

Fig. 1: site location plan.

Current archaeological work at Regis House in the City of London (part 1)

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Introduction

REGIS HOUSE is an important site occupying a position between the pre- and post-1831 London Bridges (Fig. 1). Along the east side runs Fish Street Hill, the road serving the river crossing intermittently from Roman times until Rennie's London Bridge was constructed between 1824 and 1831 in a new location, to replace the crumbling 12th-century edifice familiar to generations of Londoners.

The new bridge was constructed immediately to the west of the site, reached by a new road, King William Street, which joined the bridge *via* a vaulted causeway across Lower Thames Street. The vaults still survive as storage spaces between Regis House and the Miles Lane site to the west¹.

In February 1996, the Museum of London Archaeology Service (MOLAS) completed an excavation on

1. ILA79 excavated by Louise Miller of the Department of Urban Archaeology in 1979: 'Miles Lane: the early Roman waterfront' *London Archaeol.* 4, no 6 (1982), 143-7. The remainder of Rennie's Bridge now stands at Lake Havasu City, Arizona, USA following its replacement in 1967-72.

the site of Regis House in advance of redevelopment². The excavation was an ambitious project, generously funded by Land Securities Properties Plc, and was intended to fully record surviving structures and stratigraphy representing 2000 years of waterfront history. This will be the first time that a City waterfront site has been hand-excavated in its entirety. Linked with the excavation was a programme of systematic metal-detecting of all spoil on a context basis to maximise finds recovery. The project was particularly fortunate in that extensive observations were made by Gerald Dunning of the Guildhall Museum during the construction of Regis House and the *Steam Packet Inn* (27-28 Fish Street Hill) in 1929-31, mainly in trenches hand-dug for the piers and foundations of the structure³.

The 1929-31 observations

During his work, Dunning located, described and planned a Roman quay constructed of massive squared baulks, extending east-west across the whole southern part of the site, while to the west were other isolated timbers behind the quay. The quay appeared to be filled with 'grey mud' and substantial dumps of oyster shells, in places 2.44m thick, with pottery of the late 1st century suggesting a date of around AD 80. Timbers were also recorded beneath the south-east corner of Regis House and 27-28 Fish Street Hill, which are now known to have belonged to two, and quite probably three, later waterfronts. It was these structures which proved in 1995-96 to be infilled with the oyster shell deposits. A column drum, 0.45m in diameter, was found within the oyster infill in 1929-31.

A later ragstone and chalk Roman wall was located along the Fish Street Hill frontage, with fragments of a second 5.18m to the west. Along the King William Street frontage in the north-west were two ragstone and brick walls, aligned east-west and 6.1m apart, with a displaced Tuscan column base, 0.25m in diameter, in the intervening fill, and a pit containing 1st and 2nd-century pottery; these have now been interpreted as internal walls within a masonry building, whose west wall was found in 1995. A further isolated fragment of

ragstone wall was found in the north. These walls have now been accurately positioned in relation to the 1995-96 trench, but are not shown on the plans included in this summary.

One notable feature of the site was an extensive layer of burnt mudbrick mixed with other debris — plaster, mortar, tiles, timber — which reached up to 2.44 m thick in places. This covered much of the southern half of Regis House and 27-28 Fish Street Hill, and was clearly of a later phase than the quay and its succeeding revetments. Near Fish Street Hill, the deposit contained a large quantity of burnt samian ware, which on examination proved to be mainly of Hadrianic date; Dunning suggested that it was deposited around AD 120-30. He went on to suggest that this debris was the remains of buildings burnt in a major conflagration⁴. Crucially, he considered that there was more debris than could be accounted for by buildings on the site, and that some material was therefore brought in from elsewhere. Subsequent writers have, however, suggested that the samian wares were the burnt stock of a warehouse or shop located on the waterfront. Amongst many other research questions, the 1995 excavation aimed to determine whether this was the case, and to relocate the Roman quay. This, then, is the background to the Regis House project.

Recent archaeological work

The recent excavation programme carried out by MOLAS was completed in several stages between January 1995 and February 1996 including:

- 1) an evaluation carried out in Spring 1994, consisting of 7 boreholes, and 23 archaeological and geotechnical testpits⁵;
- 2) a controlled excavation in January-February 1995 in 18-20 Fish Street Hill (including the former *Canterbury Arms*);
- 3) a watching brief in Spring 1995 on perimeter trenches excavated for the main retaining wall of the new building, and various smaller enabling trenches in the northern and central area;
- 4) two deep controlled excavations in the south-eastern and south-western (Ridgway House) corners of the site crossing the line of the quay on the line of the perimeter wall;

48-77.

5. G. Marsh 'London's samian supply and its relationship to the development of the Gallic samian industry: Appendix I', and 'Burnt samian from London: Appendix II', in Anderson and Anderson (eds) *Roman Pottery Research in Britain and North-West Europe* BAR International Series 123 (i) (1981).
6. T. Brigham and B. Watson *Regis House, King William Street and Fish Street Hill, London EC4. An Archaeological Evaluation and Research Design* MoLAS Archive Report 1994 (unpub).

2. Regis House and Ridgway House (built 1913), 41-46 King William Street, 18-20 Fish Street Hill, and the *Canterbury Arms*, London EC4, TQ 3288 8074, site code KWS94. Project Manager: Angus Stephenson. Supervisors: Trevor Brigham and Bruce Watson.

3. G. C. Dunning *The Wharves, Regis House, King William St (circa 1931)*, unpublished notes in Museum of London archive (Guildhall Museum ref. GM 248).

4. G. C. Dunning 'Two Fires of Roman London' *Antiq J* 25 (1945)

- 5) excavation of the remaining northern half of the site between the end of July and September 1995;
- 6) excavation of the southern area between late August 1995 and January 1996, with a watching brief in February, including the northern segment of the former 27-28 Fish Street Hill.

The combined results of this work and Dunning's records enable a preliminary outline of the site's history to be assembled, which is presented in interim form in two parts: Part 1 – The 1st-century waterfront and waterside building; Part 2 – The 2nd-century waterfront and later (to follow in the Winter issue). It should be emphasised that interpretations and dates are at this stage provisional.

Natural topography

The location of the site on the north bank of the Thames was crucial to its early development. A combination of borehole and test pit logs combined with the results of excavation and watching brief work, has revealed the complex nature of the local natural topography. At the north end, near Monument Street, palaeocene London Clay was exposed at around 5.0m OD. This was cut by a series of post-glacial stream channels, leaving a plateau or peninsula of higher clay below 18-20 Fish Street

Hill, and continuing below Fish Street Hill. These features were filled with a series of gravels and fluvial deposits, which have been sampled in an attempt to determine the nature of the early post-glacial environment.

The topography of the site was substantially modified as the Thames moved to its present course. In the north, terrace gravels were deposited, largely truncated by the basements of Regis House. In the south, the clay and stream fills were cut by terracing and covered with up to 2.3m of flood plain gravels, until the south side of the peninsula was reached. The peninsula itself was capped by around 0.5m of gravel at the higher terrace level.

The Claudian revetment

The exact date of the establishment of a permanent river crossing following the Roman invasion of AD 43 is not known, but the natural promontory under Fish Street Hill was clearly the ideal location for a northern bridge abutment. It seems likely that a crossing – either a ferry or a bridge – was established early on, and that it was served from the first by a road following the line of the present Fish Street Hill (Fig. 2). Some of the earliest traces of Roman occupation in London could therefore be expected at Regis House, both on the foreshore and on the higher ground in the north of the site, away from the waterfront, and alongside the street.

On the foreshore, a pile-and-plank revetment, 0.6m high, was constructed (Fig. 3), although there were traces of some earlier activity, including the cutting of two probable quarry pits, which were infilled with silts before the revetment was built. Several timbers have been dated by dendrochronological analysis to AD 52, which means that this is the earliest securely-dated structure in London. The purpose of the revetment was to straighten the natural riverbank, and probably also to consolidate the edge of a new terrace at around 2.0-2.5m OD, possibly in association with the construction of the bridge immediately to the east. The west end of the revetment contained reused timbers including two pointed palisade or fence posts, which should take the earliest activity several years closer to the Roman Conquest.

Some distance to the south, a low post-and-wattle revetment was constructed on the open foreshore, backfilled with organic rubbish containing a number of coins of Claudian and earlier date, as well as circular studs or brooches, several with enamelled decoration. This revetment, which was firmly in the intertidal zone and therefore vulnerable. For a discussion of the bridgehead and earlier work in the area, see G. Milne *The Port of Roman London* (1985).

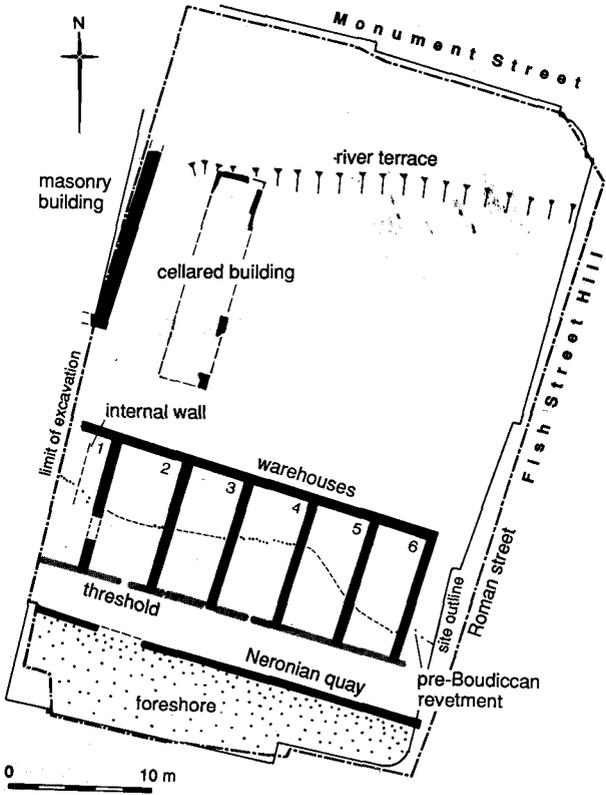


Fig. 2: the Neronian quay and associated buildings.

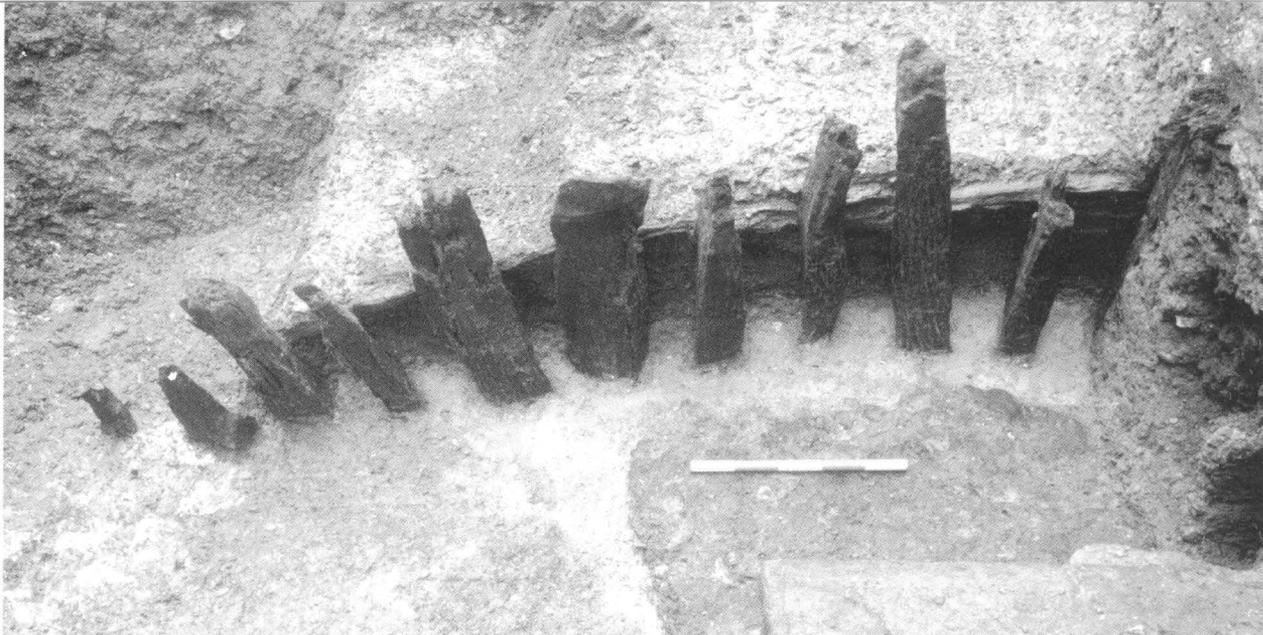


Fig. 3: the AD 52 pile-and-plank revetment
(Photo: MOLAS).

able to damage, can only have functioned to stabilise the foreshore, perhaps as a stage in the construction of the much larger quay which was to follow. A number of isolated posts were driven into the foreshore, probably at the same time. Some of the larger timbers may have functioned as mooring posts, while others may have been further stabilisation.

First-century occupation in the north

Excavation work in the north-east (18-20 Fish Street Hill) revealed a large east-west ditch infilled with gravel, and containing some late Bronze Age/Iron Age pottery; this may be residual, but evidence of prehistoric activity cannot be ruled out. A north-south ditch cut the fill of the larger feature, curving round towards the north-east. The ditch was not datable, but was probably of early Roman date; subsequently, several small trees or bushes were uprooted in the area between the ditch and the bridge approach and the topsoil removed to make way for a series of buildings. This row of substantial structures was marked by two east-west beamslots for timber baseplates supporting the walls. The east end of the southern slot returned northward, suggesting that the buildings stopped short of the street frontage, while a line of postpits to the east of the northern slot suggested a different construction method being employed within the same wall-line. Dating evidence was sparse, but preliminary spot-dating of the earliest levels suggests a date of AD 50-70, which does not conflict with the proposed Claudian date. The buildings were probably shortlived, however, being demolished and the site sealed beneath a series of gravel deposits, with several pits containing metalworking residues and fragments of what are

provisionally identified as furnace lining. In the south, a timber-lined drain was constructed, possibly replacing an earlier natural streamlet. This was soon infilled, however.

New timber-framed and earthfast buildings were laid out on the gravels, extending southward to the terrace overlooking the foreshore. In the north of 18-20 Fish Street Hill, two north-south slots represented the partitions of a range of rooms. The eastern room had a timber floor, with joist impressions and the fragmentary remains of decayed planking, while the floors of the western rooms were of brickearth. In the south, the buildings appear to have been simpler post-built structures. A substantial mudbrick wall marked the west end of the buildings, constructed within the earlier curving ditch, which was by now infilled.

These buildings were repaired or replaced subsequently, in the late 1st or early 2nd century. In the north, the ground level was raised and a new brickearth-floored building constructed, with a wooden strongbox below the floor. In the south, several deposits of charred grain were recovered, consisting mainly of spelt wheat, but also containing emmer, einkorn and other cereals⁸. The grains seem to have been processed material, which was possibly accidentally burnt during drying, and dumped. Immediately to the south, a ramshackle unmortared brick terrace wall was constructed, more or less on the line of the natural terrace. An oval clay bread oven was built on a plinth against the lee side of the wall, with a well nearby supplying water.

8. Provisional identification by John Giorgi, MOLAS archaeobotanist.

Excavation work on the western part of the site in August uncovered the fragmentary remains of several phases of the south wall of a timber-framed building on the edge of the highest terrace. Early Roman shell-tempered pottery (currently undated) was found in association, and one phase appears to have been destroyed by fire, possibly as a result of the Boudican revolt. Subsequently there was substantial gravel dumping on the terrace immediately below, and a revetted drain or aqueduct carrying spring water was cut through the early building on the line of a buried palaeochannel.

The aqueduct ran south-west towards a 10.0m long stretch of a north-south Roman masonry wall which was found during machine excavation work around the site perimeter, with a return at the south end running westward out of the site. These walls clearly formed the east side of a massive

structure, and although there was little evidence of the internal arrangement of the building, the remains of charred timbers in a doorway across the main wall suggested that the building had a timber floor at one stage. Additionally, as discussed earlier, two internal east-west walls were noted by Dunning in 1929-31, in association with a limestone column base. There was no dating evidence for any of these features, although the topographical relationship with other structures suggests that the masonry building was probably built in the mid 1st century, after AD 60.

At a later date, a narrow building at least 14.0m long and 3.0m wide was constructed to the east over the line of the buried channel (Fig. 2). Because it opened onto a lower terrace in the south, the building was half-cellarred, being around 0.7m below the surrounding ground level. The cut for the cellar was timber-revetted, with an internal rammed earth wall; evidence from later deposits indicated that construction changed to mudbrick above ground level. The aqueduct, which formerly ran through the area now occupied by the cellar, was replaced by a waterpipe cut below the floor. A brick-lined culvert was also constructed near the south end of the building. Passing under the floor, this feature continued southward through the Neronian quay (see below) to empty into the river. The building was modified during extension work to the masonry building, when a 7.0m x 4.0m room was added in the intervening area. Parts of the masonry north and east walls of the extension were recovered, terminating in a brick-quoin corner; the south wall of the room was destroyed by modern foundations, but clearly continued the line of the main building. The floors of the masonry and cellared buildings lay at the same level (4.1m OD).

The Neronian quay

In the south, the early waterfront structures were replaced by a major quay, constructed of squared oak baulks (Figs. 2, 4). The frontage consisted of four tiers of timber in excess of 500mm square in section, the largest being 750 x 480mm. The average length was around 6.0m, with individual lengths scarfed together using a simple notch-and-tenon joint; the direction of the joints demonstrated that the quay was constructed from east to west. The quay front was retained by four corresponding levels of tiebacks, the lower two and upper tiers being between 4.20-4.50m square, and up to 5.5m in length. These three tiers were grouped together, and spaced at 4.0-4.5m intervals. The third tier was less substantial, spaced at around 2.5m intervals. All

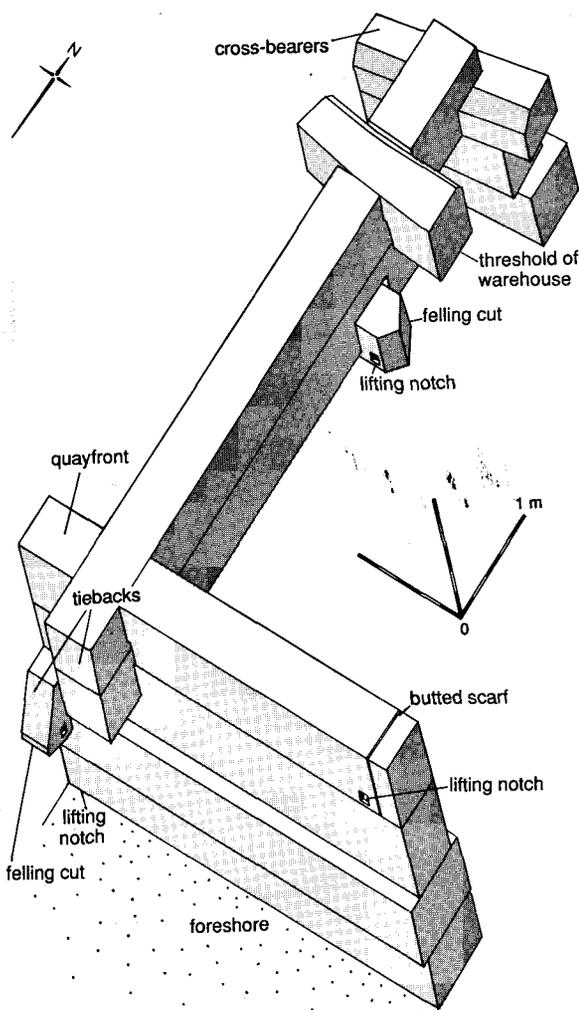


Fig. 4: the construction of the Neronian quay, showing the arrangement of the tiebacks and warehouse thresholds.

four levels of tiebacks were articulated to the quayfront using simple lap joints, with their south ends projecting beyond the quay wall as on other 1st-century quays. This would have made mooring difficult, and even dangerous, but there were a few substantial piles in front of the quay which may have acted both as fenders and mooring posts.

The tiebacks were themselves retained by two tiers of east-west timbers at the third and fourth level, set around 3.5-4.0m behind the frontage to form the back of a series of rigid boxes (Fig. 4). The upper tier of these rear wall timbers was also designed to form the thresholds for a series of waterside buildings (see below). Notably, the quayfront only continued as far east as Fish St Hill, while the rear wall of the quay and its related tiebacks stopped well short of the termination, indicating that the bridge was already in place. A revetment recorded by Dunning in this position may in fact have been part of a pre-existing bridge causeway.

The quay was infilled in stages during construction with a mixture of organic deposits and gravelly silts containing some pottery, but more importantly a variety of metal objects were found in pristine condition. These included several brass alloy *fibulae*, weights, a section of Roman scale armour (*lorica squamata*), and many coins, mainly Claudian bronze and brass alloy copies, but with some earlier examples, including silver *denarii* and a British (pre-Roman) coin. A large worked stone was also found in deposits identified as either laid down immediately prior to the quay construction, or during the initial stages of infilling. The stone was unused, and was possibly part of an engaged column from a monumental structure; the fabric itself has been tentatively identified as corallian limestone from the Oxford area. Organic finds included several large stitched sections of leather, which have yet to be identified, and a bag or folded offcut containing seeds of hemp (*cannabis sativa*).

The coins recovered from the fill suggested that the quay was earlier than the AD 80 date proposed by Dunning and later authorities; tree-ring spot-dating of several timbers has now confirmed that the quay was constructed using trees around 200 years old and felled in winter or spring AD 63⁹. This immediately put a new complexion on the structure, since it was now clear that reconstruction of London after the Boudican destruction of AD 60 began almost immediately, and that the material contained within the quay was likely to have been

collected prior to the revolt; in other words, the quay infill was a large potential resource of artefacts dating from the first fifteen years of Roman settlement. The quay was also the earliest yet discovered, although the Miles Lane quay to the west of the present bridge may have formed a slightly later continuation. By comparison, the quay was perhaps 20 years earlier than the Pudding Lane landing stage, and 30 years earlier than the Pudding Lane quay¹⁰ downstream of the Roman bridgehead. Initial plotting of the line of the quay suggests that it was constructed some distance to the north of the Pudding Lane waterfronts, but broadly in line with an early revetment on that site dated AD 59-74.

Study of the quay timbers has revealed new information on the methods of felling, moving and preparing the baulks. Some of the baulks, particularly the tiebacks, had axed ends, showing the original felling and "bucking" cuts (removal of the crown). The axed ends were also perforated across one or more corners to form a notch with rope marks, which imply that they were used for lifting or hauling the timbers. It is not yet clear whether these were added in the forest for hauling out the logs before or after rough squaring, or were used during transportation or even on site. The logs were squared into baulks by a technique known as "notch and chop": a series of parallel v-shaped notches were cut by axe into each face of the log, then the intervening block chopped out. The roughly-squared faces were then dressed with adzes, although as the timbers were not intended to be seen, they were not highly finished. All this work was carried out before the baulks arrived on site; all that remained to be done was to measure and cut the joints during assembly.

On the axe-squared end of the largest quayfront baulk was an incomplete stamp mark, repeated several times. This can be read as either 'TRAE GAUC' or 'TRAE CAUC', and could be the mark of either the woodland owner, the shipper, or the purchaser. More examples were expected, but unfortunately none were identified.

The waterside buildings

The purpose of the quay was not simply to provide a new waterfront, but to extend the area of available land for building between the rear of the quay structure and the foot of the Canterbury Arms terrace (Fig. 2). In this area, the natural clay and gravel were cut back as the quay was constructed to create a level platform for a series of buildings, or

9. I. Tyers *Report on the Timbers from Regis House* (KWS94); 1. *Timbers from the perimeter trenches* MOLAS Archive Report 1995 (unpub).

10. G. Milne *op cit* fn 7, 34-9.



Fig. 5: mud brick warehouse walls
(Photo: MOLAS).

to be more precise, a single building divided into several identical bays. Each bay was around 10.0m in length and 4.3m wide with a ramp of similar width between the sixth bay and the bridge approach, giving access to the quay. The dividing walls, which in the first four bays were of ragstone with tile courses, rested on substantial baseplates which were joined together in two lengths using half-lapped scarfs with dovetailed abutments. The southernmost lengths were similarly scarfed to the north ends of the uppermost quay tiebacks, demonstrating the contemporaneity of the quay and the buildings.

In places, extra supporting timbers were required beneath the baseplates, particularly in the area of an early gravel quarry under the east wall of Bay 6; here, stacks of timber offcuts were laid within the soft quarry infill, mainly beam ends trimmed from quay baulks. Below Bays 5 and 6, an unusual and substantial structure was built, which although partly robbed during later work, appears to have consisted of at least three and possibly four pairs

of 6.0m long squared oak baulks. They were aligned north-south and rested on a series of levelling timbers set into the foreshore, including offcuts of the baulks and sections of reused planking. These beams may originally have supported a further level of timbers aligned east-west, and a plank decking. The structure was initially tentatively interpreted as a landing stage or ferry point, which may have been in use during the construction of the adjacent bridge. However, dendrochronological analysis determined that the timbers were later than the quay, and were probably inserted after AD 70. At present, it is thought that the eastern area was originally covered by a separate structure, which was subsequently replaced by two bays (5 and 6) identical to the other four, but with mudbrick walls.

An east-west timber box drain passed below the floors of bays 4 and 5, before turning southwards below bay 3. The brick culvert mentioned earlier passed below bay 2. Both appear to have been integral parts of the original plan.

The use of the top baulk of the quay's rear wall as a threshold was a further clear indication of the planned integration of the two structures. These timbers were grooved to retain either shutters or folding doors, allowing the buildings to be completely opened to the wharf, which leads to the assumption that they were either warehouses or commercial premises related to the port.

One of the bays (4) was initially timber-floored, with planks resting on closely-spaced joists, but shortly afterwards a section of the floor was removed, and a glass furnace inserted. This sunken feature was the first of a series, indicating use over an extended period, being simply constructed of clay reinforced with tiles and amphorae sherds. In the surrounding deposits was a considerable quantity of broken glass fragments, *cullet*, collected by the glassworker for melting down. More notable were at least one nugget of raw imported dark blue glass, droplets from the melting process, and waste from blowing, including sections (*moils*) broken off the blowing iron itself. Products and possible products included twisted glass rods for stirring cosmetics or medicines, small blown bottles, beads, a small ring, and opaque tesserae. The body of a new-born child was buried beneath the floor nearby, indicating that the glassmaker and his family almost certainly lived "over the shop". Further research will be carried out on this important craft workshop and its products.

A door in the north wall of Bay 4 gave access to what is interpreted as a common alley on the terrace above. There were, however, a number of timber-framed structures in the area, which may have been annexes to the waterside building, although some of these may, upon further analysis, prove to be the remains of waterfront buildings associated with the AD 52 revetment which were destroyed either during the Boudican revolt or to make way for the AD 63 building.

The remaining bays had simple chalk and mortar floors, often surfaced with powdered tile to improve grip. In some cases, these were resurfaced many times, but subsidence into underlying features required constant repairwork, which often involved the deposition of levelling materials including highly organic debris. This preserved many fragments of writing tablets and other wooden objects; one highly unusual complete tablet resembled a modern luggage label in both shape and size.

Subsequently, probably well before the end of the 1st century, the waterfront buildings were largely demolished and rebuilt in mudbrick. (Fig. 5). It is not clear why this was necessary, but the ground may have been unstable over a wide area, given the speed at which the buildings had been erected on newly-reclaimed ground. In this form, the quay and waterside building appear to have remained in use until the end of the 1st century, at which time both structures were extended (see Part 2).

Excavations and post-excavation work

City of London. Museum of London Archaeology Service, Number One, London Wall, London EC2Y 5EA (0171-972 9111).

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 (0181-688 2720).

Greater London (except north-east and south-east London), by Museum of London Archaeology Service. Excavations and processing in all areas. General enquiries to MOLAS, Number One, London Wall, London EC2Y 5EA (0171-972 9111).

Borough of Greenwich. Cataloguing of excavated and other archaeological material, the majority from sites in the borough. For further information contact Greenwich Borough Museum, 232 Plumstead High Street, London SE18 1JT (0181-855 3240).

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 (0171-731 4498).

Kingston, by Kingston upon Thames Archaeological Society. Rescue sites in the town centre. Enquiries to Kingston Heritage Centre, Fairfield Road, Kingston (0181-546 5386).

North-east London, by Passmore Edwards Museum. Enquiries to Pat Wilkinson, Newham Museum Service, Archaeology and Local History Centre, 31 Stock Street, E13 0BX (0181-472 4785).

Surrey, by Surrey County Archaeological Unit. Enquiries to Rob Poulton, Archaeological Unit Manager, Old Library Headquarters, 25 West Street, Dorking, RH4 1DE (01306-886 466).

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