

Andrew Reynolds

Chapter 1

London into the Age of Cnut: An Archaeological Perspective

This chapter will review the archaeology of the city of London, beginning with a brief consideration of the city's archaeological resource, its extent, and recovery, before charting the early history of this city from its Roman origins through to the later tenth century and then the early eleventh when Cnut, having secured the city from Æthelred and Edmund, began to take an increasing interest in London as his new capital.¹ London's early development is complex, both in terms of its chronological and spatial development, and this background is necessary to place its urban floruit in the reigns of Æthelred and Cnut in perspective. The recent publication of a series of large-scale excavations in the heart of the walled city allows for a high-resolution reading of the redevelopment of London, in which the later tenth and early eleventh centuries are shown to have been a period of substantial and apparently planned urban growth in contrast to much less regular (and comparatively sparse) prior occupations. New findings support the idea that the Roman amphitheater discovered in the 1990s served as an assembly place for the city's aldermen, and here the evidence for the defense of London in the so-called "second Viking Age" will also be reviewed. Overall, a case will be made for the rise of London as England's principal urban center in an intense and relatively short period in the early eleventh century, in contrast to previous arguments for a later-ninth-century urban foundation by King Alfred.

Introduction

After a brief overview of the archaeology and history of London, from Roman beginnings to the earlier Anglo-Saxon period and the reemergence of urban life

¹ For this chapter, I acknowledge the organisers of the conference upon which this volume is based. I should also like to thank John Clark for his sage advice and Barney Harris for producing the illustrations. I thank my teacher Gustav Milne for encouraging me as an undergraduate, for his insight, and for several enjoyable years in which we worked on the medieval buildings of London; his writing on London is an inspiration. Lastly, I am grateful to the generations of archaeologists whose skill and commitment enabled the material story of London to be told.

in the form of *Lundenwic*, this chapter will consider the oft-supposed direct translocation of extramural settlement back inside the walls of the former Roman city in the late ninth century. London's earlier history provides the background necessary to appreciate the full significance of the developments in London's urban fabric in the later tenth and earlier eleventh century. The focus here will be on the topographical development of the city, rather than on such details of its economic or material culture history as are covered elsewhere in this book.

Archaeological inquiries into London's past have resulted in a series of transformative realizations about the nature of human occupation not only in both Roman and medieval cities, but also in *Lundenwic*, the "transitional" settlement to the west of the walled city. *Lundenwic* eluded recognition until the 1980s, despite the fact that the place-name Aldwych (Old Wic) gives away its location unambiguously.² The nature and extent of Roman London, *Londinium*, is relatively well understood. Even though the chronological details continue to be refined, whilst the meaning of the name itself has puzzled scholars of place-names,³ the exceptionally well-preserved deposits of this period in many parts of the city have allowed scholars to map out fluctuations in the extent and character of the Roman settlement with relative clarity,⁴ particularly in comparison with what is known of occupation in and outside the walled city between the fifth and eleventh centuries.

This chapter is not the first to review the post-Roman material. In particular, two key book-length treatments of London's post-Roman history and archaeology have lost none of their relevance despite decades of subsequent archaeological and historical investigation, of which an impressive synthesis has recently appeared.⁵ The first monograph is Brooke and Keir's beautifully written and perceptive investigation of the written and topographical evidence, published in 1975;

² Biddle, "London on the Strand"; Vince, "The Aldwych."

³ Rivet and Smith, *Place-Names of Roman Britain*, 396–98, though they draw no conclusion about what *Londinium* means, emphasize that the name was probably communicated by either Vulgar Latin or British speakers to Germanic speaking people (p. 397). Where they dismiss Ptolemy's association of *Londinium* with the *Cantii* (the people of Kent) in his (ca. 125–150) *Geography* (p. 398), it may be said that Ptolemy's view may merely reflect London's evolving relationship with the surrounding regions. Ekwall, in *English Place-Names*, 303, more boldly suggests that "The immediate base may be a pers.[onal] n.[ame] *Londinos* or a tribal name formed from the adjective," with the first part of the name cognate with Old Irish *lond* (wild).

⁴ Perring, *Roman London* and "Recent advances"; Mattingly, *An Imperial Possession*, 273–76; Hingley, *Londinium*.

⁵ Naismith, *Citadel of the Saxons*. Although this appeared too late for its detail to be included here, there appears to be broad alignment between his conclusions and mine. Naismith's volume is an expert synthesis, particularly strong on the economic and administrative organization of the city.

the second is Alan Vince's expert overview of archaeological findings, published in 1990.⁶ My contribution will set the historically informative results of several recently published excavations of the city within the context of revisions in overall thinking about the urban process in England and neighboring countries.

Archaeology in London: The Resource

Whereas historians and literary scholars must be ever mindful of the partial nature of their evidence, as well as of the factors that led to the initial production and subsequent survival of this evidence, archaeologists confront problems of a different kind, for all the theoretical parallels that can be drawn between written and physical evidence.⁷ Unchecked construction work and controlled excavation are both destroyers of archaeological strata. Nonetheless, our knowledge has increased enormously over the last seventy years; and particularly dramatically since the mid-1970s, when concerted archaeological inquiry witnessed such a marked upturn, both in extent and methodological approach, that Brooke and Keir, in their preface to *London 800–1600: The Shaping of a City*, acknowledged that “it is the worst time to be writing a book on London in the period most likely to be illuminated by these [archaeological] studies.”⁸ How perceptive they were.

Preservation and recovery are the two most important factors that impact upon the archaeologist's ability to reconstruct the past. While Londoners started to dig basements and cellars for their houses from the late tenth century onwards,⁹ the effects of these structures upon archaeological strata pale in comparison to the devastating destruction wrought by the digging of cellars in the exponential expansion of London in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. In many cases, even the earlier reconstruction of vast expanses of the city, after the Great Fire of London in 1666, sealed rather than erased archaeological deposits. Many of London's churches, rebuilt by Sir Christopher Wren and others, lay directly upon the foundations of their medieval predecessors, thus preserving earlier remains below them and medieval ground plans in later fabric.¹⁰ The one

⁶ Brooke and Keir, *London 800–1216*; Vince, *Saxon London*.

⁷ The key notion is that archaeological strata may be “read” as text by an excavator with the “linguistic” skills to decode the many and complex facets of the archaeological record.

⁸ Brooke and Keir, *London 800–1216*, xiv.

⁹ Horsman, Milne, and Milne, *Aspects of Saxo-Norman London I*, 109.

¹⁰ As, for example, at St. Vedast, Foster Lane and St. Brides, Fleet Street: Milne and Reynolds, “St. Vedast”; Milne, *St. Bride's*.

glaring exception to this rule is St. Paul's Cathedral. Here the scale of the works involved in the construction of the present edifice are likely to have left little in the way of structures or strata relating to the medieval and earlier religious complex, at least below the footprint of the current building.¹¹

A pioneering study of the survival of archaeology in London, undertaken in the 1970s by Martin Biddle, Daphne Hudson, and Carolyn Heighway, revealed that no less than 25% of archaeological deposits within the walled area had been erased by later activities, with at least 58% of the urban area at least partially effaced.¹² This important and innovative study, *The Future of London's Past*, was itself produced in an era of activity, when the pressures of redevelopment were ramping up again after the immediate reconstruction following World War II. A number of these developments were monitored or excavated via small trenches by dedicated teams of archaeologists funded by public donations, who managed to record only a fraction of the sites being redeveloped in the 1940s to 1960s.¹³ The challenges facing these pioneers of urban archaeology were immense, especially given the extent of rebuilding necessary after the sustained bombing of the city in the early years of the war.¹⁴

Although the history of archaeological recovery in London may be found elsewhere,¹⁵ it is important to recognize that the figures given for archaeology lost by 1973 only increased in the rest of the 1970s, while the newly formed Department of Urban Archaeology, based at the Museum of London, fought to recover the material remains of Roman and medieval London, often from the jaws of mechanical excavators. It was not until 1990 that the responsibility for recording the archaeology in advance of development, together with the burden of cost, was formally passed to property developers. This was done through planning guidance issued by the government, which, though itself not legally binding, was now at least part of the formal planning process; indeed, it worked remarkably well. In part, the need for new regulations came about due to a series of threats to high-profile archaeological sites in the city, notably the Huggin Hill Roman bath-house and (with greater media coverage) London's Rose Theatre of

11 McCourt, "An Archaeological Assessment," 214; Tatton-Brown, "Topography of Anglo-Saxon London," 23.

12 Biddle, Hudson, and Heighway, *Future of London's Past*.

13 Grimes, *Roman and Mediaeval London*.

14 There were, for example, fifty-seven consecutive nights of aerial bombardment between September 7 and November 2, 1940, while on December 29 that year the City experienced the most extensive fire since the blaze of 1666: Milne with Cohen, *Cripplegate*, 1.

15 For an excellent short summary, see Milne with Cohen, *Cripplegate*, 1–3. For a longer consideration, see Sheldon and Haynes, "Twenty-five Years," and Morel, *Archaeology in Global Cities*.

Shakespeare's time.¹⁶ Since the 1990s it has become routine for the excavation and recording of archaeological remains to precede development. Nevertheless, one wonders what has been lost. The archaeological record, though partial in its survival and partial in its recovery, is extensive. It has a huge potential to reveal so much more of London's early history, and moreover in a way that written sources, barring the discovery of long-lost documents, are unlikely to replicate.

Roman Beginnings

The earliest occupation of the site that became Roman *Londinium* is dated by some to no earlier than 50 CE. However, London's role as the administrative center and preeminent settlement in the Roman province of *Britannia* seems to come slightly later, between 60 and 70, perhaps due to the sack of Colchester, the earlier provincial capital, in Boudicca's revolt in 60 or 61 (London was also sacked).¹⁷ Interestingly, the evidence for early Roman period occupation at London has been read by some as a sign that it was in origin a commercial settlement, an *entrepôt*, rather as *Lundenwic* was some six hundred years later to the west of the Roman city; by others, however, this evidence has been taken to indicate a military foundation in the Roman invasion of Britain in 43.¹⁸

Besides its location upstream of the Thames Estuary, in itself a major gateway into southern England from Continental Europe, the site of London is relatively unprepossessing. Topographically uninspiring, with relatively little variation in elevation, the area enclosed by the third-century Roman wall (128ha) incorporates a minor river fed by rivulets (the Walbrook) draining southwards into the Thames, as well as large areas of boggy ground initially unsuitable for settlement and exploitation. The eastern part of the walled area retained this character into the late Anglo-Saxon period and was the latest part of the city to be resettled.

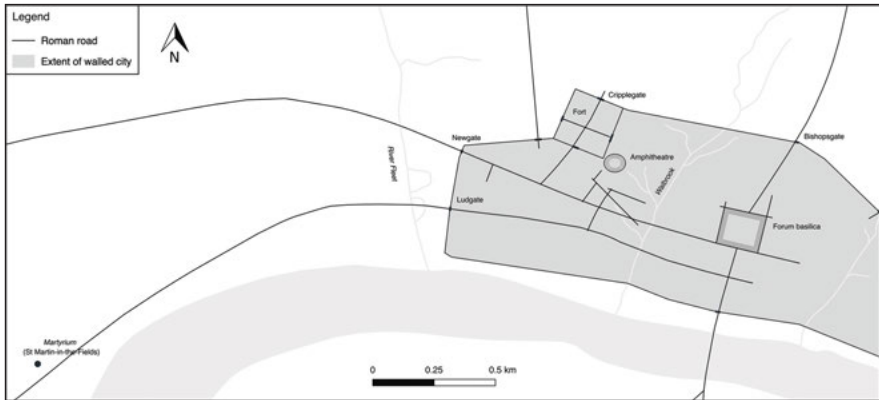
The late-first-century Cripplegate Fort, whose north-western part lay for many years unrecognized in the outline of London's city wall, provided a military focus which was subsumed, at least partly, with the development in the third century of a walled *encient* that was to dictate the extent of the city of late

¹⁶ Sheldon and Haynes, "Twenty-five Years," 5; Bowsler and Miller, *The Rose and Globe*; Bowsler, *Shakespeare's London*, 68–80.

¹⁷ Mattingly, *An Imperial Possession*, 265.

¹⁸ Mattingly, *An Imperial Possession*, 273–75; Perring, "Two Studies on Roman London."

Anglo-Saxon, medieval, and later London (Map 1.1).¹⁹ The walls of Roman towns and cities now tend to be seen as a symbolic reflection of *urbanitas* which denotes distinctions between urban and rural identities: the cost and responsibility for erecting walls appears to have been borne by a given town's population rather than by the state.²⁰



Map 1.1: The topography of London and the Roman city, showing Cripplegate fort, the amphitheater, forum basilica, the principal roads of the Roman period, and the location of the late/sub-Roman *martyrium* at St. Martin-in-the-Fields.

The relatively early onset of urban decline in Roman London can be observed in terms of an economic downturn, one which followed a spate of devastating fires and a neglect of public buildings and public space, all beginning in the late second century.²¹ By the end of the third century, major public edifices such as the forum-basilica and amphitheater had passed out of use.²² By the fourth century, much of the intra-mural area appears to have been turned over to agriculture. Presumably this was done to provide an immediate source of sustenance for the smaller number of urban dwellers within the city walls, many of whom were living by that time in large villas but in much less demographically dense occupations overall. Evidently the Roman city wall, including the riverside wall,

¹⁹ For an important series of essays on the form and function of the city at this time, see Bird, Hassall, and Sheldon, *Interpreting Roman London*.

²⁰ Mattingly, *An Imperial Possession*, 331–32.

²¹ Mattingly, *An Imperial Possession*, 334, 338; West and Milne, “Owls in the Basilica.”

²² Mattingly, *An Imperial Possession*, 336–37.

remained more or less intact into the early Middle Ages, at least in its outline if not in its verticality, on which I shall say more below.

By earlier standards the occupants of the late Roman city lived in a strange place, with ruined elements of a bygone age of classical urbanism as well as large tracts of agricultural land within the city walls: this townscape is revealed dramatically by the Number 1 Poultry excavations in the heart of the city, of which more below. In many ways, the late Roman city of London would have been a dangerous and dilapidated place to live in, not a magnet for folk seeking an urban way of life.

Nonetheless, immediately to the west of the walled city some exciting new finds have been made which bring a new perspective to the cultural transformation of Roman to Anglo-Saxon London. These are the remarkable discoveries at St. Martin-in-the-Fields, where a late Roman cemetery appears to have continued into the fifth century, possibly as a *martyrium* and associated shrine, and where two fine blue glass palm cups of seventh-century date were recovered in the eighteenth century.²³ These palm cups (probably from a burial, to judge by other graves found nearby and by burials with palm cups from the *emporium* at Ipswich),²⁴ bear witness to the rejuvenation of London as a center of population, commerce, and production, all within an economic upturn that was enjoyed by much of northern Europe from this period up until the impact of the Vikings in the ninth century; this upturn reconfigured the socioeconomic pattern of the European macro-region.

Early post-Roman London within the Walls

The fifth century is a particularly difficult period to understand in London's history. Elsewhere, owing to well-known problems of scientific dating across the later Roman to early Anglo-Saxon transition,²⁵ this century is marked both by a hiatus in the use of coin for monetary transactions and by the disappearance of readily datable commodities of the kind that were commonplace during the period of Roman occupation. In the two centuries following the latest datable Roman occupations within the walled area, the evidence for activity of any kind is extremely sparse (Map 1.2). Principally it is limited to a few sherds of early Anglo-Saxon

²³ Telfer, "New Evidence."

²⁴ Malcol and Bowsher, *Middle Saxon London*, 21, fig. 13: Scull (2009).

²⁵ The C14 calibration curve presents particular difficulties across the fifth and sixth centuries, and the Roman period in general.

pottery recovered from later contexts from a scatter of sites,²⁶ with a Germanic-style brooch of fifth-century date from a layer of fallen roof tiles at the Lower Thames Street bath-house and with a sixth- or seventh-century Merovingian-style buckle loop from a twelfth-century context at the Guildhall.²⁷ Three complete pots of northern Frankish origin, dating to the late sixth to early seventh century, which were purportedly found in the western part of the walled area (one from Gresham Street, and one from Christ's Hospital, Greyfriars, and one from Aldermanbury), may be items from an antiquary's collection.²⁸ The seeming sparsity of these visits to the former Roman city, evidenced by a few objects here and there, shows that occupation only really began again from around 600 onwards.



Map 1.2: Distribution of select artefacts of fifth- to seventh-century date found in the walled city and the location of St. Paul's.

The key documented event for the reoccupation, on any scale, of the walled city is the foundation of the monastic community of St. Paul's in the western end of the walled area in 604. Hot on the heels of the first party of missionaries

²⁶ Vince, *Saxon London*, 10–12; Schofield, Blackmore, and Stocker, “St. Paul’s Cathedral,” 82 (Table 1).

²⁷ Marsden, *Roman London*; Evison, “Early Anglo-Saxon Applied Disc Brooches,” 270–71, fig. 2a; Bowsher, Dyson, Holder and Howell, *The London Guildhall*, 300–301.

²⁸ Vince, *Aspects of Saxo-Norman London II*, 20; Vince, *Saxon London*, 11–12, fig. 5; Schofield, Blackmore, and Stocker, “St. Paul’s Cathedral,” 81.

sent to Kent in 597 was a second, also sent by Pope Gregory, in 601. This party included Mellitus, the first archbishop of the (re)founded diocese of London, and Paulinus, who went on to evangelize in northern England. Gregory's accompanying letter, in which he outlines instructions for the establishment of two ecclesiastical provinces, one based around London, the other around York, was probably inspired in part by his knowledge of the former importance of these cities in the late Empire, although his plan may also have reflected their contemporary significance (symbolically, politically, or both).²⁹

The initial foundation, assumed quite plausibly to be upon the site of the medieval and later St. Paul's Cathedral, relied on the political support of the East Saxon and Kentish kings, but lasted only for the reign of the East Saxon king Sæberht (r. 604–616). This king had been a close ally of Æthelberht of Kent (r. 560–616 or 565–618), Augustine's initial target for conversion. Sæberht's sons rejected Christianity, as did Æthelberht's, whereupon Mellitus was expelled. No permanent community at St. Paul's was reestablished – or at least protected by royal authority – until about 675, when Earconwald, then Abbot of Chertsey, was installed as Bishop of London by Archbishop Theodore of Canterbury (r. 668–690). At this time, political power over London was exercised by the East Saxon royal house, who were the first known political entity to affect control over the city after the Roman occupation of Britain: the medieval diocese of London, incorporating Essex, Middlesex, and south-eastern Hertfordshire, is quite probably a reflection of the early East Saxon kingdom to its greatest historical extent.³⁰ A few decades after the initial foundation of St. Paul's, London became mercantile once more, an *entrepôt* to the west of the ancient walled city, known to contemporaries as *Lundenwic*.

Lundenwic

As we have seen, the location of middle Anglo-Saxon London was unknown until the 1980s, even though there had long been clear written evidence for its existence in texts which include toll remission charters and Bede's famous account of *Lundenwic* as “a mart of many nations.”³¹ After years of failing to identify the *emporium* of Bede's day within the walled area, careful plotting of material culture and discoveries of archaeological features led Martin Biddle and Alan Vince to the dawning realization that *Lundenwic*, as the name Aldwych had always told us, lay

²⁹ Biddle, “A City in Transition,” 22; Vince, *Saxon London*, 10.

³⁰ Baker, *Cultural Transition*, 9.

³¹ Kelly, “Trading Privileges”; Bede, *Historia Ecclesiastica* (II.iii).

not within the walls but to the west of the former walled *encient* (Map 1.3).³² When the editors of the English Place-Name Society compiled their volume for Middlesex in the 1930s and early 1940s, they interpreted *Aldwych* as “old dairy farm,” seeing its origin in a rural context.³³ Yet the name is noted in a series of sources from the end of the twelfth century, while an “Adwych Lane,” recorded in 1551, survived into later centuries as “Wych Street”: originally the medieval lane – which is almost certainly older – incorporated the Strand as far as St. Giles in Covent Garden.³⁴ The current Aldwych erased the course of its earlier nemesis when it was constructed at the start of the twentieth century, with the name given to it in 1903 by the then London County Council.³⁵



Map 1.3: The relationship between *Lundenwic* and *Lundenburg*.

A further toponym, “The Strand,” a name meaning “bank” or “shore,”³⁶ describes an environment perfectly suited to a beach-market, in which shallow draft boats could be easily landed. Indeed, a charter of 951×959³⁷ reveals that the term (*strande*) was (at least in the tenth century) applied to the north bank of the Thames from the outfall of the River Tyburn at Westminster downstream as far as the outfall of the River Fleet. This stretch of river frontage mirrors the extent of

³² Biddle, “London on the Strand”; Vince, “The Aldwych.”

³³ Gover, Mawer, and Stenton, *Place-Names of Middlesex*, 166.

³⁴ Gover, Mawer, and Stenton, *Place-Names of Middlesex*, 185.

³⁵ Gover, Mawer, and Stenton, *Place-Names of Middlesex*, 166.

³⁶ Smith, *Place-Name Elements*, 162.

³⁷ Sawyer, *Anglo-Saxon Charters*, S 670.

seventh- to ninth-century finds on the northern side of the Thames.³⁸ The earliest occupation of *Lundenwic* is dated by material culture to the earlier seventh century, thus before the founding of Earconwald's church of St. Paul's. *Lundenwic* flourished across the eighth century; its decline at the end of this century resulted in a scatter of settlements along the bank of the Thames to the west of the River Fleet.³⁹ At its maximum extent, this *emporium* covered an area of about 60 ha.

Since the 1980s, a series of excavations has revealed the character of the middle Anglo-Saxon settlement. While most, but by no means all, interventions have been small in scale, they have provided a basis for mapping the limits of the settlement. As with the other English *emporium* (Ipswich (*Gippeswic*), Southampton (*Hamwic*) and York (*Eoforwic*)), the material culture of *Lundenwic* reveals links with northern France and particularly the Low Countries, with evidence for a range of industries producing textiles, glass, metal objects, materials of bone, horn and antler, and wooden objects as well.⁴⁰

On the thorny issue of the chronology and nature of the shift from *Lundenwic* to *Lundenburh*, a close reading of the archaeological evidence for the latest occupation of the *wic*, and of the earliest settlement within the walls of the *burh*, reveals an unexpected picture. Viking attacks on *Lundenwic* are recorded in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* entries for 842 and 851, but the shift in the focus of settlement was by no means straightforward. On the one hand, we know that *Lundenwic* was in decline by the end of the eighth century. On the other, the most recent analysis by Victoria Ziegler, based on a close reading of the archaeological sequences, their dating and material culture, presents a convincing case for a hiatus in occupation between the cessation of settlement in *Lundenwic* from the late eighth into the early ninth century, and the later re-emergence of urban (as opposed to ecclesiastical) life within the walled city.⁴¹ Ziegler's investigation focused on the very latest activity in the *emporium* and earliest evidence from the *burh*. Her view will be bolstered by conclusions reached in this chapter, that the city was largely devoid of anything approaching dense urban occupation until the later tenth and eleventh centuries.

³⁸ Gover, Mawer, and Stenton, *Place-Names of Middlesex*, 173, 222–23; Cowie and Blackmore, *Lundenwic*, 87 and fig. A1.3.

³⁹ Cowie and Blackmore, *Lundenwic*, 209.

⁴⁰ Cowie and Blackmore, *Lundenwic*, 156–69.

⁴¹ Cowie and Blackmore, *Lundenwic*, 209; Ziegler, "From *Wic* to *Burh*."

Lundenburg

The “Haga” Phase: The Earliest Occupations in the Walled City?

A few documented events in the earlier ninth century reveal that, although devoid of an urban mode of occupation, the walled city of London retained significance by virtue of its former status and evidently contemporary appearance. On August 1, 811, the Mercian King Cenwulf (r. 796–821) held a council in London “in loco praeclaro oppidoque regali lundaniae vicu,”⁴² an interesting turn of phrase that surely refers to the walled *encient*: the word *vicu* perhaps in this case applied with its Roman rather than early medieval meaning, as in “in the renowned place and royal burh, in the settlement of London.” Indeed, one of the most spectacular numismatic finds of recent years is the fine gold *mancus* minted in the name of Cenwulf with the legend **IN VICO LVNDONIAE** and now exhibited in the British Museum. However, whether this was minted in the *emporium* or within the walled area is unknown and perhaps dependent on the location of the royal palace at this time.⁴³

In 839 Bishop Helmstan of Winchester “professed” his obedience to the then Archbishop of Canterbury, Ceolnoth, “in loco praeclaro antiquorum Romanorum arte constructa vulgoque per tulluris spatia vocitato civitas Lundonia magna” (in the famous place, built by the skill of the ancient Romans, commonly called throughout the whole world the great city of *Lundonia*).⁴⁴ Although lacking urban life, the walled area with its monastery and allied settlement clearly had great renown and attracted high-level political engagements. A century earlier, Bede’s varied terminology when referring to London appears also to make a distinction between *Lundenwic* (his word *emporium*), London as a capital city (his word *metropolis*, presumably connoting an area based on the religious community at St. Paul’s), and the walled city as a whole (his word *civitas*).⁴⁵ The main point to note here is that it is no longer enough to think of a straightforward shift in focus with regard to the settlement at London. Instead, we must think of a polyfocal arrangement whereby parts of the whole fluctuated in terms of function, importance, and density of occupation.

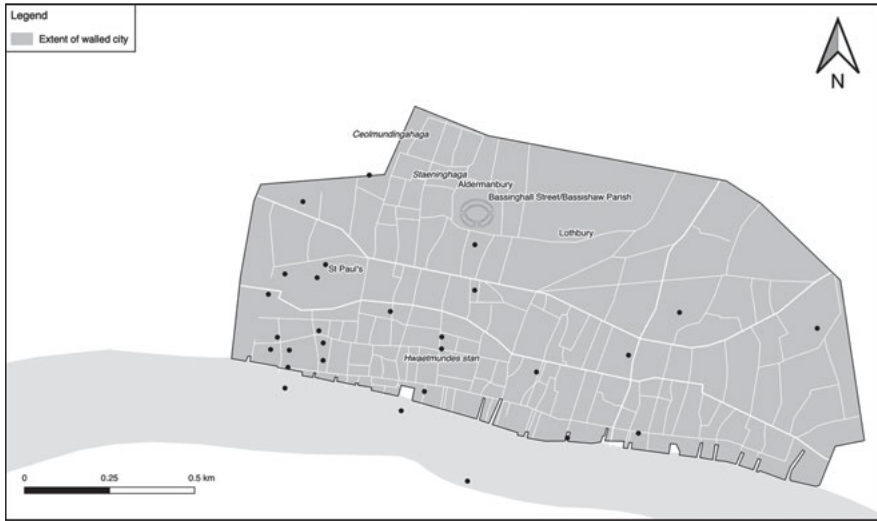
⁴² Sawyer, *Anglo-Saxon Charters*, S 168.

⁴³ https://www.britishmuseum.org/collection/object/C_2006-0204-1

⁴⁴ Haddan and Stubbs, *Councils and Ecclesiastical Documents*, 621–22.

⁴⁵ For a discussion of Bede’s urban vocabulary for London and more widely, see especially Campbell, “Bede’s Words for Places,” 34–42. I am grateful to John Clark for referring me to this piece.

Nonetheless, the western part of the walled area may have seen an intermediate phase of occupation. First, a series of finds of pottery from the fifth century through to the ninth has been made on sites mainly to the south of St. Paul's but also to the north-west.⁴⁶ The distribution of these mainly middle Anglo-Saxon finds suggests that the focus of settlement and occupation within the walls during this period lay between St. Paul's and the waterfront to the south (Map 1.4).



Map 1.4: Distribution of select seventh- to ninth-century artefacts, *haga*, *burh*, and other potentially middle Anglo-Saxon place-names and features.

The place-name record also supports such a view of earlier Anglo-Saxon occupation in the western part of the city where a series of parcels of land are indicated by names ending in *-haga* (hedge, enclosure, curtilage) and *-burh* (enclosure, fortification). A few cursory observations may be offered about this shadowy phase. The middle Anglo-Saxon finds made to date probably represent the beginnings of settlement within the walls, perhaps dependent on the monastery, perhaps part of the monastery, or both, but the *haga* and *burh* names appear to reflect the development of estates in both ecclesiastical and secular ownership within the walls. However, the lack of structures and other features suggestive of occupation within the walled area, such as boundaries, latrines, and wells, further indicates a pattern of sparsely occupied parcels of land within the walled area, rather than dense settlement.

⁴⁶ Schofield, Blackmore, and Stocker, "St. Paul's Cathedral," 82 (Table 1).

First, names of London streets and parishes, those which preserve elements suggestive of social groupings or persons of a middle Anglo-Saxon character (i.e., tribal groupings with *ingas*-suffixed appellatives, or street or parish names that incorporate personal names attested only in early sources), cluster around the area of Cripplegate fort and immediately north-east of the precinct of St. Paul's;⁴⁷ this cluster broadly reflects the distribution of finds of this date. The names in question, like the earliest charters referring to property within the walls, reflect a landed interest in the city by people from well outside its limits. For example, Basinghall Street, which skirts around the eastern side of the Roman amphitheater, and Basinghaw parish, the only parish within the walls which is coterminous with a ward, are names apparently derived from Old English *Basingahaga* (enclosure of the people of Basing).⁴⁸ Place-name evidence locates this social group firmly in northern Hampshire; the Basingas were apparently of some significance, given the evidence both for the extent of their heartlands⁴⁹ and for their implied presence in London at such a seemingly early date.

Although the name *Basingahaga* is only documented from 1180×1190,⁵⁰ names ending in *-ingas* are long recognized as signifying medium to large-scale group identities in the very earliest period of supra-local and regional polity formation in Anglo-Saxon England, effectively from the later sixth century to the eighth.⁵¹

Contemporary written sources ranging from the notional list of early English "tribal" groupings found in the much-discussed "Tribal Hidage," of probable late seventh-century date, to the grand narrative provided by Bede of the emergence of the earliest English kingdoms, with other sources in between, reveal a nomenclature for social groups that find examples among the early place-names of the walled city of London. As noted above, it is plausible that the name Basinghall Street records the Basingas' early interest in the walled city, potentially as a sub-group of the emerging West Saxon dynasty whose various families were vying for power at this time; their geographical proximity to London perhaps gave them the edge over their more westerly counterparts. The south coast of Hampshire was the location of *Hamwic*, one of the other major coastal *emporía* of the middle Anglo-Saxon period and contemporary with *Lundenwic*, and it might be suggested the "people of Basing" perhaps had active interests in both places.

The other *haga*-names recorded in London are those estates granted by charter in the ninth century, which provide the first incontrovertible evidence

47 Biddle, "A City in Transition," 23.

48 Ekwall, *Street-Names*, 94.

49 Eagles, *From Roman Civitas*, 162–64.

50 Historical Manuscripts Commission, *Ninth Report*, 44a.

51 On the matter of these groupings, see, for example, Bassett, "In Search of the Origins."

of regeneration of life in the walled area of the city. A grant of 857 to Bishop Alhun of Worcester by the Mercian king Burgred of “*Ceolmundingahaga* in the street of London not far from the west gate” suggests a location for the *haga* either just inside or outside of Cripplegate Fort.⁵² Two further charters granting parcels of land along the waterfront south-east of St. Paul’s, one of 889 and the other of 898 or 899,⁵³ have attracted a great deal of scrutiny and commentary from historians and urban topographers, notably Tony Dyson.⁵⁴ This is particularly because streets and alleys are mentioned as boundary markers, a feature which tallies with the material indicators of middle Anglo-Saxon occupation in this part of the city: both grants have been securely identified with Queenhithe (known as *Æthelred’s hythe* in the later document).⁵⁵ The charter of 889 records a grant of land to Wærferth, Bishop of Worcester within the walled city of a parcel named *Hwætmundes stan*, the enclosed space of an ancient (Roman) stone building (Huggin Hill bathhouse), for the purpose of holding a market.⁵⁶ This reference suggests yet another enclosure within the walled city and confirms the view provided by excavations in the central area of the walled city of a townscape characterized by Roman ruins in the ninth century (see *Number 1 Poultry* below). The fact that the 898/99 charter refers to a greater number of streets than the 889 grant suggests that the area saw increased development in the ten years between the two records.⁵⁷

The granting of land in the period from the late eighth to the ninth century attests to one of the great cultural shifts in tenurial history in England, namely to the transition from grants made almost solely to monasteries, to grants whereby secular individuals increasingly received lands not only by royal bequest but also, as time progressed, by will and sale. It must be significant that the three ninth-century grants considered here were made to ecclesiastics and not to members of the newly emerging secular elite.

A further *haga*-name is that of the people of Staines (20 miles west of London), *Staeninghaga*, which was granted by Edward the Confessor to Westminster Abbey and is now identified with the parish of St. Mary Staining inside Cripplegate Fort.⁵⁸

52 Sawyer, *Anglo-Saxon Charters*, S 208; Vince, *Saxon London*, 20.

53 Sawyer, *Anglo-Saxon Charters*, S 346 and S 1628.

54 Dyson, “Two Saxon Land Grants.”

55 Dyson, “Two Saxon Land Grants,” 201–2.

56 Sawyer, *Anglo-Saxon Charters*, S 346; Biddle, “A City in Transition,” 21.

57 Vince, *Aspects of Saxo-Norman London*, II, 22.

58 Harmer, *Anglo-Saxon Writs*, 327–28, S 97; Dyson and Schofield, “Saxon London,” 306–7.

The street name Lothbury – also the name of a ward in the thirteenth century⁵⁹ – has also been proposed as a further unit of great antiquity, as “the manor of Lotha’s people or descendants.”⁶⁰ The name is located a short distance south-east of the Roman amphitheater and resembles that of the Kentish king Hlothere (673–685).⁶¹ At any rate, it is the only recorded instance of “Lotha” in Old English.⁶²

The street pattern of Cripplegate Fort was for many years the one element of the Roman street layout which was thought to persist from its initial laying out to the present, in the case of Wood Street; and until the 1960s, in the case of Addle Street and Silver Street, which were erased when the London Wall dual carriage-way was constructed.⁶³ However, a fundamental reanalysis of the records of post–World War II excavations has shown that both the south and east walls of the fort were levelled within the Roman period and that the alignments of the medieval churches ignore those of the fort and its original streets. It has been observed that the medieval street pattern diverges from the underlying Roman one the further one moves away from the gates.⁶⁴ While much has been made in that past about the presence of a royal palace of King Offa of Mercia (757–796) in the fort in the second half of the eighth century, this notion has been conclusively shown to be a myth started by the thirteenth-century writer Matthew Paris.⁶⁵ The medieval church of St. Alban in Wood Street, in the center of the fort, is now plausibly redated to the early to middle eleventh century on the basis of an archaeological analysis; it cannot have been a middle Anglo-Saxon foundation associated with Offa’s supposed palace.⁶⁶

Another contender for an early enclosure in the city is the area occupied by the former Roman amphitheater; this feature was only again recognized in the 1980s as a function of excavations below the former Guildhall Art Gallery built in 1886 in the Guildhall Yard.⁶⁷ Previously an unknown entity, the discovery of London’s Roman amphitheater occasioned much excitement among archaeologists.⁶⁸ For our present purposes the key issue is that the outline of the amphitheater was evidently visible when certain streets in that part of the city were laid out. Aldermanbury

59 Ekwall, *The Street-Names*, 196.

60 Dyson and Schofield, “Saxon London,” 310, n. 9; Biddle, “A City in Transition,” 23.

61 Biddle, “A City in Transition,” 23.

62 Ekwall, *The Street-Names*, 196–97.

63 Tatton-Brown, “Topography of Anglo-Saxon London,” 21.

64 Milne with Cohen, *Cripplegate*, 122–25.

65 Milne with Dyson, “Saxon Palace at Cripplegate,” 127–29.

66 Cohen, “St. Alban’s, Wood Street,” 91.

67 Bateman, “Discovery of Londinium’s Amphitheatre.”

68 Maloney, “The Guildhall Amphitheatre.”

(“*burh* of the ealdormen” (or “ealdorman”)) to the west and Bassinghall Street to the east both markedly curved around its once upstanding remains: excavations have shown that the amphitheater stood to a height of 1.6 m in the late Anglo-Saxon period.⁶⁹ Both the *haga* and *burh* place-name elements, in combination with the survival of the outline of the amphitheater, suggest a further enclosure of significance in the Anglo-Saxon era, although the name Aldermanbury almost certainly belongs to the Late Saxon period and arguably to the function of the former amphitheater in the tenth and eleventh centuries (see *Guildhall Yard* below).

It is worth remembering that *haga*-names were still current in the late Saxon period, as exemplified by the terminology of many borough entries in the Domesday Survey of 1086. It remains possible that the late-recorded *haga*-names represent that terminology alone. However, the existence of enclosed spaces within the walls starting in the middle Anglo-Saxon period, beginning with the precinct of St. Paul’s, is also a convincing explanation for this name at an earlier time, despite the fact that Grimes’s various Cripplegate excavations revealed no pottery earlier than the later tenth to eleventh centuries.⁷⁰ It should also be noted that other sociocultural appellatives, such as *-ingas* names, also persisted late into the Anglo-Saxon period.

Significantly, although forty years of rescue archaeology have revealed little evidence of permanent occupation during this formative period, and although there are few pre-Conquest ecclesiastical finds in what must at least in part have been St. Paul’s precinct, two key discoveries hint at the potential of the area to yield valuable evidence. A number of burials (a minimum of thirty-one individuals) found to the north of Wren’s cathedral have been dated by C14 to between the eighth and tenth centuries (773–883 to 894–986 (2 sigma)),⁷¹ while a ditch, possibly that enclosing the Anglo-Saxon monastery, incorporated an organic filling which provided a C14 determination between the late ninth and mid-twelfth centuries.⁷² Unfortunately, the redevelopment of Paternoster Square (a substantial area to the north and west of St. Paul’s in the 1990s) revealed only the extent of the degradation of archaeological remains by later developments, with mainly Roman features cut into the natural gravels surviving.

⁶⁹ Bowsher, Dyson, Holder, and Howell, *The London Guildhall*, 301.

⁷⁰ Milne with Cohen, *Cripplegate*, 122.

⁷¹ Schofield, Blackmore, and Stocker, “St. Paul’s Cathedral.”

⁷² Cowie and Blackmore, *Lundenwic*, 101; see also, Schofield, *St. Paul’s*.

Lundenburh: Renewed Urban Life

Rather than dwelling on the nature of occupation at *Lundenwic* or early St. Paul's,⁷³ let us consider the emergence of later Anglo-Saxon London as an urban settlement within the walled area of the *burh*, with all of the characteristics of town life.⁷⁴ As we have seen, the old hypothesis that the population of the walled city resulted from a wholesale move from *Lundenwic*, with the threat of Vikings and King Alfred's reaction to them providing the primary motivation to resettle the walled area,⁷⁵ is now evidentially weaker than the view that there was a hiatus in urban-type settlement.

The business of controlling London had been a central concern of the kingdoms of Mercia and Wessex as they competed with each other in the eighth and ninth centuries, before, in the ninth and tenth, Wessex finally bought London within its political orbit. The need to dominate London, on the part of militarized political elites, came again to the fore during the Scandinavian incursions and eventual conquest in the late tenth and early eleventh centuries. The big question is the chronology of resettlement of the walled city: was this the outcome of Alfredian urban planning, or was it due to the initiatives of either Æthelred or Cnut? The unknowable human agency of a multitude of undocumented citizens must also account for a significant element of the development of the settlement space.

As we have already noted, the distribution of finds from within the walled area dating to before the late ninth century is mainly in the western part of the city, west of the Walbrook stream and around the precinct of St. Paul's, of which the Anglo-Saxon extent(s) are effectively unknown.⁷⁶ Vince's analysis revealed a picture of occasional opportunistic visits by rural dwellers to a ruinous urban area: doubtless dangerous, but surely with huge potential for personal or communal economic gains, in terms of the rich resource available for reclamation. One thinks here not of building stone, sculpture, and other high-end building materials – for these barely feature in Anglo-Saxon settlements or burials in the surrounding region – but more of portable material culture such as coin, iron, lead, and other objects with the potential for direct reuse or recycling. Despite claims from some

73 For a fine synthesis of the former, see Cowie and Blackmore, *Lundenwic*.

74 Defenses, urban-type plots, dense occupation, social and ecclesiastical, hierarchy, minting, commercial activity, production and manufacturing, and so on: see, for example, the list of urban characteristics produced by Martin Biddle, "Towns," 100.

75 Milne, "King Alfred's Plan," 206; Keynes, "King Alfred," 35.

76 Although a tentative and reasoned case has been put forward on topographical grounds: see Schofield, Blackmore, and Stocker, "St. Paul's Cathedral."

quarters for a strong desire on the part of Anglo-Saxon elites for *Romanitas*,⁷⁷ the degree to which Roman material was consciously sidestepped is nothing less than a striking indication, at least in non-ecclesiastical settings, of the stronger socio-ideological pull of different cultural concerns.

Roman building materials feature in the eleventh-century churches of London and region, but with regard to the Roman city it is worth considering what happened to its physical remains. While one site in particular has shown with great clarity how the first occupants of the central area of the walled city negotiated visible Roman townscape (see *Number 1 Poultry* below), many excavations within the walls (where deposits have not otherwise been destroyed or truncated by later developments) encounter deep accumulations of dark grey silt, known to urban archaeologists throughout post-Roman Europe as “dark earth.”⁷⁸ The formation processes that resulted in these soils are much debated: some think they originated as a function of cultivation, others from domestic occupations of an ephemeral but persistent nature.⁷⁹ Cultivation, dumping, and robbing activities are perhaps more likely in view of the fact that the material culture of early medieval *Lundenwic* and of contemporary rural settlements, those excavated beyond the walled area, is distinctive and durable with buildings of a regular type;⁸⁰ if the intra-mural dark earths had resulted from settlement, one should expect to find the material culture and structural evidence to go with them.

Whatever the mode and period of formation of the city’s dark earths, it is clear that, when occupation beyond the precinct of St. Paul’s began again in earnest in the tenth and eleventh centuries, at least some of the urban area had been cleared of most of its earlier buildings, at least above ground; there is evidence from both place-names and archaeology to support Gustav Milne’s proposal that the dark earth soils beyond the tenth-century core of the settlement were cultivated.⁸¹ It remains a fact that a huge quantity of building stone, roof tile, and other associated structural items is still unaccounted for. Even taking into account the effects of Christianization and the ensuing building of churches, there is no satisfactory explanation as to what happened to the built environment of Roman London, or for that matter to many other cities and major constructions

⁷⁷ See Carver, *Birth of a Borough*, 143–45, for an exposition of this concept.

⁷⁸ Horsman, Milne, and Milne, *Aspects of Saxo-Norman London I*, 110–11; Macphail, Galinié, and Verhaeghe, “Dark Earth.”

⁷⁹ Ottaway, *Archaeology in British Towns*, 71; Milne with Cohen, *Cripplegate*, 122.

⁸⁰ See, for example, the many sites of fifth- to ninth-century date drawn together in Cowie and Blackmore, *Early and Middle Saxon*.

⁸¹ See Milne “King Alfred’s Plan,” on the extent of the tenth-century core. On the evidence for cultivation within the walled area, see Milne with Cohen, *Cripplegate*, 120–22.

in Britain, unless the late Anglo-Saxon refurbishment of the city wall utilized just such a resource: this is quite possible in the reigns of either Æthelred or Cnut, to judge by the scale of the clearance of Roman buildings at the Number 1 Poultry site (see below).

The Regeneration of Urban Life in the City

The great urban surveys of London of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries record a layout that can in large part be traversed today, but it is debatable how far back in time the street pattern that these maps depict can be pushed. The earliest such map, spuriously attributed to the surveyor Ralph Agas (ca. 1540–1621) in the later sixteenth century, was printed from woodblocks now lost;⁸² however, it was based on an earlier map of ca. 1550, known as the “copperplate map.” No versions of the early “woodblock map” survive, but fortunately a modified version was reprinted in 1633. Minus the imposition of major streets in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the “Agas map” and its derivatives and successors are widely taken to portray the layout of medieval London’s streets. This map still provides the basis for all forays into the shape and form of Anglo-Saxon London (Figure 1.1). We will now assess the range of interpretations on offer for their qualities.

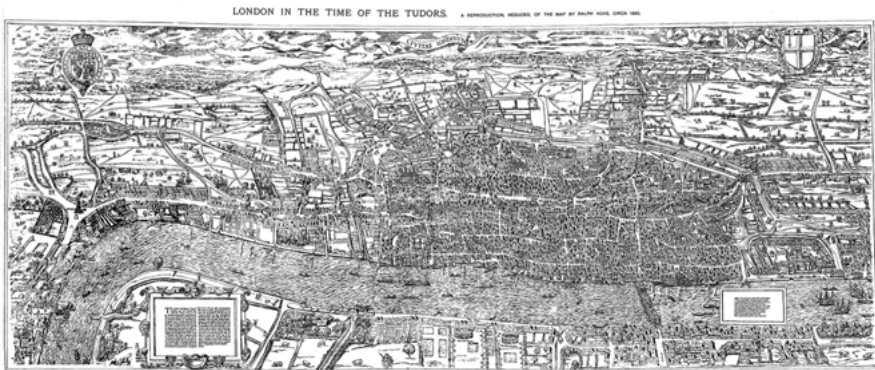


Figure 1.1: The so-called “Agas” map of London of ca. 1561.

The move back to within the walls of the Roman city and the laying out of its network of streets are commonly attributed to King Alfred the Great, in the context of the first Viking Age and his taking of the city – that is, either the walled

⁸² <https://mapoflondon.uvic.ca/map.htm>. Accessed March 3, 2019.

area or *Lundenwic* or both – from the Vikings in 886.⁸³ Jeremy Haslam, however, proposes an earlier dating of 879/880 on the basis of his reading of the political situation in southern England at that time.⁸⁴ This period in London's history has been widely taken as representative of a wider phenomenon in England: a teleological urban progression from a few large-scale coastal or riverine “urban” *emporium* to a multiplicity of fortified towns. This view is now questionable, however.⁸⁵ The remainder of this chapter will suggest that the principal period of London's growth into an exceptional urban center came later, in the period of Æthelred and Cnut.

With little other than early maps of London and earlier documentary evidence for at least some of its streets to work from,⁸⁶ Brooke and Keir noted the prominence of the principal east–west elements of the urban plan (Cheapside and East Cheap) which form the framework within which many of the city's roads developed.⁸⁷

Following early attempts to visualize the layout of Anglo-Saxon London by Mortimer Wheeler and W. F. Grimes,⁸⁸ Tim Tatton Brown and Gustav Milne offered the first detailed reconstructions of the topography of late Anglo-Saxon London in the 1980s and 1990s, utilizing exactly the kind of data that Brooke and Keir predicted would recast our understanding of Anglo-Saxon London.⁸⁹ Tatton-Brown's suggestion, that gridded streets were initially laid out in the area west of Walbrook and immediately east and south of St. Paul's minster, is supported by dated structures and streets; it reflects the distribution of material culture of seventh- to ninth-century date from within the walled area noted above. This perceptive view has been borne out by the most recent outlines produced by John Schofield, Lyn Blackmore, and David Stocker, and by Mark Burch and Phil Treveil on the basis of more recent archaeological discoveries.⁹⁰

Milne's reconstruction of a rectilinear core of planned streets set well within the walled area has remained influential and is well reasoned on the basis of the surviving street pattern in relation to the few archaeologically dated streets (Map 1.5).⁹¹

83 ASC (C), ed. O'Brien O'Keefe, 64 (*s.a.* 887 [for 886]).

84 The argument assembled by Jeremy Haslam is largely circumstantial: Haslam, “King Alfred, Mercia.”

85 Reynolds, “Spatial Configurations.”

86 Ekwall, *The Street-Names*.

87 Brooke and Keir, *London 800–1216*, 171–72.

88 Wheeler, *London and the Saxons*; Grimes, *Roman and Mediaeval London*.

89 Tatton-Brown, “Topography of Anglo-Saxon London”; Milne, “King Alfred's Plan.”

90 Schofield, Blackmore, and Stocker, “St. Paul's Cathedral”; Burch and Treveil, *Poultry and Cheapside*, 169 and fig. 144.

91 Milne, “King Alfred's Plan.”

Central to Milne’s argument is the notion that a distinct block of rectilinear urban planning is identifiable within the walled area south of Cheapside, bounded to the west by the precinct of St. Paul’s minster, and running east as far as Billingsgate. In drawing together the evidence for the earliest post-Roman development within the walled city, Valerie Horsman, Christine Milne, and Gustav Milne reported that the layout of the former city’s streets and *insulae* was not followed in the early Middle Ages (nor was it then in Winchester), and that the post-Roman occupations were laid out over fields characterized by deposits of “dark earth” and of the kind observed in so many archaeological sequences in former Roman towns across the former empire.⁹² Their insightful conclusions of thirty years ago, especially that the morphology of the city’s streets owes little (gateways excepted) to the Roman pattern, has stood up to the subsequent development-led archaeological inquiry and synthesis of their findings that has taken place since.



Map 1.5: Gustav Milne’s reconstruction of London’s street grid in the tenth century (after Milne with Cohen *Excavations at Medieval Cripplegate, London*, fig. 140).

As for a chronology of settlement within the walls, the place to start is also the fundamentally important study by Horsman and others of buildings and street development at the western end of Cheapside and in the Billingsgate area to

⁹² Horsman, Milne, and Milne, *Aspects of Saxo-Norman London I*, 110–11.

the east.⁹³ Our first detailed view of the later Anglo-Saxon occupation in London was revealed by much intensive rescue archaeological work in both these parts of the City from the mid-1970s to mid-1980s. The sites, seven in all, were dated with reference to ceramic phases numbered 1–6: nos. 1–4 concern us here, in that they cover a date range between the late ninth century (at the very earliest) to the late eleventh.⁹⁴ That the earliest such phase (1) (Map 1.6a) is as long as a century must be taken into account by anyone trying to argue, like Milne and Haslam, for a concerted reoccupation in the late ninth century.⁹⁵ Most of the elements attributed to this phase appear to represent a scatter of occupation which in some cases predates streets.⁹⁶ Presently there is an acknowledged tendency in the study of the past to seek ever earlier origins for particular features or phenomena, but it is worth remembering that the range of London's Ceramic Phase 1 (from the late ninth century to the late tenth) is broad, with London's commonest domestic pottery at this time, the so-called Late Saxon Shelley (usually abbreviated to LSS) Ware, dated to between 900 and 1050.⁹⁷ Taking the results of the Cheapside and Billingsgate analyses together, it is clear that the major horizons for renewed occupations and the construction of cellared buildings belongs to Ceramic Phase 2 (mid-tenth to early eleventh century), Phase 3 (early to mid-eleventh century) and Phase 4 (mid- to late eleventh century): particularly to Phases 2 and 3 (Map 1.6b).⁹⁸

While the work of Milne and others took place in an environment strongly conditioned by the Winchester excavations and the topographical approach to English towns that resulted,⁹⁹ it remains true that few streets within London's walled area may be securely dated to the ninth century: the weight of the evidence leans towards a dating of ca. 900–950 for the earliest occupation along streets in the western part of Milne's grid, including Bow Lane, Fish Hill Street, and Botolph Lane.¹⁰⁰ Whereas Brooke and Keir suggested a pattern of development based upon the principal east–west thoroughfares, Tatton-Brown's and Milne's analyses promoted the view of planned rectilinear grids: these perspectives are not mutually exclusive, but actually compatible. The issue of dating of the observed pattern remains central to questions of exactly when the walled

93 Horsman, Milne, and Milne, *Aspects of Saxo-Norman London I*.

94 Horsman, Milne, and Milne, *Aspects of Saxo-Norman London I*, 11 and fig. 3.

95 Milne, "King Alfred's Plan"; Haslam, "The Development of London."

96 Horsman, Milne, and Milne, *Aspects of Saxo-Norman London I*, 112.

97 Vince, *Saxon London*, 25.

98 See Horsman, Milne, and Milne, *Aspects of Saxo-Norman London I*, 114.

99 This approach began with Biddle and Hill, "Late Saxon Planned Towns."

100 Horsman, Milne, and Milne, *Aspects of Saxo-Norman London I*, 110–16.



Map 1.6: (a) Streets dated to the late ninth to tenth centuries. (b) Streets dated to the eleventh century (after Horsman et al., *Aspects of Saxo-Norman London I*, figs 109 and 110).

area again became an urban metropolis in the true sense of the expression. Presently, archaeological discoveries allow that certain streets between St. Paul's and the Thames may have emerged during the ninth century if not earlier. In the main, however, the evidence from earlier excavations points towards the tenth and eleventh centuries as the key period of London's urban growth, with the period following ca. 1000 as a key phase, now exemplified by new evidence.

A further view of the development of economic activity within the city is provided by Milne's synthesis of the development of waterfront structures. This clearly shows that during the tenth century such installations characterize the waterfront between Queenhithe and the outfall of the River Walbrook, whereas their eleventh and twelfth century equivalents extend along the entire length of his proposed early medieval core (Map 1.7).¹⁰¹ Again, the later periods stand out as marking exceptional urban growth (see *Bull Wharf* below).



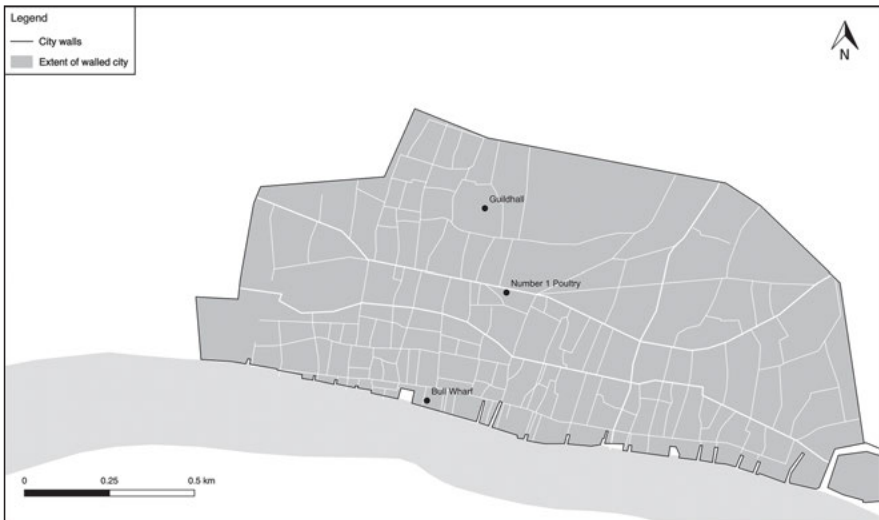
Map 1.7: The chronology of waterfront development along the north bank of the River Thames (after Milne, *The Port of Medieval London*, fig. 7).

New Excavations: New Understandings (Map 1.8)

Our understanding of London's development as a political and mercantile center has increased dramatically in the last two decades as a function of development-led archaeological intervention. The main advances in knowledge, with regard to the dating and morphology of London within the walls, have been provided by large-scale excavations in the city at Number 1 Poultry and at Guildhall, where relationships between post-Roman settlers and the Roman legacy within the walled city have been revealed in intimate detail. These two sites, meticulously

¹⁰¹ Milne, *The Port*, 19, fig. 7.

excavated and rich in artefactual and contextual detail, form the leading two case studies of this chapter, for they reveal unparalleled insights into the nature of urban expansion, on the one hand, and on the other, daily life in the city during the period of Æthelred and Cnut. The sequences of occupation revealed by these archaeological endeavours require detailed exposition, as both sites reveal the resurgence of settlement and economic activity in the later tenth and earlier eleventh century, thus squarely within the period with which this volume is concerned. A third key excavation that has been published since Vince’s synthesis is that of the London waterfront within the confines of the walled city at Bull Wharf, which has revealed river-edge activity from the ninth century, although that does not in itself prove urban occupation at this time.



Map 1.8: The location of Number 1 Poultry, Guildhall, and Bull Wharf.

Number 1 Poultry

The development of the Poultry site has provided an astonishingly detailed view of a large area in the center of the walled city. The excavations included one extensive open area (A) and a series of spatially related investigations varying in scale, but which altogether describe a study area measuring some 300 m east to west and 200 m north to south. Poultry itself is a road that represents an eastwards extension of Cheapside (a name derived from Old English *cēap*, meaning “market”), the main market street in the late Anglo-Saxon city and

beyond, with the main excavations taking place on the south side. As noted above, Cheapside/Poultry forms the northern limit of the suggested rectilinear core. Although Milne and Haslam suggest that this was part of King Alfred's re-foundation of the city, the Poultry investigations reveal that this east–west axis emerged in the tenth century, potentially earlier, but evidently not as part of a concerted effort to resettle this part of the city, and rather as a through-route which attracted intermittent settlement in the form of a few sunken-featured buildings.¹⁰² Period 8, Phases 1 and 2 dated to the tenth century (Figure 1.2a), reveal a fascinating insight into the state of the walled area at this time, with upstanding Roman buildings, of which one (Building 64) was partly reutilized to form part of a late tenth-century sunken-featured building (Building 101).¹⁰³ About 30 m to the north-west a further sunken-featured building (Building 104) had been cut into the Roman street surface. These specific instances, taken together with the discoveries made elsewhere at the Poultry site, indicate the sporadic tenth-century occupation of a still-ruined city, as opposed to a thriving urban revival for which the archaeology again reveals a later chronological horizon.

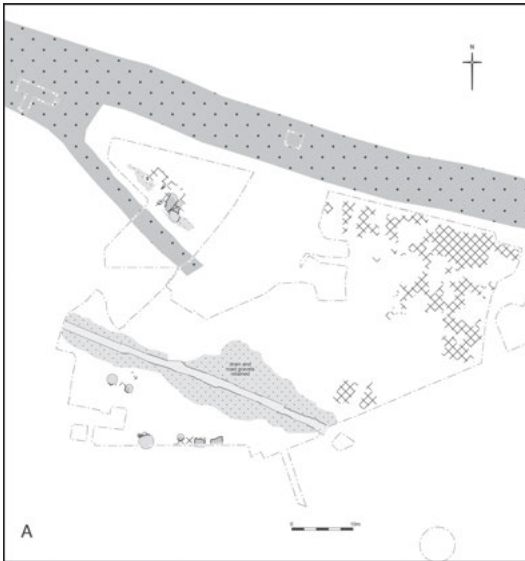


Figure 1.2a: Number 1 Poultry in the tenth century.

¹⁰² Rowsome and Treveil, "Introduction," 2; Burch and Treveil, *Poultry and Cheapside*, 20–30 and fig. 14.

¹⁰³ Burch and Treveil, *Poultry and Cheapside*, 14 and fig. 13.

Period 9 is dated to between 1000 and 1050, a chronology arrived at by narrowing the broad date range of LSS pottery by the presence of sandy Thetford-type Ware.¹⁰⁴ This phase is particularly important for us, for it is during this period that Æthelred and Cnut's engagements with London took place. Divided into two phases of activity, the first (Phase 1) is characterized by evidence for a concerted redevelopment of the area comprising clearance of existing buildings and the consolidation and leveling up of the ground surface by dumping deposits of rubble, mortar, sand, and silt.¹⁰⁵ The extent and nature of these activities match exactly the kind of groundwork one might anticipate in advance of a large-scale redevelopment, and this is indeed what followed in Period 9, Phase 2 at the Poultry site (Figure 1.2b). The subsequent laying out of properties along the line of Poultry and a further medieval street, Bucklersbury, reveals a dramatic transformation of the area from a ruinous scatter of occupation to an organized and regular (and presumably regulated) space with dense occupation. The ground to the southwest of Bucklersbury is argued to have retained common access, as it was characterized by dense agglomerations of cess-pits. Nonetheless, although the presence

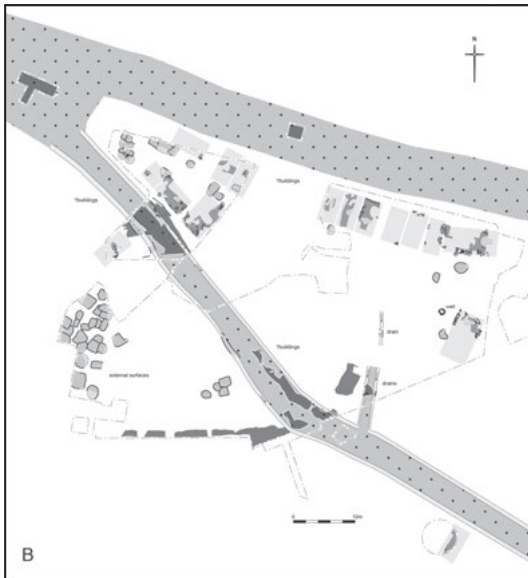


Figure 1.2b: Number 1 Poultry ca. 1000–1050 (after Burch and Treveil, *The Development of Early Medieval and Later Poultry and Cheapside*, fig. 13).

¹⁰⁴ Burch and Treveil, *Poultry and Cheapside*, 34.

¹⁰⁵ Burch and Treveil, *Poultry and Cheapside*, 32.

of both Poultry and Bucklersbury as streets in the tenth century is only an inference, their existence by the early eleventh century is a fact.¹⁰⁶

One recent proposition is that the builders of both rural and urban settlements adhered to a rigid system of grid planning based upon regular units of measurement.¹⁰⁷ However, it is equally, if not more likely that the widths of the urban-type plots (defined by buildings aligned end-on to the street frontage) were determined by the standardized extents of houses and other structures at this time, rather than by land surveyors.

Guildhall Yard

We have seen that the site of the former amphitheater remained as a distinctive feature within the walled area in the late Anglo-Saxon period, but what was its function or purpose during this time? Following an accumulation of dark earth up to 1 m deep, the first indications of reuse of the space belong to the tenth century, to go by the dating of pottery and other items, including a strap-end and horseshoes of tenth-century type: environmental analyses indicate a grassy environment “improved” with midden dumps containing the remains of food-stuffs both floral and faunal.¹⁰⁸

While the remains are seen to represent domestic occupation, it is possible also that they relate to regular gatherings of people, to their provisioning and commercial exchange: all features that might be expected at assemblies. Indeed, shortly after the discovery of the Roman amphitheater, Biddle suggested that the coincidence and remarkably symmetrical location of the early Guildhall on its northern side (perhaps also the location of the Roman Governor’s box) might be more than coincidental (Map 1.9).¹⁰⁹ One of the key observations to be drawn from the excavations of the Yard is that the space has effectively remained open ground since the Roman period. Access into the internal area in the tenth and earlier eleventh centuries appears, on the basis of the excavated evidence, to have been not only via the original south entrance, where a metalled surface was recorded, but also via the east entrance, where a late-tenth-century sunken featured building (134) lay on the south side of the point of entrance.¹¹⁰

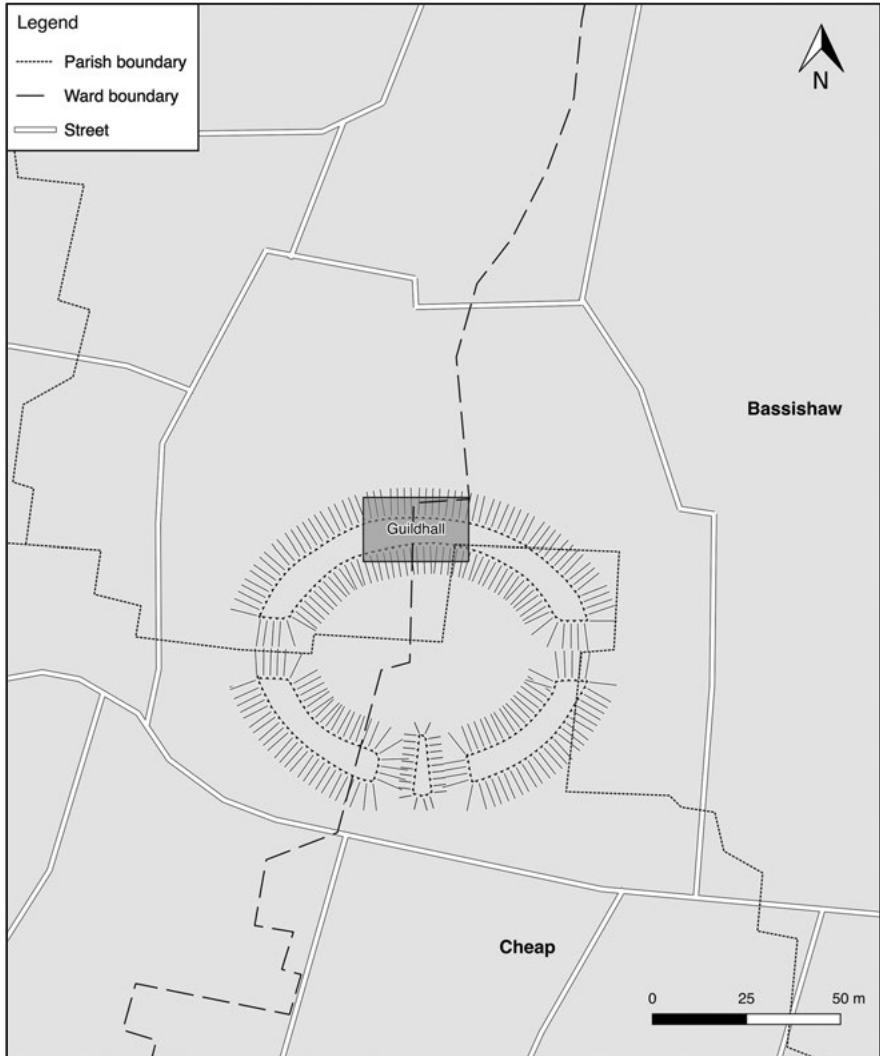
106 Burch and Treveil, *Poultry and Cheapside*, 36.

107 The case for standardized units of measurement in both rural and urban settlements in Anglo-Saxon England is in Blair, *Building Anglo-Saxon England*, 139–76.

108 Bowsher, Dyson, Holder, and Howell, *The London Guildhall*, 11–14.

109 Biddle, “A City in Transition,” 24.

110 Bowsher, Dyson, Holder, and Howell, *The London Guildhall*, 13 and fig. 12.



Map 1.9: The Guildhall amphitheater in the tenth and eleventh centuries; note the ward and parish boundaries (after Bowsher et al., *The London Guildhall*, fig. 13).

The name Aldermanbury, which, as we have seen, probably means “*burh* of the ealdormen” (or “ealdorman,” i.e., a senior official, sometimes head of a shire),¹¹¹ must be significant here. It might be suggested, following Biddle, that

¹¹¹ Brooke and Keir, *London 800–1216*, xix.

London's ealdormen gathered within the amphitheater for the court known as the Husting, effectively the shire court of London, before the guildhall itself was established in the early twelfth century, when the first reference to "terra Gialle" is found in a survey of St. Paul's of ca. 1127.¹¹² MnE *husting* derives from Old Norse *húsping* (house assembly), probably from the tenth century; aside from being the word for the conclave that murdered Archbishop Ælfheah in Greenwich in April 1012, OE *husting* is first found in a charter of 1032×1035.¹¹³ Although the term implies a meeting inside a house, an additional sense of the word is "household," perhaps with a sense of collective identity. The Husting certainly met at the Guildhall from the thirteenth century onwards.¹¹⁴ Perhaps London's folkmoot also met within the confines of the amphitheater, before it met just to the north of St. Paul's where the first record of the folkmoot there is also of the early thirteenth century.¹¹⁵ It is also significant that, as with most Anglo-Saxon assembly places,¹¹⁶ the amphitheater is where boundaries meet, in this case of Bassishaw, Cheap and Cripplegate wards and of the parishes of St. Lawrence Jewry, St. Mary Aldermanbury,, and St. Michael Bassishaw (Map 1.9).¹¹⁷

The finding of a rich variety of organic remains within the amphitheater, including various plants and dung, suggests that between ca. 1050 and ca. 1140 the space was used as a dumping ground, following an intensification of settlement and occupation round about which included the building of the church of St. Lawrence Jewry on the south side of the enclosure.¹¹⁸ This change in use of the space might be attributable to a reconfiguration of the geography of power in London as a function of Edward the Confessor's move to his new royal palace at Westminster in the mid-eleventh century. It might further be suggested that it was then that what may have been an early eleventh-century palace in this part of the city came to an end, for indications in various written sources suggest a royal presence in the Cripplegate area in the reigns of both Æthelred II (978–1013, 1014–1016) and Cnut (1016–1035). Æthelred's fourth law code (IV Æthelred, §1) notes the presence of guards at Aldersgate and Cripplegate, presumably by royal license, which implies a palace there, while the claim in the

112 Brooke and Keir, *London 800–1216*, 281. The wards each had their own courts (wardmotes).

113 ASC (E), ed. Irvine 69 (*s.a.* 1012): "leaddon hine to heora hustinga" (they led him to their assembly). Brooke and Keir, *London 800–1216*, 249, n. 5; Sawyer, *Anglo-Saxon Charters*, S 1465.

114 Biddle, "A City in Transition," 24.

115 Brooke and Keir, *London 800–1216*.

116 Pantos, "'On the Edge of Things'."

117 Dyson and Schofield, "Saxon London," 306 and fig. 104.

118 Bowsher, Dyson, Holder, and Howell, *The London Guildhall*, 19–28.

Chronicle of John of Worcester (d. 1118)¹¹⁹ of the death of the wayward Eadric Streona, upon Cnut's orders in the palace at London, that his body was thrown over the city wall, is another indication of a palace within the walls.¹²⁰

In summary, the later tenth- and earlier eleventh-century activities at the Guildhall site suggest a revival of interest in this location in the period of Kings Æthelred II and Cnut.

Bull Wharf

Despite the undoubted significance of the Bull Wharf sequence, it is important to remember that renewed interest in a part of the foreshore within the area of the walled city need not mean, as has been proposed, that there was also settlement within.¹²¹ As may have been the case with the two late ninth-century charters discussed above, these waterfront interests and activities may instead be related to preexisting activity associated with St. Paul's. Indeed, to quote from one of the published papers on the Bull Wharf investigations: "The excavated evidence certainly suggests that until the late tenth century the settlement's port facilities were rudimentary, with the shelving foreshore, revetted in places, utilized as a trading shore. Most of the intramural area, beyond a relatively small core to the south of Cheapside, remained largely unoccupied."¹²² Again, there appears to be very little evidence for King Alfred's development of London as a planned urban venture. Importantly, Bull Wharf lay just east of Queenhithe and those estates which we have seen were granted to Canterbury and Worcester in the late ninth century. The excavations revealed small amounts of imported pottery from as early as ca. 900, as well as finds of Northumbrian stycas of the mid-ninth century;¹²³ these finds might just as easily be connected with the consumption of exotic commodities by the community of St. Paul's, as with the reemergence of commercial activity in the city.

119 Sections in these annals, once attributed to Florence (*Florentius*), are now attributed to John, a fellow monk of Worcester: see Keynes, "Florence," 188.

120 Whitelock, *English Historical Documents*, 186.

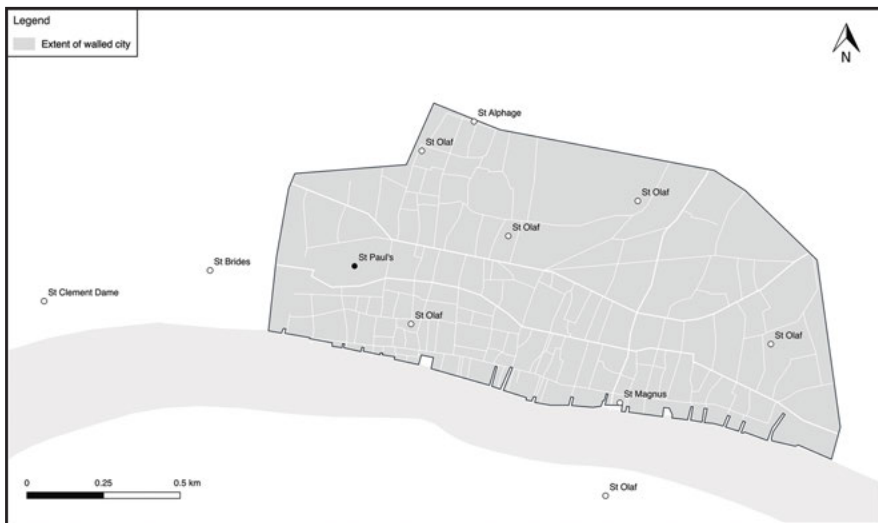
121 Burch and Treveil, *Poultry and Cheapside*, 170.

122 Ayre and Wroe-Brown, "Eleventh- and Twelfth-Century Waterfront," 198.

123 Ayre and Wroe-Brown, "Post-Roman Foreshore."

London's Eleventh-Century Churches

Besides its urban infrastructure of streets, houses, and properties, eleventh-century London and its immediate environs exhibit ecclesiastical survivals no earlier than that century, in the form of churches with either fabric characteristic of that period or dedications indicative of Scandinavian foundations (Map 1.10). All Hallows-by-the-Tower contains a doorway of tall and narrow type, its voussoirs formed of retrieved Roman tiles typical of earlier eleventh-century constructions and devoid of any Norman Romanesque features: it is the only church to exhibit standing fabric of this date in the city.¹²⁴ Some 3km north of the former site of *Lundenwic* and 3.7km north-west of St. Paul's is the parish church of Old St. Pancras, a small church but with an extensive parish. Though somewhat removed from our core focus, this church contains an archway comparable in many ways with All Hallows-by-the-Tower, while being surely of the same period.¹²⁵



Map 1.10: Churches with fabric characteristic of the earlier eleventh century (open circles) and dedications indicative of Scandinavian foundations (after Milne with Cohen, *Excavations at Medieval Cripplegate, London*, fig. 144, with additions).

¹²⁴ Thomas, *Medieval London*, 16.

¹²⁵ Lovell and Marcham, "St. Pancras Old Church," 72. Both All-Hallows-by-the-Tower and Old St. Pancras remain open to visitors.

Excavations have also revealed much about the origins of London's parish churches.¹²⁶ Immediately west of the city and the Fleet river is St. Bride's, where underlying the present post-war church are the still-visible remains of the eleventh-century (and later) churches that were excavated by Professor Grimes in his post-war excavation campaign.¹²⁷ Grimes's excavations showed the earliest phase of the church to be a two- or three-celled structure, with an apsidal east end which cut into an in-filled pit containing a late-tenth- or early-eleventh-century pitcher: claims for a late Roman basilica-type church cannot stand in the light of this observation, which was in fact published twenty-five years before Warwick Rodwell's revisionist version of the sequence.¹²⁸

It might be suggested that clearance of Roman buildings in the city, to create the kind of regularized urban spaces revealed by the No 1 Poultry excavations, generated a supply of secondhand building materials which were readily employed by builders of the rapidly emerging phenomenon of local churches. These proprietary structures later became parish churches in the twelfth century. Whether, by this time, local people wished to draw upon and reemphasize a sense of *Romanitas* is perhaps questionable. Instead, it might be wiser to seek a more practical explanation of reuse in this setting, bearing in mind that suitable building stone must otherwise be imported from the surrounding regions.

Besides the evidence of excavated and standing fabric, it is possible to view the emergence of neighbourhood churches from the perspective of church dedications. In some cases, we can place the origin of churches specifically in the context of Cnut's capture of London and the subsequent holding of urban properties by Scandinavians, going by the churches' dedication to saints popular in the Viking homelands or by the incorporation in their names of Scandinavian personal names. Foremost among these churches are: five dedications to St. Olaf within the walled city and one further instance in Southwark; St. Bride's (a corruption of the Irish St. Brigid and almost certainly an import via a Scandinavian connection with Dublin);¹²⁹ St. Clement Danes further to the west on Aldwych; St. Magnus the Martyr (d. 1115) at northern end of London Bridge; and St. Nicholas Acon, which incorporates a corrupted form of the Scandinavian royal name Hákon.¹³⁰

We have already noted the evidence for burials of the tenth century from St. Paul's, but two further pieces of evidence reflecting Scandinavian influence

¹²⁶ See Schofield, "Saxon and Medieval Parish Churches" for a full review.

¹²⁷ Grimes, *Roman and Mediaeval London*; Milne, *St. Bride's*.

¹²⁸ Rodwell, "The Role of the Church."

¹²⁹ Brooke and Kier, *London 800–1216*, 139–40.

¹³⁰ Brooke and Keir, *London 800–1216*, 138, 141–42.

require comment here. One is the magnificent tombstone depicting a backward-facing beast and a serpent in relief, once brightly painted with a variety of colors ranging from blue/black, brown/red, and brown/yellow, and found in St. Paul's churchyard in 1852 (Figure 1.3 and cover). This exceptional piece is carved in the Scandinavian-influenced Ringerike Style of the first half of the eleventh century; its runic inscription, for which the English reads "Ginna and Toki caused this stone to be laid,"¹³¹ places the monument firmly in the context of Cnut's London. Another grave marker, of late so-called Hogback-type, is also known among the collection of displaced stones from St. Paul's, but it is apparently of the late eleventh or twelfth century, with provenance insecure;¹³² perhaps it marked the grave of the child or grandchild of one of Cnut's followers. Two further fragments of grave covers of the eleventh century, one from St. Paul's, the other found somewhere in the city before 1884 and now also in the St. Paul's collection, provide yet further evidence for high-status burial in the city, and for the enrichment of St. Paul's, during this period.¹³³



Figure 1.3: The eleventh-century St. Paul's tombstone decorated in the Ringerike style (© Museum of London).

131 Schofield, Blackmore, and Stocker, "St. Paul's Cathedral," 79–80.

132 Schofield, Blackmore, and Stocker, "St. Paul's Cathedral," 79.

133 Schofield, Blackmore, and Stocker, "St. Paul's Cathedral," 79–80.

The Defense of London in the Second Viking Age

Our final matter is the role of London as a fortified settlement in the period of Cnut's invasion. Leaving aside the historical framework of London's resistance under Æthelred II and its subsequent capture by Cnut, which will be considered later in this book, it remains to ask what archaeology may reveal about the direct impacts of these events on London's urban fabric.

The evidence so far reviewed shows that the main thrust of London's urban planning and marked upturn in economic activity fits demonstrably with the late tenth and early eleventh centuries. This is particularly revealed in the coin evidence datable to the period of Cnut.¹³⁴ It remains to explore the potential of archaeology to contribute to our understanding of the material evidence for the city's civil defense up to and including the siege and conquest of 1016.

Discussions of London's defense in the face of Viking incursion tend to focus on the bridge and on the listing of Southwark as one of thirty-three fortifications which the *Burghal Hidage* claims were in existence by the early tenth century. Much less studied, in many ways through the paucity of evidence, is the role of London's City wall. What state was it in by the late tenth century? How much of its fabric was lost to its civic and private buildings? One thing for certain is that the walled extent of Roman London proved more persistent than its street pattern, which, as we have seen, had very little influence on the Anglo-Saxon and medieval street pattern. As Biddle noted with regard to Winchester, the location of Roman gates remained as a constant, while streets were lost. It is significant, perhaps, that in London the outlines of the two walled *encients*, that of Cripplegate Fort (in part) and the later City wall, have both left an imprint on the later urban plan-form: this feature surely proves their persistence into the late Saxon period and later. Although no features datable to the Anglo-Saxon period survive in those parts of the City wall that remain above ground, a new comprehensive survey of those remains is highly desirable, for this might yet reveal evidence of the early medieval refortification of London. Careful reanalysis of Grimes's sections through the sequence of city ditches along the outer northern side of Cripplegate fort, and of the ceramics recovered from them, reveal a ditch cut "perhaps in the tenth century, certainly by the eleventh."¹³⁵ The ditch was up to 15 m wide and measured over 1.5 m in depth. Further sections across the late Anglo-Saxon defenses have been recorded at Ludgate Hill, Old Bailey, King Edward Street, and Fore Street.¹³⁶

¹³⁴ Naismith, "London and its Mint c. 880–1066."

¹³⁵ Milne with Cohen, *Cripplegate*, 10–11.

¹³⁶ Cowie, *Lundenburgh*, 23.

The record in the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle* of a successful attack on the city in 994, by ninety-four ships under the command of King Sveinn Haraldsson of Denmark and Óláfr Tryggvason, later king of Norway,¹³⁷ indicates that the place was much more poorly defended then than it was by 1009, when the *Peterborough Chronicle*, showing beyond doubt that London was stoutly defended by walls and people alike in Æthelred's time, notes the frequency with which the citizens repulsed Viking attackers.¹³⁸

London Bridge

The fate of London's Roman bridge is much debated. The most recent commentary considers several scenarios: (1) that the bridge was dismantled within the Roman period in a similar fashion to other major public edifices in the city; (2) that its piers at least survived, as the line of the first Anglo-Saxon timber bridge lay to the east of the Roman bridge, perhaps to avoid the ruinous structure; (3) that the Roman bridge piers survived into the late twelfth century when they were removed during the construction of the first stone bridge across the river, known as the Colechurch Bridge.¹³⁹ Whatever happened to the Roman bridge, it is unlikely to have lasted through the Roman period as a crossing, let alone functioned as one in the sub-Roman period.

The law codes issued by Æthelred II and also by Cnut incorporate specific clauses relating to the repair of bridges.¹⁴⁰ Aside from these and some sketchy allusions in the verses of eleventh-century skalds, no explicit written evidence for the existence of a bridge at London is first found until the thirteenth-century *Óláfs saga Helga* (the saga of St. Óláfr) by Snorri Sturluson, in two identical versions (one from ca. 1220 and the other, embodied into the collection known as *Heimskringla*, from ca. 1235). Snorri here relates certain physical features of the bridge: "there was a bridge there [lit. "bridges," i.e., jetties joined one to the other] over the river between the city and Southwark so broad that wagons could be driven across it in both directions at once"; also "fortifications, both towers and wooden breast-works on the downstream side," while "under the bridge were posts, and

¹³⁷ ASC (C), ed. O'Brien O'Keefe, 87 (s.a. 994).

¹³⁸ ASC (E), ed. Irvine, 67 (s.a. 1009): "7 oft hi on þa burh Lundene gefuhton, ac si Gode lof þet heo gyt gesund stent, 7 hi þær æfre yfel geferdon"; ASC (E), trans. Swanton, 139 (s.a. 1009): "and they often attacked London town, but praise be to God that it still stands sound, and they always fared badly there."

¹³⁹ Watson, Bringham, and Dyson, *London Bridge*, 51.

¹⁴⁰ See, for example, V Æthelred § 26; VI Æthelred § 32.3; and II Cnut § 10.

these stood on the bottom beneath the river” (chap. 12).¹⁴¹ The following chapter says inventively that Óláfr, taking London back for King Æthelred from the Danes, rows his ships under the bridge from downstream, throws chains around the posts, and brings the bridge down by dragging the posts out of position.

The earliest archaeological evidence for a built river crossing is rather sketchy. Two *ex-situ* timbers dated by dendrochronology to 987×1032 come both from the same tree and have been taken to represent baseplates that form part of the southern abutment of a timber bridge of “very late tenth- or early eleventh-century” date.¹⁴² It is possible of course, that the timbers were not part of a bridge at all, but elements of a large jetty: the antiquary John Stow related some folklore referring to a ferry in the late eleventh century, whose profitability apparently funded the founding of the Priory of St. Mary Overy in Southwark (now Southwark Cathedral) and the subsequent building of a timber bridge.¹⁴³ Yet the weight of the evidence, both written and archaeological, reveals that a crossing over the Thames, one which itself formed a barrier to the passage of ships, had become a topographical fixture again for Londoners by the late tenth century or the early eleventh (Map 1.11). Nineteenth-century finds of Viking axes (some with collars decorated in the Ringerike style of the St. Paul’s tombstone), a grappling hook, and a number of spearheads all at the northern end of the bridge may be related to warfare, to bridge building, or even to votive offerings, given that they appear to represent a coherent collection: John Clark considers these items later in this book.¹⁴⁴ It is worth noting that a series of weapon finds of this date in the Thames reveals a long tradition of weapon deposits in this river.¹⁴⁵

If the written evidence may be trusted, it was just such a bridge as described above that caused Cnut and his forces in 1016 to cut a channel south of the Southwark bridgehead, in an effort to attack the city from the upstream side.¹⁴⁶ Southwark itself, as one of the fortifications listed in the Burghal Hidage, was

141 *Heimskringla II: Óláfs saga helga*, ed. Bjarni Aðalbjarnarson, 15: “Bryggjur váru þar yfir ána milli borgarinnar ok Súðvirkis svá breiðar, at aka mátti vögnum á víxl”; “vígi gǫr, bæði kastalar ok borðþök forstremis”; “En undir bryggjunum váru stafir, ok stóðu þeir niðr grunn í ánni.” Translation here based on *Heimskringla*, trans. Finlay and Faulkes, II, 15. On the reliability of this and other later narrative Scandinavian sources for this period of history, see Bolton later in this volume, pp. 464–75.

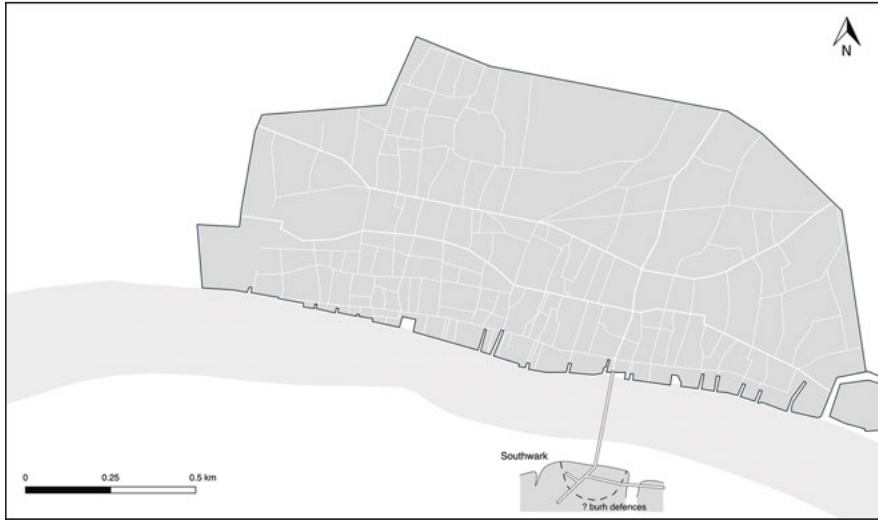
142 Watson, Brigham, and Dyson, *London Bridge*, 57.

143 *Survey of London by John Stow*, ed. Kingford, II, 56.

144 Wheeler, *London and the Saxons*, 18.

145 See Reynolds and Semple, “Non-Funerary Weapon Depositions,” for a discussion of this phenomenon.

146 ASC (C), ed. O’Brien O’Keeffe, 101 (s.a. 1016); (D), ed. Cubbin, 61 (s.a. 1016); (E), ed. Irvine, 73 (s.a. 1016).



Map 1.11: The position of London Bridge in relation to the city and to the *burh* at Southwark (after Watson et al., *London Bridge*, fig. 27).

perhaps first established in the late ninth or early tenth century.¹⁴⁷ A section recorded through a 4 m wide ditch on the western side of the southern bridge abutment in 1979, at Hibernia Wharf, is thought to represent the early-eleventh-century defenses of the bridgehead,¹⁴⁸ rather than Cnut’s channel of 1016, which is taken to have carved a path further south through the shallow marshy area south of the river in an attempt to avoid the bridgehead, which would have been defended by Edmund Ironside, son and successor of the recently deceased Æthelred;¹⁴⁹ but this is far from certain. Whereas no other physical evidence for Southwark’s defenses is known, Scandinavian literary sources provide an unusually striking level of detail about the Vikings’ occupation and defense of Southwark. Chapter 23 of *Óláfs saga Helga* relates that (in 1014) the Vikings had “dug large ditches, and made a wall and a road on the inside of wood, stone and turf, and had a great army there.”¹⁵⁰ The saga says that these features repelled Æthelred’s forces. An earlier source, the so-named *Vikingarvísur*, a group of stanzas by Sigvatr Þórðarson which is datable to 1014–1015, further claims that the same Óláfr (later St. Óláfr) Haraldsson attacked London Bridge and that “the Vikings defended the

¹⁴⁷ Watson, Brigham, and Dyson, *London Bridge*, 53; Dyson (1990), 110, n. 75.

¹⁴⁸ Watson, Brigham, and Dyson, *London Bridge*, 53.

¹⁴⁹ See note 146.

¹⁵⁰ Hagland, “London Bridge,” 233.

ditches.”¹⁵¹ In conclusion, it is clear that London Bridge became the focus for both Æthelred’s defense of London and the attempts of this Óláfr, and later Cnut, to take it.

Discussion

Although the focus here is on London in the later tenth and earlier eleventh centuries, in the time of Æthelred II and Cnut, her development as a capital city cannot be understood without a longer-term perspective. Documented events, often with chronological accuracy to the year, rarely tally with archaeological strata or with the story that physical evidence has to tell. And yet at the end of the day, although the archaeological perspective differs from that provided by chronicles, charters, skaldic poems, and sagas, it bears strong witness to the density and nature of occupation within the walled city and so works as an additional version of events.

Significantly, the war between Æthelred and Cnut is when the archaeology of London really begins to acquire the material qualities that one might expect of an urban place: dense occupation; regular plots of land; the development of street frontages; urban-type housing (buildings end-on to street frontages); latrine pits; proprietary churches for urban and sub-communities; and evidence for mercantile activity in the form of manufacturing and imports, and commercial exchange in the form of coin losses. These categories of evidence are all abundant from the late tenth century onwards, particularly from the early eleventh century. Indeed, it is known that coinage, the most powerful indicator of the rise of London as a commercial hub, reveals a sharper upturn in Cnut’s period than at any time earlier, as Rory Naismith has recently reaffirmed in his analysis of the output of the London mint.¹⁵²

The finding of a unique hoard of pewter jewelry on the northern side of Cheapside in 1834, opposite the church of St. Mary-le-Bow with its oddly configured crypt of ca. 1100, confirms the existence there of a jeweler’s workshop probably in the earlier eleventh century, perhaps one of the earliest workshops of its kind; the street later became known for its jewelers, into modern times.¹⁵³ The composition of the hoard is of particular interest. It contains several groups of objects: mainly brooches, finger rings, and slush-cast beads, most of them unfinished; there can

¹⁵¹ Hagland, “London Bridge,” 233.

¹⁵² Naismith, *Citadel of the Saxons*, 65 and fig. 5.

¹⁵³ Clark, *Saxon and Norman London*, 22–23; Forsyth, *Cheapside Hoard*, 20–48.

be no doubt that the collection of material belonged to a jeweler (Figure 1.4). The hoard also contained an old brooch of tenth- to early eleventh-century type, which finds an exact parallel, in fact a mold-match, with one from Dublin. The cultural influences of the objects in the Cheapside hoard reveal parallels with material from the eastern Baltic and central Europe, which, together with the presence of a brooch with an Irish parallel, strongly indicate a Scandinavian cultural milieu. The hoard may well belong to the period of Cnut's control of the city.



Figure 1.4: The eleventh-century Cheapside jeweler's hoard (© Museum of London).

The mapping of London's church dedications with Scandinavian associations shown above (Map 1.10) also reflects the period during which occupation within the walled area took off on a massive scale beyond the "Alfredian" core,¹⁵⁴ whose extent remains debatable.

Jeremy Haslam has made a strident case for an unequivocal phase of urban plantation in southern England. He argues that this is attributable to a combination of the defensive and economic concerns of King Alfred in the period immediately following the Viking leader Guthrum's submission following his defeat at Edington in Wiltshire in 878.¹⁵⁵ Despite a distinct lack of archaeological evidence, he suggests that "the plan form of the *burhs* . . . [including London] . . . shows that from the start their internal spaces were largely filled with burgages or tenements occupied by the inhabitants of the *burh*."¹⁵⁶ He proposes that in 879 or 880 London "would have been created as a new community within refurbished defences manned by a garrison, in which the new burghal space was reorganised and developed to include a system of planned streets, wharves and markets."¹⁵⁷

¹⁵⁴ Milne with Cohen, *Cripplegate*, 126 and fig. 144.

¹⁵⁵ Haslam, "Late Saxon Burhs," 210.

¹⁵⁶ Haslam, "Late Saxon Burhs."

¹⁵⁷ Haslam, "Late Saxon Burhs," 208.

However, it is only in the later tenth century that the evidence recovered from the field, the archaeology of organized space in London (and elsewhere), begins to emerge, whereas any explicit evidence for individual plots is mainly a feature of the early eleventh century. It remains difficult to understand why, if one follows Haslam, the spatial organization of his perceived ninth-century Alfredian “urban” venture should lack archaeological visibility, while that of a century later can be charted. Again, in common with many other places that became towns in the Middle Ages in southern England, it appears that urban life was not a feature of such locations, *burhs* included; only in a handful of exceptional places, such as Lincoln, Oxford, Winchester, and York, do we find it.¹⁵⁸ An alternative view is to see the burghal sites as temporarily garrisoned forts, which in many cases later developed into towns during the principal period of post-Roman urban growth in England (and indeed the rest of Europe) in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries.

In many respects, the argument for widespread urban development in England in the ninth century was a product of the remarkable discoveries at Winchester, which generated a model that became widely applied in England during the 1970s and 1980s, one with an emphasis on urban morphology as an indicator of urban planning.¹⁵⁹ As the former capital city of Wessex, however, Winchester is an exceptional town and the applicability of its findings to places elsewhere is questionable: each place must be assessed on its own terms. London instead appears to fit rather better with the picture of eleventh-century and later urban development in England as this is revealed by archaeology. London fits particularly well with the wider proliferation of towns in Scotland, Wales, and indeed continental and Scandinavian Europe, towns that made such a distinctive contribution to defining the twelfth and thirteenth centuries in those macro-regions.

Archaeologists working on urban places in the later twentieth century were heavily influenced by the highly creative and pioneering work of Biddle and, later in association, by David Hill. Biddle’s work on Winchester led to the development of topographically inspired models of formal urban planning which Hill and others sought to apply more widely; these models may be related to a desire to seek origins for English towns calibrated in chronological terms, with the settlements listed in the Burghal Hidage. However, many problems with this view have since crystallised, the more understandings of the English urban sequence have been refined in the light of forty years of development-led archaeology.

It also appears likely that Biddle and Hill were inspired to identify comparatively early origins for early medieval towns in England partly by the birth of

158 Reynolds, “Spatial Configurations.”

159 Biddle and Hill, “Late Saxon Planned Towns.”

medieval archaeology as a distinct sub-discipline within its field; also by a desire to emphasize the fundamental importance of studying the post-Classical world through its material remains. Medieval archaeologists fought hard to secure their position in the intellectual landscape of academe. No more energetically did they do so than in the urban sphere, where the remains of post-Roman occupation had routinely been swept away in pursuit of Roman remains. Given the culturally negative language often used to describe post-Roman occupiers – the so-called squatters of the Dark Ages – it is hardly surprising that medieval archaeologists, no less than classicists, sought the kind of “civilised” attributes for the societies they wished to understand.

The “*wics-to-burhs*” model of the trajectory of English urban development had much to commend it; for many years it stood as an entirely workable hypothesis, in view of the information available to those scholars who formulated it. In view of contemporary understandings, however, the more plausible model is now that by the close of the ninth century England possessed only a few more locations with a claim to urbanity than it had a century earlier in the age of the *wics*. Importantly, the new excavations from London indicate that this town, too, was a “late developer” in terms of becoming a fully urban settlement.

If we want to see when London really became a city, a truly urban center with all the attributes commonly accepted as features of such a place, we must accept that the archaeological evidence, whether structural, spatial, or material-cultural, points to the later tenth and early eleventh centuries as the major horizon and as the period when continental trading links with France, the Low Countries, and the Rhineland were revived.¹⁶⁰

From the perspective of eleventh-century history based on written sources, this observation then forces us to engage with the “elephant in the room.” Æthelred’s period or Cnut’s? Neither or both? Many more data are required, and indeed will come, but for now, one wonders if the main thrust of urban upturn belongs to Cnut, as might be seen in church dedications and the output of the London mint. To Æthelred might go the honors of an expansion beyond the tenth-century core, refortification of the walls, and the building of the first post-Roman London Bridge.

160 Vince, *Aspects of Saxo-Norman London II*, 45, 420–21, 432–34.

Conclusion: Capital of England

This review of the archaeology of the city of London suggests that the later tenth century, Æthelred's time, saw the beginning of London's transformation into a full-blown city; and that the early eleventh century, Cnut's time, witnessed a rapid and extensive burgeoning of activity that might be characterized as fully urban and that, moreover, was seen as urban by contemporary European townsfolk of that time and later. In this respect, the findings of archaeology place London alongside Continental, Scandinavian, and wider British developments of urban culture, rather than within an interpretive milieu that insists on an exceptional chronological trajectory for the emergence of English towns.

A concept of London as Britain's preeminent urban metropolis has arguably persisted from the Romans right to the present. While London's forms of representation varied enormously from being a sprawling metropolis, to the capital of a provincial outpost, to an empty city, to the nation's capital, still it continued to focus the religious and political attentions of elites across time. Notions of "King Alfred's London" should be played down: not militarily, but as the easy shorthand for his oft-vaunted role as town planner. Despite these fluctuations in population and interest, the ancient city of London has retained its reputation over two millennia, but it was in the reigns of Æthelred II and Cnut that it truly became exceptional.