

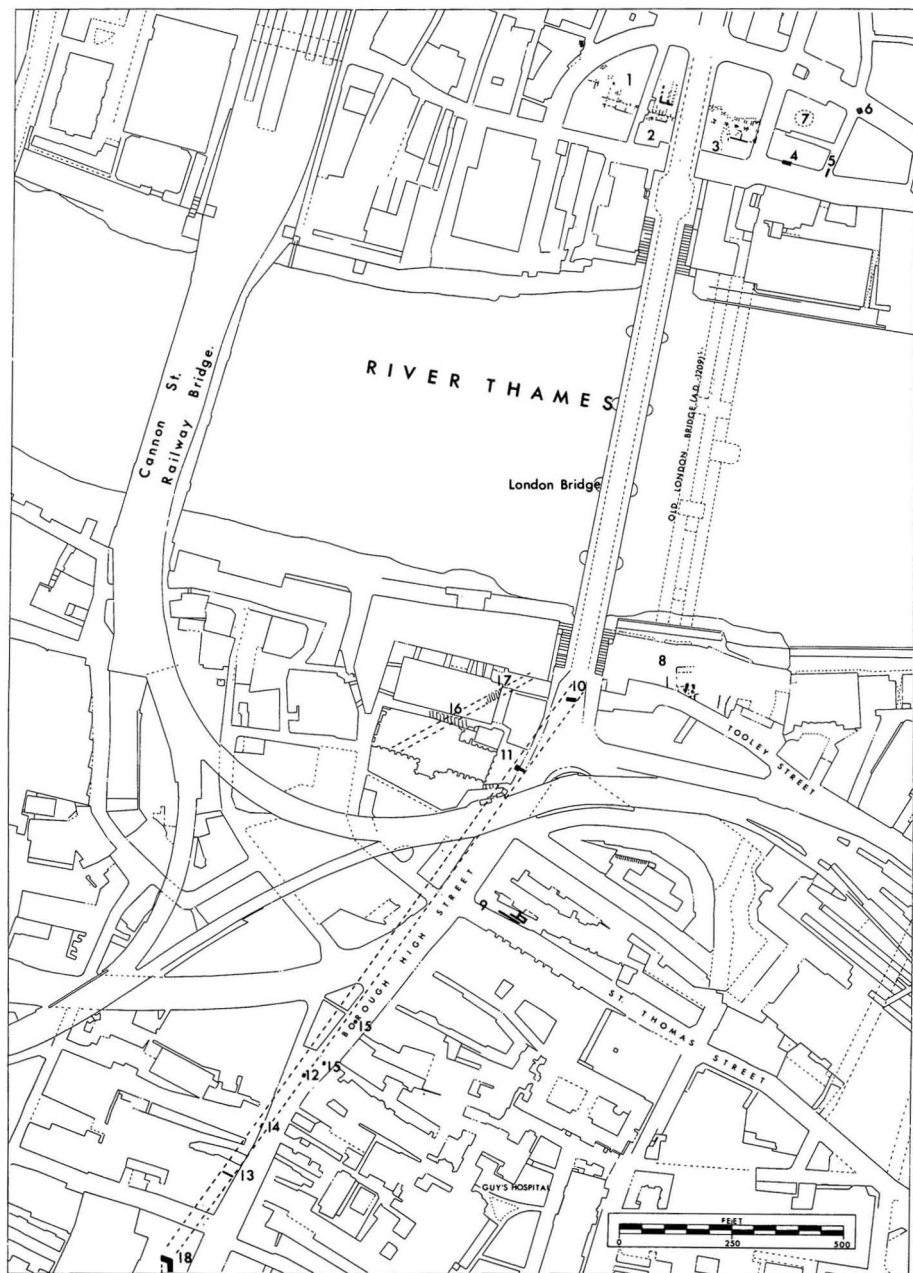
# Roads, Bridges and the Origin of Roman London

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## THE SOUTHERN EVIDENCE

The discovery of the stretch of Roman road in Montague Close in 1969 led to an immediate reconsideration of the road pattern in Southwark and the position of Roman London Bridge. The bridge has nearly always been located on the site of the medieval London Bridge, except by Honeybourne who located it further east (1969). The latter view has no real foundation and even the location of the Saxon bridge in this position, on which it is based, can only be regarded as one of many possibilities (Dawson 1972; Dyson 1975). Such a position is also very difficult to equate with the features found at its north end in Pudding Lane or with what is known of the Roman road pattern north of the river (Dawson 1970, 157-8).

The location of Roman London Bridge on the site of, or rather just to the east of, the medieval bridge was based principally on two pieces of evidence; firstly the alignment from Chichester was said to lead to the Old London Bridge position and, more particularly, two pieces of gravel metalling found by Kenyon in Southwark were held to confirm this alignment fairly close to the bridge. Secondly, the finding of Roman antiquities, particularly coins, across the river when Old London Bridge was demolished was held to mark the exact position of the bridge. To this has been added the consideration that the line of Fish St. Hill-Gracechurch St. seems to have been a principal axis from early in London's history as being the centre line of the Forum/Basilica. Evidence has already been published to show that the first consideration does not hold water (Dawson 1970) because other Roman features have been found on this line (at London Bridge 1969, St. Thomas's Hospital 1840, and 199 Borough High St. 1962) and also because the gravel which Kenyon found at 199 Borough High St. is not convincing as evidence of a road. In the same article, two other suggested alignments east of Borough High St. were discussed and, though both seemed very unlikely, they could not be completely ruled out. They now can be, since they run across the south-west corner of Toppings Wharf where once again Roman buildings were found in 1970-72 but no road (Sheldon 1974a). In excavations on the site London Bridge 1967, south of Tooley Street opposite Toppings Wharf, an area of gravel was found pierced by three large post holes which Merrifield (1969, 26-7 and 1971, 261) thought might be a hard giving access to a pontoon bridge and part of a later pile bridge respectively. In fact both of these can be ruled out by the excavations at Toppings Wharf where neither gravel hard nor piled bridge structure were found. However it



cannot be the wharf which the director thought it was (Merrifield 1969, 27), since it is some way back from the river bank in Roman times. In fact in the light of the excavations at Montague Close, one wonders whether it is necessarily Roman at all. As I have pointed out already (Dawson 1971), the gravel in any case occurs elsewhere on the site at London Bridge immediately overlying the natural clay and in places filling in depressions in it, and its greater thickness in that particular area could be due to the natural clay being lower.

The second leg of the theory is no more capable of standing up. For these finds to be relevant to the site of the bridge, it has to be shown that they occur across the river at one particular place and that they do not occur on either side of this line. Even if this could in fact be shown, there would be some doubt about the exact relationship of the finds to the position of the bridge. For example, would the concentration be on the line of the bridge itself, or upstream or downstream? There is also the problem of drift which Pardoe pointed out (RCHM 1928, 192). But in fact it can be shown that Roman antiquities occur in the river generally in the area of London Bridge and are not confined to one particular line. Merrifield, for example, points out that Roach Smith states that a concentration of coins was found in a position well to the west of the medieval bridge, while Syer Cuming locates them to the east, and seems to imply that these are differing versions of the same find, as indeed they must be if there is to be only one line across the river. Roach Smith says, in fact, that they were found in a line across the river parallel with the old bridge when its foundations were being removed (presumably c 1831) with the one particular concentration (Roach Smith 1842), and since he locates this to the west, presumably the line was to the west too. Cuming's observations are unfortunately undated (they were published, *en passant*, in Cuming 1887, 162-3). Cuming was only 14 in 1831 and his collection unlike Roach Smith's contains no object recovered during the erection of Rennie's bridge. However, it does contain a number of objects which were recovered from the Thames near the site of Old London Bridge in 1846. There is also one object in the Museum of London with the same provenance and date (Guildhall Museum 1903, 66, no. 44).

Fig. 1 Suggested alignment of Roman roads in Southwark and location of sites mentioned in the text

- 1 King William St House site; 2 2-4 Miles Lane; 3 Regis House site;
- 4 125, Lower Thames Street; 5 Pudding Lane; 6 Monument St; 7 Site south of Monument Street; 8 Toppings and Sun Wharf; 9 St. Thomas' St; 10 Tooley St (below bridge land arch); 11 Site to east of Cathedral;
- 12 GPO trench in Borough High St; 13 84-86 Borough High St; 14 66-70 Borough High St; 15 Two service trenches in Borough High St in which Road definitely not present; 16 Montague Close; 17 East Warehouse of Montague Close; 18 106-114 Borough High St

Thus there was clearly some work being done in the river in 1846 and since this is described as near the site of Old London Bridge, it is almost certainly to its east (since, were it to the west, it would surely be described as near (new) London Bridge), and this is precisely where Cuming says the piles and Roman coins were found. It therefore seems likely that these features were observed by Cuming in 1846. Incidentally, it is surprising that these iron-shod piles, which Cuming said ran right across the river, have not been adduced as evidence for the Roman bridge in the recent discussion, though Cuming regarded them as part of the Roman bridge, for they are in just the position which has usually been accepted for it. However, there is thus evidence that Roman objects were found both east and west of the medieval bridge, and from what Roach Smith says, perhaps beneath it. But Roman objects were also found on the site of the New London Bridge in 1824 (Knight 1834) so that clearly in the whole of this area, wherever work has taken place involving disturbance of the river bed, Roman antiquities have been found. If these are particularly numerous immediately upstream of Old London Bridge, as Roach Smith's unspecific description may indicate, this may well be simply a result of the well-known damming effect of that bridge causing the river to deposit material above it. It cannot even be shown that Roman antiquities are commoner in this stretch of the river which is near all the suggested positions for the bridge, than elsewhere alongside the Roman city.

Recently a new argument has been adduced for the 'Old London Bridge position' on the basis of an alignment for Stane Street which no one would have suspected in 1970. The evidence is now very strong that the road coming from the south, and presumably carrying traffic from both Stane Street and Watling Street into the City, crossed Borough High Street to the north of St George's Church on a north-south alignment, but that just south of Union Street there was a peculiar change of alignment and it continued north-eastwards. This latter alignment was only known in 1974 in one place, and then only generally since no edges were found but an alignment leading to the foot of Old London Bridge was suggested where it was believed to join the Montague Close Road (based on a projection of the alignment of what was believed to be the edges of that road found below the eastern warehouse in Montague Close (Sheldon 1974b)).

However, an alignment which takes into account both this latter evidence and that from the 1969-73 excavations at Montague Close (Dawson 1976) would lie a little to the north of this. More important, recent finds of road metallings indicate that the alignment of the Borough High Street road lies somewhat north-west of that originally proposed. South of the original find in Borough High Street, traces of it have been found at 84-86 and 66-70 Borough High Street, in both cases a little to the east of the proposed alignment, while against the modern Bridge Approach just east of Southwark Cathedral and in Tooley Street under the land arch of modern London Bridge it has been found considerably west of that alignment (50'-60' in Tooley Street) (H. Sheldon, E. Feretti and A. Graham. pers. comm.). An alignment based on these five points should be fairly secure and explains why the

timbers for the road could only be traced a short way along the tunnel in Borough High Street (Sheldon 1974b, 186) and if projected the fairly short distance to the modern river bank, would cross it below the steps leading down to the river on the eastern face of modern London Bridge which is the same point at which it meets the alignment of the Montague Close Road.

This must mean that the foot of Roman London Bridge was beneath modern London Bridge. If the buildings at Toppings Wharf are taken as aligned on the bridge foot (Sheldon 1974a, fig. 3), this would mean that a bridge starting from the east edge of modern London Bridge on the south bank would abut on the north bank at about the south end of Miles Lane.

## **THE EVIDENCE FROM NORTH OF THE RIVER**

The third leg of the argument, that there is a constant north-south axis of central importance in London's history and that the bridge is likely to have been at the south end of this, can hardly stand up on its own. In any case, if there is a road running north-east from the bridge, as suggested below, the road from the gate of the Forum would run down to it and so give rapid access to the bridge. Merrifield (1974) has recently argued this case fully but as an argument for the position of the Bridge it requires that the road to it should act differently to the others in not bending where it passes through the defences though the whole argument is based on the premise that the others do.

North of the Thames, no north-south road has been found near the river, except for a fragment of possible road metalling observed below Crooked Lane in 1961 (Merrifield 1965, 282, no. 299). Nevertheless, certain evidence from the City has been used in the discussion on the bridge position. This principally concerns the Forum/Basilica complex on Cornhill. In its final form, built probably c AD 100, this occupied a rectangular block orientated approximately north-south, along the east and west sides of which evidence has been found for north-south roads. These have not been proved to continue south of the east-west road which ran along the south side of the Forum, unless the Crooked Lane fragment is indeed a continuation of the western road. Nevertheless, a north-south road has always been postulated running south from a point in the south wall of the Forum mid way between these two roads, where the entrance to the Forum/Basilica block was presumed to be and it was this road which was believed to lead to the Bridge. No evidence has ever been found that this road actually existed, but, if it did, it would run down the east side of, or to the east of, Gracechurch Street, depending on where exactly the entrance was. If it continued the orientation of the Forum/Basilica block, it would meet Lower Thames Street more or less midway between Pudding Lane and Fish St. Hill, but a slight change of alignment is usually introduced to bring it down the east side of Fish St. Hill and thus to a bridge position near that of Old London Bridge. Few maps showing a reconstructed street plan for Roman London are on a large

enough scale to show this clearly. A similar change of alignment would be necessary to connect up the Birch Lane road (to the west of the Forum) and its possible continuation in Crooked Lane. Such a change in alignment is by no means impossible, since it would not be very different from the earlier alignments of buildings, and presumably roads, beneath the Forum/Basilica and would suggest that when the Forum/Basilica was rebuilt c AD 100, the rearrangement only affected the block north of the Fenchurch St. road. However, the evidence from Plough Court and Miles Lane would argue against this (see below).

The concept that there might have been more than one Roman bridge (that is successively not contemporaneously) has often been cast on the waters of controversy about the position of the bridge, but never taken up specifically. Although the idea might seem very reasonable at first sight, closer inspection will show that it is not the simple proposition it seems. For changing the position of the bridge entails not merely that, but moving the approach roads too, and possibly other roads, not to mention the demolition and clearing of the areas needed for these changes. Not only would this suggest *a priori* that bridge builders would prefer to rebuild in the same place if at all possible, but also that, if they did move the position of the bridge, this would show up, eventually, in the archaeological record in the form of the building of new roads and probably the disuse of old ones. There are two occasions in the history of Roman London when there is clear evidence for such a rearrangement. One has already been mentioned, when the Forum/Basilica reached its final layout c AD 100. If the tentative argument deployed above is correct, however, this would not relate to a change in the bridge position.

Similar evidence for changes in alignment, at least of buildings, occurs in the Forum/Basilica area. For the earlier buildings were themselves preceded, before the Boudiccan revolt, by buildings aligned on the Fenchurch St. road. Since this change occurred after an extensive destruction of London, the problems of replanning the roads would, of course, be much smaller than usual. But the only evidence that this affected anything but the Forum/Basilica area is the suggested kink in the north-south roads mentioned above. There is yet a third possible occasion, however, of which little is known. This was when the Fenchurch St. road, and perhaps the east-west road south of it, was laid out which, although it occurred before AD 60, was not primary (on 30-32 Lombard St. a pit was found beneath the road (Merrifield 1965, 119, fig. 16) while north of Lombard St. a phase preceded the laying out of buildings fronting onto the Fenchurch St. road (Philp 1970 and Guildhall Museum 1963).

There are three pieces of evidence which bear directly on this question but in opposite directions. On the Miles Lane site there is a perceptible difference in alignment between what is probably a first century wharf and a possibly second century brick building and this change in alignment from one which is similar to the middle phase in the Forum/Basilica area to one which is closer to the later Forum/Basilica probably took place c AD 100

or 120. Likewise at Plough Court (Merrifield 1965, 278, no. 289) a change in alignment from one consonant with the early Forum/Basilica to one consonant with the later, was noted. On the other hand, the gravel metalling below Crooked Lane is reported to have lain directly on the natural ground and there is no mention of occupation layers below it. The evidence from Montague Close would also suggest that there was no change in the position of the bridge.

Thus there are three occasions for which there is evidence for some rearrangement of the road pattern in Roman London. But on all three occasions the evidence at the moment comes mainly from the Forum/Basilica area. Moreover, the first of these can be ruled out fairly certainly as an occasion for a change in bridge position since it must date to within five or ten years of the Conquest and it is hardly likely that a new bridge would be built so soon after, if indeed this was not the occasion for the erection of the first. It will be argued below, however, that this is unlikely. The other two can only remain possibilities, though on the evidence we have at the moment, perhaps unlikely ones.

The changes in alignments, south of the Forum, if real, may relate to shifts in the entrance to the Forum area and to a stationary bridge rather than to movements of the bridge. A change in the road pattern has been suggested in one other place, at Aldgate. Chapman has suggested (Chapman and Johnson 1973, 13) that at first the road to Colchester lay to the south of Aldgate, going through the area round Haydon St. where a number of Roman burials have been found and that it was not moved to the line of Aldgate High St., where Aldgate was later to stand, until c AD 70. If this were indeed the case, such a shift in the road pattern could perhaps be linked with the alterations elsewhere after the Boudiccan fire. However, the suggestion is based only on indirect evidence, the alignments of a ditch and some insubstantial buildings, and on the assumption that the Roman road would be parallel with the 'fort-ditch', even though mid 1st century forts are often irregular (cf. Hod Hill, Waddon Hill, Richborough, The Lunt, and, on the Continent, Hofheim) and that the road lay on the same alignment as the present road which, while likely, is unproven (see Marsden 1974 for evidence for a very early date for the Aldgate road). It does not bear directly on the bridge question in either case.

Another approach to the position of the bridge is based on a suggestion by Merrifield (1969, 27) that large wharves would be downstream of the bridge to avoid the necessity for large ships passing through or under the bridge. That ships did penetrate beyond the bridge is known since two have been found well above any possible bridge position, at Blackfriars and County Hall, though one of these is a barge (Blackfriars) and the other a small merchantman, probably only a coaster (Marsden 1965). Merrifield's suggestion seems reasonable and it is not ruled out by these two boats. The sites of three, very substantial, wooden wharves of the Roman period are known, at Old Customs House Quay, at New Fresh Wharf, and at 2-4 Miles Lane, with a possible continuation on the site of Regis House (Tatton-Brown 1974).

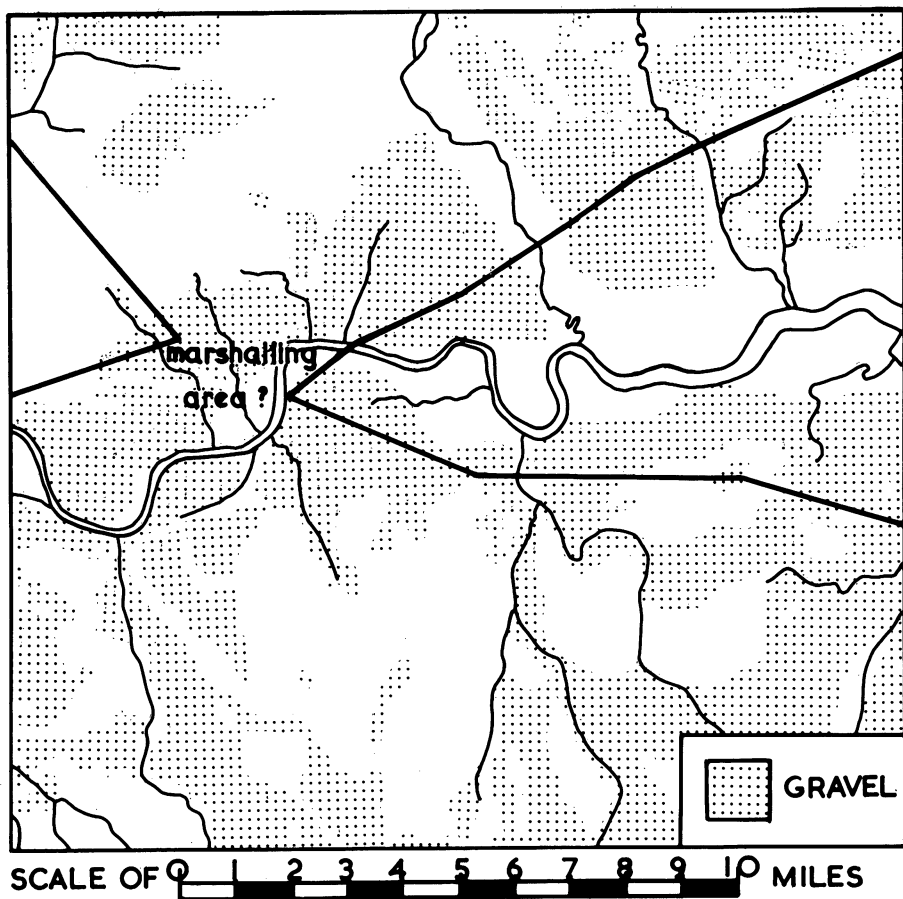


Fig. 2. Suggested layout of roads in the London area c AD 43

It will be seen that two of these are downstream of the 'Old London Bridge position' for the Roman bridge while the Miles Lane-Regis House wharf is upstream of it but all three are downstream of a bridge crossing between modern London Bridge's southern foot and the bottom of Miles Lane. Upstream of this, however, there are no certain wharves. Extensive excavations on the site of Baynard's Castle revealed no trace of a Roman wharf, although timbers were well preserved on the site (Marsden, unpubl. lecture), and observations of building operations at Broken Wharf (Grimes 1968, 59-64) and Dowgate (Merrifield 1965, 269, no. 262) appear to have produced none either. The only site which has produced features which may be part



of a wharf was that immediately west of Miles Lane where timber constructions were found which were said to be similar to those east of Miles Lane but less heavy. However, the published descriptions are not sufficient to determine exactly what the structure is and RCHM (1928, 134) seems to give up any attempt to interpret it. If indeed it is a wharf, being less heavy it may be a small one for barges or coasters.

Even if these considerations cannot be conclusive, these sites provide certain constraints on the position of the bridge. If the wharf found on 2-4 Miles Lane did indeed continue across the Regis House site, and the description suggests they are very similar, then the bridge could not have been located between Miles Lane and the middle of Fish St. Hill, except, of course, after c AD 120 when the wharf was disused. But after this there were brick buildings on both sites which are again so similar that they probably belong to the same complex which would, if it is so, rule out any bridge on this site. Similar considerations apply to the site west of Miles Lane and presumably to the length of stone-walling found in front of 125 Lower Thames St. and the presumably Roman building between Pudding Lane and Fish St. Hill (Merrifield 1965, 285, nos. 311 and 312). Thus the possible positions for a bridge in this area are more or less confined to Fish St. Hill or the area immediately to the east, which is where it is conventionally placed, or Miles Lane, which is where the evidence from Montague Close suggests it is (Dawson 1976). Any position further east or west is almost certainly ruled out by the Southwark evidence.

## THE ROMAN ROAD PATTERN AND THE ORIGINS OF LONDON

It has long been recognized that a number of major Roman roads in the London area are not aligned on the City of London but ignore its existence. For example, the northern and southern stretches of Watling Street seem to be aligned on some point at Westminster while the Silchester road is aligned to run north of the Roman city. It has been suggested that the line of Watling Street is controlled by the existence of an (assumed) pre-Roman trackway to Verulamium (Merrifield 1965, 33) but since this does not explain the alignment of the Silchester Road, it seems more likely that the same factor is operating in both cases. This, it has been suggested, is the military campaign for the conquest of Britain in the 40s of the first century. This seems the most reasonable interpretation of the pattern of alignments we have, though it should be emphasized that this is a question of alignments only since few of these roads have actually been proved by excavation within the immediate neighbourhood of the City. Alignments, however, show the intention which is what is important in this case. The significance of the excavations at Montague Close (Dawson 1976) is that it has produced another road aligned on the Lambeth/Westminster area which ought therefore to belong to this early network. Extended northwards, its most obvious target is Colchester, and in fact the Colchester road aims at the Lambeth/Westminster crossing as much as at the City. There are thus three roads

fanning out from this original nucleus at Westminster, whatever that consisted of. One to Verulamium, one to Camulodunum and one to the Channel ports. Where the second of these crossed the Thames, the Roman city and its southern suburb, Southwark, grew up. There were probably two reasons why it grew up here rather than at Westminster. There was a larger area of high, dry, terrace gravels next to the river than at Westminster and it was also the lowest bridging point on the Thames, which is the usual place for an important trading settlement to grow up.

If the road discovered in Montague Close is indeed aimed at Colchester, it would be expected that it would run north-eastwards from the northern end of the bridge to Aldgate. In fact, such a road has often been suggested (Margary 1955, 1, 48) though little direct evidence for it has been found. The best piece of evidence was found in 1831 in sewer digging when a Roman road between two ragstone walls was found which in one account was said to point towards Aldgate, though another had it going eastwards. Merrifield rejects the former because 'it could not lead to the bridge if, as is generally supposed, the Roman bridge lay to the east of present London Bridge' (Merrifield 1965, 116). But, of course, if an upstream position for the Bridge is accepted as a possibility, then it fits in quite well. But with the contradictory reports as to its direction, it cannot be taken as very strong evidence. Nor is there much support for a diagonal road from alignments of buildings, though few buildings are known in the area through which it would run. There is one wall (Merrifield 1965, 278, no. 289) which would be approximately at right angles to it in Plough Court.

The origins of Roman London are usually sought today in the 'military model' which has been proved in so many other towns of Roman Britain. On this model, a fort was established to guard the northern bridgehead in the area of Cornhill and a civilian settlement grew up west of it beyond the Walbrook, forming the twin nuclei of Roman London (Merrifield 1974). The alternative model could be called 'civilian': a settlement grew up of its own accord at a nodal transport point. The main evidence for the military model is taken to be that the arterial roads, Ermine Street and the Colchester road, do not start at the bridge but at the edge of a supposed nucleus. Since this nucleus must be very early, it must be a fort guarding the bridgehead (Merrifield 1969, 27 and 44). It is further strengthened by the suggestion that the east-west road which partly lies below Lombard St. and Fenchurch St. is the *Via Principalis* of the fort with the *Principia* lying to its north, which was the later position of the Forum/Basilica (Pevsner 1973, 26).

There is, however, an internal contradiction in this argument. For if the fort pre-dates the main arterial road, what was it guarding when it was built and why was the bridge built when there was no road leading north from it? In any case, as has already been seen, the laying out of the east-west road, though early, is not primary and there was occupation before it. It would also be an odd position for the fort, if the early road from the bridge led to Colchester, as has been suggested above. On the other hand,

the one concrete piece of evidence for a fort, a military type ditch near Aldgate (Chapman and Johnson 1973, 1 et seq.), would guard the road to Colchester though at a surprising distance from the bridge. However, if this suggested fort belongs to the actual conquest campaign, such a position, on higher ground facing the direction from which any threat would be expected to come, would be very appropriate. This would also be the line of advance intended and it would thus serve as a jumping off point. If it was built immediately after the crossing of the Thames, it might, in fact, pre-date the road by a few months. Ermine Street which does not seem to be aligned on any possible bridge position, would come later when the advance to the north was under way.

Once the initial conquest was over in AD 44, London would have little military significance and was far away from any fighting till the Boudiccan revolt in AD 60 or 61. It is likely that this fort would therefore be very rapidly abandoned as the archaeological evidence implies (Chapman and Johnson 1973, 56). After this, the next concrete evidence for a fort is for the early 2nd century one at Cripplegate. Unlike the possible Aldgate one, this was probably a garrison for soldiers who had to be in London on administrative duties as a consequence of London being the provincial capital, rather than on military duties (Grimes 1968, 35). Hassall (1973) suggests that since London was not the capital until at least AD 60 it held the governors guard. This cause would not have produced a fort till then and, if it produced one before the early 2nd century, no direct evidence of it has been found. Before AD 60, the only reason for a fort would be for guarding a supply base and Merrifield has maintained that London was an important supply base for the campaigns up to this date and it has been claimed that timber buildings excavated in Bush Lane belong to such a store base (Chapman and Johnson 1973, 68), though the evidence is hardly very strong. Moreover, Dudley and Webster (1965, 111; also Webster 1970, 181) suggest that the important supply base was at Colchester where early military tombstones do occur (Dudley and Webster 1965, 112) whereas in London they occur only from the late 1st century (Merrifield 1969, 76).

Merrifield's evidence for a fort applies, as he states (1974, 191) only to the period after AD 60, and his model entails acceptance of an unlikely 30 year gap in the existence of the fort. If there is a fort before the one Grimes elucidated at Cripplegate, is not its most likely location also in Cripplegate where Grimes (1968, 118-9) found traces of earlier occupation?

What we do know is that within a few years of the Conquest, a major east-west road was laid out and that fronting onto its north side was at least one building in stone and at this period buildings in stone are likely to be public buildings. Since this is later the site of the Forum/Basilica the most obvious suggestion would seem to be that at this point London acquired some sort of local self-government leading to the construction of a civic centre. Clearly a fairly extensive settlement must have developed by AD 60 for it to become the administrative centre of the province and the development of London must have been very rapid. Therefore, it is not unlikely

that within a few years of the Conquest, a settlement large enough to justify some local self government had arisen. Since the civic centre of Roman London was always on Cornhill, this is more likely to have been the centre of this settlement rather than west of the Walbrook.

The discovery of another road apparently aligned on the Lambeth/Westminster crossing also raises the problem of that crossing. This has been extensively discussed by Merrifield (1969, 63-7). Although there is some late and unreliable evidence for the existence of roads on the south bank of the river, right up to the crossing point, and the discovery of the Montague Close road must immeasurably strengthen this, the existence of a similar road on the north has never had any positive evidence to support it. The difficulty in finding these roads may be due to their rapid disuse except where they fitted into the later, city-orientated, pattern. However, if the Roman road was still visible in St Georges Fields in the 18th century (Merrifield 1969, 63-7), this would discount this theory. Alternatively, it could be that one has to imagine a large marshalling area stretching from Westminster to Marble Arch with a protective screen beyond at Aldgate and (?) elsewhere, where Aulus Plautius waited for Claudius in the summer of AD 43. The road from the channel ports would be built up to its southern entrance, presumably a bridge of boats across the Thames, and when the advance began, roads would be built from its southern entrance north-eastwards through Montague Close and the City towards Colchester, northwards towards Verulamium and westwards towards Silchester from its northern gate (see Fig. 2). Within the marshalling area itself, there would probably be a plethora of paths but not necessarily one road leading straight through it. After the initial phase, the Westminster crossing probably lost its importance, which was usurped by the crossing into the City, to which a link road from Watling Street, Stane Street and perhaps Ermine Street was built. One of the major tasks in the future for archaeologists is to locate and excavate a section of the road nearer the Westminster crossing to see whether or not it supports this model.

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