

# A Roman Burial from Southwark

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AN INHUMATION burial, probably of the later Roman period, was excavated in October 1975 during the current SAEC excavations at Chaucer House—see front cover. (A second burial awaits excavation.)

The site is about half a mile south of London Bridge. It lies just north-east of the projected line of Watling Street and south of the Roman settlement. Roman burials have been found in the area but only two archaeologically recorded — both 4th century A.D. inhumations at Swan Street (see forthcoming LAMAS/SAS research paper).

The Chaucer House inhumation was a rough and ready affair. The body, in an extended position, lay face down, atypical of Roman inhumation. The depth of the grave was only 25cms. — hardly deep enough for the skull to be covered. The grave's small size necessitated slight flexing of the legs and the left arm was flexed with the hand wedged up against the side of the grave. There was no coffin and no grave goods. The burial, aligned NE-SW, is probably pagan. The evidence suggests a burial without ceremony — the body simply bundled into a shallow grave. Preliminary work on the skeleton by Robin Watt indicates the individual was female, aged about 35 years

at death, and of small stature, about 1.45m. (4ft. 9ins.) tall.

The burial is later than ditches A, B and C which were dug in the early Roman period, possibly for field drainage. The ditches had gone out of use by the later 2nd century. South-west of a later Roman ditch (D), i.e. over most of the excavated area, a paucity of finds suggests the commencement of a prolonged period of inactivity. Weathering of the early Roman levels occurred and it was into this layer that the grave was cut. Associated pottery was of later 2nd century date but the sherds may be residual.

It is perhaps significant that both burials lie between the possible line of Watling Street and ditch D. North-east of this ditch there is a marked increase in finds of the 3rd and 4th centuries. Here, present evidence suggests some form of agricultural land usage continuing through the later Roman period. Although it is tempting to see the sparsely-used area to the south-west as a burial ground, ditch D could be simply a field boundary. If the excavated burial is that of a pauper, as seems possible, the grave may have been dug on waste land bordering the road rather than within the confines of a cemetery.

