

Lundenwic laid bare

Paul Arthur

IT IS A pleasure to receive on my desk Alan Vince's *Saxon London* whilst I am engaged in preparing a volume on early medieval Naples, based on the material evidence. This is not a coincidence, but a sign of the times. After well over a decade of programmed urban archaeology, and more in certain areas, the ground has been prepared for new syntheses of the character and development of many major European towns. We can cite the many excavations carried out, not only in London and Naples, but also in Rome, Milan, Marseilles, Paris, Bordeaux, Canterbury, York, and so on. This phase is to be coupled with revived interests in early medieval archaeology. Indeed, it is likely that the 1990s will witness a number of preliminary syntheses of the structures of medieval Europe, based on the results of archaeological excavations. Early medieval archaeology which, in particular, had been based on the excavation and study of cemeteries, in the 1980s saw the application of refinements in stratigraphic excavation to a number of major and minor settlement sites throughout Europe, a growing interest in the interaction between settlements and territories, and between regions and regions, as well as major developments in the manner of archaeological interpretation. Following a decade of analyses, the time is now right to stand back and obtain the broad views which should hail the research designs of the next millennium.

Saxon London helps to prepare the way by proposing a coherent picture of settlement and land-use from the decline of Roman rule to the Norman conquest, embracing the varied evidence. Perhaps the major novelty of the last decade is the increasing definition of the mid-Saxon Strand settlement of *Lundenwic*, to the west of the old Roman walled city. This area looks as though it may have been an emporium along the lines of the large continental sites of *Quentovic*, south of Boulogne, or *Dorestad* in the Netherlands, and similar to the smaller English emporia of Ipswich and *Hamwih* (Southampton). Testimony is so far limited, principally to the name and the small quantities of Rhenish Tating ware and wine amphorae, though it is probably not insignificant that coin loss diminishes from the early 9th century and the name (and the settlement?) disappears soon after, when the large Carolingian emporia are in decline. Other sites such as Canterbury may seem to have stood an equal if not better chance of developing as political and economical interfaces with the continent, though it was the Thames that redeemed London, suggesting that the *wic* sites, though prevalently coastal, were in effect projected towards the interior (p. 118). Furthermore, I find the why of the foundation of *Lundenwic* on an alternative site to *Londinium*, which again finds parallels with other emporia, somewhat alluring. Defence does not really seem to have been a preoccupation in any of the cases concerned, and it is as though all the

foundations were guaranteed some sort of neutrality or immunity within a controlled-trade network. Indeed, apparent similarities of intent across large areas of Europe, would suggest that political and economic contacts were often firmer than some pictures of the 'dark ages' would have.

The refounding of *Lundenburh*, or rather the shift back within the Roman walls, no matter how decrepit they may have become in the meantime, is probably to be put into relation with the insecure times following the fragmentation of the Carolingian Empire and the growth of new, somewhat aggressive, states whose power could not be wholly based on land exploitation and trade. This is especially true of the Vikings, whose raids (even as far as Fulham) are legendary. Increased impetus to the development of the re-settled site seems to have been given by Alfred the Great's taking of it by 886.

Many other problems still remain. Material evidence for virtually the entire period considered by the book is slim and underlines the necessity to firmly grasp all future excavation opportunities. However, in Carver's terms, we have enough to prepare an informed "research agenda" for the '90s. How did *Londinium* dissolve after Roman withdrawal? Indeed, will concentrations of early Saxon Londoners one day come to light? Why, despite such an all-time 5th-6th century low, did the site of London continue to attract attention and never lose, if only for brief moments, its prime position within British history? Here the Thames has much to answer for.

The few pages on the countryside are enticing and, although early medieval London for much of its time probably fed its reduced populace through orchards and fields located both within and immediately outside the walls, the renewal of the countryside was cardinal to the city's growth. The sources, not least the Domesday Book, tease us with the new named settlements, ploughlands (*terrae carrucae*) and mills, emphasising the opening up of fresh ground, including the heavy clays, apparently devoid of early Saxon settlement. This is a fundamental area that needs much more archaeological work and worth dwelling on in future editions.

I believe we should aim to have more ecological information, as well as specific sets of data to enable firmer comparisons between sites. One of the problems here is the general lack of closely-datable artefacts, including pottery, and I predict that scientific developments will come to our aid in the future. Furthermore, what was produced by London and when did an agricultural surplus permit the growth of crafts to supply those innumerable goods for the developing urban market?

A. Vince *Saxon London, An Archaeological Investigation*. B. A. Seaby Ltd., 1990. 164 pp., numerous black-and-white illus. Hard-back, £16.50.

Head of the London Archaeology Service appointed

THE MUSEUM of London has announced the appointment of Dr. Peter Chowne as the first head of the new integrated Museum of London Archaeology Service, from 2nd December. Dr. Chowne was formerly Deputy Director of the Trust for Wessex Archaeology, and came to archaeology in 1975 after a career in industry. Four appointments at the next level in the new hierarchy have also been made: Business and Administration (Stephen Andrews), Operations (Taryn Nixon), Publication (Dr. John Schofield) and Special Services -- i.e. finds, environmental evidence and photography -- (Peter Hinton). Posts at the next level are being advertised and interviewed internally and we should soon have a good idea of the structure and personnel of the new organisation.

An Apse for the Dean

A PLAN of the pre-Conquest churches at Waltham Abbey was included in the Summer 1991 issue of this journal (p. 294). A final small trench excavated in September showed that there was in addition a very small eastern apse in the eastern wall of the continuous transept of Church 3 built by Harold. Above ground it could have measured only about 5ft (1.5m) across, and is thought likely to have been designed to accommodate the chair of the Dean of Harold's secular college, with the main altar being free-standing somewhere to the west. This final small excavation has answered the last question likely to be asked of Harold's church and its predecessors this millennium. It leaves the position of his tomb and of the Holy Cross for the next.

New buildings for the National Maritime Museum

THE NATIONAL Maritime Museum has announced a plan, costing £37m and to take ten years to fully implement, to 'create a modern museum for the 21st century'. The plans, which will increase gallery space by about one third, are intended to increase the number of visitors by improving their experience at the Museum, and also to improve the operation of the Museum itself. Within a programme of large-scale refurbishment across the whole Museum, major developments proposed are the remodelling of the central space (the Neptune Hall) as a new main entrance, and the construction of a new Collections

Support Centre and reserve collection building beneath the north lawn, next to the Queen's House.

Rotherhithe Heritage Museum opens

THE NEW Rotherhithe Heritage Museum, housed in the former Lavender Pond Pumphouse, was opened on 7th November. It displays a collection of finds made on the local foreshore by Mr. Ron Goode over a period of ten years, including prehistoric and Roman finds, coins, jewellery, cannon balls and clay pipes. The Museum is open from 1 - 5 p.m. Wednesdays to Saturdays; admission is £1.50 (concessions £1) and the address is Lavender Road, Rotherhithe Street SE16 1DZ (tel. 071 231 2976).

Developer fined

THE OWNERS of part of the scheduled Ancient Monument site of Winchester Palace have been fined £75,000 by the Inner London Crown Court for excavating their basement without scheduled monument consent. A passer-by noticed archaeological material in a skip when J. O. Sims Ltd. were excavating the basement of their warehouse and reported it to *English Heritage*. Medieval and Roman layers, possibly including parts of tessellated floors, had been destroyed. *English Heritage* pressed for a prosecution which, despite a plea of ignorance that the basement was in a scheduled area, was successful. This is the highest fine yet imposed for a breach of Ancient Monument legislation. We congratulate *English Heritage* on their determination and hope that developers will take note.

Tebbutt Research Fund

THIS FUND was established as a tribute to the life and work of the late C. F. Tebbutt, OBE, FSA, and applications are invited, from individuals and groups, for grants towards research into the Wealden Iron Industry.

It is anticipated that about £200 will be available from the fund, and anyone interested should write a suitable letter of application giving details of themselves together with relevant information concerning the research envisaged.

Details should be sent to the Hon. Secretary of the Wealden Iron Research Group, Mrs. Shiela Broomfield, 8 Woodview Crescent, Hildenborough, Tonbridge, Kent TN11 9HD.

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One must be careful here not to confuse natural economic growth of London with the establishment of the *wic* or the minting, or indeed the circulation, of coinage. Very little is known concerning settlement layout and architecture, and we are very far from being able to attempt estimates of population densities or, indeed, from practising any form of cliometrics, usually one of the satisfying features of archaeology when compared to the methods of traditional historical research.

Though London and Naples must have seemed further apart than a two-hour flight makes them seem now, it is interesting to recall that in the later 7th century the North African cleric Hadrianus was first abbot of the monastery of Nirida (near Naples) and later abbot of St. Augustine's, Canterbury (fairly near London!), succeeding Benedict Biscop. Indeed, even archaeology suggests that in the second half of the first millennium old northern European and Mediterranean urban sites were not always, figuratively speaking, so far from each

other, sharing events likewise discernable in the archaeology of myriad other old Roman urban settlements. The ubiquity of "dark earth" deposits in the urban settlements that continued through the early middle ages tells a common European-wide story and indicates subsistence-level survival against a background of widespread demographic decline, resulting from the international economic recessions from late antiquity, plagues, wars, etc. Some old Roman towns had enough strength to stay above water, some floundered and others drowned.

The model presented by Alan Vince, embodying the work of teams of archaeologists for well over a decade, is both intriguing and convincing. Representing such an evanescent period of London's history through fragile remains, it is obligatory reading, not only for those who are interested in the history and archaeology of the period, but also for those who have responsibility for the planning and development of Britain's capital. We have lost a lot of the past, though Vince shows us that, even through the collection of minute evidence, we may still have much to recover.