

EXCAVATIONS AND OBSERVATIONS AT MINSTER COURT AND MINSTER PAVEMENT, MINCING LANE IN THE CITY OF LONDON

Bruce Watson

SUMMARY

The area of study is now occupied by Minster Court and Minster Pavement in the City of London, EC3 (TQ 3326 8082) (Fig 1). It is bounded on the east by Mark Lane, on the south by Great Tower Street, the west by Mincing Lane and, on the north, by Dunster Court. The aim of this paper is to describe and discuss the various archaeological excavations and investigations which have been carried out here from 1856 until the most recent development in 1988–9. Romano-British discoveries include Hadrianic (c.AD 120–130) fire debris and evidence of in-situ burning, plus a small cold plunge-bath of post-Hadrianic date. Saxo-Norman features consist of two sunken floored buildings and finds of this period include a fragment of an 11th-century gilded decorative mount. Medieval features include a number of cellared buildings, stone-lined wells and cesspits. Medieval finds include a decorated London Ware jug, apparently depicting the expulsion of Adam and Eve from Paradise and a small bone or ivory plaque, depicting a winged animal. The identification of this creature is uncertain, it may be a dragon, a griffin or a lion.

INTRODUCTION

The various archaeological excavations and investigations within the study area (defined in the Summary) are presented here in chronological order (sites 1–6) in the first part of the paper (Figs 1, 2). In the second part (Synthesis) the various sites are discussed period-by-period, with

reference to other London sites. The last remaining archaeological deposits within the study area were removed by redevelopment during 1988–89, providing the final chapter in a history of archaeological work spanning 133 years. This most recent phase of archaeological work has been used as an opportunity to bring together, re-appraise and publish the earlier work within this small area of the City of London.

SITE 1, 40 MINCING LANE AND DUNSTER COURT

Redevelopment during 1856 revealed up to c.7.6m depth of archaeological deposits (Fig 2)

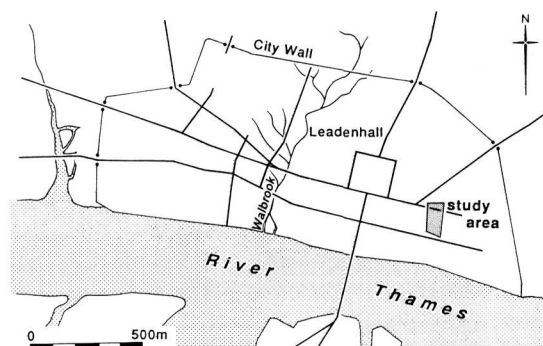


Fig 1. The walled Roman city, showing the location of the study area and road network

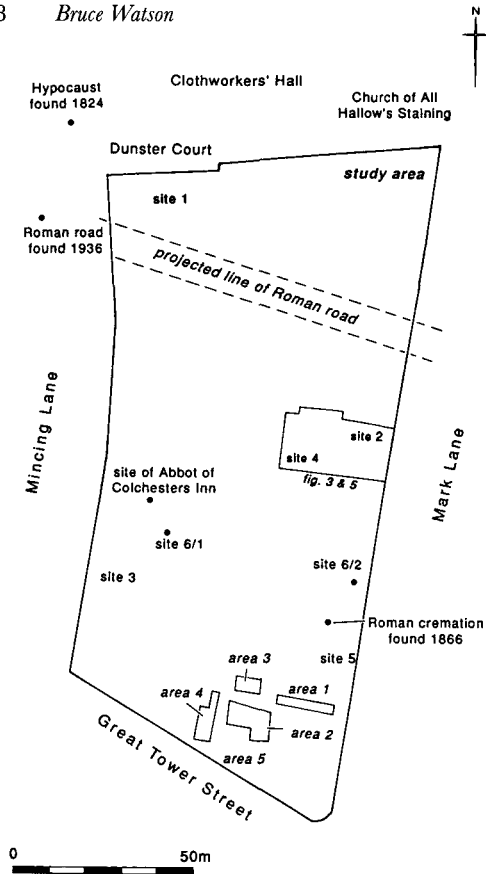


Fig 2. The study area showing sites (1–6) and other buildings and features mentioned in the text. The street frontage is taken from the 1875 OS 1:1056 map

(TQ 3325 8089). At, or near, the base of these deposits were undated chalk, ragstone and ‘cob’ or mudbrick walls or wall foundations. There was also a stone-lined medieval well, containing ‘a small earthen jar ... with green glaze’. These observations suggest that the truncated natural ground surface stood at *c.*9.0m OD. Finds included Roman pottery, human bone and a silver coin of Henry VII.¹

SITE 2, 27 MARK LANE

In 1871, within a yard or garden to the rear of 27 Mark Lane (Fig 2) (TQ 3329 8083), workmen uncovered an area of ‘plain red tessellated Roman pavement’, only 7ft (2.1m) below ground level. The area of the pavement measured 11ft (3.3m) in length by 6ft (1.8m) in width.² It can be estimated that the tessellated pavement stood at *c.*12.5m OD. An engraving, published by the

Illustrated London News,³ shows that the surface of the pavement sloped considerably, possibly due to the partial collapse of the underlying hypocaust pilae – the presence of which was not recorded. Another account of the discovery states that the pavement was found 8ft (2.4m) below ground level and ‘was much broken and pressed out of shape’ and measured about 12ft (3.6m) square.⁴ Associated finds included quern-stones, Romano-British pottery – some of which were sold to visitors – a glass bowl, a glass bead and a bronze key.⁵

SITE 3, 24 MINCING LANE

Rebuilding of the London Commercial Sale Rooms (Fig 2) (TQ 3324 8079) in 1891 revealed at a depth of about 20ft (6.1m) below ground level (estimated level *c.*8.9m OD, a 5ft (1.5m) square, chalk masonry-lined, medieval cesspit, 7ft (2.1m) deep, with a tapered profile, dug into natural sand and gravel.⁶ Finds from the backfill of the cesspit included a wooden bowl, inscribed with the letter J, a dog skull, two eggs (one hen, one duck) and a green glazed, ceramic jug. From the published engraving it appears to be a Surrey whiteware baluster jug of 13th or 14th-century date.⁷

SITE 4, 26–28 MARK LANE AND 28–29 MINCING LANE

During the redevelopment of this site in 1935–36 a watching brief was carried out by Frank Cottrill, Guildhall Museum archaeologist (Cottrill 1936, 255–256). His site records form part of the Museum of London Archaeological Archive (G M.114). The site consisted of a large block fronting onto Mark Lane to the east and Mincing Lane to the west. Most of the recorded archaeological features were within the eastern portion of the site (Fig 2) (TQ 3328 8082), where the existing basement floor stood at 11.9 m OD. Cottrill’s observations were restricted mainly to recording a series of small hand-dug foundation trenches for new stanchion bases, so it is difficult to construct a site-wide stratigraphic sequence from his observations. Instead these discrete observations have been arranged into a series of phases, each made-up of a number of separate, broadly contemporary, events. Truncated

Pleistocene sand and gravel was located at 10.80m OD.

Phase 4/1 dumping of Hadrianic fire debris

In several trenches a 40cm thick layer of dumped red fire debris was found. It consisted of a mass of burnt daub, mud brick (top c.11.4m OD), containing fragments of painted wall plaster and tegulae and imbrex roof tiles – some of which were burnt. In one trench under this debris was a layer (over 20cm) thick of white ‘cement debris’, containing roof tile and one large fragment (c.30cm long) of plain red tesserae. As the tesserae fragment was found upside down, it could mean the ‘cement debris’ should be interpreted as the dumping of demolition material or fire debris. Alternately if the tesserae had been part of the flooring of the first storey of a building on the site, which had collapsed during the fire, this could explain why it was found upside down. Amongst the Hadrianic fire debris found at Watling Court, one deposit, interpreted as the collapsed superstructure of a building, included an upside down fragment of mosaic (Perring and Roskams 1991, 38), which had presumably fallen from an upper storey.

Dating evidence for this period of activity is limited. The fire debris produced sherds of samian Dragendorff (Dr) forms 27 and 33 (late 1st–early 2nd century) and the cement debris one sherd of Dr form 18 or 31 (late 1st to mid 2nd century). Dunning (1945, 57) attributed this activity to the Hadrianic fire of c.AD 120–130, interpreting the debris as the result of the *in-situ* fire destruction of clay and timber buildings.

Phase 4/2 late 2nd-century soil and rubbish dumping

After the dumping of the fire debris, there was a further 50–60cm build-up of dumped soil and domestic rubbish including concentrations of charcoal and oyster shells (top c.11.7m OD). Presumably this material was intended to level up the area before buildings were erected. In many cases most of these later deposits had been truncated by the digging of medieval pits (4/4). Dating evidence for this phase of activity included 2nd-century ‘coarse pottery’ (Dunning 1945, 57) and one sherd of samian Dr 38 – a flanged bowl of late 2nd-century date.

Phase 4/3 the Romano-British masonry building and plunge-bath

Cumulative observations by Cottrill revealed truncated masonry foundations of Romano-British date, interpreted as one small portion of a substantial masonry building including a sunken bath (Fig 3). The full plan of this building is unknown, but it is likely that the tessellated pavement found close by in 1871 represents another part of the same building (site 2).

Construction started with the digging of a series of deep wall foundation trenches – cut into natural sand and gravel. Part of the northern arm of these trenches appears to have been either overdug or misaligned, then backfilled with sandy soil, containing cement and brick/tile fragments (Fig 4). The north wall was 1.80m wide and aligned NW-SE. It was constructed of uncoursed ragstone rubble blocks, bonded by yellow mortar containing small pebbles. The upper portion of this masonry appears to have been robbed out in antiquity and a medieval cellar wall foundation (4/4) rested directly on top of this foundation. Built into the south side of the wall – adjoining the sunken bath and at the same level as the cement floor of the bath – was a red and yellow, two-brick-or-tile (probably tegula) thick string course. Each tile was 32mm thick and up to 28cm long.

Built as part of the same phase of construction as the northern wall, was an adjoining, thinner, L-shaped, southern wall. This wall was only 43 to 46cm wide and of uncertain depth. It is interpreted as the western and southern lining walls of the sunken bath (Figs 3, 4). Examination of the southern arm of the lining wall revealed that its southern or sloping external side was trench-built (basal width 38cm), implying that the bath had simply been created by digging a large rectangular hole. This had probably been dug out at the same time as the northern wall foundation trench, lined with masonry, then floored. The masonry of the south wall was constructed of roughly coursed ragstone rubble blocks, plus one yellow fragment of brick or tile, bonded by yellow mortar, containing small pebbles. Built into the northern or internal side of the wall – at the same level as the bath floor – was a red, two-brick-or-tile (probably broken tegula) thick string course. Each tile was 38mm thick and up to 127mm long. Some 20cm above the string course of the south wall was the probable remains of a second string course –

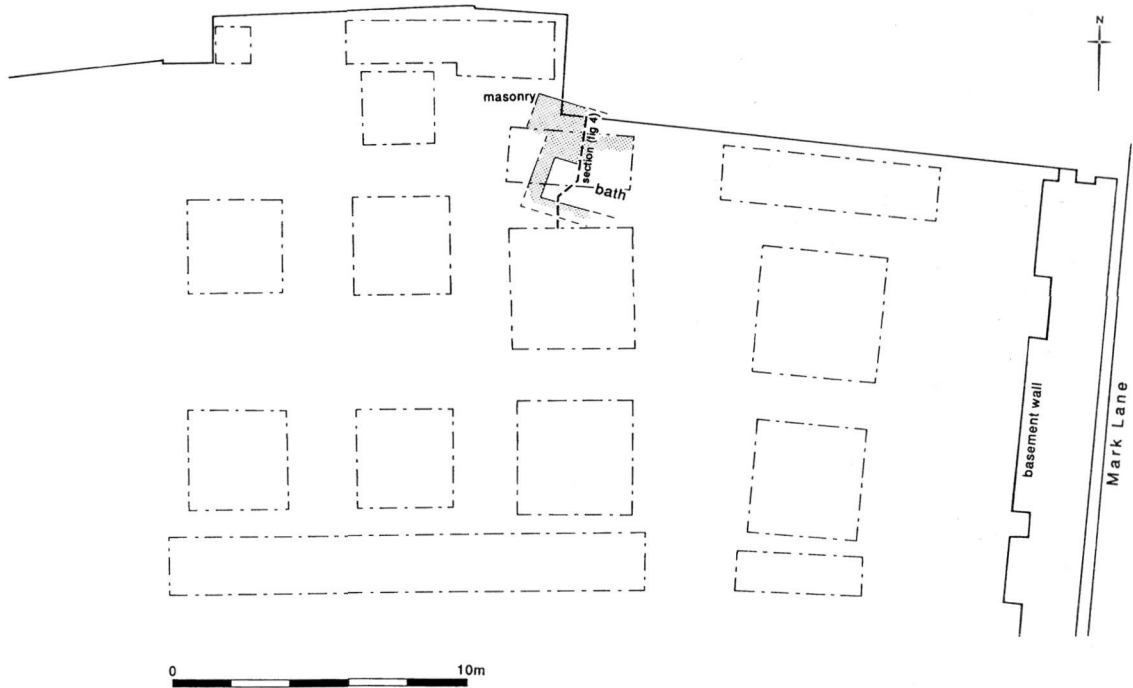


Fig 3. Plan of the Roman walls and plunge-bath found at 26-28 Mark Lane, during 1935-6 (site 4/3), showing the extent of all new foundations and stanchion bases

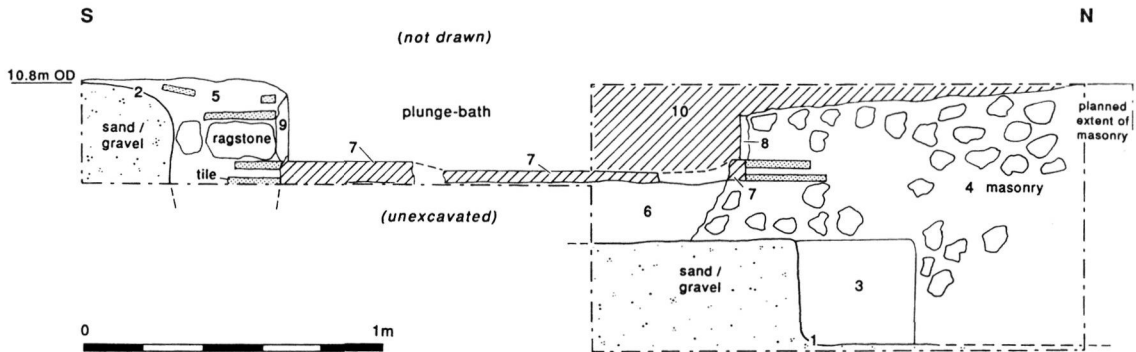


Fig 4. Composite cross-section of the plunge bath at 26-28 Mark Lane (site 4/3). KEY: 1 and 2 construction trench for masonry foundations of bath; 3 sandy soil, containing cement and brick fragments, interpreted as the backfill of an over-dug construction trench; 4 ragstone rubble masonry, bonded by buff-coloured mortar; 5 ragstone rubble masonry, bonded by yellow gritty mortar; 6 unmortared rubble makeup; 7 white cement bath floor; 8 pink plaster (waterproof) lining of bath, with white surface; 9 pink plaster lining of bath, covered by a white plaster skim; 10 undated 'black stony filling' of the bath

consisting of a single brick or tile – 38mm thick and 28cm long.

The rectangular area enclosed by the walls measured 1.52 m N-S and over 1.60m E-W and is interpreted as a sunken bath over 30cm deep. The original depth of the bath is unknown due to the absence of associated floor levels. Below the centre of the bath the natural sand and gravel had been dug out to a depth of c.10.1m

OD, then a 40cm thick layer of unmortared rubble laid down as a foundation for the bath floor. The floor consisted of a layer of white cement, containing brick or tile chips (top surface 10.46m OD) (Fig 4). The thickness of this cement floor varied from 127mm at the south side to only 50mm in the centre and 89mm at the north side. The reduced thickness in the centre may be due to the removal of stone or tile paving

originally set into the upper portion of the cement. To ensure that there was a waterproof joint between the bath floor and the adjoining walls, it had been laid at the same level as the basal string courses of the adjoining walls (described earlier). The sides of the bath were waterproofed by the application of a layer (c.40mm thick) of pink plaster (laid over the edges of the cement floor to make a waterproof joint), finished with a thin skim of fine white plaster (Fig 4). At some unknown date the bath was backfilled with 'black stony soil', possibly this backfilling happened after the robbing out or partial removal of the bath floor and the upper part of the surrounding masonry.

There are no associated finds to date either the construction or the abandonment of the bath and its surrounding masonry. It appears to have been of only a single phase of construction, without any later modifications. However, it is probable that the building was not constructed until after the levelling up of the site during the late 2nd century (4/2), therefore it is tentatively suggested that the building was constructed

during either the late 2nd or 3rd century. The interpretation of the building is discussed in the synthesis below.

Phase 4/4 medieval pits, buildings and a well

Dug into the Romano-British deposits (4/1 and 4/2) were a number of medieval cess or rubbish pits, plus one circular chalk masonry lined well, with an internal diameter of 90cm. The remains of five medieval cellared buildings found at 26–28 Mark Lane, were all of 13th to 16th-century date on stylistic grounds. Structural survival varied from truncated foundations below existing basement level to upstanding masonry preserved by incorporation into later cellar walls (Fig 5).

Medieval building 4/4a consisted of two separate, truncated blocks of mortared chalk rubble masonry containing occasional fragments of ragstone and peg-tile (Fig 5). These two blocks are interpreted as part of the same structure,

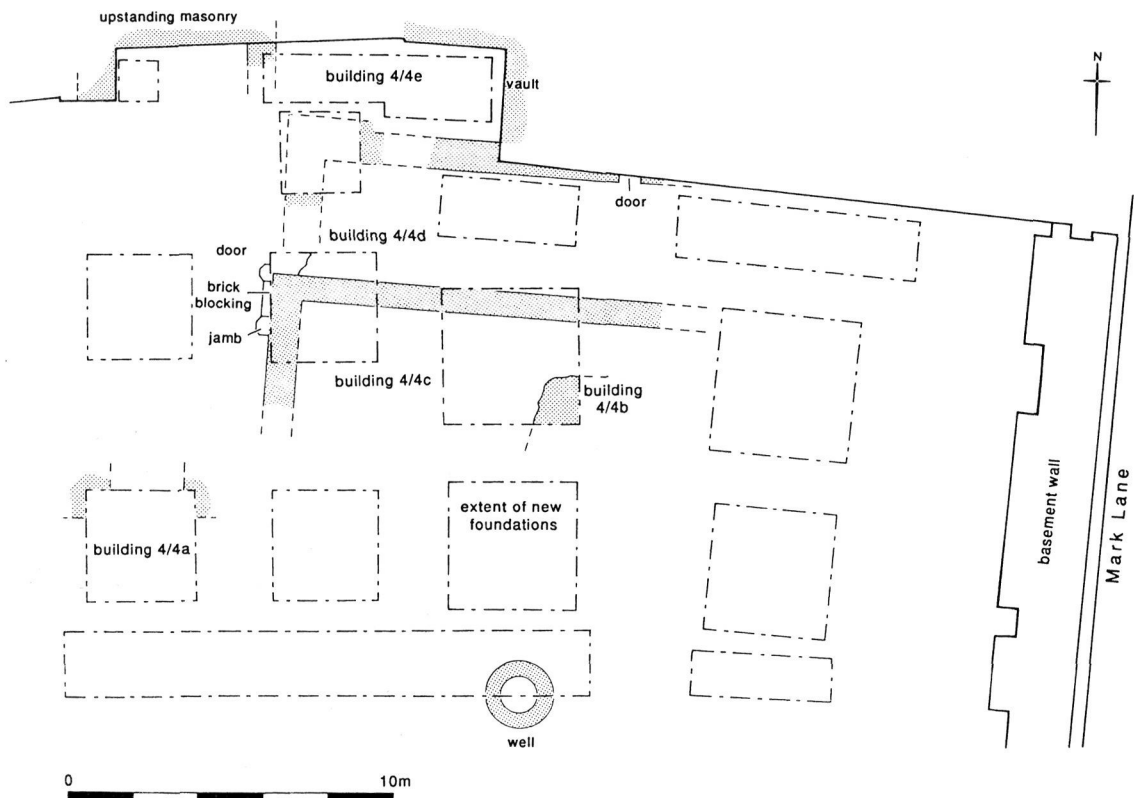


Fig 5. Composite plan of the medieval walls and well found at 26–28 Mark Lane (site 4/3)

possibly they are the truncated remains of a relieving arch for an E-W cellar wall. Nearby were found a number of moulded stones.

Medieval building 4/4b consisted of a massive, block of mortared chalk and ragstone rubble masonry, interpreted as a free-standing pier base (Fig 5).

Medieval building 4/4c consisted of the north and west walls of a large cellared building fronting onto Mark Lane, building 4/4b possibly represents part of an earlier building on this plot. The walls were 76cm wide, constructed of mortared chalk rubble masonry, containing some peg-tile. In the north-east corner of the cellar were the chamfered stone jambs of a doorway, the door was blocked with modern masonry (Fig 5).

Medieval building 4/4d consisted of a large cellar (internal width 3.61m) probably built-up against the adjoining one (4/4c). The walls were constructed of mortared chalk and ragstone rubble masonry, varying in width from 117 to 130cm. In the north wall of this cellar was a door with a four-centred stone arch, probably of 16th-century date (Fig 5). The door jambs had been rebuilt in brick. Adjoining the door were fragments of standing masonry (over 1.6m high, the inward curve of the cellar vault begun 1.30m above the existing basement floor).

Medieval building 4/4e consisted of two areas of upstanding masonry, including the stub of a N-S cellar wall and a section of vaulting, incorporated into the walls of the present basement (Fig 5). It was constructed of squared ragstone facing blocks with a chalk rubble core, bonded by light brown mortar containing chalk flecks. Later additions or repairs were all brickwork.

SITE 5 71-80 GREAT TOWER STREET AND 37-41 MARK LANE

The excavation of five areas in the south-east corner of the study area during 1949-50 (Fig 2) (TQ 3328 8074) was one of the many archaeological investigations directed by the late Professor Grimes on bomb sites within the City of London in advance of redevelopment between 1946-1968. An interim report on the site was included in Grimes's volume on his London work (1968, 123-124). The excavation is referred to as WFG 52 in the Grimes archive, held by the Museum of London. This account of the excavation has been compiled from the original site records.⁸

Due to the depth of the existing basements, archaeological survival – except in Area Three – was restricted to truncated features dug into natural geology. Due to the limited dating evidence (the result of both the partial excavation of some trenches and the loss of some finds), it has been difficult to construct a precise site-wide stratigraphic sequence. Instead the five areas have been arranged into a series of phases, each made up of a number of separate broadly contemporary events. Natural geology consisted of Pleistocene sand and gravel (estimated top c.11.0m OD), sealed by natural brickearth (estimated top c.12.0m OD).⁹ In Area One it is possible that there were traces of a subsoil horizon above the natural brickearth (Fig 6).

Phase 5/1 pre-Hadrianic features

In Area One a large brickearth quarry pit had been dug out and partly backfilled with gravelly soil and domestic rubbish (Fig 6). In Area Four a

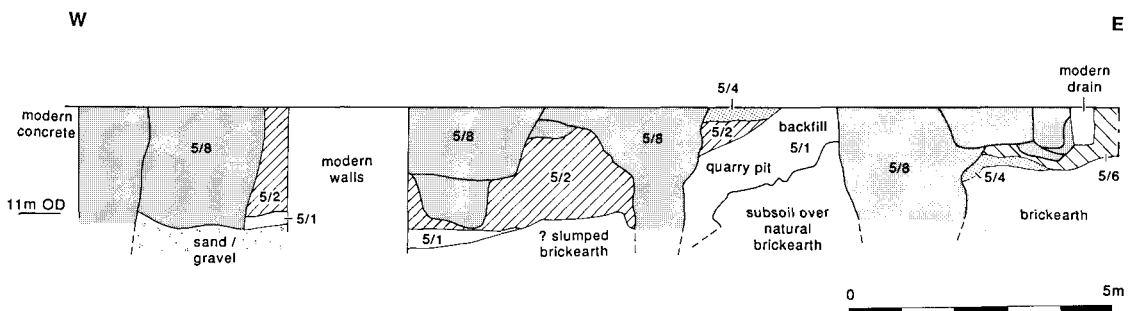


Fig 6. South facing section of Area One (site 5). The numbers refer to the site phasing

flat-bottomed ditch (width 1.22m, depth c.90cm), aligned NW-SE, had been dug. A series of timber slots along its northern side are interpreted as part of an internal revetment. Within the base of the ditch was a posthole. Both these features are considered to pre-date the Hadrianic fire (5/2) on stratigraphic grounds and are probably of late 1st or early 2nd-century date.

Phase 5/2 the Hadrianic fire

In Area Three the natural brickearth had been reddened by *in-situ* burning (implying the existence of buildings) (Fig 7). This burnt horizon was then sealed by a mass of burnt clay or daub, mortar, unburnt and burnt brickearth, possibly a mixture of burnt and collapsed clay and timber buildings and dumped brickearth. Finds from these deposits date to AD 100–120.¹⁰ Grimes suggested that the *in-situ* burning might be part of the Boudiccan fire of AD 60, but the dating confirms that it is part of the Hadrianic fire of c.AD 120–130. The partly infilled quarry pit in Area One was completely backfilled with up to 1.5m depth of ‘red burnt clay ... It should be added that this burnt material was not due to fire on the spot ... it had clearly been re-sorted and redeposited’ (Grimes 1968, 124). The ditch in Area Four was also backfilled with dumped fire debris (5/1).

Phase 5/3 land allotment

After the Hadrianic fire (5/2) a series of linear gullies aligned either NW-SE or N-S were dug across Areas Two, Three and Four (Fig 7). Residual finds from the backfill of these gullies

date to AD 50–100 and 100–120. A number of associated postholes found in Area Two may represent fence lines. These gullies are interpreted as a phase of land allotment, probably marking out potential building plots. The only possible structural evidence was a N-S slot in Area Four, backfilled with brickearth, containing finds dating to AD 100–120. This phase of activity probably dates to c.AD 130–160.

Phase 5/4 soil dumping and external surfaces

In Area Three, the infilled gullies were sealed by dumped brickearth. The brickearth contained finds dating to AD 120–160. The brickearth was in turn later sealed by the dumping of ‘black soil’ mixed with ‘grey stony soil’, containing frequent tile fragments (Fig 7). Finds from these deposits included a Verulamium region white ware mortarium sherd stamped with LUGVDV or LUGUD (AD 70–100). Another unstratified Verulamium region white ware mortarium sherd is stamped with ?MARINUS (AD 70–110). These deposits are interpreted as dumps of domestic rubbish. Grimes (1968, 124) noted that these deposits included ‘a sequence of surfaces with occupation debris which incorporated many amphora fragments as well as broken tiles and stones’. In the absence of any walls these surfaces are interpreted as pathways or yards. In Area Four a series of gravel layers are thought to be either yard surfaces or a trackway.

Phase 5/5 further land allotment

In Area Three two gullies were dug across the external surfaces and dumps of domestic rubbish

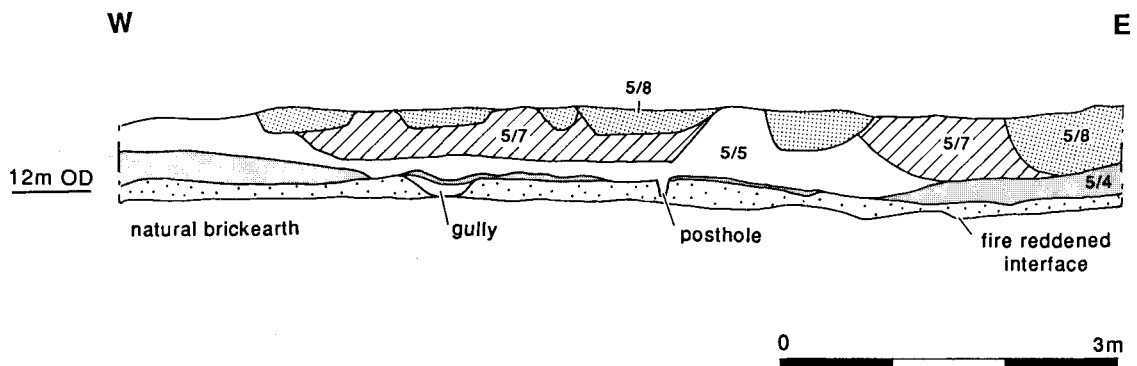


Fig 7. South facing section of Area Three (site 5)

(5/4). One was aligned SW-NE and the other NW-SE – at right angles to one another. A small gap between the two gullies may have been an entrance into a property unit or enclosure. A number of postholes, either within, or, flanking the gullies probably represent fencelines. Three oval features possibly represent postpits. These features are interpreted as a second phase of land allotment, possibly of late 2nd or 3rd-century date. Later these features were sealed by brickearth dumping, containing residual finds dating to AD 100–120. This dumping may have been intended to raise the ground level to create a level building plot, but no trace of any buildings was recorded. One unstratified find from Area Three was a 3rd-century copper alloy Roman coin.

Phase 5/6 late Roman pits

In Areas One, Two, Four and Five a series of rubbish pits were dug during the 3rd or 4th century (Fig 6). The backfill of these pits were ‘sands, clays and gravels which were stained and discoloured by humic matter and often contained much charcoal in the form of tiny flecks’ (Grimes 1968, 123). All the finds from these pits were residual, except one context dating to AD 270–400. The absence of pits from Area Three may be due to the fact that this area was inhabited during the period (5/5).

Phase 5/7 Saxo-Norman sunken floored buildings

In Area Three were portions of two truncated, rectangular parallel features or hollows, 1.20m apart, aligned N-S. The full length of these features was not determined. The western feature had an E-W width of 3.65m, a depth of 46cm, with moderately sloping sides and a flat base (Fig 7). It was backfilled with ‘dark buff (yellow brown) stony loam’ containing ‘clay’ with a basal fill of black organic silt or charcoal. The eastern feature was over 1.50m wide E-W, it was 53cm deep with a moderately sloping western side and flat base. Its basal fill was ‘grey loam’, containing charcoal, overlain by ‘buff loam’, sealed by ‘black soil’. All finds from these two features are residual Romano-British material (AD 70–140). Grimes (1968, 124) interpreted the two features as Romano-British ‘hut-hollows’, they are now reinterpreted as sunken-floored buildings of Saxo-

Norman date (AD 900–1100) for two reasons. Firstly, while no Saxo-Norman pottery was found within their fills, these two features are earlier than the medieval pits (phase 5/8). Secondly, on stylistic grounds, since the features are very similar to a number of Saxo-Norman sunken-floored buildings, excavated in London since the 1970s. Also, the width of the western building (3.65m) matches very closely the width of c.3.4 to 3.7m of a number of excavated Saxo-Norman sunken-floored buildings (Horsman *et al* 1988, 68).

One unstratified find from the 1949–50 excavations is a fragment of copper alloy gilded plate, decorated with concentric lines, to which was attached a fragment of cloth. This object is a fragment of an 11th-century Anglo-Scandinavian decorative mount.¹¹ Originally the mount was probably attached to a piece of furniture or a casket.

Phase 5/8 Medieval pits and other features

Numerous rectangular or oval shaped rubbish or cesspits, probably of 10th to 14th-century date were found in all areas. The backfill of these was of ‘a consistently black, mixed clayey content, which was evidently heavily organic and made up of decayed domestic refuse’ (Grimes 1968, 123). Other medieval features included a barrel lined well or soakaway (diameter 1.19m), a mortared chalk rubble wall foundation or pier base, and a rectangular chalk rubble lined cesspit, with an internal brick dividing wall.

The 1950–53 redevelopment of the entire study area produced a unique 13th-century London ware jug, which unfortunately is unstratified. The jug is decorated with three stylised human figures and two animals, a dog and a serpent.¹² Illustrations of the jug have been published by Dunning (1971, 3) and Cherry (1985, 9). The human and animal figures on the jug were interpreted by Dunning (1971) as a troupe of entertainers and a brothel scene. Reassessment of this jug by Cherry (1985, 8–10) suggests that the scene represents the expulsion of Adam and Eve from Paradise (Genesis Ch 3).

SITE 6 1988–89 REDEVELOPMENT OF DUNSTER HOUSE, COLONIAL HOUSE, MARKET BUILDINGS AND KING’S BEAM HOUSE

During 1988–89 all the buildings within the study area, erected during the 1950s, were

demolished and the entire area redeveloped. The archaeological potential of the site was very limited due to the depth of the existing single and double basements. Archaeological coverage, therefore, was limited to a watching brief to record any features uncovered during underpinning of the perimeter and ground reduction across the entire site. The most significant archaeological features discovered were two medieval wells, dug into natural sand and gravel (Watson 1989, 2-3).

6/1 Medieval well at 21 Mincing Lane

The truncated stone-lined well was circular in shape, with an internal diameter of *c.*1.30m and an external diameter of *c.*2.35m. Only the basal 1.25m survived below the existing basement floor (Fig 2, 8). The lining wall was constructed of coursed chalk rubble masonry, bonded by light brown sandy mortar. The internal face of the lower portion of the lining was vertical, but the upper portion curved inwards, suggesting that the interior was cone shaped. In the centre of

the well base was a mass of compact mortar and crushed chalk fragments, interpreted as construction debris.

The well was infilled with a series of laminated, fibrous, organic silts – derived from decayed cess and organic rubbish – interleaved with dumps of wood ash. Possibly the well was converted into a cesspit as it may not have been deep enough to reach the permanent water-table. Finds from the backfill of the well included a small bone or ivory plaque and sherds of locally made London and Surrey white ware (Kingston-type ware) jugs of late 13th or 14th-century date, plus part of soot encrusted Border ware cooking pot or bowl of 13th or 14th-century date. There were also sherds of several Saintonge ware jugs (1250-1500).¹³ The well was probably constructed during the 12th or early 13th-century and backfilled during the late 13th or 14th century.

The Mincing Lane bone or ivory plaque

The complete, openwork, diamond shaped plaque (Fig 9) is made of either walrus ivory or

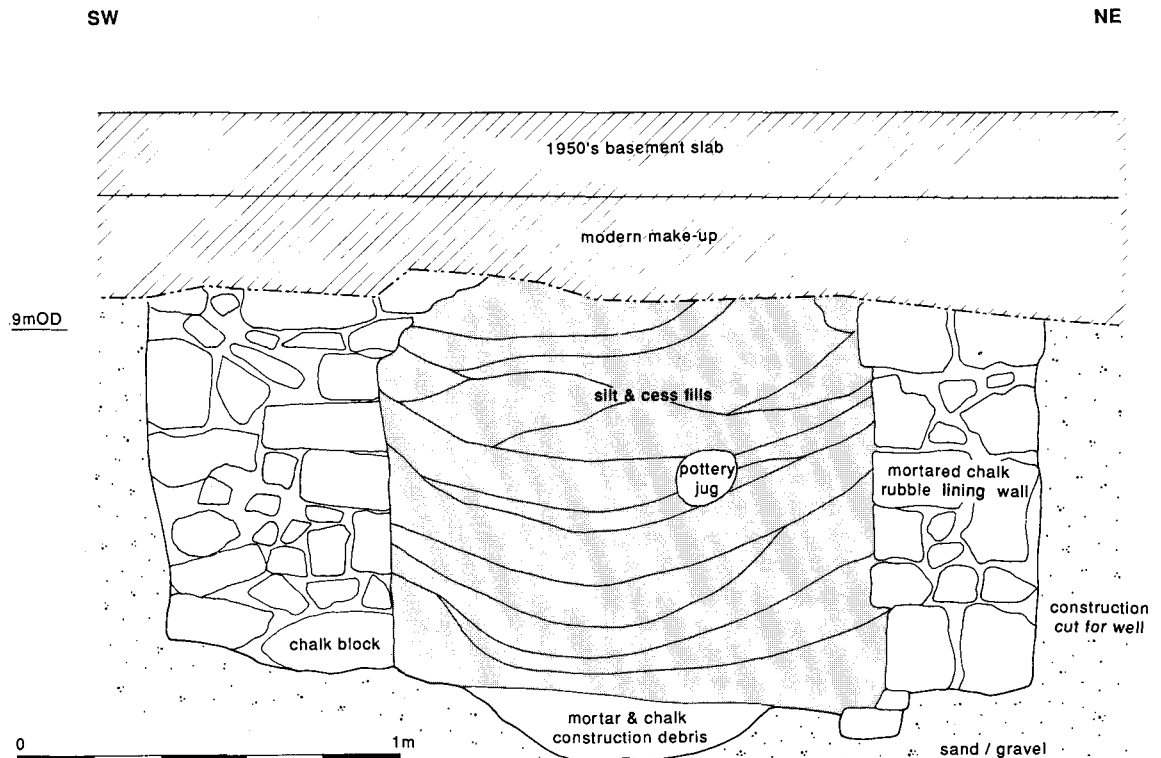


Fig 8. South-east facing section of medieval well (site 6/1)



Fig 9. *The Mincing Lane medieval bone or ivory plaque (scale 1:1)*

Cetacean bone. It depicts a winged animal in an upright pose, with outspread wings; its head is facing forwards and below its feet is a short tail. Some of the spaces between the animal and the frame have been cut away, while others have been retained. In the frame are two small fastening holes. A number of art historians and authorities on medieval ivory carvings have studied the plaque. These are their opinions:

Dr Ian Riddler, Department of Urban Archaeology, Museum of London. The animal is a griffin – a mythical creature with an eagle's head and wings and a lion's body. The size and shape of the plaque suggests that it was originally set on a manuscript cover. It is of 12th or 13th-century date (31/1/89).

Mr Paul Williamson, Department of Sculpture, Victoria and Albert Museum, London. The animal is a winged lion, not a griffin as it has a mane and no beak. The winged lion is the emblem of St Mark one of the four evangelists. The fastening holes suggest that originally the plaque was mounted on a larger object such as a manuscript cover. It is of 13th or 14th-century date (5/2/91).

Professor Else Roesdahl, Moesgard, Institut for Middelalder Arkaeologi, Højbjerg, Denmark. She knows of no parallels for the Mincing Lane ivory plaque. It is probably made from Cetacean bone, as it is too large to be carved from a walrus tusk (29/9/93).

Dr Martin Blindheim, Oslo, Norway. The animal appears to be a winged lion and is probably of 14th-century date (6/12/93).

Dr Lennart Karlsson, Statens Historiska Museum, Stockholm, Sweden. The animal is probably a dragon – because of the type of wings. The plaque is probably of 14th-century date and the style of the work suggests that it was probably not produced in Scandinavia, but in southern Europe (6/12/93).

Dr Erla Bergendahl Hohler, Department of Archaeology, Numismatics and History of Art, University of Oslo. The animal is not a lion, as it seems to have no front legs. It looks more like a dragon (4/8/94).

There is no consensus amongst the experts about the type of winged animal depicted on the plaque, it could be a dragon, a griffin or a lion. Alternately it could be one of the many mythical creatures which occur in English Romanesque sculpture (Zarnecki *et al* 1984, 149–192). One reason why the plaque may not depict the emblem of St Mark is that, in medieval art, his symbol normally has feathered, rather than bat or dragon wings. However, there is general agreement that the plaque is of 13th or 14th-century date, which fits with the date of the associated pottery. Where the plaque was produced is uncertain. Documentary evidence suggests that during the 13th and 14th centuries London did not have a large ivory carving industry, whereas Paris was a more important centre for the ivory trade at this period (Stratford 1987, 108–109). As there was a very cosmopolitan population in medieval London it is possible that the plaque was brought to London from Europe.

6/2 Medieval well at King's Beam House, 30–41 Mark Lane

This truncated stone-lined well was circular in shape, it had an internal diameter of 1.00m and an external diameter of c.1.55m, at least 1.70m of depth survived below the existing basement floor (Fig 2). The lining wall was constructed of close-jointed, coursed chalk blocks bonded by light brown sandy mortar. On stylistic grounds

the well is of 13th to 16th-century date. It was backfilled during the 17th or 18th century with ash and clinker, which included many coal fragments.

SYNTHESIS

Topography and geology

The natural ground surface of the study area slopes slightly from west to east, away from the natural plateau of the Leadenhall area on the east side of the Walbrook stream (Fig 1). Pleistocene sand and gravel was located at 10.80m OD (Site 4) and c.11.0 m OD, the top of the overlying brickearth is estimated to have been c. 12.0m OD (Site 5).

Pre-Hadrianic activity

The earliest Romano-British features within the study area were a length of ditch and a brickearth quarry pit (5/1). These are of late 1st or very early 2nd-century date, as both were backfilled with debris from the Hadrianic fire (4/1, 5/2). The scarcity of pre-Hadrianic features within the study area is probably due to the limited nature of the various archaeological investigations. For instance, excavations to the south-west of the study area at 1–4 Great Tower Street in 1989 revealed late 1st-century clay and timber buildings (Spence and Grew 1989, 18). The discovery in 1866 of an early Roman urn-cremation burial at 36 Mark Lane (within the study area) (RCHM 1928, 155), suggests that this area was on the eastern limits of late 1st-century Roman London (Fig 2). However, the scarcity of evidence and the single cremation burial have been interpreted as implying that the eastern limit of 1st-century Roman London probably lay somewhere between Mark and Mincing Lane (Merrifield 1983, 51; Perring 1991, 15). Excavations at 86 Fenchurch Street (to the east of the study area) in 1981 revealed a succession of open areas and buildings dating from between AD 60 and 80 (Upson, 1981), which confirms that at least some sites east of the study area were already settled by the late 1st century.

The Hadrianic fire

Evidence from a large number of sites in the City show that London was devastated by a

major conflagration during the Hadrianic period (c.AD 120–130) (Dunning 1945). Dunning (1945, 57) interpreted the fire debris found at 26–28 Mark Lane (4/1) as *in-situ* destruction of clay and timber buildings. However, reassessment of the site records suggests that most of this material was probably dumped here. What is not certain is if this dumped fire debris was derived from buildings on site or was brought here for disposal. Grimes's excavations located dumped fire debris and, in one instance (Area Three), *in-situ* burning (5/2), sealed by fire debris and dated to AD 100–120. In 1936 on the west side of Mincing Lane (nos 4–8), the remains of a cement-floored, clay and timber building were found, which was apparently destroyed during the Hadrianic fire (Dunning 1945, 57).

In a reassessment of the evidence for the Hadrianic fire it was considered probable that the fire debris found at 4–8 Mincing Lane and at 26–28 Mark Lane (4/1), were both the result of *in-situ* fire destruction (Roskams and Watson 1981, 63). The discovery of *in-situ* burning at only one location between Mark and Mincing Lane (5/2) suggests that there were few buildings in this area at the time of the fire and during the post-fire reconstruction, burnt debris was carted here for disposal from the area of denser settlement further west.

It should be noted that the dating evidence for this fire was largely derived from the samian found within the fire debris at Regis House during 1929–31 (Dunning 1945, 53). Now this site has been excavated by the Museum of London Archaeology Service (MoLAS) the dating evidence for the fire is going to be re-assessed. Archaeomagnetic dating by MoLAS's Clark Laboratory of two burnt mud brick walls at Regis House produced dates of AD 110–130 and 130–180 (Brigham and Watson 1996, 64).

Second and third-century land allotment and occupation

Soon after the Hadrianic fire, a series of linear gullies (5/3) were dug across the southern part of the study area. Most of these were either aligned at right-angles or were parallel to the projected line of the Roman road which ran E-W across the northern part of the study area (Fig 1, 2). Gravel road metalling was located at 4–8 Mincing Lane in 1936 (Merrifield 1965,

292), but the road has never been located either within the study area or further east.¹⁴

The linear gullies or small ditches are interpreted as a period of land allotment, probably marking out potential building plots. At Leadenhall Court, on the site of the second Roman basilica, a series of linear gullies of mid 1st-century date, represent enclosures and property boundaries (Milne and Wardle 1993, 29–30). At Austin Friars, during the late 2nd century, before buildings were constructed on the site, a series of linear gullies interpreted as property boundaries were dug (Watson, 1994, 18).

The only possible structural evidence associated with the gullies was one linear slot, which may have marked the wall-line of a cob or clay-lump walled building (5/3). The gullies were sealed by brickearth dumping and external surfaces, probably yards or trackways (5/4) of late 2nd-century date. During the 2nd or 3rd century there was another phase of gully-digging followed by further brickearth dumping (5/5).

The Romano-British masonry building

At some time after the Hadrianic fire, possibly during the late 2nd or 3rd century, on the south side of the projected road, a masonry building was constructed (Fig 2, 3). Both the date and plan of this building are uncertain as only two elements of it have been located. First, an area of plain tessellated pavement (site 2), with possibly an unrecorded hypocaust below, was found, but there were no associated masonry walls. Secondly, there was a small sunken, stone-lined, cement floored, cold plunge-bath (internal width 1.52m, length over 1.60m, depth over 30cm) (4/3). The wide masonry foundation on the north side of the bath may have supported either a water-tank (to supply the bath) or an external wall.¹⁵ It is probable that the plunge-bath formed part of the cold room (*frigidarium*) within a bath suite, which would have also included warm (*tepidarium*) and hot (*caldarium*) rooms. Such a bath suite would presumably have been private and been part of a substantial town house. The presence nearby of a tessellated pavement supports this interpretation. If there was a hypocaust under the tessellated pavement then it could have served part of the bath suite, possibly the *tepidarium*. There is no evidence that the bath suite was rebuilt or altered so perhaps it was only in use for a short period. Many bath

suites had a complex history of alteration. For instance, at Lullingstone Villa, Kent, the cold plunge-bath was reconstructed twice and refloored three times during a period of c.200 years (Meates 1979, 93–94). The discovery of a hypocaust in Mincing Lane, outside the Clothworkers' Hall in 1824 suggests the existence nearby of another masonry town house on the north side of the projected road (RCHM 1928, 134) (Fig 2).

In 1866 a portion of a decorated, ceramic, hypocaust flue-tile with mortar adhering to it, was found in Mark Lane.¹⁶ Its style of stamped decoration was described by Lowther (1948, 12) as an example of 'florid' design, on account of the ornate mass of tendrils and buds, in his corpus of decorated flue-tiles (group 3, die 8). This stamped decoration is also classified as 'die 8' in a new corpus of Romano-British tile stamps and examples of this die are also known from the *mansio* baths (dating to AD 130–150) at Chelmsford, Essex (Betts *et al* 1997, 76). It is possible that this tile was discovered on or near the site of the masonry building, if the tile was found at 36 Mark Lane which was being redeveloped in 1866, but as the find spot is unknown this suggestion cannot be confirmed.

The Mark Lane plunge-bath is one of three examples of small square, rectangular or quadrilateral baths known within the Roman city of London. The small size of the four examples suggests that each formed part of modest, private bath suites.¹⁷ In 1895 a square plunge-bath was found at 63 Threadneedle Street (internal dimensions 1.72 by 1.72m). It was lined with ragstone rubble masonry 'mixed with many broken flanged roof tiles'. One lining wall was founded on a string course of tegulae.¹⁸ Internally the bath was lined with 'plaster' and floored with *opus signinum*. In one corner of the bath was a set of semi-circular steps (Norman and Reader 1906, 218–219). In 1905 a quadrilateral plunge-bath (internal dimensions 1.90 by 3.20m) was discovered at Cannon Street. It had brick or tile-built lining walls and was both lined and floored internally with *opus signinum*. In one corner of the bath was a set of steps (Norman and Reader 1906, 215).

Merrifield (1983, 84–85) suggested that the Cannon Street and Mark Lane plunge-baths were both large enough to have been part of public bath-houses. However, the relatively small size of these plunge-baths does suggest that they were part of private, rather than public, facilities.

It has been suggested that the small semi-circular, 2nd-century, Pudding Lane, plunge-bath (length *c.*2.70m, width *c.*1.40m) might have been part of a bath suite attached to a waterfront inn (Milne 1985, 139–140). Within Roman London there are a number of examples of bath suites with larger plunge-baths than the above examples (Rowsome forthcoming). For instance, the Lime Street plunge-bath measures 2.54 by 3.50m internally (Marsden 1987, 132), while the plunge-baths at Cheapside measure 2.3 by 4.3m internally (Marsden 1976, 32–34). The Cheapside baths were originally interpreted as a public facility, but it has been suggested recently that they might have been part of a large private facility (Perring 1991, 73). The internal dimensions of the late 2nd-century plunge-bath at Lullingstone Villa, Kent are 2.44 by 3.20m (Meates 1979, 93). At the time (*c.*AD 180) when the bath suite was added to the villa it already possessed 12 rooms. It is worth considering that the number of small bath suites within Roman London could have been due to the absence of a large-scale public facility within the city, after the demolition (during the mid to late 2nd century) of the of the huge bath house at Huggin Hill (Rowsome forthcoming).

Late Roman pits

The last phase of Romano-British activity in the study area was the digging of a number of rubbish pits (5/6). The backfill of one of these pits dated to AD 270–400. It is probable that during this period the masonry building (4/3) was abandoned and the plunge-bath infilled.

The Saxo-Norman buildings, streets and finds

The walled Roman city was reoccupied and refortified during the late 9th or early 10th century (Dyson 1990). During the 10th and 11th centuries a series of new roads aligned N-S were laid out to link the re-established harbour with the city centre (Steedman *et al* 1992, 123–128). It is probable that both Mark and Mincing Lane formed part of this Saxo-Norman (AD 900–1100) street grid. Mark or 'Marthe' (Martha's) Lane is first documented in *c.*1200 and Mincing Lane (the lane of the nuns), is first documented in 1189 (Ekwall 1954, 120; 129). Stow suggested

that the nuns of St Helen's Bishopsgate (founded 1212) held property here and gave the street its name (Wheatley 1956, 121). However, as the street is documented earlier than St Helen's, the existence of an undocumented community of nuns or recluses in the area is implied (Ekwall 1954, 120). The exact date when the study area was reoccupied is not known, but it is likely to be later than the main focus of initial resettlement in the Queenhithe, Billingsgate and East Cheap area which was reoccupied *c.*AD 900–950 (Horsman *et al* 1988, 112; Ayre *et al* 1996, 19–20). Excavations at Leadenhall Court (to the west of the study area) confirm that this site was not reoccupied until *c.*AD 950–1000 (Milne 1992, 37).

Saxo-Norman occupation is represented by two sunken floored buildings (5/7) and a number of (undated) medieval rubbish or cesspits (4/4, 5/8). Other Saxo-Norman sunken floored buildings have been discovered within the City. The plans of most of these are fragmentary, but nine examples are square or rectangular; all were lined internally with post and plank walls. The majority of these buildings were between 3.0 and 5.0m wide, compared with one of the Mark Lane examples at 3.65m. The length of the buildings varied from *c.*4.5 to *c.*13.4m, and the original depth varied from 41cm to 2.3m (Horsman *et al* 1988, 68).

One unstratified find from the 1949–50 excavations was a fragment of an 11th-century Anglo-Scandinavian gilded decorative mount (5/7), only the third example known from London, the other two coming from Smithfield (Webster 1984, 103).

The medieval cellared buildings and other features

Fragments of five medieval cellared buildings were found, fronting on to Mark Lane (4/4) (Fig 5). On stylistic grounds all the cellars are of 13th to 16th-century date. However, some cellars obviously remained in use during the post-medieval period since fragments were found incorporated into the standing buildings on site. The ground storey of the associated medieval buildings may also have been stone-built, but the upper storeys would have been timber-framed. In *c.*1957 a complete cellar or undercroft, probably of late 13th or 14th-century date, was found at 50 Mark Lane (on the east side of the street). Its walls were *c.*75cm thick, with internal

facings of squared chalk blocks and chalk and flint rubble cores (Harris 1958).

To the north of the study area stood the church of All Hallows Staining (Fig 2) which was documented by 1170–97 (Carlin and Belcher 1989, 64). The medieval church, apart from its tower, was demolished during the 19th century. A survey of the tower in 1993 by Richard Lea of English Heritage has established that the earliest standing fabric is probably of early 14th-century date (Schofield 1994, 89).

Broadly contemporary with the medieval cellared buildings were four stone-lined wells (1, 4/4, 6/1, 6/2), one barrel-lined well or soakaway (5/8), two stone-lined cesspits (3, 5/8), plus a number of rubbish or cesspits (4/4, 5/8). Many of the pits were closely spaced or intercut each other (Fig 6). The density of pits was greatest within the areas some distance back from the medieval street frontage, suggesting that the centre portion of the study area was probably an open-space for most of the medieval period. On the Agas map of London (c.1562) all the street frontage around the study area is shown as built-up, although quite large areas of the interior were still open (Fisher 1981, plate 10). One of the wells was later used as a cesspit during the late 13th or 14th century (6/1) and contained the bone or ivory plaque, depicting a winged animal, variously interpreted as a dragon, a griffin or a lion (Fig 9). This well stood on the approximate site of the Abbot of Colchester's Inn or town house in Mincing Lane (Carlin and Belcher 1989, 69) which the abbot acquired in c.1230 (Kingsford 1916, 93).

CONCLUSIONS

The six sites discussed here were all relatively small-scale pieces of work; only Site 5 consisted of a series of excavated trenches. Three of the sites are antiquarian observations between 1856–91, reflecting the fact that much of the City's archaeology was destroyed during this period by the digging of deep basements. It should also be noted that the accounts of the antiquarian work given here are a re-interpretation of many of the discoveries and not just a gazetteer. For instance, the medieval stone-lined cesspit found on Site 3 was originally published as a 'square pot hole' of Romano-British date (RCHM 1928, 134).

Antiquarian finds from the study area are also

worth re-appraisal, the decorated flue-tile from Mark Lane, for instance, can now be dated and placed within a national corpus, thanks to the work of Ian Betts. These two examples illustrate the scope for re-examining antiquarian observations and finds from the City on a systematic basis to see what they have to contribute to current work.

The more recent archaeological investigations within the study area (sites 4, 5 and 6) were also relatively small-scale, yet each produced significant new information, and two produced medieval finds – the gilded mount and the ivory plaque – both of which are objects of national interest.

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The 1988–89 work (MCT88) was undertaken by the Department of Urban Archaeology of the Museum of London. The site was negotiated by Marie Nally, DUA Excavations Officer and funded by Prudential Portfolio Managers Ltd. Dick Bluer and Dave Lawrence recorded the two wells; Julie Edwards spotted the medieval pottery, and the plaque was found by James Mathews, one of the site engineers.

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Figs 1 to 8 were drawn by Kikar Singh of the MoLAS drawing office, and Fig 9 was drawn by Nigel Harris of the DUA.

NOTES

¹ *Archaeol Journal* 1856, 13, p274. Procs at the meeting of Archaeol Institute, 4 April 1856.

² *The Illustrated London News* 13 May 1871, p470.

³ *ibid.*

⁴ *Journal of British Archaeol Assoc* 1871, 27, p387. Procs of the Assoc, 26 April 1871.

⁵ *Journal of British Archaeol Assoc* 1871, 27, p514. Procs of the Assoc, 24 May 1871.

⁶ *Daily Graphic* 21 October 1891, p12.

⁷ *ibid.*

⁸ The excavations at WFG 52 occupied four trenches or areas, plus one small separate area: 'G cutting' an area of intercutting pits in the south-west corner of the site, this is described here as Area Five. As the exact position of Area Five was never plotted on the trench location plan its extent is not shown on Fig 2.

⁹ The OD levels of natural geology are estimated from local observations, as it has not proved possible to determine the precise level of all the pre-War basements covering the area – from which all depth measurements were made during the 1949–50 excavation. During 1988–89 (site 6) truncated sand and gravel was located at 8.82m OD along the Mark Lane frontage and at 9.09m OD along the Mincing Lane frontage.

¹⁰ All the Romano-British dating evidence for WFG 52 cited is taken from the 1992–93 pottery spot-dating by Jo Groves, see site archive for details.

¹¹ MoL, Acc No. 92.87/1.

¹² The jug is now on loan to the MoL, Acc No. L152.

¹³ The medieval pottery from the well was spot-dated by Julie Edwards of the DUA finds section in 1989.

¹⁴ The lack of evidence for the continuation of the road eastwards within the study area is probably due quite simply to the absence of any archaeological investigation within the area of 36–38 Mincing Lane and 17–21 Mark Lane.

¹⁵ At Lullingstone villa, Kent, the thickness of the masonry walls around the late 2nd-century plunge-bath varied from 45 to 81cm. The increased wall thickness was thought to be due to less stable geology on one side (Meates 1979, 93). Adjoining the external wall of the 4th-century baths suite at Northchurch villa, Hertfordshire, were two large rectangular blocks of masonry interpreted as water-tank bases (Neal 1976, 15).

¹⁶ In the original publication of this flue tile (Price 1870, 216), it is stated that it was found in Fenchurch Street during the 1860s. However, in the 1908 *Catalogue of London Antiquities in the Guildhall Museum*, page 73, it is stated that the tile was found in Mark Lane during 1866.

¹⁷ A small plunge-bath is defined here as one with an internal floor area of less than seven square metres. The Mark Lane example is included in this category due to its width of less than 2m.

¹⁸ *Archaeol Journal* 1895, 52, p198–199. Procs of meeting of Royal Archaeol Inst, 3 April 1895.

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