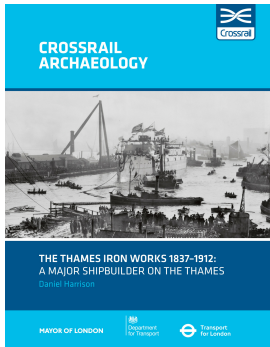


## The Thames Iron Works 1837–1912: a major shipbuilder on the Thames



**Daniel Harrison**

Museum of London Archaeology /  
Crossrail Limited

2015

114 pages, paperback

103 figures, 2 tables, bibliography

£10

Reviewed by Peter Rowsome

Thames Iron Works is part of the series of reports on findings from the Crossrail project. Whether you describe it as a popular or hybrid publication it is undoubtedly an attractive and informative book. It traces the history of The Thames Iron Works and Shipbuilding Company, which launched some of the most famous warships of the Victorian era from its slipways near the mouth of the River Lea. The company was a pioneer in shipbuilding and civil engineering projects using iron. Evidence of important parts of the yard included workshops, a furnace and

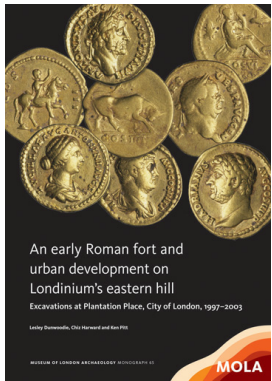
a slipway. The archaeological findings are seamlessly integrated with the history of the company, placing it in the wider context of London's 19th-century industry and society.

The book shows how industrial archaeology can be presented to a wider audience without any loss of scholarship. It is well-written and clear, combining thorough technical analysis with explanations that should make sense to those less familiar with the topics covered. MOLA have once again produced a good-looking book, with a clean page layout and pleasing design. The text is complemented by an outstanding selection of relevant photographs, maps and historic documents. There is a full bibliography for those who want to do further research while the paper and digital archives and finds from the site are publicly accessible at the LAARC. The lack of an index is a minor drawback.

Thames Iron Works was nominated for the recent London Archaeological Prize and proved to be a strong contender, with one judge saying 'This is the type of book we should be producing for sites if we are after public support for archaeology.'

There are far too many interesting facts and details in the book to go into here but this Arsenal fan did note the presence of a football crest on p. 26 with the following caption 'The riveter's hammer still features on the West Ham United football club crest, with TIW on the heads'. Highly recommended (not West Ham, but the book)!

## An early Roman fort and urban development on Londinium's eastern hill Excavations at Plantation Place, City of London, 1997–2003



**Lesley Dunwoodie, Chiz Harward and Ken Pitt**

MOLA Monograph 65

2015

263 pages, hardback

180 illustrations, tables, bibliography  
and index plus CD

£30

Reviewed by Becky Wallower

Having helped process finds on site at Plantation Place for several months in 2000, I was keen to see how the incredibly dense and significant evidence would pan out. And indeed, it turns out to have been just as important as expected, and even more complex.

The most telling discovery was of the corner of a previously unknown early fort, built to reinforce defences after the Boudican revolt, c. AD 63. Constructed over the main east-west road and the remains of clay and timber buildings, this was smaller than the later fort in at Cripplegate, but would have accommodated a garrison of up to 500. The defences consisted of two *fossa fastigata* ditches (with 'ankle breaker' slots in the base), and a well-built *vallum* which made use of salvaged timbers from the destroyed town. An internal road and facilities such as a well, latrine, cookhouse and granary were identified within the circuit. The

extensive military finds (including an important infantry cuirass) provided good evidence of the material culture of an urban fort.

Although much disturbed, the pre-Boudican phases on site revealed the main road, a minor road on the west of the site, and possible industrial areas. Probably planned as a temporary measure, the scale of the new structure clearly had an impact on the eastern hill, with little rebuilding in the immediate vicinity for some decades, and local roads displaced. The fort apparently ceased to be well maintained from c. AD 70 and was finally cleared around AD 85, begging the question: where was the military housed until Cripplegate fort was built in c. AD 120?

Development after the clearance had a quite different, largely civilian, character. More ordered and prosperous clay and timber buildings appeared and the east-west road was reinstated. Glass working on a small scale may have been established.

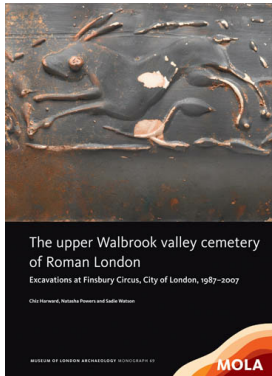
All this was destroyed in the Hadrianic fire, after which the area became less densely occupied but very wealthy. In the redeveloped *insula*, a large townhouse with at least three wings was constructed, and continued to be remodelled through several centuries. It was in the townhouse that the stunning hoard of 43 gold coins was found – in a bag within a box, buried in a sunken strongroom. These date from the reign of Nero, AD 65–6, to that of Marcus Aurelius, AD173–4 and must represent a fortune concealed by a rich Londoner but never recovered.

Analysis of excavations and finds is integrated, as is now common practice, and important issues are discussed in detail, in the context of Roman parallels in both Britain and elsewhere in the empire. Although a full chapter and other sections are devoted to the fort, this volume does a terrific job of giving life to the the locality, and to the site and its use over its long life.

As with the amphitheatre in 1985, finding such a major Roman structure in the most thoroughly investigated city in Britain is salutary – much may yet remain to be discovered.

## The upper Walbrook valley cemetery of Roman London

### Excavations at Finsbury Circus, City of London, 1987–2007



**Chiz Harward, Natasha Powers and Sadie Watson**

MOLA Monograph 69

2015

210 pages, hardback

141 illustrations, tables, bibliography and index

£25

Reviewed by Peter Rowsome

*The upper Walbrook valley cemetery of Roman London* provides us with a thoughtful and detailed analysis of evidence that sheds light on one of Roman London's most debated topics: the significance of the human skulls and other skeletal material recovered from the Walbrook stream. This publication reports on the finds from two MOLA sites located on the north side of Finsbury Circus, excavated between 2003–7. The scope and significance of the work is enhanced by the decision to integrate the evidence from four adjacent, unpublished DUA/MoLAS sites that were excavated in the 1980s and 1990s. The result is a much more substantial report, providing readers with an excellent research dividend. The developers of the sites should be congratulated for supporting a combined publication of the findings.

The unusual number of skulls found in the Walbrook over the last century or so has often been attributed to the disposal of victims of the Boudican rebellion and sometimes associated with

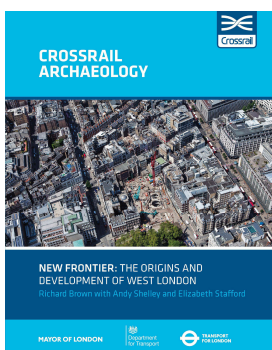
ritual deposition or a 'cult of the head'. Excavations at Liverpool Street in 2014 for Crossrail found yet more skulls and skeletal material in 1st-century Walbrook flood deposits and a 2nd-century roadside ditch. An April 2016 Channel 4 documentary called 'The Mystery of the Crossrail skulls' presented four contending theories. While the Boudican massacre theory faltered, as the burials were clearly later, other suggested sources for the skulls included streambank erosion, the disposal of executed prisoners or gladiators killed in the amphitheatre, and a Hadrianic rebellion brutally suppressed by Roman soldiers who followed a Celtic custom of head hunting.

These competing theories can be confusing, the evidence varying from site to site, and the Channel 4 programme left this viewer wanting more facts. Fortunately, the authors of *The upper Walbrook valley cemetery of Roman London* have reviewed the pre-Crossrail evidence, showing that the extra-mural cemetery in the upper Walbrook area near Finsbury Circus did suffer from riverine erosion and that this led to the sorting and selective redeposition of skeletal material downstream, with skulls tending to travel the furthest. The evidence is clearly presented and interpreted.

The authors also discuss some of the more intriguing aspects of the findings that are not so easily explained. The ongoing disturbance of burials along the stream banks should have been obvious to cemetery users but formal burial continued for a lengthy period. Did these particular burials have to be interred in this marginal area for some reason? Was the placing of the dead in a location where they might be at risk of disturbance intentional, perhaps related to the ritual significance of the Walbrook? As is often the case, the devil is in the detail.

This handsome monograph has all of the high production values that we have come to expect from MOLA. The presentation of the evidence is flawless, the well-edited text supported by carefully cross-referenced phase plans, drawings and photographs, all backed up by detailed specialist reports and a full index. I would certainly recommend it to anyone interested in London's Roman cemeteries.

## New Frontier: the origins and development of West London



**Richard Brown with Andy Shelley and Elizabeth Stafford**

Oxford Archaeology

2016

105 pages, paperback

many illustrations, bibliography

£10

Reviewed by Alastair Ainsworth

As this was the first of the Crossrail Archaeology publications series I had read, this volume was not what I expected. It is not a book for specialists, but for general readers like myself with an interest in history and who probably live or work in west London.

The Crossrail construction site ran along a corridor through

London: this book covers the section from the west boundary of inner London to Tottenham Court Road station. Where this and other new stations and facilities were constructed, the authors provide a detailed description of the development of both the station and the surrounding area. This history is thoroughly embellished with names, professions and other information about the people influencing change.

The Palaeolithic to the Medieval periods are covered in only 24 pages, with the remaining chapters concentrating on post-Medieval London. The major Palaeolithic finds, discovered during the excavation for the portal at Royal Oak, included bones of Ice Age fauna such as reindeer and bison. Description of this last site included fascinating details about the evolution of the Charing Cross Road area where the original Crosse and Blackwell factory was located.

My impression was that the proof-reading of the book was done in a bit of a hurry. Also, colour highlighting would have aided understanding some of the reprinted old maps.

Nevertheless, this book is full of facts and little known details, ideal for anyone interested in the history of the development of west London.