

Letter

Jim Gould's suggestion about Boudica's last battle in your last issue is interesting but it doesn't take account of what we are told by our ancient sources for the campaign. Dio says (Loeb translation 62.8) "However, he [Suetonius Paulinus] was not willing to risk a conflict with the barbarians immediately, as he feared their numbers and their desperation, but was inclined to postpone battle to a more convenient season. But as he grew short of food and the barbarians pressed relentlessly upon him, he was compelled, contrary to his judgment, to engage them." This accords well enough with the version given by Tacitus: (Penguin translation, *Annals*, 14.33–34) "Suetonius, undismayed [the context seems to mean by the fall of Colchester and the rout of Legio IX], marched through disaffected territory to Londinium. ... At first, he hesitated whether to stand and fight there. Eventually, his numerical inferiority – and the price only too clearly paid by the divisional commander's rashness, i.e. the loss of part of Legio IX; the Latin specifies Petilius] – decided him to sacrifice the single city [oppidum] of Londinium to save the province as a whole. ... the inhabitants were allowed to accompany him ... those who stayed ... were slaughtered by the enemy ... The natives enjoyed plundering and thought of nothing else. By-passing forts and garrisons, they made for where loot was richest and protection weakest. ... Suetonius collected a brigade and detachments of another [this translation uses footnotes and says 'the fourteenth and twentieth respectively', i.e. Legio XIV and Legio XX], together with the nearest available auxiliaries – amounting to nearly ten thousand armed men – and decided to attack without further delay. He chose a position in a defile with a wood behind him. There could be no enemy, he knew, except at his front, where there was open country without cover for ambushes".

This makes it clear enough that Suetonius was retreating – he could hardly take the refugees from London along with him in a daring dash into the heart of the rebel-held area; nor could he expect his position to be safe from attack from the rear in such a location. Tacitus is likely in any case to have told us of such a daring move, both because of the contrast with what happened to Petilius Cerialis and more especially because of his opinion of Suetonius Paulinus: (Penguin translation, *Histories*, 2, 25) "Suetonius Paulinus ... was by nature dilatory – the sort of man that prefers a cautious, well-considered plan to the luck of the gambler it would be soon enough to start winning when precautions had been taken against defeat". (The reference is to the first battle of Cremona, in the fighting between Vitellius and Otho, AD 69).

My own view is that Nick Fuentes was right in general terms, for the reasons I set out in *Roman Surrey* (2004, 25–6) (and before that in *The Archaeology of Surrey to 1540* (1987, 192, n9). In brief, Suetonius needed to defend the remaining towns and his strong ally C(T)ogidubnus; he was expecting Legio II to join from somewhere in the west; the other two legions were coming back from Wales and must have been told to avoid the London road after Suetonius assessed the situation at London as hopeless, and keep further west for the rendezvous with Legio II; the rebels were intent on looting and destruction ('by-passing forts and garrisons') – and no doubt also wanted to get even with the old enemy south of the Thames. So everything suggests a battle somewhere out in the direction of Silchester.

David Bird

Note: the Penguin translations are rather free but are mostly acceptable for the purposes of this discussion – and I have lost most of my copies of the relevant parts of the Loeb.

Mosaic

We report with regret the recent deaths of Don Imber, a pioneer of Lambeth's archaeology and author of *Lambeth Lost and Found*, and of Daphne Lorimer, for many years a leading light of the Hendon and District Archaeological Society, and perhaps best known for her work on the West Heath mesolithic site. We hope to publish fuller obituaries of both in a future issue.

Fish bone collection

Museum of London Specialist Services has been awarded a grant from CoLAT to augment and improve the fish bone reference collection; examples of about 50 species have been acquired. The collection is of benefit to the identification and analysis of archaeologically recovered fish assemblages. It is available at the LAARC for consultation by request, contact Roy Stephenson (see p. 322).