

Fig. 1: Location map.
 A = 1893 street plan with postulated alignment of Roman road (stippled);
 B = plan of site c 1984;
 C = Roman and medieval road network.

Recent Work at Stratford, E15: 30 Romford Road

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EXCAVATIONS AND watching briefs by the Passmore Edwards Museum (Romford Road, Stratford, London E15) on a number of sites in north-east Greater London are beginning to shed light on the development of villages in the south-west parts of Essex. They include West Ham (1973, 1976, 1983), Stratford (London Borough of Newham); Ilford (1959/60, 1961: London Borough of Redbridge); Dagenham (1976: London Borough of Barking and Dagenham) and Romford (1984: London Borough of Havering).

The Parish of West Ham to the east of the River Lea lies about 5 miles east of the City astride the present main road from London to Romford. The River Lea divides into several branches at this point, converging at Three Mills below which it flows to the Thames (Fig. 1). Little is known in detail from documentary sources about the pattern of settlement at Stratford before the 16th century. Lying half a mile to the north and west of West Ham village, the

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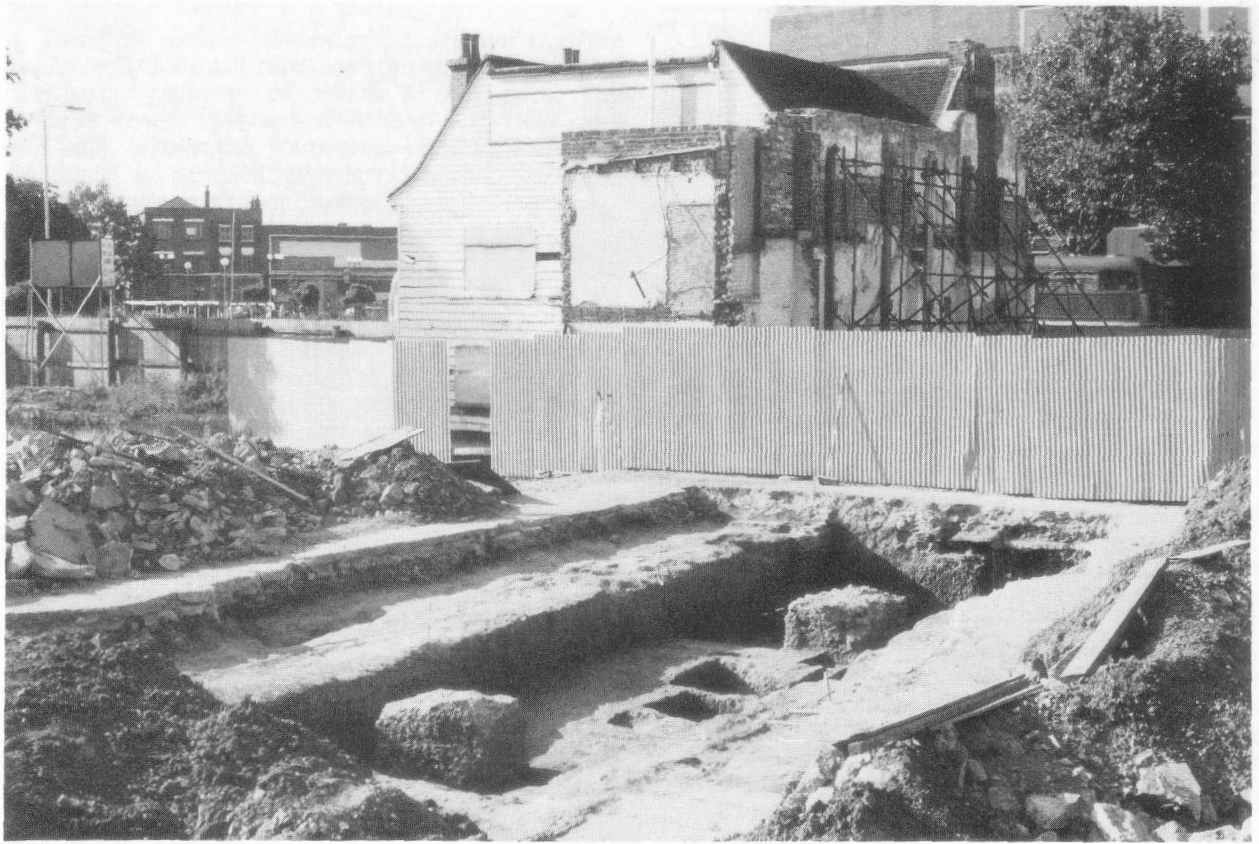


Fig. 2: General view of excavations, looking north-west.

name is first recorded as a place name between 1066 and 1087. Maud (d. 1118) built Bow and Channelsea Bridges, connected by causeway, to convey the redirected main road over the Lea and Channelsea, and settlement appears to have grown up along the road on each side of the bridge at Stratford Bow and Stratford Langthorne. The Cistercian Abbey at Stratford Langthorne was founded about half a mile to the south of this road by William de Montfitchet in 1135. Early 16th century rentals of the Abbey's land provide much topographical information about West Ham, with Stratford as one of the main areas of settlement. By the early 17th century it formed one of the parish wards, and by 1670 had become the largest ward with 179 houses².

The excavation

When in the summer of 1986 preparatory work began on the renovation of the property at 30 Romford Road (known as Webbs: London Borough of Newham TQ 3916 8448) under a scheme funded

2. Supervised by Graham Kenlin. The Archaeology Project has also conducted excavations at 5 other main sites in Walthamstow, Stratford and Barking.

by the London Borough of Newham to provide new administrative offices for the Passmore Edwards Museum, the Museum undertook the recording of the standing structure, and the organisation of excavations on and around the property to establish its building history and the elusive position of the Roman Road. This work was undertaken by members of the West Essex Archaeological Group (weekends), and members of the Forest Projects Community Programme Agency Archaeological Project, sponsored by the Passmore Edwards Museum Trust³.

The present standing structure (Figs. 2 and 3) comprises a weatherboarded timber house of symmetrical plan with 2 bays either side of a central cross-passage. The frame rests on brick ground walls supporting timber sole plates. The bays are divided into front and back rooms, separated by sleeper beam partition wall. Wooden panelling discovered *in situ* behind plasterboard walls has been dated c

3. Victoria History for the County of Essex (VCH Essex) Vol. VI (1973) 43.

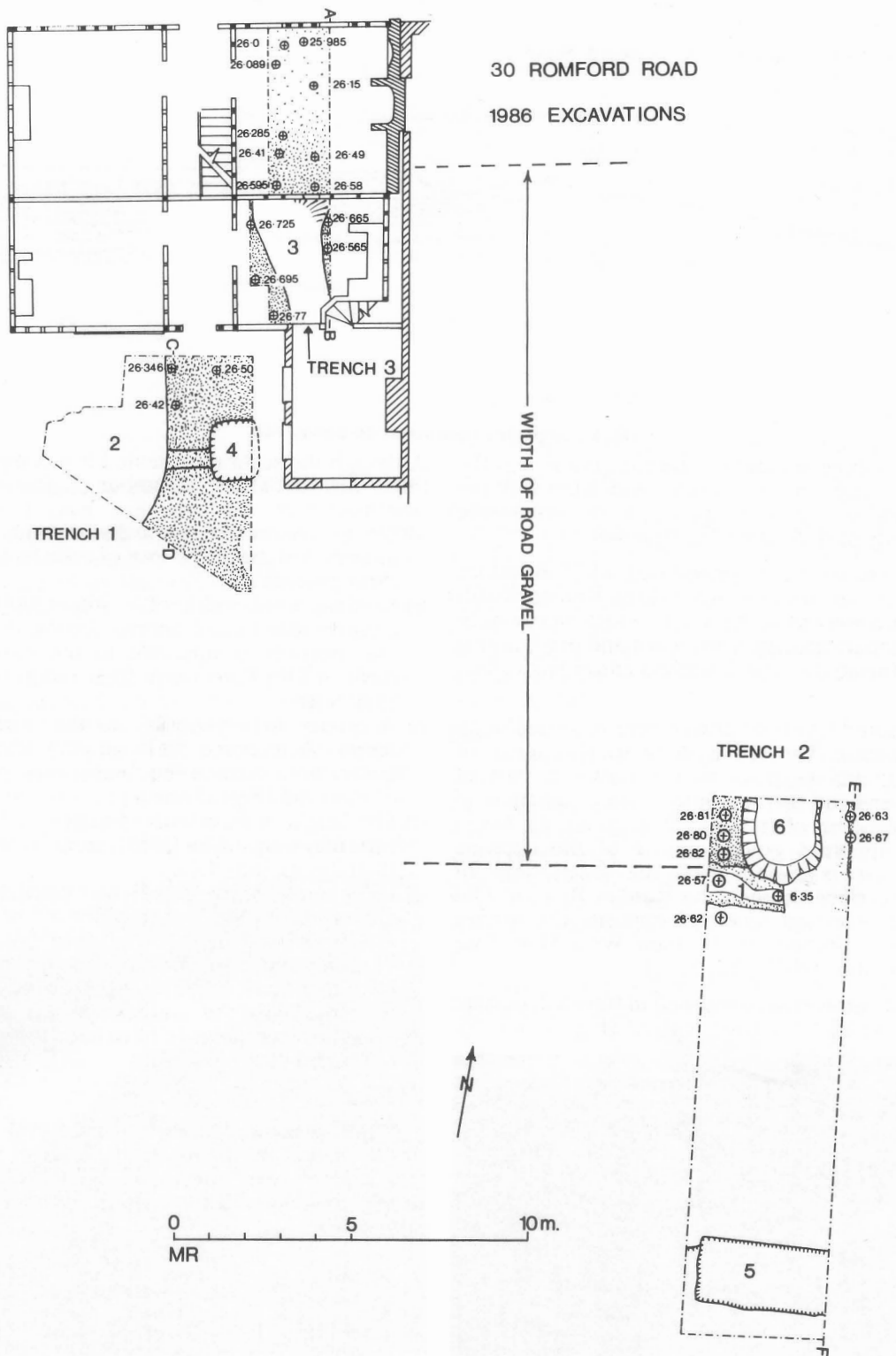


Fig. 3: Plan of 30 Romford Road and excavation. Heights of surviving road metalling (stippled) in metres above O.D.

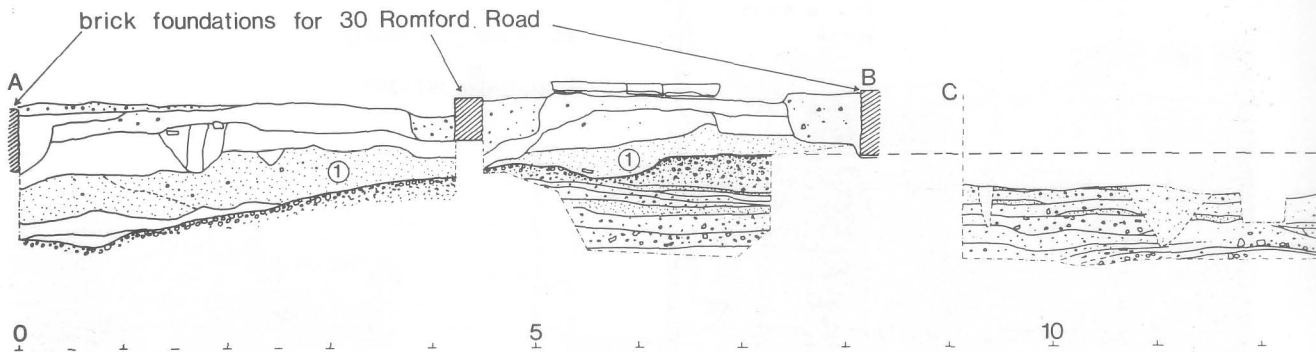


Fig. 4: Composite section across site looking east.

1720, providing a useful starting point to the excavation, and a mortar spread associated with the construction of the only original brick wall in the house neatly sealed all earlier deposits.

Two trenches were opened behind 30 Romford Road to pick up any evidence for the Roman Road, and a trench was cut within the two eastern rooms to establish the construction sequence and pre-building activity. The results are described chronologically.

Phase 1

Redeposited layers of gravel were recorded in all three trenches. The rising slope to this series of compact gravel deposits in the northern part of trench 3, and the marked gully/drainage channel in the northern end of trench 2 (Fig. 3, no. 1), taken with the apparent graded nature of the deposits between, are consistent with the descriptions of previous sections through the Roman Road at Old Ford⁴ and a section recorded opposite the former Central Fire Station of the then West Ham Fire Brigade in May 1963⁵ (Fig. 1, A).

Final road surfaces survived well in trench 2, despite partial removal by a later feature (Fig. 3, no. 6).

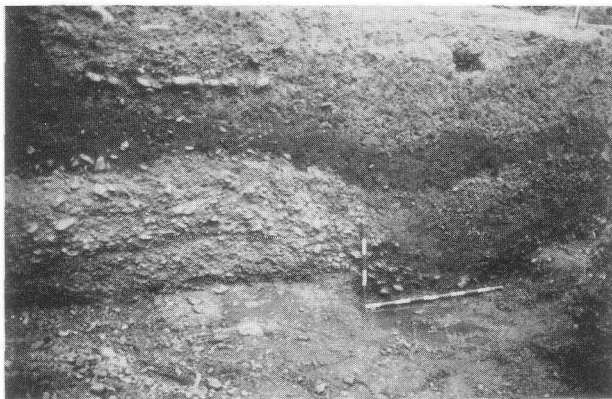


Fig. 5: View of section e-f, showing Roman road (to left).

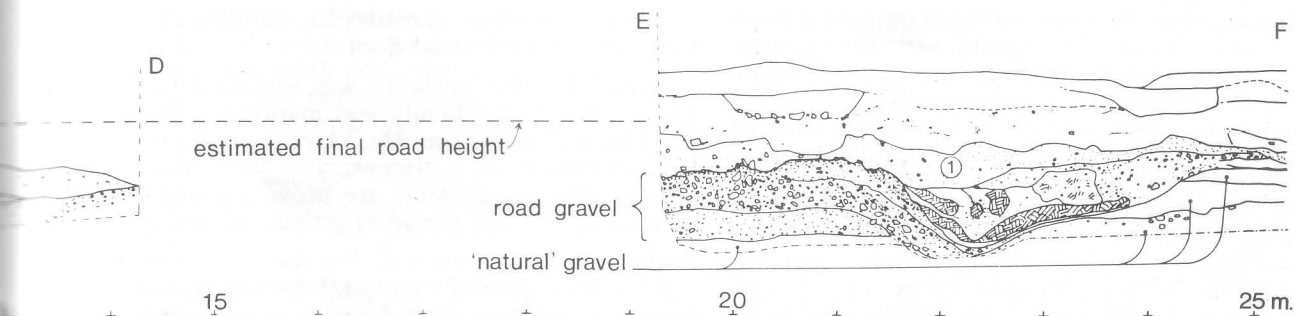
Although the section presented is a composite from three different areas, a number of observations are possible.

- Up to 9 successive deposits of sand and gravel indicate a complex history of resurfacing (at least three periods).
- Its final total width of c 30m (100ft) suggests considerable lateral spread during its period of use, possibly comparable to the road development at Old Ford (with final recorded width of 28m, 92ft).
- A quarry depression lay to the north (Fig. 4, section A-B) and a drainage gully above a silted quarry area defined the final southern perimeter of the road (Figs. 5, 6).
- The height of its estimated final metalled surface varied by only 0.24m (10in), from 26.58 to 26.82m (87ft 2in to 88ft) OD.
- In general coarse gravel was overlain by finer gravel and sand. In one place a lower layer of sand overlay a thin bedding of brickearth.
- The only material associated with these surfaces were two small fragments of possible Roman tile from the fill of the southern gully.
- The ground appears to have been deturfed before the foundations were laid.

Phase 2

No evidence was found for medieval resurfacing of the road at this point. A fine layer of light brown soil, built up over the road once it had fallen into disuse, contained 13th century potsherds (Fig. 4, context 1).

- H. Sheldon and L. Schaaf 'A Survey of Roman Sites in Greater London' *Collectanea Londiniensia* London Middlesex Archaeol Soc Special paper 2 (1978) 71; P. S. Mills 'Excavation at Roman Road and Parnell Road, Old Ford, London E3' *Trans London Middlesex Archaeol Soc* 35 (1984) 25.
- K. Marshall 'Ancient Roads at Stratford, E15' *Essex Naturalist* 31(3) (1964) 208-213.



DATUM 25.0 m. above O.D.

M.R.

Phase 3

At least two narrow gullies or ditches were cut through the brown soil into the Roman road beneath. Running north-south, they may represent parallel property boundaries. Subsequent building activity is indicated by the wall slots for two timber structures belonging to the late medieval period.

Phase 4

A large quarry pit, post-dating the timber structures mentioned above, had completely removed the road metalling from the western half of trench 1. Border Ware in the primary fills suggests a late 15th century date for this activity. This quarry extended to the north beneath the present structure. A cess pit drained into this sunken area, which appears to have slowly filled with refuse during the

16th century. The cess pit contents indicate final use c 1600-1650 (Fig. 3, no.4; Figs. 7, 8).

Phase 5

A beaten earth floor within a post built structure was found beneath the floor of the front room on a slightly different alignment to the present structure. Finds associated with the floor level, and the contents of a quarry pit in the back room, belong to the second half of the 17th century. The structure appears to have acted as a coal store during its final period of use.

Phase 6

Contrary to previous hypotheses on the development of the present structure, the house appears to have been erected at its present size with deep brick wall footings supporting all exterior walls, and a shallower brick footing supporting the central east-west partitioning. The mortar spread for the brick end wall acted as support for floor joists of reused medieval timber which lay directly on the ground.

Rocque's map (c 1741-5: Fig. 9) of the area clearly indicates a field boundary with crossing point

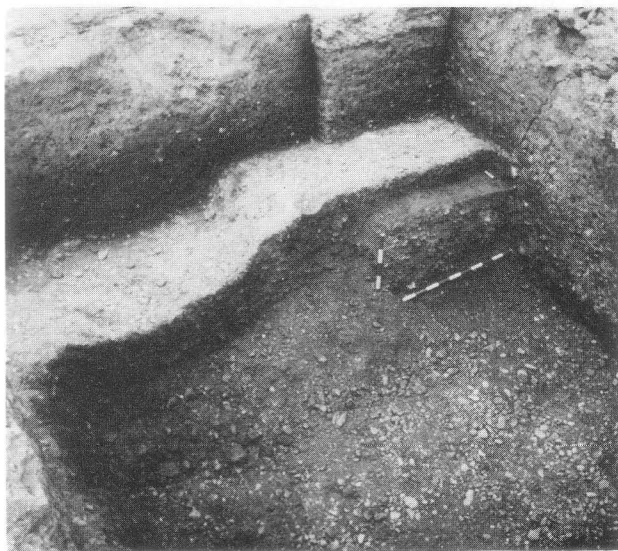


Fig. 6: View of final road surface, northern end of trench 2 (looking north-west).

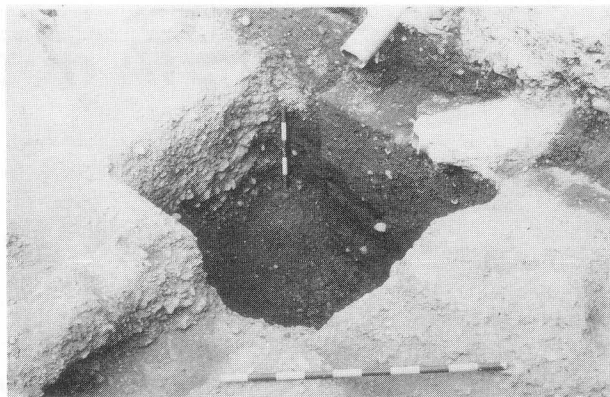


Fig. 7: Cess pit in trench 1, looking east (= Fig. 3, no. 4).

running north to the Romford Road from Ass House Lane, which would correspond with the flat-bottomed ditch at the southern end of trench 2 whose square end pinpoints a crossing/gate (Fig. 3, no. 5; Fig. 9). This would identify Webbs as the building with rectangular back-garden and central path – and a gravel path was uncovered in trench 1 running up to the back door. The poor rate books for Stratford Ward (1771-1821) indicate that 30 Romford Road formed property no. 9 on the 1821 survey, and also as early as 1778 when owned by one Joseph Rives/Rivers. On his death (c 1780/2) it passed to his wife who in 1783 was assessed as poor, when the rateable value was lowered from £16 to £10. By 1786 the house and gardens belonged to a Mrs Read, and had been reassessed at £20. Neighbouring properties were not given a revaluation, and it has been suggested that improvements had been made to the

building at this time – possibly the addition of some fireplaces on the ground floor.

From 1809 the property was occupied by Mrs Curtis. The Curtis family was involved in various West Ham charities, and Mrs Mary Curtis let free 30 Romford Road for a dispensary in 1861. The 19th century pits and contents are providing additional information on this period of activity on the site.

Discussion

It has been generally accepted that the network of highways radiating from London were laid down early in the 1st century, with construction levels at Old Ford suggesting a date soon after 43 A.D. The Roman road at Stratford highlights the problems of recording based on limited area excavation and incomplete profiles, of distinguishing 'natural' gravel from redeposited gravel, and of correlating metalled

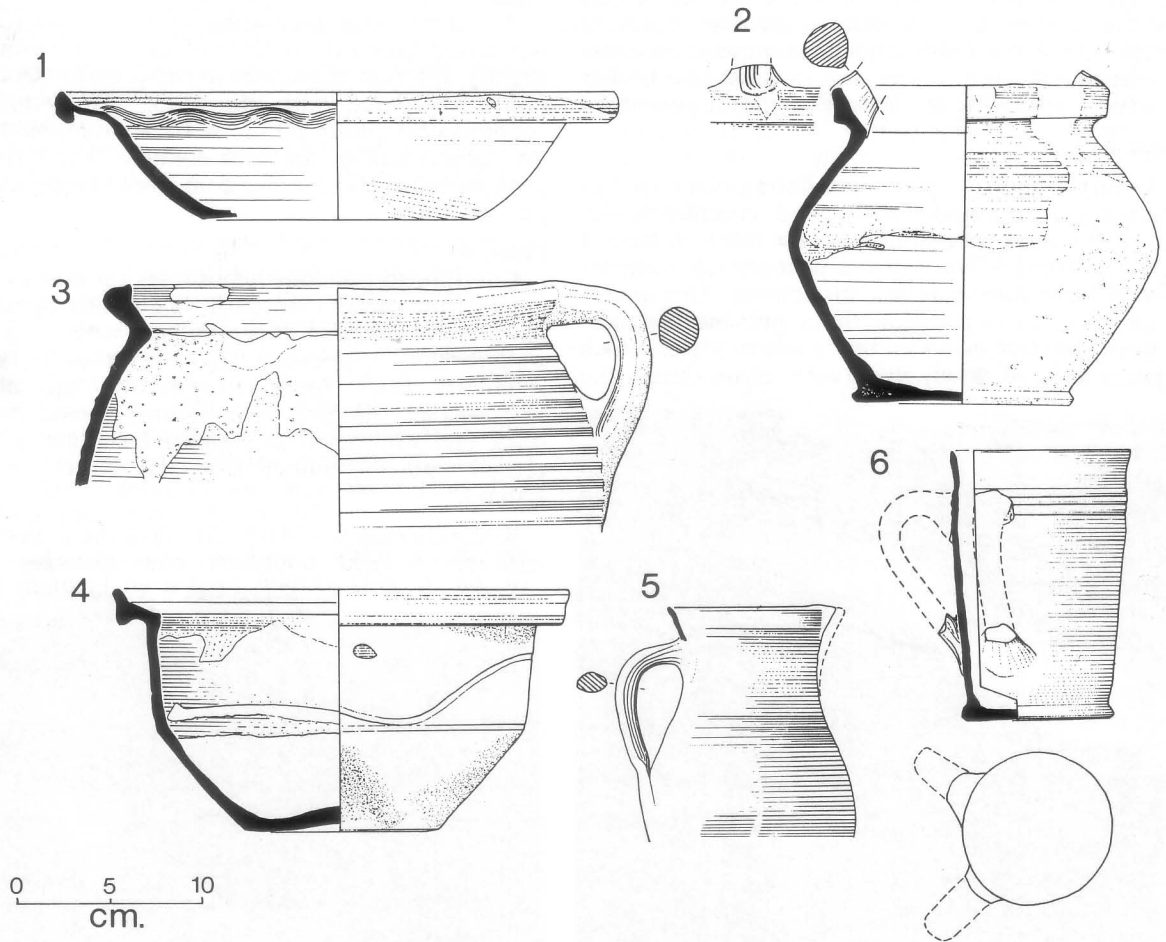


Fig. 8: Selection of pottery from cess pit.
 1 = Surrey White Ware, 2 & 4 = Guys Ware, 3 = Post-medieval Red Ware,
 5 - 6 = Post-medieval Black Ware.
 (Scale 1/4).

deposits laterally when there appears to be considerable axial variation. As at Old Ford, the quarry or ditch on the south side appears to have a primary fill of gravel spill beneath layers of clay or gravel, sand and clay. Natural also appears higher to the south of the road. The 1963 road section (TQ 3955 8642) which required a mechanical digger to cut through, comprised a 0.4m (16in) thick spread of gravel graded from side pits which also lay beneath a deposit of brown soil. The great width of the 1986 section suggests extensive lateral spread with successive remetalling. Unlike at Old Ford, no evidence exists for Roman settlement along the road at this point.

Subsequent sequences show general similarities with Waltham Abbey (Sun Street) and Stepney, with medieval boundary markers running perpendicular to the street, and similar brown soil accumulation. The early 12th century resiting of the main road to run north-east – south-west from Stratford to Bow is the most likely period for abandonment of this section of road for a slightly different alignment to the north. The substantial late medieval quarrying of road gravel might provide an origin for the village pond. Excavations by the Museum in 1982 revealed a large feature at the northern end interpreted as the late medieval village pond (shaded area, Fig. 1 B), and it may be related to the quarried area found in trench 1 in the 1986 excavations (Fig. 3, no. 2). Defoe, describing the area in 1722, refers to the growth of two hamlets at Stratford, one at Maryland-Point and one ‘facing the road to Illford’ named the ‘Gravel- Pits’: an apparent reference to the area concerned⁶. He also recorded that Stratford had doubled in size during the previous 20 to 30 years, which corresponds with the suggested construction date for the present 30 Romford Road.

6. D. Defoe *A Tour through the Whole Island of Great Britain 1724-6* Vol. 1 (1724).

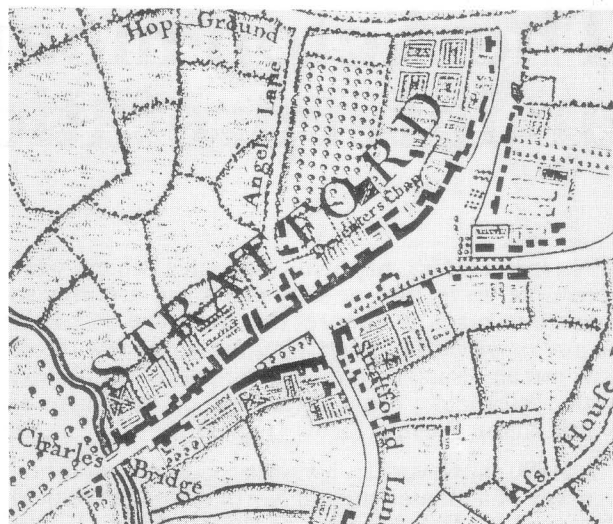


Fig. 9: Detail from J. Rocque's Survey of London c 1741-5. Boxed area = Fig. 1, B).

Acknowledgements

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A.G.M. of the London Archaeologist

THE EIGHTEENTH A.G.M. of *the London Archaeologist* was held on 27 May in the Lecture Theatre of the Institute of Archaeology. The following officers were elected – Editor, Clive Orton; Assistant Editors, Barbara Davis and Rhoda Edwards; Secretary, Nesta Caiger; Advertising and Promotion, Betsey Kentish; Subscriptions, Shiela Broomfield; Managing Editor, Nicholas Fuentes – and the auditors were re-elected. Marsden Anderson, the retiring Chairman of the Publication Committee, was thanked for his work over the past

two years. Representatives to serve on the Publication Committee were elected from the City of London Archaeological Society, Croydon & District Natural History Society, Pinner Local History Society, Richmond Archaeological Society and West London Archaeological Field Group. The accounts showed a surplus on the year of about £50, but they did not reflect the recent price increase, which is needed to clear the accumulated deficit. After the close of business, Nick Merriman spoke on ‘New Evidence of Central London in Prehistory’.