

Current archaeological work at Regis House in the City of London (part 2)

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Second-century revetment and occupation

AFTER FOUR decades of use, the Neronian quay (see Part I, previous issue) was extended southward in or immediately after AD 102 (Fig. 6)¹¹ to a line close to that of the Pudding Lane quay excavated in 1981¹². The new revetment consisted of a substantial mortised baseplate supporting a series of posts with plank cladding to the rear (Fig. 7). There may also have been a waling beam or mortised top plate. Tiebacks at several levels were set into the infill of the structure, which consisted largely of organic dumps and oyster shells, and extending over the former wharf. The sheer volume of oyster shells,

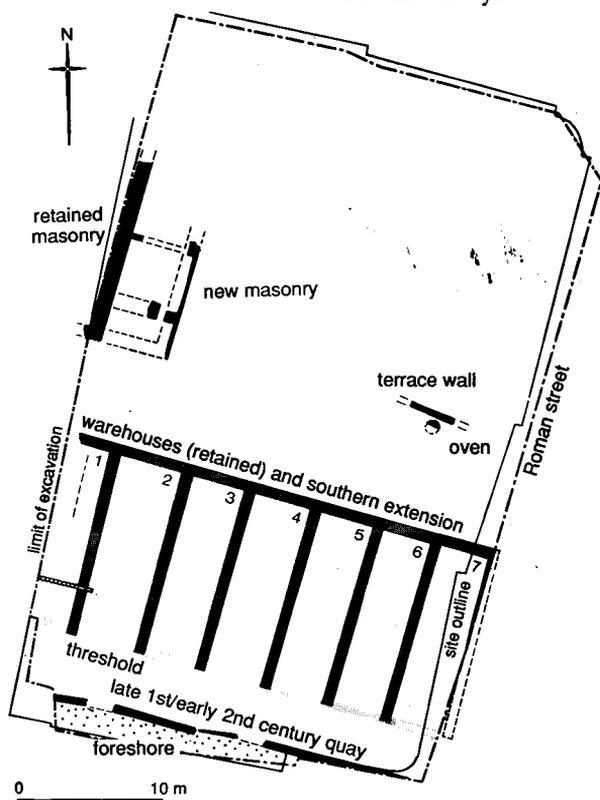


Fig. 6: the early 2nd-century extension to the quay, its associated warehouses and other buildings.

which were also found in large quantities at Pudding Lane, seems to suggest that there was a substantial processing industry greater than that required for purely local consumption. This hypothesis is supported by the purity of the deposits, with very little sign of other intrusive material (e.g. bones, pottery, organic waste) which would be expected if the oysters were simply discarded from the table with other household rubbish.

The oyster dumps formed the base for new wharf surfaces and floors as the waterside building was extended southward to the old quay line (Fig. 6). The opportunity also seems to have been taken to construct a seventh bay to the east of Bay 6 against the main street, although the exact form of this is currently unclear, since it may have extended northward along the street frontage. Apart from a single timber-framed wall with masonry infill, the extension work was mainly executed in mudbrick, with the daub covering of one wall being clearly keyed for a plaster finish using roller-stamped designs (a diaper pattern on the west face, chevrons on the

11. Dendrochronological dating by Ian Tyers, ARCUS, Research School of Archaeology, Sheffield University.

12. N. Bateman and G. Milne 'A Roman Harbour in London and Observations near Pudding Lane, City of London, 1979-82' *Britannia* 14 (1983) 207-226.



Fig. 7: the early 2nd century quay, showing the internal plank cladding. (MOLAS)

east). The discovery nearby of painted plaster with similar marks on the back indicates that the bays were finished to a fairly high standard, despite their commercial function.

By this time, the bays were becoming much more diverse internally, with several examples of timber and wattle-and-daub partitions, while Bays 2 and 3 appear to have been interconnected by a wide doorway. Bay 6 had a kitchen area at the north end, complete with oven; the presence of the kitchen and the discovery of a number of complete broken and unbroken bowls, flacons and dishes along the west wall of the bay have led to its preliminary identification as a tavern.

In Bay 3, three 0.6m-long lead ingots were found buried beneath an early floor level. Weighing at least 170lbs, two of the ingots were stamped on the upper surface IMP VESPASIAN AUG, the third IMP VESPASIANI AUG, denoting that they were imperial property. All three had additional stamps on the side BRIT EX ARG VEB ("Britannia, from the silver mines"; the addition VEB has been observed on other Vespasianic ingots, and may have been part of a place-name). All three had incised or stamped marks at the end, possibly of the mine concession-holder. The ingots are thought to have originated in the Mendip mines, with parallels for all three having been identified from Charterhouse-on-Mendip¹³. The reason for their abandonment is unclear; they were presumably the stock of a leadsmith, or goods in transit stored for security reasons, but may have been stolen and hidden. Their owner seems to have moved on, died — or been arrested — in any case, for in a later level, the same bay produced two stone vases or mortars of aragonite and travertine, and the rim of a lava bowl, indicative of a new trade. All three of these were imported, some probably from the Mediterranean.

Meanwhile, the glass workshop in Bay 4 went out of production. A considerable concentration of unused tesserae was found in subsequent levels, which strongly implies that they were being manufactured or traded here; it is even possible that there was a resident mosaicist, although this was a very specialist craft which in Britain was perhaps confined to a few schools of workmen.

Probably after several decades had elapsed, the early-2nd-century waterfront was extended further, beyond the boundary of Regis House. Dunning's records from 27-28 Fish Street Hill show several occurrences of jointed 0.45m-square tim-

bers, which may represent either two further advances of around 4.5m and 4.0m respectively, or a single larger event. Whatever the interpretation, the structures were infilled with oyster shells as before. There was some evidence in the south-west that brickearth and mortar surfaces were laid out over the infill, and that several warehouse bays were extended again, initially to the line of the revetment of AD 102, and then beyond the site boundary.

The Hadrianic fire

Subsequently, there was evidence of a major fire affecting the entire area. Dunning suggested a date of AD 120-130 for this, although Marsh believed it to have occurred no later than AD 125¹⁴. Archaeomagnetic dating by the Clark Laboratory of MOLAS of two burnt mud brick walls produced dates of AD 110-130 and 130-180 for the Hadrianic fire. The timber-framed buildings which covered much of the site were destroyed and the larger masonry building in the north-west was also badly damaged. Burnt mudbrick debris up to 2.0m thick was deposited over the southern terrace, becoming considerably thinner in the higher area to the north, but still reaching up to 0.8m in the north-west, where it

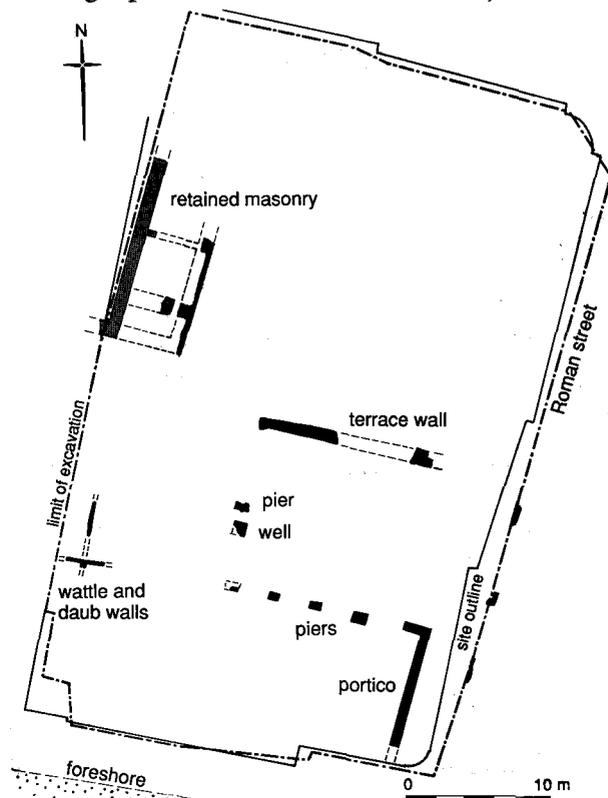


Fig. 8: the post-Hadrianic fire buildings. By this date the waterfront had been extended southwards again beyond our limit of excavation.

13. Dr. Martin Dearne, *pers. comm.*

14. G. Dunning, *op cit* fn 4; G. Marsh *op cit* fn 5.

infilled the half-cellar, and was piled up against the walls of the masonry building. It can only be assumed that a substantial retaining wall was constructed somewhere below the present Thames Street, to support the south edge of these great dumps; nothing was noted at 27-28 Fish Street Hill, however, where the fire debris continued at least as far south as the centre of that site, below the current pavement of Lower Thames Street.

It was clear from the excavation of the fire debris that it consisted of two distinct phases of deposition: the lower half of the deposit was probably derived from buildings destroyed on site, and contained many examples of almost complete burnt mudbricks, with the remains of burnt structural timbers, wall plaster and mortar. Sections of unburnt mudbrick were also encountered, which suggests that parts of some of the walls were sealed by collapsed debris before they were exposed to the flames. The debris was sealed by a trampled surface, which in some places was sealed by a thin chalk spread. Crucially, a building was constructed on this surface before the final levelling took place (Fig. 8), consisting of finer material, possibly imported from other sites (see below).

The remains of the building consisted of several elements. In the south-east, an L-shaped masonry foundation was constructed directly over the east wall of the pre-fire Bay 6, extending southward beyond the old frontage. This was of standard Roman construction, but unusual materials, with several courses of squared chalk interspersed with double string courses of roof tile, laid with their flanges turned outward to mimic brickwork. Some ragstone was used, mainly as quoins at the north end where the wall returned west in line with a row of four piers. Three of these were of chalk and tile, and one entirely of roof tile (Fig. 9). A possibly later second row, represented by a fifth pier, lay almost 6.0m further north, within the backfill of a large timber-lined well or cistern constructed within the building, and dated by dendrochronological analysis to as 117-162. After its subsequent backfilling, and the construction of the masonry pier, the well was replaced by a smaller box-framed structure constructed in its south-eastern corner. Sooting and scorching showed that the tiles used in the walls had clearly been salvaged from the surrounding fire debris.

Around 4.0m further east under the Fish Street Hill frontage, fragments of a second chalk and tile wall was recorded during watching brief work; sections of the same wall were also recorded by Dunning in 1929-31. The area between the two walls

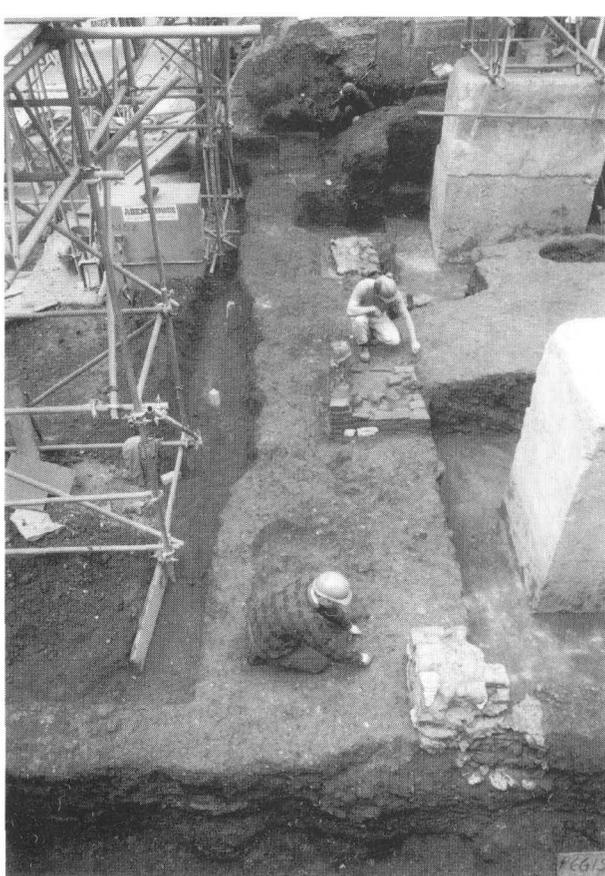


Fig. 9: the piers for the colonnaded south side of the post-Hadrianic fire building, cut into the lower fire debris. (MOLAS)

may have been a wide portico or open area, and it seems probable that the streetfront wall supported the side of a causeway leading onto the Roman bridge: thick gravel surfaces and side ditches of the approach road were recorded on the east side of a coursed ragstone foundation which continued the line of the street frontage northward almost as far as 18-20 Fish Street Hill. The date of that section of wall is unclear, but was probably Roman, although not of the same construction.

The north side of the new building appears to be represented by a terrace wall located in the centre of the site, and evenly spaced in relation to the two rows of piers (i.e. a further 6.0m to the north). In the south, the building continued beyond the limit of excavation, probably to the line of one of the later waterfronts, or to the retaining wall postulated in this area. The western wall line has not been established, but currently the most likely position lies on the east side of the main drain, which was recut through the fire debris on a slightly different line. This area was disturbed by later intrusions and

modern foundations, which would have removed any surviving traces.

Following the completion of the building, the final deposits of burnt debris were dumped around the new walls to raise the ground level almost to that of the next terrace. As mentioned earlier, the mudbricks in these upper layers were crushed to fine powder, which suggests considerable reworking, and it is probable that they were brought in from other sites in the area. In the south-east, this later material contained a substantial quantity of decorated samian dated to the late 1st and early 2nd centuries, undoubtedly part of the deposit noted by Dunning. Its presence in this final deposit, and the fact that the sherds were well mixed, suggests that the samian was brought in from elsewhere, presumably from a local store or shop destroyed in the fire, rather than from a warehouse *in situ*¹⁵. These deposits contained a quantity of mainly red and white wall plaster fragments and parts of two pipeclay Venus figurines, which may have been from the same source.



Fig. 10: part of a Saxo-Norman sunken floored building. The wall-line is marked by a decayed horizontal plank, supported internally by a line of posts. (MOLAS)

To the west of the chalk-walled building, wattle-and-daub structures were erected on the raised ground, only to be destroyed by a further fire (currently undated). The remains were then sealed by dark earth deposits provisionally dated by coin evidence to the 4th century. Meanwhile, in the north-east, at 18-20 Fish Street Hill, an east-west masonry wall was constructed, probably replacing a pre-fire timber-framed predecessor. This may have formed part of a general masonry reconstruction in the area, although no other walls survived owing to extensive later intrusions.

In most areas, later Roman activity was truncated, although in his 1929-31 observations, Dunning recovered a quantity of Oxfordshire Red Colour-coated ware, which implies that there was late Roman settlement in the area. Excavations nearby at Pudding Lane (Fig. 1) revealed continued activity until the very late 4th or early 5th century¹⁶.

Saxo-Norman and medieval activity

Judging by the negative evidence from three excavations to the east of Fish Street Hill, it is probable that the area of the bridgehead was not occupied from the early 5th century until the late 9th or early 10th century. Environmental evidence from Pudding Lane indicates that the area was waste ground during this period, colonised by elder and nettles¹⁷. Following Alfred's decision to reoccupy the walled area of London in 886, new harbours were established at Queenhithe and Billingsgate. A number of bridge abutment timbers found *in situ* at Fennings Wharf, Southwark in 1984 confirm that a bridge was in place by the late 11th century, a factor which would have encouraged the reoccupation of the bridgehead by craftsmen and traders¹⁸.

Evidence of late Saxon and Saxo-Norman (c 900-1100) occupation at Regis House was limited due to truncation by later features. However, portions of two sunken-floored buildings (Fig. 10) and number of cess and rubbish pits were located. A well in 18-20 Fish Street Hill produced three soot-encrusted 10th- or 11th-century cooking pots. The scattered distribution of these features suggests that the pattern of Saxo-Norman settlement was dispersed, with many external pitted areas. By comparison,

15. G. Marsh *op cit* fn 5, 222.

16. G. Milne *op cit* fn 7, 141.

17. G. Milne 'Excavation Summaries - Billingsgate Area, 16-17' in V. Horsman et al *Aspects of Saxo-Norman London: 1 Buildings and Street Development* London Middlesex Archaeol Soc Special Paper 11 (1988).

18. Publication work on Medieval London Bridge is an ongoing MOLAS English Heritage project.

19. G. Milne *op cit* fn 17, 16-17.

the earliest Anglo-Saxon features at the Pudding Lane excavation consisted of a well and eleven pits dating from the late 9th or 10th century, with 11th-century occupation represented by a number of sunken-floored buildings¹⁹. One structure at Regis House is provisionally interpreted as a stone-lined sunken-floored or cellared building, probably of 12th-century date.

The late 12th to 15th-century period at Regis House was represented by a series of mortared chalk rubble walls, interpreted as the foundations of cellared buildings with timber-framed upper storeys (Fig. 11). The largest building in the south-west portion of site contained three large pier bases. Associated with these foundations are a number of stone-lined wells and cesspits. The basal fill of one late medieval well contained a large collection of well-preserved tools including an adze blade, fragments of scythe blade, a hammer (complete with handle) and some bone-handled knives. In 1930 Dunning recorded a medieval timber-lined well along the Monument Street frontage containing a polychrome or Saintonge ware jug of late 13th or 14th-century date²⁰.

Post-medieval redevelopment

Most of the medieval sequence appears to have been destroyed by the later intensive occupation of the area, which was crossed by a series of alleyways and courtyards, and in the north by Crooked Lane (Fig. 12). Each of these thoroughfares was lined with buildings, and it appears that the site was largely covered from an early period. Part of Globe Court was occupied by a brick-floored cellar. The entire area of the site was devastated by the Great Fire of London, on 2nd September 1666. Although direct evidence of this has not yet been identified, there are many fragments of 16th to early 18th-century brick-built cellared buildings, plus associated wells, sumps and cesspits. Interestingly a number of medieval well linings suffered from subsidence, so that the wells were often relined with brickwork during the post-medieval period.

A survey of the parish of Saint Margaret, Fish Street Hill in 1638 records that the following named houses or former inns stood on the site: the *Talbot*, the *Blue Boar*, the *Jack and Apes*, the *Black Raven*, the *Three Pigeons*, the *Swan*, the *White Lion*, plus a number of shops²¹.



Fig. 11: substantial chalk rubble wall foundations. The indentation on the right-hand side is a cesspit. (MOLAS)

The complete pattern of the 1820s buildings can be reconstructed from a survey of the area compiled shortly before the construction of the new London Bridge (Fig. 12)²². The construction of the new bridge during 1824-31 involved a major redesign of the bridgehead and the construction of King William Street and a vaulted causeway as part of the new bridge approach. One result of this work was the destruction of St Michael's church during 1830 (located to the west of the site) and the discovery of many Roman antiquities within "a stratum of argillaceous native earth" or brickearth²³. Another result of the construction of King William Street was that Crooked Lane and a number of the earlier yards were built over. This closure in turn prompted the redevelopment of a number of the properties occupying the site and the infilling of many cellars and other features. The backfill of these features

20. G. C. Dunning 'Inventory of Polychrome Jugs Found in England and Scotland', Appendix A, in 'Kidwelly Castle, Carmarthenshire' Fox, C. and Raleigh Radford, C.A., *Archaeologia* 83 (1932) 113-134.

21. Q. Waddington *The story of Regis House* (circa 1932) 24-26.

22. These data were taken from a map in the Corporation of London Record Office ref. 28 A.1.

23. J. Kempe 'Account of Various Roman Antiquities discovered on the site of St Michael's Church, Crooked Lane' *Archaeologia* 24 (1832) 4.

provided good collections of tobacco pipes, porcelain, glass bottles and English stonewares.

During the 1880s a deep shaft was excavated in the north-west corner of site to provide access to the King William Street underground station, which opened in 1890. This was the terminus for the forerunner of the present Northern Line, which operated between Stockwell and King William Street, being the world's first electric underground railway. In 1913 and 1929-31, the remaining 19th-century properties were in turn cleared to make way for Ridgway House, Regis House, and the *Steam Packet* public house.

Discussion

The site has already produced some interesting and important results.

The very early date for the first revetment (AD 52) demonstrates the importance of the waterfront from the very beginnings of *Londinium*, while the establishment of the quay eleven years later sug-

gests that the town was regarded as important enough to be given an impressive harbour within three years of the Boudican revolt, and it is conceivable that this was already at the planning stage before the revolt. However, even if the quay was not planned until afterwards, the rapid reconstruction of the town's infrastructure to facilitate the movement of food, raw materials, and possibly troops would have been a logical decision²⁴. The fact that the quay structure itself stops suddenly on the line of Fish Street Hill strongly suggests that the Thames bridge was already in place.

The presence of 'hauling notches', the range of joints used and the untrimmed axed ends of many timbers (both 'bucking' and felling cuts) invite comparison with timbers recorded at Miles Lane in the 1920s and again in 1979²⁵. On that site, the eastern part of the quay exhibited similar features, and it now seems very likely that at least part of the Miles Lane waterfront was constructed at the same time. In that case, the new quay was a very extensive piece of engineering. It is interesting that the earliest main port facility should prove to be upstream and not downstream of the bridgehead – at the time the Regis House quay was constructed, the waterfront to the east of the bridge was still protected solely by piled embankments and revetments. This was not remedied for perhaps 20 years, when a landing stage was finally constructed at Peninsula House/Pudding Lane²⁶. The revetment constructed at Regis House in AD 102 brought the upstream waterfront back into line with the landing stage and its succeeding quay at Pudding Lane; the later revetments constructed further south before the 'Hadrianic Fire' serve to show that the local development of the waterfront was more complex and rapidly-changing than previously thought.

The growth pattern and establishment dates of the oak quay baulks confirm that their parent trees were all fast-grown timber, not primeval forest, and that they were derived from the same environmental region. It is hoped that analysis of the individual tree-ring growth patterns will provide new data on late Iron Age woodland management

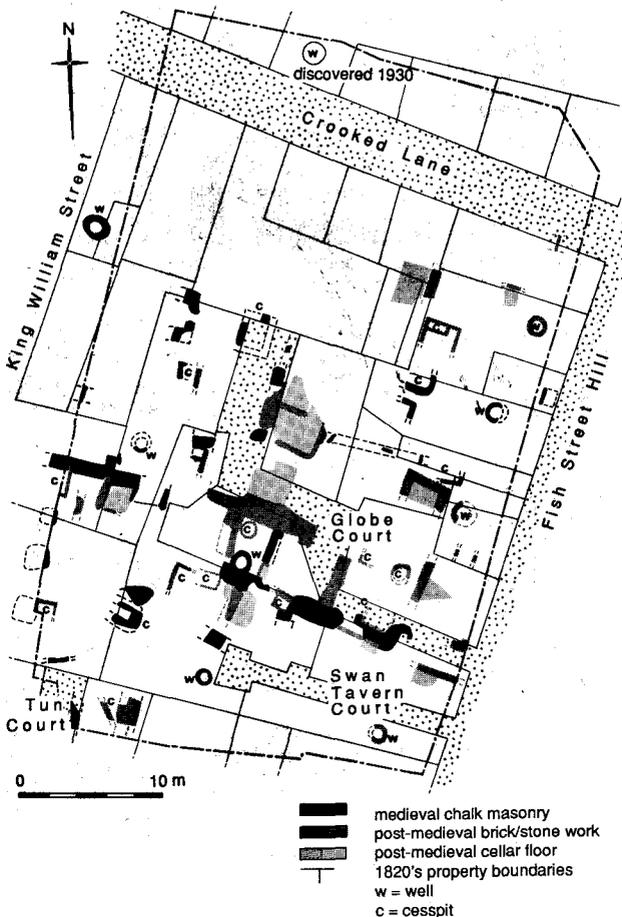


Fig. 12: composite plan of the late medieval and post-medieval foundations, wells and cesspits, superimposed on the 1820s property survey.

24. It should be noted in this respect that the Emperor Nero increased the number of troops in the province following the Boudican revolt "by transferring from Germany two thousand regular troops, which brought the ninth division to full strength, also eight auxiliary infantry battalions and a thousand cavalry" (Tacitus: *The Annals of Imperial Rome*, XIV).

25. F. Lambert 'Some Recent Excavations in London' *Archaeologia* 71 (1921) 55-112; L. Miller *op cit* fn 1.

26. N. Bateman and G. Milne *op cit* fn 12, 210-214.

in southern Britain, and may identify processes such as thinning or lopping.

The presence of a substantial 1st-century masonry building at the west side of the site, well away from the bridge approach, is also noteworthy, considering the presence of timber-framed structures on the approach road itself. Once again, a comparison with Miles Lane is apposite, for a very similar structure occupied the eastern edge of that site (Building A). Both were very substantial, and may have been part of an official construction programme, in much the same way as Milne suggests for the Pudding Lane warehouses²⁷. The scale of such a programme can be clearly seen, since the wide carriageway of King William Street intervenes.

The site has also produced interesting artefactual and ceramic evidence from several different periods of Roman occupation, including the pre-Boudican, the Hadrianic and the 3rd to 4th centuries. A high proportion of pottery imports (up to 65%) has already been noted in preliminary work on the material from 18-20 Fish Street Hill²⁸. The presence of a section of *lorica squamata* suggests a military presence, for which more evidence should be forthcoming, while a concentration of fibulae in the south-east may imply the output of a single bronze workshop. Other noteworthy finds, including the

27 G. Milne *op cit* fn 7, 72.

lead ingots, turned stone products and several fragments of exotic marble inlays will also provide evidence for the wide trade network focusing on the site, the full extent of which has yet to be appreciated.

Acknowledgements

The archaeological project at Regis House was generously funded by Land Securities Plc. Particular thanks are due to Eddie Allen of GMW Partnership for help in arranging the work programme, and to Peter Ponsford, Bernie Allen and Jackie Glinn of Trollope and Colls for arranging site accommodation and attendance, and numerous instances of help in other areas. Thanks to the many MOLAS field staff, volunteers, and students of the Institute of Archaeology who all contributed to the project, and specialist staff including Pat Connolly and Alan Gammon (metal detectorists), Graham Spurr (environmentalist), Jackie Keily and Tamsin Hobbs (finds assistants).

Thanks also to Jeanette van der Post of the MOLAS Drawing Office who produced the artwork for these articles, Francis Grew and John Shepherd of the Museum of London Early Department for their assistance with the 1929-31 site archive and finds, and to Tony Dyson of MOLAS, who kindly agreed to edit this paper and comment on the text.

28. Thanks to Robin Symonds, MOLAS Romano-British ceramic specialist for this information.

Excavations and post-excavation work

City of London. Museum of London Archaeology Service, Walker House, 87 Queen Victoria Street, London EC4V 4AB (0171-410 2200).

Croydon & District. processing and cataloguing of excavated and museum collections every Tuesday throughout the year. Archaeological reference collection of fabric types, domestic animal bones, clay tobacco pipes and glass ware also available for comparative work. Enquiries to Jim Davison, 28 Blenheim Park Road, South Croydon, CR2 6BB.

Greater London (except north-east and south-east London), by Museum of London Archaeology Service. Excavations and processing in all areas. General enquiries to MOLAS, Walker House, 87 Queen Victoria Street, London EC4V 4AB (0171-410 2200).

Borough of Greenwich. Cataloguing of excavated and other archaeological material, the majority from sites in the borough. For further information contact Greenwich Borough Museum, 232 Plumstead High Street, London SE18 1JT (0181-855 3240).

Hammersmith & Fulham, by Fulham Archaeological Rescue Group. Processing of material from Fulham Palace. Tuesdays,

7.45 p.m.-10 p.m. at Fulham Palace, Bishop's Avenue, Fulham Palace Road, SW6. Contact Keith Whitehouse, 86 Clancarty Road, SW6 (0171-731 4498).

Kingston, by Kingston upon Thames Archaeological Society. Rescue sites in the town centre. Enquiries to Kingston Heritage Centre, Fairfield Road, Kingston (0181-546 5386).

North-east London, by Passmore Edwards Museum. Enquiries to Pat Wilkinson, Newham Museum Service, Archaeology and Local History Centre, 31 Stock Street, E13 0BX (0181-472 4785).

Surrey, by Surrey County Archaeological Unit. Enquiries to Rob Poulton, Archaeological Unit Manager, Old Library Headquarters, 25 West Street, Dorking, RH4 1DE (01306-886 466).

Individual membership of the Council for British Archaeology includes 10 issues a year of British Archaeological News, as well as the supplement CBA Briefing, which gives details of conferences, extra-mural courses, summer schools, training excavations and sites where volunteers are needed. The subscription of £18 p.a. includes postage, and should be sent to C.B.A., Bowes Morrell House, 111 Walmgate, York, YO1 2UA (01904 671417).