



Fig. 1: location of site in relation to Roman city wall.

Excavations at 9 St. Clare Street

ROBERT ELLIS

LIMITED EXCAVATIONS were carried out by the Department of Greater London Archaeology of the Museum of London between October and November 1983 at 9 St. Clare Street, EC3. The site lies c 140m (150 yds) east of the City wall within a Roman cemetery area and within the precinct of the medieval Abbey of St. Clare (Fig. 1).

The Abbey

The Abbey was founded in 1293 by Blanche d'Artois, Queen of Navarre, as a house for Franciscan nuns and named after the founder of the Order who was canonized in 1253. Although committed to a life of personal poverty, the community was allowed to possess endowments and

lands, and throughout its existence appears to have enjoyed generous gifts of both lands and tenements, and also privileges from the Crown. The House became the richest of the Order in the country and was a popular burial place for members, particularly female, of the nobility. After the House was dissolved in 1539, the buildings passed through various hands, being subsequently used for purposes such as an armoury, workhouse, and prison for men taken after the battle of Culloden. Although parts of a number of conventual buildings appear to have survived until as late as the 18th century, having been incorporated into other buildings, little is known of the original lay-out of the Abbey. Today the only apparent indication of its existence lies in

9 St. CLARE STREET
ROMAN REMAINS

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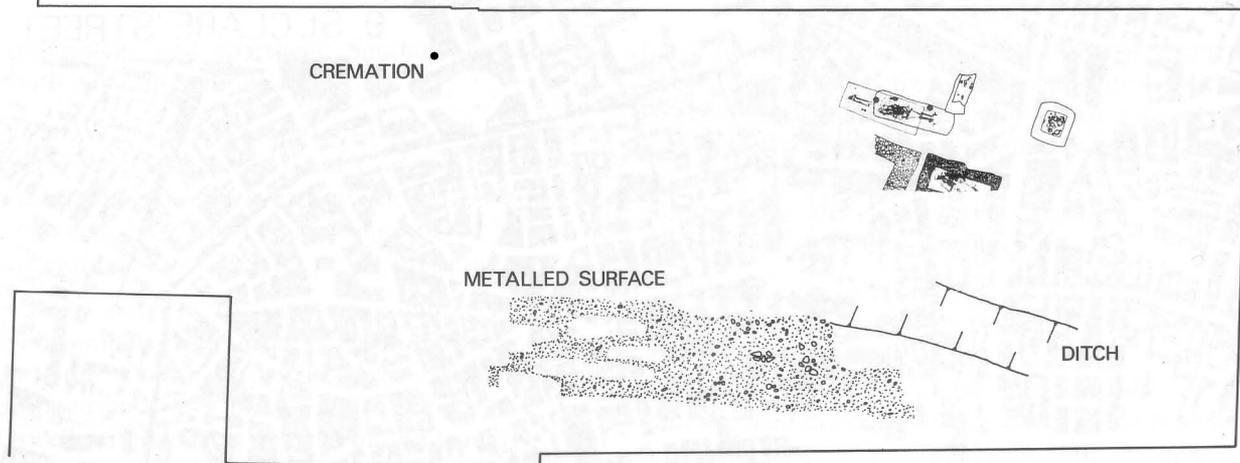


Fig. 2: Roman remains.

the street names St. Clare Street and the Minories, after *Sorores Minores* as the nuns were known. The extent of the precinct is known, as it later evolved into the parish of Holy Trinity, Aldgate, lying outside the present-day City boundary. It is still reflected in the rather curious alignment of the boundary with Tower Hamlets in this area.

Holy Trinity Church

Holy Trinity church, which stood on the site of 9 St. Clare Street, appears originally to have been the nuns' chapel. It became a parish church in 1566, and over the years was rebuilt and altered on several occasions. The churchyard was subjected to heavy

use for burials and was cleared several times to make way for new occupants. In 1705 vaults were inserted inside the church to provide space for burials, these also being emptied and re-filled a number of times. Burials continued in the churchyard until 1771 and in the vaults until 1860. Its use as a place of worship ceased in 1899 when the parish was united with that of St. Botolph, Aldgate, after which it was used as a parish room.

Recent history of the site

The church was badly damaged during World War II, and only the medieval north wall was left standing. Between 1956 and 1958 the site was cleared for redevelopment, during which time Mr. F. J. Collins recorded details of the north wall and of the construction of the church¹. All remains, both of the church and burials, were supposedly removed at this time before the construction of an office block. These offices were demolished in 1983 to make way for a larger block. In the course of ground clearance for this work, the discovery of numerous human bones on the south side of the site indicated that the portion of the graveyard to the south of the church had not in fact been cleared. On inspection by representatives of DGLA, it was evident that remains of the post-medieval, medieval, and Roman periods were still extant. The Department was eventually permitted to excavate Roman burials during the removal by contractors of the later burials.

1. F. J. Collins 'Notes on the Church of Holy Trinity Minories' *Trans London Middlesex Archaeol Soc* 20 Pt 4 (1961) 160-5.

MUSEUM OF LONDON

requires

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Two part-time indexers are required on our Community Programme scheme, one to compile bibliographic information, the other grid references for a computerised bibliography.

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The usual CP scheme regulations for application apply. The pay is £63 for an 18 hour week.

Further details and application forms from Personnel Officer, Museum of London, 150 London Wall, EC2Y 5HN.

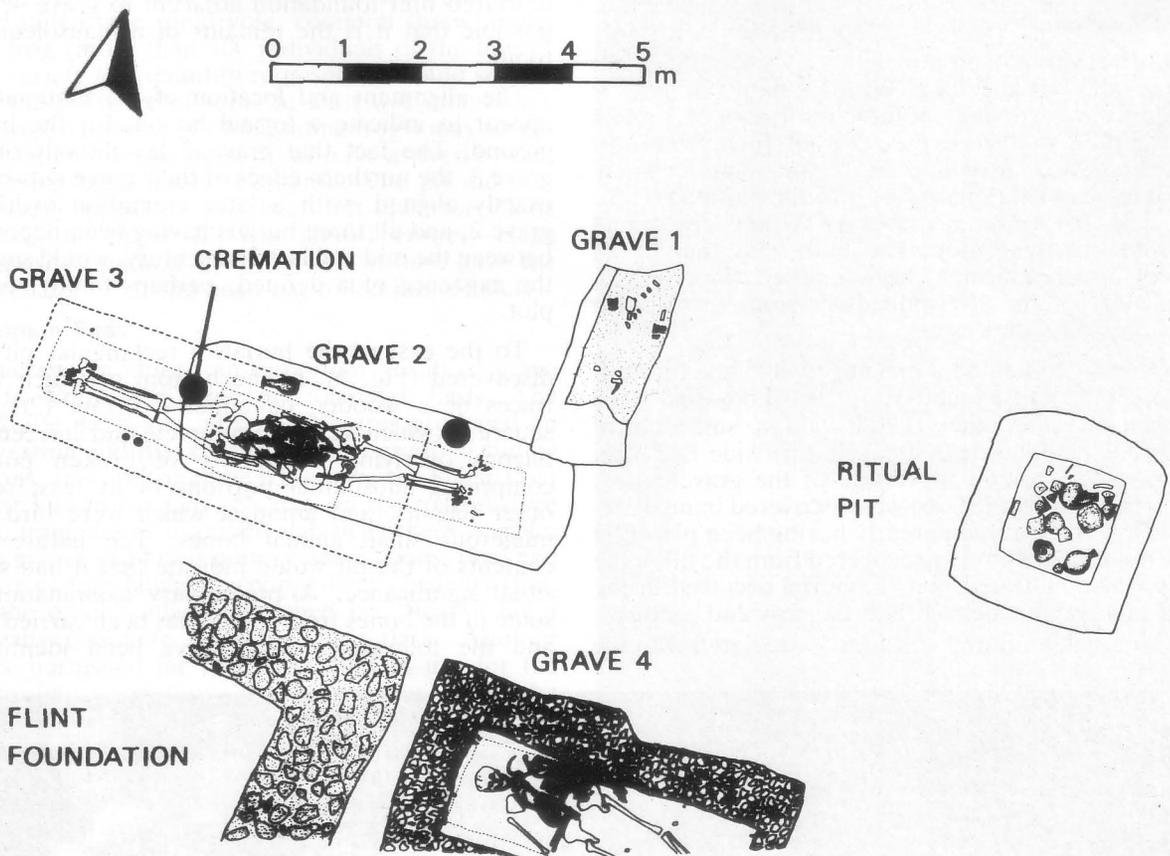


Fig. 3: Roman burials and 'ritual' pit.

Roman remains (Fig. 2)

Underlying the burials on the south side of the site was a metallated surface of rammed gravel sealed by layers containing Roman material. On its north side was an associated ditch aligned WNW-ESE. There seems little doubt that the metallated surface was the remains of a road; pottery recovered from the bottom of the ditch (dated 55-70) and underlying the gravel (dated mid 1st century) indicate a date in the middle of the 1st century for its construction. A coin of Posthumus (259-268) was found on its upper surface, suggesting that it was in use until at least the latter part of the 3rd century.

On the west side of the area cleared for construction a late 2nd century cremation was discovered.

To the north-east of the site a small area had been less disturbed by the various redevelopments and a number of Roman features were discovered (Fig. 3). The area contained one late 1st/early 2nd century inhumation burial (grave 4), two 2nd century inhumation burials with associated grave goods (graves 2 and 3), and a late 2nd century cremation

burial. Adjacent to the inhumations was a mortared flint foundation. A badly disturbed 'plaster' burial (grave 1) overlay grave 2.

Grave 1 was aligned north-south, and all that remained of the body, possibly that of an adult female, were the hands, knee-caps, and a few vertebrae. A deposit of calcium carbonate had been placed around the body. Although no dating evidence was recovered from the grave, a date after the 2nd century is suggested for its deposition from the fact that it overlay grave 2 (late 2nd century). This type of burial rite is normally associated with the later Roman period, and examples found elsewhere would indicate a probable date of 4th century for its deposition.

Grave 2 contained the body of a male aged 35-45, 1.65m (5ft 4in) tall, and aligned W-E. The body had been placed in a wooden coffin, and on the north side of the body a glass vessel² and a cooking pot of the late 2nd century lay beside the coffin. The upper portion of the body lay directly above the wooden

2. Photograph on cover of *London Archaeol* 4 No 14 (Spring 1984).

coffin of grave 3, which resulted in its sinking c 0.40m (1ft 4in) when the wood decayed (Fig. 4).

Grave 3 contained a male aged 25-35, 1.85m (6ft 7/8in) tall, and aligned E-W. Staining c 50mm (2in) wide from a wooden coffin was in evidence, and 44 coffin nails were recovered. Beside the left knee of the body two small mid 2nd century 'poppy-head' beakers had been placed next to the coffin (Fig. 5). A coin of Antoninus Pius (138-161) was found beside the right foot. The body was that of an exceptionally tall man; he was taller, for example, than any of the 107 individuals from the Roman cemetery at Cirencester.

Grave 4 contained a male aged 40-50, 1.75m (5ft 8 7/8in) tall, and aligned W-E. The body had been placed in a wooden coffin, and a surround of ragstone chippings c 0.40m (1ft 4in) wide had been constructed around the inside of the grave-cut. A coin of Domitian (81-96) was discovered immediately below the chin, apparently having been placed in the mouth, and pottery recovered from the fill of the grave also indicated that the burial occurred in the Flavian/Trajanic period (late 1st/early 2nd century).

Although no burial was found associated with the

mortared flint foundation adjacent to grave 4, it is possible that it is the remains of a mausoleum or tomb.

The alignment and location of the inhumations appear to indicate a formal lay-out for the burial ground. The fact that grave 2 lay directly above grave 3, the northern edges of their grave cuts being exactly aligned, with a later cremation overlying grave 2, and all three burials having been deposited between the mid and late 2nd century, would suggest the existence of a defined, perhaps family, burial plot.

To the east of the burials a rectangular pit was discovered (Fig. 6), at the bottom of which were traces of a wooden container c 0.75m (2ft 6in) square, in which were two complete mid 2nd century flagons overlying a quantity of broken pottery comprising substantial portions of at least seven other flagons, and amongst which were bird and numerous small animal bones. The nature and contents of the pit would indicate that it had some ritual significance. A preliminary examination of some of the bones from the pit has been carried out, and the following species have been identified:



Fig. 4: grave 2 in centre foreground, grave 4 to right, mortared flint foundation to right foreground.

(Photo: R. Ellis)

heron, harvest mouse, wood mouse, bank vole, short-tailed vole, field vole, common shrew, mole, and frog (more than 100 individuals of the latter). The variety and quantity represented would suggest that the presence of some at least was intentional, although a number (? of migrating frogs) may simply have fallen into the open pit or have arrived by dint of having been inside the heron. The pit did not, however, appear to have been left open for a long period; the upper fill was almost entirely clean redeposited natural sand and gravel, and gave the impression of having been backfilled immediately.

Roman finds

The site produced an important group of grave goods, cremation urns and general finds. The road-side ditch and adjacent features produced an interesting mid-first century pottery group including flagons, jars and small beakers from the Sugar Loaf Court kiln in the City. Nearby on the road surface lay a fragment of inscribed slab in Purbeck marble. Two graves produced pottery grave goods. One had a pair of fine Highgate 'poppy-head' beakers (Fig. 5), the other a black burnished jar. Near it lay a virtually complete imported glass flask. Another black burnished jar had been used as urn for the succeeding cremation. The rectangular pit to the east contained substantial portions of several flagons brought from the Verulamium region. One other interesting ritual item was a fragment of a pipe-clay Venus figurine, which are invariably Gaulish imports and are often associated with ritual sites.

Medieval remains (Fig. 7)

Although the south side of the site had been disturbed by numerous post-medieval burials, a substantial portion of medieval wall foundation built of chalk blocks was still present. It was c 1.70m (5ft 7in) wide and for 3.00m (9ft 10in) of its length was aligned NW-SE. At its south end it turned to the south, and at its north end the remains of its construction trench turned west, aligning with another portion of medieval wall discovered at the south-west corner of the site of the post-medieval church. The former wall would appear to be part of the semi-octagonal east end of the medieval church, the main body of which would have lain to the south and west of the site. This is corroborated by the

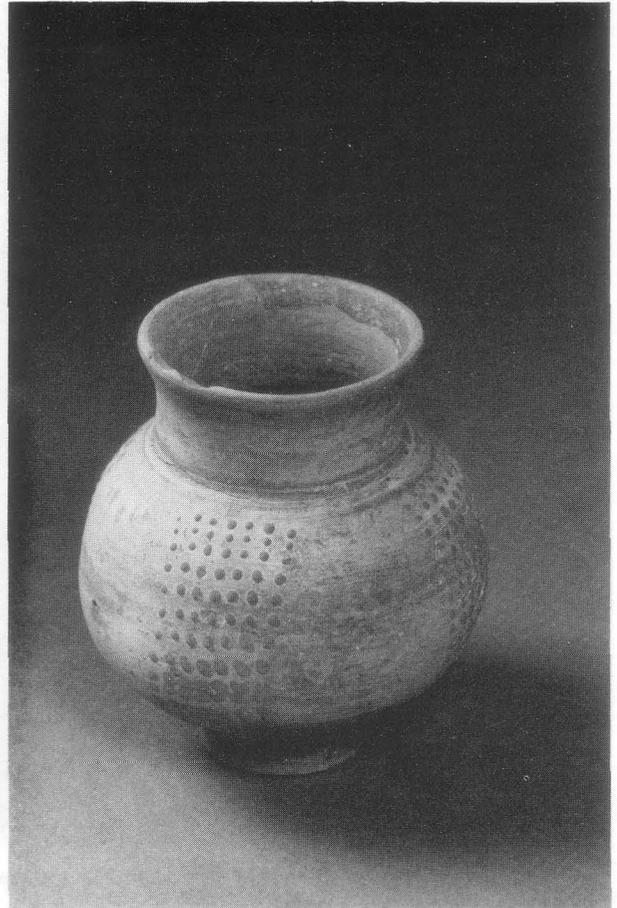


Fig. 5: 'poppy-head' beaker from grave 3; 85mm (3½in) high.
(Photo: Museum of London)

findings on the adjacent site to the south-west; in 1964 the tomb of Anne Mowbray, who is known to have been buried in the church, was discovered there. Several walls were also recorded, and these can be interpreted as belonging to the south wall of the church and to the cloisters.

A number of graves were exposed lying deeper than the majority, and it is probable that their

(continued on p. 120)

Local Societies – amendments

THE FOURTH SET of amendments to the list of local societies (Vol. 4, no. 15, 403-4) is as follows:

London Nat. Hist. Soc. Sec. Miss D. E. Woods, 58 Beehive Lane, Redbridge, Ilford IG1 3RS.

New entry

Harefield Hist. Soc. Sec. Mrs. M. Evans, 4 Hall Drive, Harefield, Middx.



Fig. 6: 'ritual' pit; scales 1.00m and 200mm (3ft 3in and 8in).

(Photo: R. Ellis)

occupants had been buried within the choir while it was still standing. They were presumably therefore people of high rank, either nobility or abbesses. It was only possible to record the location of the graves, as the burials were removed by the contractors.

Conclusions

Although the excavations were limited in extent, the information recovered is of interest. Grave 4 is the earliest recorded Roman inhumation from London, and the 'ritual' pit is somewhat unusual. It was not known that a Roman road existed on this alignment, although it is not clear whether the road was principally for access to the burial area or an actual thoroughfare. This may perhaps be clarified by future excavations on the projected line of the road, which, if projected in a straight line, would run from the area of Free Trade Wharf, Shadwell, to approximately the junction of Lime Street and Leadenhall Street in the City. In 1984 the Department carried out an excavation at West Tenter Street, c 200m (220 yds) ESE of the site and

immediately to the south of the projected road line³. Some 132 Roman burials were recovered, and appeared to be aligned to the course of the road.

The discovery of key elements of the medieval church will mean that when the archaeological information from this and adjacent sites has been more thoroughly examined, together with documentary evidence, significant progress can be made towards producing a plan of the Abbey of St. Clare.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Mike Allen, Bob Cowie, and Alex Hooper who worked on the excavation, and Dr. Stephen Pierpoint for his work on the finds. The human bones were examined by Dr. Tony Waldron, and the animal bones identified by Alison Locker. I am grateful to Martha Carlin for information on the documentary aspects of the site, and to Dr. P. R. V. Marsden and Mr. F. J. Collins for information about previous excavations.

3. R. Whytehead *Trans London Middlesex Archaeol Soc* (forthcoming).

9 St. CLARE STREET
 MEDIEVAL REMAINS

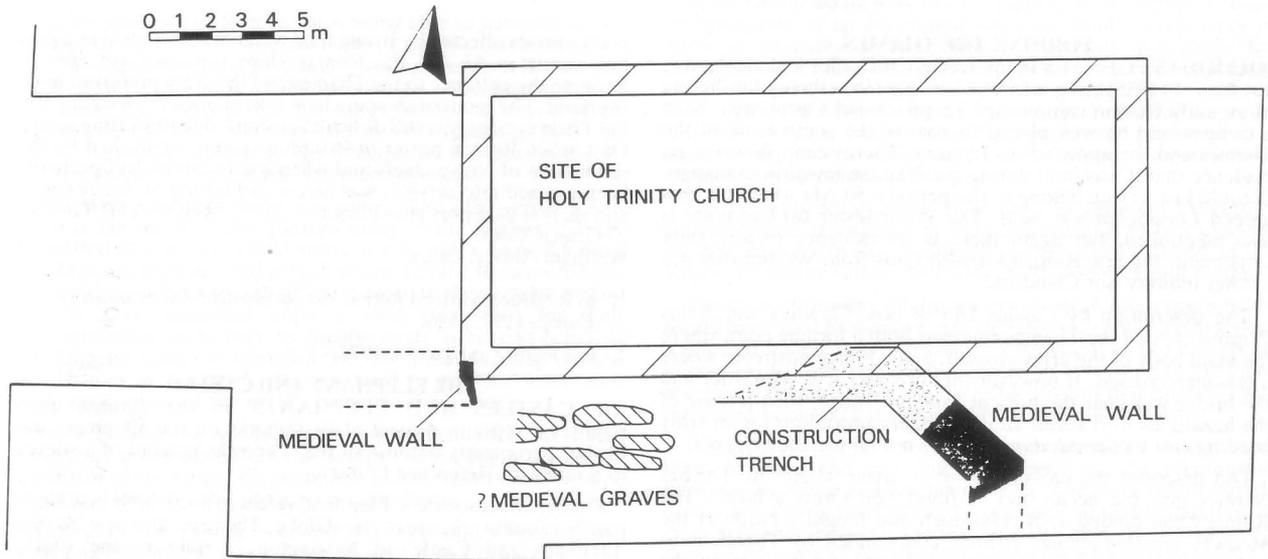


Fig. 7: medieval remains.

Excavations & Post-Excavation Work

City, by Museum of London, Department of Urban Archaeology. A series of long term excavations. Enquiries to DUA, Museum of London, London Wall, E.C.2 (01-600 3699).

Croydon & District. Processing and cataloguing of excavated and museum collection every Tuesday throughout the year. Archaeological reference collection of fabric types, domestic animal bones, clay tobacco pipes and glass ware also available for comparative work. Hon. Curator, Croydon Natural History & Scientific Society Ltd., Museum Building, Croydon Biology Centre, Chipstead Valley Road, Coulsdon, Surrey. (01-660 3841 or 22 43727).

Hammersmith & Fulham, by Fulham Archaeological Rescue Group. Processing of material from Sandford Manor and Fulham High Street. Tuesdays, 7.45 p.m.-10 p.m. at Fulham Palace, Bishop's Avenue, Fulham Palace Road, S.W.6. Contact Keith Whitehouse, 86 Clancarty Road, S.W.6. (01-731 0338).

Inner and North London Boroughs, by the Museum of London, Department of Greater London Archaeology (Inner/North London). Several rescue sites in various areas. (01-242 6620).

Kingston, by Kingston upon Thames Archaeological Society. Rescue sites in the town centre. Enquiries to Marion Shipley, Kingston Heritage Centre, Fairfield Road, Kingston. (01-546 5386).

North-East London Boroughs, by Passmore Edwards Museum. Enquiries to Pat Wilkinson, Passmore Edwards Museum, Romford Road, E.15. (01-534 4545).

South-West London Boroughs, by Museum of London,

Department of Greater London Archaeology (South-West London). Excavations and processing. Enquiries to Scott McCracken, St. Luke's House, Sandycombe Road, Kew. (01-940 5989).

Southwark and Lambeth, by Museum of London, Department of Greater London Archaeology (Southwark and Lambeth). Several sites from the Roman period onwards. Enquiries to Derek Seeley, Port Medical Centre, English Grounds, Morgan's Lane, SE1 2HT. (01-407 1989).

Surrey, by Surrey Archaeological Unit. Enquiries to David Bird, County Archaeological Officer, Planning Department, County Hall, Kingston, Surrey. (01-546 1050 x3665).

Vauxhall Pottery, by Southwark and Lambeth Archaeological Society. Processing of excavated material continues three nights a week. Enquiries to S.L.A.S., c/o Cuming Museum, 155 Walworth Road, S.E.17 (01-703 3324).

West London Boroughs, by West London Archaeological Field Group. Enquiries to 273A Brentford High Street, Brentford, Middlesex. (01-560 3880).

The Council for British Archaeology produces a monthly Calendar of Excavations from March to September, with an extra issue in November and a final issue in January summarising the main results of field work. The Calendar gives details of extra-mural courses, summer schools, training excavations and sites where volunteers are needed. The annual subscription is £5.50 post-free, which should be made payable to C.B.A., 112 Kennington Road, S.E. 11. (01-582 0494).