

Fig. 1: detailed site location plan

Roman land management and post-medieval structures at 100–142 Union Street, Southwark

Catherine Edwards

Introduction

In October 2006 and March 2010 archaeological investigations were carried out by AOC Archaeology at the site of 100–142 Union Street, Southwark, located at TQ 3210 8010. An initial evaluation was conducted over four separate areas, recorded as Area 1–4 (Fig. 1). This revealed post-medieval basements truncating Roman and post-medieval features. The mitigation phase involved the excavation of two open areas recorded as Area 1 and 4, which measured 683m² and 627m² respectively (Fig. 1). The investigations were carried out under the site code UIN06 and the site archive will be accessible at the London Archaeological Archive and Research Centre under this code. The investigation was commissioned by Lake Estates Limited.

The site lies approximately 550m south of the current River Thames and 540m west of Borough High Street (Fig. 2). The natural geology observed on site varied from east to west, with

gravel terrace deposits and brickearth located in the east, whilst in the west the brickearth was overlain by alluvial clay and sand deposits. The clay and sand sequence is likely to be associated with the rise in the Thames during the pre-Roman period.¹

Roman sequence

During the pre-Roman and Roman periods, the site would have been located within the western limits of the south island of Southwark (Fig. 2). The location of Roman settlement within Southwark was dictated to some extent by its topography, as the area consisted of low-lying islands or eyots separated by mudflats, marshes and tidal watercourses. The site lay on the eastern edge of the Bankside Channel and west of the Roman road known as Road 2. The earliest archaeological remains on site date to the early Roman development of Southwark and its expansion. During this period the site would have been located within unoccupied land, away from the focus

of activity on and around the northern end of Road 2 and further afield along Road 1 (Fig. 2).

Activity on site in this period was in the form of a sequence of large ditches, some were interconnected and some had later re-cuts (Fig. 3). The fill sequence included deposits of clays and sands, indicating natural filling rather than deliberate backfilling. That said, however, a small amount of domestic deposition had taken place producing pottery, bone and ceramic brick material. The natural filling of the ditches suggests that they functioned as part of a land drainage system, moving water away from transport routes and occupied ground into channels, some of which may have drained into the Bankside Channel. Recovered pottery sherds indicate an initial filling date before AD 115, most likely between AD 90–115, with the re-cuts being established after AD 115, more specifically AD 115–130. The small pottery assemblage indicates a low-status population, located on the

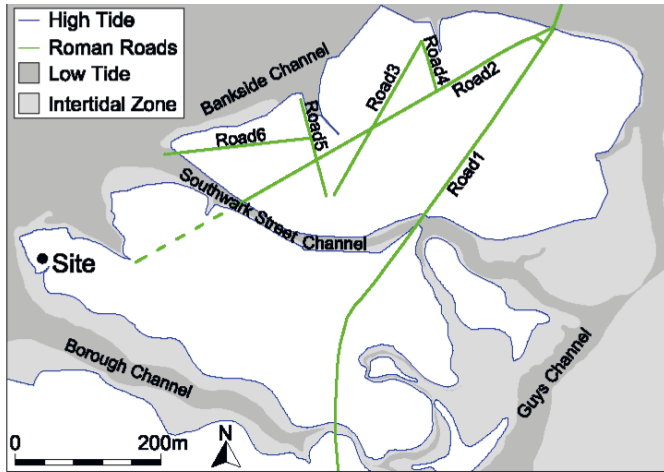


Fig. 2: location within Roman Southwark (adapted from MOLA 2009, Fig. 4)

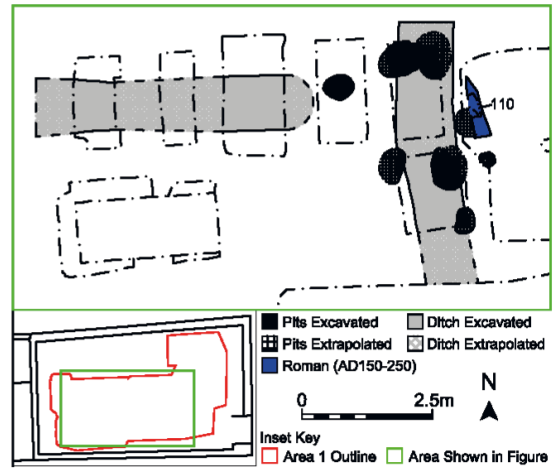


Fig. 3: Roman features in Area 1

periphery of a settlement, depositing waste associated with the consumption of food and drink (Fig. 4). The presence of un-mortared and unworn *opus spicatum* bricks (specialised bricks used in herring-bone tessellated flooring) suggests that they were perhaps surplus to requirement and as such were discarded, most likely from a high-status building.

In the late 2nd century the ditches were no longer in use or maintained, and silted up. This is possibly due to the low river level, which allowed for the reclamation of parts of the Bankside Channel for occupation.² Following the silting-up of the ditches, the site became used for the deposition of domestic waste in pits (Fig. 3). Little can be inferred from the pits themselves other than their use as waste pits. The pottery recovered from these features date to AD 70–150, but the majority of sherds date more closely to AD 100–120, suggesting that the site was reused swiftly once the ditches were no longer

in use. Only two pits of this date were recorded in Area 4, suggesting activity was focused on Area 1. Examples of bowls, cups, lids, jar, beakers and dishes were recovered. Three fragmentary but near-complete vessels were recovered from a highly-truncated feature in Area 1. Two are in *Verulamium* region white ware: one a cup-mouth ring-necked flagon (Fig. 5, 1), the other a necked jar (Fig. 5, 2). The latter has some similarity to face-pot forms, although more than 60% of the rim is present and no evidence of applied decoration is visible. These vessels were not produced later than c. 160 AD; however, their association with a black-burnished style (2F) jar in Thameside Kent ware (TSK), produced c. AD 180 (Fig. 5, 3), suggests that the *Verulamium* ware had been deliberately retained. Several aspects of this group suggest that it had a votive function. A small (c. 5mm) post-firing perforation was observed on a body sherd of the near-complete flagon. Deliberate

piercing of flagons, which would render them useless for their presumed function of holding liquids, has been noted as a widespread trend in votive deposits, although it remains uncertain whether this represents some kind of deliberate destruction. Unfortunately the level of truncation of this context precludes a satisfactory interpretation.

After AD 150 there is a general reduction of activity on site and a noticeable shift in activity from the western Area 1 to the eastern Area 4. Several pits were recorded in Area 4, suggesting a continuation in the deposition of domestic waste from a nearby settlement (not illustrated). Bowl, jar, beaker, amphorae and dish indicate domestic wares ranging in date from AD 150–250. Two narrow linear features ran east–west, with another aligned north–east to south–west, suggesting the establishment of individual plots, field or property boundaries. No further evidence for Roman activity was present within the

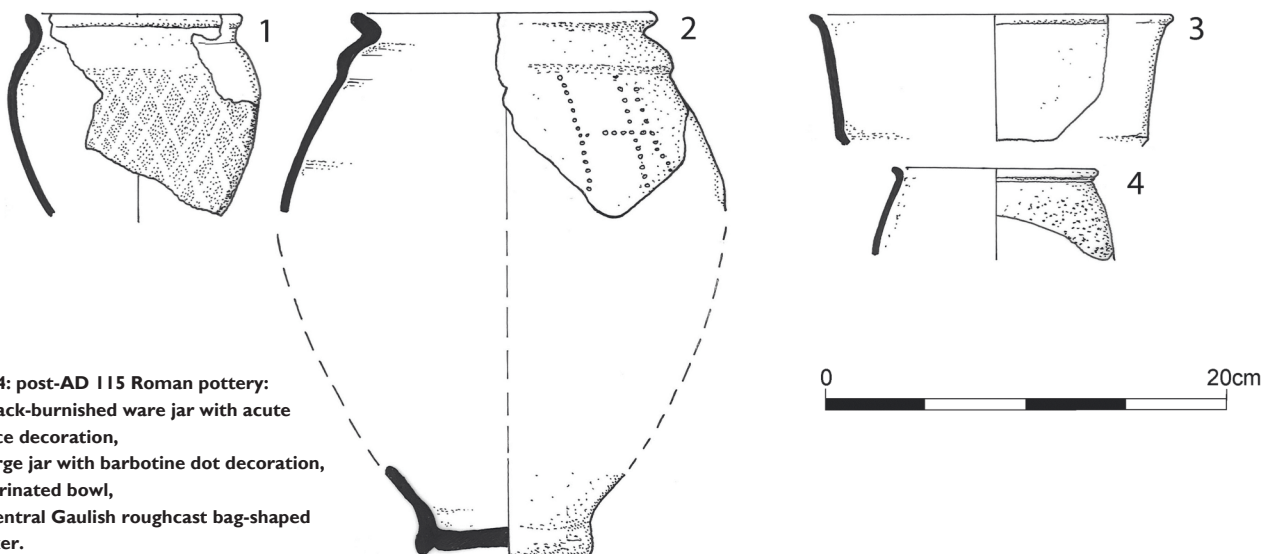


Fig. 4: post-AD 115 Roman pottery:
 1. black-burnished ware jar with acute lattice decoration,
 2. large jar with barbotine dot decoration,
 3. carinated bowl,
 4. Central Gaulish roughcast bag-shaped beaker.

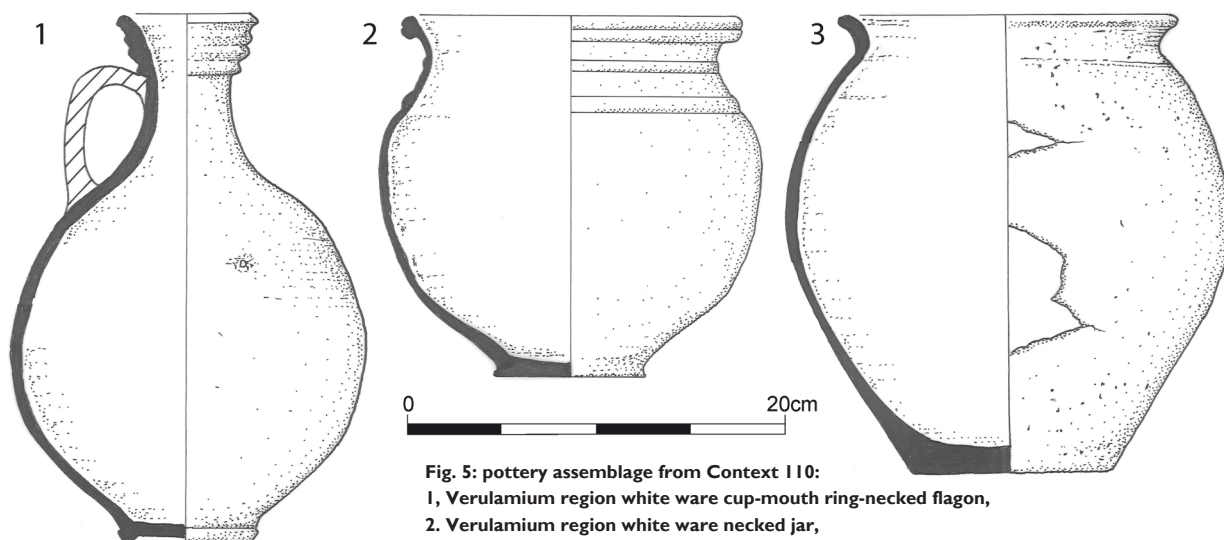


Fig. 5: pottery assemblage from Context 110:
1, Verulamium region white ware cup-mouth ring-necked flagon,
2, Verulamium region white ware necked jar,
3, black-burnished style (2F) jar in Thameside Kent ware (TSK).

western area of the site (Area 1) with only limited remains recorded in the eastern end of the site (Area 4) dating to after AD 250. Only eight contexts, mainly in the form of pitting (not illustrated) were dated to this period, more specifically AD 250–300/350. The increase in pottery sherds suggests a slight increase in localised activity. A large number of horn cores, along with cattle bones recovered from a well [5/028], suggest that horn-working or tanning activities were carried out locally to the site (Fig. 6). The deposition of silty clay sand across the site signals the end of the Roman occupation on site. The deposit indicates the abandonment of the site, and may be attributed to an accumulation of 'Dark Earth', which is thought to have several different origins. The deposit recorded on site varies in colour and consistency, which might indicate subtle changes between deposits; some deposits might be alluvial, some organic waste, cultivation soils or natural vegetation growth.³ Of note from this deposit was a substantial part of the spike of a Chalk amphora (Peacock and Williams class 50).



Fig. 6: fully-excavated well 5028

Post-medieval sequence

The site remains undeveloped and abandoned until the mid- to late-17th century. At this time the site is likely to have been located in agricultural or grazing lands as indicated by cartographic evidence.⁴ As occupation and industrial activities in Southwark increased and the spread from north of the river gathered pace, the site became used for the deposition of domestic waste, and possibly small-scale land management. The earliest activity involved the deposition of both domestic and industrial waste in pits in Area 1. Finds included a glass toiletry or medication bottle, window glass, clay tobacco pipes, butchered and unbutchered animal bone and domestic pottery vessels dated to AD 1600–1725.

Brick structures dating to 17th–18th centuries were recorded in Area 4 (Fig. 7). Room layouts were identifiable along with brick, cement and mortar floors. The locally produced bricks were almost all unfrogged, in fabrics MoL 3033 or 3034. Other interpreted structures within this structural group included a stairwell and chimney base. The structural remains are likely to have fronted onto Queen Street. Queen Street and its western adjoining road Duke Street were renamed Union Street in 1813.⁵ Rocque's Map of 1745 and Horwood's Map of 1799 indicate properties located along both Duke Street (Area 1) and Queen Street (Area 4). Approximately 20 complete iron-washed salt-glazed beer bottles dated to the second half of the 19th century were recovered in the backfill, probably a result of the partially

demolished structure being used as a drinkers' den. Several were identifiable and recorded as C. GIBBONS of Union Street, Southwark, J. MILLS (established 1850: one example with corrugated blob-top rim and J. MILLS stamped on neck), WESTERN & WOLLAND, Bermondsey (four examples all with W & W stamped on neck but with two variations of lower body stamp), Joseph Bourne & Son manufactured bottles (two examples without retailers' stamps) and R. WHITE (seven examples with three stamping design variations).

Wells and culverts occupied the site between the 18th and 20th centuries. The backfill of the wells indicates the deposition of domestic wares suggestive of the lower half of the social scale. Fragments of imported clay tobacco pipes from France may have been sold from 108 Union Street, where a William Charlesworth is listed as tobacconist in the mid-19th century (1851 and 1861 census). The culverts, constructed during the 19th–20th centuries, are likely to have been built when further dwellings were established on Union Street and Ewer Street as indicated on the Goad Insurance Plan 1889 (not illustrated).

Following the clearance of slum dwellings in Southwark, large well-built properties were constructed fronting Union Street (Fig. 8).⁶ Three buildings were recorded on site, each of which would have been divided into two separate properties. Only the chimney bases and basement walls were present, formed of yellow stock brick on concrete footings and a concrete floor. The buildings appear on the 1916

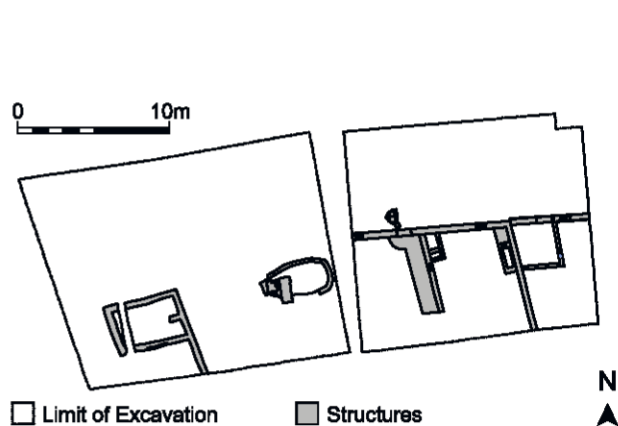


Fig. 7: post-medieval structural remains in Area 4

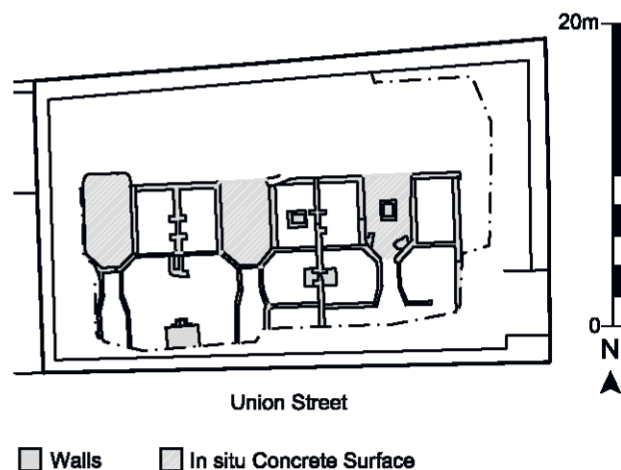


Fig. 8: post-medieval structural remains in Area 1

Ordnance Survey map but not on the 1896 Ordnance Survey map or the Booth Poverty Maps of 1998–99, giving 18–20 years for their construction.

Discussion

The excavations at 100–142 Union Street have added to the growing knowledge of Roman Southwark. The Roman remains are comparable to other sites excavated nearby. The early Roman period is characterised by open drainage ditches used to carry water away from main roads and settled sites. Similar ditches have been recorded on neighbouring sites such as 10–18 Union Street (USA88 and USB88), 97–101 Union Street (UNN98), 103 Union Street (UNO99) and 206 Union Street (UNS91). The site investigation confirms that the site, during the Roman period, would have been located away from intensive activities or settlement and was also outside the main areas occupied by the Roman ‘Southern Cemetery’. The postulated votive vessels deposited on site are of interest as they hint of potential ritualistic activity being carried out on site. The vessels from the site were identified as *Verulamium* region white ware and a cup-mouth ring-necked flagon. Similarly pierced *Verulamium* region flagons were found in wells at Swan

Street, Southwark⁷ with further possible votive vessels recorded locally in a well at 10–18 Union Street.⁸ Opposite the current site at 103 Union Street (UNN98–99),⁹ possibly votive finds included a triple vase, two tazze, an unguentarium, oil lamps and *Verulamium* ware pottery dated to AD 140–200. It is also worth pointing out however that the flagons recorded on 100–142 Union Street, might have been modified for a variety of special purposes, including specialist food or alcohol production.¹⁰ Later Roman activity in the form of domestic and industrial pitting suggests that the land remained unoccupied by settlement, but contained the waste from a possible local tanning industry near to the site but not actually on it.

The abandonment of the site from the post-Roman period until the mid- to late-17th century is in keeping with the known history of the area. A growth in industries in Southwark, especially those deemed too unpleasant for north of the river, helped to drive the increase in the local population. This rise in population increased the requirement for new buildings in the form of shops, dwellings, public houses, poor houses and factories. Many of them were constructed on Union Street. The 17th–18th century structures recorded on

site, and the later culverts, would have been part of this expansion of settlement. Both the early structures in Area 4 and those served by the culverts in Area 1 appear to have been demolished between 1889 and 1898 as both sites appear vacant on the 1898 Booth Poverty Map.¹¹ The earlier properties in Area 1 appear to have been replaced by 1916, as the later larger structures recorded on site appear on the 1916 Ordnance Survey map. They are typical of the structures still standing on Union Street today.

Following her graduate qualification in archaeology in 1999, Catherine has established 14 years of fieldwork expertise and supervision. She has supervised complex urban and rural occupation contexts together with cemetery excavations, and she has a keen interest in research abroad and in the UK. In her role of Project Officer at AOC, she manages projects in the field and regularly liaises with consultants, clients and regional archaeological monitors. Catherine is committed to the dissemination of archaeological investigations and her publication record includes both excavation and geoarchaeological reporting spanning the Saxon period right through to the post-medieval period.

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