

Lift going down: the investigation of Roman buildings at Dyers' Hall, City of London

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Introduction

The subject of this article is a small area, a former wine cellar in the basement of the north-western part of Dyers' Hall, 10 College Hill, in the City of London (Fig 1). Excavations were carried out to form a new lift pit where a sequence of archaeological deposits, some 2.5m deep and mainly of Roman date, were recorded. The three stages of investigation comprised the assessment (research),¹ the monitoring of geo-technical test pits (evaluation)² and the investigation during the construction stage (mitigation).³

Geology and topography

The City of London lies above gravel terraces deposited by the flow of the River Thames. Natural deposits on the site were encountered at between 2.5m OD and 3.5m OD and consisted of sandy gravels.

The Dyers' Hall is built upon an interesting topographic position. The land is entirely within the floodplain of the River Walbrook; an important tributary of the Thames prior to and during the Roman period. Rising from a series of minor watercourses, the principal stream was located on the south side of Highbury Fields⁴ and ran broadly south-west to join the Thames. The final length of the Walbrook ran under what is now Tallow Chandlers' and Skinners' Halls respectively to enter the Thames (an outfall still exists). Dyers' Hall abuts Skinners' Hall and sits on what would have been land just east of the main channel of that river. The north bank of the modern Thames is c. 200m to the south.

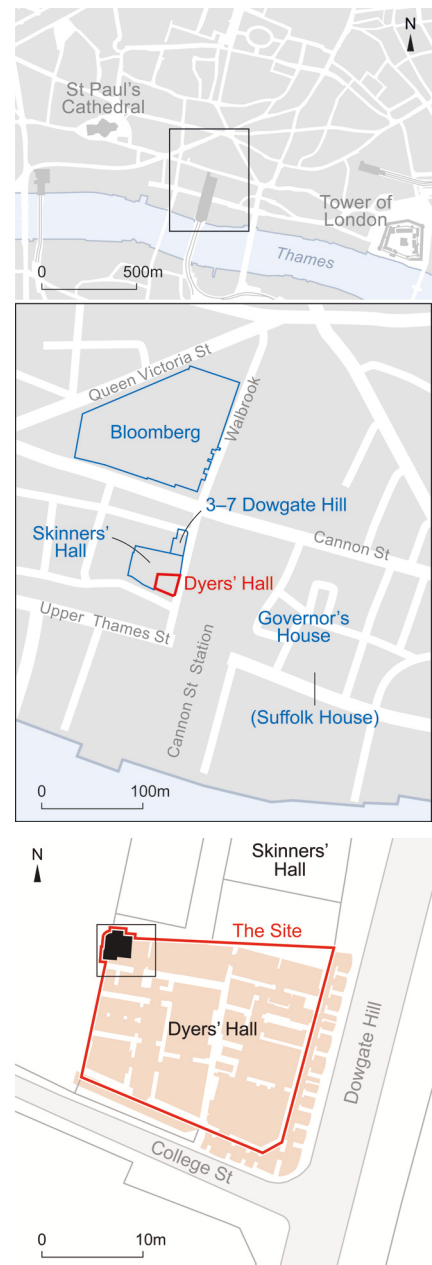
Archaeological background

The Dyers' Hall, the third livery company hall to stand on the site, is a Scheduled Monument (1002057) and is Grade II* listed. The listing description ends thus:

During the 19th-century rebuilding, the remains of a Roman tessellated pavement were uncovered at a depth of nearly 5m below ground level. The scheduling includes the archaeological and environmental remains below the hall. The remains of a Roman imperial palace or *praetorium* form a separate scheduling, a short distance to the east.⁵

The reference to a tessellated pavement was intriguing, as the lift shaft was to be excavated within an existing basement. Importantly, the OD height of the modern street level is c. 7.1m OD, the surface level at which the modern basement floor lay was at 4.5m OD (with 2.6m lost). The records from the 19th-century observations are recorded briefly in the Greater London Historic Environment Record (GLHER). This describes a tessellated floor at between c. 4.6m and c. 4.9m below ground level (MLO14713). Those depths would mean the pavement occurred at approximately 2.5m to 2.2m OD; this is a depth past which the lift pit would reach during the construction stage.

The reference to the imperial palace relates to the so-called 'Governor's palace'⁶ and the interpretation of that site as a palace remains contested.⁷ For this reason, the so-called Governor's palace is termed Governor's House and, to prevent misunderstanding,



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Fig 1: site location (top and bottom) with nearby key archaeological sites (centre)

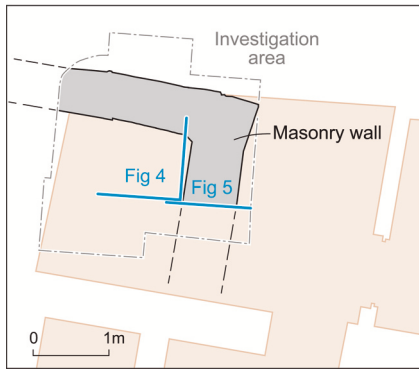


Fig 2: plan showing the Phase 2 masonry wall

the modern Governor's House built on the site of Suffolk House which was part of the Governor's House excavations in 1969 and 1994, is called Suffolk House in this report. This article takes cognisance of the proximity of what is surely high status, well-investigated Roman site/s, and seeks to compare assemblages where possible.

There is one further record on the GLHER (MLO13339) from within the site. This describes a flood deposit c. 1.4m deep interpreted as being the 'ancient Walbrook', thus reminding us of another debate – over the precise course of the Walbrook over time. This subject has benefitted from much recent work and publication, referenced below.

The archaeological sequence

Early Roman construction: 1st century AD
The earliest activity on the site (Phase 1) dates to the early Roman period.

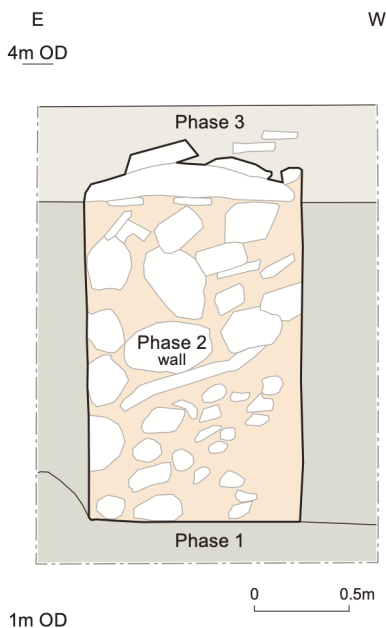


Fig 3: section showing the Phase 2 masonry wall

Despite the size of the investigation area (6m²), variation in the level of natural geological deposits was notable. A difference of 1m being observed (as deposits were recorded at 2.5m OD and 3.5m OD). This is a constrained space and interpretations within it are mindful of that. However, the construction of an impressive masonry structure on this location (Phase 2; Fig 2) will have required terracing of what was a slope, running east to west and dropping sharply.

This is known from various studies (drawing on borehole data) and very specifically due to nearby geoarchaeological boreholes just 10m to the west (within Skinners' Hall). These boreholes recorded natural deposits between 0m and 0.5m OD, above which were deposits recorded as natural river silts. This shows a rapid drop into the channel of the Walbrook,⁸ a short distance west of the investigation area.

A masonry building and associated occupation: 1st–2nd century AD

A masonry wall and associated occupation layers were constructed, and in use during the 1st–2nd century. Cut into the underlying geological deposits, the wall was constructed of ragstone blocks and other material (Figs 3 & 4). It measured a maximum of 1.7m in height and 1.04m wide. The L-shaped corner of a room/building was recorded, the longer section of wall being 2.5m long and the shorter 1.5m long. It is noted that the wall continued west and south beyond the investigation area.

The foundation of the Phase 2 (1st-century) masonry wall consisted of a mixture of hard robust rubblestone materials, all acquired from south-east England. Dominant in this structure (40kg) and from the entire stone assemblage (80% by weight) is the use of a hard-grey sandy limestone, Kentish ragstone, quarried from the Lower Greensand outcrops along the banks of the Medway, from the Maidstone area as well as Hassock stone from the same exposures.

It is clear from the size of the blocks (up to 16kg) that these would have been transported by boat, probably similar to the Blackfriars 1 type vessel,⁹ to the City as ballast, and off-loaded on the north bank for use in this early structure. This

stone and the much smaller quantities of chalk, flint and septarian nodule and a concretionary London clay used in its construction were bonded in a hard-gritty mortar.

A Purbeck marble cornice was recovered from the earliest 1st-century (Phase 2) levels in the backfill of the construction cut for the masonry wall. It is well preserved (Fig 5) and was clearly derived from an earlier building than that associated with the wall. It is discussed further below. Associated with the Phase 2 wall, and room it defined, were a sequence of layers some of which contained building material including brick.

Several postholes were also recorded, possibly part of an internal timber structure. Notably, eight of a total 14 schemes of painted wall plaster derive from this phase. Although occurring within make-up/demolition layers (and not *in situ* on walls), these show the existence of a range of painted, high-status rooms within close proximity. The range of painted wall plaster on the site is discussed below.

Episodic use and disuse layers within a Roman building: 3rd–4th century AD

A levelling episode and floor layer begins the sequence in Phase 3. It was recorded across the investigation area, sealing the Phase 2 structural remains, and was associated with a later

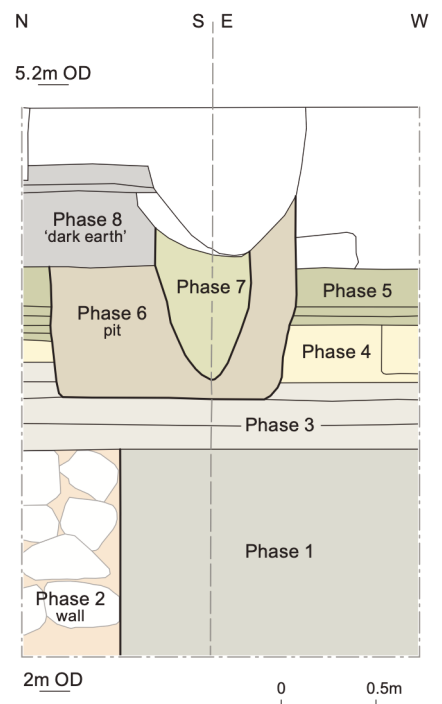


Fig 4: section showing Phases 1–8 with the Phase 2 masonry wall in context



Fig 5: Purbeck marble cornice fragment with traces of red paint surviving

building, the walls of which were not within the investigation area. It is notable that the earlier stone structure was buried and sealed (at least in this location) by this later activity.

Phase 3 comprised a series of occupation/demolition layers starting at c. 3.5m OD. Six of a total 14 schemes of painted wall plaster derive from layers in this phase. Most are incorporated within make-up layers and are residual. One notable exception was Scheme 14 which comprised the largest portion of painted wall plaster (67%). This appears to have collapsed from a wall, straight on to a floor (at 3.7m OD) – a rare example (on this site) of a moment in time captured among deposits which have gone through several processes before being deposited and therefore span a longer period (Fig 6). Amplifying that point, brushstrokes are visible on the wall plaster giving insight into the artistic techniques used (see below).

A floor layer (G20) was stratigraphically above this. It contained *opus signinum* and lay at 3.4m OD. Chunks of this material were up to 6cm thick. Such a depth of this specific material can be used in situations where waterproofing is important. Seven fragments of window glass (cast matt/glossy) were also recovered from Phase 3 deposits. They are mentioned here due to their relative rarity and associations with high-status buildings.

Phase 4 was characterised by layers of use/disuse deposits associated with

the occupation of a building on this location. Several postholes and a possible beam slot (G38) may be part of a structure. The layers are consistent with being inside a building, and are indicative of several episodes of construction and demolition of new floor surfaces on the same location. Two fragments of window glass (cast matt/glossy) were recovered from Phase 4 deposits.

Phase 5 also contained several layers with *opus signinum* incorporated into them. This was re-worked and not *in-situ* flooring, but nonetheless it is indicative of flooring made from this material. Several burnt layers and one possible burnt floor surface were recorded (G44). This Phase was characterised by layers of use/disuse deposits associated with the occupation of a building on this location. A single pit was recorded as Phase 6 and this was sealed by several occupation layers also of Roman date (Phase 7) within which there is burnt material indicative of occupation.

Oyster shell (1407g, 41 valves) was recovered throughout the sequence, but Phase 5 deposits contained more than the other Roman phases of activity. The largest variety of animal bone came from this phase also, where the assemblage was dominated by sheep and cattle.

Post-Roman Phase 8: dark earth abandonment layer and later activity
A layer characterised as dark brown soil

with oyster shells was recorded sealing the above phases. This was 0.55m deep and occurred at 3.93m OD. This type of deposit is well known in the City and is sometimes referred to as 'dark earth', a deposit which sealed many sites after the Roman period.¹⁰ This deposit was cut by several 19th-century drains/pits and was sealed by the floor of the pre-existing basement floor. We should note that the extensive deposit sequence above this point had been removed in the 19th century in order to create the existing basement. Phase 8 also contained 12 postholes cutting the Phase 7 layers, which may have formed part of a wooden structure.

Discussion

Previous work within Dyers' Hall

The correlation between the OD height of significant Roman occupation in this investigation and that from earlier 19th-century observations is interesting. The tessellated floor mentioned above at Dyers' Hall was recorded at c. 2.2m to 2.5m OD. While the occupation layers (floors, made ground, demolition) recorded in this investigation occurred mainly between 2.5m and 4.5m OD, it is possible the 19th-century findings relate to an episode of tessellated



Fig 6: selected pieces of painted wall plaster



Fig 7: reconstructed view of the mouth of the Walbrook with revetted banks c. AD80. The site of the Dyers' Hall (centre) is as yet undeveloped and the suggested bath-house and temple at Governor's House lies directly east (right) (Judith Dobie/MOLA)

flooring in the same Roman building, or group of buildings, as that recorded in this investigation.

Topography and proximity to the Walbrook

It has been estimated that the Walbrook channel would, at high tide, have reached c. 1.5m OD.¹¹ This made it a navigable channel, through which goods were brought from the Thames into the City. Its course lay just metres from the building discussed in this article and, at 1.5m OD, the water regularly reached just c. 2m below the ground on which the 1st-century masonry building (Phase 2) stood. The sharp drop in ground level of Dyers' Hall is all the more important to understand, given this proximity to the Walbrook. These Roman buildings were on the banks of that watercourse.

The observations made from this investigation and recent work within the Skinners' Hall¹² support the conjectured, but evidence-based, reconstructed view (Fig 7).¹³ These identify Dyers' Hall as being on dry land immediately east of the Walbrook, slightly higher than the water channel and off the estuary, though in its flood plain.

The site needs to be considered in relation to nearby land. Specifically, the evidence we have for water management. For example, to the south and east, there is evidence for waterfront development and land

reclamation (Fig 9). This comes in the form of wooden revetments, among them a late 1st–2nd-century quay and timber revetment from the Suffolk House site which was thought to continue as far west as the mouth of the Walbrook stream (Fig 8).¹⁴ If that was the case, the quay and revetment would have provided protection from the Thames to the south, which would have positively improved the viability of a building on the Dyers' Hall site.

The establishment of a masonry structure in the 1st century may have coincided with other contemporary development works. For example, the establishment of a quay and associated waterfront to the south was combined with construction of various 'prestigious Thames-side developments'.¹⁵ It is reasonable to associate the 1st-century masonry structure at Dyers' Hall with this period of development.

The embanking of the land adjacent to the Walbrook in order to create level land for timber and masonry structures is well documented to the north of the site at the Bloomberg building. There investigations found that, from the AD 60s, intensive land reclamation in the Walbrook valley allowed the construction of a succession of timber buildings, both domestic and commercial. Open area excavation gave an opportunity to reveal and record timber cradles used to embank land and eventually to raise it by several

metres. This gradually narrowed and eventually led to the culverting of the Walbrook at that location.¹⁶

The Dyers' Hall investigation was very confined in contrast, but recorded the north-east corner of a room/building, made of masonry. This continued west outside the investigation area. We know that land drops away into the Walbrook a short distance west. Therefore, it is possible the room extends another c. 5m and may be supported on its western side by embankments, such as those recorded at the Bloomberg building (a short distance to the north).

Indicators of a possible bath-house

There are several strands of evidence pointing towards a bath-house being either on, or close to, the site. The



Fig 8: view of part of the Roman revetted timber waterfront under excavation at Suffolk House (MOLA)

building material (below) included 9.2kg of box flue tile, used for moving hot air vertically and laterally. There were also examples of rare ceramic cylindrical *tubuli* for carrying water/air (from Phase 5 deposits) and fragments of *opus spicatum* paving bricks, the latter being commonly used on floors of bath-houses during the 1st century. The small quantity of window fragments found in Phase 3 and 4 (1st-/2nd-century deposits) are of a type associated with high-level, clerestory locations, especially bath-houses.¹⁷

The wall plaster (see below) included a scheme (22, Phase 5) which had a water-resistant base coat and signs of limescale residue. It also had a painted design too fragmentary to work out the subject matter, but which includes areas of black ground, overpainted in places with blue and white and also green in both blocks and speckles. Given the range of colours, the use of such a base coat and the limescale residue, the plaster

may have originated from a bath-suite or water feature.

The proximity and possible links between Roman remains at Dyers' Hall (10 Dowgate Hill) with those recorded in investigations at 3–7 Dowgate Hill (to the north, Figs 1 and 9)¹⁸ are noteworthy and have revealed strikingly similar material. The watching brief¹⁹ at that site monitored a series of exploratory pits. Various elements were revealed: internal rooms of a heated Roman building; a tessellated floor with an *opus signinum* rendered wall, faced with thin slabs of Purbeck marble, while nearby there were the remains of the corner of a hypocaust system. Two tile walls, 2.45m high and constructed of tile, were also rendered with *opus signinum*. The bottoms of these walls were lined with vertical tiles and columns of tiles (*pilae*) had been set on its mortared (Roman concrete) floor. Another similar floor lay above it.

A collapsed tile wall, ragstone walls and concrete floors were found in other pits and a large north–south wall, constructed from both complete and fragmentary roof tiles, was revealed in a later trench. This wall had a ragstone foundation with stepped-in offsets cut deeply into natural brickearth and gravels to the west. It had been rendered on its eastern face and was thought to be a retaining wall perhaps for a hypocaust system.

The presence of Purbeck marble, ragstone, flue tiles, concrete flooring, *opus signinum* are all shared with Dyers' Hall. There is also a shared topographic position (adjacent to the Walbrook). Were they contemporary and did they have shared functions? What is the relationship between heating systems and water identified at these locations? Future investigative research in the area may assist with this.

Surrounding evidence

There is a further, intriguing source of evidence from the excellent work done by mudlarks over many decades on the Thames foreshore at Dowgate. This has resulted in the recording of a quantity of material including pieces of box-flue tile, hair pins, finger rings, brooches and gaming pieces (Fig 10). Given the presence of such material and the relative lack of other finds, often more plentiful on Roman sites, it is thought that a bath-house might lie nearby,²⁰

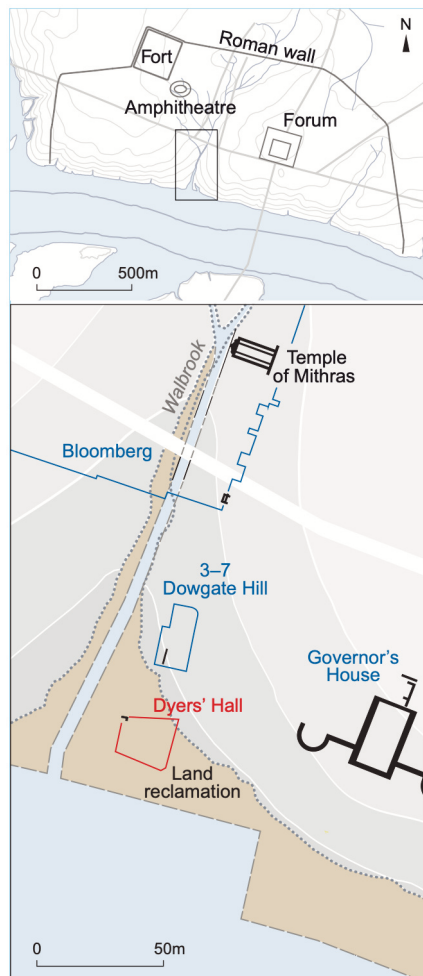


Fig 9: mouth of the Walbrook showing the position of Dyers' Hall with the known major buildings of Roman London



Fig 10: a carnelian intaglio from a finger ring depicting a hound chasing a hare (LON-CF9D8) and a selection of Roman counters from the foreshore at Dowgate – not to scale (S Wyatt/PAS)

with the finds making their way down a watercourse and on to the foreshore over a period of time.

When considering this possibility, it was important to consider nearby sites, and to note their topographic positioning. The Huggin Hill bath-house is 300m to the west of Dyers' Hall and the Billingsgate bath-house is 600m to the east. All three locations benefit from being located on the break of slope in the gravel terrace. All three locations share an important geological position; located at the point where the Taplow Gravels meet the London Clay. The OD height at Dyers' Hall and Billingsgate is similar at c. 7m OD, while Huggin Hill is at c. 10m OD. Land to the north of each rises, while to the south continues a gentle sloping towards the Thames.

Marsden noted that the understanding of geological deposits below the Huggin Hill bath-house was 'crucial to understanding why the baths were placed here, for the baths were clearly located on a springline.'²¹

He also commented on the positioning of Roman water features in the gardens of Roman date in the Governor's House complex. These were located c. 100m east of Dyers' Hall and they also lie at c. 7m OD in the same geological position.

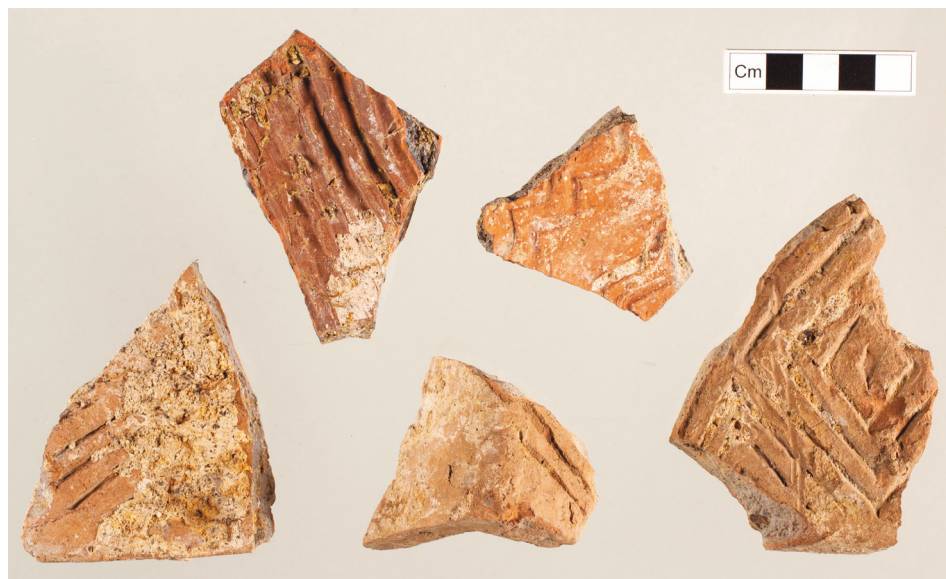


Fig 11: ceramic roller-stamped box-flue tile fragments

Proximity to the Governor's House site
The proximity of Dyers' Hall to the Governor's House site, that range of important Roman buildings immediately to the east of Dyers' Hall (beneath modern-day Cannon Street Station and the offices of Historic England) was noted at the outset of this project. Would contemporary or related remains be revealed?

This limited investigation has provided a comparatively small amount of data to contribute. However, it did yield contextual and artefactual data of interest for comparative purposes. The large complex of buildings excavated and recorded at the Governor's House and Suffolk House sites are located c. 100m east of the Dyers' Hall.

The layout of buildings in the area is affected by the alignment of the Thames (broadly north-west/south-east) and the local topography, certain hilltop locations being targeted (for example the Governor's House, see Fig 1). Of course, the grid of Roman roads in the city also affected the alignments. There is a small section of wall revealed within the investigation at Dyers' Hall (see Fig 2). The two stretches of wall were aligned north-east/south-west and north-west/south-east respectively. We can expect those walls to continue beyond the investigation area and for a room to have been formed. Many of the rooms/buildings excavated to the east at the Governor's House site share this same alignment.²²

There are other similarities, with a much larger number of occupation

deposits excavated at the Governor's House and, over a much larger area, many possible floor surfaces and/or demolition layers were recorded at that location. These contained ash, Roman building material and, in some cases, were recorded as floors, being of mortar or *opus signinum* and recognisable in both plan and section.

The same pattern occurred at Dyers' Hall, a site of layers, only some of which were recognisable as 'floors' and in which others were interpreted as demolition layers, or made ground on which to make a new floor. The depth and character of the layers is similar to those observed within the north and west ranges of the Governor's House.²³

The finds evidence

The similarity of deposit character is amplified when we consider certain artefactual material, specifically the building material and painted wall plaster. This wealth of early well-preserved building material fabrics and finds, in addition to the site's proximity to the footprint of Governor's House shows that, along with the painted wall plaster, these materials once belonged to such a prestigious building complex, now considered to perhaps be a bath-house and temple (see Fig 7).

Of national importance is a finely carved cornice in Purbeck marble, which would have been thickly painted red on three sides with the iron pigment haematite, only traces of which remain (see Fig 5). This is only the second provincial example of this rock to have surviving paint.²⁴ Quarried,

supplied and carved in enormous quantities throughout the southern half of the province from as early as the AD 50s, shelly dense Purbeck marble was the material of choice in Neronian and Flavian provincial carving, monumental²⁵ and funerary inscriptions because of its ability to take polish, to be carved and here to form a base for the application of paint. It is clear that the building to which it belonged was very early indeed and opulent; the fortuitous preservation of the paint must be down to its short period of use.

The succeeding 2nd- and 3rd-century internal occupation surfaces yielded large loose border *tesserae* cubes in both yellow and red tile fabrics and a fragment of indurated chalk mosaic, together typical of red, white and yellow stripped tessellated pavements in this area of London.²⁶ Examples of roller-stamped box-flue in a diamond pattern (Fig 11),²⁷ common in late 1st- to early 2nd-century levels and a more rare procuratorial tile stamp PPBR (Fig 12)²⁸ that dates from AD70–120 are also a feature of building materials from other excavations in and around the area of Governor's House.

Painted wall plaster

Identified in the earliest 1st-century occupation/demolition levels and foundation wall [136] (Phase 2) was a large (205kg) group of exceptionally well-preserved building materials. In addition to large ragstone blocks incorporated into the wall fabric, there were dumped rectangular *lydion* bricks



Fig 12: stamped tile fragment showing the 'B' of PPBR

that once formed its lacing courses, paving brick (*opus spicatum*), scored box-flue tile, chunks of waterproof concrete (*opus signinum*) and bonding mortar as well as large *tegulae* and *imbrices* of a form and fabric typical of 1st-century tiled roofing in the largest provincial towns.

A total of 360 fragments of Roman wall plaster was collected, weighing 13.493kg and with a combined surface area of just under 0.3m². Over 30 individual schemes of decoration were recorded, although just one of these can be attributed to a building recorded during the excavation. The majority were recovered from demolition horizons or re-used as building rubble/ hardcore in internal floor surfaces and wall construction. Although fragments from a number of schemes were recovered from 1st-century deposits, the majority of the plaster was recovered from deposits dating to the 2nd century, coinciding with a city-wide increase in decorative plaster schemes from the Flavian/ Trajanic period.

Phase 2 and 3 deposits include both polychrome panel-based designs on white ground and more complex coloured-ground schemes, at least some of which are also panel-based. Of particular note is a scheme from an internal wall from Phase 3, which had collapsed directly on to a floor surface of 2nd-century date. The scheme of decoration appears to include coloured panels with complex decoration, including possible figurative subject matter, imitation marble and architectural illusionism (see Fig 6). The dominant colour is a distinctive pale green but white, pink, pinkish-buff, red, black and blue are also used.

The appearance of blue pigment and three-dimensional subject matter concurs with findings elsewhere in the city and province,²⁹ with the former first appearing in dumps dated AD 125/135–170, and the latter appearing in the middle of the 2nd century.³⁰ Late Roman deposits (Phases 4 and 5) include further white-ground schemes, including polychrome panel border designs, but also a small number of coloured-ground schemes, including a



Fig 13: an example of wall plaster from 21 Lime Street showing vertical green bands and red panels, interspersed with a vertical black area depicting a candelabrum with deer and birds (MOLA)

complex blue, black and green scheme, possibly originating from a bath-suite or other water feature. At least some of these, including the latter, are residual or were re-used in later floor surfaces.

The assemblage varies in quality and complexity, ranging from unpainted, through polychrome panel schemes on plain or white ground to well-executed coloured-ground schemes, suggestive of investment and wealth. Quite a few of the latter use blue pigment, sometimes prodigiously. There is no obvious connection between the plasterwork from this site and other buildings in the vicinity, including the ‘Governors House’ recorded to the east,³¹ although close comparison is impeded by a lack of detailed description of the plasterwork from these sites.

Although very fragmentary, the Suffolk House site had wall plaster that used expensive imported pigments.³² It is likely, however, that a significant proportion of the assemblage originated from high-status buildings nearby. A potential source for the possible bath-house plaster may be the hypocausted masonry building found south of the site at 3–7 Dowgate Hill, just north-east of the mouth of the Walbrook.³³

One notable feature is the use of crushed tile in the base coats of a relatively high number of schemes on

site. Where this has been noted in other assemblages from the city, it was suggested the tile was added to prevent persistent pervading damp from the proximity of a nearby watercourse.³⁴ At least some of the wall plaster with *opus signinum* base coats in the assemblage may derive from a bath-suite, but located on the banks of the Walbrook, a similar explanation for the high proportion of schemes with crushed tile seems plausible.

Viewing the remains as an artist

This site allows us an opportunity to consider what the presence of art on a site

may indicate about the buildings on and around it. Roman artists possessed a deep understanding of how light, space, colour and design work inside rooms and how borders and themed designs could be best used to frame and divide spaces on walls and floors. They worked using well-defined conventions and, therefore, even when (at Dyers’ Hall) we find the partial remains of buildings, and fragmentary remains of the art associated with them; we are still gifted with a rich opportunity to see inside those buildings.

Contemporary artists are working in similar ways now, and have inherited techniques to create colour and to use space and theme in ways which a Roman artist would recognise. Today, anyone wishing to design a space may visit the studio of an artist and look at or borrow samples. They are picking from a series of design styles. So too in Roman Britain. Mosaicists and painters were distinct skill-sets in the Roman world, and both types of artist would frequently work in the same spaces. Floors and ceilings of special rooms were designed to work together.

There are interesting signs of how both the mosaicist and the artist may have worked and travelled in the Roman world: an epitaph from Perinthus in Thrace names an artist who is represented as saying that he had laid mosaics in many cities, and an early Christian epitaph from Szombathely in Hungary commemorates a pair of travelling painters (*pictores peregrini*).³⁵



Fig 14: fragment of Dyers' Hall wall plaster showing the brush marks

Roman Britain, and *Londinium* as the largest town, have many fine examples of painted wall plaster. Mosaicists and painters must soon have set up schools in Britain and trained locals to carry on their tradition, so we should expect to find specifically British tendencies or motifs appearing. This certainly happens: British versions of the red and black candelabrum scheme (see Fig 13), for example, seem on present evidence to have been simpler than the Continental versions – they lacked an animal or bird frieze in the narrow decorative band between the main and dado zones (*predella*) and had, instead, simply a marbled dado.³⁶ This may not be the case in the fragmentary example from 21 Lime Street which shows a possible frieze of deer and birds above a marbled dado.³⁷

There are many fine examples of wall paintings across the City of London and Roman Southwark, such as the bath-houses at Billingsgate and Huggin Hill, the special buildings at the nearby Governor's House site and, slightly further afield, the magnificent 2nd-century painted wall plaster schemes revealed at 8–13 Lime Street (Fig 16).³⁸

The plaster from Lime Street is more complete and found in higher quantity than at Dyers' Hall. The use of red panels with green decorative (candelabra) borders was noted on a central frieze. The high quality of the painted plasterwork was on a par with similar paintings at *Verulamium* (St Albans) and Leicester – all of 2nd-century date.³⁹ In all these cases, the visitor to these rooms was surrounded with stories and colours which had a

specific cultural context and meaning. Within Dyers' Hall, the 1st-century cornice (Fig 5) is striking because of its red colouring, its curved edges and three deliberately visible sides. The cornice and the dado are devices which conveniently frame spatial areas. Fresco wall paintings are carefully designed to fit certain framed spaces; even simple dividing panels would be of a certain size. The topics which were painted, the use of space and colour within each scene and surrounding it, all had defined rules and customs. There were set approaches to wet rooms and buildings in damp areas which is relevant for any room constructed so close to the Walbrook.

The painted wall plaster from Dyers' Hall comes from several schemes and much of it is re-worked into occupation layers. Small quantities of loose yellow and red border *tesserae* from a tessellated floor and of course that piece of three-sided cornice were also recovered. The physical remains of these architectural and artistic devices are scattered throughout the archaeological sequence. Although they are from deposits which were temporally separate, they share links to well-known Roman artistic traditions. The use of colour, often requiring imported ingredients, was an expensive activity in both labour and imported goods. Artists working with plaster have a high level of skill – the brushwork visible (see Figs 14 and 15) is a record of their work and affirms the high status of buildings in the area.

Huge care and expense went into the consideration of space on these walls and floors. The effects of both light and damp would have been closely controlled and incorporated in the design, before the paintings ever went on. While actual windows were not recorded in this investigation, we have recovered fragments of window glass. No heating system has been recorded, but tiles used in the circulation of hot air were found. While this small investigation at Dyers' Hall only partially revealed these buildings, it indicates just how much may still be preserved below the modern building.

Conclusion

Combining this investigation with the antiquarian records of work in the building indicates that the ground



Fig 15: another fragment of wall plaster that clearly shows the vertical brush strokes

beneath Dyers' Hall still contains several phases of significant Roman structures. These are high status in certain cases (indicated by the painted wall plaster and other artistic and artefactual material) and are typical of the location. Unlike some City excavations, those at Dyers' Hall were very localised (6m square) and much remains preserved below Dyers' Hall.

The investigations at 3–7 Dowgate Hill and Dyers' Hall were not extensive enough to demonstrate whether a bath-house was present on the eastern bank of the Walbrook, in Dowgate Hill. However, the proximity of these remains to the Walbrook is notable, water supply being key. Both sites are located close to important buildings. There were water features recorded at Cannon Street (to the east), while the Huggin Hill bath-house (to the west)⁴⁰ is a more thoroughly excavated and published site. This function would fit with the location and types of buildings in the vicinity of Dyers' Hall.

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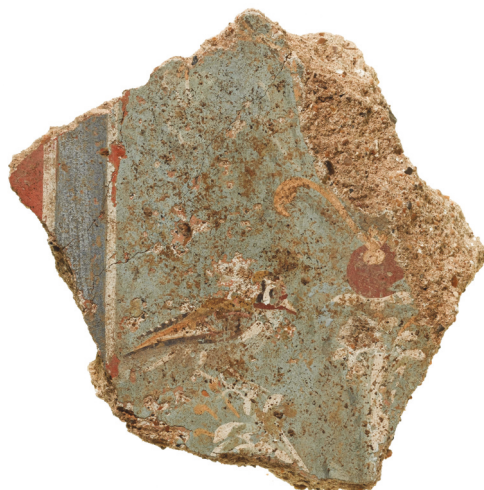


Fig 16: a fine example of wall plaster from 8–13 Lime Street depicting a goldfinch (MOLA)

the archaeological works. Graphics were produced by Carlos Lemos and the analysis of artefacts/ ecofacts was completed by the following people:

Eniko Hudak (Roman pottery), Kevin Hayward (building material, mortar, *opus signinum*) Berni Sudds (painted wall plaster), John Shepherd (metal and small finds), Kevin Rielly (animal bone), Kate Turner (oyster, marine shell and environmental (plant) remains) and Barry Bishop (lithics).

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1. Archaeology Collective *Dyers' Hall, Dowgate Hill, London* Archaeological desk-based Assessment (Nov 2017). The works were required by Planning Condition 3 (Permission 18/01268/FULL) covering a series of works to Dyers' Hall, of which the lift shaft excavations were one part. Dyers' Hall is a Scheduled Monument (1002057) and the works were carried out under a Scheduled Monument Consent (SMC).

2. AOC Archaeology *Dyers' Hall, Dowgate Hill, City of London: archaeological monitoring during geo-technical test pitting* (2017).

3. PCA *Dyers' Hall, 10 Dowgate Hill, City of London: an archaeological watching brief* (2018).

4. T Taylor 'The pre-Roman Walbrook Landscape and Roman London – a topographical survey' *London Archaeol* **16** (1) (2020) 3–9.

5. Scheduled Monument listing (1002057). Available from: <https://tinyurl.com/y4ajdndz> [accessed 12 January 2021].

6. P Marsden 'The Excavation of a Roman Palace Site in London, 1961–1972' *Trans London Middlesex Archaeol Soc* **26** (1975) 1–102.

7. G Milne 'A Palace Disproved: re-assessing the Provincial Governor's presence in 1st century London' J Bird, M Hassall & H Sheldon (eds) *Interpreting Roman London* Oxbow Monogr 58 (1996) 49–55.

8. MOLA *Geoarchaeological Evaluation and deposit model report* (2019). This described the results of two boreholes AH1 and AH2. Borehole AH1 is c. 10m west of the investigation area at Dyers Hall. MOLA recorded natural geological deposits in AH1 at 0.52m OD and in AH2 at 0.05m OD.

9. P Marsden *Ships of the Port of London: first to eleventh centuries AD* English Heritage Pub 3 (1994) 80–9.

10. B Yule 'The 'dark earth' and late Roman London' *Antiquity* **244** (1990) 620–628.

11. T Taylor 'The pre-Roman Walbrook Landscape and Roman London' *London Archaeol* **16** (1) (2020) 3–9. See page 7 for details on estimated tide height and to explain how vessels/goods may have passed well north of the location of our investigation at Dyers' Hall. Taylor estimates that shallow vessels could have taken goods at high tide into the centre of the city, along the Walbrook. This is because the Thames tide would have encroached as far as the

northern end of modern Bucklersbury.

12. MOLA *Skinner's Hall 8½ Dowgate Hill, London, EC4R 2SP, City of London* Archaeological desk-based Assessment (2009).

13. MOLA *Archaeology at Bloomberg* (2017) 23.

14. T Brigham with A Woodger *Roman and Medieval Townhouses on the London Waterfront: excavations at Governor's House, City of London* MoLAS Monogr 9 (2001) 17–18. This discusses the evidence for revetments and land reclamation to form a Roman riverbank.

15. R Hingley *Londonium: a biography* (2018) 81–85. This describes results from the various sites in the vicinity of Dyers' Hall and provides a summary of the work of P Marsden (*op cit* fn 6) and T Brigham (*op cit* fn 14) on the high-status buildings east of Dyers' Hall; sometimes referred to as the Governor's House.

16. *Op cit* fn 13, 28–29.

17. J Shepherd 'Notes on the Glass assemblage' PCA Archive Rep (DOA18. Dyers' Hall, Dowgate Street, City of London).

18. MoLAS *Archaeology in the City of London, 1907–1991: a guide to records of excavations by the Museum of London and its predecessors* Archaeological Gazetteer Series (1998).

19. The text is from GLHER record (ELO7319) *Dowgate Hill (3–7): Archaeological watching brief and excavation*. Also reported upon in *op cit* fn 18.

20. S Wyatt & P Clayton 'Mudlarking at Dowgate' *London Archaeol* **15** (12) (2020) 338–9. Clayton remembers past mudlarking on the Thames foreshore at Dowgate, while Wyatt considers what is still turning up in the same area and is now being recorded by the Portable Antiquities Scheme.

21. P Marsden 'Two Roman public baths in London' *Trans London Middlesex Archaeol Soc* **27** (1976) 1–70.

22. *Op cit* fn 14, Fig 48. This shows the layout of buildings recorded at the Governor's House and Suffolk House.

23. *Ibid*, 7–8. This covers the north and west ranges and describes several floor layers which share similar depth and character to those recorded at Dyers' Hall.

24. See F Pritchard 'Ornamental stonework from

Roman London' *Britannia* **17** (1986) 182.

25. See P Bidwell 'Neronian eagle' *The Legionary Bath-House and Basilica and Forum at Exeter* (1979); Togidubnus stone from Chichester (RIB I.91).

26. Typical of basic mosaic flooring in the Bush Lane/ Cannon Street area, see D Neal & S Cosh *Roman Mosaics of Britain. Vol III: South-East Britain* (2009) 408–12, nos 370.12–370.21.

27. Designs 16 and 18. See I Betts, E Black & J Gower 'A corpus of relief-patterned tiles in Roman Britain' *Journal of Roman Pottery Studies* **7** (1997) 88–90.

28. A sizeable group of procuratorial tile stamps have been recorded from the area of the 'Governor's Palace'; see I Betts 'Procuratorial Tile Stamps from London' *Britannia* **26** (1995) 218.

29. N Davey & R Ling *Wall Painting in Roman Britain* *Britannia Monogr Series* 3 (1982).

30. I Betts 'Roman refinement in Lime Street' *London Archaeol* **14** (8) (2016) 203–5.

31. *Op cit* fn 6.

32. *Op cit* fn 14, 40 and 109–10.

33. P Rowsome 'The Huggin Hill baths and bathing in London: barometer of the town's changing circumstances' in J Delaine & D E Johnston (eds) *Roman Baths and Bathing Part 2: design and context* *J Roman Archaeol Supp Ser* 37 Pt 2 (2000) 262–77.

34. R Goffin 'The Roman painted wall plaster' in R Bluer & T Brigham with R Nielsen *Roman and later development east of the forum and Cornhill: excavations at Lloyd's Register, 71 Fenchurch Street, City of London* MoLAS Monogr 30 (2006) 140–2.

35. *Op cit* fn 29, 48.

36. For example, see wall plaster from Leicester; *op cit* 29, 171–81.

37. *Op cit* fn 30.

38. I Betts & A Telfer 'Finches, Flowers and Fruit: painted wall plaster from 2nd-century buildings at 8–13 Lime Street, London, EC3' *Trans London Middlesex Archaeol Soc* **69** (2018) 27–48.

39. *Op cit* fn 29.

40. Scheduled Monument 1001981. Huggin Hill Roman bath-house, 120m WNW of St James's Church. Available from: <https://tinyurl.com/y5gh87wf> [accessed 12 January 2021].