

A Prehistory for Central London?

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THIS ARTICLE is an attempt to review for the first time all of the post-glacial prehistoric material from Central London in a comprehensive manner. Palaeolithic material is not covered, as a thorough review has already been made¹. The area chosen for study is shown in the accompanying maps. It has been defined mainly to suit publication format at a meaningful scale, the only constraint being that it should include those sections of the Thames along Westminster, Lambeth, Southwark and the City where most of the material is found. It thus does not comprise any geological or topographical entity. The aim of the article is quite simple: to bring the existing material together on a series of maps and to demonstrate that there exists a large enough body of prehistoric evidence in the area to make further elucidation of the nature of prehistoric occupation in Central London a possibility, if a coherent strategy for its recovery is formulated.

Previous Work

It is over fifty years since the last reviews concentrating solely on prehistoric material were made, and these covered only the City². Waddington saw the finds as clear evidence of pre-Roman occupation in the City, while Wheeler was far more cautious in his study of the Bronze Age material, arguing that it was insufficient, in view of the lack of contemporary pottery, to indicate settlement during this period.

Research into the prehistory of the central London area has been bedevilled by a continual search for a nucleated Late Iron Age settlement in the area of the City which would have been a predecessor to Roman Londinium. The evidence for this has been thoroughly reviewed by several authors³, who demonstrate that the actual material claimed to indicate pre-Roman settlement or trading activity could either be of post-Conquest date, or given a deliberately false provenance to increase its value on the antiquities market⁴.

John Clark has discussed the derivation of the 'legend' of a pre-Roman London from the undis-

1. J. J. Wymer *Lower Palaeolithic Archaeology in Britain* 1968.
- 2a. R. E. M. Wheeler 'Bronze Implements from the City of London' *Antiq J* 7 (1927) 294-8.
- 2b. Q. Waddington 'Vestiges of pre-Roman London' *J British Archaeol Ass Ser 3* 39 (1934) 382-401.
- 3a. R. E. M. Wheeler *Roman London* Royal Commission on Historical Monuments (England). An Inventory of the Historical Monuments in London, Vol III. (1928) H.M.S.O., London.

puted Celtic derivation of the name⁵. He shows that Geoffrey of Monmouth's spurious *History of Britain* forms the basis for various attempts to find remains of 'Troia Nova', the New Troy founded by Brutus on the supposed site of London. Subsequently, finds of 'lake dwellings' in Switzerland led to a fusion of erroneous philology and mistaken archaeology whereby the modern Welsh 'llyn dyn' (lake city) was seen as the derivation of 'Londinium', and Roman wattle structures found preserved in various parts of the city were interpreted as prehistoric 'pile dwellings'⁶. Problems of Iron Age material in Central London are discussed below (p.324); it is sufficient here to point out that it has been the almost unanimous opinion of previous writers that there is little or no irrefutable evidence for a nucleated Iron Age precursor to Roman Londinium. If a large scale settlement such as an oppidum had existed, even if totally obliterated now, a large volume of residual pottery and other finds would have indicated its presence as is the case at Canterbury, St. Albans and Colchester. At the moment there is still no reason to believe that there was any town-like occupation on the site of the City of London immediately prior to the Roman invasion. Nevertheless, this does not rule out the possibility, as Merrifield has speculated, that there may have been small scale settlements in the area, as might be expected all along the well drained gravel terraces of the Thames⁷. However, because of the focus of London's archaeology on the development of the urban centre, the absence of any definite pre-Roman town has sometimes led in turn to a dismissal of any prehistoric evidence from the area as irrelevant and insignificant⁸, perhaps being casual losses dropped by visitors⁹.

The Volume of Finds

It should be stated at the outset that the volume of prehistoric finds from Central London is tiny compared with those from nearly all later periods. Nevertheless, the fact that the finds have never been gathered together has led to the impression that there is almost no prehistoric evidence from the City

- 3b. R. E. M. Wheeler *Roman London in Roman Times*. London Museum Catalogue No. 3. (1930) H.M.S.O., London.
- 3c. R. Merrifield *Roman London* (1969).
- 3d. R. Merrifield *Roman London City of the Romans* (1983).
- 4a. G. Marsh 'Nineteenth and Twentieth Century Antiquities Dealers and Arretine Ware from London' *Trans London Middlesex Archaeol Soc* 30 (1979) 125-9.
- 4b. D. Bailey 'A so-called Greek rhyton from London' *Antiquity* 33 (1959) 218-9.

of London and its environs. For example, even as recently as 1980 a review¹⁰ stated that the total evidence for prehistoric activity in the City consisted of fragments of pottery from two excavations, two hoards of scrap bronze, and "perhaps a dozen scattered finds of individual objects". Seven years later, it is possible, largely through further excavation and additional research on museum collections, to modify this picture considerably. Now, prehistoric activity has been noted in 34 excavations in the City alone, supplemented by 95 single finds made previously and the two bronze hoards mentioned above, which consist of 10 and 7 objects respectively. Over the whole of the area covered, prehistoric material has been found on over 250 separate occasions, ranging from single flint flakes to a Bronze Age ring ditch and an Iron Age timber structure. Although this material is not yet of sufficient quantity to be able to reveal much information about the nature of prehistoric settlement in the area, its volume and distribution suggests that it is now time to shift focus away from the search for a pre-Roman Londinium and to assess the prehistoric evidence in its own terms for what it can tell us about the occupation of the Middle and Lower Thames since the last glaciation.

Assessing the prehistoric material

Biases in the preservation, recovery and proper identification of prehistoric material, the unreliable provenances given to some finds, and considerable changes in the topography of the river and streams over the last ten thousand years all make the production of distribution maps of prehistoric material extremely problematic.

Biases in survival and recovery

The first bias concerns the low rate of survival of most prehistoric material in comparison with that of later periods (apart perhaps from Saxon and Viking). The proportion of material that was perishable was far higher: stone buildings, roof tiles and glass, for example, are unknown. In addition, any prehistoric material which may have existed in the area is highly likely to have been exposed to disturbance from the Roman period onwards. The beginning of Roman occupation itself saw large-scale disturbances of the existing brickearth terraces on the north bank of the Thames. On no site excavated by the Department of Urban Archaeology

has the pre-Roman ground surface survived to its turf line, and only on a few has the brickearth survived to such a height that root holes survive. The natural thickness of the brickearth deposits varies over the area, as does the likely extent of truncation, which makes assessment of the original height of the ground surface an extremely difficult task. In some areas, particularly those most densely settled in the Roman period, truncation and disturbance is likely to have been extensive enough to remove any traces of prehistoric occupation except the deeper ditches and postholes. Subsequently this Roman disturbance has been aggravated, most notably by the deep basements excavated from the Victorian period onwards, which have extensively destroyed much earlier stratigraphy in a number of areas¹¹. Recovery of evidence from cuts in brickearth is further complicated by the fact that they can be extremely difficult to detect. That remarkable survival is possible even in intensively redeveloped urban environments, is shown by the discovery of part a formerly marshy depression formed during the Mesolithic period at the Peninsular House site¹².

Prehistoric finds from the area fall into three groups: *in situ*, unstratified residual land finds, and river finds. So far in the area studied here, only three large prehistoric features have been found *in situ*, at Richmond Terrace, Clerkenwell Green and Fennings Wharf, together with evidence of smaller post holes and gullies on three other sites¹³. All of these have been found unexpectedly on sites where excavation was undertaken primarily to learn more of the known sites of other periods. The discovery of these prehistoric structures begs the question of how many other finds have been lost or gone unrecorded in areas where there is less chance of excavation because of the lack of known structures? Apart from the *in situ* discoveries noted above, all prehistoric material found on land cited in this survey has been found in a residual context. One effect of this residuality is that only certain categories of material typical of certain prehistoric periods are recognised. Difficulties may also be experienced by some excavators, trained in later disciplines, in distinguishing struck flint from the unmodified flint in the gravels.

A large proportion (up to 50%) of material has been dredged from the Thames or found on its foreshore. The dredging of the river in the 19th and

5. J. Clark 'New Troy to Lake Village - the legend of prehistoric London' *London Archaeol* 4 no. 11 (1983) 292-6.

6. A. H. Lane-Fox 'A description of certain piles found near London Wall and Southwark, possibly the remains of pile-dwellings' *Anthrop Rev* (1867) 5 lxxi-lxxxiii.

7. Merrifield *op. cit.* fn 3c, 13; *op. cit.* fn 3d, 21-2.

8. P. Marsden *Roman London* (1980) 11.

9a. Wheeler *op. cit.* fn 3a, 20.

9b. Merrifield *op. cit.* fn 3c, 13-14.

10. J. Schofield & T. Dyson *Archaeology of the City of London*. City of London Archaeological Trust (1980) 6.

11. M. Biddle & D. Hudson *The Future of London's Past Rescue Publications* (1973).

12. G. Milne *The Port of Roman London* (1985) 22.

13. At Cromwell Green (Westminster), at 5-23 Southwark St., and at Cotton's Wharf (Southwark).

early 20th centuries has itself brought problems in determining the true provenance of finds, because in some cases material dredged from one part of the river may have been deposited in another part to fill in holes or make up embankments. G. F. Lawrence, for example, notes that when London Pool was dredged near London Bridge, the spoil was deposited on the foreshore, mainly at Hammersmith and Wandsworth¹⁴. At present we have no way of knowing whether the concentration of prehistoric finds noted from these two areas is a reflection of this redeposition or of genuine activity. Much further work remains to be done on the archives of dredging companies and the Port of London Authority.

One result of the two different methods of recovery of prehistoric material, dredging and excavation, is that two entirely different kinds of assemblage have been collected. In the second half of the 19th century and the first half of the 20th, much prehistoric material in Central London was acquired by antiquarians (such as Thomas Layton) in the form of complete objects recovered from the river or foreshore, or, less often, during building operations in areas which may once have been streams or marshes. These finds were often poorly labelled and now are of limited scientific value.

The material that comes from excavations by the various archaeological units, however, usually takes the form of fragmentary or very small items such as sherds of pottery and flint flakes, which evidently represent the casual accumulation of settlement debris. To use the two groups of material together might potentially be misleading, because much of the material found in the river is rarely found on settlements¹⁵, and, it has been argued, such patterns might represent two entirely different kinds of activity. Particularly in the Bronze Age it has been suggested by Richard Bradley¹⁶ that the bronzes found in watery contexts may have been deliberately deposited there as part of funeral rituals or as offerings to gods or as an affirmation of status. Other explanations have been put forward for the material, such as erosion from settlements or casual losses¹⁷, and there is doubtless not a single explanation that covers it all. However the fact that most of the larger river finds such as swords are not found on settlements does suggest that they may be

of a special nature, and that the presence of prehistoric material does not necessarily indicate occupation of the adjacent river banks.

A separate problem, the converse to that of the problem of residuality, occurs in certain areas of former marsh such as Westminster and Southwark. In these areas, prehistoric levels may be covered by such a depth of silt that excavations may not actually penetrate deep enough to find them. This problem is well illustrated by the case of the Iron Age timber platform found at Richmond Terrace, Whitehall in 1983¹⁸. Excavations on the site had revealed, underlying post-medieval buildings, a thick deposit of bluish clay which had been laid down under marshy conditions, described by the excavator as 'natural'. Historical data had shown that the land was marshy until the Middle Ages, and safety regulations did not permit deeper excavation. However, a subsequent watching brief found the remains of part of a timber base plate and post, evidently part of a larger structure, covered by at least 0.80m (2ft 8in) of this bluish silt. The timbers have been dated to 590±70 b.c. (Har-6393)¹⁹.

This chance discovery has important implications for prehistoric riverine archaeology in London. It suggests first that there was some Iron Age occupation of the area around Thorney Island in Westminster, and that it still survives in an excellent state of preservation under deep silt. The wider implication is that there may be other areas where such preservation is possible: such is the magnitude of the timescale involved (c 12000 years from the Early Mesolithic to the Medieval period) that in any place where post-glacial silting and flooding has occurred, seemingly 'natural' deposits might cover earlier traces of human activity. If such areas could be pinpointed, perhaps by the use of borehole surveys, careful watching briefs and perhaps even excavations could be undertaken to determine whether there is archaeological evidence beneath the silts.

Changes in Topography

This problem forms part of the wider debate concerning the changes in the topography of the river Thames during the Holocene. Most work has concentrated on the morphology of the Thames before, and during, the Roman period. The most

14. G. F. Lawrence 'Antiquities from the Middle Thames' *Archaeol J* 86 (1929) 69-98. Also, the Way MSS in the Library of the Society of Antiquaries note a bronze 'macehead' found at Barnes in 1841 "in gravel from London Bridge".

15. D. Longley *Runnymede Bridge 1976: Excavations on the site of a Late Bronze Age settlement*. Res Vol Surrey Archaeol Soc No. 6 (1980).

16. R. Bradley 'The destruction of wealth in later prehistory' *Man* 17 (1982) 108-22.

17. The various explanations are reviewed in S. Needham & C. Burgess 'The Later Bronze Age in the Lower Thames Valley' in J. Barrett & R. Bradley (eds.) *The British Later Bronze Age* B.A.R. British Series 83 (1980) 437-69.

18. Based on archive report of the Central Excavation Unit and information from David Andrew.

19. The existence of only one C-14 date for this site should give cause for doubt as to the validity of the date. Its position beneath such a depth of silt might however argue that it is of considerable antiquity.



Fig. 1

recent summary²⁰ argues that the Thames at the City of London in the mid 1st century A.D. was tidal, much wider than it is today, and at low tide meandered between small eyots and mudflats.

However, when it comes to discussing the development of the Thames in central London in earlier periods, opinions remain divided. Nunn²¹ argues persuasively that the Thames has moved progressively northwards since the last glaciation, only assuming its present course around AD 200.

20. G. Milne, R. W. Battarbee, V. Straker, & B. Yule 'The River Thames in London in the mid 1st century A.D.' *Trans London Middlesex Archaeol Soc* 34 (1983) 19-30.

21. P. D. Nunn 'The development of the river Thames in Central London' *Trans Inst Brit Geog (N.S.)* 8 (1983) 187-213.

22. G. Willcox 'Problems and possible conclusions related to the

archaeology and history of the River Thames in the London Region' *Trans London Middlesex Archaeol Soc* 26 (1975) 285-92.

According to his reconstruction, the Thames during the Neolithic, for example, would have flowed in a roughly straight line from Vauxhall to Bermondsey. At the other end of the scale, Willcox²², whose views on the 1st century river are criticised by Milne *et al*²³, considered that the river at the City in the Neolithic was far lower and narrower than it is now, and implies that it flowed in the same course, and Gibbard²⁴ states that evidence from studies of other rivers suggests that "... the present course of the

23. Milne *et al op. cit.* fn 19.

24. P. L. Gibbard *Pleistocene History of the Middle Thames* (1985).

River Thames is inherited from the latest Devensian time and that there has been little or no erosion since then". There are objections to both positions taken. The argument put forward by Nunn does not explain the large concentration of Mesolithic, Neolithic and Bronze Age finds dredged from the present course of the river. On the other hand, Willcox's reconstruction has rather been overtaken by evidence of sandbanks and buried channels found in archaeological excavations in Southwark which do suggest a much wider river consisting not of a single channel but a complex of shallow braided streams and marsh²⁵. Although Gibbard's work only extends to the western edge of Westminster, his proposition that woodland clearance created greater inwash which gradually silted up the side channels of the river until only one broad channel remained, requires further investigation. (The assertion however that there has been little erosion since the Devensian is merely relative in comparison with the massive erosion of the glacial periods).

Since the question of the course and appearance of the river at various stages in the post-glacial period is not resolved, the present-day course of the river has been depicted rather than hazarding guesses as to its shape at different periods. The underlying drift geology is indicated, and the positions of streams which are known from borehole surveys, excavations and historical references: these may not have assumed the same course during every prehistoric period, and almost certainly not all streams have yet been discovered. The base-map is thus made up of composite information, and has been drawn to set the prehistoric material in some sort of environmental context. The maps should not be taken as indications of the appearance of prehistoric settlement and landscape during the various periods indicated²⁶. Excavations and finds from buried river channels at Chertsey and Kingston, and from a settlement buried deep in silt at Runnymede Bridge indicate both that topography and settlement in the Thames valley has changed greatly over the last few thousand years, and that this process is seen all through the Middle and Lower Thames²⁷.

Provenances

In addition to the biases of deposition, survival and recovery mentioned above, the maps finally

25. A. J. Graham 'The geology of north Southwark and its topographical development in the post-Pleistocene period' *Southwark Excavations 1972-74*. Surrey Archaeol Soc and L.A.M.A.S. Joint Publication No. 1 (1978) 501-17.
26. The following sources of information have been used: The course of the Thames is that of the modern river. The streams are based on the 1932 Geological Survey with amendments to the Walbrook based on recent archaeological excavations. The alluvial margin (represented by a dotted line) is taken

have to be read with the *caveat* that some of the older finds have rather vague provenances. The labels for the majority of finds made before scientific excavations were carried out bear only a street name or the approximate position they were dredged from the Thames (e.g. 'Thames, opposite the Tower'). In such cases, findspots have been plotted midway along the street or in the middle of the river, so a considerable margin of error must be allowed for. Some material is now lost and only known through historical references. As mentioned above, some may also bear false provenances to enhance their value. The most likely of these are the exotic items such as a silver iron age brooch only otherwise found in the Balkans, and a pair of 'Neolithic' axes shown by microscopic analysis to be made of New Zealand basalt, and these have been omitted. Also to be regarded with suspicion are such items as the complete pots, almost certainly from burials, which would be unlikely to survive in a city environment.

The range of prehistoric evidence

The impact of the maps shown here will be largely impressionistic. For the reasons outlined above, the distributions on the maps show little more than the locations of archaeological excavations where prehistoric material has survived and been recovered. Despite the artificiality of the Three Age divisions, they remain useful for ordering this material because of its residual nature²⁸.

Mesolithic and Neolithic (10,000 – 2200 BC)

The distribution of stone finds shown in Fig. 1 consists mainly of flint, and seems to be the densest concentration mainly because all flint material has been plotted onto the same map. The flints have not been distinguished into periods because most are undiagnostic and undatable without a secure context. The distribution here may thus represent not only Mesolithic and Neolithic flintwork but also that from the Bronze and Iron Age, although the bulk of it is likely to belong to the first two periods. Flint is also likely to be over-represented in the material record because of its durability.

The material shown covers a period of around eight thousand years, and all that the finds can indicate is that there has been some occupation (indicated by land finds) in the area of the City and Southwark during this period. No indication of the

from the 1982 Geological Survey, with refinements in the Southwark area based on archaeological excavations.

27. Chertsey (*pers comm*), Kingston: Field & Penn 1978, Runnymede, *op cit* fn 15.
28. A numbered list of the finds shown here is on file in the Prehistoric and Roman Department of the Museum of London. It is hoped to prepare a full archive of this material with distribution maps showing numbered finds.

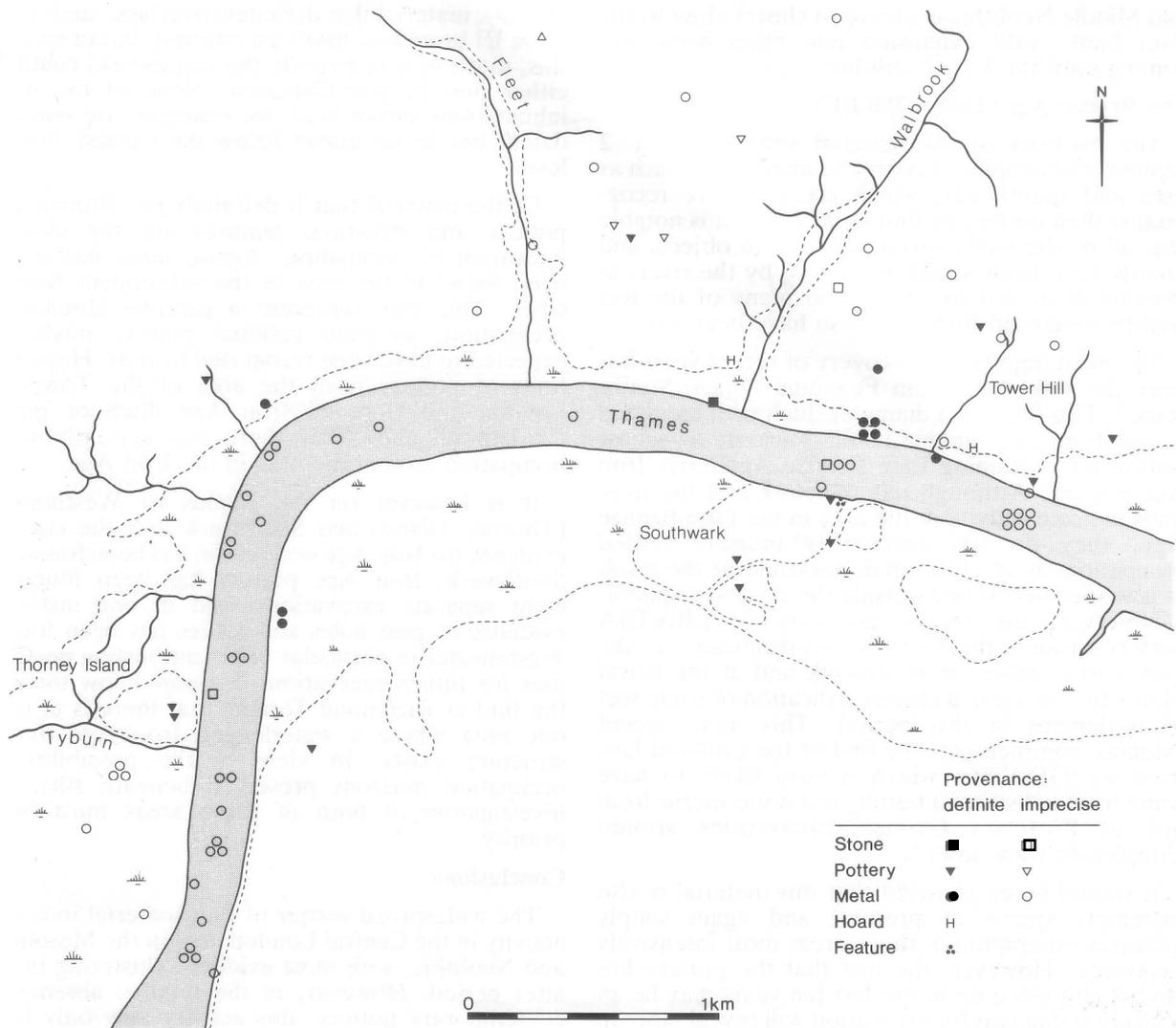


Fig. 2

density or duration of occupation can be given, except to state that the microlithic component of the assemblage is small in comparison with that which is more likely to date to the Neolithic. That occupation seems concentrated in these two areas is almost certainly a product of the intensity of archaeological investigation there, and further excavation might reveal indications of occupation all along the gravels of the banks of the Thames. It is however noteworthy that quite large concentrations of flint material have been found on the islands of

29aA. D. Lacaille 'Mesolithic facies in Middlesex and London' *Trans London Middlesex Archaeol Soc* 20 (3) (1961) 101-150.

29bA. D. Lacaille 'Mesolithic facies in the transpontine fringes' *Surrey Archaeol Collect* 63 (1966) 1-43.

30. J. Barrett 'The Bronze Age' in D. Collins *et al* (eds.) *The Archaeology of the London Area: Current Knowledge and*

Southwark and on the sandbanks of Lambeth. These may have provided convenient locations for the occasional exploitation of the resources of the river such as fish and fowl, as suggested over two decades ago by Lacaille when writing of Mesolithic hunter-gatherers²⁹. The northern bank, with its light capping of fertile brickearth overlying gravel, would also have provided an ideal environment for early farmers³⁰. Humphrey Case, in a recent review of the Mesolithic and Neolithic of the Upper Thames valley³¹, has noted the tendency for late Mesolithic

Problems Special Paper No. 1, London Middlesex Archaeol Soc (1976) 33-41.

31. H. Case 'The Mesolithic and Neolithic in the Oxford Region' in G. Briggs, J. Cook, & T. Rowley (eds.) *The Archaeology of the Oxford Region* Oxford University Department for External Studies (1986) 18-37.

and Middle Neolithic evidence to cluster close to the river bank, with expansion into other areas not coming until the Late Neolithic.

The Bronze Age (2200 – 700 BC)

The majority of the material shown on Fig. 2 represents examples of complete metal types such as axes and spearheads, which are far more recognisable than pottery or flintwork. Here, it is notable that all of the well-provenanced metal objects and hoards have been found in or right by the river, in streams or in marshy areas (and many of the less well-provenanced finds may also have been so).

The most impressive discovery of recent years has been the ring ditch from Fennings Wharf, Southwark³². This 8m (26ft) diameter ditch with cremated human bone and flints in its fill, enclosed a shallow central pit containing Late Bronze Age/Early Iron Age pottery. Although this structure and the river finds indicate activity in the area in the Late Bronze Age, they do not necessarily indicate settled occupation, as all of this material could be the result of activities performed outside the domestic sphere.

However, the recent discovery of LBA/EIA pottery around the City, in Westminster, at the Tower of London, in Southwark and at the Royal Mint site³³, is a much clearer indication of some sort of settlement in this period. This more recent evidence complements the find of the Collared Urn from the GPO site, which is most likely to have come from a disturbed burial, and some sherds from one of Professor Grimes' excavations around Cripplegate (now lost)³⁴.

It should be emphasised that this material is also extremely sparse at present, and again simply indicates occupation in those areas most intensively excavated. However, the fact that the pottery has almost all turned up in the last ten years may be an indication that careful excavation will reveal more in the future. Whether the concentrations of river finds (themselves poorly provenanced) indicate areas of adjacent settlement can also only be discovered by further excavation.

The Iron Age (700 BC – AD 43)

It is when one turns to a consideration of the Iron Age in Central London that most controversy is likely to occur, in view of the history of the search for a pre-Roman 'Londinium' outlined above. Assessment of the material is also made much more difficult by the fact that so much of it can overlap with the Roman period. On the map shown here

32. Noted in *London Archaeol* 5 no. 3 (1984) 67.

33. At Cromwell Green, 15-23 Southwark Street, 106-114 Borough High Street, Fenning's Wharf, 11-19 St. Thomas's Street, Tower of London, Royal Mint, Maiden Lane, Westminster Hall and Westminster Abbey.

(Fig. 3), material that definitely overlaps, such as La Tene III brooches, has been omitted, but in spite of this, much of it (especially the metalwork) could be either pre- or post-Conquest. None of the three inhumations shown here, for example, are securely dated, but lie on gravel below the earliest Roman levels.

Of the material that is definitely pre-Roman, the pottery and structural features are the clearest indication of occupation. Again, none has so far been found in the area of the subsequent Roman city³⁵. This may represent a genuine absence of occupation, as even residual pottery might be expected to have been recognised by now. However, finds of pottery from the area of the Tower of London and from an Iron Age ditch or pit in Clerkenwell show that there was certainly some occupation around the area in the Iron Age.

It is however on the islands of Westminster (Thorney Island) and Southwark that the clearest evidence for Iron Age occupation has been found. In Southwark, Iron Age pottery has been found in eight separate excavations, and in one instance, evidence of post holes and gullies has been found. Westminster in particular offers interesting possibilities for future excavation. We now know through the find at Richmond Terrace that there is at least one area where a waterlogged Iron Age timber structure exists. In view of the possibility of occupation horizons preserved beneath silts, the investigation of both of these areas must be a priority.

Conclusions

The widespread scatter of flint material indicates activity in the Central London area in the Mesolithic and Neolithic, with most evidence clustering in the later period. However, in the relative absence of contemporary pottery, this activity may only have been sporadic. Early Bronze Age activity is represented by barbed and tanged arrowheads from Southwark, and half a dozen other single items from the Thames. Other evidence of settlement is sparse until the Later Bronze Age: two beaker sherds from Cromwell Green, Borough High Street and Southwark Street, the GPO Collared Urn, and fragments of possible Deverel-Rimbury ware from St. Thomas's Street, the Royal Mint site, Westminster Hall and Cromwell Green. These might just as easily have come from disturbed burials as from settlements and thus evidence of earlier Bronze Age settlement is not conclusive. The shift in focus in the

34. Mentioned in Merrifield *op. cit.* fn 3c, 14.

35. Apart from an unstratified spindle whorl from the GPO site and two suspiciously complete vessels supposedly from Fetter Lane (Museum of London accession nos. 10454 & 10461).

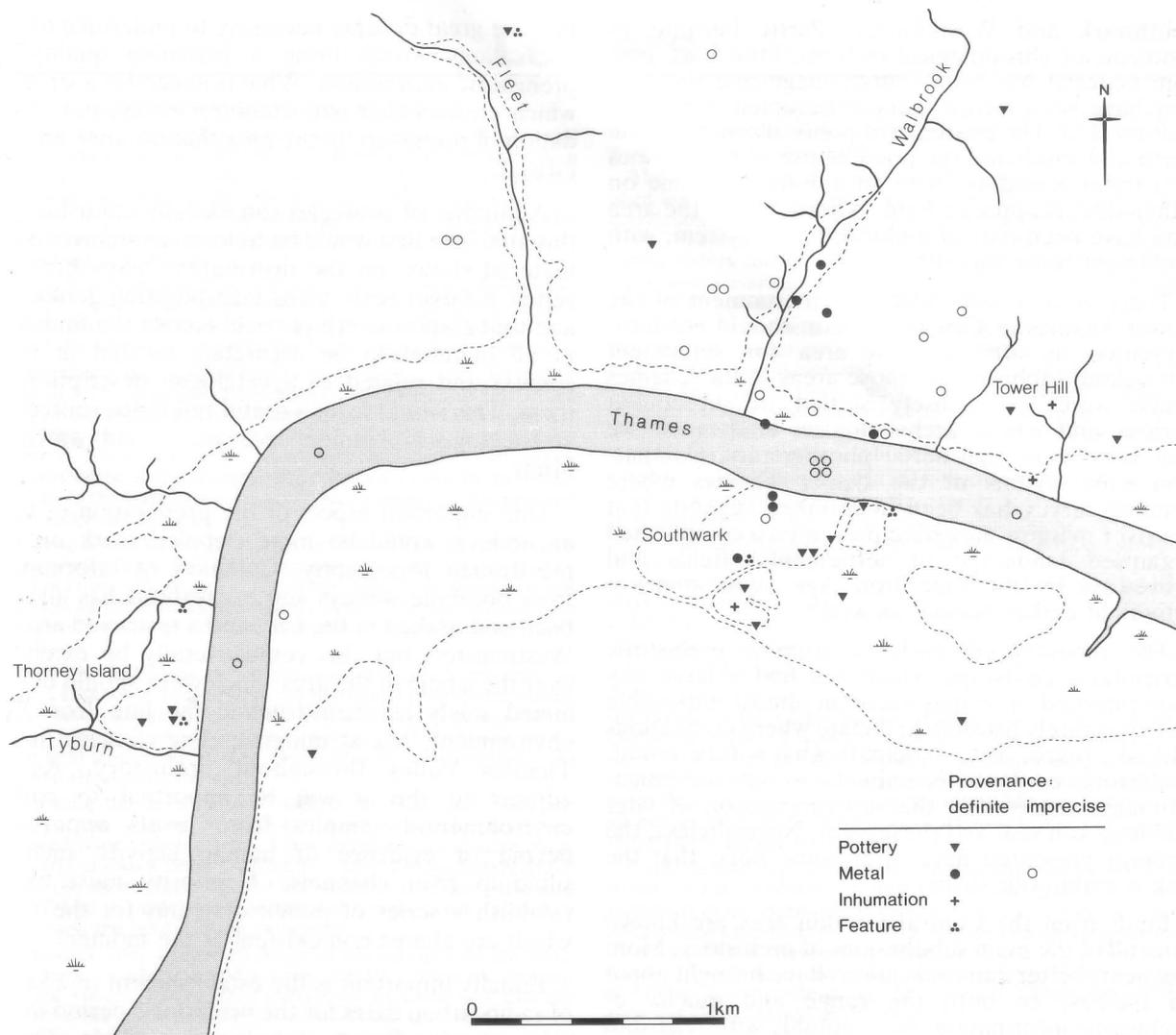


Fig. 3

Later Bronze Age from the Upper Thames Valley to the Lower has frequently been noted³⁶, usually from the large amounts of Late Bronze Age metalwork that have been found deposited in the River Thames largely within the Greater London area. In recent years this river coverage has been added to by the discovery of a number of apparent areas of contemporary settlement³⁷. In view of this, it is noteworthy that most of the pottery that has been found in the Central London area studied here belongs to this Late Bronze Age/Early Iron Age period, and may indicate an expansion of settle-

ments in the Lower Thames, controlling metalworking and other trade, and perhaps being responsible for the deposition of metalwork in the river and its tributaries. However, this must remain conjecture until stratified settlement material is found.

In the Iron Age the volume of identifiable material in the river declines in comparison with that of the earlier period, and indeed all kinds of finds seem scarcer, although this could purely be because of problems of recognition. The earlier Iron Age pottery is found outside the future City, mainly in

36. E.g. R. Bradley 'The Bronze Age in the Oxford area - its local and regional significance' in G. Briggs, J. Cook, & T. Rowley (eds.) *The Archaeology of the Oxford Region* Oxford University Department for External Studies (1986) 38-48.

37aNeedham & Burgess *op. cit.* fn 17.

37bD. Field & S. Needham 'Evidence for Bronze Age settlement on Coombe Warren, Kingston Hill' *Surrey Archaeol Collect* 77 (1986) 149.

Southwark and Westminster. Partly because of problems of chronological overlap, little Late Iron Age material has been found, suggesting the area may have been rather sparsely occupied in the last century B.C. The existence of political centres to the north and south and the possible use of the Thames as a tribal boundary, with an uninhabited zone on either side, is apposite here. Alternatively, the area may have been part of a planned field system, with settlement some way off.

There is no reason why the environment of the Lower Thames in Central London should not have presented as attractive an area for settlement throughout prehistory as those areas of the Thames which were less densely settled in subsequent periods and whose archaeological landscapes are thus known through aerial photography. Comparison with regions of the Upper Thames where detailed survey has been undertaken suggests that the river margins may have presented a complicated organised landscape of settlements, fields and droveways by the Late Iron Age, with intensive activity at earlier periods as well³⁸.

The recovery of evidence from a prehistoric agricultural landscape which has had a large city superimposed on it may seem an almost impossible task: it is rarely possible to dictate where excavations will take place, or to anticipate what will be found. Prehistoric evidence is unlikely to survive intact, although occasionally the superimposition of later buildings can seal and preserve it. Nevertheless, the findings presented here offer some hope that the task is within our scope.

Finds from the Central London area are known from all of the main subdivisions of prehistory. More frequent, better-run excavations have brought about an increase in both the range and quality of prehistoric information, most notably with regard to land finds. Sampling even of single features may be able to provide material (such as carbonised grain) which will give general evidence for settlement and a clue to its character, especially when this can be compared with the fairly large body of evidence of the agricultural economies of the Upper Thames. Prehistoric pottery and structural features are only just beginning to turn up. The problem now is how to develop a strategy to maximise the potential recovery of this evidence.

It would not be appropriate to design a programme of research excavations aimed at seeking out prehistoric material: this is not possible given the dictates of rescue excavation, nor would it be likely

38. D. Benson & D. Miles *The Upper Thames Valley: An archaeological survey of the river gravels*. Oxfordshire Archaeological Unit (1974). Maps 11 & 31 provide useful comparisons.

that the great expense necessary to undertake urban excavations would bring a matching quality of prehistoric information. What is needed is a strategy which ensures that opportunities for greater elucidation of prehistory in the area that do arise are not missed.

A number of strategies can usefully contribute to this aim. The first would be to form an archive of the material shown on the distribution maps here. A series of larger scale maps incorporating geological and topographic overlays could enable the findspots of all material to be accurately located in their context and related to a catalogue description of them. This would form a useful reference source for archaeologists planning excavations and watching briefs.

One important aspect of the preparation of such an archive would be more detailed work on the pre-Roman topography. Collation of information from borehole surveys and excavations has already been undertaken in the City and a restricted area of Westminster, but this could usefully be extended over the whole of the area. Such work should not be aimed solely at reconstructing the late Iron Age environment, but at understanding changes in the Thames Valley throughout prehistory. As an adjunct to this it will be important to collect environmental samples from levels apparently devoid of evidence of human activity such as silted-up river channels. A priority must be to establish a series of pollen diagrams for the area, which are almost non-existent at the moment.

Equally important is the establishment of a series of radiocarbon dates for the prehistoric period in the area, and for Greater London as a whole. This is however largely dependent on suitable material turning up for sampling.

Finally, it is important to bear in mind that the recovery of prehistoric occupation evidence is a distinct possibility, and that it may lie beneath deep deposits of silt. When time is running short on a site, investigation of deeper layers may seem a luxury. As Richmond Terrace has shown, it could be very worthwhile. If we start to know exactly what prehistoric material has been found where, it will then be possible to anticipate where more may be found, or where relevant environmental and dating evidence can be collected. It is only then that we will start to be able to build up a picture of prehistoric settlement and land-use in Central London.