

# The Little Rose Estate: new insights into the Rose Theatre, Southwark: part 2

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## Introduction

This article is Part Two of a two-part article reporting on an archaeological/engineering evaluation undertaken at the Corporation of London Technical Services Depot, 54 Park Street, London SE1 (TQ 3230 8040) in the London Borough of Southwark, immediately to the east of the Rose Theatre (Scheduled Monument No: 20851) and west of Southwark Bridge Arches (Fig. 1). The site is bounded by Park Street to the south, Southwark Bridge to the east and a building known as Rose Court to the west. The archaeological remains of the Rose Theatre lie within the basement of the Rose Court building itself.

Part One<sup>1</sup> reported on the background to the project – from a Project Planning and Topographical, Documentary, Cartographic and Archaeological aspect – whilst Part Two details the archaeological results and conclusions. These results are linked to the original research aims for the project that included:

- defining the character and extent of any surviving archaeological remains (particularly those relating to the Rose Theatre and the boundaries of the Little Rose Estate) and assessing their significance,
- facilitating an engineering assessment of the foundations of Southwark Bridge arches to enable an exploration of their possible function in future display proposals.

## Archaeological results

In excavation and recording of the archaeological sequence within the trial pit, the following evidence was recorded.

### Before The Rose

At the bottom of the sequence a deposit of blue-grey clay silt was recorded, by hand-held auger,

at an upper level of *c.* 0.70m OD. This material was recorded as being at least 0.80m thick and was sealed by a 0.60m thick deposit of grey sandy silt at an upper level of 1.30m OD. Evidence from this phase comprises alluvial material deposited prior to the recorded post-medieval construction activity.

### Contemporary with The Rose

#### *Land surfaces (pre-18th-century)*

Recorded evidence comprised a dark grey/blue-grey clay silt layer [28] containing small fragments of brick and a light grey coarse sandy silt [29] with frequent sub-angular and rounded flint pebbles at an upper height of 1.52m OD. It is thought these contexts represent land surfaces that may be contemporary with The Rose.

#### *Revetted ditch (undated)* (Figs. 9 and 10)

Located along the western side of the trench was a timber post-and-plank revetment to a north-south aligned ditch. The cut of the ditch [30] was not fully exposed, but *c.* 0.30m of the ditch fill was removed to expose the timbers. The post-and-plank revetment was left *in situ* for later excavation and more complete analysis and recording.

The revetment comprised a series of oak posts (*Quercus* spp.), apparently driven into the eastern side of the ditch cut, against which horizontal planking had been set. No evidence of joints and fittings was located in the area excavated. The planks were set against the cut of the ditch, and although not fully exposed, they appear to be part of the eastern boundary to the Little Rose Estate. Samples were taken for dendrochronological analysis, but of the four samples sent to the University of Sheffield, two had less than the minimum number of rings regarded as suitable (*c.* 25 and *c.* 30 respectively) and the other two had 54 and 55 rings respectively. These were measured but could not be matched to relevant

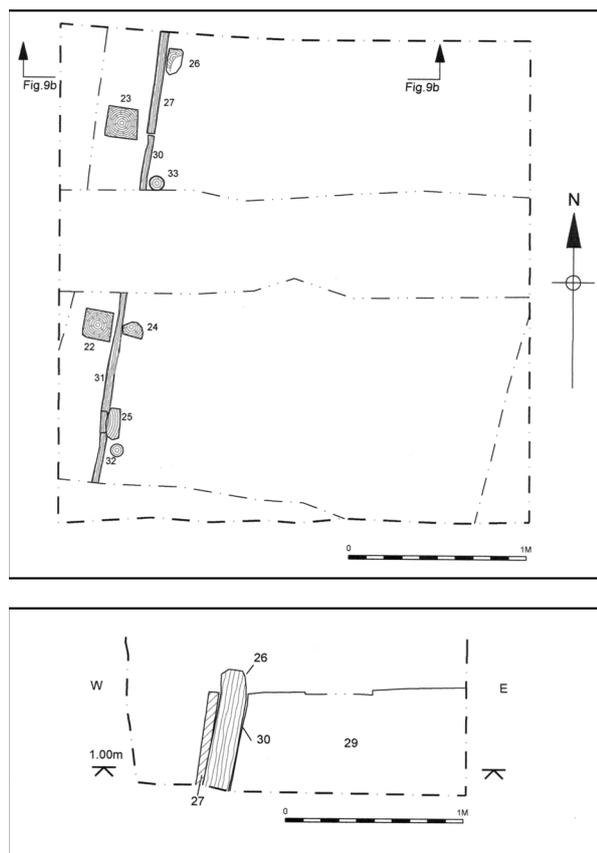
reference data and hence no date was determined.<sup>2</sup>

The recording of such a feature is of huge significance for the assessment of the survival of the entirety of the Little Rose Estate. Although dendrochronological analysis of the sampled timber posts did not provide any results, the value of such dating might, in any case, be limited. Documentary evidence from the Surrey & Kent Commissioners for Sewers indicates that not only were the sewers subject to constant re-embanking and re-enforcing (from the 16th century onwards) but that the sewers in the vicinity of the Rose remained as ‘open-ditches’ at least until the early 19th century.

That the sewers remained as open ditches until the early 19th century is shown by the records of the Clink Court Leet for 1814 to 1824.<sup>2</sup> These records include the information that on October 5th 1815 the Sewer Commissioners were fined £5 by the Clink Court for ‘not arching or covering



**Fig. 10: photographic view of southern half of trench (looking to the south-east) showing floor (16), drain (18) and timbers (22), (24), (25), (31) and (32).**



**Fig. 9: plan and section of revetted ditch**

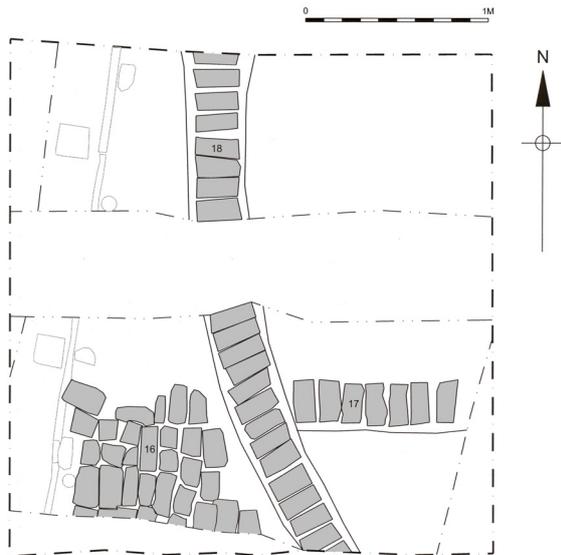
*over nor making good the Embankment of the Common Sewer on the West side of Rose Alley being One hundred and fifty feet in length likewise the Adjoining Sewer on the North side of Maid Lane being forty nine feet in length’.* Four years later (on October 7th 1819) the Sewer Commissioners were fined again by the Clink Court ‘for not putting up a Fence to the Sewer at the end of Rose Alley Maid Lane’.

It is possible therefore, that the recorded timbers are contemporary with The Rose and, if so, the discovery of well-preserved outlying structural remains is a reminder that the immediate environs formed an integral part of the site and warrant equal archaeological attention.

## Late-18th to early-19th century

### *Ditch backfilling*

The partially excavated upper fill of the ditch [14] consisted of a waterlogged soft mid to dark grey clay silt containing pottery, occasional clay pipe and ceramic building material (mainly bricks), provisionally dated to the late-18th to early-19th century. The fill also produced several nails



**Fig. 11: plan of brick floor with drain**

(possibly fittings from the revetment), part of a possible iron blade and a two-pronged fork.

The two-pronged mid-18th-century fork had a moulded shaft and plain, turned-ivory whittle-tang handle with one prong shortened through breakage. Forks, initially with two prongs, had come into restricted use during the 16th century, and were just starting to be superseded by three-pronged versions in the 18th century. Two body sherds of green glass (probably from an 18/19th-century bottle) and the base of a green glass bottle or phial (late-18th- to 19th-century) were recovered from the same context along with animal bones, including a pig mandible, a juvenile cattle lower limb bone with butchery marks, a juvenile sheep/goat upper limb and a rabbit lower limb bone.

*Brick floor with drain* (Fig. 11)

At the western limit of the trench a brick wall [21], aligned roughly north-south, truncated the deposits of Phase 3a. The wall, running parallel to the revetted structure and continuing beyond the northern and southern limits of the trench, was constructed of red frogged bricks (fabric 3032) and thought to be of 18th- to 19th-century date.

To the east of wall [21] was a series of fragmentary brick floors and a brick structure interpreted as either a plinth or drain [17]. The feature consisted of a single course of poor-quality bricks (fabric 3032) laid one brick wide,

aligned east-west across the trench and loosely bonded by a light grey white mortar. Located at an upper height of *c.* 1.59m OD towards the centre of the trench this 'structure' fell away to the ditch to the west.

Associated with [17] was an irregular brick floor [16] located at an upper height of 1.62m OD, comprising two courses of bricks of 18th- to early 19th-century date (mainly fabric 3032 but incorporating some pre *c.* 1700 brick, fabric 3033). The bricks comprised full and half bricks, bonded by mid-grey/brown sandy silt or in places a light grey-white sandy lime mortar.

The recording of this evidence is consistent with the cartographic information on Horwood's map of 1792/9, which shows 'Smiths Rents' abutting the eastern boundary of the Little Rose Estate.

## Early-19th century

*Brick drain and foundations of Southwark Bridge* (Fig. 10)

Cutting through phase 3b deposits was a brick drain [18] *c.* 0.32m wide, running north-east/south-west across the trench and constructed of a double alignment of bricks, forming a channel, capped with a single course of bricks (Fig. 11). The drain (brick fabric 3032) was probably contemporary with the construction of Southwark Bridge – the Rennie bridge documented as being constructed in 1819.

At the eastern limit of the trial pit, the foundations of Southwark Bridge, consisting of stepped brickwork footings at a lower level of *c.* 1.52m OD, were recorded. Access restrictions prevented assessment of whether the arches were also set on piled foundations. The piers, originally 0.61m wide, were bonded with 'Roman Cement'. In relation to the engineering results, research undertaken in the Corporation of London Record Office would appear to indicate that the existing northern and southern foundations/approaches to Southwark Bridge are original to the 1819 Rennie bridge, with subsequent redevelopment of the bridge restricted to the riverside abutments and central piers. Truncation caused by the foundations of Southwark Bridge is tightly limited to the footprint of the bridge itself, with the unexpected revelation that the bridge appears to be sitting on footings that only extend to 1.52m

OD. Although it was not possible to expose the base of the foundation, probing beneath the corner of the foundation indicated that it did not continue beneath this level.

Not only does the tight footprint have significant implications for the archaeological survival of the entire Rose Estate, it also has implications for the possible survival of the remains of the Globe playhouse and Estate to the south. Although the research framework for London archaeology was not available at the time of this evaluation, the results dovetail tightly to L7 Framework Objectives, 'London After 1500 Research Priorities' and those concerning the changing physical appearance and social topography of the city and its suburbs, brought about by the Dissolution of the monasteries. Additionally the archaeological evidence from the site of The Rose also contains the potential to address research aims looking at industrial production.<sup>3</sup>

The survival of largely untruncated 18th- and 19th-century archaeological deposits and structures is also of significance for the potential survival of archaeological remains of the Little Rose Estate within the remainder of the evaluated site.

## Late-19th to mid-20th century

### *Industrial structures*

Constructed over the brick-lined drain [18] was an east-west aligned wall [3] (running up to the foundations of Southwark Bridge) and brick floor [7]. Within the wall was an opening that appears to have been located in order to prevent the wall bearing down on the underlying brick-lined drain.

Overlying the offset foundations of the wall was a series of make-up layers for the brick floor [7], recorded at an upper height of 2.00m OD. Both the wall and floor were constructed of frogged bricks (fabric 3032) impressed with an 'R' and dated to the 19th to early-20th century.

In the late-19th to early-20th century the opening in wall [3] was blocked and a further east-west wall [4] was added to the north (with its foundations sitting on floor [7]), in effect forming a small room or cellar. Cut into the upper courses of wall [4] were two partly cement-filled mortises. They could have held horizontal members across the space. To the south of the

'room', deposits sealing brick floor [7] were overlain by a substantial dump of broken wall and floor fragments which appeared to have been deliberately positioned to hold a sandstone fixing block, further secured by the use of 'Roman Cement', flush up against the blocking of the doorway.

The final recorded phase consisted of the backfilling of the recorded 'structures' and the strengthening of the original piers for the bridge. Blocked mortises and cut reinforced steel joists (RSJs) indicate bracing or a supported walkway between the bridge and buildings to the east with the slab for the Corporation of London Technical Services Depot completing the sequence.

On completion of the evaluation the unexcavated archaeological strata were protected by the insertion of a layer of Netlon fencing as a visible barrier, over which *c.* 0.30m of soft fill was placed before backfilling the trench under archaeological supervision.

## Discussion

Despite the limited available space for the excavation of the trial trench, the results of the evaluation achieved five of the eight original aims. By undertaking targeted evaluation, using some of the extensive sources that are available for the study of The Rose, the results have provided new insights into the Little Rose Estate and indicate that archaeological survival on the unexcavated eastern side of the Rose Theatre is as complete and as significant as that uncovered in 1989.

The recording of what would appear to be part of the eastern boundary of the Little Rose Estate underscores the unique character of the archaeology of The Rose. Research into the archaeological potential of the sites of London's Tudor and Stuart playhouses, undertaken on behalf of English Heritage, demonstrates that of the twenty-two sites assessed (dating from 1567 to *c.* 1642) the Rose appears to be the only site located within existing 21st-century property boundaries.<sup>4</sup> The Rose has not been subject to major subsequent property division.

The quality of the archaeological character of The Rose is enhanced by the quality of documentary evidence relating to the playhouse. Of all

London's Tudor and Stuart playhouses, it is the one for which the most comprehensive documentary sources survive. Not only does that documentation (letters, accounts, petitions, maps, play texts etc) provide a means of unravelling the evidence provided by archaeology, the archaeology also provides a means of further understanding and enhancing the documentation. As a model for the study of a post-medieval archaeology, The Rose provides an unparalleled opportunity to transcend the '*compartmentalized specialization that has done ... a disservice*' to post-medieval archaeology, and a unique means of linking '*archaeological information into the wider economic [and social] development of post-1500 Britain*'.<sup>5</sup> The potential the site contains (in relation to access and education linked to archaeology and a host of associated and non-associated disciplines – e.g. theatre performance, the development of English literature and literary studies) is huge. Unlocking that potential remains the challenge.

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- Corporation of London Record Office,
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- Southwark Local Studies Library.

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