

Ritual deposit on a Roman site in the City

Diccon Hart and Melissa Melikian report on an excavation at 11 Leadenhall Street, City of London

Introduction

In August and September 1999 AOC Archaeology Group undertook an excavation at 11 Leadenhall Street, City of London, (NGR) TQ 3312 8112 (Fig. 1). This was followed by a watching brief which was carried out intermittently between August 1999 and May 2000. Archaeological work on the site was recorded under Museum of London site code LDH 99. The site is a rectangular plot, bounded to the west by the Lloyds Building, by Leadenhall Street to the north, the Al Rafidan Bank

to the east and buildings fronting Whittington Avenue to the south. It covers approximately 245 sq. m and is currently occupied by a late-19th-century building with a single basement extending under the whole of it.

The scheme of development involved the refurbishment of the building's interior. This included the construction of new piles and pile caps across the site and the underpinning of the rear wall of the property. The planning consent required that a programme of archaeological works be

undertaken prior to the redevelopment. It was deemed necessary to excavate in ten areas of the site (Fig. 2). However, following the removal of the concrete slab in the area of Trench 4, it became apparent that the degree of recent truncation was such that no further investigation was required. Trench 9 was originally intended to be one trench, but investigations along this section of the western wall of the basement provided the opportunity to

Topographical and archaeological background

The underlying geology of the area is Langley Silts, commonly referred to as brickearth, overlying the natural glacial gravels (Taplow Terrace). Before major land reclamation in the medieval period, the site was situated on the eastern hill located to the east of the Walbrook Valley.

Scant indications of prehistoric human activity have been found in the area. The earliest visible activity appears to be of the Roman period. In the mid-1st century this area lay on the periphery of the original Roman settlement, evidenced by a cremation cemetery found at the Leadenhall Court site (site code LCT84).¹ The most significant event of the 1st century in the locality was the construction of a wide north-south road, observed at excavations at Whittington Avenue (site code WIV88).² The road exerted some influence on the settlement, with clay and timber buildings lining both sides of it in a ribbon development. There is extensive evidence of re-planning and expansion of the city in the late 1st century. By the 2nd century the site is located within the core of the Roman settlement; the Roman Basilica and forum lay immediately to the west and the

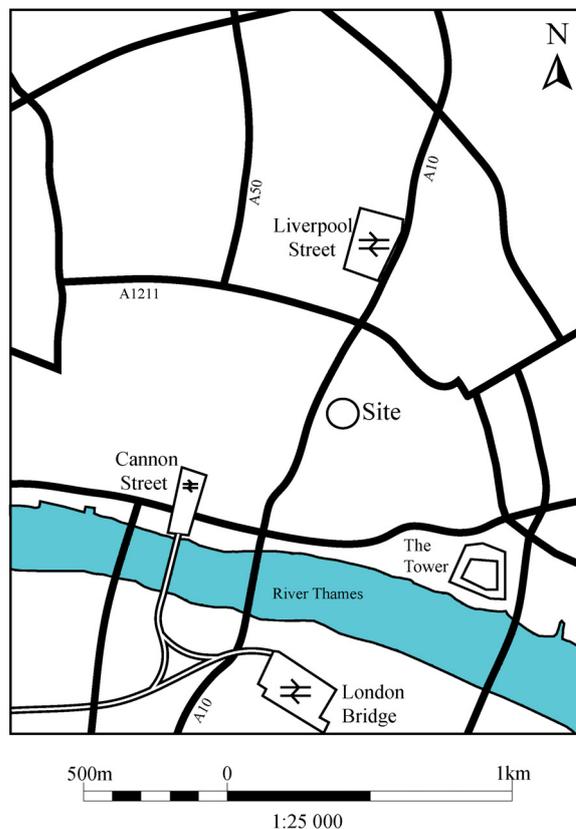


Fig. 1: site location

associated street system was expanded (Fig. 3). This development represents the elevation of *Londinium* from a trading settlement to the administrative capital of the province, a status which was formerly held by Colchester. By the 3rd century political instability and economic recession were to cause London to decline. Buildings observed at Whittington Avenue were abandoned in the early 3rd century,³ while the Basilica seems to have met the same fate by the end of the 3rd century.⁴ The east-west road that ran along the northern side of the Basilica was resurfaced for the last time in the late 3rd century and continued in use for some time afterwards, falling into a state of considerable disrepair during the early 4th century. Most of the Basilica was systematically demolished and cleared some time in the early 4th century.⁵ By the end of the 5th century *Londinium* was all but abandoned.

It was not until the 10th to 11th centuries that the area of Leadenhall Street seems to have been re-occupied, coinciding with the laying-out of a new street plan much in keeping with that of the present day. However, it was only in the early 13th century that urban development on the site intensified. The Leadenhall complex lay immediately to the west of the site. This was an aristocratic residence established by the Neville family in the 13th century after they had purchased the land in 1195.⁶ 'Leadenhall Porch' is thought to have at least partly stood on the site in the late medieval period. This suggests that the site may once have provided access to the Leadenhall complex from Leadenhall Street. The Leadenhall complex was acquired by the City of London in 1411 and was used for trade.⁷ It is quite feasible that the former gatehouse of the estate was sold into private hands and converted into a town house during this time. In the late medieval period a granary, market, grammar school and chapel were built at Leadenhall.⁸ In the 1790s the northern half of the Leadenhall site was extensively redeveloped to allow the construction of Georgian terraces along the Leadenhall Street frontage.⁹ It was at this time that the existing boundaries of 11 Leadenhall Street were first laid out. The property was once more redeveloped in the late 19th or early

20th century with the construction of the present building.

The archaeological sequence

Natural deposits

Natural brickearth deposits were recorded at between 12.41 m OD at the northern end of site in Trench 8 and 11.89 m OD to the south, in Trench 2. In Trench 9A the natural brickearth appeared to be quite weathered, possibly as a result of deturfing. Other sites in the locality (Leadenhall Court and Whittington Avenue) encountered substantial truncation of the natural brickearth by Roman quarrying activity. The preservation at 11 Leadenhall Street suggests very little truncation of the natural deposits.

Pre/Early Roman activity

No clear evidence of pre-Roman activity was observed, as many of the earlier deposits remain undated. In Trenches 1, 8 and 9B the earliest archaeological deposits observed were redeposited brickearth dumps encountered at 12.45 m OD, 12.57 m OD and 11.87 m OD respectively. No artefactual dating evidence was observed in any of these deposits.

Whilst many of the earliest deposits encountered remain undated, the form of these deposits accord well with what is

known of initial building activities associated with the founding and expansion of the 1st-century town. Certainly both the weathered brickearth observed in Trench 9A and the redeposited brickearth sealing the natural deposits in Trench 1 and 9B support the evidence from Leadenhall Court for the deturfing of much of the site and subsequent deposition of a slab of brickearth across the area in advance of building.¹⁰

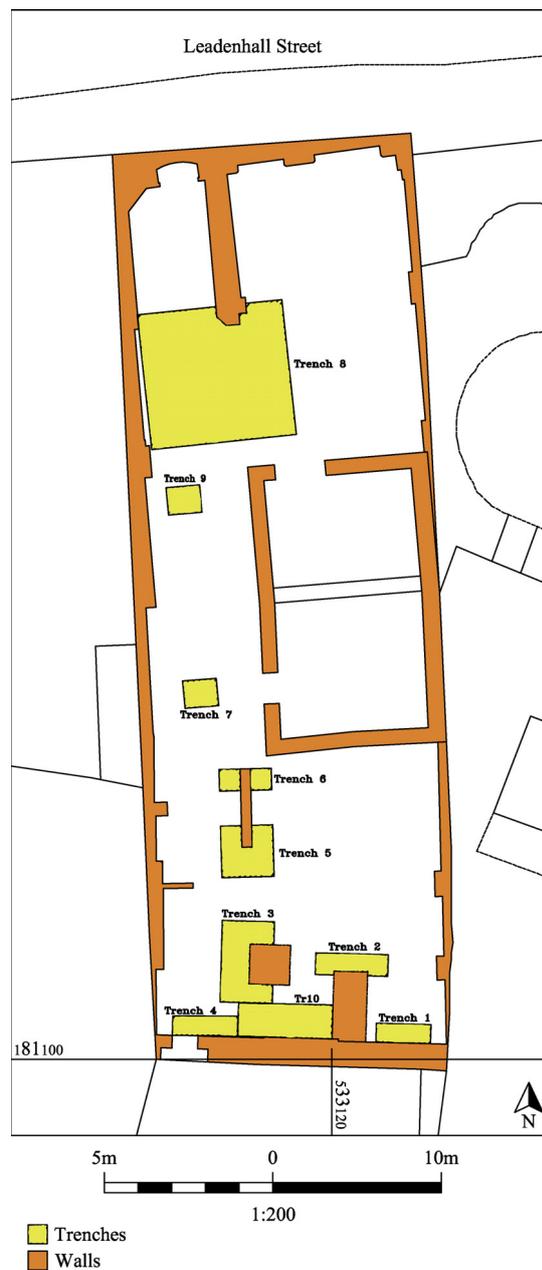


Fig. 2: detailed site/trench location

ROMAN RITUAL DEPOSIT



Fig. 3: site in relation to Roman London

Roman

The early Roman deposits encountered were heavily truncated by later activity. In Trench 1 the re-deposited brickearth was cut by a sub-rectangular Roman pit. Overlying these features was a make-up layer followed by a building evidenced by a series of internal floors. The sequence of construction seems to have first been the spreading of a 80 mm thick gravel layer which was covered with 0.1 m of redeposited brickearth. This was covered with a beaten sandy-clay floor, less than 10 mm in thickness, which sloped slightly from 12.72 m OD at the west to 12.62 m OD at the east. It had been burnt *in situ*, and was also worn in patches, which probably necessitated the laying-down of the next floor level found above it. This floor consisted of a similar, 0.27 m thick, orange sandy clay that contained mortar, particularly towards its base. The top of the layer was at 12.86–12.93 m OD. Pottery retrieved from the make-up deposit was

dated to 50–100 AD and the burning has been tentatively related to the Boudiccan sacking of London in AD 60. Cut into the uppermost floor was a small circular pit, roughly 0.20 m in depth, which contained a near-complete beaker with an inverted lid (Fig. 4). It appeared to have been deliberately placed within the cut.

In Trench 1 a north-south spread of cemented coarse sandy mortar, 0.2–0.3 m wide, cut the uppermost floor surface. This was probably a relatively insubstantial foundation for a north-south internal partition wall. It is thought to run at 90° to the large east-west external wall seen in Trench 2 and may have butted up against it. At some point this internal wall was demolished and a new floor built over it. Some of the debris from its demolition appears to have been used as make-up for the floor, which comprised a c. 0.15 m thick compacted sandy mortar matrix with frequent inclusions of building material (daub/cob, tile, mortar), pottery

and animal bone. This make-up deposit survived at 12.51 m OD. Three make-up layers sealed this floor, the first being a dump of redeposited orange brickearth, less than 0.25 m thick, dated to c. 120–160 AD. It contained animal bone, brick, slag and plaster. Plaster recovered from this context appears to be painted wall plaster, fallen in lenses, and may indicate stripping of internal walls or demolition of a standing structure. This was overlain at the eastern side of the trench by a 0.15 m thick dark greyish-brown sandy clay dump of demolition debris. The western portion of the area was levelled with redeposited brickearth, which contained pottery dating to the mid 3rd to late 4th century. The layer above was a very firm yellowish-brown mortar containing some chalk/lime and very small pebbles (50–70 mm thick) at 13.41–13.39 m OD. It seems likely that this was not actually the original floor, but the mortar bedding for a more substantial floor that was later robbed

out. Above this was a 0.3 m thick Roman make-up/dump layer of mid-reddish-brown silty clay, containing ceramic building material and residual 2nd-century pottery, surviving at c. 13.69 m OD. Cut through this layer were two Roman pits.

Evidence of a building was also found in Trench 2. Overlying the natural deposits was a 0.2–0.3 m thick layer of crushed and packed chalk. A thin layer of dark grey silt with charcoal lying over the top of this deposit suggests that it may have constituted a surface, possibly a floor, although it is equally possible that it may have functioned as a light foundation or consolidation to the underlying brickearth. The chalk sloped down slightly to the southeast, a gradient that appears to have been levelled to 12.43–12.32 m OD by the dumping of a mid-yellowish-brown sandy silt. This contained occasional fragments of chalk, mortar, *tegula* (roof tile) and charcoal and was dated to the 1st to 3rd century AD. These deposits were truncated to the south by the construction of a substantial load-bearing, WNW-ESE wall (Fig. 5). A 1.05 m length appeared in the trench at 13.33 m OD, but its width is not known. The wall had foundations constructed of random coursed roughly hewn ragstone blocks within a construction cut. A lacing course of *tegulae*, less than 0.45 m deep and more than 0.3 m wide, was located between the foundations and the wall superstructure. The wall superstructure was built on top of the foundation, using random un-coursed roughly-hewn ragstone blocks (100–300 mm) bonded with soft mid-yellow sandy mortar. Remnants of painted plaster still adhered to some parts of the northern face. The cut was backfilled with firm light-mid brownish-grey sandy silt with lenses of grey silt and inclusions of charcoal and pottery dated to AD 50–150. Associated with the construction of the structure was a 20–50 mm thick area of trample to the north of the wall which sealed the construction cut of the foundation. Abutting the wall was a less substantial NNE–SSE wall located at 90° to the north. This wall was later, as the construction cut truncated the trample layer. The wall itself was trench-built, and was constructed of unfinished

greensand and limestone blocks up to 250 x 150 x 15 mm in size, in random courses, and bonded by a grey silty clay with gravel. Only a short section of the wall was seen, measuring 0.3 m long by 0.2 m wide. It survived to 12.40 m OD.

No direct stratigraphic relationships could be established between the masonry walls seen in Trench 2 and the apparently internal wall and floor sequence in Trench 1. However, the location suggests that they are likely to represent the same building. Given this, artefactual dating evidence suggests the building was in use from the 1st to 2nd century and fell out of use in the mid-3rd to late-4th century. There was no evidence to indicate the function of this building.

Evidence of a probable Roman road was found in several trenches. In Trench 5 the road consisted of a mid-dark brown sandy clay with layers of compacted gravels, measuring > 0.75 m thick. In Trench 10 the lowest recorded deposit (12.67 m OD) was mid-yellow sands and gravels, which have been interpreted as the road surface. In Trench 7 the natural brickearth was overlain by a 0.85 m thick remnant of redeposited dirty sand and gravel that may be part of the Roman road. These remains are thought to represent the north-south Roman road that has been identified at other sites in the locality (Whittington Avenue).

Other Roman activity at the site was represented by a sequence of make-up layers, dumps and pits. In Trench 8 the natural brickearth was overlain by a series of Roman make-up layers and dumps; one of them contained amounts of ceramic building material (CBM) that suggests the demolition of a structure nearby. The highest surviving Roman deposit in Trench 8 was a dump recorded at 13.43 m OD. In Trench 9A the natural brickearth was sealed by a relatively homogeneous layer of mid-greenish-brown clayey-silt at 12.22 m OD, which contained occasional small pebbles and very occasional fragments of oyster, degraded CBM and charcoal, along with larger pieces of CBM. Sealing this layer was a succession of Roman dump layers or make-up deposits, thought to be associated with building demolition and consequent ground levelling. The pottery recovered from this context has a date range of c.

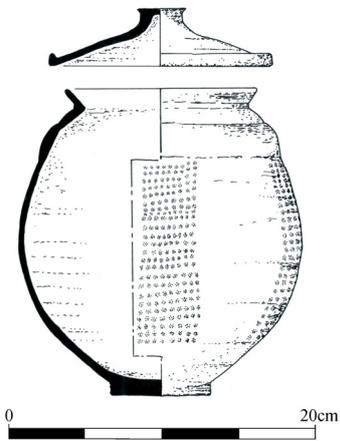


Fig. 4: ritually-deposited beaker

AD 170–300. The presence of a *tegula* in this deposit implies the existence of an earlier roofed structure nearby. In Trench 10 the probable road was sealed by a sequence of dump or make-up layers. These deposits were sealed by a sequence of beaten clay floors that occurred at c. 13.17 m OD. A further three dump layers sealed these floors. The uppermost layer was encountered at c. 13.40 m OD and contained pottery of 2nd-century date.

Further Roman pits were recorded in Trenches 8 and 10. In Trench 8 two pits were recorded; one cutting the brickearth and the other cutting the first pit. The main fill of the second pit was a mixed dark greyish-brown and mid yellowish-brown silty clay that contained CBM, pottery, animal bone and moderate-frequent gravel inclusions. The pottery retrieved indicates a date of AD 120–160. In Trench 10 the latest recorded Roman features were two pits cutting into a dump. One of these pits contained pottery of mid-late 2nd-century date.

Medieval

The earliest datable post-Roman activity was mid-10th to mid-11th century in date and largely consisted of pitting. The pits were concentrated in the southern half of the site, though such patterning is most likely the result of differential representation. Nevertheless, their presence confirms the pattern of reoccupation of this part of the City during this period, and

ROMAN RITUAL DEPOSIT

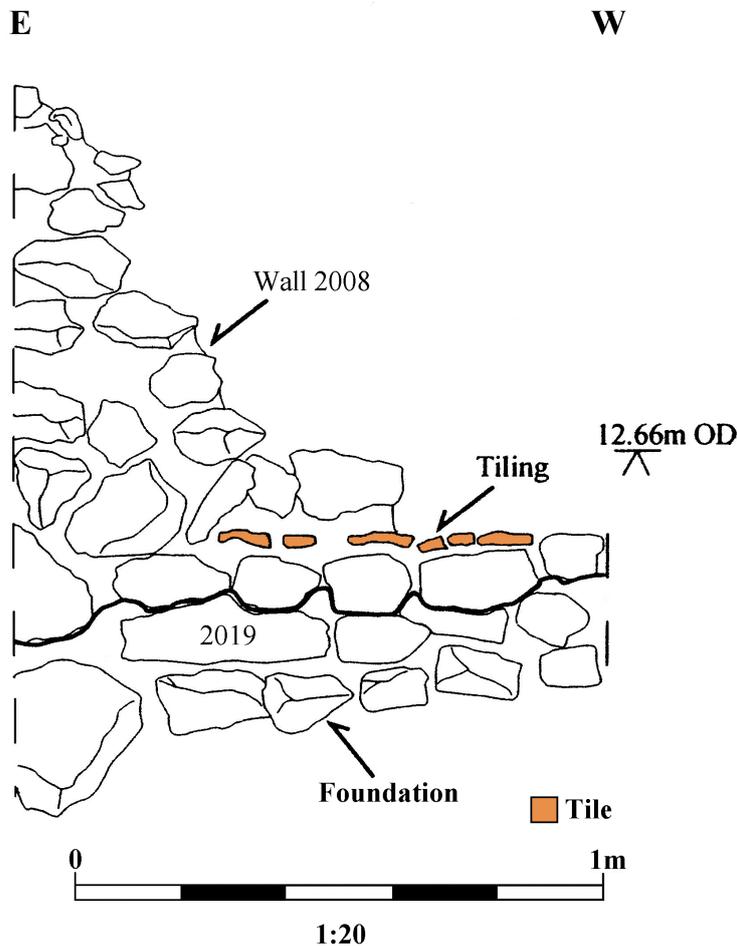


Fig. 5: Trench 2, elevation of walls

probably represents a variety of activities from refuse pits to quarrying and robbing.

In Trench 2 medieval activity consisted of dumping, levelling and wall robbing. A 0.6 m thick layer of brickearth was dumped against the northern internal face of the substantial Roman wall. It is of interest to note that this deposit was of medieval date (1080–1200), suggesting that the wall was at least partially standing at this time. A further episode of dumping or levelling followed. Later the wall was partially robbed out. Much of the northern part of the trench was occupied by a large rectilinear pit cut from 13.29 m OD. It had vertical sides; excavation was discontinued at 11.65 m OD due to health and safety considerations. Two fills were discerned

within this pit. The lower was a friable dark brown clayey sand that contained frequent medium pebbles, brick fragments and pottery dating to *c.* 1000–1150. The upper fill was mixed, containing pottery 1340–1400 in date. A similarly-dated medieval dump of dark grey-brown sandy silt sealed both the robber cut and pit in this trench.

Post-medieval

Various post-medieval features were recorded. In Trench 3 the earliest such deposit was a dump encountered at 13.63 m OD. It was overlain by a dumped deposit of large charcoal fragments. Truncating these contexts was an east-west post-medieval brick wall footing with associated construction cut and rubble backfill surviving up to 13.15 m OD.

A large soakaway was encountered in Trench 8. The construction cut measured *c.* 3.1 m by more than 2.1 m, and was not fully excavated, despite auger sampling to a depth of 10.80 m OD. Along the northern, eastern and southern sides of the cut, part of the original brick build of the soakaway walls survived as structural element. This consisted of unfrogged red bricks (220 x 100 x 60 mm) laid in Old English courses dated to the late 15th to late 17th centuries. Since it is thought the walls were not substantial enough to bear loads, it is more plausible that this structure was a soakaway. It was backfilled behind the walls by a dark brownish-grey sandy silt that contained frequent pebbles, moderate amounts of CBM and occasional pottery, very similar to the material found between the brickwork in the absence of a more formal mortaring. One of the walls was modified at some point by the insertion of a 0.4 m wide drain built from radially coursed header rows of red unfrogged brick (220 x 60–65 x 100–110 mm) of late 17th- to 19th-century date. This had only survived to a maximum height of 13.15 m OD. This drain/culvert ran north to south at a gradient into the soakaway. Two substantial dump layers were within the backfill of the soakaway. The lower was a 1 m or more thick dump of dark greyish-brown sandy silt that contained moderate brick rubble and pebbles, occasional oyster shell and animal bone, moderate amounts of charcoal, and pottery. A substantial piece of worked Reigate Stone was recovered from this dump. It shows a combination of mouldings to form a diverging ogee and hollow chamfer, and presumably derives from the foot of a vault or the springer of a window jamb. The fragment is thought to be of later medieval date and it may well have derived from a substantial building associated with the Leadenhall complex. Above this dump was a dark greyish-brown silty clay with frequent brick rubble and pebbles and occasional to moderate amounts of chalk building debris, oyster shell, and frequent peg tile, surviving at 12.97 m OD. Pottery from this upper context indicates a mid-18th- to late-19th-century date for the backfilling of the structure.

Above this backfilling dump was a thin (0.1 m) rubble dump layer of dark brownish-grey sandy silt with very frequent brick and tile rubble, occasional residual late medieval pottery, charcoal, and frequent chalk debris. This layer was cut by a 0.4 m wide north-south culvert. Only the base remained; it was constructed of bricks laid as stretchers on edge in a radial manner and did not appear to have been bonded. These bricks measured 230 x 60 x 100 mm and were of similar type and date (17th to 19th century) to those used in the construction of the culvert described above.

Conclusions

The excavations at 11 Leadenhall Street provided evidence for Roman, medieval and post-medieval activity. However, the extremely limited exposure afforded by the mitigation strategy severely hinders the interpretation of these findings in relation to surrounding sites.

Evidence for at least one masonry building fronting the Roman road was revealed in the south-east corner of the site. It comprised an external masonry wall with a sequence of internal beaten earth floors. No direct stratigraphic relationships could be established between the masonry walls seen in Trench 2 and the internal floor sequence in Trench 1. As a result it is problematic to determine the duration and function of this building. Pottery retrieved from the construction cut of the substantial load-bearing WNW-ESE wall indicates a mid-1st- to mid-2nd-century date for its construction. Pottery recovered from the make-up of the latest floor level in Trench 1 is of mid-3rd- to late-4th-century date, but this floor may post-date the structure seen in Trench 2. The function of the building remains unclear; however, comparison

with contemporary findings on adjacent sites suggests that the building probably represented a private structure, either a dwelling or commercial premises or possibly both.

The apparently ritual placement of a large beaker and lid beneath one of the floor levels is of interest. Rites of commencement or foundation offerings, placed beneath floors, are common throughout the Roman period in Britain.¹¹ They took the form of baby, animal or bird sacrifice, food and drink in pottery containers or even coins.¹² There are several examples of ritual placed vessels in this context from Roman London. At Monument House a complete necked jar with an inverted lid were found.¹³ At 13–21 Cheapside a grog-tempered bead-rimmed jar was incorporated into the sill of a building.¹⁴ It contained the base of a Gaulish samian beaker and unidentified metal objects. There were also examples from the amphitheatre excavations at Guildhall¹⁵ and sites in Southwark.¹⁶ Interestingly, these vessels tend to be jars rather than vessels that are given an exclusive ritual function.¹⁷ They often have lids and sometimes have contents.

The site lies on the course of an early Roman road, evidence for which was encountered towards the western-central portion of the site in the form of layers of indurated gravels. Due to the combination of the alignment of the Roman road and the mitigation strategy employed on the site, very little may be inferred about roadside activity during this period. However, the identification of a substantial masonry building immediately to the east of the road in Trenches 1 and 2 accords well with the evidence for buildings fronting up against the road on its eastern side at Whittington Avenue (WIV 88). On the

basis of the dating evidence and the masonry used in its construction this building is tentatively identified as the northern extent of Building 1 at Whittington Avenue (WIV 88). None of the Roman remains encountered on the site are thought to be associated with the Basilica and forum located to the west of the site although the area exposed was limited.

The earliest datable post-Roman activity was mid-10th- to mid-11th-century in date and largely consisted of pitting. The presence of such pitting on this site confirms the pattern of reoccupation of this part of the city during this period, as attested at Leadenhall Court (LCT 84) and represents a variety of activities from refuse pits to quarrying and robbing. Later medieval activity took a similar form, with much of the pottery being retrieved from pit fills and dumps and ranging in date from the 12th to the 15th century. Dating evidence indicates the substantial WNW-ESE Roman wall was robbed out in the 15th century, an activity comparable to the broadly contemporary piecemeal robbing of the Basilica walls at Leadenhall Court (LCT 84).

There was a variety of post-medieval activity on the site. The majority of it was 19th- and 20th-century foundations and services, but of interest is the large late-15th- to 17th-century soakaway encountered in Trench 8.

Acknowledgements

The project was funded by Leadenhall Property Holdings Ltd. Archaeological works were monitored by Kathryn Stubbs of Corporation of London. Many thanks to Jenny Hall and Fiona Seeley for their information and advice on ritual deposition of ceramic vessels.

1. G. Milne and A. Wardle 'Early Roman Development at Leadenhall Court, London and related research' *Trans London Middlesex Archaeol Soc* 44 (1993) 135–50.

2. G. Brown and B. Pye 'Whittington Avenue excavations: a summary' in G. Milne (ed.) *From Roman Basilica to Medieval Market: Archaeology in Action in the City of London*. (1992) 135–7.

3. *Ibid.*

4. *Op. cit.* fn 1.

5. *Ibid.*

6. M. Samuel and G. Milne 'The 'Ledene Hall' and medieval market' in G. Milne (ed.) *From Roman Basilica to Medieval Market: Archaeology in Action in the City of London*. (1992) 39–50.

7. *Ibid.*

8. *Ibid.*

9. *Ibid.*

10. *Op. cit.* fn 1.

11. R. Merrifield *The Archaeology of Ritual and Magic* (1987).

12. *Ibid.*

13. 1. Blair and D. Sankey *A Roman drainage culvert, Great Fire destruction debris and other evidence from hillside sites north-east of London Bridge: excavations at Monument House and 13–21 Eastcheap, City of London*. MoLAS Archaeology Studies Series (in prep.).

14. *Ibid.*

15. *Op. cit.* fn 11.

16. Fiona Seeley, *pers. comm.*

17. *Ibid.*