

# Excavations at 97–101 and 103 Union Street, Southwark

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## Introduction and circumstances of fieldwork

In 1998 and 2000 AOC Archaeology Group carried out two excavations in Union Street, London Borough of Southwark, London SE1 (Fig. 1). The first was at 97–101 Union Street (UNN 98) on behalf of CIBA Ltd in August to September 1998. The site covers an irregular plot of land measuring *c.* 120m<sup>2</sup>, centred at NGR TQ 3223 8002. Archaeological works at 103 Union Street (UNO 99) were carried out on behalf of Caine Developments Ltd between January and April 2000. The site covers an area of *c.* 30m<sup>2</sup>, centred at NGR TQ 3222 8002. The sites are located on the south side of Union Street at the junction with Great Guildford Street. Both sites underwent an evaluation phase prior to the excavation of further areas determined by the impact of new foundations.

The following report presents the findings as a continuous narrative incorporating information from several specialist reports. For further

information and specialist appendices please refer to the archive report. The full archive will be available for consultation on request at the London Archaeological Archive Research Centre (LAARC). For the purposes of this report, context numbers for 97–101 Union Street (UNN 98) are standard; for 103 Union Street (UNO 99) they are italicised.

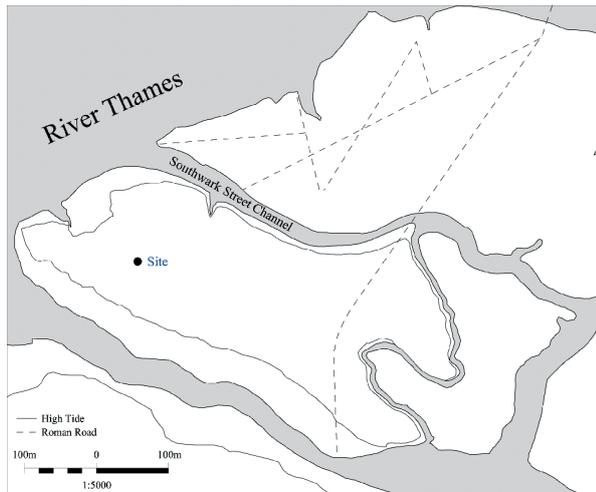
## Topographical and archaeological background

The site is situated immediately north of the southern edge of the Thames alluvial flood plain, with two localised eyots of terrace gravels approximately 300m to the east. The existence of such gravel deposits in the north Southwark area was instrumental in the Prehistoric and Roman development of the region, as these islands were the first places in the area to become inhabited. The nature of the Roman settlement in Southwark was dictated by the local topography. At this time, Southwark was predominantly marshy with islands of clay-capped sand and gravel. The area which was to become the Roman settlement concentrated on northern and southern islands divided by the 'Southwark Street Channel'. It is thought the sites at Union Street were located near the western tip of the southernmost island (Fig. 2).

Southwark provided the first place upriver on the Thames where it was possible to construct a harbour and a bridge, which could be reached by road from the major invasion entry points on the coast. Southwark had the advantage of being situated on firm ground and at the shortest crossing point on the Thames. The southern bridgehead itself has not been discovered but is inferred from the two major roads which converge at the bank side. Roman Southwark would have been prone to flooding and from the 1st century onwards there is evidence of land reclamation and water management. Excavations at Winchester Palace<sup>1</sup> revealed major



Fig. 1: location of the sites



**Fig. 2: map of Roman Southwark, showing probable location of the Union Street sites**

development in the area from *c.* AD 80, and as occupation intensified the intertidal zones were progressively reclaimed and the riverfront advanced to the north. It appears that during the Roman period Southwark changed from an early trading and industrial centre to later administrative or residential quarters. During the early period, before major land reclamation had occurred, Southwark would not have been a desirable area for habitation.

Evidence of a 'southern cemetery' has been identified in Southwark; Roman burials have been predominantly found in two areas. The first is the area south of the junction of Stane Street and Watling Street near St George's Church, Borough. The second is further north towards the Thames, along the road thought to run from the Southwark bridgehead towards modern Lambeth.<sup>2</sup> The extent of the cemetery is difficult to define due to the changing boundaries of Roman Southwark.

During the Saxon period a general rise in the level of the Thames rendered much of the area occupied by the Romans inaccessible to the Saxon immigrants. This was confirmed during the Courage Brewery excavations<sup>3</sup> where a significant deposit of dark earth sealed the Roman deposits. During the medieval period the site would have been located within the grounds of the Manor of the Bishop of Winchester. The manorial residence, Winchester Palace, lay at the north-eastern corner of the estate. The area of the

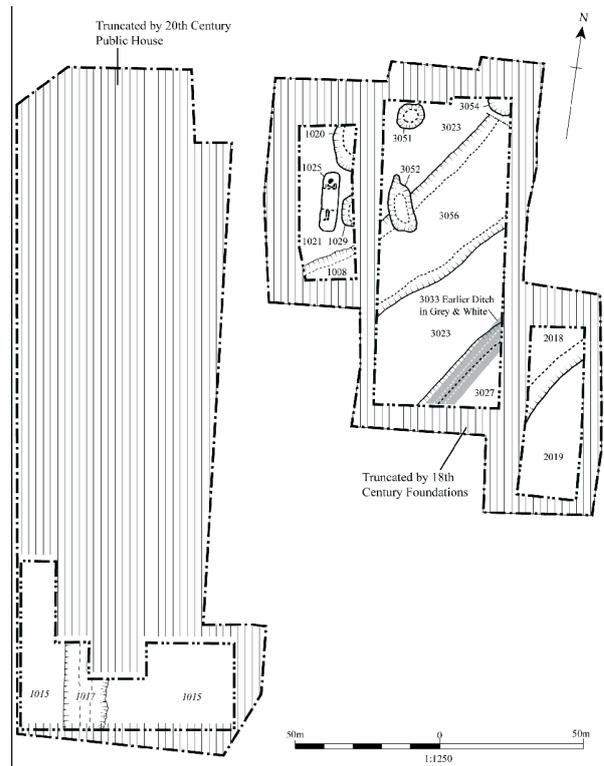
site appears to have been maintained as open field throughout the medieval period. This area likely retained its marshy character, as it was not systematically drained until the 16th century.

## The archaeological sequence

The majority of archaeological features recorded were from 97–101 Union Street (Fig. 3).

### *Natural deposits*

The natural drift deposit underlying the archaeology at Union Street was heavily indurated gravel of the First Terrace. This comprised variable yellowish brown sand with clay patches and up to 80% gravel by volume. The natural topography was a gradual slope to the south, dropping from +0.8m OD at the street front, to +0.00m OD at the rear of the properties. The levels of the pre-Roman deposits indicate that the south end of site may have been prone to flooding until the ground was made up during the ensuing occupation. This gravel terrace was sealed by lenses of alluvial silty clay and silty sand, which contained neither artefacts nor



**Fig. 3: site plan showing locations of features mentioned in the text**

ecofacts and apparently originated from the deposition of river silts during the pre-Roman and early Roman periods.

*Phase I: Roman, c. 50–150 AD*

Before any direct activity on site, a further layer of alluvial silt containing abraded pottery sherds and worn cow and horse bones was deposited (3034). This was deeper to the south, and formed a more level horizon than previously at +0.85m OD. No other activity prior to or from this period was identified.

*Phase II: Roman, c. 140–170 AD*

Towards the south of site a dump of sandy silt was identified (3036) containing building material as well as imported pottery. One notable sherd was from a face-pot, examples of which have been found elsewhere in Roman London. It was very heavily truncated by later ditches and lay in a shallow hollow, suggestive of a ditch [3061], but this could not be confirmed.

*Phase III: Roman, c. 140–200 AD*

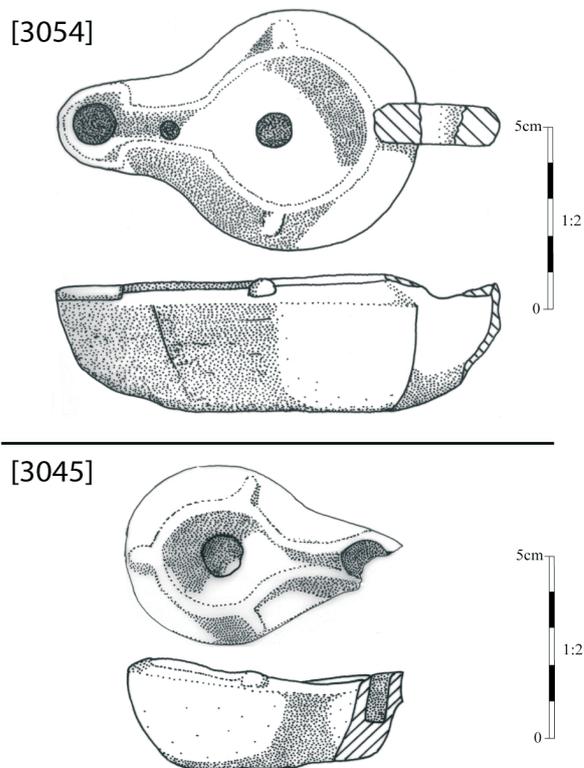
A ditch running NE to SW [3033] was recorded cutting through dump (3036). This ditch was 0.49m wide, and was most likely a small property boundary or a drainage channel to alleviate flooding. The fills (3028, 3029, and 3030) produced very few finds. During the use of this ditch, a second, wider ditch was established (1008, 3056) 5m to the north on a similar alignment. The fills contained tesserae, building materials, weathered disarticulated human bone and pottery, most of which came from *Verulamium*. Also present was an almost complete small oil lamp with blackening around the spout (Fig. 4). The ditch was sealed by layers of alluvial sand deposited in the mid-2nd century, indicating a period of inundation and flooding.

*Phase IV: Roman, c. 180–250 AD*

Following the wash of alluvium which sealed the earlier features [3033] and (1020), a layer of silty clay was deposited (3038, 1018, 1019). This appears to be an agricultural horizon, with the high quantity of bone and charcoal indicative of such an improved soil (3023, 1021, 1015). The finds from these layers were mostly abraded, indicating some reworking of the deposit. The top of this sequence was at +1.12m OD, and it is possible that this sequence was deposited specifically to raise the ground level.

A single burial [1025] was uncovered cutting into this agricultural soil. The inhumation was oriented north-south, measuring 2.10m by 0.65m by c. 0.36m deep. On the recommendation of the archaeological monitor for the London Borough of Southwark the skeleton was left *in situ*, as the development would not impact on the remains. The skeleton (1024) was accordingly only partially exposed in order to characterise the nature, condition, and degree of survival. The skeleton was adult, buried supine, with the skull facing slightly west to south-west. The arms were crossed on the chest with the hands laid on opposing shoulders. The skeleton measured c. 1.60m in length. No evidence of grave goods was seen.

Stratigraphically contemporary with the burial was a ditch [2018, 3027] oriented north-east to south-west, on the same alignment as the Phase III ditch. The ditch was filled with sandy silt and then recut [3019]. This sandy silt contained Antonine pottery, including two fragments from an unguent bottle, and a fragment from a triple vase. A ditch running north-south (1017) was



**Fig. 4: Roman oil lamps**

recorded at 103 Union Street. It was of similar depth (0.28m) and stratigraphic position but 1.65m wide.

*Phase V: Roman, c. 240–300 AD*

Five pits were recorded in the north of the excavated area [1020], [1029], [3051], [3052] and [3054]. Each pit cut the same horizon, (1022) and (3039), a layer of probably alluvial sand. All contained household waste and were probably refuse pits. The earliest [1029] was rectangular with steep sides and a flat base. It was filled with three subtly different deposits which seemed to be largely reworked alluvium. The pottery collected dated to the 2nd century but the level from which it was cut indicated a 3rd-century date. The second pit [1020] was earlier in date and quite irregular. The filling of the pit seems to have been gradual, since among the dark grey silt were lenses of pale sand which probably come from erosion of the sides of the cut. It is possible that this was a tree pit, a feature of the early Roman landscape. The third early pit [3054] was notably regular. Although only half of it was within the area of excavation, it was probably circular and it was concave-based. At the bottom of the cut was a thin layer of mineralisation, indicating that this feature was regularly damp in the past. The fill contained lenses of pale yellow sand, deriving from the edges of the cut. Among the finds was a piece from an Antonine 'pie-dish' and a second oil lamp with a broken handle fired reddish-brown (Fig. 4). On the base of the lamp was a blurred stamp that possibly reads 'LON.' Whether this stamp is dedicatory or is the maker's stamp is unknown. Although probably manufactured in the 2nd century, the lamp could have been used for many years until it was discarded.

The two remaining pits were the latest and the deepest. The pottery finds from [3051] were all manufactured in Britain, suggesting a reliance on local manufacturing in this later phase. The primary fill of the pit mostly derived from the sides of the cut, whereas the upper fill was much darker and clayey, suggesting some mixing with a developed soil. It seems likely that the fills result from a domestic clearance action. Within the fill of this pit were some pieces of human bone which may be the result of disturbance of the burials identified in Phase IV. The other late pit [3052]

contrasted to the above, containing pottery from as far away as the Mosel Valley and Eastern Gaul as well as wares from the Lower Nene Valley and *Verulamium*.

*Phase VI: Roman, c. 300–450 AD*

This late phase of Roman occupation featured two pits and a layer of plough soil which was the last to be deposited during Roman occupation. The pit which contained the most finds [3053] intruded on an earlier pit, so some of the finds may come from resultant disturbance. The majority of the finds were small and abraded, but part of a cooking pot with an intricate lattice design, manufactured at the Alice Holt kiln in Hampshire, was of a 3rd-century date. The other pit [1010] was only half sectioned since it continued beyond the limit of excavation. The fill was markedly different from the other features on site, containing a high proportion of gravel and containing only one sherd of pottery, dating from AD 270–400. The function of this pit is unknown.

The last phase of Roman activity on this site is evidenced by several layers of compact, stony, sandy silt (1003), (1004), (2012), (2013), (2014), (2015), (3011), (3012), (3013) (1013) and (1012). The layers were thicker to the east and represent a series of dumped deposits laid over a short time period. The final deposit of the Roman period was a thick layer of rich dark brown humic sandy silt (1011), (2011), (3010) & (3040) which contained heavily abraded pottery; indicating some reworking of the deposit. The pottery was dated from the early years of occupation to the 4th century.

*Saxon*

Within the plough soil mentioned above was a single sherd of hand-made pottery which may date to the Saxon period. This area was flooded in the Saxon period and not occupied, so that it is possible that the pottery may have been washed into the area.

*Medieval*

There were no cut features of medieval date recorded on site, but occasional fragments of medieval roof tile were collected from post-medieval deposits. At this time the site was located within the Manor of the Bishop of Winchester, part of Lambeth Marsh, which was not fully reclaimed until the 17th century.

### *Post-medieval*

Post-medieval activity on site is represented by two distinct phases of activity: a large intrusive ditch and the construction of tenements. The post-medieval ditch [1007] ran north-south, cutting through the earlier Roman ditch [1017]. It was observed for a maximum length of 6.70m and 0.55m deep. Only the eastern edge was seen. The western edge lay beyond the limit of excavation under Great Guildford Street; giving a width of at least 4.25m. The primary fill of the ditch (9011) was anaerobic, waterlogged sandy silt, typified by the black colour which signifies organic decomposition. This primary fill yielded post-medieval pottery ranging in date from AD 1600–1800, but the ditch could have been cut in the late medieval period and gradually filled. The upper fill of the ditch (1006) was completely different from any of the other deposits on site being stiff, mid-brown clay. The clay was very clean, suggesting that backfilling the ditch was a deliberate activity, necessitated by the construction of later tenements on the site.

Thick layers of agricultural soil (1015), (3003) and (3004) lay to the east of the ditch. These layers were truncated both horizontally and vertically by construction cuts for tenements erected on site in the 18th century. All that remained of these structures were foundation walls and partial basement floors except at 103, Union Street, where the public house still stood. Two substantial brick structures were recorded [3005] and [3006], a red brick foundation running north-south marked the boundary between 97 and 99 Union Street, and another foundation ran east-west marking the rear wall of 99 Union Street. Beyond the south wall of the cellar of 103 Union Street was found a circular soakaway of 0.97m diameter [12004].

### *1941 to 2000*

Wartime destruction resulted in demolition on this site. 97–101 Union Street and the pub at 103 were razed to the ground following fire-bombing. The pub was rebuilt in the 1950s as the *Three Jolly Gardeners* and 97–101 Union Street was used as a hard standing.

## **Discussion**

The first activity identified on site was from the Roman period and, despite the small size of the

sites, separate phases were identified. The gradual slope towards a creek between Southwark's gravel islands between +0.80m and 0.00m OD indicates that the Thames was low-lying during the Roman period, alluvium being washed onto the site until the mid-2nd century. The creek was canalised after AD 180, a period which also saw a drop in water levels. The level of high tide during the mid-first century was c. 1.25m OD, dropping to 0.00m OD by AD 180.<sup>4</sup>

The earliest ditches may be considered property boundaries but continual tidal inundation until the early 3rd century suggests that they were more likely flood alleviation schemes. Indeed the 0.30m deep layer of silt with developed soil above may be imported; dumped to raise the ground level further above high water mark. A drop in river level is shown by Milne to have occurred during the mid 3rd century,<sup>5</sup> and this is also the likely date for the single inhumation found at Union Street.

The drop in river level may even be seen as a reason for the cemetery. The identification of the burial shows that the cemetery known to exist in western Roman Southwark extends as far as 103 Union Street, and perhaps further. The GLSMR records that further inhumations were found at 103 Union Street during excavations for the cellar in the 19th century, but this was the only one found during excavation. Recent excavations at America Street, within 50m, suggest that this is likely to be part of a larger cemetery.

The finds from Phases IV and V are indicative of a structure in the vicinity. Quantities of *tegula* and *imbrex*, as well as tesserae, indicate a building of high status. The presence of an unguent bottle, two *tazzae*, a triple pot and two lamps all imply the proximity of a shrine of some description. The pits that characterise Phase V resemble domestic pits but their presence on a cemetery site may suggest ritual activities of remembrance although the area excavated was too small to be certain.

Abandonment of Roman Southwark is represented by the ploughsoil of the final phase of Roman occupation. This ploughsoil remained undisturbed until the post-medieval period. Cartographic evidence for this part of Southwark indicates that the site was marshland. An unprovenanced map of Southwark from AD 1603

identifies the area now Union Street as 'Lambeth Marsh', across which ran a number of channels to aid drainage, and it is probable that the post-medieval ditch is one such channel. The first buildings erected in the area are those recorded on the Rocque map when Union Street was known

as Queens Street. The foundations recorded at 97–101 were typically 18th-century, and the houses above survived until the Second World War. The public house at 103 Union Street, on the corner of Great Guildford Street, was rebuilt, whilst the houses were not.

1. B. Yule and B. Rankov 'Legionary Soldiers in 3rd-century Southwark' in B. Watson (ed.) *J Roman Archaeol (Supplementary Series no. 24)* (1988) 67–77.
2. B. Barber and J. Hall 'Digging up the people of Roman London: Interpreting evidence from Roman London's cemeteries' in I. Haynes, H. Sheldon

- and L. Hannigan (eds) *London Underground, The Archaeology of a City* (2000) 102–121.
3. C. Cowan *Urban development in north-west Roman Southwark*. MoLAS Monograph 16 (2003).
4. B. Watson (ed.) *J Roman Archaeol (Supplementary Series no. 24)* (1998).
5. G. Milne *The Port of Roman London* (1985).

## Letter

### Medieval Gallery at the Museum of London

I was pleased to see the review by Andy Agate and his colleagues from the Institute of Archaeology of the Museum of London's new Medieval London gallery, that appeared in *LA* 11.4 (Spring 2006), and I hope it will encourage readers to visit the new gallery and make up their own minds.

However, perhaps I may be permitted to provide one update and a comment on the article.

What would not have been obvious at the time your reviewers visited the gallery was that the 'story telling space' – 'an incomprehensibly empty void' – was a temporary measure until funding could be found for what had from the start been intended to fill this space. By the time the review appeared in print work was already underway on the construction of a 'late Saxon house' in this corner. It is based on the MoLAS excavations in Guildhall Yard, which revealed 11th-century streets and buildings in the by that time waterlogged interior of the former Roman amphitheatre (see Nick Bateman *Gladiators at the Guildhall* (2000) 49–58). Our house (inspired in particular by 'Building 100' on the site – pp 54–5 in *Gladiators*) has been designed and largely constructed by Damian Goodburn, with input from the Museum's own technicians. Thatching the roof and wattle-and-daubing of the walls was carried out by East Sussex Archaeology and Museums Partnership, experts in traditional building techniques – visitors to the museum over Easter could see this in progress and smell the never-to-be-forgotten smell of fresh daub. This will be a venue for Saxon story-telling sessions

and for visitors to sit and soak up the atmosphere (!) and handle replica objects. In due course it will be balanced by and contrasted with a 'Tudor shop' at the other end of the gallery.

We are disappointed that the reviewers feel we have missed the opportunity 'to create a forward-thinking exhibition and use [our] collections in a dynamic and ground-breaking way'. I'd welcome advice on how we might have been more 'forward-thinking'. I'm afraid the one suggestion made – displaying an awl piercing a hole in a belt to demonstrate how it was used – would in the context of the Museum of London not be 'forward-looking' but decidedly 'retro', since such displays featured when we first opened in 1976. And, rightly or wrongly, our current design strategy largely excludes 'images and virtual representations of people in "real" situations' – our Roman London gallery is a fine example of an earlier MoL approach. There are features that we feel are at least up-to-date – the listening post and A/Vs, the children's captions and interactives, the 'Game of Life' and the computers (and you can now access the last on-line on the Museum of London's website at <http://www.museumoflondon.org.uk/English/EventsExhibitions/Permanent/medieval/>). All these come as part of the package, and were particularly aimed at a family audience.

The new gallery is certainly attracting more people, and comments are largely positive – we're just starting a formal evaluation of visitor reactions, and I look forward to seeing the results of that.

John Clark  
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Museum of London