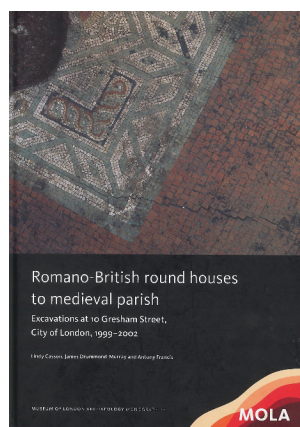


LA book reviews usually run to up to a maximum of three quarters of a page. Here Dominic Perring extends the standard review to consider in more depth the conclusions and potential further research.

Romano-British round houses to medieval parish: Excavations at 10 Gresham Street, City of London, 1999–2002



Linda Casson, James Drummond-Murray and Antony Francis

MOLA Monograph 67

2014

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143 figures (some colour), 33 tables, CD with 12 further tables, bibliography and index

£25

Reviewed by Dominic Perring

This Gresham Street site represents one of Roman London's more interesting recent excavations, and its publication has been eagerly awaited. It is consequently disappointing to find that it fails to present sufficient of the primary data to put the more interesting conclusions to proof. This should not, however, detract from the fact that the excavations were undertaken to high standards and MOLA deserve credit for marshalling complex evidence into an elegantly produced volume full of provocative information.

Town planning and discrepant communities in early Roman London

The site lay on the north-west margins of Roman London. This report dates the earliest occupation to the decade after the Boudican revolt, at which time a ditched enclosure was established on an alignment that anticipated a street that crossed the site east to west (Figs 1 and 2).¹ A rectangular timber building at the heart of the enclosure was surrounded by short-lived round-houses with south-east facing entrances and central hearths, as well as smaller structures that may have been animal-pens or stores.² Hearths within a small room in the rectangular building were used to make blue beads of Iron Age style from imported glass (Fig. 3).³ The architecture, like the glass-working, finds parallel in both Gaul and Britain drawing on traditions that pre-date the advent of Rome.

Similar houses had stood alongside the Roman precursor to Newgate Street but were not replaced after the revolt. Perhaps post-fire re-planning involved relocating suburban *vicani* from this main street, where more evidently imported styles of Roman

architecture soon prevailed, to the Gresham Street area. This new settlement was a short distance to the west of the Roman water-works at 30 Gresham Street, which may have supplied the Roman baths at Cheapside and are likely to have been built on the western boundary of the late Neronian planned settlement.⁴

The identification of this area as part of an under-regulated suburb beyond the Roman baths might account for the ease with which changes were made here early in the Flavian period, when the Neronian buildings were flattened to permit the insertion of a north-south street.⁵ It is not clear, however, why this new street was needed. An earlier north-south road, a short distant to the west, allowed full access to properties in this part of town.⁶ Since in later periods the new road lead directly to the Cripplegate fort's south gate it opens the possibility that its creation anticipated the fort's construction, which had been planned-for fifty years before it was built.

Horses, houses and ritual

A peculiar feature of the Neronian occupation of the site was the presence of parts of several horses disposed of here after their working lives.⁷ The evidence is consistent with the practice of burying horses close to city boundaries, which preference may have had a ritual dimension.⁸ It is consequently disappointing not to be given more information on the contexts in which these remains were found or the assemblages with which they were associated.

The Gresham Street site presented further evidence of ritual activity within its late-first and early-second-century assemblages, which contained a higher proportion of tazze (incense burners) and face-pots than any other London site.⁹ These are objects known to be associated with religious practice.¹⁰ Elsewhere I have suggested that springs on high ground near Gresham Street may have been the focus of sacred ponds, later converted into Roman sanctuaries where temples were built. The nearby presence of temples might have added to the prevalence of vessels used in ritual, although it is not clear whether they relate directly to the use

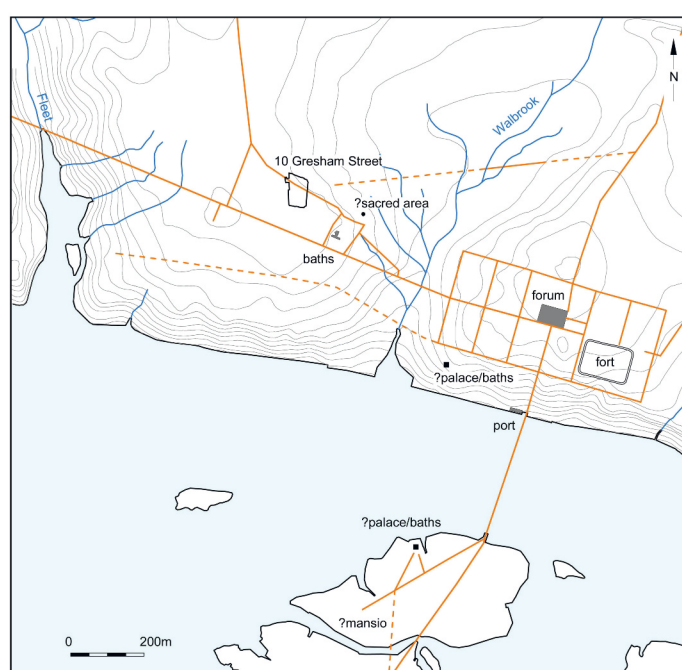


Fig. 1: Roman London c. AD 65, showing the location of the Gresham Street site (Justin Russel, Archaeology South-East)



Fig. 2: plan of Neronian buildings at 10 Gresham Street. Glassworking took place in Room B. © MOLA

of the buildings found at Gresham Street or should be considered a form of ‘background noise’. The report suggests that since the tazze and face-pots were found in several different houses they may have been in widespread domestic use.¹¹ One problem with this argument is that the identification of houses and properties depends on reconstructions of building plans that appear highly conjectural and are not always supported by the evidence provided.¹² This is one of several instances where the architectural interpretations advanced in this report fail to convince.¹³

Rethinking the Hadrianic Fire

I am similarly unconvinced by discussion of the fire-destruction horizons found on the site. Several early-second-century buildings (Period 4) appear to have been destroyed by fire, which

is seen likely to date *c.* AD 130.¹⁴ A subsequent chapter deals with later occupation (Period 5).¹⁵ Here a handsome town-house containing a mosaic-floored reception-room overlooking a peristyle courtyard is described (Building 50, fig 4). This building was also destroyed by fire, and the evidence again draws us to a

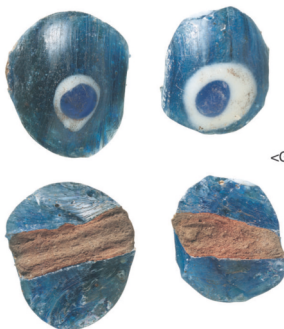


Fig. 3: blue glass bead manufactured in pre-Roman style © MOLA

date *c.* AD 130.¹⁶ It is entirely possible that we have evidence here of two separate fires occurring a couple of years apart, but some doubt remains. Could Building 50 have been part of the earlier Period 5 occupation of the site? From the evidence presented we cannot be certain that it was not: since there is no description of the two successive fire horizons being present in the same stratigraphic sequences.¹⁷ The authors’ conclusion that two separate fires raged here at dates later than suggested for the Hadrianic fire of London (AD 120/125) is eventually magnified into ‘upheaval caused by the wave of fires throughout the Hadrianic period.’¹⁸

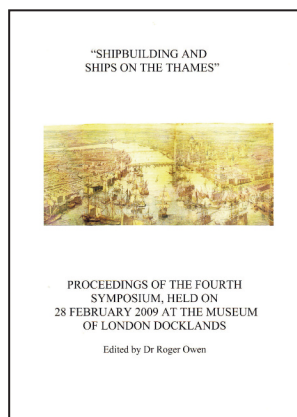
Whether or not there were two separate conflagrations, we must question received wisdom on the dating of the Hadrianic fire. There is mounting evidence to suggest that a date *c.* AD 130 should be preferred to AD 120/125.¹⁹ This requires us to assume that the warehouse assemblage at Regis House, from which the fire is usually dated, had been held in store for a few years and therefore lacked the Lezoux products associated with shipments of the later 120s.²⁰ Later dating would distance the fire from Hadrian’s earlier visit to Britain, but put it into a period when revolt cannot be dismissed as a possible cause. This would, indeed, have been a matter of upheaval!

This report begs many exciting questions. When was the Cripplegate fort first planned? What were the circumstance of the Hadrianic fire? What distinguishes ‘Roman’ from ‘native’, urban from suburban, and domestic from ritual? Answers must be sought elsewhere, but this task is not helped by the way the evidence is presented here. The overarching interpretative framework fails to convince and future research demands better descriptions of finds assemblages, supported by more contextual and stratigraphic detail.



Fig. 4: a Hadrianic town house (Building 50) showing an in-situ kitchen/store assemblage in the foreground with a mosaic-floored reception behind. The building was destroyed by fire *c.* AD 130. © MOLA

Shipbuilding and Ships on the Thames Proceedings of the Fourth Symposium



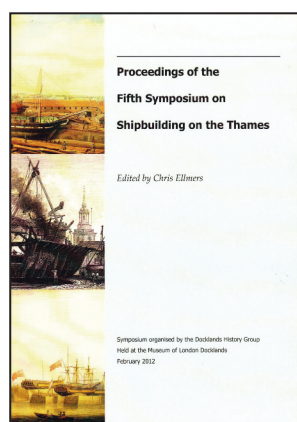
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Both reviewed by Clive Orton

The Symposium on Shipbuilding on the Thames has been held (under slightly different titles) every three years since 2000. These are the first two Proceedings to be sent to us for review. With ten and eight papers respectively, it is impossible to mention each individually in a short review, so I shall concentrate on the archaeological highlights.

From the Fourth Symposium, held February 2009, I must mention Damian Goodburn's account of the excavation in 1999 of fragments of a late-13th-century galley from the London waterfront. They are the only known surviving examples of archaeological evidence from a large late medieval oared ship, and shed important light on the design of warships of this period, despite having ended up re-used as fish-pond lining in Southwark.

The scale of shipbuilding on the Thames is demonstrated by Ian Buxton's overview, which shows a terminal decline from the mid-19th century to the largest and last warship, *HMS Thunderer*, built at the Thames Iron Works as late as 1912. Even more surprising is the Thorneycroft works at Chiswick, which was building small warships until early in the 20th century.

Moving to the Fifth Symposium, held in February 2012, readers may well be familiar with the work of the Thames Discovery Group, and here Gustav Milne and Elliott Wragg summarise recent evidence from the foreshore for both shipbuilding and shipbreaking. Chris Ellmers discovers a lost shipyard at Deptford, and Peter van der Merwe shows what art can contribute to our knowledge of London's shipbuilding industries.

Most *London Archaeologist* readers will find something to interest them here, and some may find themselves drawn further into a world of which they previously knew little. Any understanding of London's past is incomplete without knowledge of its shipping industries, and we should be grateful to those who remind us of them.

Continued from preceding page:

NOTES

1. The report treats this road as Flavian (road 2/3, p. 33), but it was possibly earlier (p. 54). A Neronian date would better explain the settlement topography.
2. p. 20–21.
3. See A. Wardle on the Roman glass, p. 184.
4. This monograph makes little reference to discoveries at 30 Gresham Street. It is to be hoped that the forthcoming publication of that site will use statistical approaches to finds assemblages (the data for which is absent here) to explore differences in patterns of consumption between these two sites.
5. Road 1, p. 31–2.
6. At 7–10 Foster Lane and 33–39 Gutter Street, p. 54.
7. p. 14.
8. Horse-burials are also found in ditches marking the limits of Iron Age sanctuaries, reminding us of the sacred nature of urban boundaries. C. Johnson *A Biometric study of Equids in the Roman World* (2006) 85.
9. The figures are not given. Table 3, referred to on p. 58, doesn't contain the promised data. It is a pity that quantification by EVE was not attempted, and that the data on sherd count and weight are presented in such summary fashion that they are of little value (Table 16).
10. D. Perring 'Two studies on Roman London: A. London's military origins – B. Population decline and ritual landscapes in Antonine London' *J Roman Archaeol* 24.1, 249–8.
8. One such wet-place may have been found on the southern boundary of the excavated area: p. 28.

11. p. 58–60.

12. Fig. 23 identifies ten buildings within the block bounded by Roads 1, 3, 4 and 5. The evidence can be recast to suggest that the block was occupied by a single building. The plan of buildings shown on Fig. 53 is equally open to reinterpretation.

13. Others include using isolated stone footings or robber trenches to assume the presence of masonry buildings (p. 63), the presumption that destruction horizons including brick and tile represents collapse from tile roofs (p. 78), and spatial interpretations using Vitruvian terminology (p. 82).

14. p. 61–2.

15. It is infuriating to find that a storeroom assemblage of twenty vessels is not described in full: p. 92.

16. p. 86 and p. 92. The dating draws on good diagnostic assemblages of Verulamium Region White ware.

17. It would have been useful to have had a land-use diagram and stratigraphic matrix available on the CD that accompanies this volume.

See R. Featherby on the Roman pottery, p. 156.

18. Archaeomagnetic dates from Regis House suggests c. AD 130: T. Brigham, B. Watson and R. Bartkowiak 'Current Archaeological work at Regis House in the City of London (part 2)' *London Archaeol* 8.3 (1996) 64. This is perhaps supported by samian from I Poultry: J. Hill and P. Rowsome *Roman London and the Walbrook stream crossing Part II* MoLA Monogr 37 (2011) 355.

20. G. Marsh 'London's samian supply and its relationship to the development of the Gallic samian industry', in A.C. Anderson and A.S. Anderson, *Roman Pottery Research in Britain and North-West Europe, 173–238* (1981) 226.

21. D. Mattingly *An Imperial Possession: Britain in the Roman Empire* (2006), 120–1.