

# ROMAN METALWORK FROM THE WALBROOK – RUBBISH, RITUAL OR REDUNDANCY?

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## INTRODUCTION

I well remember my first meeting with Hugh Chapman, when he was interviewed for his appointment to Guildhall Museum staff in 1969. When I was asked for my opinion, I very much annoyed Norman Cook, then Keeper of the Museum, by saying I thought he was far too good for us. We were then working in odd corners provided temporarily by the Corporation of London, and although our collection had survived the war intact and had subsequently grown enormously, apart from a small selection exhibited temporarily in the Royal Exchange and subsequently in shop premises that were difficult to let on the Bassishaw High Walk, the bulk was stowed away in store-boxes accessible only to its own staff and little known or esteemed. True we were promised that it would form part of a brand-new custom-built Museum of London, but when? Its birth was dependent on the agreement of a Government Department, the Corporation of London and the Greater London Council, which would give it equal financial support – a completely new commitment for the GLC. Not surprisingly, all three were quite happy that decisions previously taken should not be implemented until some unspecified future date. It did not seem to offer much to a young man on the threshold of his career. Yet in one respect Norman Cook was quite right; it did give Hugh the opportunity to become intimately familiar with a great Roman collection. Its particular strength was its unique

accumulation of metal artefacts in a wonderful state of preservation, and Hugh was able to develop a special expertise in this field, so that he was many times asked to contribute a specialist's report on metal finds from excavations, not only in London.

Guildhall Museum's great collection of Roman metalwork came almost exclusively from sites in the valley of the Walbrook, a small stream that flowed through the centre of the Roman city. How prolific this material was is indicated by the contribution it had also made to other Museum collections – not only to the London Museum, soon to merge its collection with that of Guildhall Museum, and the British Museum, but also to museums in the British Commonwealth overseas. When I visited the Royal Ontario Museum several years ago, I found obviously Walbrook material, labelled 'City of London', prominent in its Roman exhibits. I believe an equally generous consignment went to New Zealand.

The Walbrook metalwork, as we shall see, is outstanding on three counts: its sheer quantity, its uncorroded condition and the continuing serviceability of the majority of the objects. It is obviously important that such a remarkable phenomenon should be correctly interpreted, as I believe it has not been in the two admirable studies produced by the Museum of London's archaeological staff (the former Department of Urban Archaeology) in the last three years: *The Upper Walbrook in the Roman Period*, by Catharine Maloney and Dominique de Moulins, published

as a CBA Report in 1990, and *Excavations in the Middle Walbrook Valley* by Tony Wilmott, published by LAMAS in 1991. My debt to both these publications will become apparent, and although I have ventured to disagree with them in one important conclusion, without them I could not have marshalled my own argument. There are those who feel that a memorial lecture should be uncontroversial, but I do not believe Hugh would have agreed, for he was always an advocate of open debate. The Museum of London has in the last 17 years sponsored research into Roman London of a standard never before known, culminating in a succession of published reports, of which the two Walbrook reports are worthy representatives. Yet in this very excellence there lies a danger – that the admirable series of published reports emanating from the Museum will establish a new orthodoxy that may not be challenged. That, in my view, would be regrettable, for varying conclusions may be drawn from the same set of facts, and the facts themselves may look different viewed from a different angle. As a survivor of a most unsatisfactory period of investigation, I am conscious of my temerity in rejecting any conclusion of a new and better age. I have, however, the advantage of personal memories of one major Walbrook site, and also familiarity with those finds of the past that tend to be disregarded by the younger archaeologists simply because they were not recovered under ideal conditions. I do not believe we can do this without risk of distorting the whole picture. The new and vastly improved investigations have not been sufficiently extensive for us to rely on them alone.

The special qualities of the Walbrook metalwork can best be appreciated by a visit to the Roman gallery in the Museum of London, where an overwhelming majority of the metal exhibits comes from the Walbrook valley. In planning the gallery I tried to put on display as much of the Walbrook material as possible, some of it in what I called ‘vignettes’ of Roman London, putting things together as they might have appeared when in use – like the ‘habitat’ groups in natural history museums. Space precluded full-scale reconstruction of interiors, but we could show a carpenter’s bench and shelves, part of a smith’s workshop, and a cutler’s stall with his stock-in-trade. Each tool had to appear serviceable, and remarkably little restoration was necessary. Only missing wooden handles usually had to be replaced. In selecting this material for exhibition, Hugh’s familiarity with the collection and the expertise he

had acquired enabled him to take full responsibility for assembling and supervising the construction of these and other vignettes (Plates 1 and 2).

There is no mystery about the survival since Roman times of uncorroded metal; it survived ‘as good as new’ because it was kept throughout in waterlogged conditions that were completely anaerobic – *ie* with all air excluded. Iron remained unruined – the only chemical change being sometimes the deposition of some bluish phosphate of iron, the result of organic acidity in the soil, and this also inhibited corrosion. Copper-alloys remained untarnished and shining bright. These ideal anaerobic conditions were produced by the silting of the stream-bed, which in its more sluggish phases produced a horrible sticky substance, black with organic pollution, of the consistency of thick porridge, as in a revetted stream-bed of a tributary of the Walbrook at Cophthall Court. In its healthier, more free-flowing phases, the silt was more gravelly, though still black with organic waste. Both were sufficiently anaerobic to prevent corrosion of metals.

## **RUBBISH DUMP OR LOCAL REFUSE SITE?**

### **The Walbrook stream**

These deposits of anaerobic silt, however, are found in the banks of the Walbrook as well as in the bed of its main stream and tributaries. In some places these bank deposits are as rich in metal artefacts as the stream-bed. Where did they come from? Tony Wilmott has no doubts about this, and repeats several times his belief that they were brought as rubbish ‘from all parts of the Roman city’ (Wilmott 1991, 64). In this I believe he is quite wrong, and I believe also that this basic error has resulted in other misinterpretations. We have no evidence that refuse in Roman London was normally allowed to accumulate in surface middens; it was commonly disposed of by householders tidily and fairly hygienically in pits on their own premises. Finds in pit groups are familiar to all London archaeologists and are useful because they filled quickly and can be closely dated by the broken pottery they usually contain. This is so rarely accompanied by metalwork that I cannot recall a single example from the contents of the numerous Roman rubbish-pits and cess-pits handled by staff of Guildhall Museum in the

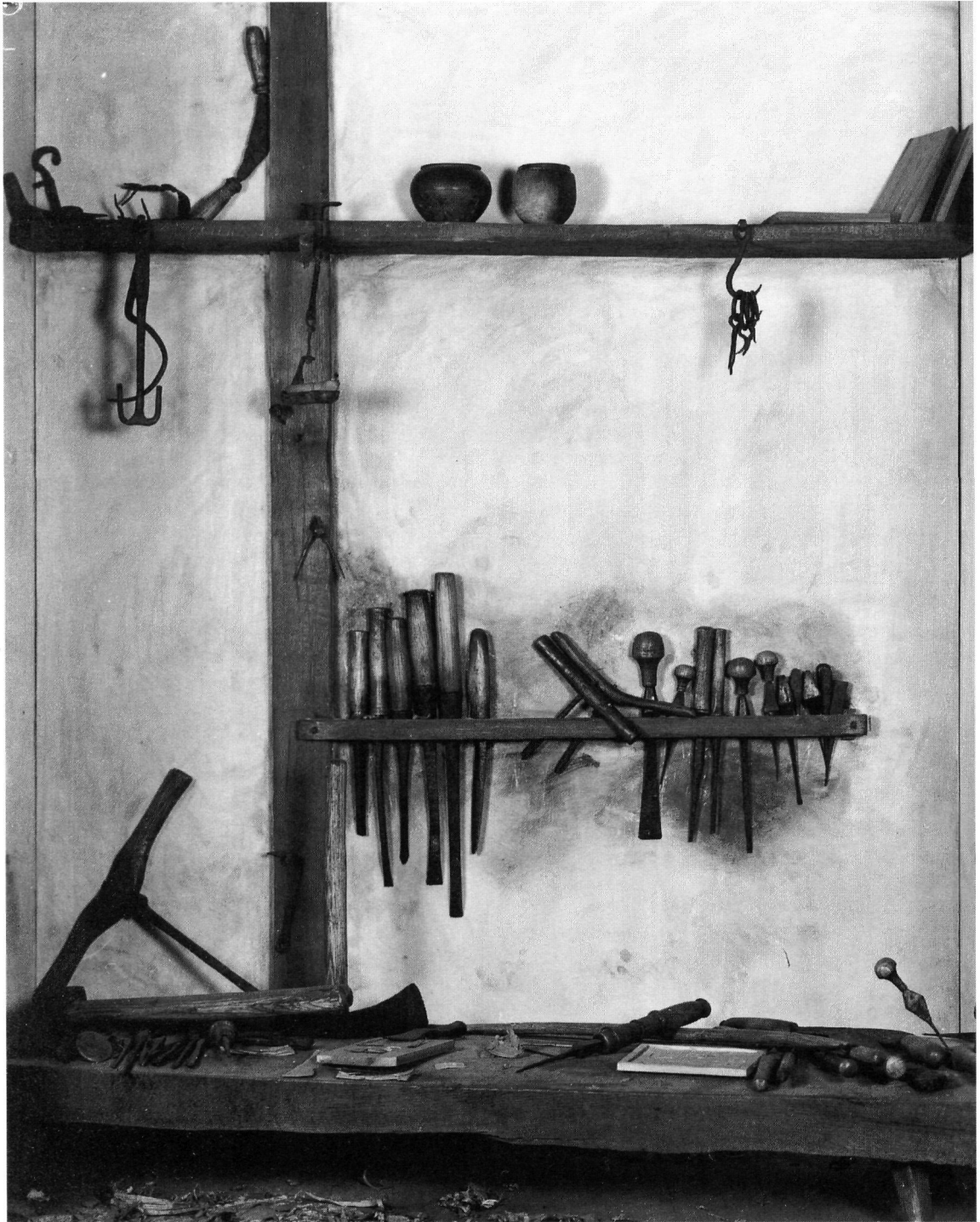


Plate 1. Reconstruction of Roman carpenter's bench and shelves by Hugh Chapman, with original Roman tools and other metalwork from the Walbrook (Museum of London)



*Plate 2. Reconstruction of Roman cutler's stall by Hugh Chapman, with original knives and tools from the Walbrook (Reconstruction of stall in the Museum of London copied from a Roman tombstone)*

1950s and 60s. It would certainly have attracted attention both because it could be dated and because it would have needed urgent conservation, for dry refuse did not provide the conditions that kept it free from corrosion. The black silt, sometimes called 'peat' when it contained a high concentration of organic matter, found incorporated in the artificially raised banks

of the Walbrook, has always been recognised as being of watery origin. For years in fact it misled intelligent observers into the belief that the lower Walbrook was a wide river, navigable to the site of the Bank of England, since the wide spread of such deposits was believed to indicate the width of the stream.

It was Professor Grimes's section across the

valley, laboriously excavated in 1953–4, that cut the Walbrook down to size, indicating a stream normally no wider than 12–14ft (Grimes 1968, 92–5). At that time Grimes believed that the peaty layers were probably flood deposits made by the stream before the Mithraeum was built in the 240s. His section shows, however, that these layers are interleaved with the dumps of clean clay undoubtedly brought from elsewhere to raise the level for occupation on the banks, suggesting that they were dumped at intervals while this process was continuing. The most substantial peaty deposit lay further east, filling a hollow some time before the first floor of the Mithraeum was laid. The watery origin of these deposits can hardly be doubted, and they could have come from the Thames, some other tributary of the Thames, the fill of wells kept waterlogged by subterranean springs – or the Walbrook itself. This material had obvious disadvantages for the stability of the banks, as it was compressible and could therefore cause subsidence, as happened in the Upper Walbrook in one place (Maloney & de Moulins 1990, 47). There was therefore no point in bringing it from elsewhere, and it seems reasonably certain that it came from the Walbrook itself, and was incorporated in the banks only in order to dispose of it. The Grimes section does in fact suggest there was a clearance of silt that was blocking the revetted stream-bed, and that it was this, combined with increasing pressure from the build-up of the west bank, that led to the collapse of the revetment after the middle of the second century. This seems to be confirmed by Noël-Hume's observations just north of the Mithraeum, which puzzled me greatly at the time. A fill of fine gravelly silt, dated to the mid 2nd century by a brooch (Plate 3) near its base (a date confirmed by Wilmott's study of the pottery) lay deep within the revetted banks,<sup>1</sup> immediately overlying the primary stream-bed of the artificial channel, consisting of pebbles and sand overlying the natural London Clay. This contained a little Flavian-Trajanic pottery, but the lowest finds (ER 268E) were consistently Claudian-Flavian, also the date of pottery from the earliest levels of the bank outside the revetments (Wilmott 1991, 21; ER 268E and F). The early 2nd century seems to be missing from the stream-bed sequence, and this is the period when the Upper Walbrook seems to have had drainage problems (Maloney 1990, 120). Were these partly due to silting of the Middle Walbrook, which necessitated



Plate 3. Bronze fibula (Collingwood Class Sii, attributed to middle of 2nd century) found deep in gravelly silt in revetted stream-bed of Walbrook, immediately overlying pebbles and sand of earliest (Flavian) bed of the artificial channel, together with other objects apparently dumped at one time by a metal-worker (ER 268 G). (Museum of London)

the unblocking of the stream by transferring its silt to the banks?

### Finds from the NSDC

Let us now examine more closely the metalwork from one Walbrook site (Plate 4). This is the site

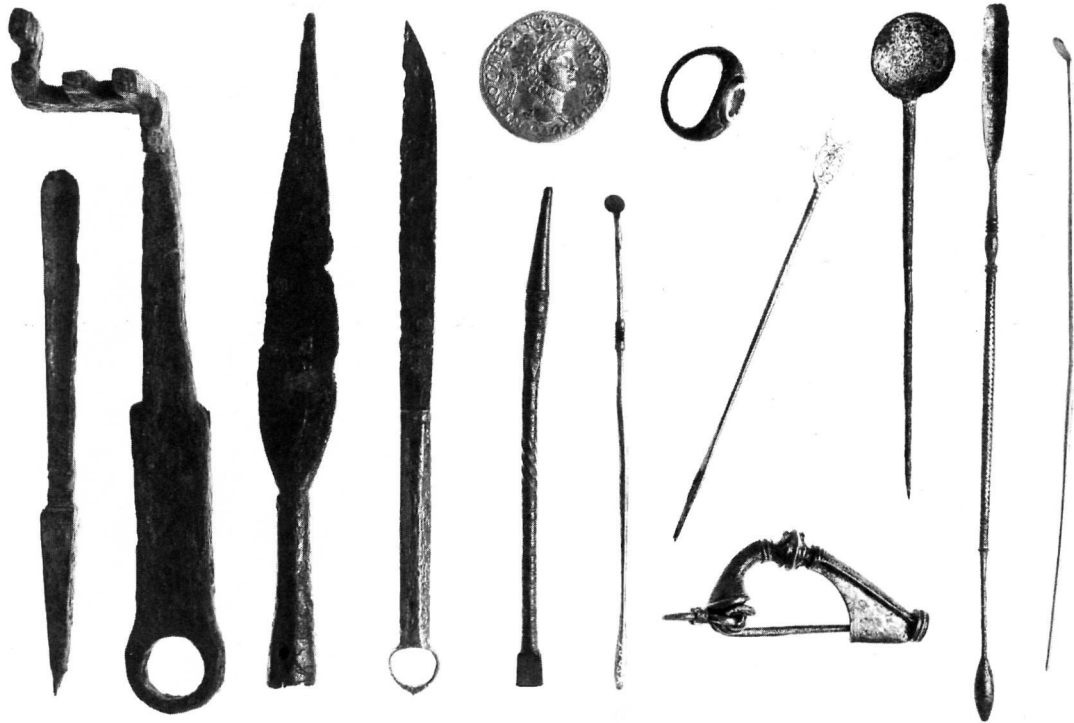


Plate 4. *The main classes of Roman metal artefacts from the Walbrook, comprising (1-r) a tool (spoon-bit), key, weapon (spear-head), knife, coin (as of Nero), stylus, ligula, finger-ring (with intaglio), hair-pin, fibula, spoon (with pointed handle), ligulae ('curette' type 1., 'ear-pick' type r.). Only needles are missing here from the 12 main classes of metal artefact that occur repeatedly in the Walbrook series (Museum of London)*

of the National Safe Deposit Company just opposite the Mansion House, a small triangular site only 418sq m in overall area, bisected by the Walbrook immediately north of its main Roman crossing-place in Bucklersbury. Its centrality to *Londinium* might be compared with that of Piccadilly Circus in modern London. It was excavated by builders in 1872-3, and J.E. Price, then Museum Clerk for Guildhall Library, was able to recover a great quantity of antiquities, nearly all Roman, for Guildhall Museum. His published account indicates that Roman levels were reached in three great trenches dug for the massive foundations of the external walls of a triangular building designed for maximum security (Puleston & Price 1873, 55). Price's plan indicates the position of two of these, perhaps all that he himself saw. They cross the stream-bed in two places, and on analogy with Bucklersbury House immediately to the south, it might be expected that some Roman metalwork would have been recovered here, as well as one or two

post-Roman metal artefacts (a key and stylus) in 'Walbrook condition', presumably from higher levels of the stream-bed. Price makes it quite clear, however, that most of the antiquities (including Roman metalwork, since he mentions vast numbers of coins and also personal objects of iron and bronze) came from the west end of the trench parallel with Bucklersbury (Point F). Yet he also mentions remains of buildings, which would not have provided the anaerobic conditions in which most of the metalwork he recovered must have been preserved. He also mentions evidence of fire which had melted some metals and glass (not surviving in the collection). This area cannot have been larger than a few square metres, but may have been a deep accumulation, with later buildings, possibly destroyed by fire, overlying an earlier dump of water-logged silt, from which most of the complete metal objects came. It is reasonable to assume that it came originally from the neighbouring stream-bed,

including possibly the portion underlying the road, which would have been particularly subject to blocking.

Wilmott compares the Walbrook metalwork with that of two other anaerobic dumps that were excavated in recent years by archaeologists, and which do in fact contain material probably discarded as refuse. In significant criteria, however, there is no similarity whatsoever between the metalwork from these and that from the Walbrook. Only in the actual condition of the metal is there any similarity. The special characteristics of Walbrook metal artefacts both from stream-bed and bank dumps, is their *continuing serviceability*. Wilmott is dismissive of this argument, saying (and I quote): ‘many must have been discarded in antiquity because of superficial damage which is no longer apparent ... It is unfortunate that Roman criteria for assessing utility or lack of utility are not recoverable’ (Wilmott 1991, 172).

It is a neat phrase which enables him to ignore the outstanding characteristic of the Walbrook finds; but I suggest it is incorrect. For tools and practical appliances the criteria are likely to be precisely the same as they would be today – and modern craftsmen tend to retain familiar tools until they are broken or totally worn out. I recall that my grandfather, who was a shoemaker, retained one hammer throughout his working life – and gradually his thumb wore a thin place in the wooden handle, until eventually it broke, but only after his retirement. Personal ornaments, fibulae, hair-pins and the like, are of course affected by fashion, but are more likely to pass down the social scale – *eg* from mistress to servants – than to be thrown away as refuse, particularly if they had some value as metal. The other striking characteristic of Walbrook metal finds is their concentration in some areas, so that *numbers* of complete artefacts from a site are also significant. Including coins, which likewise remained serviceable, for there was no demonetisation in the 1st and 2nd centuries – the relevant period – the finds recovered by Price from the National Safe Deposit Company’s site, totalled 179 serviceable metal artefacts catalogued by Guildhall Museum (Guildhall Museum 1908, 108–18); those from the Thames foreshore at Billingsgate Buildings, recovered by trained archaeologists, whose aim was to preserve for study everything they found, totalled just 12 (Jones 1974). From the dump within the wooden Antonine waterfront at New Fresh Wharf (Dyson

*et al* 1986, 235–9), also excavated by archaeologists, they totalled 45, but 33 of these were coins, almost certainly lost during cash transactions on the waterfront. (See Appendix for tabulated details.) At Billingsgate Buildings the commonest metal artefacts were needles – three serviceable and five broken. There was also a great dump of leather scraps on this site, and the needles likewise no doubt reflect the proximity of a riverside industry (Fig. 1). I suspect there is nearly always a local explanation for the special characteristics of dumped refuse. We have no evidence whatsoever that refuse in Roman London was ever transported far from its source.

It will be noted that nearly all the metalwork from the National Safe Deposit Company site falls into a limited number of categories: tools, weapons (rare), knives, fibulae, hair-pins, ligulae (two types – here put together – probably used domestically, to extract cosmetics from flasks), spoons, needles, styli (the most abundant artefacts on all Walbrook sites), finger-rings, keys, and of course coins.

As we have seen, the NSDC material probably comes from both the stream-bed and a dump of silt on its bank. A similar pattern is shown by the material stratified in the stream-bed at Bucklersbury House – and datable to the first half of the 2nd century. (See Appendix for tabulated list). The same categories are represented, and there is the same very high proportion of serviceable metal artefacts, totalling 104. (Fig. 2)

A significant difference from the NSDC series is the increase in the quantity of craftsmen’s tools, which no doubt came from local workshops on the banks. These were replaced in this area, and elsewhere in the Middle Walbrook, by more widely spaced and more substantial residences after about the middle of the 2nd century. The material deposited by a main street in the centre of *Londinium* probably *was* brought ‘from all parts of the Roman city’, but not as dumped refuse; it came in the hands of the multitude of individuals who passed by; whereas on Bucklersbury House it came from local workshops, and was concentrated where the stream was accessible to them.

## RITUAL DEPOSITS?

### The Walbrook skulls

The difficult question of whether ritual played any part in accumulating this great quantity of

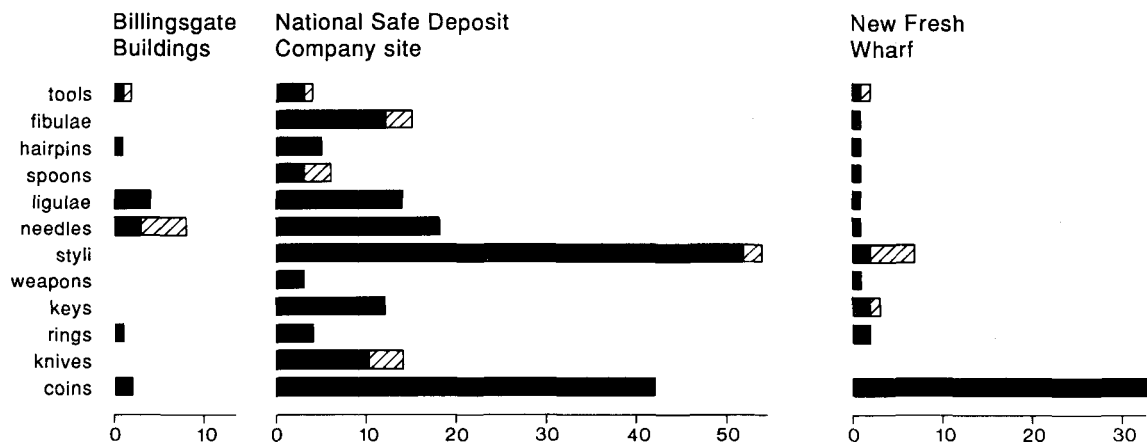


Fig 1. Histograms comparing Roman metal finds from National Safe Deposit Company's (Walbrook) site with those from Billingsgate Buildings and New Fresh Wharf (Thames-side sites). Hatched extensions to bars represent incomplete specimens

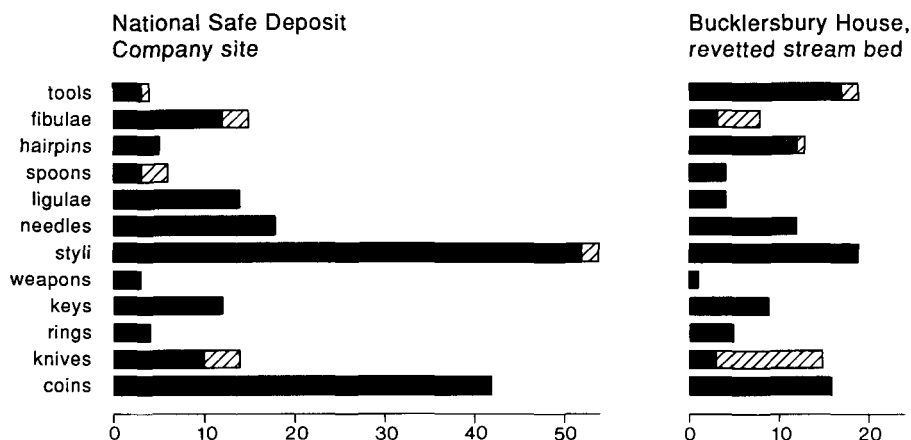


Fig 2. Histograms comparing unstratified Walbrook Roman metal finds from National Safe Deposit Company's site in Bucklersbury, many said to be from west bank, with stratified metal finds from revetted Walbrook stream-bed on Bucklersbury House site

serviceable metal artefacts, mostly originally in the stream-bed, though sometimes transferred to the banks, must now be addressed. Both Wilmott and Mrs Maloney have recognised another Walbrook phenomenon as having ritual significance, though they have little to say about it. Great numbers of human skulls have been found in the upper channels of the Walbrook – more than 100 from one site in Blomfield Street (Plate 5). They are unaccompanied by other human bones, and almost invariably have no lower jaws, suggesting strongly that they were fleshless when deposited. They are predominantly of young males (in itself almost ruling out older ideas of their origin in the Boudican massacre, in which, according to Tacitus, the victims were the aged women left behind in *Londinium*). None

have been found south of the Walbrook crossing at Bucklersbury; one (doubtful) on the NSDC site, nine from the Bank of England site, increasing numbers north of the junction of the east and west streams of the Walbrook, and greater numbers north of the line of the later City wall (Blomfield Street and Finsbury House) (Marsh & West 1981, 86–102). In support of the dictum that ritual activity is unlikely to have been centered on a polluted stream in an industrial environment, Mrs Maloney has suggested that the skulls were deposited in an unpolluted area to the north and were subsequently carried by the stream to the places where they were found (Maloney 1990, 124). It is improbable that they would travel far in the rapidly silting channels, however, and one was





Plate 5. Roman skulls from the Walbrook, with the characteristic brown staining (Museum of London)

found high in the silt of a second-century roadside ditch in the Upper Walbrook – a position it can hardly have reached from an unpolluted stream-bed nearer the Walbrook's source.

Two of the Walbrook skulls have been dated by radio-carbon as within the dates 110 BC to AD 130, and one between 100 BC and AD 390 (Bradley & Gordon 1988, 507), while (as we have seen) one was archaeologically dated by being in the fill of the ditch of a road dated AD 120–40, while another came from the fill of a Roman canalised stream (Maloney 1990, 30–1, 34). A date within the Roman period seems likely for them all.

The deposition of skulls in watery places is well-known in Roman Britain, and in Roman London is also known in wells (Cannon Street and Queen Street), in ditches (fort ditch in Aldermanbury and in a roadside ditch in Southwark) as well as in two places on the waterfront (Marsh & West 1981, 94–5; Merrifield 1987, 37–8, 45). In the London area skulls were likewise deposited in the Thames in much earlier times, and large numbers were recovered in the same dredging operations that produced spectacular finds of Bronze Age metalwork and less abundant but equally spectacular finds of metalwork of the pre-Roman Iron Age. Carbon 14 dates for six of these skulls indicated that four were of the Middle – Late Bronze Age (1388–800

BC), the period to which most of the Thames metalwork is attributed. One is earlier (Neolithic – 3925–3338 BC) and one later (Anglo-Saxon) dating from AD 620–852. It is interesting that the last is of the same period as a group of spearheads from the Thames, including four from Battersea Bridge where the skull itself was found. One of the Bronze Age skulls, from Mortlake, is said to have been found 'underlying' Bronze Age metal objects. There does therefore seem to be some correlation between skulls and metalwork deposited in the Thames. Prehistorians, such as Richard Bradley, suggest that both were connected with the unknown Middle and Late Bronze Age funerary rituals, which may have involved excarnation (burial or exposure until the flesh has gone) (Bradley & Gordon 1988, 503–9).

It is interesting to find the two practices re-emerging in close association in the Roman Walbrook, but we may be quite sure that even if similar ritual was involved, its purpose was quite different. The study of ritual is in its infancy, but it is already clear that although ritual may have a very long life, it survives only by being reinterpreted to accord with new beliefs or to satisfy new needs. It is unlikely that these Romano-British practices had anything to do with funerary rites, about which we know a fair amount for the relevant period, and more likely that they were applied to contemporary needs and problems. It is unlikely that Roman

officialdom can have approved the deposition of remains of the dead within the limits of the Roman city, which was against Roman law and repugnant to Roman feelings and traditions. It is therefore likely to have been surreptitious, and it may be for this reason that it was more commonly practised in places remote from the main streets. Metalwork is said to have been rare in the Upper Walbrook, where the skulls are most common, while metalwork is abundant on the Bucklersbury House site between the two main east – west thoroughfares of the Roman city, where no skulls were found. Metalwork and skulls are not, however, mutually exclusive; there is an area of overlap on the Bank of England site, where nine skulls were found, but there was a great abundance of metal artefacts. This was perhaps sufficiently far from the main road to the south (125m) to permit the occasional deposition of a skull, but metalwork was more commonly deposited. I tentatively suggest therefore that if metal objects were deliberately placed in the Walbrook as ritual deposits it may have been in substitution for the preferred skulls, the supply of which cannot in any case have been limitless. (Their source is a mystery, for in the later 1st and early 2nd centuries, cremation was general, and the few large battles that might have produced them were far from London. Were they the heads of criminals, sent to London for execution, and possibly displayed for deterrence until the flesh had decayed, as heads of traitors and rebels were displayed in London in later centuries?)

### **Metal objects as votives**

We need not be surprised if metal objects were in fact offered as votives in Roman Britain. There was a tradition of offering ironwork to the gods going back to the pre-Roman Iron Age in Britain and Northern Europe generally. They were sometimes buried in sacred places on dry land, as in a hoard of iron objects buried within the hill-fort near a shrine at South Cadbury. More commonly they were deposited in watery places as in Llyn Cerrig Bach, where a great accumulation of metalwork was found. Several hoards of ironwork found in bogs and other watery places in Scotland are considered to be ritual deposits, and we have an example much nearer London in the Lea Valley near Waltham Abbey, in which a blacksmith's hoard of the late

pre-Roman Iron Age or early Roman period was found in the remains of a wooden box in the river-bed. This is an example in which votive intention is indicated not by the continuing serviceability of an implement, but by its deliberate destruction by bending – at the cost of considerable effort. Two pairs of tongs were treated in this way in the Waltham hoard (Merrifield 1987, 29–31). In general, with the coming of the Pax Romana, and the prohibition of arms to civilians, votive weapons tended to be replaced by more peaceable appliances or by votive miniatures. (It is interesting that a miniature sword only 4in long has been identified by Dr Greep among the metalwork from the Walbrook at Bucklersbury House (Greep 1981, 103–6). Personal ornaments such as fibulae and rings were also used as votives at Romano-British temples, as well of course as coins (Woodward 1992, 72–3). A number of temple-sites were in fact first identified by the finds of similar votives – *eg* Springhead in north Kent, which became known as a place where treasure-hunters could find Roman brooches, before the temple itself was discovered.

## **RELIGION AND INDUSTRY**

Part at least of the reluctance of London archaeologists to recognise ritual in the Walbrook valley seems to have been due to their conviction that this was a workaday industrial area, where religious activity seemed to them inappropriate. I suggest that this arises from a misunderstanding of ancient religion, which was part of the fabric of everyday life.

### **Ritual ceramic wares**

There is in any case abundant evidence of ritual/religious activity in the Walbrook valley in its earlier industrial phase, quite apart from the deposition of human skulls and metalwork. Some of it may indeed have been centred on the industrial work itself, rather than on the stream. It can best be demonstrated by the concentration in this area of two types of pottery that appear to have been made solely for ritual purposes: pottery given a human face by the addition of features (Plate 6), or in somewhat later times by the addition of a human mask modelled in clay, and multiple vases consisting normally of three



*Plate 6. Face-pots, complete. (l) from London Wall, (r) from Cannon Street. Being unbroken, they were clearly deliberately buried, but the imprecision of the records leaves doubt whether they accompanied cremation burials, which might be encountered in the Upper Walbrook Valley at London Wall, or non-funerary ritual as at Bucklersbury House; this is most probable for the Cannon Street pot (Museum of London)*

cups joined by a common ring-base. On the map (Fig 3) finds of substantially complete vessels of both kinds are indicated by an F or an M. Significantly they occur elsewhere in the City on sites occupied by early cremation cemeteries or in close proximity to them, where ritual offerings are likely to have been made either to the shades of the dead or to underworld deities on their behalf. The indications on the map represent only almost complete or large portions of such vessels that are likely to have been used near the place where they were found. (I have not

included a small sherd of a face-pot showing an eyebrow from the foreshore dump at Billingsgate Buildings, as this is not comparable with the substantially complete pots represented on the map. Incense-burners were well represented at Billingsgate Buildings, but unlike face-pots and multiple vases have a random distribution through the Roman city, and were presumably used in domestic cults.)

One face-pot on the Bucklersbury House site seems to have been left standing on a grassy surface where it was last used. It was in close

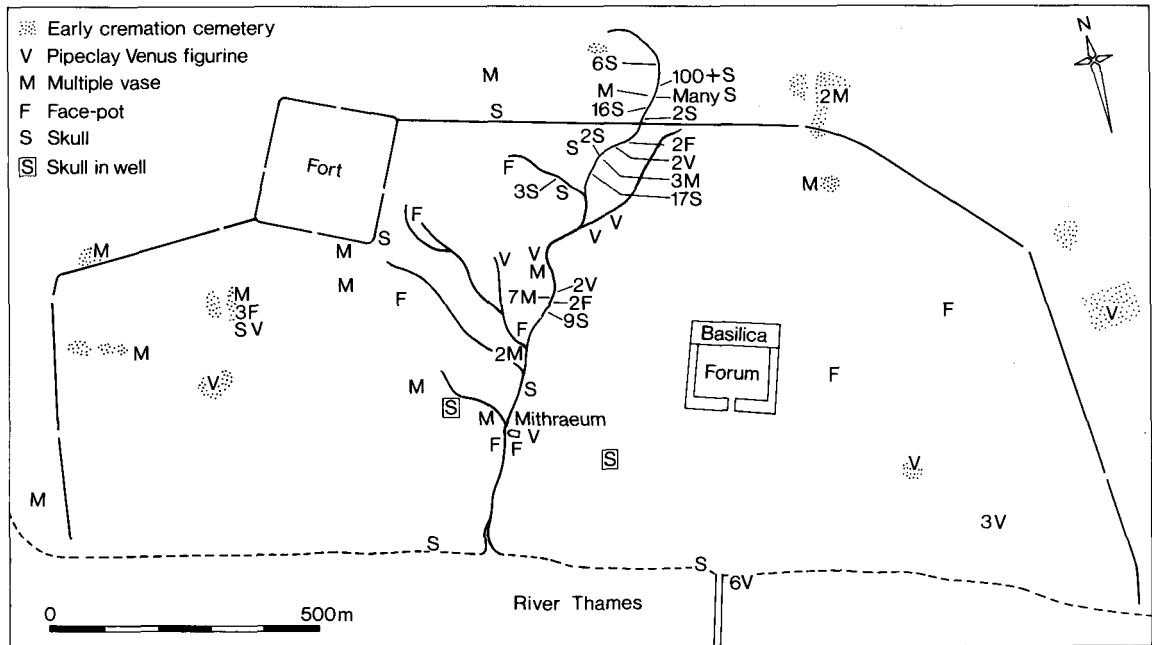


Fig. 3. Distribution map of human skulls (S), pipe-clay figurines of Venus (V), face-pots (F) and multiple vases (M) in Roman London

association with a burnt wooden structure with an arcaded panel that may have been a shrine. Subsequently the pot seems to have been carefully covered with a cairn-like deposit containing flints and pieces of iron. (This cannot have been the fill of a pit, the base of which exactly coincided with the burnt grassy surface on which the pot stood, as has been suggested.) Face-pots and pots of similar form sometimes bore applied emblems of the smith's craft, and Wilmott was probably right in suggesting that the ritual here was specifically associated with metal-working. I am reminded of a visit a few years ago to a silversmith's workshop in Jogjakarta, Central Java, where offerings were made at a crude altar at the commencement of the industrial process, as an essential propitiation of mischievous spirits that might otherwise interfere with it.

The non-funerary use of the multiple vases (Plate 7) is unknown, but the possibility that those in the Walbrook valley were used in ritual directed at the problems of the stream and its silting cannot be ruled out.<sup>2</sup>

The pipeclay figurines of Venus Anadyomene ('rising from the sea') have a clearer connection with the spirit of the stream. When Frank Jenkins wrote an important paper in 1958 on 'The Cult of the Pseudo-Venus in Kent' he listed all the known examples with provenances then known from Roman London (Jenkins 1958, 60-76).

There were 16, of which nine came from the Walbrook valley: Bond Court, Bank of England (2), Coleman Court, Cophall Court, Founders' Court, Angel Court and London Wall (2). The remainder were mostly from early cemeteries, and they were not uncommonly buried with cremations, for reasons which remain obscure. In Gaul and elsewhere in Britain, however, they have more usually been associated with springs and streams, or with temples built on watery sites, and there is little doubt that Jenkins was right in identifying this particular image of Venus as a water-nymph. The Walbrook examples, however, are scattered and fragmentary, and do not suggest the site of a shrine to such a deity. They were more probably kept in domestic shrines by those living on the banks of the stream until they were accidentally broken. None are recorded as being from the stream-bed, but one pipeclay fragment of another deity, possibly Mars, was found there, and it may have been an appropriate place for the disposal of 'sacred' rubbish. Since then six fragmentary Venus figurines have been found in the embankment dump at New Fresh Wharf (not Billingsgate Buildings as stated by Wilmott). These have no local religious significance but form part of a great ceramic dump of Central Gaulish imports, presumably unloaded there and found to be



Plate 7. Multiple vases from the Walbrook valley, (1) from London Wall. As with the undamaged face-pot from the same area, this may possibly have accompanied an unrecorded – even unnoticed – cremation burial (Museum of London)

broken, or possibly subsequently cleared from a neighbouring warehouse.

In spite of the evidence for local respect for a water-nymph on the banks of the Walbrook, Tony Wilmott concludes that 'it does not seem very likely that the sort of functional polluted water-course postulated above would have been the focus of religious devotion' (Wilmott 1991, 175). 'Religious devotion' is of course an emotive term that diverts attention from the strictly practical purpose of much ancient ritual. Roman *religio* involved the recognition of external powers with a will of their own (*numina*), with whom it was necessary to come to terms by performing appropriate rituals, usually including sacrifice or some other form of offering. It was a practical businesslike arrangement that entered into more aspects of human life, both domestic and public, than we can easily realise today. It was particularly necessary in dealing with a recalcitrant power of nature that could be useful or hostile. Ritual is for frontiers, and is more likely to be encountered where men and nature meet than in wild places, however numinous, where nature can be left alone. The need to use a marshy valley in the centre of *Londinium*, and to convert its natural streams to useful drains and

suppliers of water for industrial purposes, would therefore have been likely to have promoted *religio* from the beginning of activity in the area. It would have been further stimulated by later setbacks, when the silting and overflowing of the stream would have been taken as a clear indication of the anger of its *numen*, and of the need to placate it.

#### A Roman parallel

There is a remarkable parallel from Rome itself, centuries earlier. The marshy area between the hills, later occupied by the Roman Forum, was drained by a natural stream that was canalised at an early date by stone revetments, and much later (after 200 BC) was arched over. This was the *Cloaca Maxima*, the great central sewer of Rome. Tributaries of the main stream were converted into subsidiary drains. At the junction of one of these with the *Cloaca Maxima*, a shrine to the tutelary goddess, Venus Cloacina, was built. A late Republican representation of this, on a coin of L. Mussidius Longus, about 39 BC, shows a circular structure with two statues of Venus on a fenced platform.<sup>3</sup> It was here,

according to Livy, that Virginia was killed by her father in 450 BC, to save her from dishonour by a decemvir. For this purpose he seized a knife from a butcher's shop nearby, and this part of the Forum seems to have been occupied by provision shops at an early date (Grant 1970, 18). Butchers and fruiterers no doubt found the open sewer a convenient place for the disposal of organic waste, and this part of early Rome cannot have been more salubrious than the Walbrook valley at its worst. This did not preclude the building of a shrine to the stream-spirit, nor did the crowded workaday atmosphere of the drained area discourage the building of other and greater temples, including the most sacred shrine of Vesta itself.

### City shrines

*Londinium* was closely linked with the administration of the province, and high-ranking Romans, who must have been well aware of the metropolitan analogy, would have been concerned with the project of draining the Walbrook valley. There is evidence from several sites that the earliest canalisation of the Walbrook by revetting its bed was early Flavian (Wilmott 1991, 75). It may be significant that the Governor of Britain from AD 74 to 78 was Sextus Julius Frontinus, who was interested in engineering, and was later to write a book on the transportation of water at Rome (*De aquae ductu*). He may well have initiated the Walbrook project, and if so would have been fully conscious of its similarity to the draining of the Roman Forum. Practical and scientific interests for a 1st-century Roman did not preclude participation in traditional religious customs, and Frontinus himself became a member of the College of Augurs, whose function was to ascertain the will of the gods by observing omens. We have no evidence that a public shrine to the local Cloacina was set up in the Walbrook valley, but in the circumstances it is by no means unlikely. If so, as at Rome, a precedent was set for more temple-building, with dedications to greater deities. This polluted industrial district contained at least two shrines to the triple Celtic mother-goddesses; one near Cannon Street in Budge Row, we are informed by an inscription, was restored by the district at its own expense (Collingwood & Wright 1965, 1 (London 2)); the other probably stood in the upper valley near Moorgate Street, where a votive tin plaque representing the goddesses was



*Plate 8. Votive plaque of tin, formerly surmounted by a feather-like terminal, with repoussé relief representing the three Celtic Mother-goddesses standing between two columns surmounted by a triple arcade, found on site of 55-61 Moorgate in 1929, with channels of brooks flowing eastward to the Walbrook. It may be noted that the arcading is very like that of the burnt wooden 'shrine' found at Bucklersbury House. The votive probably came from a similar edifice in the neighbourhood (Museum of London)*

found (Plate 8). It would undoubtedly originally have been placed in their shrine which was probably nearby (Toynbee 1978, 128-47). Similarly a damaged stone cult figure of Mercury found in or on a 2nd-century gravel surface at 55-61 Moorgate probably came from a shrine nearby (Frere 1988, 463 pl XXVIIB). The proximity of two more shrines with unknown dedications is probably indicated by lead curses from Telegraph Street in the Upper Walbrook and from Prince's Street in the Middle Walbrook (Plate 9) (Collingwood & Wright 1965, 3-4 (London 6 and 7)).

### CONCLUSION

We must however return to the unresolved issue of the Walbrook metalwork, and here we know of no parallel from Rome. If this is in fact a ritual deposit, its affinities, as we have seen, lie in the Celtic and northern world rather than the Mediterranean.

It may be helpful to examine closely two deposits stratified in the mid 2nd-century stream-bed that seem to be among the last of their kind, each of which seems to come from a single



Plate 9. Lead curse from the Walbrook at Prince's Street, previously nailed to a wooden structure, most probably a neighbouring shrine. The same inscription is incised on both sides: 'T[ITVS] EGNATIVS TYRANVS DEFIC[T]VS EST ET P[VBLIVS] CICEREIVS FELIX DEFICTVS E[S]T' 'Titus Egnatius Tyranus is cursed and Publius Cicereius Felix is cursed' (Museum of London)

source and consists of material probably deposited at one time – as is accepted by Tony Wilmott (Wilmott 1991, 128). Both were excavated by Ivor Noël-Hume from within the revetted banks on the Bucklersbury House site, in the gravelly silt deposited in the final phase before the collapse of the revetment. Both seem to have been deposited by metalworkers, in all probability at the time of their enforced departure from their former workshops and homes. In these circumstances ritual is likely, for terminal deposits marking the end of occupation and often accompanied by debris of demolition have been observed in many places, including London (Merrifield 1987, 45–50). The discarding of rubbish is equally likely, since anything not worth removing *ipso facto* becomes rubbish. If the troubles of the departing craftsmen were in part economic, they may have been left with unsaleable stock on their hands, and redundant material in a pristine condition might be disposed

of. We will now examine the first of these groups, numbered E.R. 268 G, to see if these categories can be distinguished.

Certain additions must be made to the group illustrated by Wilmott, which is not complete (Wilmott 1991, figs 90–1, nos 468–85; see also Appendix). They include a bronze fibula of distinctive mid 2nd-century type, readily identified from Noël-Hume's MS record, which Wilmott apparently did not see; also in Hume's list were a hook, a pin, two styli, three ligulae, shears, a joiner's dog, several needles, bronze studs and waste fragments, with a great quantity of nails, and a single coin of Domitian (not necessarily residual). Eight of the twelve classes of metal artefact found at the National Safe Deposit Company's site, and in the general series from the stream-bed at Bucklersbury House, are represented here, but only by one or two specimens. It raises the question whether these

larger series were perhaps made up of an accumulation of similar groups, varying in some particulars according to the trade represented. Here tools are represented by two iron punches; and in the series generally there is a preference for thrusting, penetrative tools – chisels or bits for carpenters and masons, awls for shoemakers, and so on. A repetitive pattern would favour the idea of ritual, but undoubtedly some of the material from 268 G could fall into the category of rubbish, either by being broken or not worth carrying away. A phalera, chape, armour-scale and ornamental studs are probably products of the workshop, and therefore could be regarded as redundant, but are insufficient in quantity to suggest that over-production was a factor in the deposition of Walbrook metalwork. No parcels or packets of similar objects found together have ever been recorded, and styli, the commonest of all Walbrook implements, always seem to occur only one or two at a time.

Let us now compare the second stratified group, E.R.268 H, with the first (Wilmott 1991, 131–5, figs 91–2, nos 486–508. See also Appendix). Tools are again represented by a punch, but a much more delicate one made of copper alloy. It has been suggested that it may have been used on gold. If so, it is not surprising that surplus products and waste are lacking. Pins are strongly represented, and iron objects include a broken fibula, a miniature knife 2¼in long, perhaps made as a votive, a stylus, a tanged spike of unknown use, the tine of a rake, and various nondescript fittings. There was a single old coin of Claudius, probably residual, but possibly selected for its Minerva reverse and thrown in with the rest.<sup>4</sup> There was also a quite enormous quantity of iron nails (three hundred-weight-sacks full, it is said). All had been used before, and were carefully extracted for recycling, but had become ‘rubbish’ in the sense of being too heavy for easy removal.

Putting both groups together, the one common feature of the majority of these disparate objects is that they have *points*. This of course also applies to the nails, and it was perhaps the reason that they were included, presumably with some effort, for it would have been easier simply to have abandoned them for future burial with the remains of the workshop from which they came. It is a characteristic shared by many objects from the general unstratified Walbrook series, *eg* from the site of the National Safe Deposit Company – not only styli, knives, hair-pins and needles, but also spoons of the *cochleare*

variety and some ligulae of ‘ear-pick’ type. Has it any significance for our present enquiry? Here perhaps I may cite a comparison with recent British folk customs without evoking too much shock and horror among archaeologists! The commonest small votives dropped in holy wells in the 19th century in Cornwall, Wales, Scotland and northern England were domestic pins, and the wells were often called ‘pin-wells’ on that account.<sup>5</sup> But why should pins be particularly acceptable to water-spirits? If we further consider the commonest tools in the Walbrook series, we find a distinct bias towards thrusting and penetrative appliances – chisels, bits, awls, and, as we have just seen, punches. In contrast axes and adzes do not occur; hammers are very rare indeed, and saws are nearly all fragmentary. Was all this based on very simple sympathetic magic, to meet the clearly perceived need of a spring or stream to penetrate the obstacles that impeded it? If it did not, disasters occurred, ranging from the failure of a well or drainage system to flooding. Keys might be regarded as symbols of a different kind, but for a similar purpose, intended to open a way that was closed. Attempts at explanation can only be highly speculative, but the existence of a ritual involving deposition of metal artefacts in the stream is less doubtful. I have to leave the answering of my original question to personal judgement, however, as it depends on an assessment of probabilities. The pattern of finds rules out, I think, the suggestion that unsaleable goods were being dumped on a large scale; common sense must, in my view, reject the idea that these remarkable concentrations were achieved by bringing together rubbish dumps, all anaerobic, from other parts of the City. Very local disposal of refuse must account for fragmentary metalwork and possibly a few items from stock, uncollected orders and the like, as well as scrap metal saved but not worth removal. Accidental losses of articles normally carried on the person must account for some finds, and the muddy conditions often prevailing on working surfaces on the banks probably contributed to the loss of tools. But so much repetitive loss of serviceable appliances and the apparent bias towards certain classes of artefact strongly suggest that ritual also made a substantial contribution. As I have demonstrated, a great deal of ritual was going on in the Walbrook valley in its early industrial phase – so why not this, a practice conforming with a well-known tradition, of which recognisable survivals in recent times can be found?<sup>6</sup>



## APPENDIX TABULATED FINDS FOR COMPARISON

## Metalwork from Walbrook sites

<i>National Safe Deposit Company site, 1872-3</i>		<i>Bucklersbury House Revetted stream-bed (ER 268K)</i>
Weapons	3	1
Tools	3 (+1 broken)	17 (+2 broken)
Knives	10 (+4, blades only)	3
Styli	52 (+2 broken)	19
Needles	18	12
Ligulae	14	4
Spoons	3 (+3 broken)	3
Keys	12	9
Pins	5	12 (+1 broken)
Fibulae	12 (+3 without pins)	3 (+5 broken)
Finger-rings	4	5
Coins (identifiable)	42	16
Miscellaneous	1 iron lamp (+1 manacle with broken chain)	— (+1 manacle without chain)
Totals	179 serviceable artefacts	104 serviceable artefacts

In both cases these were recovered by a single archaeologist working intermittently on a building site in competition with other collectors. For comparison the finds of metalwork from two non-Walbrook anaerobic sites, excavated by teams of archaeologists under controlled conditions, are tabulated below:

## Metalwork from non-Walbrook sites

<i>Billingsgate Buildings</i>		<i>New Fresh Wharf</i>
Weapons	—	1 (+1? corroded and bent)
Tools	1 (+1 broken)	1 (+1 broken)
Styli	—	2 (+4 broken)
Needles	3 (+5 broken)	1
Ligulae	4	1 (bent but complete)
Spoons	—	1
Keys	—	1 (+1 broken)
Pins	1	1
Finger-rings	1	2
Fibulae	—	1
Coins (identifiable)	2	33
Miscellaneous	—	1 fish-hook (+1 broken 'altar-shovel')
Totals	12 serviceable artefacts	45 serviceable artefacts

Accidental losses (of coins and a gold ring) probably made a substantial contribution to the finds at New Fresh Wharf.

Finally tabulated below are two groups that appear to have been dumped deliberately in the Walbrook stream at Bucklersbury House. Each appears to have been deposited on a single occasion from a single source, probably in the middle of the 2nd century, when workshops on the banks were being abandoned. They are additional to the stream-bed series tabulated above.

## Associated groups from Walbrook stream-bed

<i>ER 268 G</i>		<i>ER 268 H</i>
Tools	2 punches (iron)	1 punch (copper alloy)
Knives	—	1 miniature knife
Styli	2	1
Needles	3 (+2 broken)	—
Keys	1	—
Ligulae	3	—
Pins (Hair and dress)	— (+1 bent and broken)	7 (+1 broken)
Fibulae	1	— (+1 broken)
Coins	1	1 (?residual)
Nails	many	great quantity
Fittings various, ?products	(copper alloy fittings 7)	(copper alloy and iron fittings 12, including 2 iron spikes)
Totals	13 serviceable artefacts	11 serviceable artefacts

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Guildhall Museum *Excavation Register* 268G; Wilmott 1991, 21, where the wrong reference (301) is given to this brooch in the find-list. 301 is a residual 1st-century brooch from ER 268K. The mid 2nd-century brooch from 268G is 304, as is shown by a sketch in the excavator's MS ER Notebook.

<sup>2</sup> Three incomplete examples were found with an unguent flask and a red-deer antler in the fill of a well in Union Street, Southwark, associated with the debris of demolition, circumstances in which ritual deposits are common (Merrifield 1987, 45–8). The incompleteness of the vases might suggest, however, that they had been used elsewhere, possibly at a domestic shrine, and were deposited in the well treating it as a *favissa* (receptacle for sanctified refuse) rather than marking offerings to the water-spirit (see G Marsh in J Bird *et al* (eds) *Excavations in Southwark 1972–4*, 1978, I, 221–32).

<sup>3</sup> E A Sydenham *The Coinage of the Roman Republic*, 1952, 181, 1093–4, pl 128, 1093. The marble ring which originally held a metal grating, resting on a travertine base over two courses of tufa blocks, is still preserved beside the steps of the portico of the Basilica Aemilia (E Nash *Pictorial Dictionary of Ancient Rome*, 1968, I, 262–3).

<sup>4</sup> Minerva was the goddess of craftsmen.

<sup>5</sup> D Longman and S Lock, *Pins and Pincushions*, 1911, 59, 61–3; J C Davies, *Folklore of West and Mid-Wales*, 1911 (facsimile ed 1992), 302, 303, 306, 307. Nails and needles also were used, J M Mackinlay, *Folklore of Scottish Lochs and Springs*, 1893 (facsimile ed 1993), 16, 189.

<sup>6</sup> The best single source for recent survivals is Francis Jones, *The Holy Wells of Wales*, Cardiff, 1992 ed, (page references below). More than 50 wells, evenly divided between North and South Wales, received offerings of pins in the 19th century (10, 93, 222, map 5.) Brass buckles also were offered at Ffynnon Baruc, Barry Island, Glamorgan (101); needles at Ff Fihangel, Bodfari, Flintshire (179); and, interestingly, *keys* as well as pins were thrown into Ff Saint, Criccieth, Caernarvonshire, on Easter morning, a variant rationalised as a 'solace' for St Catherine, its patron saint (153). Coins also were commonly offered, mainly groats, pennies and farthings (92–3). They were sometimes thrown into the well with the pins, as at Ff Degla, Denbighshire (173), but where the well was closely associated with a church, or had a local guardian, a separate collecting-box was often provided for gifts of money. Coins were however thrown into the water of Ff Farchill, Denbigh (174), and were found when St Non's Well, St Davids, Pembrokeshire, was cleaned in 1825 (210).

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