took place in Londinium between about AD 90 and 130. On the sites of the great basilica, the riverside palace, the public baths in Upper Thames Street, and the Cripplegate fort, tiles stamped 'P BR LON', or some variant of this, have been found. Apart from a few sporadic finds, and a small concentration north of St Paul's, where some may have been made, they are in fact limited to these areas, with the addition of another significant concentration west of the baths in the south-western part of the city, where, as will be seen, there are indications of massive public works at a somewhat later date. A variant 'P PR BR' strongly suggests that the second P stands for provincia, rather than a plural form with the first P such as procuratores or portitores (port officials) as has sometimes been proposed. The first P might well in fact stand for procurator, since a state brick-works in London is likely to have been under the control of the procurator's civilian branch of the administration. What is quite clear is that it was the provincial government, and not any local authority, that took steps to provide tiles and no doubt other necessary materials for this great programme of public building, which
The Growth and Decline of Londinium

The late first and early second centuries were clearly also a period of growth for the city—especially to the west of the Walbrook and to the south-east of the earlier planned central district on Cornhill. Roman buildings of this period occur, for example, beneath All Hallows Barking near the south-eastern corner of the city, where they are aligned on Great Tower Street, strongly suggesting that this was a Roman roadway to the riverside, along which ribbon development took place. Similarly, near the western extremity, there was a major development of timber-framed clay-walled buildings, perhaps used for industrial purposes, immediately east of Christ Church, Newgate Street, and north of the main Roman road to the west. On these sites and many others, though not necessarily all, the expansion before AD 125–50 is marked by the debris and burnt pottery of the second great fire of Londinium, which occurred about that date, and in default of any historical suggestion of arson at this period is usually regarded as accidental.55 The fire did not extend to the Cripplegate fort, which was presumably saved either by good fortune or by military discipline, although the possibility that it was built just after the conflagration rather than before it cannot be entirely ruled out.

The development of the waterfront accompanied the growth of the city, and by the early second century the north bank of the Thames was embanked with a timber revetment as far east as the site of the Custom House, more than 420 m. east of the presumed position of the bridge. About AD 140 it was replaced on this site by a more elaborate timber quay, made of a series of joined box-like structures, and this extended some 6 m. south of the earlier waterfront.56 A massive wooden waterfront of similar construction, dating from the early third century, has also been found nearer the east of the presumed position of the bridge, suggesting that it was built just after the conflagration rather than before it could not be entirely ruled out.

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This new building, however, apparently had no successor on the site, but was overlaid by the featureless dark soil which elsewhere in London seems to mark the interval between recognizable Roman occupation and that of the later Saxon or early medieval period. It seems to have been deliberately dumped, and the most convincing explanation is that it represents some sort of agricultural activity. On a single small site it could of course merely indicate the replacement of a building by a garden. Nevertheless, it remains true that later Roman occupation levels have been remarkably elusive on the sites recently investigated in the interior of the western part of the city.

Some confirmation of a change in the nature of the occupation of Londinium in the second half of the second century—and probably in its third quarter—is given by the change of the late Flavian public baths north of Upper Thames Street. These were deliberately demolished about that date, after being greatly extended as recently as the early second century. Again we seem to have the same story: development in late Flavian times, continued expansion under Hadrian, and a break in occupation in Antonine times; for no major public building succeeded the demolition of the baths.

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54 G. C. Dunning, Annu. J. 21 (1945), 14–60. See also Merrifield, 91, for additional sites.
56 R. Hobley and J. Schofield, Annu. J. 17 (1951), 14 f.
Instead, two much smaller and slighter Roman structures were built there at a subsequent but unknown date. Nevertheless, the public baths were not left derelict but were deliberately demolished as if in readiness for a major redevelopment, that either did not take place or mainly affected a much larger area, probably to the west.

It would be premature, while the evidence is still so scanty, to speculate on the reasons for an apparent set-back in the later second century. Historical sources give no clear indication whether this might have been due to political troubles, economic recession, or a visitation of plague, and it may be a long time before archaeological research can produce an explanation. Moreover, we have no confirmatory evidence as yet from the more important eastern half of the city, which may present quite a different picture. It was, after all, only a little later that the port of Londinium was provided with a new and massive quayside.

The City Wall

It is quite clear, also, that the Roman authorities still considered Londinium to be of the greatest importance, since they took impressive measures to safeguard it. For it was about this period, or very little later, that the city was provided with its great wall—a fortification that was to determine the shape of London for more than a thousand years. Moreover, there is no suggestion that it was a defence for a shrunken city, like the late Roman city walls of Gaul. Instead, it enclosed the whole area of Londinium at its greatest expansion, extending from the Tower of London in the east to Blackfriars in the west, and incorporating the earlier Cripplegate fort in the north-west by meeting its north-eastern and south-western corners. The north and west sides of the fort now became part of the city wall, thereby saving a great deal of stone, which had to be brought from the ragstone quarries of Kent, the nearest source of good building-stone.

Even so, an immense quantity of ragstone had to be transported by barge down the Medway and up the Thames. The wreck of a large barge that, from its date, may well have been taking part in this operation, was found at Blackfriars in 1969. On an estimated capacity of 68 m³, it can be calculated that at least 1500 similar barges—loads would have been required to build this landward wall of more than 1 km. It was 2.7 m. thick at ground level, where it was faced externally with a plinth of sandstone (from the same part of Kent), and just over 2.4 m. thick above this. Parts of it have survived in recent times to a height of 4.4 m., and it must have been at least 6 m. high, with a narrower parapet wall above that. Even in the fort area more material had to be added, since the original fort walls were only half the thickness of the new wall, and were therefore reinforced on the north and west sides by an internal thickening to bring them to the standard thickness. In all, at least 86,000 tonnes of ragstone had to be quarried and brought to Londinium. The immensity of the task cannot be judged in terms of transport and unskilled labour alone. The wall was constructed by skilled builders who laid regular courses of squared ragstone blocks to form both faces, before filling the interior between them with rubble concrete, consisting of layers of unworked lumps of ragstone set in lime mortar. This work was carried out in horizontal stages, separated by double or treble levelling courses of flat tiles, each providing a level platform on which the stage above could be securely based. Skilled work was also required at the quarries, where more than a million squared facing blocks had to be shaped. Finally the battlements at the top were covered with coping-stones, carefully shaped with convex upper surfaces—and at least 1,500 of these had to be produced. Other essential building included the construction of four (possibly five) gate-houses where existing roads crossed the line of the wall, and an unknown number of internal turrets containing wooden stairways to the ramparts. There was a V-shaped external ditch 3-5 m. wide, and 1.11-2.3 m. deep, 2.4-5 m. from the wall, and earth, presumably from the ditch and the foundation trench, was finally piled as a bank against the inner face of the wall.

Only digging, earth-moving, and general muscular assistance can have been entrusted to forced labour, and much of the work demanded specialized skills that were probably mainly to be found in the army. This was clearly a task that drew on much more than local resources, and it can only have been undertaken when these were not required elsewhere. Moreover, the uniformity of the whole of the landward wall suggests that it was constructed as a single continuous operation, though one that can hardly have been completed in a few months. Within the period between about AD 190 and 220, indicated for the building by archaeological evidence (see n. 45), the most likely time seems to be between AD 194 and 196, when Claudius Albinus, governor of Britain and usurping emperor, was preparing to make his final (and unsuccessful) bid for power against his rivals. For this, he was compelled to strip Britain of its military strength in order to fight on the Continent, thereby putting the province at risk from barbarian attack. The towns were the bastions of Roman civilization, from which law and order could be restored, and there is evidence that a number of them were fortified with earth ramparts about this time—work that could be carried out by local forced labour with a minimum of supervision. Londinium received special treatment, presumably because it might be required as the principal base for the recovery of the province. The northern defences of Britain were in fact overrun and partly destroyed, so that, for the next fifteen years after the defeat of Albinus, the principal concern of Severus and his sons was the re-establishment of the northern frontier, and it is unlikely that they would have been able to devote building resources to the provision of a wall for Londinium.

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11 P. Marsden, TL.M. 19 (1976), 90-91. An ancient stone building known as Heatmouth tower and described as a crosswall seems to have survived on this site until the 9th cent., however, when it is mentioned in a charter (J. Dyson, ibid., 26). It seems likely that part at least of this was the early Roman terracotta wall north of the baths which can be seen above ground on the west side of Huguen Hill.

12 There is abundant evidence, from deposits surrounding the wall and contemporaneous with it, that the wall was not built earlier than about the last decade of the 2nd cent., and debris deposited by a coin forger in a turret of the wall shows that it had existed in existence for some time when he was working—apparently about AD 220 (J. M. McNeill, Roman London (1966), 139-139).


14 The core-boulders seem to have averaged about 1 m. in length for the embrasures, and 0.6 m. for the merlons (or vice versa). The estimated total is for the wall excluding the two fort walls, which would presumably already have been built and cemented, it is almost certainly an underestimate, since it does not allow for the additional core-boulders required for gate-houses and internal turrets, and the existence of core-boulders with lustral projections suggests that the latter at least were provided with them.

15 S. Price, Britannia, a History of Roman Britain (1967), 210 1.
Outside the Walled City

The only true suburb of Londinium was Southwark, where some occupation is likely to have begun at the southern bridgehead as early as in the City of London itself. As we have seen, archaeologists working there have been unable to find evidence of occupation earlier than about AD 50. There are indications of bronze and iron-working in Flavian times in the neighbourhood of Toppings Wharf, and these are associated with somewhat flimsy houses of timber and unbaked clay, which have been found bordering the two approach roads to the bridge. Such buildings occupied the sites in at least two phases until about the middle of the second century, when they seem to have been abandoned. It was in fact in Southwark that this phase of apparent local desertion, suggesting a more general decline, was first clearly demonstrated in the London area (see n. 40). On only one site, in St Thomas Street, is there evidence of continuous occupation to the end of the second century. About the middle of the third century or a little later, recovery seems to have commenced, and substantial stone-built structures began to appear on both sides of Borough High Street, the northern stretch of which overlies a Roman road. This passes to the west of Borough High Street just south of Union Street, where it changes direction to the south, again crossing the modern street. Another Roman road has been found north of Southwark Cathedral, heading in a south-westerly direction, presumably to the Westminster ford. The alignments of both roads converge on the site of Old London Bridge, on or near which the Roman bridge must have been located.

North of the river major Roman roads left Londinium by four of its gates. The main road to Colchester passed through Aldgate, continuing along the line of Aldgate High Street and presumably Whitechapel High Street. Ermine Street, the main road to the north, passed through Bishopsgate and is perpetuated by the modern street of Bishopsgate. The Silchester road, the main road to the west, passed through Newgate, and, after crossing the Fleet, presumably by a bridge, continued on or near the line of Holborn and Oxford Street, with a fork leading to Verulamium along Edgware Road. An alternative route to the west seems to have passed through Ludgate and along Fleet Street and the Strand to meet the road from the Westminster crossing, probably joining the main Silchester road in Chiswick High Road. It seems likely that there was a minor gate in the neighbourhood of the later Tower Postern, giving access to a road skirting the river along the line of The Highway, Stepney, beside which a late Roman military site, probably a signal-tower, was found in 1973-4. In general, no extra-mural development followed the roads out of Londinium; instead, as was the Roman custom, the roadside beyond the city limits was usually devoted to the dead. There were burials in the neighbourhood of Holborn Viaduct and Holborn, Fleet Street and Bishopsgate, and although Roman buildings have been found in these areas, they are more likely to have been elaborate tombs or memorials than dwelling-places. One underlies St Bride’s Church, and another was in the neighbourhood of St Andrew’s Holborn. It is likely that, in the case of St Bride’s at least, the Roman structure determined the position of the Saxon church, though this does not necessarily imply continuity with any late Roman Christian cult of the blessed dead. The Aldgate road is exceptional in that the main cemetery area lies well to the south of it, in the neighbourhood of Alie Street. There is reason to believe, however, that the original road to Camulodunum lay further south, and that it was moved to Aldgate during the late first-century replanning of Londinium, when the cemetery was presumably already established.

There is little doubt that the adjacent countryside was exploited for food production, but it was probably farmed by residents of Londinium, who returned to the city when the day’s work was done. One must go considerably further afield into the outer boroughs of Greater London to find definite traces of probable farm-houses. At Westminster, however, there are indications of Roman buildings that were clearly residential, although we do not know enough about them to identify their purpose.

Londinium in the Third and Fourth Centuries

Ironically, the completion of the city wall, Londinium’s greatest surviving monument, was soon followed by some diminution of the city’s pre-eminence. The political reorganization under Severus divided Britain into two provinces, with York (Eboracum) the capital of Britannia Inferior while London became the capital only of Britannia Superior. To some extent the seat of power also moved to York as the centre of military activity, and an imperial palace was built there. A century later, under Diocletian, a further division into four small provinces took place, but Londinium, in addition to being the capital of one of these, was probably also the seat of the vicarius, who was the link between the four provincial governors and higher authority. Londinium also housed the British mint until its abolition in 316, and until the very end seems to have been regarded as the financial centre of Britain. Between 316 and 385, when the London mint was briefly re-established by the usurper Magnus Maximus, Londinium had been officially renamed Augusta, a mark of imperial esteem that was perhaps earned by the city’s new function as a strategic base for the restoration of law and order after barbarian incursions. It gave good service in this role on at least two occasions—in 360, when Lupicinus was sent by Julian, and in the greater crisis of 367-8, when Count Theodosius was sent by Valentinian, and subsequently restored the defences of Britain.

This work may well have included the strengthening of London itself by the addition of bastions to the city wall on its more vulnerable east side and by the rebuilding, 1 M. Hummertow has pointed out that the pattern of coin finds in Southwark also suggests an origin for the settlement of about AD 50. (Southwark Excavations 1972-4 (1975), ii, 589-90.)
2 R. Merrifield and H. Shielon, London Archaeologist, 2 (1972-3), 88-9. The precise point on which the roads converged is near the western side of the medieval bridge, but it is likely that the principal road continued on its known alignment beyond the junction and then changed alignment to that of the bridge before reaching it. This would have taken place on the considerable part of the south bank that has since been eroded by the river.
5 H. Shielon and E. Schauf, Collectanea Londinensis, LMS Special Paper No. 2 (1978), 72-3.
6 Hypocaust tiles are said to have been found under the nave of the Abbey Church (RCAM, iii, 148).
7 The Nostra Dipitutae, a list of offices, compiled about AD 455 and subsequently amended, includes an officer in charge of the Treasury at London.
completion, or repair of the riverside wall. It has been shown that at least one, and probably all, of the hollow bastions in the neighbourhood of Cripplegate are of medieval origin. There is, however, a strong probability that the solid bastions on the eastern side of the city are late Roman. They contain much reused Roman material, mostly derived from funerary monuments, but also including coping-stones from the Roman wall itself, packed to form solid platforms on which artillery (ballistas or catapults) could be mounted. They are a characteristic late Roman fortification intended to cover the approaches to the wall with a field of projectiles, and their absence from the defences of Londinium would be surprising. Moreover, it is clear that these bastions were constructed at a time when the Roman monuments were still visible in the cemeteries and the original battlements of the Roman wall were intact, until they were superseded in places by the new bastions themselves.

The defensive riverside wall can also be attributed to a late phase of the history of Londinium. No trace of the distinctive city wall of the late second or early third century has been found on the waterfront, and it seems likely that at this time the river itself was considered sufficient protection, as it was throughout the Middle Ages. A continuous defensive riverside wall was in fact probably incompatible with the use of the riverside for the wharfs of an active port. Traces of massive stone walls have, however, from time to time been observed under Upper and Lower Thames Streets, and recently investigations at both western and eastern ends of the Roman city have shown that there was a late Roman riverside wall that stood well above the contemporary river level and was therefore undoubtedly defensive, and not merely an embankment. Where this was built on gravel rather than clay, a foundation consisting of a chalk platform laid on wooden piles was constructed. Preliminary results from a combination of Carbon 14 dating and dendrochronology, carried out at the University of Sheffield by Ms Ruth Morgan and Ms Jennifer Hillam on piles from Blackfriars, New Fresh Wharf, and the Tower of London, suggested a date not earlier than the third quarter of the fourth century, but subsequent work by dendrochronologists, based on the dated German sequence, indicates a date a century earlier. The history of the riverside wall is evidently complex, for another section near Blackfriars contained as building material altars from German sequence, indicates a date a century earlier. The history of the riverside wall is evidently complex, for another section near Blackfriars contained as building material altars and sculptures from pagan temples, including one that had been rebuilt in the mid-third century; manifestly this section cannot be earlier than the Christian fourth century. At the Tower, moreover, a later defensive wall was found to the north of the first riverside wall, and a deposit of earth laid against its inner face, apparently immediately after construction, contained late fourth century coins, including one of AD 188-92. It would seem, therefore, that building and rebuilding the riverside wall extended over a long period, the latest refortification belonging to the final phase of the Roman occupation, and possibly the work of Stilicho's military expedition of AD 396-8.

**Destruction of Third-Century Magnificence**

A tantalizing glimpse of the south-western part of the city in later Roman times is afforded by the massive blocks of masonry reused in the riverside wall at Blackfriars. These have been shown by T. Blagg to come from a monumental arch and a screening wall with an ornamental end. Both were richly decorated with figures of deities, and strongly suggest the presence of a religious precinct. Since the architectural fragments are massive, they are likely to have been reused in a stretch of riverside wall not far from their source. Excavation at St Peter's Hill in 1981 revealed massive foundations of oak piles, rammed chalk, and stone blocks, for the west and south walls of a large building set on the lower of two terraces. The retaining wall of the upper terrace served also as its north foundation. Here as elsewhere in this area, there was a lack of domestic debris, as might be expected in a precinct of public buildings. It is likely that the arch and screen also belonged to this. There is little doubt that both are of the third century, as are a unique relief of four Mother-goddesses and two inscribed altars commemorating the rebuilding of temples (one of Isis), found in the same stretch of wall. The rebuilding of one temple by a governor or acting governor and the participation of an imperial freedman in the rebuilding of the other are clear indications that, whatever setbacks Londinium had suffered in the third century, it was still the home of officialdom. These inscriptions relate to rebuilding, however, probably in the second half of the century, whereas the great monumental arch, at least, is more likely to have been constructed when the precinct was laid out. A major public work seems to be indicated, and one, moreover, apparently devoted mainly to religion (perhaps accompanied by entertainment, as was usual in the Roman world). In a city that appears to have been in a state of some decline, there must surely be a political explanation for this rather surprising development. It is tempting to attribute it to the presence of the domus divina itself in Britain from AD 208 to 211, and especially to the influence of Julia Domna, a strong-minded lady with a keen interest in religion. What seems to be certain is that these third-century pagan buildings were still available as a quarry for building-stone, not necessarily in a ruinous condition, in the Christian Londinium of the later fourth century.

Our sparse archaeological evidence for late Roman London comes almost entirely from the neighbourhood of the river, where buildings continued to be occupied between St Peter’s Hill in the west and the Tower of London in the east, and were even rebuilt, as at Pudding Lane after 171.

**The End of Roman London**

The condition of London after the abandonment of Roman responsibility for Britain in AD 410 has been much debated. Did it continue to be a stronghold of sub-Roman civilization?

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77 Hill, Millier, and Blagg, op. cit. 121-9.
78 Britannia 13 (1982), 174; London Archaeologist, 4 (Spring 1982), 162.
80 Millier, and Blagg, op. cit. 169–71, 195. 8
81 The temple of Isis was rebuilt in the reign of two Augusti, probably Valerian and Gallienus (AD 253-60), though the brief reign of Caracalla and Geta (AD 211-22) is perhaps a possibility, particularly in view of the part of the Severan dynasty in the Egyptian cult. Since the precinct itself was probably, then new, however, the rebuilding would have been on a new site, like the new Isca built for Caracalla on the Quirinal; it would therefore presumably have been regarded as a new temple and given a dedicatory inscription in a different form.
until the end of the century at least, as might be suggested by the curious absence of late fifth-century Saxon material from a considerable territory to the north of Londinium. Or was it a city that had been essentially a trading and administrative centre unable to maintain its population when trade was disrupted and government no longer existed? Archaeology has not yet answered these questions, but it has given us a glimpse of one small corner of Londinium in the relevant period, and from this certain tentative conclusions can perhaps be drawn. A large house, with a bath-house in a central courtyard, stood in late Roman times on a terrace in the hill-slope just above the river-front, about 210 m. to the east of the bridge. Part of the bath-house has long been familiar as the hypocaust preserved beneath the late Coal Exchange in Lower Thames Street. The house was occupied until about AD 400 or later, on the evidence of a coin hoard of AD 388-402 found scattered on the floor of a furnace room, from which the east wing was heated by a system of underfloor heating. The ash of the final firing of the furnace itself contained a fragment of an amphora of a distinctive eastern Mediterranean type, probably from Gaza, of the fourth or fifth century. It was presumably a container for a standard Mediterranean product such as wine or olive oil, commonly imported into Britain in earlier times from the western Mediterranean. An import of this kind from the east would be more likely after the disruption of the nearer sources of supply by the barbarian incursions into Spain in 409, and similar imports in the west of Britain have been attributed to the second half of the fifth century. The only other stratified sherds of amphorae of this type from London, however, came from a deposit dumped on the Cannon Street palace after its demolition, and the pottery associated with these was of the fourth century. Nevertheless, in the final phase of the house in Lower Thames Street, which, on coin evidence cannot be earlier than about the end of the fourth century, luxury imports were apparently available, and there must have been exports to pay for them. Since in these disturbed times most other commodities would have been in short supply, it is possible that the eastern traders came to purchase slaves. Londinium, accessible from the Continent but temporarily safe from its troubles, may possibly have served as entrepôt for the traffic in captives.

It is unlikely, however, that much of the city’s prosperity remained. The Lower Thames Street house shows evidence of significant social change in its final occupancy. Alterations to the heating system suggest multiple tenancy, with separate furnaces heating small suites of rooms, while the bath-house was no longer used for its original purpose. The ash containing the amphora sherd was never cleared away, and at this point the building was abandoned. The windows were broken, giving access to wind and rain, and in due course the roofs collapsed over both house and bath-house. While the building stood as a roofless shell, it received a visit from a group of Anglo-Saxons, probably on a scavenging expedition, and one of their women lost her brooch in the debris of the bath-house roof. The date of this applied disc-brooch is clearly crucial. It appears to be an English derivation of a Continental type of the early fifth century, and is likely to have been made, possibly in Surrey, in the first half of the fifth century. An identical specimen, however, comes from a grave at Mitcham that has been attributed to the second half of the fifth century. The brooch from Lower Thames Street is therefore likely to have been lost between AD 410 and 500—in all probability before 471—and the building had then been derelict for some time.

It would be rash to generalize from the fate of one building; nevertheless it stood on a central site near the river, where occupation would be as likely to continue as anywhere in the city. Our one piece of evidence does therefore favour the hypothesis of a period of abandonment, perhaps only partial, not so long after the traditional date (AD 417) of the Battle of Crecganford when, according to the Anglo-Saxon Chronicle, the Britons of Kent fled for safety to London. Why should anyone have wished to leave the city with its powerful defences in those unsettled times? Economic pressure may have been a strong influence, since even refugees must eventually make a living, and a London without trade or bureaucracy could have supported only a tiny population under a subsistence economy—a population too small to man the extensive defences effectively.

It has been suggested that a major cause of the abandonment of Romano-British towns may have been plague, possibly the epidemic of about AD 445, described by Hydrius, or one described by Evagrius that spread through the Roman world about AD 451. The scanty evidence from London does not conflict with this hypothesis, which might also account for the apparent avoidance of the city and its territory, together with Verulamium and Camulodunum, by the Anglo-Saxon settlers of the later fifth century. It may be that they had a greater danger to fear than a sub-Roman army, for which we have as yet no firm evidence in this area.

Sir Mortimer Wheeler once argued that the Middlesex Grim’s Dyke and the Faestendic in west Kent were boundary lines containing the territory of the fifth-sixth century London, and marking it off from the lands of the new settlers. An excavation in 1973 of what appears to be an eastern extension of Grim’s Dyke at Brockley Hill showed that, contrary to more recent views, it could not be earlier than the fourth century. Wheeler was therefore almost certainly right in his assessment of date and probably right in his interpretation of purpose. It is significant that these earthworks are devised for containment of London’s territory, not its defence. Nevertheless it seems unlikely that such a massive work was undertaken merely to restrict the wanderings of plague-stricken refugees.

Whatever the reason for the abandonment of the house in Lower Thames Street, it is unlikely to have been an isolated phenomenon, and the roofless ruin by the Thames is a fitting symbol of the end of the distinctive civilization of Roman London. No attempt seems to have been made to repair and

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66 The whole bath-house and part of the east wing of the house have been preserved under the new building that has been erected on the site.
68 P. R. V. Marsden, TLM 41 26 (1971), fig. 47, Nos. 141-4. Unstratified sherds of class B amphorae have also been found on the sites of St Dionysius backchurch and St Katherine Coleman Street. Although all are from the Eastern Empire they are of varying ages and from various sources.
reoccupy the derelict house, and the first indication of purposeful activity on the site was the deliberate demolition and removal of the walls—perhaps many years later. Elsewhere in the city occupation may perhaps have continued, or may have been renewed after a brief period of time; but it is likely to have been of a non-urban character, with a subsistence economy in which the specialized skills of Roman material culture could not survive. In a period of anarchy and extreme fragmentation London was merely a fortress unable to support a garrison. It could only resume its proper function as a centre for collection and redistribution after the development of new factors tending towards reunification—the dominance of powerful kingdoms, the return of the Christian Church, and the revival of overseas trade.

Postscript on Roman London, March 1988

Publication of the London Atlas has coincided with a great expansion of archaeological investigation in the City of London, reflecting the acceleration of development due to the revolution in financial marketing nicknamed 'Big Bang'. New technological demands have made existing accommodation out of date, and rebuilding proceeds apace. Fortunately a more enlightened attitude by public authorities and developers alike has made it possible for archaeologists to meet this new challenge on a scale that would have been unimaginable fifteen years ago. There are at the time of writing more than 100 full-time archaeologists employed within the historic 'Square Mile' alone, largely at the expense of the developers themselves, who can usually be persuaded to allocate a small percentage of their development costs to the recovery and publication of the archaeological evidence that would otherwise be destroyed without record.

New information on Roman London is therefore still being won, and will, it is hoped, continue to be for perhaps another ten years. This has made it necessary to revise the map and text to the latest possible moment, and I am indebted to the Department of Urban Archaeology of the Museum of London, and in particular to John Maloney and David Bentley for their willing co-operation in this task.

It is symptomatic of the dramatic advance in our knowledge that the amphitheatre of Londinium should have been identified only within the last few weeks, on a site where there had previously been no suspicion of its existence. Excavation on the east side of Guildhall Yard, formerly the site of the medieval Guildhall Chapel and subsequently of the Art Gallery, has revealed an unbroken 8 m. stretch of curved wall, which leads to an imposing buttressed entrance-way, 10 m. wide with timber thresholds still surviving. The north end forms the western wall of a small chamber adjacent to the entrance, to the north of which a more fragmentary wall continues the curve, with equally fragmentary traces of a similar small chamber on the north side of the entrance. The curved wall is the internal wall of the amphitheatre enclosing the central arena, and other fragmentary walls previously recorded on another site to the south may mark the position of the external curved wall that enclosed the tiered rows of seats. The two chambers flanking the eastern entrance to the arena each had doorways opening on to the entrance-way and through the curved wall into the arena.

Fortunately, although only a very limited portion of the total plan has so far been recovered, it is sufficiently diagnostic for a positive identification to be made. There is a close parallel in the amphitheatre at Cirencester, where the north-east entrance to the central arena is similarly flanked by two chambers. There is also evidence for two chambers flanking the east entrance to the amphitheatre at Dorchester (Maumbury Rings). It is suggested that these were used as cells for prisoners or wild animals, and possibly also as ante-rooms for gladiators and other performers. At least one of each pair probably also contained an altar to Nemesis and served likewise as a shrine.

The curved retaining walls of the raised seating would have continued round the oval arena, with the church of St Lawrence Jewry overlying the south-western quadrant, and the Guildhall itself built over the northern half. The proximity of the south-east corner of the contemporary fort suggests that the amphitheatre was used for military purposes as a ludi or training ground as well as for entertainment. The legionary ludi at Chester is similarly placed outside the south-east angle of the fortress. In the case of London, the military function would probably have been training the governor's guards in ceremonial drill as much as in the use of weapons.

The discovery of the amphitheatre is of great topographical interest, for it not only influenced the curves of Basinghall Street and Aldermanbury, but may well have determined the site of the Guildhall itself. Guildhall Yard occupies the central part of the arena and has evidently been an open space and natural place of assembly throughout London's history. If early civic leaders took the central place of honour in the raised seating at the northern end of the short axis of the amphitheatre, they would have occupied the very place where the thirteenth-century Guildhall would eventually be built.

Another important recent discovery, somewhat overshadowed by that of the amphitheatre, was an octagonal Romano-Celtic temple outside the city wall, south of the road to the west from Newgate. It was built fairly early in the Roman period on a site previously occupied by pottery kilns, and was subsequently replaced by a large masonry building containing at least nine rooms.

The finding of the amphitheatre was hailed by some newspapers as the discovery of the last important building of Roman London, but this is almost certainly untrue. It would not be surprising if Londinium also had at least one theatre, and quite possibly a circus for chariot-racing. Major temples and government buildings may also remain to be discovered, to say nothing of market halls and horrea. We know a fair amount about one large bathing-complex, the public baths on Huggin Hill, but scattered early finds indicate that there were others, of which we know virtually nothing. Important work has already been done on the water front, but we need more information over a wider area, and we remain in ignorance of pre-Boudican riverside facilities, as well as of much else about the earliest Londinium. It will be surprising if the intensive work now being undertaken does not fill many of these gaps within the next ten years or so, and some future finds may be quite as dramatic as anything in the past.