

New foundations

A monograph won the 2016 London Archaeological Prize for best publication of 2014/2015 – and it was one that transforms Southwark’s prehistoric and Roman archaeology. Becky Wallower interviewed principal author, Douglas Killock, and monograph editor and contributor, Victoria Ridgeway, to discuss how they put together a publication to match the importance of the site: Tabard Square.

Since it was relaunched in 2007, *London Archaeologist* has been on a mission: we want to promote high standards of writing about archaeology, and encourage the widest possible range of publications on the subject.

A key tool in this quest is our administration since 2010 of the bi-annual London Archaeological Prize – familiarly known as the publication prize. This series of ‘Author, author...’ articles in LA enables us to quiz the prize winners on how they work and think, and to showcase some of the methods, ideas and approaches that make their publication so successful.

The story

The story of *Temples and Suburbs*, the prize winning monograph on Tabard Square by Pre-Construct Archaeology (PCA) starts, of course, with large scale excavations, or rather with the desk-based assessment and evaluation leading up to them. Given that it was in an Archaeological Priority Zone, near Roman Watling Street, and part of Southwark’s braided riverine landscape, the assessment identified the site as having high archaeological potential. The subsequent evaluation recorded a prehistoric fluvial channel, extensive Roman deposits from mid first- to fourth-century date, and post-medieval buildings and features.

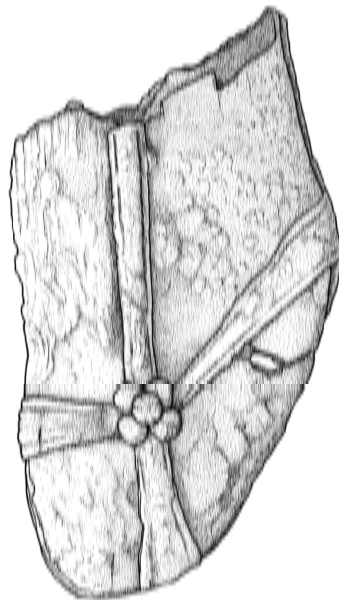
By the time Douglas Killock was appointed site supervisor, he had done extensive background research, and anticipated good, if not exceptional, results. For a year from July 2002 he led a team of 50 archaeologists working on what would be the largest open-area site ever excavated in Southwark: around 1.15 hectares located between Long Lane and Tabard Street. Starting from the centre, they moved from area to area, phase to phase, as the

perimeter secant pile wall was built and demolition and construction progressed around them.

Results

What no one had expected was the discovery of an important temple complex that was begun in the second century, and enough ground-breaking new material to merit a major monograph on the prehistoric and Roman findings alone.

The rarity of religious buildings, let alone complexes, in *Londinium* and its surrounding area meant that the Tabard Square site was certain to impact



ABOVE One of the fine illustrations that helped bring clarity to the presentation of Tabard Square was of this larger than life-size sandaled bronze foot, probably of a deity. See the cover of LA Summer 2015 for a photo. **RIGHT** Reconstruction drawings became part of the iterative process of developing the monograph, as each detail included in the picture was examined in light of the evidence. The result, whilst evocative, is a reminder that archaeological publication can only presents possible interpretations of the remains encountered.

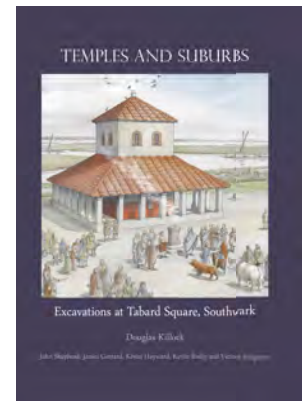
interpretation of the period. The fact that the complex continued to be developed, clearly remaining an important aspect of the Southwark suburb, only magnified this point.

Some of the Roman discoveries featured widely in the media as they surfaced – the canister of cosmetic cream, or ‘pot of goo’, that was opened to display ancient finger marks, for instance, and the remarkable *Mars Camulus* inscription providing the first ever mention of Londoners in the Roman archive. Both these, indeed, have been subjects of further publications in their own right.

It was in the lengthy post-excavation process, however, where the full Tabard Square story emerged, providing new elements not only of the picture of Roman London’s less thoroughly investigated suburb, but of Southwark’s prehistoric landscape as well.

Making sense of the immense

Douglas has been supervising sites for PCA since he joined 21 years ago, after spells at the DUA and in Italy. He’s



published numerous site reports too, including nearby Bermondsey Street, Tyers Gate and Southwark Street, but Tabard Square turned out to be the most significant by far. It's also the first time he's been principal author of a monograph, which involved much more than a scaling up exercise. From the start, his goal was above all to do justice to the site.

He was especially conscious through the phased excavation that the topography was not as expected. 'More land, less water,' as he succinctly puts it, meant that ideas of the landscape were being debated and refined throughout excavation and drafting processes. 'When the channel wasn't as predicted we had to reassess the model and evidence. Setting out the arguments for nudging the shoreline northwards a bit became a more significant part of the monograph than anticipated.'

Similarly, substantial Roman evidence across centuries demanded much cross-speciality expertise and interpretation. A good example was Ditch 8, which was maintained and reused throughout the life of the complex, and collected numerous depositions for seemingly different purposes. Having necessarily been excavated piecemeal throughout the excavations, it was only in the post-ex process that the metalwork, pottery,

BELOW the *Mars Camulus* inscription with the first mention of Londoners, *Londiniensi*. All images © Pre-Construct Archaeology.



animal bone, timber, wall plaster, jewellery and other finds – and sections of the 80m ditch itself – could be joined up and its lifelong relevance assessed.

As Victoria Ridgeway has managed publications for much of her 22 years with PCA and has edited 19 monographs, the whole process was more familiar. With a rough outline and sequence in mind from the assessment stage, the key challenge this time was the size and complexity of the project, as she worked to convey the site's significance without losing important detail. With Douglas in the role of principal author, specialists (many in house) were brought in according to the significance and volume of evidence. Key contributors were James Gerrard (pottery and coins), Kevin Hayward (stone and building material) and Kevin Rielly (animal bone). John Shepherd, with expertise across Roman Britain, co-edited the volume with Victoria and both also wrote text. Once Douglas had written the main text (in a single block), the process was iterative, 'a balancing act,' as Victoria puts it, with sections and components being refined and moved around. Differing interpretations of data and text were resolved through discussion and revision.

'We know that our main readers are our peers,' Victoria explained. 'They're the ones who'll be referring to this in the long term, so it has to meet their needs. But all sorts of people will want to know more about such an important site, so we wanted the general sections especially to be straightforward and clear, but also readable and interesting.'

Thanks to funding over and above that provided by the developer, Berkeley Homes, a more ambitious publication than originally imagined was possible. SLAEC made a grant for assessment of the coins, and PCA's own management provided extra funds to ensure the necessary scale and quality.

Final verdict

The entries for the 2016 London Archaeological Prize were of an exceptional standard: only a few points separated the top five and there was initially a tie for the top place. In the runoff, Tabard Square won the judgement for its clarity and usability – precisely what PCA had worked to achieve. Judges also commended the

The quest for clarity

Not all monographs are fit to win prizes, but this one won praise from all the judges. It was obvious from our interview that doing justice to an incredible site was the prime motivation for all concerned with Tabard Square, but how do you do that? We asked Douglas (DK) and Victoria (VR) for some insights.
 DK: First, find some amazing archaeology... and then don't lose site of the big picture. When you're immersed in 14,000 contexts no one can hear you scream, so we tried not to work in isolation. Lots of discussion kept inspiring all of us to go back and do more work.
 VR: We kept revisiting the period plans too, stripping out detail that didn't make them clearer, simplifying where we could. We felt that clarity was really key, in the writing as well as the presentation.
 DK: I think having to stop sometimes for other work also gave us clarity. It allowed us to let our pet ideas go in some cases, and meant we read enormous amounts.
 VR: And reading is so important for the writing side: the more you read, the better an author you become. More than anything, though, I think we were all genuinely excited by the site, even through the long post-ex exercise.
 DK: Absolutely. That moment when I was called over to see the inscription finally revealed stays with me even now. I could see '...ondiniensis' and said to Ireneo Grosso, the digger, 'It would be nice if there was an 'L' before that.' He invited me to have a look from another angle, and there it was: history literally before our eyes.

comprehensible and clear site plans (produced by Mark Roughley), the layout (designed by Cate Davies) and the well presented specialist reports.

Given the complexity and difficulty of the excavations, it's not hard to see why the judges especially appreciated the care taken in explaining the implications of the findings, and in setting the site in context, both locally in Southwark and London, and more widely in Britain. And did the authors feel it had turned out as hoped? 'Better,' said Douglas. And Victoria is – quite rightly – 'very, very pleased'.

Temples and suburbs: Excavations at Tabard Square, Southwark

by Douglas Killock, John Shepherd, James Gerrard, Kevin Hayward, Kevin Rielly and Victoria Ridgeway
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