

# Commentary

By GROMATICUS

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## City-Dig

IN *The Future of London's Past* Martin Biddle time and again emphasised the importance of the riverside area in the planning of archaeological work ahead of (and alongside) redevelopment.

In time his prediction is being borne out — in particular the medieval and Roman wharves at the Custom House site, the medieval jetty at Trig Lane and the Roman riverside wall with its unexpected bas-reliefs and moulded stonework (p.289) bear witness to his perception.

Of course there is much more yet to be uncovered (the Trig Lane site is only half dug as yet) and there is still the Roman bridge to be found—perhaps on the D.U.A. site of St. Magnus in Lower Thames Street, roughly on the line of the medieval bridge (if Tim Tatton Brown's theory that the Roman bridge had stone piers on which the medieval bridge was built, is correct).

On the 'dry land' attention will be fixed for some time on the G.P.O. site in Newgate Street where a number of Roman beam slots have appeared cut into the natural brickearth; the demolition date appears to be in the third quarter of the 1st century. It has been suggested that they indicate either military occupation or domestic buildings.

On this site it will also be interesting to see whether any trace is found of the Saxon folkmoot, ("first in dignity, as doubtless first in age" — Stenton) which lay between St. Pauls and the Palace of Ethelbert in Aldermanbury and which was probably derived from the missing Roman amphitheatre or theatre (Biddle 4.32).

## Sleeper Beam Slots

The mention of beam slots at the G.P.O. site brings to mind the propensity of many archaeologists to assign such features when associated with 1st century pottery, as evidence of "early military occupation." (On the site in question the theory of an early timber fort in the area is very plausible as it would explain why the dating of the stone built Cripplegate fort appears to be no earlier than the end of the 1st century).

There are a number of Roman settlements around London, for example, Bow, Brentford, Enfield and Putney, where the evidence for occupation (burials, building materials, coins, pottery, etc.) is consider-

able and irrefutable, but where there is a basic lack of house plans. Clay 'floors', hearths, rain gulleys ending in sumps and burnt daub with impressions of timber frames and wattles have all been found, but there are no certain indication of walls in situ.

Alison Laws has recent suggested that the missing buildings at Brentford were of timber construction with sleeper beams laid *on the ground* — leaving therefore little or no trace of their presence. This certainly fits the facts but in turn together with 'military' slots, raises further thoughts.

Are all 'early military' beam slots truly such, or could some at least be civilian? Was there a local native tradition of using sleeper beams laid on the ground and does this explain away the absence of hut walls inside Iron Age hut circles such as at Heathrow and Bedfont? Could the basic difference between military and civilian building procedures be that the former bedded their beams into the ground (by the rule book), while the latter simply laid them on the surface?

## C.B.A. Certification Scheme

The proposals by C.B.A. for the establishment of a series of nationally recognised archaeological qualifications to common standards have been generally well received. To career archaeologists without academic qualifications in archaeology this step will be very welcome as it will enable them to obtain a formal value of their own worth. Many experienced amateurs will also welcome the chance of testing their skill accumulated over the years, while for newcomers to archaeology a national study course has much to commend it.

It is proposed that the qualifications should be a diploma consisting of a number of certificates that can be obtained over several years with a level lying roughly half way between GCE "A" Level and an Honours degree. It is also thought that in due course a demand may come apparent for the establishment of an additional, higher level qualification, equivalent to an Honours degree plus formal professional training.

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## LATE PUBLICATION

The Editor regrets the delay in the issue of this number which has been caused by circumstances beyond his control.