

Fig. 1: the Fleet Valley in the Roman period (area of development shaded).

The Fleet Valley Project

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IN THE PREVIOUS issue, we looked at the excavation of two notable buildings which have created much interest in London's archaeology this year¹. In this issue we look at an excavation which, although in some ways less glamorous, should yield much information about the topography of London – the Fleet Valley Project (Fig. 1).

Historical background – (i) the Fleet River

The Fleet rises in Kenwood and Hampstead Ponds and flows to the Thames through Camden Town, King's Cross and under Farringdon Road, Farringdon Street and New Bridge Street. Its name is Saxon, meaning a tidal inlet, and was originally applied only to that part of the river between the Thames and Holborn. The Fleet Valley has been said to be almost a ravine in the prehistoric and early historical periods.

Little is known of the impact of man on the valley before the Roman period, when the river lay some 180m (200 yards) to the west of the 2nd century city wall. The importance of Ludgate in the Roman period is not known, nor is it known whether the Fleet was used as a port at this time.

1. Clive Orton 'A tale of two sites' *London Archaeol* 6 no. 3 (1989) 59-65.

Both the city and the east bank of the Fleet seem to have been largely ignored during much of the Saxon period. However, the original St. Paul's cathedral dates from AD 604, and St. Bride's church was built during this period. The main focus of Saxon settlement seems to have been in the Strand area until the late 9th century².

Activity in the area increased after the Norman conquest. The Fleet Prison (see below) is believed to date from the early days of the conquest. The city defences were considerably strengthened, with the addition here of two fortresses – Baynard's Castle and Montfichet's Tower. Although the site of the later Baynard's Castle is known, the position of its predecessor and the Tower of Montfichet are not. Both were demolished in 1283 to make way for the priory of the Black Friars (see below).

The earliest mention of the river being used to bring cargoes into London is in the early 12th century when stones for the rebuilding of St. Paul's were landed here. The first mention of coal being imported into London via the Fleet is in the early 13th century.

2. Alan Vince 'New light on Saxon pottery from the London area' *London Archaeol* 4 no. 16 (1984) 431-9, especially Fig. 2.

Throughout the medieval period the Fleet was a major thoroughfare with many wharves lining its banks. However, due to the activities of the citizens of London, it was also a major nuisance. Butchers and tanners used it to dispose of offal while the citizens used it to dispose of their rubbish and receive the contents of their latrines. It was dredged and scoured many times, but remained a nuisance up to the Great Fire in 1666.

Following the Great Fire, a major programme of rebuilding was carried out under the direction of Christopher Wren and Robert Hooke. Part of the programme involved converting the Fleet Ditch into a canal with wharves on both banks. The work was finished by 1674 but was not a financial success. Too few boats used the canal and too few merchants the wharves and warehouses. The general population and the cabmen, however, found a use for the wharves as thoroughfares and rubbish dumps.

In 1733 the canal was arched over between Holborn Bridge and Fleet Bridge. The wharves were turned into roads and the strip in the middle used as a new home for the Stocks Market. In 1766 the lower reach of the canal was also covered in, in order to provide an approach for the first Blackfriars Bridge. Today, the canal of Wren and Hooke forms the major part of the Fleet sewer under Farringdon and New Bridge Streets.

(ii) The Fleet Prison

The king's prison on the Fleet is first mentioned in the early 12th century, at which time it was the principle (if not the only) prison in London. It was often referred to as the "Gaul of London". With the building of Newgate as the "Prison of London" in 1187/8, the king's prison acquired the name of "Fleet". It is the only prison of the time which is known to have been built of stone, although it may, in common with other prisons, have originally been built of wood.

The prison and its precinct were surrounded by a moat which may date from the mid 13th century. When it was redug in 1335 it was 10ft (3m) wide and bordered by "tree clad banks". It was much abused by the citizens of the surrounding area who built latrines over it. This, together with the dumping of rubbish into it, resulted in its being partly blocked up in 1356 and again in 1502. It was abandoned and covered in by the time of Stow in 1603.

In its early life the Fleet was used to house all prisoners whom the king wished to have tried there. Largely used by the Courts of Common Pleas and Exchequer, it frequently housed Crown accountants in arrears with their payments and other Crown debtors. By the

late 14th century it was also being used by the Council and Chancery Courts.

After 1352 it became the place of imprisonment for very many private debtors and, from the reign of Henry VIII to 1641, for prisoners convicted by the Court of Star Chamber. Other inmates in the Tudor period included numerous state prisoners, such as the Earl of Northumberland, individuals who annoyed or otherwise fell foul of Cardinal Wolsey, and prisoners of war.

From the 14th century onwards it has been described as a comfortable prison – at least for those who could afford to pay for the better accommodation it contained. According to a document of 1561 there was graded accommodation within the prison, the prices varying from room to room in the upper quarters. The really destitute were confined to the lower accommodation in the cellars. Wardens exploited the situation to their financial advantage and also ran a kitchen and bar where the prices were adjusted to the prisoner's rank.

From its earliest days the prison underwent many

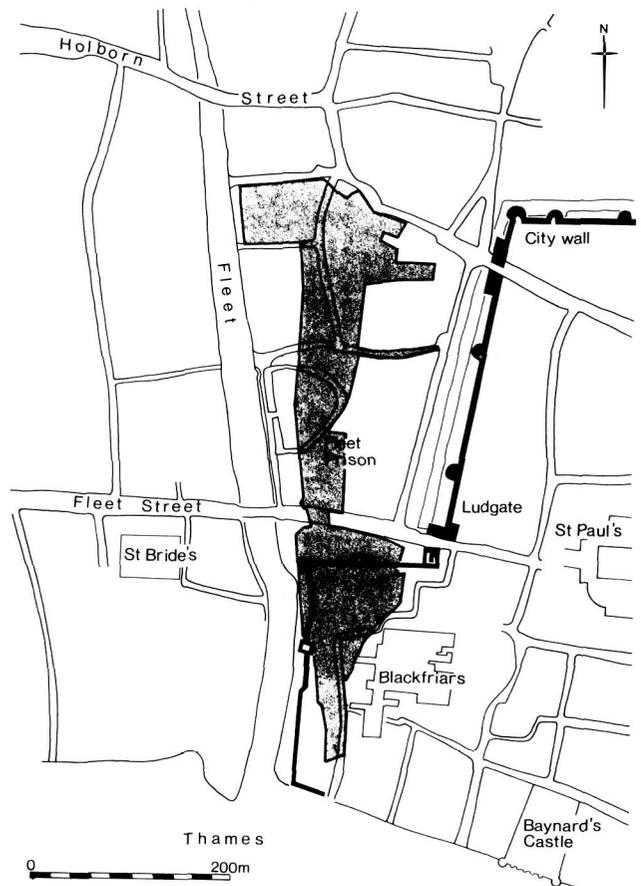


Fig. 2: the Fleet Valley in the 13th century (area of development shaded).

repairs and rebuilds. Large sums of money were spent on it in 1184-90, and about 1335 it was either rebuilt or substantially altered. It was destroyed by fire at least three times. The first was in the Peasants' revolt of 1381, the second in the Great Fire of 1666. After rebuilding in the 1760s it again suffered from fire in the Gordon Riots of 1780. Rebuilt in the 1780s, the prison remained substantially unaltered until its destruction.

The Act for its demolition was passed in May 1842 and its inmates transferred, under protest, to the Queen's Prison. It was sold to the Corporation of London in 1844 and the site finally cleared in 1846. The land was sold to the London Chatham and Dover Railway Company in 1864, when the construction of the present railway viaduct began.

(iii) The Black Friars

The Dominican Order of Preachers (the Black Friars) arrived in England from Bologna in 1221. A gift of land from Hubert de Burgh allowed them to establish a foundation near the north-east corner of Shoe Lane. This was enlarged in 1262 when they were given royal permission to enclose the lane.

In 1278 the Archbishop of Canterbury was granted a large area of land between Ludgate and the Thames, which he made available to the Black Friars. The grant carried with it permission to demolish a portion of the Roman city wall, Montfichet's Tower and the first Baynard's Castle, in order to provide material for the building of the new priory.

The church was begun in 1279, and in 1287 a royal grant of 100 marks was secured towards its erection. In 1288 the church was still being built, and in 1292 the cloister was being laid out. In 1294 a quay on the bank of the Thames was under construction.

While the priory was being built, Edward I directed that a wall be built at the expense of the city so as to enclose the Friars' precinct. It ran west from Ludgate to the edge of the Fleet, where it turned south towards the Thames (Fig. 2). Work on the wall started in 1283 but was not completed until 1320. In 1315 Edward II made murage grants towards the expense of the construction, and specifically for the erection of a turret on the east-west stretch of the wall.

Very little has survived of the history of the priory before the 16th century. In 1522 Henry VIII put up the visiting Emperor Charles V at the priory. For the occasion he linked his new palace at Bridewell³ on the west bank of the Fleet with Blackfriars by means of the Bridewell Bridge. A covered gallery led from the eastern end of the bridge into the Friars' precinct. This

3. Derek Gadd and Alan Thompson 'Bridewell Palace' *London Archaeol* 3 no. 10 (1979) 255-60.

bridge survived until the middle of the 18th century and, being built high so as to allow the passage of shipping, lent a "venetian" appearance to the mouth of the Fleet. Catherine of Aragon was put on trial before the papal legate in the great hall of the priory in 1529 during Henry's divorce proceedings.

On the dissolution of the monasteries in 1538, the priory was surrendered to the crown. There followed the granting of leases, of sales and of gifts by the Crown to favoured persons. The major beneficiary through the latter half of the century was the Earl of Cobham, who established his town house in the precinct.

The area had become a fashionable one by the beginning of the 17th century, and an important shop-keeping area. It also became an important area for theatre, with the establishment of the Blackfriars theatre by the Burbages in 1596. Shakespeare was a member of the company and purchased a house in the area. The theatre was used mainly in the winter months when the Globe and the Rose on the south bank were surrounded by muddy water.

The Society of Apothecaries acquired Cobham House in 1632 as their Guild Hall, and is still there today. During building works in 1925 a number of stones from the priory buildings were recovered and removed to St. Dominic's Priory at Haverstock Hill, Hampstead, where they were re-erected as a memento of the original settlement at Ludgate.

The development

The Fleet Valley site, being developed by Rosehaugh Stanhope Developments, extends from Holborn to Blackfriars and lies beneath and both sides of the railway viaduct, on the east bank of the Fleet (see Figs. 1 and 2). The development will include re-aligning the railway tracks so that trains will run underground to a new station beneath Ludgate Hill. This will provide a new link to the Snow Hill tunnel, which is used by British Rail's Thameslink service. New offices will be built above the railway line.

Excavations, funded by Rosehaugh Stanhope, started in September 1988 and are due to continue into 1990. Several areas are being investigated in that time by a team of up to 60 archaeologists from the Museum of London's Department of Urban Archaeology, under Project Co-ordinator Bill McCann.

Previous work in the area

Much of the area was sterilised for development and archaeological investigation by the building of the railway viaduct. The plan of Black Friars was elucidated early this century⁴, and since the late 1960s

4. A. W. Clapham 'On the topography of the Dominican Priory of London' *Archaeologia* 63 (1912) 57-84, but see 7 Ludgate Broadway (*London Archaeol* 5 no. 6 (1986) 160).

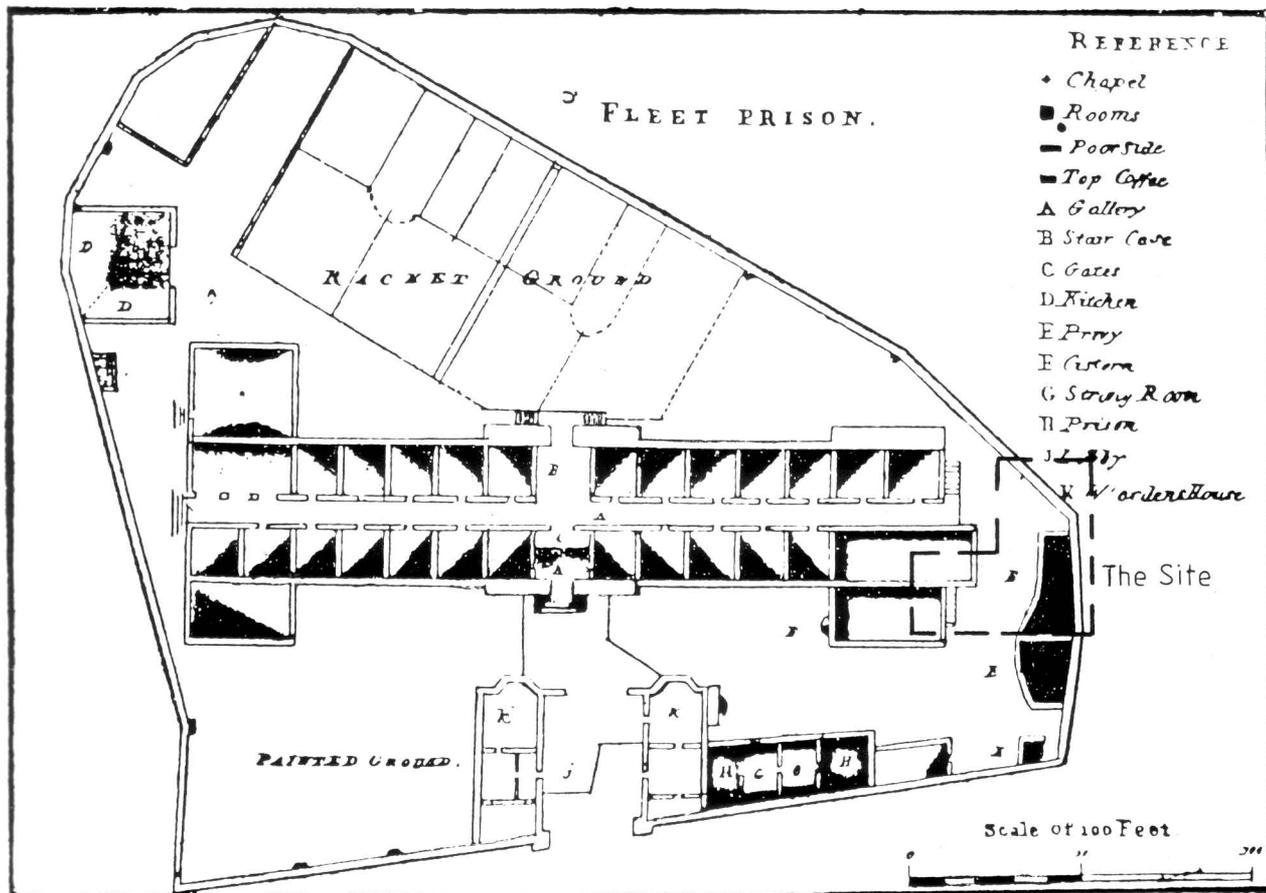


Fig. 3: 18th century plan of the Fleet prison (broken line encloses area excavated).

a series of excavations have examined the city wall and ditch in the Ludgate area⁵. Other sites, in the Carter Lane area⁶, may have uncovered the site of Montfitcher's Tower. Excavations at 19-25 Old Bailey in 1988⁷ uncovered evidence for substantial Roman activity in the area during the whole of the occupation period. This included a number of kilns used for the firing of fine pottery, an octagonal Romano-Celtic temple and a substantial villa-like building with a hypocaust. Other sites to the west of the area have investigated the west bank of the Fleet⁸ and the Bridewell Palace (see above).

Current excavations

Sections of the prehistoric and Roman riverbanks have been recorded in a number of places. The first

5. 37 Ludgate Hill (*Trans London Middlesex Archaeol Soc* 22 pt. 3 (1970) 9);
Ludgate Hill (*London Archaeol* 2 no. 10 (1975) 256);
1-6 Old Bailey, 42-46 Ludgate Hill (*London Archaeol* 4 no. 10 (1983) 275);
22-26 Blackfriars Lane (*London Archaeol* 4 no. 14 (1984) 385);
35-38 New Bridge Street (*London Archaeol* 5 no. 2 (1985) 49);
41-43 Ludgate Hill, 8 Pilgrim Street (*London Archaeol* 5 no. 14 (1988) 385-6);
54-66 Carter Lane, 1-3 Pilgrim Street, 29-33 Ludgate Hill (*London Archaeol* 6 no. 2 (1989) 47).

direct archaeological evidence for the Roman road out of Ludgate has been found, as well as a minor road observed at Holborn Viaduct running southwards towards the area of the temple and villa (see above). It too was made of rammed gravel with a slight camber, and was at least 1.5m (5ft) wide. A section of compacted gravels observed immediately north of Ludgate Hill may have formed part of a ford across the river at this point.

Eleven articulated skeletons of late Saxon date (950-1050) were excavated in a small area immediately west of Black Friars Lane. Curiously, only three skulls were associated with the burials, which may form part of a cemetery. The area will be further excavated after demolition of the viaduct.

6. *London Archaeol* 6 no. 2 (1989) 52.
7. 52 Carter Lane (*London Archaeol* 5 no. 10 (1987) 270);
54-66 Carter Lane, 1-3 Pilgrim Street, 29-33 Ludgate Hill (see fn. 5).
8. 6-7 New Bridge Street (*London Archaeol* 5 no. 2 (1985) 49);
17-21 Farringdon Street (*London Archaeol* 5 no. 10 (1987) 271);
City of London Boys' School (*London Archaeol* 5 no. 14 (1987) 387).



Fig. 4: the 11-12th century toilet seat.

(Photo: Museum of London)

Excavations in Pilgrim Street⁹ revealed a large part of the east-west section of the medieval city wall, as well as the entrance to a turret. More is expected to be found further along Pilgrim Street.

The remains of two major buildings were excavated immediately south of Ludgate Hill and east of the viaduct. The earlier, dating from the mid 12th century, had a single step of a spiral staircase surviving within the foundations of a corner turret. There were possibly two rooms, and the whole building was probably 8 to 9m (nearly 30ft) square. The later building dated from the 13th or 14th century and retained the lower courses and threshold of an ornate doorway. It was close to, and possibly contemporary with, the medieval extension of the city wall.

The stonework in both these buildings was of a very high order, suggesting that they were not properties of the merchant classes. The earlier was strategically close to the bridge across the Fleet and therefore in a good position to serve a defensive function. The possibility that it was the Tower of Montfichet has not been ruled out.

Much worked stone was recovered from a 16th century well south of Apothecary Street. It had been

used as the well lining, and has proved to be window tracery of the 15th century. It almost certainly came from the Black Friars Priory. Associated with it was rare and well-preserved stained glass which was made in Venice and included fragments of an inscription.

Other finds from the medieval period include timber and stone-built revetments along the river bank. The timber revetments survived to a height of at least 1.5m (5ft) and 3m (10ft) in length, whilst the 14th century river wall, observed in short lengths over 15m (50ft) in total stood to a height of 2.5m (8ft).

One of the most exciting finds has been part of the foundations of the Fleet canal under Farringdon Street. The materials excavated, piles of pine with oak timbers fastened to them, correspond precisely with the descriptions given in the manifests for the work carried out in the 1670s.

In the south-east corner of the Fleet prison, the two 18th century rebuilds of the perimeter wall have been uncovered, together with part of the yard and what may be part of the prison building itself. This area is located on an 18th century plan of the prison in Fig. 3. It is hoped that further excavation will locate the moat and much of the eastern side of the prison precinct.

Finds

Many finds have been recovered from a series of wells of several periods. The lower levels of the wells have remained waterlogged, resulting in a high degree of preservation of organic materials, in particular leather and wood. One of the medieval wells was lined with a wooden barrel. Finds from its backfill include a quantity of leather, including a decorated scabbard for a knife. Pottery dating to between 1250 and 1350 includes a complete Kingston ware jar of unique form. The barrel lining of the well has been lifted intact to be preserved for display in the Museum.

The earliest excavated example of a wagon axle, dating to the 11th or 12th century, has been found. It had been re-used, first as a support within a building and later as one of a group of piles in the foundations supporting a stairwell. It may also have been used as a support for chopping ropes, since there are a number of chopping marks on one side.

An 11-12th century three-seater toilet seat (Fig. 4) was found *in situ* over a small rectangular wattle-lined pit. It is made from a radially-split oak plank and measures 1.85 × 0.37m (6ft × 1ft 3in). It had not been finished off to a very smooth surface and was probably uncomfortable to sit on. A fire within the pit suggested that an attempt was made at sterilisation, and the process charred the underside of the seat. A 12th century single-seater toilet seat has been excavated at Coppergate, York, and a late medieval

example at Winchester. Stone examples are known from monastic and castle sites.

Most of the wells produced post-medieval artefacts. One contained several complete wine or spirit bottles (one with its original contents). Another well produced much late 16th to mid 17th century pottery, including a variety of tableware forms such as a colander, a brazier, a money box and a very beautiful Palissy type polychrome plate. It came from the Saintonge region of France and the moulded polychrome decoration shows an Arcadian scene. It is unusual to discover this type of vessel on an archaeological excavation; they can never have been common and were usually treated with great care and regarded as family heirlooms. Production of this type of ware began in 1540.

From other locations on the site, items relating to metal manufacturing and bone processing may suggest localised industrial activity. The finds have included a stone mould, a crucible, iron slag, copper and lead waste and an unfinished copper brooch. It had one of the four green glass insets remaining. The "screw" – a length of extra metal used to hold the item while it was being worked – was still in place.

Acknowledgements

We wish to thank Sue Rivière of the Department of Urban Archaeology, Museum of London for her help, and for suggesting this article to the *London Archaeologist*.

Excavations & Post-Excavation Work

City, by Museum of London, Department of Urban Archaeology. A series of long term excavations. Enquiries to DUA, Museum of London, London Wall, EC2Y 5HN (01-600 3699).

Croydon & District, processing and cataloguing of excavated and museum collections every Tuesday throughout the year. Archaeological reference collection of fabric types, domestic animal bones, clay tobacco pipes and glass ware also available for comparative work. Enquiries to Mrs Muriel Shaw, 28 Lismore Road, South Croydon, CR2 7QA (01-688 2720).

Greater London (except north-east and south-east London), by Museum of London, Department of Greater London Archaeology. Excavations and processing in all areas. General enquiries to DGLA, Museum of London (01-600 3699 ext. 241).

Local enquiries to:

North London: 3-7 Ray Street, London EC1R 3DJ (01-837 8363).

South-west London: St. Luke's House, Sandycombe Road, Kew, Surrey (01-940 5989).

Southwark and Lambeth: 6-8 Cole Street, London SE1 4YH (01-407 1989 or 403 2920 – office – and 928 0778/9 – finds).

West London: Town Mission Hall, Mission Square, Pottery Road, Brentford, Middlesex (01-560 3880).

Hammersmith & Fulham, by Fulham Archaeological Rescue Group. Processing of material from Fulham Palace. Tuesdays, 7.45 p.m.-10 p.m. at Fulham Palace, Bishop's Avenue, Fulham

Palace Road, SW6. Contact Keith Whitehouse, 86 Clancarty Road, SW6 (01-731 4498).

Kingston, by Kingston upon Thames Archaeological Society. Rescue sites in the town centre. Enquiries to Marion Shipley, Kingston Heritage Centre, Fairfield Road, Kingston (01-546 5386).

North-east London, by Passmore Edwards Museum. Enquiries to Pat Wilkinson, Passmore Edwards Museum, Romford Road, E15 4LW (01-534 4545).

Surrey, by Surrey Archaeological Unit. Enquiries to David Bird, County Archaeological Officer, Planning Department, County Hall, Kingston, Surrey (01-541 8911).

Vauxhall Pottery, by Southwark and Lambeth Archaeological Society. Processing of excavated material continues three nights a week. Enquiries to S.L.A.S., c/o Cuming Museum, 155 Walworth Road, SE17 (01-703 3324).

The Council for British Archaeology produces a monthly British Archaeological News (9 issues a year). It gives details of conferences, extra-mural courses, summer schools, training excavations and sites where volunteers are needed. The annual subscription of £7.50 includes postage, and should be made payable to C.B.A., 112 Kennington Road, SE11 6RE (01-582 0494).