

Rediscovering the past at Landmark Court

Excavations by MOLA at the Liberty of Southwark have followed the work of DGLA, which excavated its northern sector in the 1980s. A wealth of structures and finds has raised the question as to what these Roman buildings might have been.

Excavations have been conducted prior to the construction of the Liberty of Southwark cultural quarter – a new mixed-use development by Transport for London and U+I (a regeneration developer and investor). The development, on a triangular site between Southwark Street, Redcross Way and Union Street, will be a mix of housing and commerce and will re-instate some of the medieval yards and lanes, as in the Bloomberg redevelopment in the City, where the line of a medieval cut-through was re-instated between the Bloomberg buildings.

MOLA has been working with the developers and the London Borough of Southwark. Excavations began in mid-June and continued until the end of 2021. However, these are not the first excavations on this site, as DGLA excavated at 15–23 Southwark Street from 1980 to 1986 and started to identify, in the northern part of the present site, both clay-and-timber buildings and a substantial masonry building. The latter was dated to c. AD 74, an early date for ragstone to be used in buildings when stone was confined to the public buildings only, which suggested public, rather than private, ownership. The building was thought to be of high status, set around a courtyard where hypocausts, tessellated flooring and large quantities of painted wall plaster were found.

A tessellated floor was excavated on an adjoining site in Redcross Way to the west in 2005 and parts of the same 1st- to 4th-century building complex were also found there, with pottery overlying one floor dated AD 120–160. There were *opus signinum* and tessellated floors, one of which had been preserved *in situ* and covered in geotextile until a few weeks ago when it was revealed again.

Carrie Cowan and Dave Beard wrote the initial

report for *London Archaeologist*¹ and *Layers of London* – the cover shows the hypocaust from Building 6 – the full excavation was published in *LAMAS Transactions* and featured one of the cavalry pendants from the site on the cover.²

The earlier excavations suggested that it may have been part of a much larger complex, and the new excavations are beginning to show this to be so, as they have been able to increase the nature and extent of the building. The 1980s' excavations had postulated that it could have been part of a *mansio* – an official stopping-off point for important officials and government messengers from the imperial posting service (*cursus publicus*) – providing the opportunity for a rest and change of horses.

A number of military objects were recovered from the site in the 1980s and the building may have been associated with the nearby Winchester Palace site, where a substantial building had been built by the military (surviving marble inscriptions of the 3rd century list the units involved). It appears that this area of Roman Southwark must have served as an area where important administrative or military functions were carried out.

The excavations were tracked by the development website (<https://thedig.thelibertyofsouthwark.com/>) and MOLA have been working with a group of local residents to create digital updates about the discoveries on site, wanting to connect the past with the present (<https://tinyurl.com/526fucfc>).

1. D Beard & C Cowan 'Excavations at 15–23 Southwark Street' *London Archaeol* **5** (14) (1988), 375–81.
2. C Cowan 'A possible mansio in Roman Southwark: Excavations at 15–23 Southwark Street, 1980–86' *Trans London Middx Archaeol Soc* **43** (1992), 3–192.

LEFT MOLA excavations under way on the main site
RIGHT An *opus signinum* floor under excavation



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Join us at the LA Annual Lecture at 7.00 pm on 19 May 2022 and catch up with the latest information on the excavations.

Although it is still early in the post-excavation research phase, it is hoped that Antonietta Lertz from MOLA will bring us up to date with the discoveries.

See the opposite page for details.

