ARCHAEOLOGY IN LONDON: ANNUAL ROUND-UP AND NEWS FOR 1855/6

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The London and Middlesex Archaeological Society is 150 years old this year. While the Society has always tried to look forward rather than back (often difficult in the fields of history and archaeology!), there is room, on occasion, for a pause and ponder about where we have come from and how we got to where we are now. In this context, the less-visited sections of journals and volumes, the 'proceedings' or 'notes' pages, as well as the indexed and thus well-read articles, often hide little-known gems provoking wonder, amusement, and reflection; the 1850s were years of no exception. This article therefore offers a gentle trawl through the archaeological journals, reports, and newspapers available at the time of our founding.

Since the first provisional committee meeting to discuss the establishment of the Society took place in July 1855, and the first meeting of full members in January 1856, I have drawn material from both years. The results show at once (and unsurprisingly) that so very much has changed, and yet at the same time that some 'current' ideas and research themes in London and Middlesex archaeology have very long pedigrees indeed. The summary comes in the form of a chronological collation to show the range of interest in each broad archaeological period, and a news board that lifts up some of the less well-known archaeological stories of the time. If the tone seems a little light-hearted, it is not meant to detract from the hugely valuable work of our past antiquaries both in bringing to light lost wonders of the region's archaeology, and in making absolutely certain that the climate was created, and has endured, for us to have a Society and a *Transactions* of which we can be very proud. They should be remembered with very grateful affection.

THE DISCOVERIES

Prehistoric

Probably the most widely reported and presented work was that of J Akerman at the great round barrow that formerly stood off Sandy Lane in Teddington. Already damaged by road widening, and threatened by further development in 1854, the barrow, then measuring 96ft (29.3m) across and 12ft 3in (3.7m) high, was subjected to what we might call a classic work of rescue archaeology in advance of development impact. Akerman and his team cut to the centre of the barrow, recorded a heap of calcined bones, and recovered a beautiful, intact bronze 'knife or dagger' as well as secondary burial evidence, worked flints and a 'half-baked urn'. The event was marked by an article in *Archaeologia* (36, 175–6), and the knife was exhibited widely at the Society of Antiquaries, LAMAS, and the Archaeological Association. It formed the subject of a colour finds illustration published in our *Transactions* (1, 140), with an apology that the technology of the day did not allow entirely accurate colour reproduction. For shame, editor! We also learn that so much exhibiting could take its toll on the artefacts: the knife was readily disintegrating by the end of the year.

The Thames, long renowned as a source of fine antiquities, in 1855 yielded up to the founder and trustee of the London and Middlesex Archaeological Society, the Reverend Thomas Hugo, two fine 'celts' of black flint from Battersea, with others from Blackfriars and Teddington (*Trans London Middlesex Archaeol Soc* 1, 133).

Roman

Naturally, the greatest area of interest shown by

the new Society was in the City of London itself, and the consideration of Roman discoveries was of paramount importance, as shown by the wide ranging study of the detail and context of that remarkable mosaic discovered under the former Excise Office between Old Broad Street and Bishopsgate Street on 20 February 1854 (*Archaeologia* 36, 203–13). Accompanied by a detailed plan and section which would certainly serve for any report of today, the article, by William Tite, attempted to link other mosaic finds in order to prepare a street plan of the Roman city, and then, by considering known Roman extramural cemeteries and known destinations of major regional roads, to establish the true locations of principal gateways in the Roman walls. We now know that his conclusions (involving the assumption that the forum lay under the Mansion House, and the need to 'move' Bishopsgate itself considerably south-eastward) were wrong, but the research framework had been set. The mosaic itself was carefully lifted in its entirety and removed to the Crystal Palace at Sydenham, intended for display in the exhibition. As we shall see, this was not exactly a guarantee of preservation for posterity!

Tite's mosaic was a lucky one. In January 1856, on the eve of his departure from London (see below), Charles Roach Smith penned a short article summarising recent Roman discoveries in London (*Trans London Middlesex Archaeol Soc* 1, 31–4). In it he reveals that another mosaic of 'great extent and good design', exhibiting 'busts (of deities?)' in roundels, had recently been revealed in Paternoster Row, but laments that the excavators for the sewer in which it appeared had cut it to pieces, not permitting even the crudest sketch to be made.

The article is interesting also for the light it sheds on the mid-19th-century understanding of the topography of the Roman city. Roach Smith identifies the wealthiest district as being in the vicinity of Bishopsgate Street and Leadenhall Street, based on frequency and execution of mosaics. He suggests Clements Lane as the site of the basilica based on the find there of an inscribed stone considered to spell PROVINCIA BRITANNIAE. And he locates a temple to the *Deae Matres* at Crutched Friars based on the large stone panel illustrating them, found there. Where, in this emerging civic structure, was London's theatre, for surely there must be one? His answer lay in the critical examination of the topography of the town just outside Newgate — the precipitous descent from Green Arbour Lane (opposite Newgate Prison) down to Seacoal Lane was to his eye uncharacteristic of the general slope of the Fleet Valley, and provided an obvious candidate for the setting of banked seats and flat stage. Alas, his theory remains just that.

No great distance to the south was one of Roach Smith's last published archaeological observations in London before his retirement. At the site of *The Times* newspaper's offices at Blackfriars, he recorded a length of the western Roman city wall surmounted by later medieval work (see below) (*The Builder* 1855, 221, 269).

Examples of other archaeological watching briefs which took place at the time included more Roman walls in Old Broad Street in 1854 and in October of that year Henry Sass reported a considerable length of what he believed to be Roman water piping. This lead conduit was formed in 9ft lengths and had joints sealed with lead strips. It apparently lay 4ft below the surface of the street. Given the depth (some 12ft) of Tite's mosaic below Old Broad Street, it seems improbable that this could have been Roman, and it may instead represent an otherwise unknown medieval (or even later) water system (*Proceedings at Evening Meetings of the London and Middlesex and Surrey Archaeol Socs*, 1860–63, 3–6). In Abchurch Lane in 1855 (*RCHM(E)* 1928, 106); and at Mincing Lane in 1855, where chalk, ragstone and brickearth in layers at a depth of 12ft to 20ft (3.7m to 6.1m) suggested dwellings formed within cob walls (presumably an early identification of clay and timber buildings) (*Arch Journ* 13, 274).

The very large scale excavations along New Cannon Street, between 1852 and 1854, revealed considerable remains at a depth of 12ft (3.7m). Roman walls of ragstone, chalk, and tile on wooden piles, and 20ft (6.1m) of plain red tessellated floor, and then another massive Roman masonry wall 20ft from the frontage, comprising masonry and layers of red and yellow tile, were accompanied by much other Roman 'work', pottery, and a human skeleton. The latter was considered to be Roman, lying east–west accompanied by iron coffin nails 2–7in long. The site was declared by Cuming to be a 'villa' and was, he said, comparable with one he had seen recently at Little St Thomas Apostle (*JBAA* 10, 110, 191, 195–6; *RCHM(E)* 1928, 111).

Also noted at the latter site, and compared with observations from 18th-century sewer cuttings, was a great deposit of charred wood

and ashes at a depth of 16ft (4.9m). Cuming, admirably connecting disparate stratigraphic observations, and anteceding many current debates about large scale Roman city fires, suggested, somewhat emotively, and 'with a fair show of probability that these ashes are the debris of the City, sacked and destroyed by the infuriated Britons in revenge for the outrage offered to the brave queen of the Iceni — the beautiful and ill-fated Boadicea'.

Cuming did not stop there with his remarkable vision to set research agenda. Roman London, he surmised, was a city only as far west as the Walbrook valley. To the west of this line lay the suburbs, composed in part of manufacturing areas, but also containing the grand Roman villas of which the Cannon Street remains was but one. Perhaps recognising inevitable disappointment that this proposal would raise in confident minds, he noted: 'It may be less honour to Londoners that London was not the large Roman city it had been supposed, but truth demanded that we should not conceal that point' (*JBAA* 10, 196). Such heresy exercised at least one meeting of the Society of Antiquaries too (*Archaeologia* 36, 211). Setting aside the fact that he was as mistaken as Tite about the city's topography, the important point is the nature of the approach. For no other period of London's archaeology was this kind of thinking being published at the time, and the idea of developing theories that he and others could test against observed data was arguably considerably ahead of its time for the capital.

Antiquities from the City and its environs were, of course, also collected and displayed. Another reference to the *Deae Matres* was unearthed in Budge Row in 1855, in the form of a white marble cornice just 15½in long by 4in high, carrying the inscription: 'to the mother goddesses, the district restored [this shrine?] at its own expense' (*Proc Soc Antiq London* 4 (1856), 113). The ubiquitous Reverend Hugo had obtained a statuette of the young Hercules with the Nemean Lion, found at the junction of Cannon Street with St Paul's churchyard (*Arch Journ* 12, 286), while the bronze of an archer discovered in Queen Street, Cheapside, in 1842 was still considered current enough for exhibition and display to the new Society (*Trans London Middlesex Archaeol Soc* 1, 133; see also *RCHM(E)* 1928, 46). Slightly lower down on the 'Wow!' factor scale were three Roman lamps, and bits of Roman horse furniture from Queen Street (*Trans London Middlesex Archaeol Soc* 1, 134). Further afield, the Chairman of another brand new county archaeological society, Leicester (antedating LAMAS by just a handful of months, and many happy returns to them indeed!), exhibited three bronze Roman coins, from the Fleet Ditch at the bottom of Holborn Hill. We are told one of these coins bore the name LICINIUS and the image of a fortress (*Leics Archaeol Soc Trans* 1, 34).

Moving outward from the City, in Bow, the discovery of a Roman stone coffin, accompanied by a vase, an urn, and a patera, may (sort of) represent the earliest enactment of the Burial Act (of 1853): the finder being unsure as to how to proceed in the matter of the human remains, a member of the local constabulary was quickly summoned to provide formal direction. His solid and practical advice was to reinter the bones in a nearby gravel pit, advice which was immediately followed: the skeleton was apparently 'huddled into a hamper'(!) and duly disposed of (*Trans London Middlesex Archaeol Soc* 1, 193). From a site not too far from Bow, in Ratcliff Highway, discovered in 1852, Thomas Hugo provided for exhibition and publication a beautiful example of a Roman fibula brooch (*Trans London Middlesex Archaeol Soc* 1, 22; *JBAA* 10, 88) (Fig 1).

Perhaps, in comparison with other displayed antiquities, pride of place for least unique artefact should go to the single (and as far as is reported, unremarkable) Roman brick from the city wall, proudly exhibited to the Society by Henry Ely (*Trans London Middlesex Archaeol Soc* 1, 146). One wonders how long the gathering was engaged by this object.

Saxon

The Saxon period, ever ephemeral and mysterious in London, was represented only by Reverend Hugo's exhibition of Merovingian gold coins from the Thames (unhappily not well located) and a lovely lead Saxon fibula 'brooch' in fine enough a condition to merit an illustration and the disconcerting descriptor 'nearly new'! A Saxon cross was claimed from the site of Christ Church, Newgate Street, but no more information was provided (*Trans London Middlesex Archaeol Soc* 1, 123, 143, 146).

Medieval

Medieval archaeology in contrast was well represented and religious life was, perhaps unsurprisingly, at the top of the archaeological

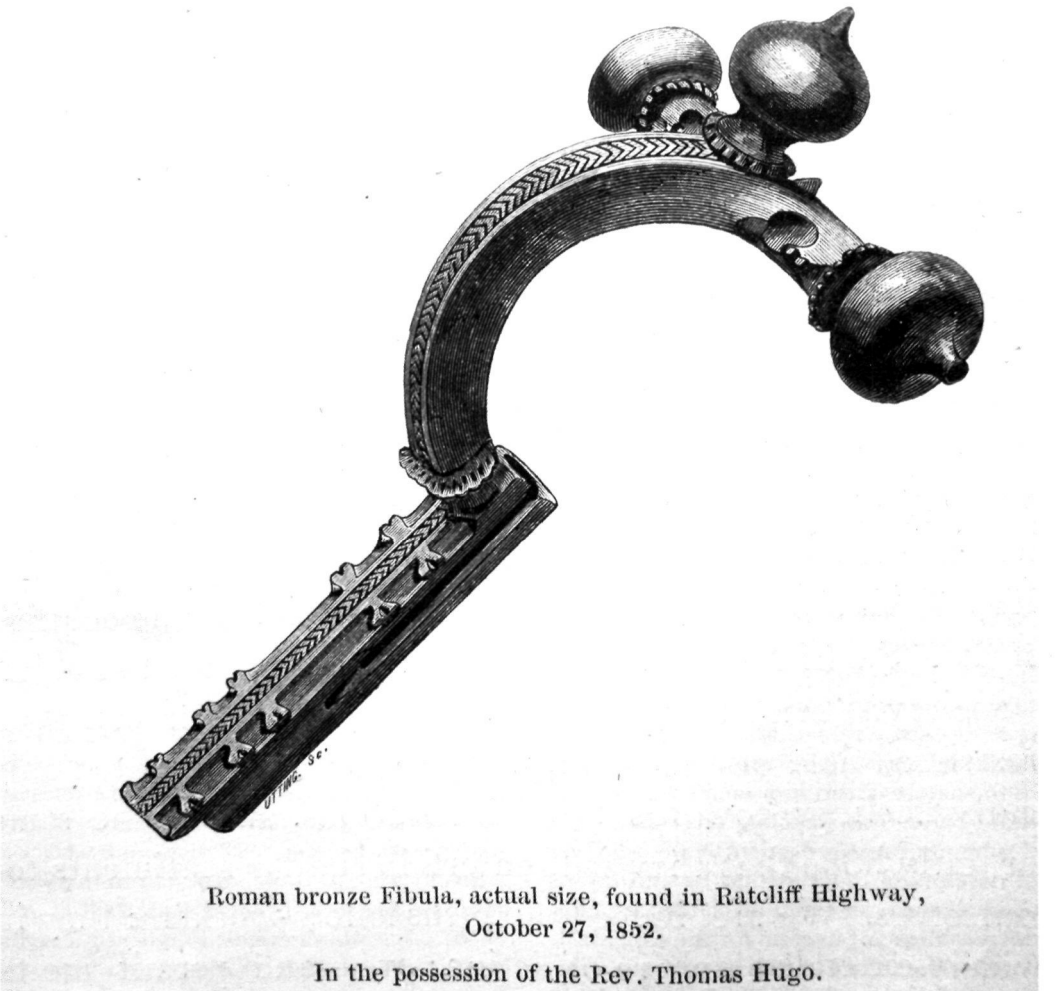


Fig 1. Hugo's Ratcliff Roman brooch (image enlarged here)

agenda. The study of extant antiquities was of obvious importance, with our Society publishing articles on St Helen's Bishopsgate, and work on monumental brasses in the region in its first volume. Religious architectural fragments were also of interest. During late 1854–56, stonework derived from Blackfriars, St John Clerkenwell (Fig 2), Greyfriars, and St Stephen's chapel Westminster was exhibited (*Illustrated London News* June 1855; *Trans London Middlesex Archaeol Soc* 1, 121, 133; *Proc Soc Antiq London* 3, 248). Westminster was ripe for antiquarian pickings following the fire that had gutted the palace in 1838, and the massive rebuilding project still under way in 1855, and the accounts of further medieval antiquities give wonderful (and sobering) details of how they were acquired (*Trans London Middlesex Archaeol Soc* 1, 143). An entire medieval painted panel deriving from the palace's Painted Chamber was purchased in a cellar on the palace site from workmen using the proceeds to 'buy liquor'. At the same time, Tudor painted glass could be obtained from Henry VII's chapel by paying boys to clamber up the exterior water pipes and tease quarries out! To set academic curiosity at ease in the abbey itself, the stone step between the shrine of Edward the Confessor and Henry V's tomb was broken out to free the previously obscured end of a worn medieval grave slab. What was revealed is really quite beautiful and formed the very first colour plate published by LAMAS. It was (so it is

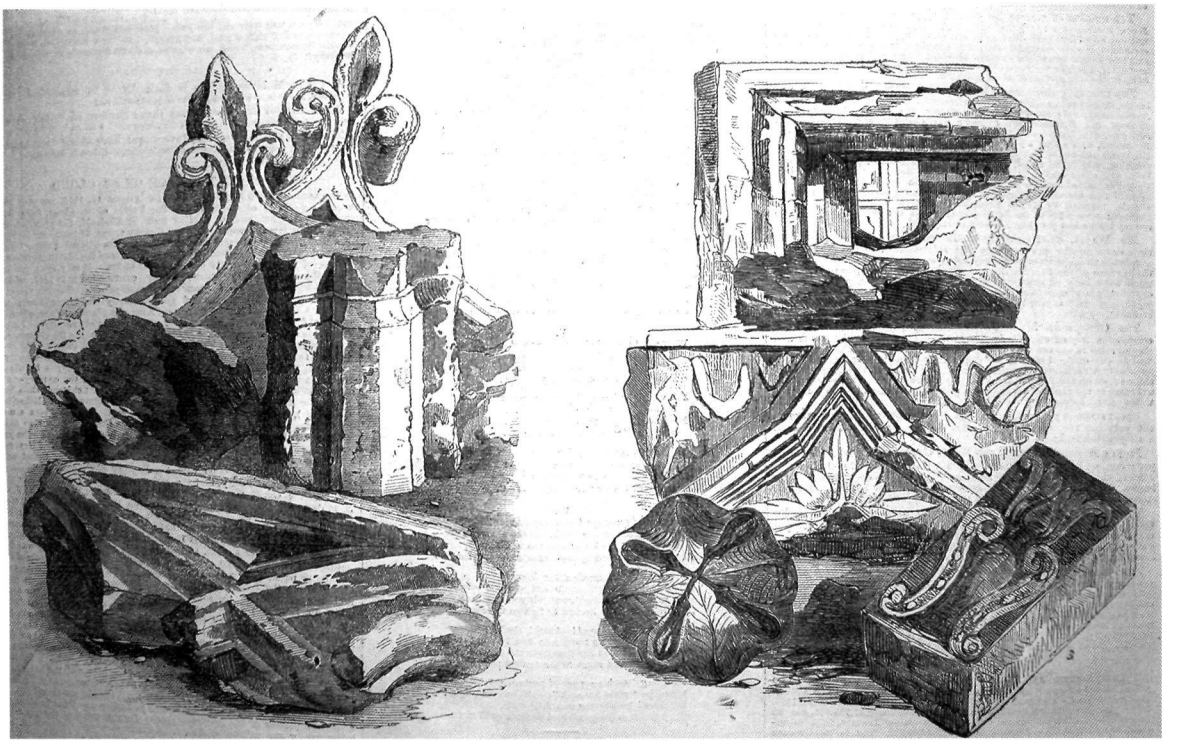


Fig 2. Architectural fragments from St John Clerkenwell (Illustrated London News)

believed) the memorial of the one time Earl of Pembroke, son of William of Valence, and it was inlaid with an extraordinary rich glass mosaic. Whether this can in any way be tied to the fabulous Cosmati pavement not a million miles distant from the slab's location is something I am not able to tell, although the dates of the completion of the pavement (finished 1268) and John de Valence's death (January 1277) are suggestive (Fig 3).

Sharp-eyed antiquarians were also interested in artefacts. Hugo had obtained a beautiful 14th-century ivory triptych piece from the Minories, site of the Franciscan nunnery of St Clare, while the members of LAMAS were invited to examine a sample of the shroud cloth from the body of a knight whose grave had been discovered during repairs to the Temple (*Trans London Middlesex Archaeol Soc* 1, 120, 133). Medieval pilgrim badges were recovered from the Thames: three lead badges from London, one showing the Virgin and child, one a bishop, and one an initial 'T' with Christ crucified, were displayed by Hugo (*Proc Soc Antiq London* 3, 144, 250). The carved figure of an ecclesiastic in slate was found by Mr Gibbs at White Row, Whitechapel (*JBAA* 10, 190).

Secular medieval life was not ignored however. The medieval defences set atop the western Roman city wall (see above) comprised massive ?Norman or Early English work and a later passage or window from the medieval Dominican friary which took in the site following the western city defence extension in the later 13th century. A detailed study of Crosby Hall was included in the first volume of LAMAS *Transactions*, and the foundations of the great mansion known as Tower Royal (originally a 13th-century wine-merchant's mansion, later that of high nobility) were uncovered during excavations along New Cannon Street (*JBAA* 10, 191). Another London inn, the Abbot of Waltham's house near St Mary-at-Hill, was the subject of a historical study in *Archaeologia* (36, 400–17). A fourth great house, Gerrard's (or Gisor's) Hall, about 200m west of the Tower Royal, and dating back to the 12th century, was also affected by the New Cannon Street road scheme. Its crypt, built *c.*1290, was carefully dismantled in 1852 in advance of the building of the new street itself. Like Tite's mosaic, it had been crated and shipped to Sydenham as a gift to the Crystal Palace Company, for future display. There it languished

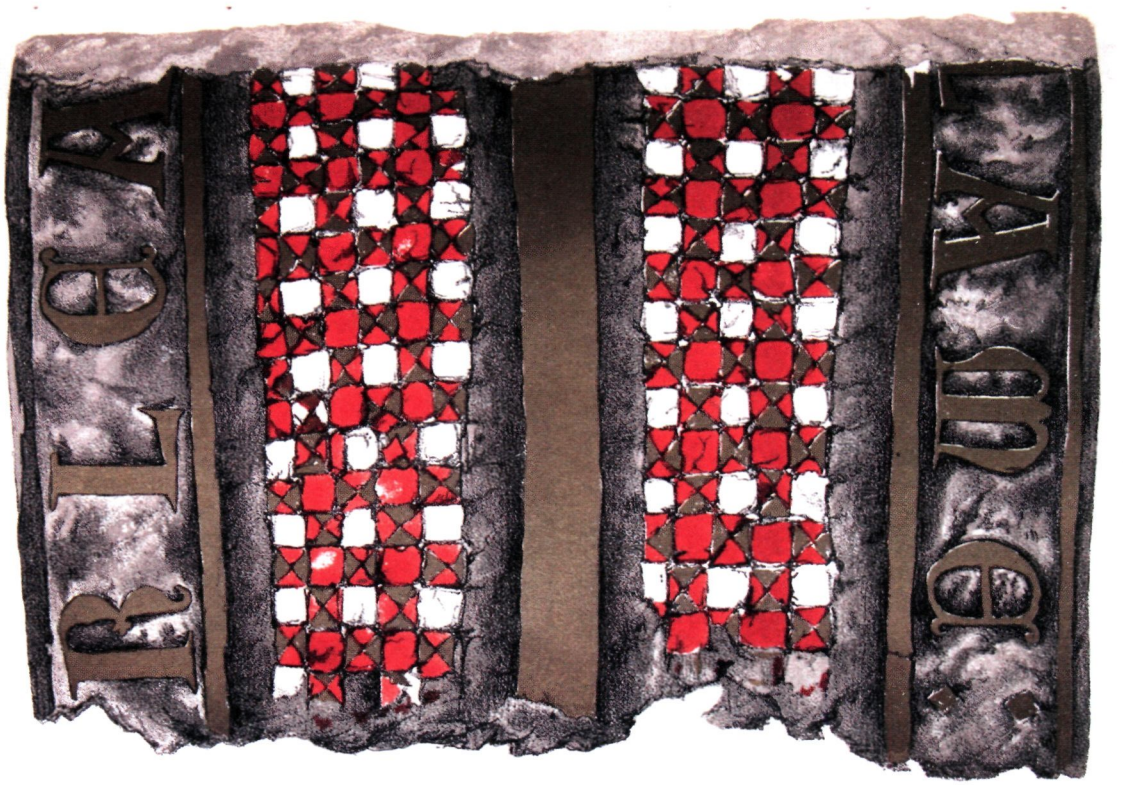


Fig 3. 'Enlaid' graveslab from Westminster Abbey

unreconstructed before being crushed up in the year of the foundation of LAMAS for road metalling and foundation material for the engine house there (*Daily News*, 17 December 1855). Its wasteful fate considerably focused energies to found our Society.

Secular finds were also considered. Sidney Smirke reported on the removal of some 'modern' ashlar to restore the old masonry at Westminster Hall: within cavities in the wall he was surprised to see an immense quantity of small bones and other detritus which he supposed had been dragged in by mice and rats living off the leavings of great feasts. Among this detritus was a fine decorated medieval leather knife sheath (*Trans London Middlesex Archaeol Soc* 1, 119). Hugo recovered 14th-century horse furniture from the Fleet Ditch (*Proc Soc Antiq London* 3, 136) during the extensive reorganisation of the valley of the River Fleet to permit the construction of Farringdon Road, the railway, and the Fleet Sewer. Works here were to go on for more than a decade, and stretched from Clerkenwell down to the City waterfront.

Post-medieval

Little of post-medieval date was reported upon at this time, although there were some notable exceptions. Hugo proved himself an archaeologist unrestricted by period or fashion, reporting the excavation of a Russo-Greek triptych from a grave in the churchyard of Christchurch Spitalfields (*Trans London Middlesex Archaeol Soc* 1, 133; *Arch Journ* 12, 186–7), and reminded members of the Royal Archaeological Institute of a discovery of a remarkable silver reliquary found suspended by a chain of silver from the neck of a skeleton in St Dunstan Fleet Street in 1831. W Pettit-Griffith presented some Tudor terracotta pieces from buildings in St John Clerkenwell, and a piece of plaster ceiling ornament from nearby Berkeley House (*Trans London Middlesex Archaeol Soc* 1, 133). Meanwhile, stone cannon balls had been recovered from the moat of the Tower of London, and an armorial set of helmet and gauntlets from West Drayton church, Middlesex (*Trans London Middlesex Archaeol Soc* 1, 143–4).

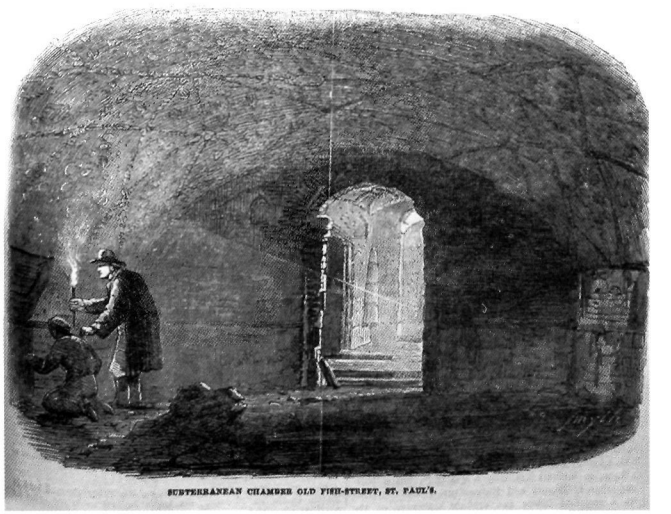
The Transactions of the Leicester Archaeological Society held a report of a singular post-medieval London Thames find: at Waterloo Bridge was found a plate of copper, 1½in square, engraved on one side with the words 'John Wheatley Citizen and Poultirer of London' and on the other with an image of John himself, smoking a pipe at the door to his emporium (*Leics Archaeol Soc Trans* 1, 34). The date of this curio is not clear — perhaps readers could shed light on Wheatley for a future *Transaction*?

The final substantial structure is one reported only in the newspapers of the day, specifically the *Illustrated London News*, and can only be surmised as being post-medieval — it may indeed be earlier in origin. The report actually dates from 14 October 1854 (361–2), but readers will forgive the slight digression. On the corner of Old Fish Street and Lambeth Hill stood a house, apparently built in 1668, with extensive cellarage. During the cleaning out of these cellars a vaulted two-celled chamber was revealed. The inner, smaller, cell had at its head a 'raised seat' canopied in part, and stone recesses to either side suggestive of cupboards or aumbries. One of these contained a 'marble trough' which the correspondent considered to be a baptismal font for infants. The vaults of both cells were 'curiously groined' and the whole was richly decorated with polished marine shells, fragments of antique glass, pieces of quartz and calcareous spar, formed into patterns or devices. The overall view of the outer, larger chamber is given (Fig 4). Was this, as the reporter surmised, a secret Catholic chapel of some kind, or is there some other explanation — again, readers might wish to air their views to the Editor?

NOTES AND NEWS

Archaeology has never been a stranger to controversy, and 1855 and 1856 were no exceptions. Obviously, the most important news was the founding of our Society, and the society archives, available at the London Metropolitan Archive in Clerkenwell (Acc/2899/03/), contain a remarkable scrap book of early newspaper articles relating to the genesis and early meetings. Maev Kennedy's fascinating public lecture in June of this year (2005) provided a wonderful account of some of the people, customs, and places associated with this first year. The origin of the society was, as the Gerrard's Hall fiasco exemplified, essentially to help protect and preserve the antiquities of London from wanton destruction without record or consideration.

Individually, some remarkable antiquarians had already been fighting a lone battle in this regard, and there are none so celebrated as Roach Smith. Active for over twenty years in the



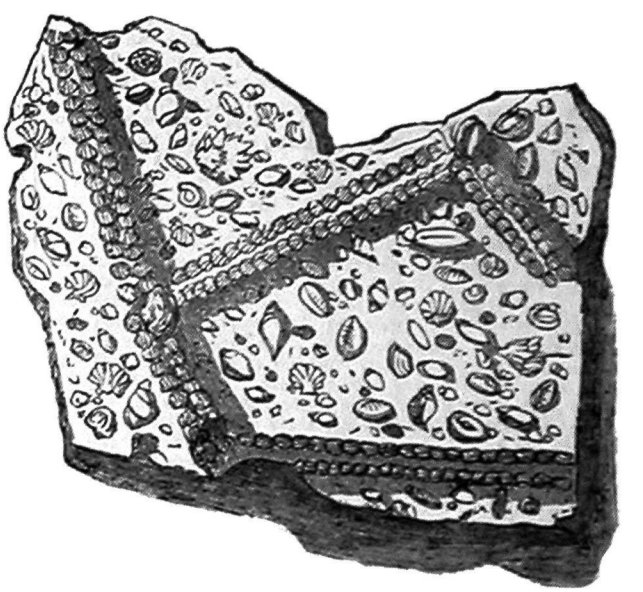


Fig 4. Old Fish Street 'chapel' (Illustrated London News)

City, from his premises in Lothbury and then Finsbury Circus, he had collected a renowned museum of antiquities covering every period of occupation of the City. Wishing to ensure that the collection, well known by antiquarians throughout Britain and the Continent, and visited on at least one occasion by royalty in the person of Prince Albert, should enter public hands rather than be dispersed, Smith had entered into negotiations with the Corporation of London. The City authorities refused to take on the collection, as did the British Museum, following subsequent approaches to them. Roach Smith had valued his expenses in gathering the collection at some £300 but it would appear that officers in the Antiquities Department of the Government considered the worth to be far lower. The issue became a *cause célèbre*, and in July 1855 petitions were submitted to the House of Commons, and a memo to the Treasury, signed by influentials of the day. On 3 May 1856, the *Illustrated London News* (from which this brief extract is drawn) was able finally to publish an announcement that following pressure from the Antiquities Department to the British Museum, a sum of £2000 had been agreed for the purchase, lamenting in summation that 'it is much to be regretted that the directors of our national establishments should appreciate so little whatever is really national'! Roach Smith retired from London that year, but his collection survives to this day (for a fine potted biography of Roach Smith see Hobley in *London Archaeologist* vol 2 pt 13 (1975), 328–33).

Members of our Society also had their trials and tribulations at this time. Our Reverend Thomas Hugo was in 1855 very active in the British Archaeological Association, and held office on their council. In an alarming and embarrassing affair, he had brought forward accusations of a terrible sort against the Association's Treasurer of the day, apparently relating to the misappropriation of funds at a certain excavation. An Extraordinary General Meeting was convened to consider a motion to remove Hugo from office. Factions developed and a considerable debate ensued, but the members decided outright that the hapless Hugo was guilty of impugning the name of the Treasurer and he was ejected from the Association forthwith (*JBAA* 10, 88). It may have been a reporter friend of one of the anti-Hugo camp who quite viciously reported in *The Athenaeum* in October 1858, on the failure of the arranged hosts of a LAMAS outing to Enfield to appear, that 'the unhappy excursionists found themselves floundering in the antiquarian shallows of the Reverend Thomas Hugo'! What irony it would be if Hugo's forced expulsion from the BAA (no matter whether deserved or not) had catalysed his will to establish our own LAMAS?

One penultimate piece of news is not (as far as I am aware) London-related, but deserves wider circulation in the light of the current Treasure Act and the associated very positive agreement made by DCMS to support the Portable Antiquities Scheme from this year onward. It is tucked away in the *Archaeological Journal* (12 (1855), 200), so I think it worthy to quote in full:

> A few weeks since, as a servant was chopping wood, the log of wood which had served for a chopping board for several years suddenly split and out flew fifty guineas of the reigns of Charles II and James II. These were at once sent to the Lords of the Treasury, who, having allowed the British Museum to select such as were required for the national collection, sent back to the proprietor the remnant and also the amount paid by the Museum for the selected pieces. It is hoped and believed that the liberality displayed by the Lords of the Treasury upon this and other occasions will be a means of preserving from destruction many objects of interest and value.

I could not possibly speculate on what the view of the DCMS (or indeed of the current Chancellor) would be on a request to return to this Treasury-led approach, but would very much like to think that in this particular case the largesse shown by Her Majesty's Government found its way in turn down to the lowly woodcutter! Fifty is such a nice, round number, is it not?

AND FINALLY...

Subscription to LAMAS in 1855 was 10/-, or 50p in current parlance. Using the fabulously crude estimate of 2.5% inflation over the last 150 years, that would according to my calculations equal a sum of £20.30. Members should not panic, as Council have no immediate intent to raise it to this dizzying height, but it does demonstrate what a fantastic bargain membership is in the 21st century! Many, many happy returns!!