

ROMAN LONDON : CHEAPSIDE

BY

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THROUGH the kind offices of Mr. William C. Edwards and in his company, I was enabled to view, on February 4th, 1923, the progress which had been made towards excavating the site of Nos. 62 and 63 Cheapside. In the two trial holes that had been made, water was reached at the depth of 14 feet from pavement-level to basement, plus 13 feet 6 inches from the basement, i.e. about 27 feet 6 inches from the pavement-level—judging from the depths reached on the west side.

On the west side of the site, running north and south, were two walls. The outer—the westerly one—was of brick and was being partly cut away. The inner wall against it was of rammed chalk, the pieces being of somewhat large dimensions

The chalk wall was supported upon piles, if one can judge by one or two piles which had been taken out. The piles were of oak, 7" by 5½" in size. In the water area, mud intermixed with Thames ballast and clay was encountered. Immediately to the east of the clay wall there was a cess-pit and overhead, to the north, the upper remains of a filled-in arched sewer of about 4 feet in diameter could be seen.

Near the east end of the site were two walls running north and south, a space of about 3 feet 4 inches intervening. The inner one appeared to be the older, the outer one seeming to be the post-fire wall and to be separated from the post-fire wall on the west by a space of 16 feet—a frontage. A trial hole near here reached the water level, a level which appeared to be higher than at the western end. This, however, is unlikely.

Throughout the area, there were blocks of chalk mixed up with irregularly shaped blocks of Kentish ragstone and with

modern and pre-fire red bricks. Apart from the ragstone nothing could be detected as truly Roman, unless possible the yellow-ochreous friable mortar which seems to have been employed.

The note of Mr. William C. Edwards concerning the excavation is as follows:—

It is clear that if the ragstones are Roman materials, they did not come from the site for not a single Roman bonding or roofing-tile was found on the site. The inference is that the Roman wall was on the north side of Cheapside and that the old south frontage of Cheapside was south of the present frontage. This is shown by the position of the well known Crypt of Bow Church. Wren tells us that he built the tower of the Church on the Roman road. The wet and marshy character of the ground, disclosed during the excavation of Nos. 62 and 63 Cheapside, and also during the examination and excavation in 1915 in the Crypt of Bow Church by Mr. Frank Lambert, F.S. A., and Mr. Cater, F.S.A. (*Journ. Brit. Archaeol. Assoc.*, N.S. Vol. xxi, 1915, p. 281 and p. 295) may have been Wren's reason for advancing the new tower and steeple to the north of the old site (*cf. Parentalia*, p. 265).

Another interesting thing disclosed by these excavations was that the old walls show that the sites were changed—No. 62 after the fire was about 5 feet east of its wall. Apparently the Commissioners made a list of various claimants and gave for each site 16 feet so that in some cases there was a gain and in others a loss. These walls which have just been demolished were composed in part of fire-damaged bricks with a large percentage of "bats," the bricks being without proper bonding.

It may also be mentioned here that wells in these parts of Cheapside appear to have been failures. Of course, good wells are generally in sandy strata overlying clay stratum or strata and vice versa. This led to the old inhabitants preferring some wells to others for obtaining their water. These mud wells quickly choke up whilst the sandy wells are always satisfactory.