London in the Not-so-Dark Ages
Transcript

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During the 1970s and early 1980s, archaeology in the City revealed plenty of evidence for both Roman and medieval London, but Saxon London, the ‘mart of many nations’ described by Bede, was strangely elusive. Today I want to show how our understanding of the development of Anglo-Saxon settlement outside the former Roman city of Londinium, ie up to the time of Alfred, has changed over the past 40 years or so, and especially since recent excavations at and near St Martin-in-the-Fields – where, significantly, the discovery of ‘treasure’ in the 13th century led to a riot – probably making it the earliest findspot of Anglo-Saxon artefacts in London.

Background
The story starts in the Late Roman period. The riverside wall was strengthened c AD 388–402, but London was abandoned by the Romans c AD 410, and until recently evidence for late Roman activity was limited to a few late Roman/early 5th-century buildings, military-style accessories found in the extramural cemeteries and a few finds from near the Tower of London which suggest that there was some form of late occupation, perhaps military, in this area, and last week here my colleague Sadie Watson presented new evidence for a late military presence on the Bloomberg site by the Walbrook.

The decline in minting and the importation and use of mass-produced pottery, together with a lack of other diagnostic artefacts, generally make it difficult to reliably date deposits of the later fourth and early fifth centuries. In the 1930s, the dearth of Saxon material was such that Wheeler suggested the London area was avoided by Saxon settlers. Even today, the only datable Early Saxon finds from a stratified context within the Roman walls are a mid-fifth century disc brooch with Germanic-style floriate cross, probably an insular copy, not an import, and one or two pieces of pottery, found in 1968 in the demolition debris of a Roman bathhouse by the Thames at Billingsgate, which coin dating shows was in use until after AD 395 (possibly to AD 402); residual fragments of glass claw beaker were also found. Add Tower Street Brooch.

Today, however, we can see that the lack of Early Saxon finds in the City is due to the Roman defences and crumbling ruins of buildings alien to the fifth-century immigrants. The cemeteries in the upper river valleys of the Brent, Wandle, Cray and Darent, in south London and Surrey have long been known, but since the 1980s a number of fifth and sixth century sites have been found to the west of the city, nearly all by the Thames or in river valleys. The Billingsgate brooch is identical to one from grave 201 at Mitcham and another from grave 123 at Guildown, Surrey, and this, together with pottery and other finds reflect the movement of people up the Thames and its tributaries from c AD 450 onwards. The main fifth to sixth century occupation sites excavated so far are at Tulse Hill, in the Effra valley to the south, where up to seven buildings were excavated, by the Thames at Hammersmith, where the remains of up to six buildings were found, and at Prospect Park, Harmondsworth, where eleven sunken-featured buildings and two halls were found in 1993–5 by Wessex Archaeology, part of a cluster of sites in the valleys of the Brent, the Crane and the Colne. Sites dating to the seventh century are known at Brentford and Clapham, Enfield and Hendon. In addition, Early Saxon fish traps have found in the Thames at Barn Elms, Putney and at Shepperton.

The closest site to the City is in Aldersgate, where four shards of fifth to sixth century pottery were found c 1997–9 by Pre-Construct Archaeology in the ditch outside the city wall. Two shards of Early Saxon pottery were found by Grimes in a dump of Late Roman material during work at St Brides in the 1960s, though not recognised until the 1990s, while excavations c 1989–90 on sites in Clerkenwell, on the east bank of the River Fleet and just to the north of the Roman cemetery in Smithfield, found a Saxon burial, part of a glass cone beaker like the one seen here from Mitcham, and pits with fifth to sixth century pottery like this found under the church of St John Clerkenwell.

The pottery fabrics from these sites are distinctive and a scientific study of them has helped to identify early activity within the area that later became Lundenwic, which we are coming on to. The most distinctive fabric is tempered with coarse sandstone similar to that found in the Millstone Grit, to the north of the Pennines, but probably derived from Quaternary deposits, transported south along the former course of the Thames to end up in East Anglia and parts of north London, notably near Finchley. Another distinctive fabric type, rare but found at several sites along the Thames valley, contains crushed bone. Sandy and chaff-tempered wares are
more typical of the sixth to seventh centuries.

Coming back to the City and the early 1980s, although London was described by Bede, writing in the eighth century, as ‘the metropolis’ of the East Saxons, archaeological finds could not support the documentary evidence, which tells that following the Augustinian missions and conversion of the East Saxons, Pope Gregory decided in AD 601 that London should be the primary see of England, and that in AD 604 Aethelberht of Kent, over-king of England South of the Humber and uncle of Saeberht, king of the East Saxons had a cathedral church built in London in which Mellitus could preach to the East Saxons. Following the deaths of Aethelbert and Saeberht in AD 616/617, Essex reverted to paganism, and Christianity only regained its hold in AD 653, when the East Saxon king Sigebert Sanctus was persuaded to convert.

A charter from Aethelred of Mercia dated to between AD 693–704 refers to a monastery in the City of London, but actual finds were limited to a few shards of seventh to tenth century pottery found to the south of St Paul's, some in marsh deposits below the collapsed Roman riverside wall. I will not say more here other than that John Schofield will be picking up this story in two weeks’ time, but it remains true that such evidence as we have for Anglo-Saxon activity in the City is from around St Paul's and dating from the late seventh/eighth century. Two/three complete late sixth or early seventh century pots from Northern France, are antiquarian finds, said to have been found on sites in the western part of the City, but with no real context to prove this. So where was the community that might have used the first church?

The answer lies to the west, near St Martin-in-the-Fields, where, as I said at the beginning, the first find was probably in 1299, when the discovery of gold ‘treasure’ at St Martin-in-the-Fields led to a riot. After this nothing is mentioned until the 1720s, when at least two north-south Saxon burials in stone coffins were found, between fourteen–twenty feet below ground, during the construction of the portico of the new church of St Martin-in-the-Fields. In one was a spear and a palm cup; an inverted palm cup was also found in the ground. In 1775 Maitland recorded ‘great quantities of human bones’ discovered to the north of this in King Street, although no other finds were reported. The Garrick Street gold ring, found c 1897, is dated to the late seventh or very early eight century and could also be from a grave. Its exact find-spot is unknown, as is that of the Fetter Lane sword pommel, discovered c 1893; both are now in the BM. It was some time, however, before the significance of these finds was recognised.

The first real advances were in the 1930s. In 1935, finds of Saxon pottery and loomweights at the Savoy led Sir Mortimer Wheeler to propose that there were groups of Saxon buildings between the City and Westminster, while in 1937, the discovery of a complete pot and scattered human bone in Drury Lane led Myres to suggest that there may have been a cemetery there. In the early 1960s substantial remains and numerous artefacts were found in Whitehall, where waterlogged conditions had preserved timber structures at the confluence of the Tyburn and the Thames; an interim report was published in the Illustrated London News in 1963.

In 1972, nineteen shards of residual Saxon pottery and a loomweight were found by Mike Hammerson at Arundel House, just south of the Strand and dated by Jeremy Haslam to the late eighth or ninth century. Linking the finds to those from the Savoy and the fact that the Strand is on the line of a Roman road, a series of settlements or farms was suggested, and it was rightly predicted that the strip of land along both sides of the Strand and Fleet Street is an area ‘from which more important archaeological evidence of occupation in the Saxon and medieval periods might be expected’. In his 1976 survey, however, John Hurst remained cautious, venturing no further than ‘a scattered settlement’... ...while in 1980 Tony Dyson suggested that Frithuwald’s charter of AD 675, the first to mention the port of London, was referring to Southwark.

In 1984, however, Lundenwic was independently and simultaneously identified by Martin Biddle and Alan Vince, using surveys of churches, find-spots and documentary evidence. Both proposed two foci – religious and administrative in the city, with a trading settlement to the west. This theory was confirmed in 1985, when Saxon remains, including a single building, structures and the first real evidence for trade and industry were found by the then DGLA at Jubilee Hall, just south of the Covent Garden piazza. Since then, numerous sites have been investigated, some published by MOLA and its predecessors, some by PCA, and other archaeological units. There is also Alan Vince’s general discussion of 1990

The development of Lundenwic
And this brings us to the second part of our overview, which covers the development of the trading settlement. Like most emporia, Lundenwic was strategically located, at the border of different kingdoms – East Saxons, South Saxons, Kent and Wessex, near the mouth of the Thames, with a good beach for boats, and linked to the city and hinterland by at least two Roman roads, one under the Strand, one to the north, it was an ideal port for traders coming, as recorded by Bede, by land and by sea. The largest excavation, at the Royal Opera House, published in 2003, covered 2500 sq metres. At this time the oldest Anglo-Saxon find was this residual late sixth or seventh century saucer brooch and it was thought that activity in the area of the Strand began in the area of the waterfront, probably near Charing Cross Station, in the early seventh century, with scattered burials to the north and that the settlement expanded over them around c AD 670.

To some extent this is still true, but the finds from the sites shown here, point to a longer chronology. The first clue came from two adjacent sites at the western end of Long Acre, excavated in 1999 and 2000, where a few shards of sandstone-tempered and bone-tempered pottery were found – fabrics typical of the fifth to sixth century rural settlements around London, but unlike anything previously found in Covent Garden. A third century Roman scabbard slide was also found at 15–17 Long Acre. Between 2005–7, the reasons for these unexpected finds were made clearer by exciting evidence for Late Roman and Early Saxon activity, not continuous as such, but probably connected by tradition and memory, found by MOLA at St Martin-in-the-Fields and at Upper St Martin’s Lane.

The work at St Martin-in-the-Fields revealed the remains of first and third century Roman buildings in the northern part of the site, a possible tile kiln to the south with an archaeomagnetic date of AD 400–450 for the last firing. The site lies close to suitable clay and a former stream, both necessary for tile making, and the stream may also have influenced the choice of the site for burial – four definite and two possible late Roman graves were found on the west side of the site, which, with the sarcophagi found under the portico in 1722, suggest a religious focus of some form by the fourth century, if not earlier. The MOLA finds include another stone sarcophagus containing bones from the right hand and right foot of the original burial, but mainly emptied and reused for a second body that has a $^{14}$C date of AD 390–520, and a likely date of AD 410. The fact that the skull was missing may be explained by nineteenth century damage.

Another inhumation has a $^{14}$C date of AD 369–78, while one toward the north end of the site was dated by a coin of Constantius (355–65); this had been cut through at the head end, possibly by a subsequent grave. The skull and right scapula (shoulder) were found in the later cut, together with a near complete pot with incised and dimpled decoration that probably dates to the mid/later fifth century. This is the most complete pot of its date in London; it may be an import or a local copy, but is contemporary with the Billingsgate bathhouse finds and like them demonstrates movement of new settlers up the Thames in the fifth century. Later visits to the site are indicated by a mud-brick oven with a $^{14}$C date of c AD 540–600 in to the north east of the fifth century pot, over which was found part of an imported polychrome glass bead of similar date.

The coincidence of fourth century burials and industrial activity is difficult explain, unless the tiles were made for a specific building, such as a villa or, more likely, a shrine or temple. Looking at the location of the site, it lies not only at a probable crossroads of the Strand (the Roman road to Bath), and a Roman route between Westminster and the road to Oxford, but also between two branches of a stream that flowed south into the Thames, a location similar to that of the Mithraeum described here last week, exactly on a bend that offers extensive views up and downstream. Westminster abbey is thought to stand on the site of a temple of Apollo, and the religious focus here also suggests something rather extra-ordinary, the memory of which continued to attract visitors and then traders to supply the settlement that developed a short distance to the north around Upper St Martin’s Lane, on higher ground to the east of the same stream, probably the original settlement in the area that became Lundenwic.

Here, the fifth or sixth century finds from the MOLA site include a few shards of pottery and part of a rare glass cone beaker, with unusual pinched base, and unmarvered white trails, possibly imported from the Meuse valley or the Rhineland (sadly, residual). An unusual third century brooch, and Roman pottery of mixed date were also found. Due to the location of the site, it is the first in Covent Garden with any waterlogged Saxon deposits, and a ditch dated to after AD 730 contained the remains of several leather shoes. The sequence is long, and a male
Moving eastwards, in 2003 a cluster of ten cremations, the only ones in the area, was found at the London Transport Museum, eight in pots. Pots B6, on the screen, B7 and B8 were in the same pit, suggesting a family group, and the bone from B8 was C\textsuperscript{14}-dated to AD 430–640 at 95% confidence. This pit also contained nineteen burnt beads and an ornate pair of tweezers, probably Frankish and of fifth to sixth century date, suggesting that at least one of the group was a foreigner or had connections in northern France, Belgium or Germany. Cremation B1, C\textsuperscript{14} dated to AD 410–550, or AD 480–540 (42% confidence), was cut through by a north-south female burial B11, which had virtually no grave goods. To the south was an east-west burial, B12, containing a female wearing a shield-on-tongue buckle, an amber necklace and a polychrome reticella bead, all imported. A Kentish garnet keystone disc brooch found in a well that cut through the head of the burial is probably also from this grave. Taken together, the finds suggest a late sixth or early seventh century date. Although the relationship between these burials is unclear, they are the best evidence for trade and traders around the time when St Paul’s was built in AD 604.

At least 25 scattered seventh century, ‘Conversion-period’ burials have now been found, forming two main clusters, the first at St Martin-in-the-Fields, possibly emulating a Continental-style cemetery. Whether the Roman cemetery here was reused in the fifth or sixth century is unclear, but at least one burial with a spear and a palm cup was found in a reused Roman sarcophagus in 1722, and five definite and seven possible seventh century burials were found by MOLA, two C\textsuperscript{14} dated to AD 660. They include an important male buried with a palm cup and a fragmented hanging bowl full of hazelnuts. Here you can see one of the basal discs and one of the bird-shaped escutcheons with red enamel. The deceased also wore a seventh century silver signet ring, probably an import, similar to those here, with a large round bezel bordered by groups of three pellets on either side. Usually of gold or copper alloy, such rings underline the growing importance and power of the upper classes of the Frankish/Merovingian world, and are important indicators of rank and the power to endorse documents, and as the C\textsuperscript{14} date is AD 660, the wearer could have been a port reeve or an official in charge of the development of the new wic, or emporium. A few yards to the north of the male burial was an empty grave cut containing a Kentish-style gold pendant, silver rings and five beads, two of amethyst and three of glass. These probably represent a disturbed female burial of AD 650–60.

The second burial area appears to be centred on the area around the Covent Garden Piazza. Including St Martin-in-the-Fields, there are now four weapon burials, all with spears, and one with a shield. Another probable weapon burial in Long Acre was truncated but the deceased wore a late seventh century belt set, made of iron with inlaid cruciform motif in copper alloy and originally silvered. The buckle belongs to a type known from Switzerland to the Netherlands, with good parallels in northern France and Belgium, suggesting not only the burial of a foreigner abroad, but direct commercial and cultural contact with the Merovingian continent. Only two other buckles of this type are known in England, both of copper alloy and with profiled edges, are from graves in Ipswich and Southampton, again associated with the early development of these emporia. The richest female in this area, found beneath the ROH prop store in Floral Street, wore a late example of a Kentish-style composite disc brooch dated to c AD 650–660, with three beads and two or three linked silver rings, probably from a necklace.

When we look at the topography of the area, the reason for the location of the Early Saxon finds, and for the main distribution of burials is quite clear, being along the ridge of higher ground overlooking the Thames, with the earlier settlement to the west and the later north-south road in slight valleys. The real density of burial is impossible to ascertain due to disturbance by Saxon pits and quarries, and by later developments, but it is quite possible that the whole area was used for burial for up to 150 years. Where the community was living in the earlier seventh century, other than at Upper St Martins, is less easy to ascertain, but by the mid seventh century the population was clearing growing, as were trading activities, due to the development of elite powers, the revival of Christianity and the strategic location of the settlement.

**The wic**
The site of the existing settlement offered good beaching facilities with springs for water and open, well-drained land on the gravel terraces that could be easily farmed and built on, and raw materials for the construction of buildings and roads, and all were exploited. From the pottery sequences, coins, scientific dating and dendrochronology of waterfront we can probably date the foundation of the wic to the reign of Wulfhere of Mercia, king between AD 658–675, or the subsequent Kings of Kent. At this time the settlement appears to have been laid out to a specific plan; occupation expanded and buildings were erected over the forgotten burials. This may have been accelerated by a move to burial in churchyards following the revival of Christianity (after c AD 653, and perhaps not until after AD 675 when Erkenwald was bishop), although it is not yet known where these new cemeteries were.

This sequence is clear from the Royal Opera House excavations, where by c AD 670, or certainly by c 700, the ring ditches and burials (left) (including adult dated to AD 607–660, and an old male dated to AD 640–673) were superseded by seven wells, five buildings and an extensive yard (right). The remains of fence lines suggest that the land was divided into plots, which seem to have remained fairly fixed from then on. A three metre wide north-south road was built, linking the area with the Thames and possibly also with the Roman road to the north. The road was initially flanked by drainage gullies, later by timber-lined drains. These features were not stratigraphically related, and the buildings could predate the road, as they are on a different alignment (parallel to Upper St Martin’s Lane). Both, however, were post-dated by a grey layer of rubbish that accumulated over the burials; this may derive from the buildings, but it is also possible that it was carted out from the settlement to the south or west. The pottery includes chaff-tempered wares and a few imports from northern France.

In period 4.1, more buildings were constructed to the north and west, but still on the same alignment. Some, including a smithy (B6), form a courtyard arrangement. Industry was developing and imported pottery from France and the Rhineland, probably used for wine, is more abundant. In the early 8th century, period 4.2, occupation became denser - the open yards became more enclosed and several new buildings were constructed, including another smithy (B11) which had a hearth base of Roman tiles and a possible anvil base. The buildings fronting onto the road began to be aligned with it, but those away from it were not. The latter were accessed by alleyways leading from the main road, and by subsidiary pathways, which evolved into an irregular grid. Several buildings had hearths, while tanning pits were dug in the north east corner of the site (point out). Many buildings were multifunctional, with crafts taking place alongside domestic activities; some buildings probably also housed livestock. Rubbish accumulated in the minor alleys between buildings, but most streets were kept clean.

This pattern continued throughout the rest of the eighth century (period five), although the buildings became more standardised and those by the road were more consistently aligned with it; the alleys were also improved. The overall density of buildings remained the same; there was generally less space between them, but most had associated yards. By the ninth century (period six), however, there was a distinct decrease in the amount of activity. The dominant pottery is now Ipswich ware, which defines the major phase of trading activity in the mid eighth century. Period six is generally defined by the arrival of shell-tempered ware, sometime between AD 770 and AD 800, although this is much less common.

Quantification of the pottery by period shows that the local handmade wares with a vegetable, or chaff, temper are the main type in the early period, but beginning to go out of use by c AD 750. Ipswich wares, from East Anglia, appeared c AD 730–750 and seem to have dominated the market well into the ninth century. Made, or finished, on a turntable, and fired in permanent kilns, they were much stronger and were widely distributed, perhaps as containers for other goods or as part of the wine trade. From the late eighth or ninth century shell-tempered wares begin to occur. Imports occur throughout and we’ll come back to them.

Some 60 timber buildings were found on the Royal Opera House site, and by now the total is probably around 100. The core zone of Lundenwic probably covered some 55–60 hectares, from Charing Cross Road/Northumberland Avenue in the west to Aldwych in the east, if not beyond. The northern limit was initially in the area of Long Acre. The road on the Royal Opera House site was resurfaced more than ten times, probably with gravel taken from extensive quarries to the north to the site. Other roads were probably constructed and maintained with gravel from quarries by the National Gallery and elsewhere on the fringes of the settlement.

At the same time as the late eighth/ninth century decline at the Royal Opera House, there is some shifting of emphasis. In the second half of the eighth century a farm was established by Trafalgar Square (under the National Gallery) and by c AD 770–800 there was a possible royal hall, in Whitehall. There was probably also
activity on the highest part of Thorney Island, later the site of Westminster abbey. There was also developing activity between Holborn and the Fleet valley, and it is possible that the area of the Temple was of a higher status than the core zone, although this is poorly understood due to lack of opportunity for excavation. There is some evidence for burials here, but their date is unknown as the archaeologists were not allowed to excavate them. A late eighth or ninth century well contained a Quentovic sceat, pottery and crucible fragments that suggest glass manufacture nearby.

**Trade**

The function of most wics was to supply the court, the church, or both, with goods and revenue from tolls, and the density of the buildings and range of activities represented across the settlement substantiate Bede’s description of London as the capital (metropolis) of the province of the East Saxons, and an emporium, of many nations coming to it by land and sea.

A land grant shows that ships were visiting the portum Lundoniae c AD672–74, perhaps regularly, and this is supported by the discovery of a waterfront embankment at York Buildings, near Charing Cross station, extending for least 17m wide and at least 0.8m high. Dendrochronology shows that this is the oldest such construction in the country, dating to c AD 679 or shortly thereafter. Evidence for a waterfront at Arundel House, to the east of Kingsway, near Somerset House has also been found. The river at this time lay approximately 100m south of the Strand; whether the waterfront was continuous or not is very unclear.

By AD 680 trade with Kent was regulated, and a royal hall was used by the Kings of Kent to enable Kentish merchants to receive warranty of goods purchased in London, and a king’s reeve (someone such as was buried at St Martin-in-the-Fields) was appointed to witness transactions. This hall may have been inside the city walls, but it seems more likely that it was in, or adjacent to the actual port. Possibly the first contemporary reference to Lundenwic is in a grant of AD 687, which refers to land ‘iuxta Lundoniam’ and a property ‘supra vicum Lundoniae’. Several religious foundations were granted revenue, or exempted from paying tolls in the port of London, including Rochester and Worcester, Offa’s foundation at Westminster, and the nuns of Minster in Thanet. Ipswich ware and imported pottery has been found on at least two sites near Windsor, where there may have been a palace, but there is little or none from Bermondsey or Chertsey, where there were religious houses, or from the settlements along the Thames at Battersea, Chiswick, Chelsea, Kingston and Staines, or inland at Hendon and Northolt.

Trade developed rapidly in the late seventh century, and in the eighth century, when Lundenwic was the port of Mercia, it flourished under their kings Aethelbald and Offa, although this increase was stimulated by the influence of the Frisian traders on North Sea trade. The other English wics are Hamwic, now Southampton, Ipswich and York. In all cases, the main emphasis of cross-channel trade seems to have been with northern France/Belgium (including the Seine Valley), and the Rhineland. Frisian traders were present in London as early as AD 679, while Anglo-Saxon merchants, some perhaps from London, were attending the annual fair at St. Denis from c AD 700. Trading connections between Lundenwic, Dorestad and Quentovic and Dorestad are noted by St Boniface in AD 716 and AD 718.

Other than pottery, the main evidence for trade comprises quernstones of Niedermendig lava, imported via the Rhine for grinding flour (as they had been in the Roman period), of which 316 frags were found on the Royal Opera House site (no weight given), 224 frags (c 25kg) from various MOLA sites published in 2012 and 48 frags (8kg) from USM. This is, of course, what stayed in the wic - Lundenwic was an entrepôt, mostly the port of Mercia, but later of Wessex, shipping goods upstream to Oxfordshire and beyond. At the last count there were 26 coins from archaeological contexts, including eleven sceattas from the Royal Opera House site. This is broadly comparable with Ipswich but less than Hamwic; where c 90 have been found. Most appear to be from London, Kent and Essex; coins from Hamwic and Ipswich are much less common. One may be from France, two are probably Frisian, and another may well be so. This Wodan monster coin is an insular copy of a type originating in Ribe.

Imported jars and pitchers occur in all periods, probably arriving as part of the wine trade, and although some could have been brought by merchants for their own use there are no particular concentrations to indicate merchant enclaves. The amounts of imported pottery fluctuate over time, but average 12% by shard count at the Royal Opera House and c 14% on a range of other sites c 12-14% by shard count and c 9% by weight. The
peak is between AD 730–770.

Turning to local industry, bone and antler working was practised from the start, but although antler offcuts are present on most sites, the amount of waste is minimal by comparison with that found in other wics and emporia such as Hamwic or Haithabu. Combs, pins, and weaving tools are the most common finds, but a range of objects is found, including spoons. Weaving was carried out on a small scale up to AD700/730, and on a large scale after this, probably due to the influence of Frisian traders, and the exchange black stones (lava querns) for English cloth, the quality of which was found wanting, is famously documented by correspondence in 796 between Charlemagne and Offa (resolving 7-year dispute). Some 1024 loomweights were found on the Royal Opera House site, weighing 157.4kg. Those from MOLA sites published in 2012 total 301 frags, 35.3kk.

The London mint was the earliest, and one of the most productive, in England, and its coins were in wide circulation by the 640s AD. The location(s) of this mint is unknown, but there is some evidence for possible coin manufacture in the 8th-century on or near the Royal Opera House site, where sceatta-sized blanks, small ingots, crucibles and other finds such as a length of gold wire suggest that the melting and casting of silver and copper alloy objects was carried out on a small scale, mainly after 730; a key mould was found on Bedfordbury. So far there is no evidence for cupellation. Of especial interest is a mould for a small disc brooch, the design on which seems to have been inspired by a series H sceat (the bird from the front face, the annulets from the reverse). This type of coin dates from the reign of Cynewulf, so the mould should not be earlier than the 760s AD. Iron smithing started in the late 7th century, in one case directly over the Long Acre burial with the Continental belt buckle, and continued into the 9th century. The most common items are knives and keys. Two possible smithies were found on the Royal Opera House site, but the general distribution of slag suggests that the industry was mainly confined to peripheral sites.

Further evidence of daily life is provided by the finds from cesspits and wells, the latter including a variety of combs a variety of combs and a complete 8th-century iron cauldron and trivet. Other finds show a taste for ornament in what must have been a rather smelly environment. Arguably the most personal finds are two items with English runic inscriptions: a bone handle (Royal Opera House), and a cattle vertebra with the name Tatberht (National Portrait Gallery).

Decline

In AD 764 Lundenwic suffered a major fire, with two more in AD 798 and AD 801, and although some of the eighth century buildings on the Royal Opera House site continued in use, only three new ones were constructed. In the ninth century, widespread political instability on the Continent, led to a decline in international trade, compounded by the threat of Viking raids. To what extent defensive measures were taken is unclear, but two substantial east-west ninth century ditches could have been dug in advance of the first Viking attack in 842; that at the Royal Opera House was fortified and on a different alignment to the buildings; the fill was sealed by a layer of dark earth containing a hoard of 21 Northumbrian stycas, the latest being of Osbert (AD 848–67). The coins may thus have been buried at the time of, or after, the second raid in AD 851, when this part of thewic had been unoccupied for several years. The picture of decline in ninth century Lundenwic is somewhat at variance with its description in 811 as a royal town (oppidoque regali Lundaniae vicu), and another of 839, which speaks of ‘an illustrious place...called throughout the world the city of London’. It may be that people had moved to Westminster or closer to the city. If they were already moving back into the safety of the Roman city walls, they took none of the pottery types used in Lundenwic with them, but they may have sheltered in the area of the Temple, as a coin hoard of AD 842 was found there. The last recorded use of the term ‘wic’ for London is in a (spurious) charter of AD 857, and in AD 886 the city within the Roman walls was formally refounded by Alfred.

Discussion

And this brings us back to the Romans. The site at St Martin-in-the-Fields is between two streams with excellent views up and downstream. It may have started as a military posting station or lookout, but later became a high status cemetery, located at a crossroads of the Strand, the Roman road to Bath, and a north-south route leading from Westminster to Watling Street. Stone coffins are immensely heavy and had to be imported from far afield; less than twenty specific examples are known from the other Roman cemeteries in London. The cluster at St Martin-in-the-Fields is remarkable, and the tile kiln suggests a shrine or temple nearby. While the fact that the site retained this importance in the seventh century may simply reflect the opportunistic reuse of the
sarcophagi, it seems to be more than a coincidence, and a conscious desire to emulate a high status Merovingian cemetery. So, what we may be seeing here is a something like the transition from Roman villa with burials to Frankish church that has been noted on the Continent, where unwalled bourgs often evolved around a shrine outside a fortified civitas, or in locations suitable for trade, with settlement then developing along the same stream by the sixth century.

While there is no doubt that St Paul’s was located in the city from the late seventh century onwards, some consideration should perhaps be given to the possibility that Aethelberht’s first church of AD 604 might have been outside the city, where there was clearly a local community to use it. Most burials, however, date to between c AD 630–670, and show that the community was both wealthy and well connected. The real growth of Lundenwic, from c AD 675 onwards, follows the revival of Christianity in AD 650s and may coincide with a move towards burial in churchyards. The evidence for town planning on the Royal Opera House site strongly suggests that the development of Lundenwic, both in spatial and economic terms, was determined by royal power, although also influenced by the church and wider economic forces; the peak of activity, AD 730–770, probably owed much to the trading exploits of the Frisian merchants. Lundenwic was also an entrepôt, supplying sites upstream in Wessex and Mercia, and possibly also downstream (eg Barking Abbey), although this role is less well understood.

**Conclusion**

What I have outlined today is one view of a changing story. There is much we will never know due to damage by past development, and things may change again if we get another excavation in the right place, but we now have a considerable amount of evidence for activity from the fifth century onwards and can prove that, as described by Bede, London really was a mart of many nations coming to it by land and sea.

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