

Section 1:

Roman London

From Gustav Milne, *Roman London*
(1995)

Historical sources: a meagre haul

The study of Roman London's past can be approached from different directions: the historian works with whatever written records have survived, the archaeologist studies the physical evidence of the town, two quite separate sets of data, different in quantity and in kind. Initially at least, these two sources should be treated separately, for both need careful assessment and interpretation by their respective specialists: an archaeologist who cannot speak Latin will not understand the subtleties of written references any more than a classicist who has never excavated will be able to interpret a complex archaeological sequence. The archaeologists working in London during the last 20 years have seen a seemingly never-ending body of data build up from site after site, day by day, year on year, as will be seen in the rest of this book.

In stark contrast the surviving documentary record for Londinium, the raw material from which the classical historian must wrest the town's history, presents a meagre haul. The sum total of the evidence from contemporary classical sources is summarised below (together with contributions from some post-Roman writers) in translation, taken principally from the RCHM volume on Roman London published in 1928. It is not strictly correct to say that the Roman historian's haul was finite, since archaeology is also discovering written data, in the form of inscriptions from buildings or tombstones, graffiti, writing tablets, and so forth: this corpus is summarised separately...

There are therefore but fourteen direct documentary references to the City listed below, and, of these, half are merely incidental mentions on maps, lists or in geographies. Of the remainder, one is of first-century date; there are none at all from the second to mid-third century; one from the late third and four from the fourth century. The corpus seems fixed and finite: there have been no new discoveries of annals,

panegyrics or epic poems in Roman London in the last 20 years.

AD 43: Roman Invasion

This passage, by Cassius Dio (c. AD 150–235), is thought to describe the London area during the Roman invasion in AD 43, although it was written 100 years later:

Thence the Britons retired to the River Thames at a point where it empties into the ocean and at flood-tide forms a lake. This they easily crossed because they knew where the firm ground and the easy passages in the region were to be found; but the Romans in attempting to follow them were not so successful. However, the Germans swam across again and some of the others got over by a bridge a little way upstream, after which they assailed the barbarians from several sides at once and cut down many of them. In pursuing the remainder incautiously, they got into swamps from which it was difficult to make their way out, and so lost a number of men.

AD 61: Boudican uprising

Following the sacking of the new provincial capital at Camulodunum (Colchester), the Britons led by Queen Boudica turned towards the Roman settlements of Londinium and Verulamium (St Albans). This oft-quoted report incorporates the earliest surviving direct reference to Londinium, dated to either AD 60 or 61. The 'businessmen and merchandise' (*negotiatorum et commeatuum*) mentioned below probably refers to military supply contracts, rather than purely civilian trade. It is worth stressing that the author, the historian Cornelius Tacitus (c. AD 55–120), was only six at the time of the rebellion and never actually visited Britain. His source was his father-in-law Julius Agricola who was serving in the province as a military tribune at the time of the rebellion, and was a legionary commander there in c.

AD 70–3 returning as governor in AD 78–84:

But Suetonius (the Governor), undismayed, marched through disaffected territory to Londinium. This town was not distinguished by the title of 'colonia', but was an important centre for businessmen and merchandise. At first he hesitated whether to stand and fight there. Eventually, his numerical inferiority — and the price only too clearly paid by the rashness of the divisional commander (who had earlier been defeated by the rebels) — decided him to sacrifice the single city of Londinium to save the province as a whole. Unmoved by lamentations and appeals, Suetonius gave the signal for departure. The inhabitants were allowed to accompany him. But those who stayed because they were women, or old, or attached to the place, were slaughtered by the enemy. Verulamium suffered the same fate.

The natives enjoyed plundering and thought of nothing else. Bypassing forts and garrisons, they made for where loot was richest and protection weakest. Roman and provincial deaths at the places mentioned (Londinium, Camulodunum and Verulamium) are estimated at 70,000. For the British did not take or sell prisoners, or practice other war time exchanges. They could not wait to cut throats, hang, burn and crucify — as though avenging, in advance, the retribution that was on its way.

Mid second century: Ptolemy's Geography

Claudius Ptolemy of Alexandria (c. AD 100–51) compiled his *Geography*, a gazetteer of peoples and places, in Greek. It contains three direct references to London:

a) Noviomagus was 59 miles more to the south than Londinium in Britain. b) Next to the Silures, the most easterly are the Cantii, amongst whom the principal cities are Londinium and Rutupiae. c) In the island of Albion, Londinium has its greatest day of 18 hours.

AD 193–208

Although there is no direct reference to London by name in the events of this period, it is known that the British governor Clodius Albinus mounted an unsuccessful rebellion which ended in his defeat at the hands of his rival, Septimius Severus. The province was invaded by the Roman army once more, and was subsequently divided into two, Londinium becoming the capital of Britannia Superior.

Early third century: Antonine itinerary

A record of fifteen main roads in the province shows that route no. II from Rutupiae (Richborough), a principal port on the south coast, to Hadrian's Wall

in the extreme north, passes through London. Seven other routes begin or end at London:

no. III to Dubris (Dover);
no. IV to Portus Lemanis (Lympne);
no. V to Luguvalio ad Vallum (Carlisle) via Eburacum (York);
no. VI to Lindum (Lincoln);
no. VII to Regno (Chichester);
no. VIII to Eburacum (York);
no. IX to Venta Icinorum (Caistor by Norwich) via Camulodunum (Colchester).

AD 296: rebellion of Allectus

In AD 286, the British governor Carausius illegally declared himself emperor of Britain. He was subsequently murdered and succeeded in AD 293 by his one-time colleague, the ambitious Allectus. In AD 296 Britain was invaded by another Roman army, this time led by Constantius Chlorus in a successful attempt to win back the province from the usurper Allectus. This event is commemorated by the famous Arras medallion, which shows Londinium (*Lon*) welcoming Constantius Chlorus (the restorer of eternal light). In the aftermath of this rebellion, the province was divided into four, of which Londinium was presumed to be the capital of *Maxima Caesariensis*. This record of the events is from the Panegyric to Constantius composed by Eumenius (AD 260–311):

Unconquered Caesar ... those of your troops who ... reached London found the survivors of the barbarian mercenaries plundering the city and, when these began to seek flight, landed and slew them in the streets. And not only did they bring safety to your subjects by the timely destruction of the enemy, but, also induced a sentiment of gratitude and pleasure at the sight.

AD 314: Council of Arles

Following Constantine's conversion to Christianity in 312, many clerics were invited to attend a council at Arles including:

... Eborius, bishop of York in the province of Britain, Restitutus, bishop of London in the said province; Adelfius, bishop of ?Lincoln.

AD 360: invasion of Picts and Scots

The fourth century saw the province increasingly under threat from barbarian incursions. The next three passages are from the *Rerum Gestarum*, by Ammianus Marcellinus (c. 325–90).

... the general [Lupicinius] came in the midst of winter to Boulogne; and collecting transports and embarking his troops, he sailed with a fair wind to Richborough on the opposite coast. Thence he marched to London, that he might take such decision as the

aspect of affairs demanded and might more quickly hasten to take the task in hand.

AD 367-8: barbarian conspiracy

The province was overrun by a concerted wave of invasions by Picts, Scots and Saxons, and was only restored after a full scale invasion by a Roman army led by Count Theodosius. The accounts of these events are the first record that Londinium had recently been renamed *Augusta*.

(Theodosius) ... reached Boulogne ... he crossed the strait in a leisurely manner and reached Richborough, a sheltered haven on the opposite coast. And when the Batavi and Heruli and the Jovian and Victorian legions ... had also arrived, he then, relying on the force of numbers, landed and marched towards London, an ancient town which has since been named Augusta; ... he attacked the predatory and straggling bands of the enemy who were loaded with the weight of their plunder, and having speedily routed them while driving prisoners in chains and cattle before them, he deprived them of their booty which they had carried off from these miserable tributaries of Rome ... Amid scenes of jubilation which recalled a Roman triumph, he made his entry into the city which had just before been overwhelmed by disasters, but was now suddenly re-established almost before it could have hoped for deliverance.

AD 369: Britannia recovered

Theodosius ... marched with resolution from Augusta, which the ancients used to call Londinium, with an army which he had collected with great energy and skill; bringing a mighty aid to the embarrassed and disturbed fortunes of the Britons. ... He vanquished the various tribes in whom their past security had engendered an insolence which led them to attack the Roman territories: and he entirely restored the cities and the fortresses which through the manifold disasters of the time had been injured or destroyed, though they had been founded to secure the age-long tranquillity of the country.

c.AD 400: Notitia Dignitatum

The Notitia is a late Roman collection of administrative information, including lists of civil officials as well as the disposition of various military units and personnel. The report records that there was '...an Officer in charge of the Treasury at Augusta [London]'

c.AD 457: Anglo-Saxon Chronicle

The Roman legions serving in Britannia were withdrawn for service elsewhere in the beleaguered

empire, and were not replaced. By c.AD 410 the province had to look to its own defence against invaders whom later writers called Angles, Saxons and Jutes. The Chronicle was compiled from the late ninth century onwards, and was written, not in Latin, but in the contemporary English language:

In this year Hengest and Aesc fought against the Britons at a place called Crecganford [Crayford, Kent] and there slew four companies; and the Britons then forsook Kent and fled to London in great terror.

Early sixth century: Stephen of Byzantium

Stephen compiled a geographical dictionary which included this reference: 'Lindonion, a city of Britain; ... the name of the inhabitants is Lindonini.'

AD 604: Bede's Ecclesiastical History of the English Nation

The province was ultimately overrun by the pagan Saxon peoples, who were subsequently converted to Christianity. The Venerable Bede (673-735) probably never visited London himself, but wrote his famous *History* in Latin in a Northumbrian monastery, over 100 years after the event recorded here:

Augustine, archbishop of Britain, ordained two bishops, viz Mellitus and Justus: Mellitus to preach to the province of the East Saxons [Essex] who are divided from Kent by the river Thames and border on the Eastern Sea. Their metropolis is the city of London, which is situated on the banks of the aforesaid river, and is the mart of many nations resorting to it by sea and land.

Early seventh century: the Martyrology of St Jerome

An obscure document apparently compiled from fifth-century sources mentions the otherwise unknown fourth-century bishop Augulus, '...born in the town of Augusta in Britannia.'

Seventh century: the Ravenna Cosmography

This document contains a list of over 5000 place names from the Roman world, compiled from various sources by a clerk in Ravenna, a seat of government in the Byzantine empire until AD 751. It mentions London three times as: 'Londinis, Landini' and 'Londinium Augusti'.

A history of Londinium

Taken as a whole, these references are neither detailed nor as evenly distributed over time as one would like, although they do at least provide the name of our settlement. Working solely from written data it can be suggested that Londinium was founded before AD 60, that it was not initially ranked as a

municipium (i.e., a chartered town), that a proportion of its population was engaged in trade, that it had no major defences and, as a consequence, suffered horribly in the uprising of AD 61. The fact that old people and women are mentioned as living there implies that the settlement had been in existence for some time, and must have been of some consequence, even if of uncertain legal status, to be discussed alongside the *municipium* of Verulamium and the capital of Camulodunum. The figure quoted for the number of dead in the three settlements means little more than 'a substantial number', and provides no guide to the population of any of the towns at this time. Although the precious fragment from Tacitus provides us with a remarkable opening view of Londinium, those few lines represent the most detailed account of the Roman city to have survived. Its position and extent are not recorded, neither are there any topographical details regarding street plan, buildings, or public facilities.

The other records suggest that the town lay at a crucial junction of the road network, was prosperous enough to be worth sacking, and was also known by the name of Augusta by the mid fourth century. It was sufficiently important to have a bishop and house the treasury and seems, at first glance, to have maintained its existence in spite of the Saxon invasions. Later chapters show to what extent the archaeological evidence collected over a twenty-year period confirms, complements or contradicts such inferences.

Citizens

Inscriptions, whether on tombstones, writing tablets, or plaques, as graffiti scratched on pottery or on walls, or as names stamped on knives or ingots, all speak eloquently about those who once lived and worked in Roman London... Our inscriptions show that the town's population would have been very mixed. For some of its history, the provincial Governor lived here, together with his staff and associated military detachments, but there were also craftsmen, workmen, merchants, retired soldiers, freedmen, slaves, men, women and children. The inscriptions demonstrate that Latin was spoken, written and read, however badly; some of the Latin used on the Metunus curse is notably vernacular in style and ungrammatical in form, for example. Personal names such as 'Olussa' and 'Hector', and funerary monuments with Greek inscriptions show that Greek was also known here. Other provinces represented in the city include Gaul and Asia Minor. Unfortunately the Celtic languages spoken by the native Britons are not well represented in the written record. However,

'Thames' and 'London' are both based on Celtic words, and there are some British personal names, such as 'Dagobitus'. The alter gave his daughter the Latin name of 'Grata'; a sign of the increasing Romanisation of the indigenous population. All in all, Londinium seems to have been a cosmopolitan city, struggling with an unfamiliar language in its eagerness to adopt the trappings of Romanisation.

Officials

It would seem appropriate to begin the list with evidence of the Imperial Legate, the provincial Governor himself, since by the end of the first century the Governor and his staff would have been based here. A third-century inscription discovered in 1975 made reference to the hitherto unknown Governor who oversaw the restoration of a temple, one M. Martiannus Pulcher.

The official in charge of the finances of the province, the Procurator, would also have been based in Londinium. Parts of a tombstone, discovered in 1852 and 1935, commemorate Julius Alpinus Classicianus, the Procurator responsible for reorganising the province after the Boudican revolt. The presence of this tombstone suggests that, since he seems to have died in Londinium, this Procurator may have been living and working there in AD 61. Other evidence of the Procurator's presence has been recovered in the form of bricks with the official stamp PP BR LON (*Procurator Provinciae Britanniae Londinii*) which have been recovered from sites in the City, Southwark and Westminster; writing tablets which have been branded as issued from his office; and an iron stamp M P BR (?*Metalla Provinciae Britanniae*) which probably refers to the mines of the province of Britain. A timber from the amphitheatre which is stamped MIBL and ICLV may also be connected with official supplies.

One of the inscribed altars discovered in 1975 on the Baynard's Castle site records the name of Aquilinus, described as the 'emperor's freedman', the only such attribution yet known from London. The gentlemen must have been one of the trusted advisers in the imperial household. Three colleagues are also mentioned on the same stone, although no indication of their status is given: they are Mercator, Audax and Graecus; who may have also been engaged as officials of some sort in the Imperial service.

Military

There would have been a strong military presence in Roman London, since all the Legions serving in Britannia would have had detachments based there in the Cripplegate Fort. Writing tablets found in Vindolanda near Hadrian's Wall refer to a cohort of Tungrians sent to support the Governor in London

in AD 90, and also to a letter from Chrauttiis to Veldius, the Governor's groom in London. The military tombstones recovered to date record the names of sixteen soldiers serving with the Governor, including two centurions: (Semp)ronius Semp(ronianus) and Vivius Marcianus of *Legio II Augusta*...

There is also some evidence that another military unit was represented in London: the *Classis Britannica*. This was the fleet which was raised to transport the Roman army to Britain in AD 43, and which then provided support for all subsequent military operations there... Tiles stamped with the legend CL BR (*Classis Britannica*) have been found in England, all from sites between London, Richborough and Pevensey...

Apart from serving soldiers, London no doubt also had its share of veterans living there. A fragment of a bronze military diploma which conferred citizenship on the recipient, was recovered from a second-century, fire-damaged building on the Watling Court site in 1978. Unfortunately the name of the veteran who had served in the army for 25 years did not survive, but the name of a witness, Quintus Pompeius Homerus, did.

Craftsmen

Moneyers are represented by the mint marks on the coins from the short-lived London mint which was in operation c. 290-326 and again briefly in the 380s, but it seems unlikely that there were more than five or six moneyers working there. Initially, the mint marks were L (*Londinii*); ML (*moneta Londinii*) and SML (*sacra moneta Londinii*) but there were changed after 296 to LN or LON (*Londinii*) and PLN (*percussa Londinii*) 'struck in London'...

The names of craftsmen, some of whom presumably plied their trade in Londinium, have been found stamped on several items. Most notably, this group includes four knives with *P Basili f(ecti)* or a similar legend. This had been interpreted as: 'P (...), the slave of Basilius, made this.' If this reading is correct, it seems to show that London patrons were setting up slaves or freedmen in business.

...A samian vessel had *L Jul Senis crocod ad aspr* stamped upon it, which is thought to refer to 'Julius Senis's ointment for roughness [of the eyes]', and therefore represents an occultist's stamp used for impressing the message on cakes of ointment.

There is also evidence for heavy industries, with a reference to the building of ships, in a writing tablet which mentions *navem faci...* as well as a steering oar *clavi faciendi*. Brick manufacture also produced inscriptions: *tegulae* found in Cloak Lane in 1989 bore the stamps of the kilns of *Decimus M... Val...* and *Decimus M... P*, for example. In addition to the officially stamped tiles already discussed, several have

graffiti upon them. The most celebrated is the specimen with AUSTRALIS DIBUS XIII VAGATURSIB COTIDIM carved into the clay while still wet (i.e., before the tile was fired) and therefore written by a brickmaker who was clearly more or less literate and numerate. He was also somewhat aggrieved, since the inscription reads: 'Augustalis has been going off by himself every day for these thirteen days.'

Commerce

Evidence for commercial transactions comes from two main sources. The first includes inscriptions painted onto storage jars imported into Britannia, of which several have been found in London. Among the more legible examples is one on an amphora from Southwark which translates as: 'Lucius Tettius Africanus' finest fish sauce from Antipolis'... The recent discovery in West Smithfield of a wine amphora with a 25-litre capacity provides evidence of British trade, for it had been made in the kilns at Brockley Hill, to the north of London. It bore the stamp *Senecionus*, who may have been the potter or the owner of the native vineyard which was supplying Londinium with wine at that date.

Even more detailed evidence comes from writing tablets...

Men

The names of several civilian men are commemorated by inscriptions on tombstones or, in one case, on a sarcophagus. Although the age at death was legible in only two instances, it was at least 70 years in both cases. The gentlemen in question were Flavius, who may have been from Antioch, and A. Alfidius Olussa, who was born in Athens...

A tombstone found on Ludgate Hill in 1806 records the name of Anencletus, described as a 'slave of the province' who seems to have been in the service of the Provincial Council, a body which represented all British tribes. He may have been involved in the organisation of the state cult of emperor worship, for which a major temple was presumably built in the city, perhaps represented by the NUM C... PROV... BRITA... inscription mentioned previously...

Women

Funerary monuments are our principal source for female names from Londinium. Those represented include the wife of the Procurator Classicianus, Julia Pacata Indiana and Claudia Martina who died aged nineteen, and had been the wife of the Imperial slave Anencletus... The excavations at Crosswall in 1980 recovered a tombstone set up by Aurelius (presumably the grieving father) to commemorate a young girl, Marciana, who had died aged ten.

We know little else about most of these people beyond their names, but there are two other characters who merit mention, both immortalised on lead plaques as part of a curse. One was found in Union Street Southwark in 1989, and had *Martia Martina sive* (Martia a.k.a. Martina) inscribed upon it backwards. Why she was being cursed was not recorded. The other was one *Tretia* (probably a mistake for Tertia) *Maria* whose name also appears on a lead plaque as part of a curse. She had obviously upset someone, for the message reads: 'I curse Tretia Maria and her life and mind and memory and liver and lungs mixed up together and her words thoughts and memory. Thus may she be unable to speak what things are concealed nor be able...' Fortunately, the rest of the plaque is missing.

From Nita Clarke & Phil Evans, *London for Beginners* (1984)



* I came, I saw, it rained.