

respective storage pits, where the occupants lived a fairly self-sufficient lifestyle. The presence of scattered Iron Age material to the east suggests that this is not the only occupation site in this part of London. The proximity of the river and of the crossing in the area of Putney Bridge is likely to have provided some link with the wider world, but this was not reflected in the archaeological record.

The single pit of Roman date initially seems out of place. However, Roman pottery has previously been found in the Parson's Green area, in a possible ditch or pit (SMR 050302). There is also a possibility that the Roman road which leaves the City at Ludgate and continued along the line of the Strand also continued as far as the Putney Bridge crossing<sup>3</sup>. This single pit may indicate some form of roadside activity in the Roman period.

Evidence of late Saxon activity on the site, again in the form of a single pit, was also unexpected. The pottery was in the form of a single sherd of Early Medieval Sandy Ware cooking pot, which is dated as c 900-1050. This is just about the first excavated feature of this date in the area, with the main occupation in the late Saxon period being concentrated at Fulham, which is included in the Domesday survey. This pit at Parsons Green seems to suggest that activity continued well beyond the centre of Fulham, although its nature is unclear.

When one considers the medieval origins of Parsons Green, it is perhaps surprising that there were no features, or finds, from between the 11th and

3. D. Perring, *pers. comm.*

## Letter

### Dark earth

PETER HUGGINS is quite correct to point out that dark earth type soil horizons are found in many urban centres including Canterbury, London, *Lundenwic*, Southwark, York<sup>1</sup>, so it is unlikely that all these soils have identical histories of formation and development. The assumption that *dark earth* is the product of farming or horticulture is largely based on the observation that in section it looks similar to well-worked horticultural soil, due to extensive reworking (root/worm activity). However, this reworking may be the last chapter in a complex history – which obscures the earlier ones. Therefore we should not assume that all *dark earth* type soils have the same origin.

The greatest hindrance to the study of London *dark earth* type soils is that it has normally been truncated by post-medieval cellars – so we cannot study a complete soil profile, plus there is always a high risk of contamination (e.g. intrusive features),

the 16th centuries. Medieval occupation is likely to have been concentrated closer to the green itself, and has been totally destroyed by subsequent buildings. The documented growth and popularity of the area, especially from the 17th century, appears to be mirrored in the archaeological record, with most building-related work in the 18th and 19th centuries. Although the more recent use of the site for gardens has caused some disturbance, it has also led to the survival of some of the prehistoric remains.

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as it is an unsealed context. The only untruncated late Roman *dark earth* soil horizon known inside the walled Roman city was discovered by molas in 1992 during the evaluation of the west yard of King Edward Buildings Sorting Office, Giltspur Street<sup>2</sup>. From summer 1998 until spring 1999 during the redevelopment of the site as the new Merrill Lynch London headquarters, MOLAS is carrying out a series of excavations and it is hoped to examine more of the unique *dark earth* soil horizon. We plan to carry out an interdisciplinary study of the *dark earth* using a variety of analytical techniques including diatoms, magnetic susceptibility, micromorphology, molluscs, pH, particle size, organic content, phytoliths (biogenic silica rods from the cellular structure of grasses) and pollen. It is hoped that this array of techniques will provide detailed information on the parent materials of the *dark earth* and explain how it developed over time, before it was sealed by Saxo-Norman occupation. The interim results of the King Edward Buildings project will be published in the *London Archaeologist* in due course.

Bruce Watson

MOLAS

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1. Letters, *London Archaeol* 8 no. 8 (1998) 223.

2. See 'Dark earth and urban decline in late Roman London' in

Roman London Recent Archaeological Work *JoRA Monograph* no. 24 (1998) 100-106.