

CI 4-dated Late Anglo-Saxon activity on the northern edge of Stratford High Street

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Introduction

Archaeological investigation by MOLA (Museum of London Archaeology) in the Lea Valley during redevelopment work at the site of Duncan House, High Street, Stratford, on the west bank of the Channelsea River, revealed wood debris and *in situ* stakes that have been radiocarbon dated to between the late 8th and late 10th century AD (Fig 1).¹ The strata suggest an associated, if approximate, ground level of about 2m OD.

The site is underlain by Kempton Park river terrace gravels at about 0.9–1.0m OD, while modern ground level in the north-eastern part of the site is between 5.4m and 5.9m OD. The gravel was overlain by c. 0.75 of clayey alluvium which was sealed by 0.15–0.30m of gravelly sand found as high as 2.05m OD. The gravelly sand is thought to be historic made-ground and there was wood debris, including pieces of roundwood, fragments of wood-working waste and cleft oak timbers found strewn on the interface with the clay alluvium.

Datable finds

This gravelly sand layer covered three oak stakes (tops at 1.66–1.72m OD) that had been driven into the clay. There was also a larger, radially cleft timber pile or driven post (200mm x 170mm x 1.05m long) protruding above the gravelly sand to 2.11m OD.

One fragment of Roman *tegula* roof tile was recovered from the clay alluvium below the gravelly sand and further alluvial clay/silt layers over the sand (rising to a truncation level as high as 2.80m OD) included other fragments of ceramic building material, one of

which was of a late- or post-medieval peg roof tile.

Radiocarbon dates were obtained from one of the three oak stakes (not the larger radially cleft pile/upright found at a higher level) and two pieces of the wooden debris: a fragment of oak wood-working waste and a piece of willow/poplar roundwood. The stake is dated to cal AD 775–985 (SUERC-78943; 1137±24 bp). The oak woodworking debris fragment is dated to cal AD 770–950 (SUERC-78944; 1171±24 bp); the willow/poplar roundwood to cal AD 895–1020 (SUERC-78945; 1074±24 bp). The calibrated date ranges (each at 95% confidence) all together span the period from AD 770–1020, overlapping between AD 895 and 950.

To put the dates and levels in context: large high-water spring tide levels in the Thames in the City were at c. 2.0–2.2m OD just before AD 100 and fell to c. 0m OD by the end of the 3rd century before rising again to c. 1.7–1.8m OD by the 7th century.² The tide level continued to rise thereafter, returning to early Roman levels just after AD 1100. Thus, it is not surprising to find an activity area at about 2.0m OD dating to the late Anglo-Saxon period, albeit on what was probably low ground, perhaps very near the riverbank.

Historical background

Some historical context for the area at this period is provided by the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* which records how, in AD 895, a Danish Viking army encamped further to the north after bringing their ships up the Lea from the Thames. In an effort to prevent the

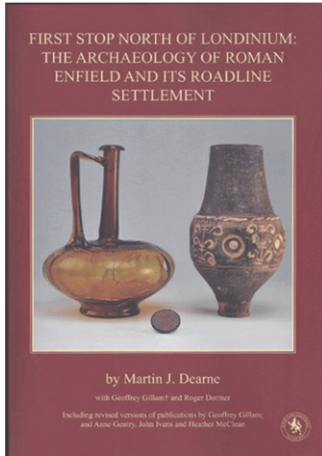
Viking army from bringing their ships back down and out of the Lea, King Alfred rode up the valley and found a spot where ‘...one might block the river, so that they could not bring out their ships.’³ As a result, the Danes are reported to have abandoned their ships and escaped overland.

Perhaps modern Stratford High Street runs across a part of the Lea Valley that was suitable for this sort of defensive action in late Anglo-Saxon times. The modern road itself is thought to have developed from a 12th-century



Fig 1: site location plan

First Stop North of Londinium: the archaeology of Roman Enfield and its roadline settlement



**Martin J Dearne, with
Geoffrey Gillam† and
Roger Dormer**

Enfield Archaeological
Society

2017

342 pages, paperback

137 figures, 19 colour plates,
bibliography and index

£30

Reviewed by Diana Briscoe

Founded in 1955, the Enfield Archaeological Society has been excavating in the modern borough since 1966 and this report covers sites and finds from the early 1900s to 2011 around the Bush Hill Park settlement, plus MOLA's fieldwork in 2012–13.

The Bush Hill Park settlement appears to have been a ribbon

development along the western side of Ermine Street, starting in the Flavian period, and may well have been the first stopping point for travellers from London heading north. Re-used ceramic building materials include roof tiles and hypocaust fragments, so it is not unreasonable to conclude that there may have been a *mansio* or *mutatio*, and possibly a bathhouse as well, somewhere in the area. However, as many of the 55 investigations covered were keyhole interventions in suburban gardens, it is difficult to obtain an overall picture of the settlement or how it expanded over time. There is some evidence of industry and commerce, while hipposandals confirm the importance of transport. Finds of samian ware, amphorae, fine glass vessels, exotic jewellery and a hoard of 326 coins (dating to the mid-4th century), testify to the settlement's longevity and prosperity.

The report also includes an overview of the various excavations at Churchfield in Edmonton between the 1920s and 1971. Sadly, most of those excavations were poorly recorded and unpublished, except for Geoffrey Gillam's 1951 excavation, and most of the finds have been lost. There are also brief considerations of seven burial sites, other interesting finds and a Gazetteer of Isolated Finds.

It is inevitable that some artefact reports could not be brought up to modern standards, due to the loss of finds and lack of records, although much material is included for the first time. The book is well designed, clearly laid out and contains a comprehensive index. The author and society are to be congratulated on an excellent production, which will introduce many to a part of Greater London hitherto unknown.

causeway, which is said to have been commissioned by Queen Matilda.⁴

Discussion

The evidence from Duncan House contributes to the developing picture of Anglo-Saxon activity in the Lea Valley, complementing radiocarbon dates obtained from other sites nearby. Many wooden structural elements (stakes, piles, wattle rods and other timbers) found during archaeological investigations on the bank of the Waterworks River about 1km to the north-west of the site have been dated to the Middle and Late Anglo-Saxon period.⁵

Just 350m to the west of the site, at 150 Stratford High Street (also on the bank of the Waterworks River), stakes from a wattle structure have been dated to between the late 9th and mid-11th centuries (along with an Early Anglo-Saxon date from a different structure at the same site).⁶ The new radiocarbon dates and the associated spot heights from Duncan House are important new data points for archaeologists seeking to understand the complex history of the Lea Valley.

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