

# Excavations at Staines

## a survey of recent work

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SINCE THE LAST report in *the London Archaeologist*, a number of explorations and two excavations have taken place together with the appointment of a full-time Field Officer (the author) and the establishment of the Spelthorne Archaeological Field Group<sup>2</sup>. In this short report I hope to bring together the information available and, in some respects, put Staines on the archaeological map.

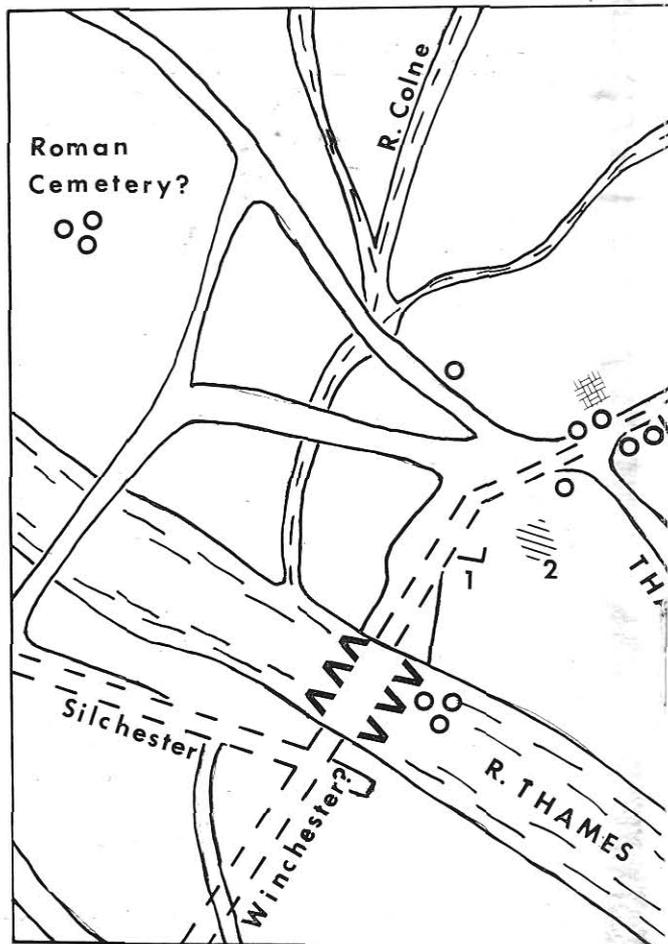
In the absence of any comprehensive publication of a number of sites (nine in all), information is of a limited nature and therefore they will be mentioned only briefly, but their importance is of significance to any discussion regarding the archaeology and history of Staines.

**Barclays Bank** 1969 (TQ 03727168) 10 on map.

The emergency excavations of 1969 upon the Barclays Bank site<sup>3</sup>, revealed the existence of a road and two buildings superimposed. The road, it seems, is the earliest structure on the site and had an east-west alignment across the front portion of the site<sup>4</sup>. A layer of mud covered the road, a burnt layer above this and then the two timber-framed buildings superimposed. From the work that has been carried out on the pottery, dates for the two buildings are late-1st century A.D. and A.D. 120-130. Also present on the site was a group of imported fine wares dated A.D. 40-60 and a cavalry helmet cheek piece (fig. 2) c. A.D. 50. The presence of this early material, and the road, would seem to indicate that there was an early military presence in Staines but that it was soon succeeded by the civilian settlement, and the

road realigned, running today beneath the present High Street.

Both timber-framed buildings were destroyed by fire, though whether by accident or of some major



1. *London Archaeol* 1 (1970) 161
2. Applications and information from Mr. W. E. Woodage, 5 Fifehead Close, Ashford, Middlesex TW15 3SD
3. *London Archaeol* 1 (1970) 161
4. *Ibid.*, 162

catastrophe it is impossible to ascertain. Although 3rd and 4th century material was also recovered from the site, due to the advanced state of construction, the excavation failed to find any definite occupation levels. Medieval pottery was found and one feature, which contained 12th century pottery.

**Thames Street** 1970 (TQ 03667157) 3 on map.

Part of a Roman road with side ditch was found, but there seems to be some confusion as to its alignment, it being either parallel to the road on Barclays Bank, or at right angles to it. Roman pottery was recovered from the side ditch.

**Conservative Club** (TQ 03517158) 1 on map.

Exploration of two modern column bases revealed sections of two daub walls, superimposed, with a layer of burnt material separating them. Material recovered was of a similar date to that from Barclays Bank.

**Friends Burial Ground** (TQ 03707152) 4 on map.

Two trenches were dug, 3m square, and later

followed up by large-scale excavations (see below).

**Johnson and Clark**, 19 High Street (TQ 03457159) 2 on map.

During extension at rear of building, exploration of 10 modern column bases 2 x 2m produced Roman, medieval and post-medieval material.

**Halifax Building Society** 1971 (TQ 03687169) 9 on map.

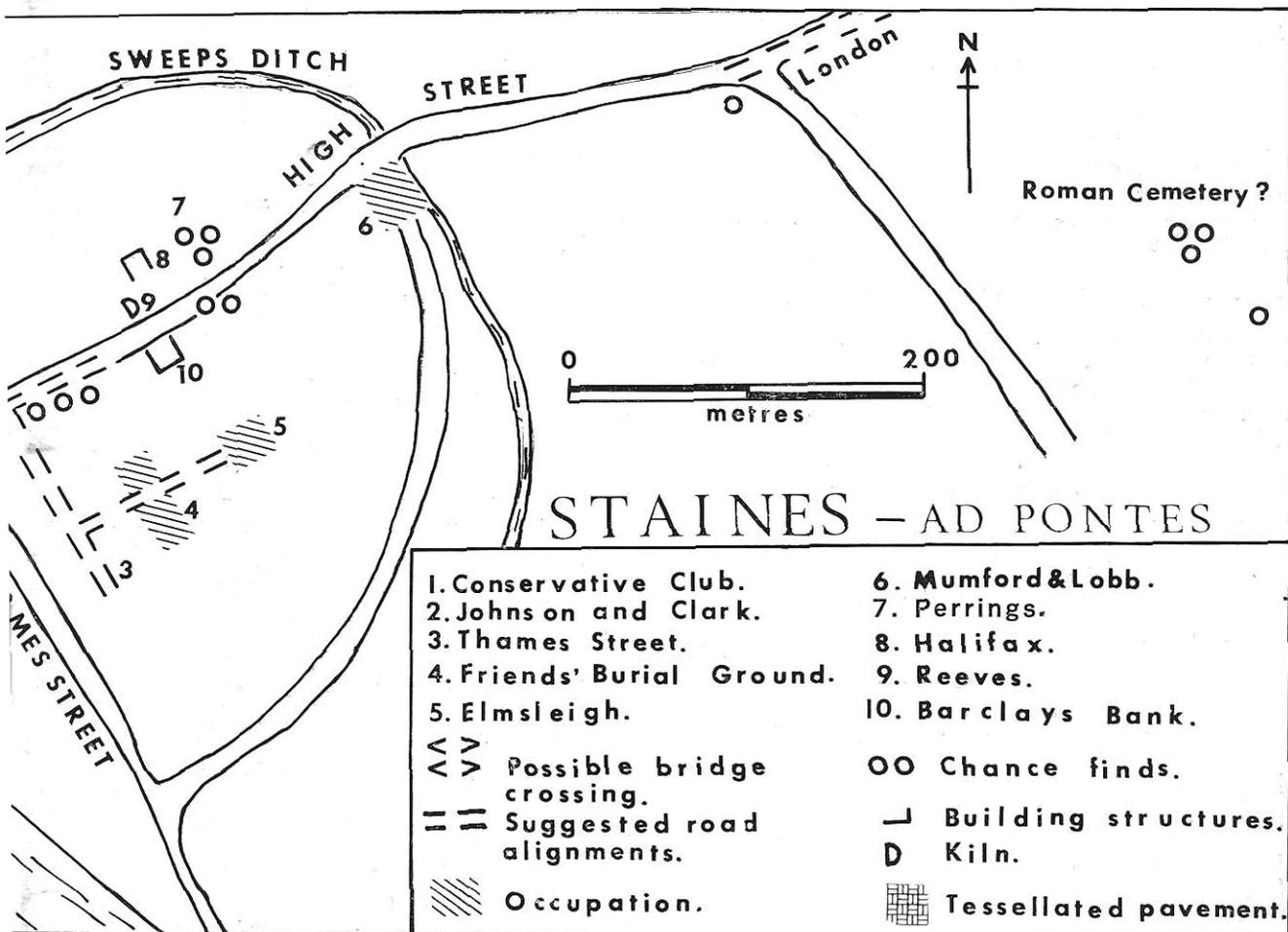
A cross section of a Roman kiln was found, with six wasters of 2nd century date; the infill contained 4th century pottery.

**Halifax Carpark** 1971 (TQ 03697175) 8 on map.

Here a clay floor of Roman date was found, cut by two features, one a ditch containing grass-tempered pottery, and the other a pit with medieval pottery.

**Perrings** (TQ 0360 7165) 7 on map.

Exploration of modern column bases recovered



1st-4th century and post-medieval pottery.

**Mumford and Lobb** 1972 (TQ 03857177) 6 on map.

Material from 1st-4th centuries, together with medieval and post-medieval.

**Elmsleigh** 1974 (TQ 03767165) 5 on map.

This site<sup>5</sup>, 30 metres from Barclays Bank site of 1969, gave the first evidence of 4th century occupation, together with Saxon and medieval in an area of 690 square metres examined. The geology is that of Flood Plain Gravels shelving to the south away from the High Street; these gravels at the southern end of the site were covered by silts. In the northern part of the site, the gravels were covered by occupation levels. The site gave no evidence of occupation before the 4th century, except for residual pottery, and a possible alleyway with a NE-SW alignment across part of the site, this being heavily cut by later pits and gullies.

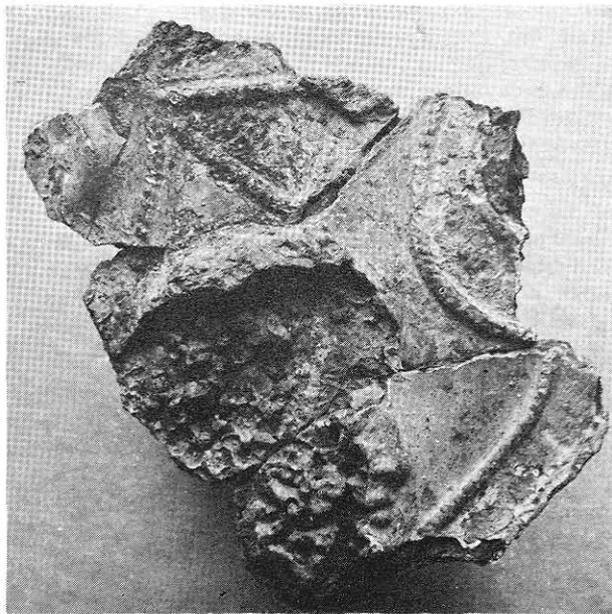
In the 4th century the north-west part of the site was levelled with clay, in-filling the side ditch of the alleyway and covering the alleyway itself. This clay was used for the floors of a timber-framed building, of which beam trenches were found in association. Another building was located in the north-east corner, with associated metal working. At the back of this building there was a large oval dump of iron ore, with a hollow centre, the iron feature surrounded by stake holes.

A gravel surface associated with these buildings was cut by numerous pits, at least two Roman, containing Alice Holt pottery. During the 4th century the buildings were either demolished or fell into disuse. The site was later levelled and covered by a gravel surface, which was in turn covered by clay and used as a floor for a building; beam trenches were again found. Pottery which was found, was residual Roman and fresh grass-tempered wares. The buildings fell into disrepair, there being no evidence of burning or deliberate demolition.

Above this layer, and covering most of the site, was plough soil of 11th-13th century date; this was approximately half a metre deep. Laid upon this was a gravel surface of late medieval date, cut by two post pits and numerous post holes. Unfortunately no plans of a structure can be discerned due to most of the gravel being destroyed in later centuries. This surface was covered by a black soil containing post-medieval material and the remains of an 18th century brick wall.

At the southern end of the site, where the silts overlie the gravels, the only occupation evidence was that of a large 16th century building with a pre-

5. Report forthcoming in *Trans London & Middlesex Archaeol Soc* 1976



**Fig. 2.** Cheekpiece from a Roman cavalry helmet c.A.D.50, found on the Barclays Bank site (10 on map).

existing 15th century structure. The building had been demolished in the latter part of the 17th century; only part of the structure was available for investigation as the rest lies beneath the National Car Park.

This site has been important, as it gives us our first stratified groups of pottery from Staines, especially of the medieval period, even though the site is not directly upon the High Street where the greatest concentration of material appears to be.

**Friends Burial Ground** 1975 (TQ 03707152) 4 on map.

As mentioned above, excavations on a limited scale had been carried out and revealed evidence of Roman occupational debris at a depth of 2 metres below the modern surface.

The land of the site had been raised in the 19th century by 1 metre to the south and by 2 metres to the north to accommodate the burials.

An area of 300 square metres was opened up by machine with the removal of the top metre of soil to the south of the burials. Sections cut by a trencher revealed Flood Plain Gravels to the north, shelving to the south as at Elmsleigh, and upon this was the occupational debris; this had been sealed by silts and the silts, in turn, cut into by pits and gullies of 4th century and medieval date.

The north part of the Burial Ground was investigated, the top 2 metres of soil being removed. This exposed directly the 4th century levels, a clay sur-

face, and the remains of a bank apparently built against the encroachment of water depositing the aforementioned silts. Below the clay bank was the remains of an alleyway with side ditch and bank. Beneath this bank were two features containing prehistoric pottery and the complete skeleton of a cow, dated to the late Iron Age. Pottery and flint tools recovered within the Roman levels date back to the Neolithic and one assumes that close to the site there is evidence of prehistoric occupation.

At present processing is in progress and first assessment shows important groups of fine and coarse wares, plus quantities of vessel and window glass, mosaic fragments, wall plaster and numerous small

finds. Because of the importance of the finds and features, excavations will commence again in the spring.

#### Summary

From the evidence found so far, it would seem that Staines had some form of occupation at least as far back as the Iron Age and perhaps even earlier. During the first two centuries of the Roman period the settlement expanded and prospered. A decline occurred in the 3rd century with expansion again in the 4th century and a final collapse in the 5th century, the town not regaining its importance and prosperity until the 12th/13th century.

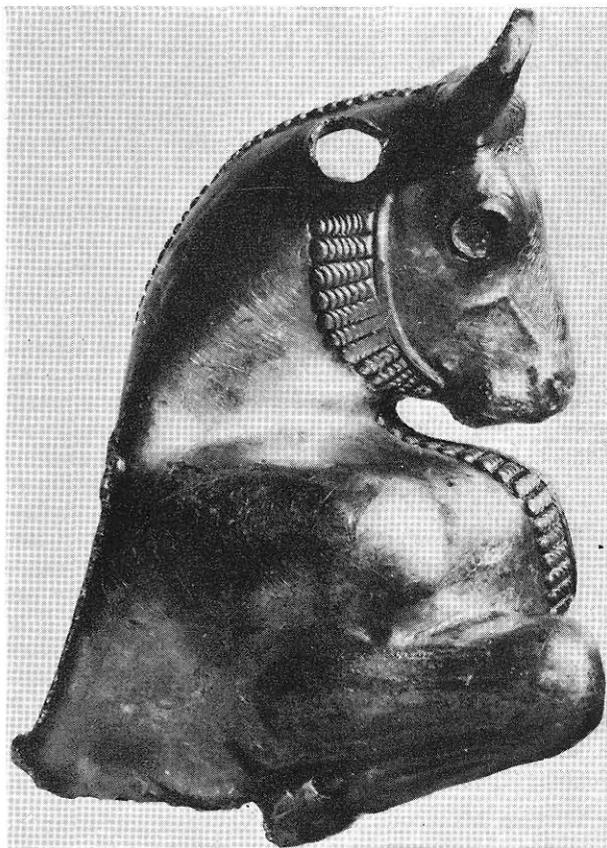
## Treasures from Thrace at the British Museum

BARBARIC splendour, extravagance and masses of gold are the main features of the current very successful exhibition 'Thracian Treasures from Bulgaria' (until 28th March—see Diary for times, etc.). Over a thousand objects, many of them vessels and ornaments of pure gold, illustrate the art of the ancient Thracians from the Copper Age to the Roman period.

The development of the metal working is shown from its beginnings, with the simple gold ornaments from the Varna necropolis to the Late Iron Age flamboyant and extravagant chieftain's treasure of Panagurishte, a hybrid of Classicism and barbaric magnificence. This latter treasure, famous for its sheer weight in gold (6.1 kg or 13.2 lbs.) is one of the centre pieces of the exhibition.

The Thracians were tribes living in the northern parts of the Balkans who were known for their warlike character as described by various classical authors. They were conquered by the Persians, Macedonians and Romans. Little is known of their previous history, except from excavations. Recent work such as the excavations of the Varna necropolis (1973) or the painted tomb of Kazanluk (1974) and of various burial mounds give insight into the burial customs of these people.

This is the exhibition of gold, gold and more gold, combined with an exciting art, as well as archaeologically excavated material.



Part of silver vessel ending in a forepart of a bull — from Rouse (4th century B.C.)