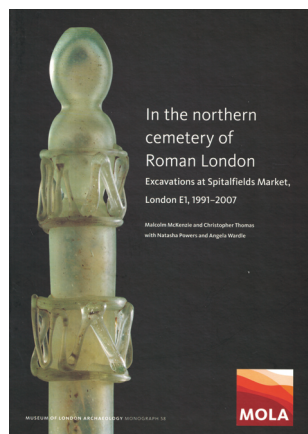


## In the northern cemetery of Roman London – Excavations at Spitalfields Market, London E1, 1991–2007



**Malcolm McKenzie and Christopher Thomas with Natasha Powers and Angela Wardle**

MOLA Monograph 58

2020

221 pages, 162 figs, 54 tables, bibliography, index

ISBN 9781907586514

Hardback, £30

Reviewed by Jenny Hall

Those living and working in London and beyond can't have missed the press coverage in 1999 when excavations close to Spitalfields Market uncovered a limestone sarcophagus with a lead coffin containing a skeleton, and an interesting group of grave goods in the grave cut. It spawned much media attention, so it is excellent that the report is finally published.

The redevelopment of the Spitalfields Market area comprised numerous excavations and watching briefs in the late 1990s, where 169 inhumation and five cremation burials had been found to the east of Ermine Street and on the north-eastern edge of the main Roman northern cemetery. In standard cemetery publication form, the report reviews the funerary and burial practices, burial goods and the people. There were two periods

of burial: one from c. AD 70/120–250 where one area had been set aside for neonates and children, with the majority buried in wooden coffins, not something that was evident from other cemetery sites. The other was from c. AD 250–400 where another area indicated the spatial separation of high status burials – both areas suggest deliberate cemetery planning. There were, in fact, three stone sarcophagi, with the possibility of further examples having been robbed out. As well as these, the base of a timber burial vault, containing a child in a chalk-packed coffin, included several fine glass vessels from the Rhineland or northern Gaul.

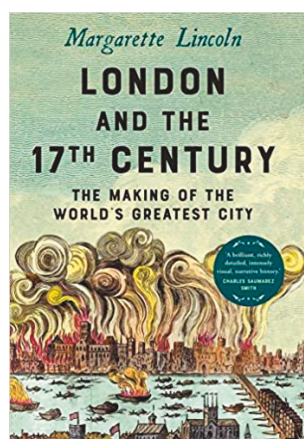
Although this relatively small area of the cemetery did not reveal as much detail as the earlier eastern cemetery excavations<sup>1</sup> or indeed the later cemetery at Lant Street, Southwark,<sup>2</sup> where DNA and isotope analyses revealed ethnicity, it is important in its own way. The spaciousness of the area, the unusual nature of some burials, the number of glass vessels and the rare nature of some are all noted, indicating that some burial rites and goods are more familiar from continental cemeteries, emphasising the cosmopolitan and mobile nature of London's population.

It was disappointing that there was little new photography of some objects, especially the glassware, as the conservation work to piece them together has been masterly. Many of the specialist reports from 2005–6 have been updated, but it was difficult to find specific details about particular burials. Information about the Spitalfields Roman woman and her possible ethnicity is spread throughout the book. Although the forensic evidence has been overtaken by analysis from other sites, it is still important. As usual, presentation and design is up to the high MOLA standard.

1. B Barber & D Bowsher *The Eastern cemetery of Roman London: Excavations 1983–1990* MoLAS Monogr 4 (2000).

2. V Ridgeway, K Leary & B Sudds *Roman Burials in Southwark: Excavations at 52–56 Lant Street and 56 Southwark Bridge Road, London SE1* PCA Monogr 17.

## London and the 17th Century: the making of the world's greatest city



**Margarette Lincoln**

Yale University Press

2021

384 pp, 15 figs, 2 maps, notes, bibliography, index

ISBN 9780300248784

Hardback, £25.00

Reviewed by Clive Orton

'History', someone said, 'is one damned thing after another', and the story of London in the 17th century is no exception. We are guided through the salient events – Gunpowder Plot, Civil War, Commonwealth and Restoration, Plague, Fire, Monmouth's Rebellion and the Bloody Assizes, and the 'Glorious Revolution' (better called the Dutch Invasion) – as seen through the eyes of a wide range of Londoners, both rich and poor. The narrative is interspersed with thematic discussions of topics, such as the role of the City companies, trade and commerce, coffee-houses and printing, scientific advancement and the important role of

immigrants. I had not realised the significant contribution of the Huguenot refugees to industry in London – they weren't all weavers in Spitalfields as we sometimes imagine. Coal is not often mentioned in historical accounts, but here we see the effects of its growing use – changes in cooking and heating, dreadful smogs, and the privations if the supply from Newcastle was cut off.

There is little explicit archaeology. The Civil War defences are discussed briefly (p108), but not referenced. The account seems to be based on Vertue's map of 1738, which recent research has shown to be inaccurate;<sup>1</sup> revision will be needed for a second edition. The coverage of shipbuilding might have benefitted from reference to work of the Thames Discovery Programme and to recent excavations in Deptford.<sup>2</sup> There is interesting implicit archaeological evidence in the accounts of 'home improvements', which show changes in cooking utensils, as well as the growing use of tin-glazed ware and porcelain for domestic display.

I found this book both useful and interesting, and I learnt a lot from it. The many excerpts from diaries and letters give a real feel for what life must have been like for people in varying circumstances. There are excellent references, as well as helpful suggestions for further reading. The illustrations are very useful scene-setters – I particularly liked Piñar's digitally constructed bird's-eye view of an early stage of the Great Fire.

1. P Mills 'The Civil War defences of East London reviewed: preliminary results' *London Archaeol* 16 (3) (2021), 59–67

2. A Francis *The Deptford royal dockyard and manor of Sayes Court, London: excavations 2000–12* MOLA Monogr Series 71 (2017).