

# EARLY FULHAM

KEITH WHITEHOUSE

THE BEGINNINGS of settlements in Fulham and Putney appear to be due to a prehistoric river crossing and the names Fulham and Putney are indicative of this.

## A Ford and Trackway

Although the origins of the crossing are lost in antiquity, the ford was probably close to the site of the present Putney Bridge. Professor Grimes has suggested a conjectural route for a connecting trackway<sup>1</sup> which must have linked a number of settlement sites including the Neolithic one at Putney.<sup>2</sup>

Geographically, this is a suitable spot on the Thames for a ford as the river banks are overlaid with gravel with no intervening alluvium. Roughly aligned with the Fulham Road, the trackway is a natural route of communication from the east of London to western Surrey.

The middle Thames from Staines to the City has produced a wealth of weapons, tools and other artifacts of all the archaeological periods indicating how important this stretch of the river has always been for communication and settlement. However very few riparian sites have so far been located, due mainly to the lack of archaeological investigation. Excavation in recent years has begun to attest to early settlement and more information should become available as the industrial sites of the riverside are redeveloped. In the case of Putney in particular the last decade has produced evidence of habitation for all the major periods.

Although the trackway theory is becoming generally accepted, there is controversy as to whether it could later have been laid out as a Roman road. This suggestion is made plausible by a Romano-British settlement, apparently centred around the Bemish Road area at Putney,<sup>3</sup> and the discovery of a Roman road and settlement at Old Ford, Bow.<sup>4</sup>

After the Roman administration in Britain ceased, during the first half of the 5th century, invasions by Saxon and other raiders presumably brought the settlement at Putney to an end. From

this point in time until the 8th century nothing is known of the history of the crossing area.

## Grant of Fulham

Circa A.D. 705 Waldhere, 5th Bishop of the East Saxons (London), acquired from Tyrhtilus, 2nd Bishop of Hereford, a place called *Fulanham*. Thus the connection of the Bishops of London as Lords of the Manor of Fulham began, and remained so, despite a period during the Commonwealth, until the Manor and its revenues passed into the hands of the Ecclesiastical Commissioners in 1868. It can be said that the Bishop's land tenure is one of the oldest in England. The present incumbent of the Bishopric still lives at Fulham in his 16th century manor-house, Fulham Palace.

The Saxon Charter of the grant, survives as a early 17th century copy, taken from a medieval cartulary, the *rotulus antiquus*, belonging to St. Paul's Cathedral, the original charter having been lost.

The translation reads as follows:

'In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ

I, Bishop Tyrhtilus, have resolved to offer and bestow a small portion of land on Wealdhere, bishop of London, in return for his acceptable money, with the consent and permission of Sigeheard, king of the East Saxons, and of Conred, king of the Mercians, that by these benefits willingly conferred on the Church I may be able to purge the guilt of my sins and obtain the remedy conferred by divine goodness. The possessions of this land are 50 hides in the place which is called Fulham, etc.<sup>5</sup>

The 'etc' indicates that the medieval charter could not be fully deciphered. By its very nature of a copy, it should be treated with caution, although there is no reason to dispute its authenticity. The meaning of '50 hides' is disputable. It could mean either 50 hides of land or 50 men working on the land.

The grant had the approval of Sigeheard, king of the East Saxons and Conred, king of Mercia. At that time Mercia was the overlord of the East

1. W. F. Grimes, *The excavation of Roman and Medieval London* (1968) 44.  
2. Stan Warren, 'Neolithic Occupation at Putney', *London Archaeol* (Autumn 1971) 276-79.  
3. See next issue of *London Archaeol*.

4. Harvey Sheldon, 'Excavations at Lefevre Road, Old Ford, E.3' *Trans London and Middlesex Archaeol. Soc.* 23 (1971) 42-77.  
5. D. Whitelock, *English Historical Documents*, c. 500-1042 449.

Saxon kingdom. Fulham until 1880 was part of Middlesex and the 'middle Saxons' were an offshoot of the East Saxons. Hence the reason why Fulham came under the East Saxons, who had occupied London from the beginning of the 7th century and began to gradually settle throughout Middlesex. Why Hereford owned Fulham is not known, but it adds support to the theory that a settlement was here by at least the 8th century, presumably by the riverside.

The area of the grant is virtually identical to the present London Borough of Hammersmith, formerly the metropolitan boroughs of Fulham and Hammersmith, the latter being part of the Manor of Fulham until 1834. The Borough of Hammersmith is bounded by the Thames on the south and west, Counters (Chelsea) Creek on the east, Wormwood Scrubs on the north. Fulham was divided from Hammersmith by Parr Ditch (earliest documentation *le perre* circa 1270) which ran from the Thames on the west, winding its way to the Hammersmith Road (St. Mary's Church).

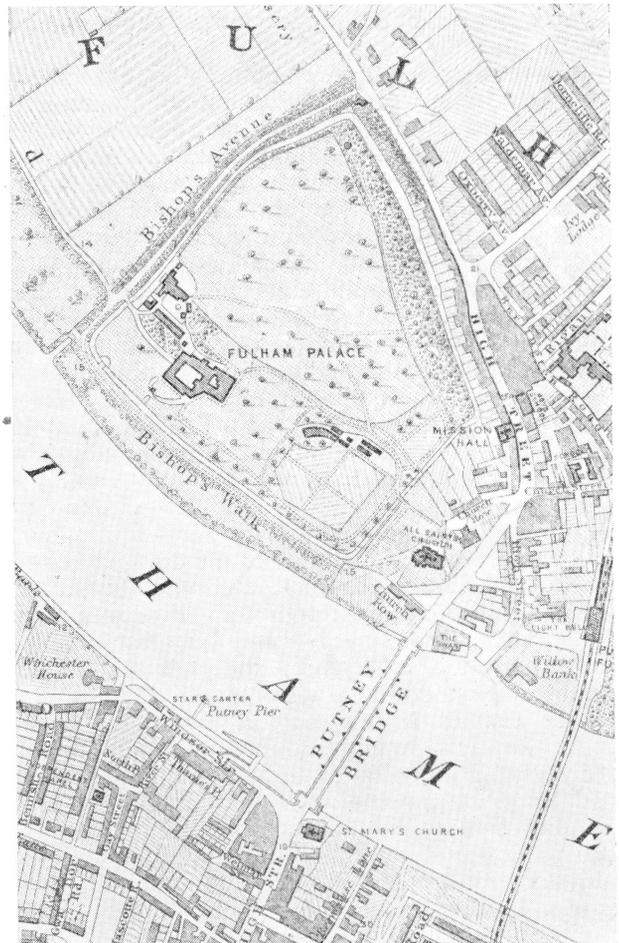
The See of London, as the bishop's administrative area was known, was founded in 604, Christianity spreading throughout Middlesex during the 7th century. The area of the See covered London, Middlesex, Herefordshire and parts of Essex. Over the centuries this varied as new properties were acquired and old ones disposed of.

Fulham was only one of several manor-houses the bishop resided at throughout the See, but because of its proximity to London by river, Fulham soon must have become one of the more important possessions. It is not known when the bishop took up regular residence, but by the 13th century he was often here, perhaps to get away from the over-crowded and unhealthy state of London, only staying at his official residence, not far from St. Paul's Cathedral, when it was necessary for business.

### Origin of the name Fulham

Several opinions exist on the meaning of 'Fulham' which is of undoubted Saxon origin; 'ham' means a homestead or settlement. 'Ful' is interpreted as a personal name 'Fulla' i.e. a Saxon chief? or as 'foul' meaning wet and muddy, used particularly in a Saxon place-name for the state of a road or ford. The interpretation of Fulham could therefore be 'Foul-town' or 'Fulla's home'. The former is the more probable in geographical terms.

'Ful' has also been interpreted as 'fowl', the birds which inhabited the reeds and marshes of the low-



This map of 1892 shows clearly the unusual shape of the Fulham Palace moat. The area of Putney in the bottom left corner is where the main traces of the Romano-British settlement have been found.

lying river banks. Although long held, this theory is now considered the least likely.

### Theodred's Will

Dating from about 950 Bishop Theodred's will lists "Fullenham" as one of his properties: "And let it stand at Fulham as it now stands unless anyone will free my men." This is the first allusion to actual buildings in existence. Also mentioned in the will are "Wunemannedune and Sheen," believed to be Wimbledon and nearby Sheen. This is very significant, because some time between the 8th century and the 13th century,<sup>6</sup> the ford became a ferry. The bishop having to cross the river to

6. In 1210 King John paid 1d. to have a horse harness carried over the river at Fulham.

Putney to gain access to the two properties in Surrey.

The meaning of 'Putney' is uncertain although the generally accepted interpretation is "Putta's Hythe," the 13th century appellation being 'Puttenhuth', the landing place of Putta. An interesting light has been thrown on Putta, 1st Bishop of Hereford, who died A.D. 688. As his successor, Tyrhtilus, owned Fulham, Putta may also have done so. But this early date has not been considered acceptable for Bishop Putta.<sup>7</sup> Hereford Cathedral was sacked in 1055 by Gryffyth, a prince of Wales, destroying any documents which could have thrown light on these early bishops.

The ferry may support the theory that Putney is a secondary settlement from Fulham to work the ferry, for there is no evidence of habitation there before the 11th century.<sup>8</sup>

### Vikings

The major event of the Dark Ages for Fulham must have been the visitation of the dreaded Danes. The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle for 879 states: "In this year the pagans set out for Cirencester from Chippenham and stayed there one year. In the same year, too, a body of the pagans drew together and sat down in winter quarters at Fulham on the Thames. In this year the pagans left Cirencester for East Anglia and occupied and divided the region. And in the same year the pagans, who had before sat down at Fulham, went over the sea by way of France to Ghent and remained there one year."<sup>9</sup> It is to this unwelcome horde that the intriguing one mile long moat, formerly encompassing Fulham Palace, is attributed.

Until the 1920's, the Palace grounds of 28 acres, were enclosed by a moat, approximately 10ft. wide and up to 8ft. deep in some parts (see map). Its origin is uncertain but it has been the centre of much speculation. Generally it is considered to be defensive and not a land boundary;<sup>10</sup> this theory appears to be originally the view of Sir Arthur Blomfield, in a lecture 'The Olden Times of Fulham.'<sup>11</sup> Claiming that the Danes were the only known large armed force to be in the vicinity before the Conquest, he concluded that the moat must be therefore attributed to them.

London at this time was under Viking control with the figure holding the position of Bishop of London being uncertain but it may have been Swithulf.

Although it is now generally accepted that the site of Fulham Palace is where the Vikings camped,

it is by no means certain. Chiswick Eyot on the Chiswick/Hammersmith border is considered to be a contender for the encampment. However, this belief appears to be a documentary miscopying. Various chroniclers since the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* have handed down the story to posterity and Roger Hoveden<sup>12</sup> states that the Danes landed at *Insula Hame* which appears to be a misreading of *in fulanhome* mistaking the 'f' for an 's'. This fictitious 'Isle of Hame' has been dubbed onto Chiswick Eyot.

The suitable landing place at the ford, perhaps with the already fortified Palace, was more than ample reason for choosing Fulham to make camp. The visitation of pagans, who left the following year with some of Guthrum's discontented followers, to continue hostilities in Europe, apparently left a lasting mark on the local inhabitants, there was a wharf near Putney Bridge called 'Comedane-wharf' as late as 1447. Near Crabtree Dock, not much more than half a mile north of the Palace, Thomas Faulkner tells of "great quantities of human bones have been from time to time discovered. A tradition has prevailed, that they have lain here since the period of the invasion by the Danes; but we have not been able to discover any certain traces of the time when, or how they were deposited here."

### Roman Camp?

The discovery of a Romano-British settlement in Putney opposite the Palace has led to the suggestion in recent years, that the moat may have had its origins in a Roman Camp. The site is ideally situated to defend the ford, and a camp could well have been established there as a bridgehead by Aulus Plautius while he waited at the Thames for the arrival of Claudius.

The Palace earthwork is a rough 'D' shape, which is typical of Viking camps, but the north, south and west sides are at right angles making two playing card' corners similar to a Roman camp. The east side looks alien in shape and may have been a later alteration as it varies in width (see map).

The earliest documented account is in the Court Rolls of Fulham Manor for 1392 when it is referred to as the great ditch (*magna fossa*). In 1476 it is referred to as the 'moat ditch of Fulham.'

Regardless of the origins of the moat, one may feel safe to say that it is pre-conquest. It could have been dug by the Saxons, perhaps against the Viking invasions, with the Bishop taking the initia-

7. Keith Bailey, 'Battersea in the Dark Ages' *The Wandsworth Historian* (No. 3) 1.  
8. Keith Bailey, 'Putney in the Dark Ages, *London Archaeol.* 1 (Winter 1968) 19.  
9. Translation from *Anglo Saxon Chronicle* ed. by Edmund Gibson (1962) 85.

10. P. D. Whiting, 'A History of Fulham' (1970) 25-26.  
11. Lecture given in 1856 in the Boys' National Schoolroom, All Saints Church, Fulham.  
12. Roger Hoveden 'An Historical and Topographical Account of Fulham' (1813).

tive when King Alfred ordered the fortifying of the burghs; the Vikings would probably have refashioned the earthwork to suit themselves. About half the area within the moat, known as the Warren, has been given over to garden allotments since World War I, but surprisingly no significant finds have been recorded!

To mention all the features of the moat, other earthworks and mounds in the vicinity of the Palace, would take up another article, but before the Palace defensive system is left, mention should be made of an apparent mound at the junction of Rigault and Burlington Roads' (TQ 245762). On the east side of Fulham High Street in line with the south-east corner of the moat, a ridge of high ground runs from the mound almost parallel with the High Street, ending just north of the north-east corner of the moat. This may well be a defence enclosing the High Street, perhaps of later construction, forming an outer bailey.

The earliest documentation of Fulham High Street is 1391 when it bore the significant name "burystrete". Taken from Saxon 'burgh', meaning a fortified estate, it could refer to the moated and fortified Palace or the enclosed and fortified High Street. Unfortunately the Court Rolls of Fulham Manor do not survive before 1384; the earlier rolls were destroyed during the Peasant's Revolt of 1381.

Until recent times, the High Street extended from the riverside crossing at Swan Wharf Dock to Bishops Avenue on the north side of the moat. The houses on the east side of Fulham Palace Road (formerly part of High Street) facing the moat are built on the above mentioned ridge formerly known as 'High Bank'. It can be clearly seen that these houses, to a more or less degree, are suffering from subsidence, possibly due to settlement of the earthwork and its ditch?

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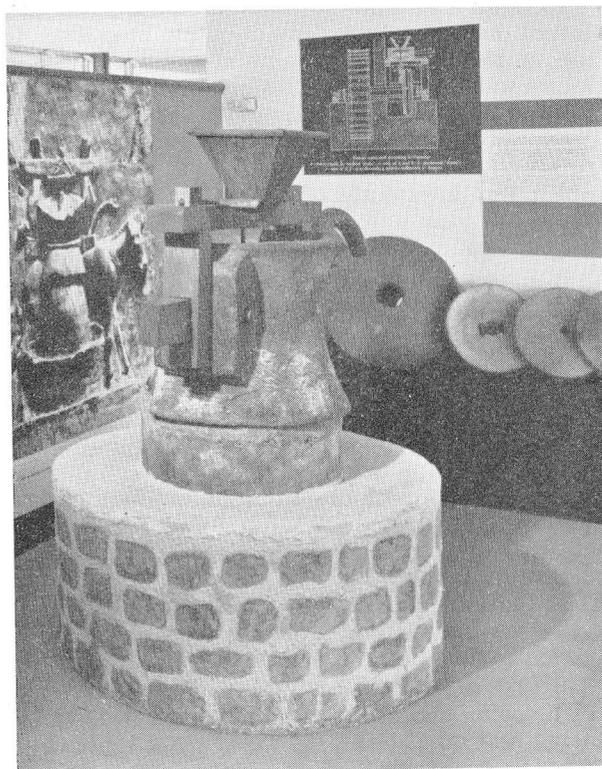
## LIFE IN ROMAN LONDON

A MAJOR NEW feature at Guildhall Museum is the "Life in Roman London" gallery. The aim of this room, the first to be completely re-displayed since the Museum moved into its present temporary premises four years ago, is to use items from the extremely rich collection of Roman material found in the City to show something of everyday life in the capital of the Roman province of Britain.

The exhibition begins with the historical background, from the founding of *Londinium* in A.D.43 as a military base and trading centre, and its tragic destruction in A.D.60 by Boudicca, grimly illustrated by a number of skulls, to its rebuilding on a grander scale as the financial and political capital of the province.

Of particular interest is the reconstruction of a Roman kitchen, complete with a cooking-pot on the open hearth, storage jars and bowls, kitchen-knives and ladle on the table and a small quern. The same technique of placing objects in their appropriate setting has been carried out elsewhere in the display which depicts many aspects of life in and around London including agriculture, workshops, personal ornament, trade, games and pastimes.

Guildhall Museum which is on the Bassishaw Highwalk just behind Guildhall itself, is open from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. from Monday to Saturday.



The reconstructed donkey mill of the type found in commercial bakeries.