

The 'Pre-Norman' Bridge of London

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IN APRIL, 1975, the Museum of London Department of Urban Archaeology undertook an excavation due east of St. Magnus Church, near London Bridge, mainly as an extension of the 1974 operations at New Fresh Wharf to the east where Roman timber quaysides with Saxon modifications had been uncovered. But the new work also held out the agreeable prospect of testing a claim that it was to the east of this church that the 'pre-Norman,' i.e., the Saxon and probably the Roman bridge crossed the north bank of the Thames. This contention appeared in a lengthy paper published (in 1969—towards the end of her life, though it had clearly been in her mind at least as early as 1934) by Marjorie Honeybourne, the doyenne of London topographers¹. It came as a very novel idea, at odds with current opinion: the medieval successor to the 'early' bridge, Peter de Colechurch's stone structure of c.1176 passed, as is well known, to the west of St. Magnus which was, and for that matter still is, the generally agreed location of the Roman bridge—though there is rather less certainty about exactly how far west. Miss Honeybourne's paper was invoked and then discussed at length in an exchange of views, largely conducted in these pages, which can hardly be called a controversy since neither the author nor any protagonist was drawn to reply in any way, and which terminated in a reaffirmation of the earlier, archaeological, preferences².

Recent documentary work carried out in conjunction with the excavation necessarily involved a re-assessment of the evidence which Miss Honeybourne used, as well as an examination of further evidence, in the deeds of the Husting Rolls (which could be described as a medieval Land Register) which, oddly, she does not seem to have used³. Though by no means complete, this work cannot be said to sustain her conclusions, and an interim statement to this effect is perhaps appropriate before a fuller discussion is made available in the published excavation report.

'The Pre-Norman Bridge of London' does not

1. 'The Pre-Norman Bridge of London' in *Studies in London History presented to Philip Edmund Jones*, ed. A. E. J. Hollaender and W. Kellaway (1969) 17-39. Miss Honeybourne had outlined her ideas in E. Jeffries Davis' *Notes on the Map of London under Henry II*, published as an appendix to F. M. Stenton, *Norman London* (1934) 38-9. The accompanying map of London incorporates these ideas.
2. *London Archaeol* 1 (1970) 156-60 (Graham Dawson); 186-7 (Ralph Merrifield) (1971) 224-5 (Graham Dawson); (1972) 330-2 (Graham Dawson); 2 (1974) 183-91 (Ralph Merrifield and Harvey Sheldon).

make for easy reading. It contains a vast amount of invaluable information about the bridge head area, particularly on the City bank, but this very prodigality often makes it difficult to be sure just what points are being established. However, the heart of the argument appears on pp.34-5, and depends upon the coincidence of the boundary between Bridge and Billingsgate wards just east of St. Magnus church with the alleged site of Drinkwater's Wharf, a quay whose comparatively late appearance in historical sources is explained in terms of the earlier existence there of the 'Pre-Norman' bridge.

Drinkwater's Wharf

Although the significance of Drinkwater's Wharf is first introduced on pp.34-5, its history had already been discussed, together with three other neighbouring wharves to the east of the medieval stone bridge, Fish Wharf, Rederesgate or Fresh Wharf and St. Botolph's Wharf, on p.24. After listing numerous references, none of which is earlier than the 14th century, Miss Honeybourne goes on to say that "from the parish named and from descriptions of adjacent wharves, the only possible site for this wharf is between Fish Wharf (largely south of St. Magnus' church) and Fresh Wharf (close to a southern extension of Pudding Lane) . . .". None of the 'printed' Hustings wills which Miss Honeybourne cites justifies this conclusion. In fact, only two of them, the wills of 1328 and 1347, give any indication of location at all: '*iuxta pontem*' and '*ad finem pontis*'—next to, and at the foot (or end) of, the bridge⁴—which is rather a different matter. Moreover, two non-testamentary Husting deeds of Roger and Margaret Shipbrook (1372) and John Moddon (1375), which Miss Honeybourne cannot have seen, describe Drinkwater's Wharf as a tenement in Bridge Street near London Bridge, facing Bridge Street to the east, and Oystergate and the Thames to the west⁵. Drinkwater's Wharf, then, lay not to the east of St. Magnus church, nor east of the Bridge at all, but immediately to its west.

The point at which John Stow refers to Drink-

3. Since the Hustings was a court of record, the rolls contain both wills and deeds concerned with land. The former, calendared and published, were used extensively by Miss Honeybourne. The latter, though not yet available in print, are indexed and readily accessible at the Corporation Records Office, but do not appear to have been used at all.
4. Corporation of London Records Office: Hustings Rolls 56 (119), 74 (175). 'At the foot (literally 'the end') of the bridge' must presumably be taken to mean 'alongside the bridge abutment.'
5. *Ibid.*, 99 (182), 102 (1).

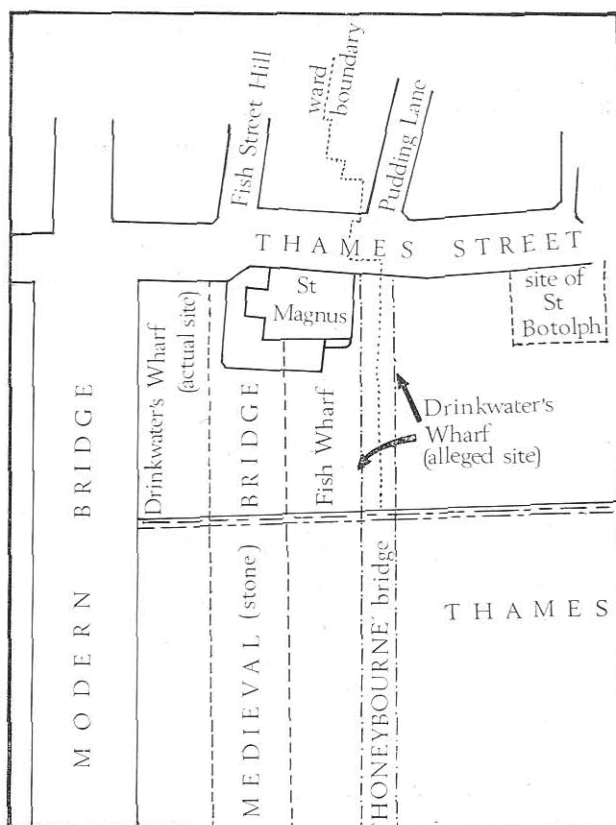
water's Wharf in his account of Bridge Ward also makes clear its location west of the bridge⁶, and Kingsford duly placed the name in the appropriate position on his accompanying map. But Stow also mentioned Fish Wharf in the same breath, which led Kingsford to locate this too west of the bridge. Fish Wharf, however, as Miss Honeybourne says, was mainly sited south of St. Magnus. It may well have extended westwards under, or in front of, the bridge abutment to adjoin Drinkwater's Wharf, but it certainly did not adjoin Drinkwater's Wharf to the east.

Ward Boundaries

Just to the east of St. Magnus church runs the present boundary between the wards of Bridge and Billingsgate. "What more natural," asked Miss Honeybourne (p.34), "than that the early ward divisions should be determined in this district by the line of the bridge?" But the fact of the matter is that here, as elsewhere in the City, ward boundaries do not follow the lines of major roads through the City, but were so arranged that the wards are bisected more or less equally by the roads. The ward map in Professor Brooke's and Mrs. Keir's recent book makes this point very clearly, and nowhere more so than along the length of Fish and Gracechurch Streets⁷. In any case, had the former line of the bridge south of Thames Street exercised such a hold on the drawers of ward boundaries, one might reasonably expect a comparable legacy further north along the line of its approach road, namely, along Pudding Lane. Except at the northernmost end of the Lane, where it adjoins Eastcheap, the ward boundary runs well to the west.

The Southwark Evidence

A further attribute of the boundary between Bridge and Billingsgate wards is that it "is said once to have run across the whole width of the river" (p.34). No source is given for this claim, and it is hard to see what purpose such an extension would have served. But one use to which it has been put by Miss Honeybourne is in aligning it, or its further continuation across the Southwark bank, with a narrow strip of land between St. Olave's church and St. Olave's Stair, which appears as City property on a large scale map kept at the Comptroller and Solicitor's Office at Guildhall. The absence of any record of the date of its acquisition by the Corporation led Miss Honeybourne to suppose that the strip had been held from a very early date and, more particularly, that it represented the southern approach to the 'Pre-Norman' bridge. Since the ward boundary north of the Thames cannot be ex-



plained in terms of a pre-existing road, and its existence across, let alone south of, the river is somewhat dubious, the significance of the Southwark strip was questionable even before 1970-1 when Harvey Sheldon's Toppings Wharf excavation revealed that in the 13th and 14th centuries the strip was occupied by houses which completely ignored its boundaries and which indicated that its creation was post-medieval⁸.

One final point that should be stressed is that to demonstrate the untenability of Miss Honeybourne's theory that the pre-1176 bridge was situated east of St. Magnus and that it was approached along the line of Pudding Lane is not quite the same as say that it, or even some other bridge, never existed there at all. Both the proposition and the repudiation are based upon documentary criteria, and by far the greater part of the historical material is of considerably later date than the bridge to which it has been related. The fact remains that the only conclusive proof of the position of the pre-Norman bridge will be the archaeological excavation of the pre-Norman bridge.

6. John Stow, *A Survey of London* ed. C. L. Kingsford, 1 (1971) 215.

7. C. N. L. Brooke and G. Keir, *London 800-1216: The Shaping of a City* (1975) 152-3.

8. Harvey Sheldon, 'Excavations at Toppings and Sun Wharves, Southwark, 1970-2,' *Trans. London and Middlesex Archaeol. Soc.* 25 (1974) 7; Graham Dawson's note in Harvey Sheldon, 'Excavations at Toppings Wharf . . .', *London Archaeol.* 1 (1971) 254.