

# ARCHAEOLOGICAL FINDS IN THE CITY OF LONDON 1966-9

Contributed by the Guildhall Museum

## INTRODUCTION

This is an account of some archaeological investigations in the City of London between 1966-9. The text has been compiled by Mr. Peter Marsden who also directed the excavations.

The author is indebted to Mr. R. Merrifield for his valued advice in the preparation of these reports; and to the volunteers, mostly from the City of London Archaeological Society, whose labours were not in vain.

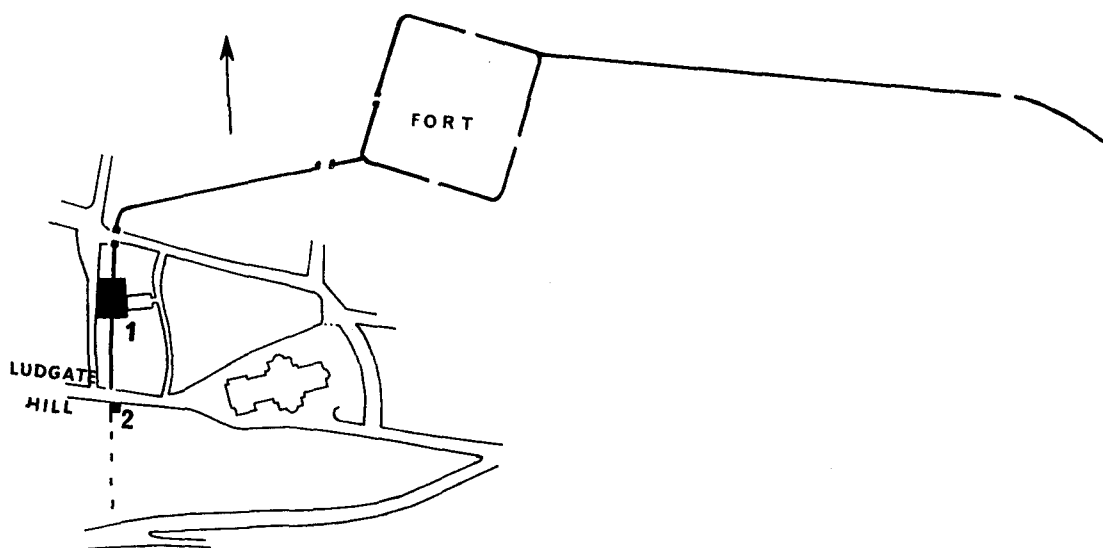


Fig. 1  
Sites excavated 1966-9.

Reference is made in this paper to groups of excavated objects which have been recorded in the Museum Excavation Register (e.g. E.R. 1237). These groups comprise the dating evidence for the archaeological features described in this report, but owing to a lack of time and staff none of them can be drawn at present. It is hoped that these groups will be published eventually, but meanwhile they are available for study on application to the Director, Guildhall Museum, Gillett House, 55 Basinghall Street, London, E.C.2.

### *Site 1. Central Criminal Court Extension (1966-9)*

The Roman and medieval features found inside the city defences on this site in Warwick Square, were reported in the last volume of the Transactions. As the rebuilding of the site in the area of the city defences was not completed the publication of the features on that part of

the site has been deferred until now (see fig. 2). Particular thanks are due to the architect of the new building, Mr. G. Whitby, and to the Central Criminal Court Extension Committee not only for permitting two detailed excavations in this part of the site, but also for preserving a short length of the bottom of the Roman city wall in the basement of the new building.

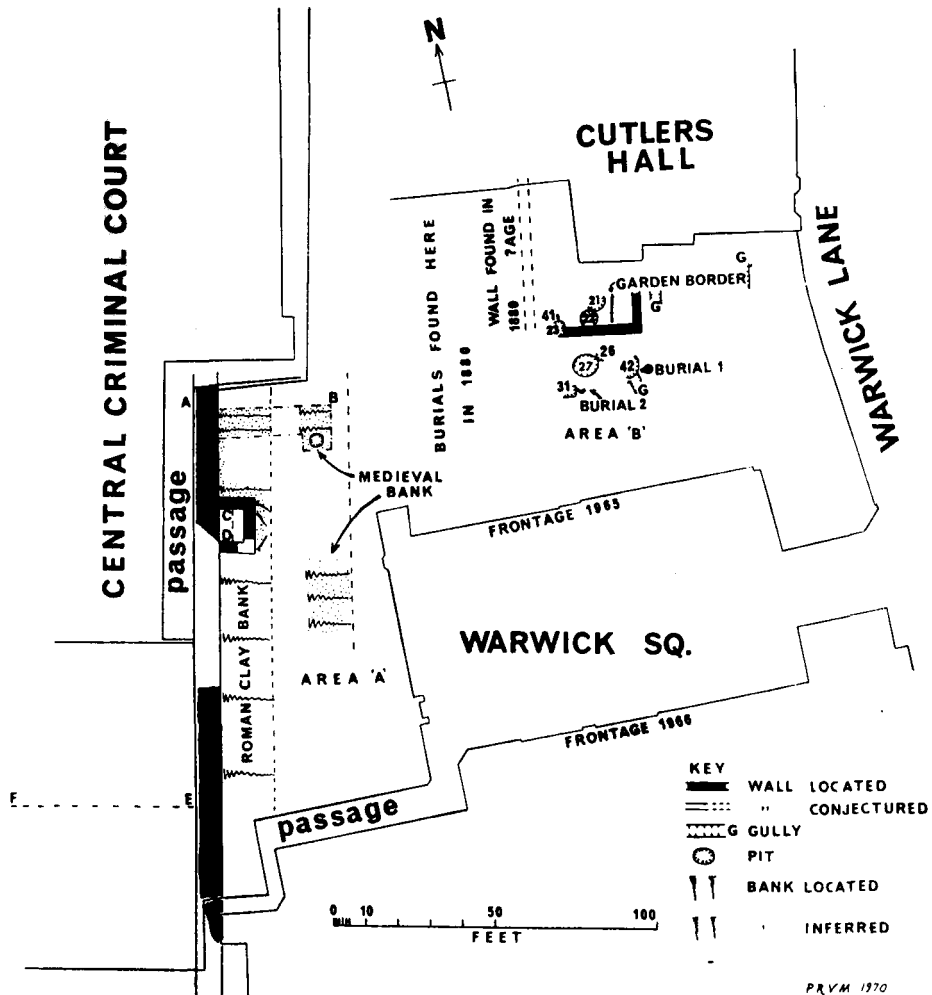


Fig. 2

Plan of Roman and Medieval City Defences on the Central Criminal Court Site.

## THE CITY DEFENCES

### ROMAN

The Roman city wall was probably about 8 ft. thick, but its outer face had been destroyed. The wall was built of ragstone and buff mortar, with courses of bonding tiles at intervals. A section was dug against its inner face and an almost complete sequence of Roman deposits was found (see fig. 3, plate A). Layer I was the loamy deposit pre-dating the wall as the wall foundation was cut into it. The deposit contained a considerable quantity of pottery ranging from the Flavian to the Antonine period (c. 170 A.D.), and a coin of Trajan.

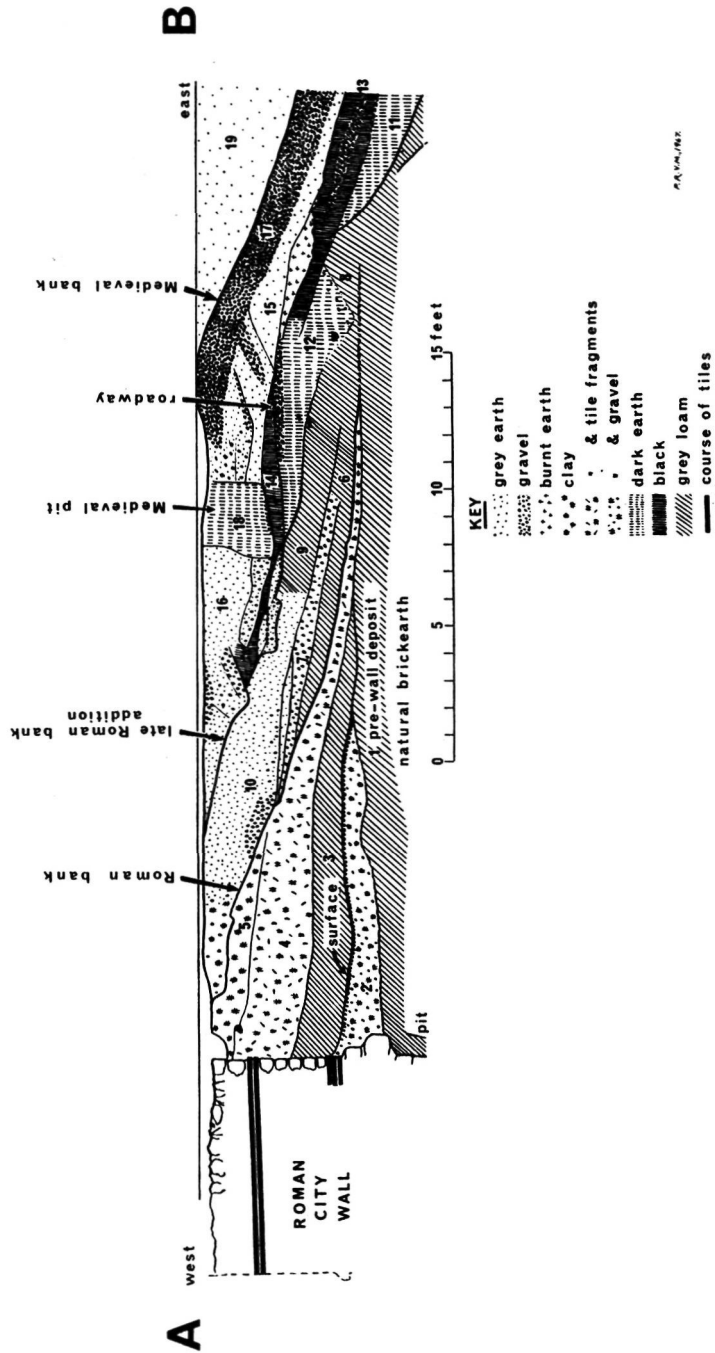


Fig. 3  
Section through Roman and medieval banks inside the City wall  
on the Central Criminal Court Site.

The first of the post-wall deposits was level 2, a clayey gravelly deposit overlying the foundation of the wall. The surface of this was hard and evidently formed at the time the wall was built, for it was covered by the internal bank of the wall.

The bank itself was about 5–6 ft. in height and 16 ft. wide, and comprised deposits 3, 4 and 5. Its surface was covered with a thin film of mortar dust which had presumably been weathered off the face of the wall above. The bank overlay the footings of the wall, and was evidently thrown up after the building of the lower part of the wall, but presumably almost immediately after, so that its date can for all practical purposes be taken as identical with that of the wall. Fortunately, the layers of which it was composed contained pottery which gives us a *terminus post quem* for their deposition. Level 3 was a grey loamy soil, evidently part of level 1 redumped, and it contained a considerable quantity of pottery, none later than the third quarter of the 2nd century A.D. (E.R. 1132). Deposits 4 and 5 were two major dumps of brickearth containing pottery of not later than the end of the 2nd century (E.R. 1193).

Overlying the tail of the bank were layers 6 and 7. The former was a greenish sandy soil with a small quantity of pottery of the early 2nd century (E.R. 1144); and the latter a gravelly earth containing a considerable quantity of Flavian pottery and a coin of Claudius (E.R. 1137). A few feet further east the bank tail was overlaid by a loamy soil (8) containing pottery of the early 3rd century. This deposit is especially important because unlike layers 6 and 7 it was not dumped, but was apparently gradually formed after the construction of the bank. It therefore suggests a date around A.D. 200 for the latter.

Layers 9 and 10 comprised an addition to the Roman bank at an unspecified date, and this might be associated with a pit or ditch, level 11, containing sherds of the 3rd century (E.R. 1143).

The later bank addition was possibly cut into by layer 12, a deposit of dark earth containing sherds of the 4th century (E.R. 1138). Overlying 12 was layer 13, a dark earth containing sherds of the first half of the 4th century (E.R. 1134, 1141). Above layer 12 was a small cambered roadway parallel with the wall, and built of ragstone chips. Possibly contemporary with this was a deposit of burnt earth, above level 13, which contained a single sherd of 3rd century pottery (E.R. 1145). It is likely, however, that the roadway is early medieval, since it lay in the open when the overlying deposit (layer 14) was formed, and this contained pottery of the 11–12th century.

A few yards south of this cutting was found an extremely well preserved turret on the inside of the city wall (plate B). The turret measured 8 ft. by 10 ft. internally, and its walls were 3 ft. 2 ins. thick. Its courses of tiles were exactly as in the city wall to which it was originally bonded, but on this site the wall was found to be leaning outwards slightly and had broken away from the turret (plate C).

The entrance to the turret was above the Roman land level behind the bank, and the sill of the entrance had been destroyed. A hollow in the tail of the bank behind the turret, however, suggested that the original position of the entrance lay about the middle of the east wall of the turret. In the bank behind the turret was found pottery of the late 2nd or early 3rd century and a coin of Domitian (E.R. 1237A, 1237B).

Pottery from and below the bank behind the Roman city wall points to its having been built about the end of the 2nd or beginning of the 3rd century, and this is consistent with the evidence from excavations on other sites along the city wall. These are on Tower Hill<sup>1</sup>, in Coopers Row<sup>2</sup> and in the Cripplegate area where a worn coin of A.D. 183–4 was found in a

deposit antedating the wall.<sup>3</sup> Other dating evidence which may be relevant to the building of the city wall is the quantity of pottery not later than the end of the second century contained in the material deliberately dumped in the east ditch of the Roman fort in the Guildhall area, presumably after its enclosure by the city wall.<sup>4</sup>

All of the evidence described above indicates a date *after which the wall was built*; and the significance of the turret on the Central Criminal Court site is that from it for the first time was recovered a sequence of datable deposits *post-dating* the wall, and together with the earlier deposits these strongly suggest that the wall was built before A.D. 225.

The sequence of deposits (section C-D, fig. 4) shows at the bottom a *grey loam* deposit which pre-dates the wall. This is the same layer as level 1 in fig. 3. The *grey loam* is covered by a *thin mortar spread* which was clearly deposited when the turret and city wall were built. In the section the north and south walls of the turret are shown, and also how the mortar of the wall underlay the dumped deposits above. The deposits must therefore have been dumped after the turret and the city wall were built. The lowest deposit was the *dirty gravel* which contained small pieces of mortar and many sherds dateable to the end of the 2nd or beginning of the 3rd century (E.R. 1244). This deposit had a hard surface and might have been dumped very soon after the construction of the turret to serve as a floor.

### SECTION ACROSS ROMAN TURRET

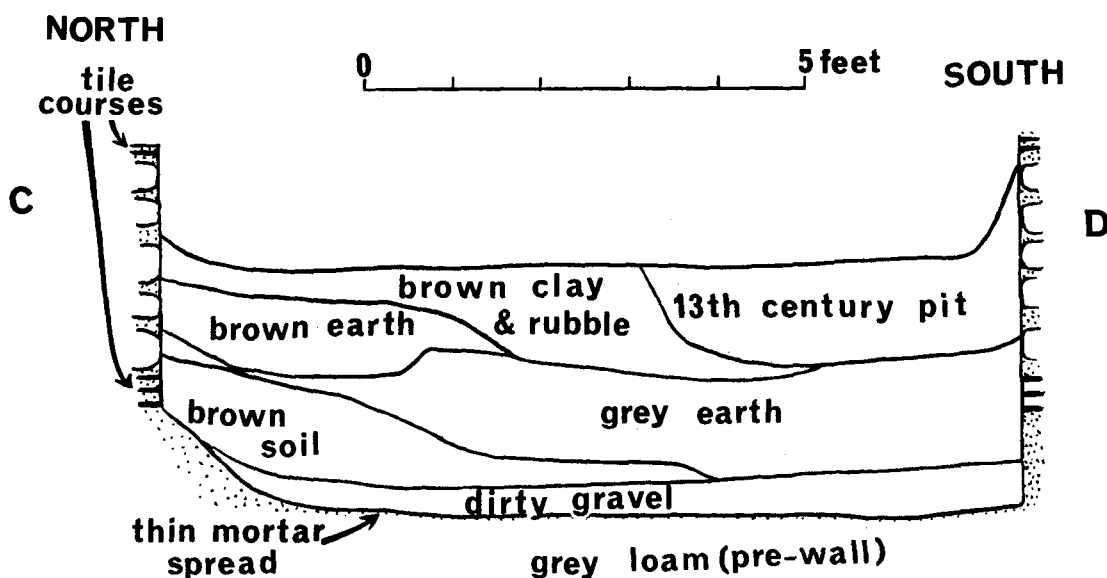


Fig. 4

Section through dumped deposits inside Roman turret on the Central Criminal Court Site.

The *brown soil* above, which was also a dumped deposit, contained a very large quantity of pottery dateable to the first quarter of the 3rd century (E.R. 1236, 1245). It also contained two coins of Antoninus Pius dated to 145-161 A.D., one of Commodus (A.D. 180-192),

and a denarius of Caracalla (*R.I.C.*, 311b) dated to A.D. 213–7. The earlier coins are well worn, but the denarius of Caracalla is in almost mint condition. There were also two forgers' double moulds made from three denarii which likewise showed practically no sign of wear. One mould had an obverse of Geta (A.D. 210–212) and the other an obverse of Severus (A.D. 201–210). Both had the same reverse of Caracalla (*R.I.C.*, 251) dated A.D. 215. It is quite clear from the lack of slag, crucibles and other items connected with metal working that the forging was carried out elsewhere, but it seems most unlikely that this layer was dumped very much later than A.D. 220.

Overlying this was a dump of *grey earth* containing a considerable quantity of pottery of the mid 3rd century and fragmentary skeletons of at least six dogs (E.R. 1247, 1235).

A layer of *brown earth* above this deposit on the north side of the turret also contained sherds of the mid 3rd century (E.R. 1248).

Above this was a deposit of *brown clay and rubble* from which a mortarium rim fragment of the mid 4th century was recovered (E.R. 1249).

Cutting into the *brown clay* was a 13th century rubbish pit (E.R. 1250, 1234).

It is clear from the slope of the dumped rubbish deposits that the dumping had mostly occurred at the north-west corner of the turret; and the lack of any hard surfaces, except on the *dirty gravel*, indicated that people did not walk upon the rubbish.

It must be assumed, therefore, that the lower part of the turret was occupied by a stairway, presumably of wood, leading from the doorway, the sill of which did not survive and must have been above the level of the layers of rubbish. Behind and below the stairway was evidently a space which remained open, and this was used from time to time for the dumping of refuse.

#### MEDIEVAL

The excavation against the inner face of the city wall exposed part of a great early medieval bank of earth and gravel which had been piled against the wall (fig. 3, layers 15, 16 and 17). The top of the hard gravel layer 17 is the surface of the bank.

Overlying the small roadway of ragstone chips was a deposit of black earth, layer 14, which contained many sherds of the 4th century. This had evidently been dumped during the early Middle Ages for on the road surface was a single rim sherd of a cooking-pot of the 11th or 12th century (E.R. 1139, 1192). Above layer 14 could be seen the tip-lines of the medieval bank. Layer 15 contained much 4th century pottery and one possible early medieval sherd (E.R. 1146).

Cutting into the medieval bank was a pit, layer 18, containing a few sherds, one of which was glazed. This seems to date from the 12th or 13th century, and clearly post-dates the bank. Another pit (not shown on the section) was found dug into the gravel layer 17 and this contained a large quantity of pottery of the first half of the 13th century (E.R. 1136). It would seem that the bank was built probably during the 12th or early 13th century.

A section was quickly dug across the defensive ditches outside the city wall by a mechanical excavator. This disclosed the presence of two ditches, both evidently of medieval date (see fig. 5). Deep disturbances beyond the wall had destroyed all trace of the Roman ditch, which anyway may have been destroyed by one of the medieval ditches.

The earlier medieval ditch had been almost entirely destroyed by the enormous later medieval ditch, and only its V-shaped bottom had survived. A medieval brown glazed tile

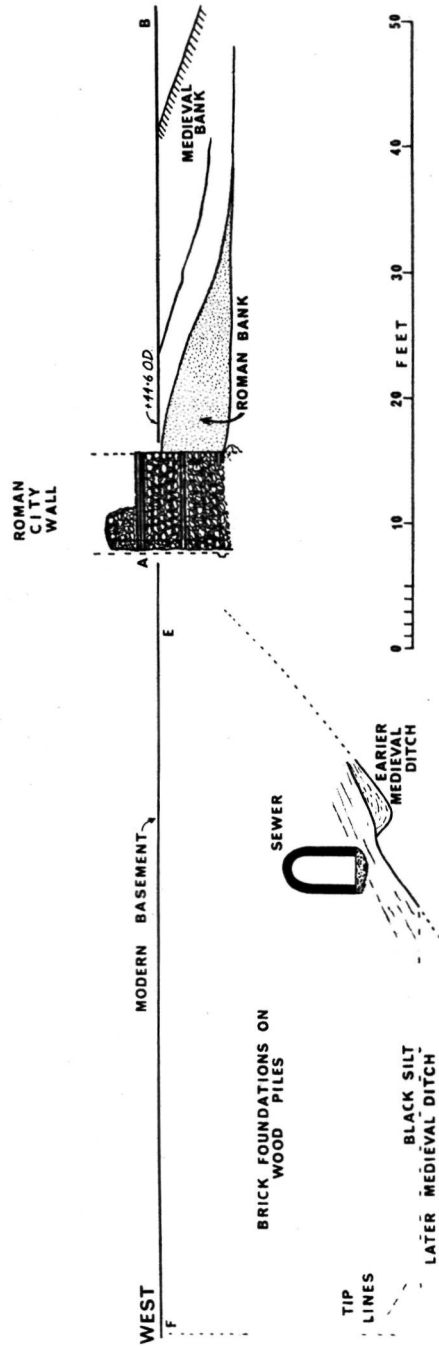


Fig. 5  
Section across Roman and Medieval City Defences  
on the Central Criminal Court Site.

fragment was found at the bottom of the ditch filling suggesting a date of not earlier than the 12th or 13th century for the ditch. The bottom of the earlier ditch lay 17 feet below the plinth level at the base of the Roman wall, and 21 feet beyond the probable position of the destroyed external face of the city wall.

The later medieval ditch was clearly very broad, its outer limit not having been found at 62 feet beyond the outer face of the city wall. Its bottom was not reached in the excavation which extended 20 feet below the level of the bottom of the Roman wall. The lower filling of the ditch comprised a stiff black silt and layers of peaty vegetable debris. A part of the sloping east side of the ditch close to the city wall was located indicating that the ditch started more or less from the city wall. Downward sloping tip lines, presumably following the outer slope of the ditch were located at 62 feet beyond the outer face of the city wall.

It is clear that this extremely large ditch was probably between 80 and 100 feet wide at this point, and that the street now called Old Bailey, which existed in the 13th century, presumably had its origin as a street or track following the outer edge of the great ditch. The streets now called Houndsditch, Minories and Fore Street were probably of similar origin.

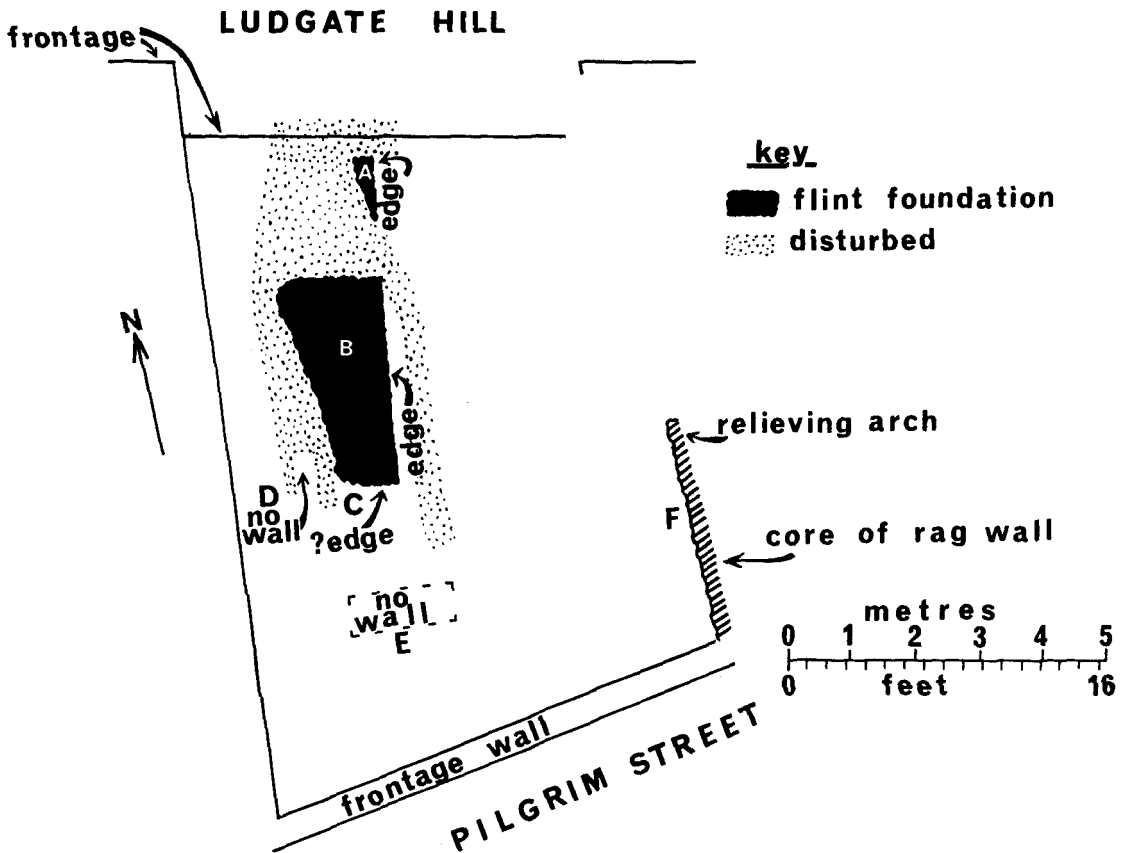


Fig. 6  
Roman and late walls at No. 37 Ludgate Hill.



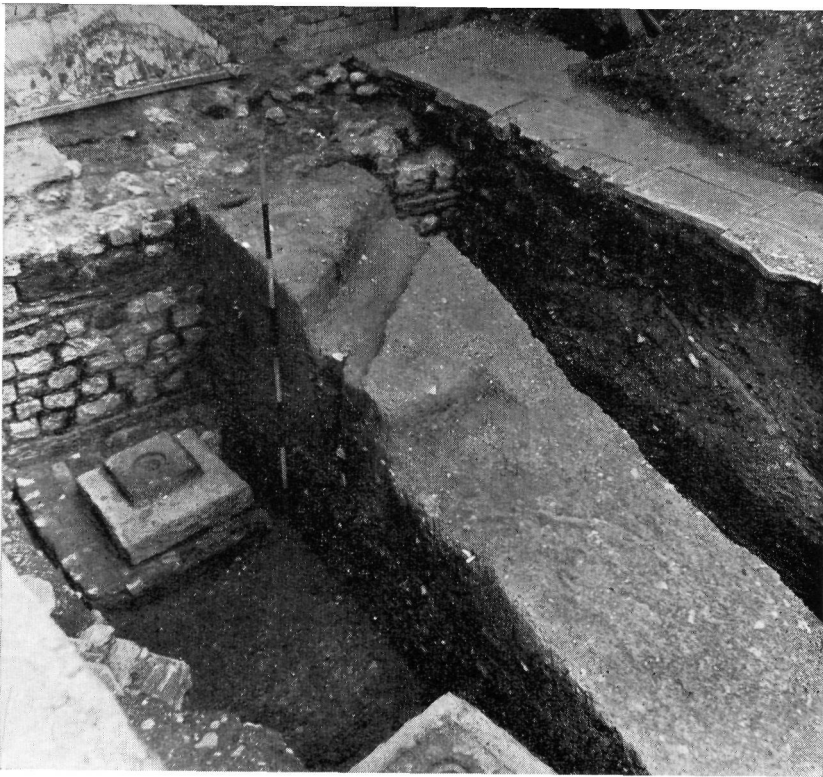


PLATE A. Inner face of Roman city wall, showing the surface of an unexcavated section of the Roman clay bank. Note two square modern foundations. (Scale in feet).

PLATE B. Roman turret found on Central Criminal Court site. Roman city wall is on the right. (Feet Scale).





PLATE C. Junction of Roman city wall (*left*) and north wall of internal turret (*right*), showing the crack where the former has pulled away from the latter. (Scale in feet).

Unfortunately due to lack of time it was not possible to investigate this deep narrow section cut across the city ditches. However in the higher part of the section the black silt was overlaid by dumped rubble and rubbish upon which lay several brick walls. These walls tended to be built on wooden piles, and are clearly buildings constructed after the ditch was filled-in in the late 16th century.

Site 2. 37 Ludgate Hill 1969 (fig. 6)

During alterations to this building the owners, Haslemere Estates Ltd., kindly allowed the museum to excavate beneath in the basement during one weekend to try to locate Ludgate, which was thought to lie partly on this site.

#### ROMAN

The basement floor was found to overlie the natural brickearth at a depth of about three metres from pavement level. Cutting into the brickearth were several Roman pits and a foundation, which had all been badly disturbed by recent drains and foundations.

The Roman foundation (fig. 6 A, B) was built of flints, freshly mined from chalk, set in sticky puddled clay. Only two fragments of it had survived the extensive modern disturbances, and only the bottom of this foundation had survived.

This was either the foundation of the Roman city wall or part of the south tower of the Roman gate at Ludgate. A trench (E) was dug south of the Roman foundation to clarify this important point, and in it no sign of a continuation of the Roman foundation was found. It seems most likely, therefore, that the Roman foundation (A, B) was the east or rear wall of the south tower of the Roman gate. This view is strengthened by the possible discovery of the south-east corner of the tower, although the south edge (C) was not too straight. A little west of this corner (D), however, no trace of the south wall of the tower was found in a small undisturbed area, and this suggests the existence of an external buttress at the east end of the south wall of the tower. It must be remembered, however, that only the bottom of the Roman foundation had survived, and that these ends of the wall may be more apparent than real and could be due to variations in the depth of the Roman foundation trench. Nevertheless this does not apply to the eastern edge of the foundation which was positively located.

The construction of the foundation is exactly like that of the Roman city wall, indicating that a gate at Ludgate was a primary feature of the defences of Roman London.

#### POST ROMAN

Buried in the east wall of this modern building is part of a wall of ragstone set in yellow mortar (F). Only parts of this wall were seen, for it extended below the level of the modern basement floor, and was observed standing to a height of 4 metres above the ground floor—giving it a total surviving height of about 7 metres. Almost half way along the east wall of the modern building was seen, in the basement, the edge of a relieving arch.

There is little doubt that this is the rear or east wall of the south tower of the last gate built at Ludgate in 1586. The earliest known mention of a gate here dates to 1100-1135, but this gate was rebuilt in 1586 and demolished in 1760.<sup>5</sup>

#### NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> London & Middlesex Historian, No. 3 (1966), p.8.
- <sup>2</sup> Trans. L.M.A.S., Vol. 21 pt. 2 (1965), p.135, fig.1.
- <sup>3</sup> R. Merrifield, *The Roman City of London, 1965*, p.52.
- <sup>4</sup> Trans. L.M.A.S., Vol. 22, pt. 1 (1968), p.9.
- <sup>5</sup> H. Harben, *A Dictionary of London, 1918*, p.372.