

Chapter I

The Walbrook

THE site of the Mansion House was in the centre of Roman Londinium (see Plan 63) just as it is in the centre of the London of to-day. Before the Roman walls were built there were probably fortifications enclosing an encampment, and the site in question was just outside those boundaries on the western side, and near the eastern bank of the Walbrook stream.

The level of Roman London is ascertained from the discoveries of streets and pavements of houses, which as a rule may be assumed as about level with the roadway. In St Paul's Churchyard (Plan 63, 196) the pavement of a domestic building was found at a depth of 18 feet below the present level of the ground. At Warwick Square remains of a building were found at a depth of 17 feet. Then further east at Bow Church (176), as is recorded in Wren's *Parentalia*, there was a Roman causeway at a depth of 18 feet, this was 4 feet thick and was used for the foundation of the tower of the church. Opposite Bow Church (174) some paving was found about the year 1615 at a depth of roughly 15 feet. At the north-east end of Queen Victoria Street (125) a fine mosaic pavement was found at a depth of 19 feet, this is preserved in the Guildhall Museum, and probably formed the flooring of a room of a villa overlooking the Walbrook. In the Poultry (118) part of a pavement was found at a depth of about 18 feet below the surface. When the National Safe Deposit Buildings were erected a timber staging was found running north to south, parallel with the west front of the Mansion House at a depth of about 25 feet, this is supposed to have been a landing stage but the evidence is slight, and if so it was probably slightly above the level of the stream. In Bucklersbury, on the south side of the National Safe Deposit Buildings, there were remains of a macadamized road at about 25 feet in depth, this roadway

had a gap, and it is thought the gap indicated the position of a bridge over the Walbrook. We learn that a bridge was there long before 1291 (see page 4). At the corner of Lombard Street and King William Street, paving was found in the year 1785 at a depth of 10 to 15 feet (87) and further east at a depth of 17 to 18 feet. In the same street at a depth of 8 feet some paving was found, and it has been suggested that as it was so near the surface it must have been of late date, but there is no reason why it should not have been the flooring of an upper room, especially as some paving was found adjoining at a depth of 17 feet. If the paving was that of an upper room it might naturally be expected that remains of the lower floor would be present, but these are not mentioned.

Still further east in Leadenhall Street (44) pavings were found, one at a depth of about 9 feet, the other at a depth of about 19 feet 6 inches, no doubt there were either two floors of a house as explained by Sir W. Tite¹, or 9 feet was a misprint for 19 feet. In the Minories (18) heating flues were found at a depth of 18 feet. It is stated² that "an ancient paved causeway" was found in Lower Thames Street at a depth of 20 feet, and that it was uncovered by labourers making the sewers. This is difficult to believe as the invert or bottom of the sewer in Upper Thames Street is about 11 feet 6 inches below the pavement and 10 feet above Ordnance Datum. If such a paving existed at about Ordnance Datum it would have been flooded at high tide to a depth of about 14 feet, but as low tide would be about 6 feet below Ordnance Datum the paving might have been a causeway at right angles to the river, used for loading ships, and not a street parallel with the river as at present. According to recent information from the foreman of the sewer works an old cobble road was found at a depth of about 13 feet 6 inches.

The Romans occupied London for about 450 years, and it seems improbable that the level of the city should rise 10 feet in that time, and that the lower remains were constructed at the very beginning of that period and the remains at the higher level just before they withdrew. There are far fewer remains at a high level than at a low level, and in the ordinary course of

¹ *Archaeologia*, vol. xxxix, p. 494.

² *Gentleman's Magazine*, 1832, Part 2, p. 11.

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events the building operations should have been greater at the later date. The Romans had upper floors to certain buildings, particularly the “insulae” or blocks of dwellings for the working people. Flats were built in Rome as early as 455 B.C. Dionysius relates that “the plebeians agreed to divide among themselves *bona fide* the building lots of the Aventine, each family selecting a space in proportion with the means at its disposal, but it happened also that families, not able to build independently, joined in groups of two, three and more, and raised a house in common, one family occupying the ground floors, others the floors above.” Plutarch in his life of Sylla states: “I am an old acquaintance, we lived long under the same roof, I hired the upper apartment at two thousand sesterces, and he that under me at three thousand.” This obviously refers to a building of more than one storey. Further particulars are given by the author in his book on Residential Flats. A pottery lamp found on the site of St Paul’s Cathedral illustrates buildings with upper floors¹.

About the year 1900 excavations were made at the Mansion House, in consequence of certain settlements, and I heard a rumour that some old work was encountered but not exposed: an opening made in a disused cellar proved that the rumour was no “lying jade,” and Plate I and Plan 1 show the result. A small portion of the wall was exposed, noted, and the earth filled in, but further excavations should be made towards the north as that end of the wall was not exposed. It will be seen from the illustrations that the bottom of the wall and top of the piling are about 17 feet below the adjoining road level of Walbrook: and that the black earth is about 17 feet 2 inches below that level. One face of the wall is rendered in cement and there is an off-set with tiles laid at a slope, the tiling and cement were probably on the outside of the wall and built for protection against bad weather. It is impossible to state if the sloping tiles went further or were level beyond the point shown, which is 14 feet 5 inches below the present road level.

Plan 63 was prepared by Mr Francis Reader; shaded lines show the extreme limit of the Walbrook stream during its history: this does not mean that in Roman times the river was nearly as wide as the Thames, but that it had changed its

¹ *Victoria History of London*, vol. 1, p. 25.

course at various times during its existence within the extreme limits of the black peaty earth. Unfortunately we know comparatively little about the Walbrook in Roman times: it is clear it was a narrow stream in the middle ages, and the Bucklersbury macadam roadway indicates that it was narrow in Roman times. On the west bank of the stream there was a villa which is referred to above, and there was a Roman building on part of the site of the Mansion House on the east bank of the stream.

Mr Loftie, in his well-known book on London, gives a description of Roman maidens tripping down steps to the Walbrook stream, one wonders what his authority was for doing so; the depth of the two approaches to the bridge at Bucklersbury and the piling at about the same depth, lead us to assume that the level of the water was about the same as that of the adjoining land. Perhaps the steps belonged to the houses.

In an article in the *Morning Post* of May 23rd, 1886, it is stated that

this river ran between steep banks and the land on which the Mansion House stood would then have been at a considerable elevation. During recent excavations the ancient Roman landing stage was discovered at a depth of 20 feet, and boats would thus have been enabled to come up from the Thames.

This statement was made at a meeting of the Middlesex Archaeological Society: one would be glad to learn on what authority.

The Walbrook in the neighbourhood of the Mansion House was covered over about the year 1473, and this portion of the stream is not shown on any of the old maps. Agas's Map, made *circa* 1570, is the earliest known; it shows a portion of the stream north of the wall.

When 12 Tokenhouse Yard was built, in 1870, a portion of some vaulting over the stream was discovered, the span was 8 feet and is described as Tudor work.

The following are extracts from the Calendar of Letter-Books¹ of the City of London.

Friday the Feast of St. Margaret (20. July), 19 Edward I (A.D. 1291).

An inquisition was made as to who is or are bound by right to repair the bridge of Walebrok near Bokerelesbere, and who had been accustomed to do it and in what manner, &c. The jurors say that a certain

¹ The Letter-Books are not books of letters, but form a series of which the different volumes are distinguished by the letters of the alphabet.

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tenement formerly belonging to Richard de Walebrok, and now held by Thomas Box; another tenement in the same street formerly belonging to John de Tulesan, senior, and now held by John de Tulesan, junior; another tenement formerly belonging to Laurence Fitz Michael, and now held by the Society of Luka and John le Mazerer; and the tenement of Bokerelesbere held by the heirs of Roger Beyvyn, are bound to repair the bridge aforesaid, and have been accustomed so to do in common. They further say that of old four stones used to be placed opposite the aforesaid tenements, one stone before each tenement, in token of their duty to repair the bridge; but these were afterwards removed by Walter Hervy, the then improver (*aprouator*) of the City; and at that time he caused the bridge to be repaired at the cost of the tenants of the tenements aforesaid, &c. Therefore precept was given to the Sheriffs to distrain the aforesaid tenants of the said tenements for the repair of the said bridge, &c.

Calendar of Letter-Book A, p. 178.

Tuesday after Feast of Purification B.M. (2 Feb.), 20 Edward I (A.D. 1291–2).

Edmund de Byre, Mabel his wife, Anselm de Thele and Edyth his wife demised to William de Evre a tenement formerly belonging to Ralph Lupus in the parish of St. John upon Walbrok (except a house occupied by the aforesaid Edmund and Mabel adjacent to the parish church), situate between the church towards the south and Candelwystrate towards the north, and between the course of the Walebrok towards the west and Walbrokstrate towards the east.

Calendar of Letter-Book A, p. 190.

Thursday the Feast of SS. Simon and Jude (28. Oct.), 5 Edward I (A.D. 1277).

It is agreed . . . that the course of the Wallebroke shall be entirely freed from dung, rotten matter, and other obstructions and nuisances, and that gratings (*rastalli*) be replaced at each tenement on the course aforesaid from the Moor of London down to the Thames, under penalty of 40s. to the use of the Chamber of the Guildhall of London.

Calendar of Letter-Book A, p. 212.

The Assizes of the City of London read by the Mayor and reputable men A.D. 1276–7 and 1277–8.

Also the course of the Wallebroke and all the King's road shall be freed....

Calendar of Letter-Book A, p. 217.

Inquisition taken before the Mayor on Wednesday the morrow of the Translation of St. Benedict (11 July), 28 Edward I (A.D. 1300), as to who are bound to repair the covering over the water-course of Walebroc, over against the chancel-wall of the church of St. Stephen de Walebroc. The jurors say that the parishioners of the said church of St. Stephen are bound of right to repair the said covering.

Calendar of Letter-Book C, p. 71.

Wednesday before the Feast of St. George (23 April), 19 Edward III (A.D. 1345).

William de Iford, John de Enefeld, John de Westwyk, David de Kyngestone, John atte More, Richard Kisser, John de Thrillowe, William de Bray, and William Tithynglombe sworn to see that the water-course of the Walbrook be not impeded.

Calendar of Letter-Book F, p. 120.

Indenture of grant by Adam de Bury, the Mayor, the Aldermen, and John de Cantebrigge, the Chamberlain, to Thomas atte Ram, "brewere," of the Moor and the keeping of the water-course of Wallebroke for a term of seven years, quit of any rent, but on condition that he well and honestly safeguard the Moor and keep the said water-course clean.

Dated in the Chamber of the Guildhall, Thursday the morrow of St. James (25 July), 48 Edward III (A.D. 1374).

Calendar of Letter-Book G, p. 324.

Common Council held in the Chamber of the Guildhall on Wednesday, the 6th. May, 6 Richard II. (A.D. 1383).

Also that the Aldermen of the several Wards of Colemanstret, Bradstret, Chepe, Walbrok, Vintry, and Douegate, through which the water-course of Walbrok runs, take steps to prevent it becoming stopped up by refuse, &c.

Calendar of Letter-Book H, p. 216.

The Feast of the Assumption, 15 Aug. 8. Richard II. (A.D. 1384).

A proclamation made against covines and conspiracies; against walking the City after 9 o'clock (at night), except officers of the City and those engaged in preserving the peace; and against throwing rubbish into the Thames, the Walbroke, and the Flete.

Calendar of Letter-Book H, p. 247.

2 July, 3 Henry V. (A.D. 1415).

Ordinances by the Common Council to the effect (1) That the little postern built of old in the City Wall and leading to the Moor should be pulled down, and a new and larger one built to the westward of it, *with a gate* to be shut at night and other fitting times; (2) that the Moor be laid out for garden purposes; (3) that a common latrine outside the City Wall be removed, and a new one built within the wall upon the foss of the Walbrook, where a "scluys" or "speye" was to be constructed for the purpose of carrying off the filth; (4) that those living on the margin of the Walbrook near the Thames cause the banks of the same to be piled or walled.

Calendar of Letter-Book I, p. 137.

A Common Council held on Saturday, 11th. March, 3 Edward IV. (A.D. 1462-3).

That all latrines over the ditch of Walbroke should be abolished.

Also that the owner of land on each side of the said ditch shall clean his portion of the same, and pave and vault it up to its middle line. If the owner should refuse to carry out this order, his land should go to any one who was willing to do so, to hold the same to him and his heirs.

Calendar of Letter-Book L, p. 21, 22.

A Common Council held 12 July, 17 Edward IV. (A.D. 1477).

Ordinance forbidding the making of "any Priveye or sege" over the

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Walbrook or upon any of the town ditches, and ordering the abatement of those already in existence. *Calendar of Letter-Book L*, p. 149.

Stow published the first edition of his *Survey of London* in 1598, and the following are extracts from his writings with reference to the brook. He says it ran “through the midst of the citie unto the river Thames, serving the heart thereof.”

And that in the 28. yeare of *Edwarde* the first, it was by inquisition found before the Maior of *London*, that the parish of St. *Stephen* upon *Walbrooke*, ought of right to scowre the course of the saide Brooke, and therefore the shiriffes were commanded to distraine the sayde Parishioners so to doe: in the yeare 1300. the keepers of those Bridges at that time were *William Jordan* and *John de Beuer*. This water course having diverse Bridges, was afterwards vaulted over with bricke, and paved levell with the Streetes and Lanes where through it passed, and since that also houses have beene builded thereon, so that the course of *Walbrooke* is now hidden under ground, and thereby hardly knowne.

Stow's *Survey*, Kingsford, vol. 1, p. 14.

Robert Large Mayor, 1439. gave to the new water Conduits then in hand forty markes, and towards the vaulting over of *Walbrooke* neare to the parish Church of S. *Margaret* in *Lothbery* 200. Markes.

Stow's *Survey*, Kingsford, vol. 1, p. 18.

There have beene of olde time also, diverse Bridges in sundrie places over the course of *Walbrooke*, as before I have partly noted, besides *Horshew* bridge, by the Church of saint *Iohn Baptist*, now called S. *Iohns* upon *Walbrooke*. I reade that of olde time every person having lands on either side of the sayd brooke, should clense the same, and repayre the Bridges so farre as their landes extended. More, in the II of *Edward* the third, the inhabitants upon the course of this brooke, were forced to pile and wal the sides thereof. Also that in the third of *Henrie* the fift, this water course had many Bridges, since vaulted over with Bricke, and the streetes where through it passed, so paved, that the same watercourse is now hardly discerned. For order was taken in the second of *Edward* the fourth, that such as had ground on either side of *Walbrooke*, should vault and pave it over, so farre as his ground extended.

Stow's *Survey*, Kingsford, vol. 1, p. 27.

Now from the North to the South, this Citie was of olde time divided not by a large high way or streete, as from East to West, but by a faire Brooke of sweete water, which came from out the North fields through the wall, and midst of the Citie, into the river of Thames, which division is till this day constantly and without change maintained. This water was called (as I have said) *Walbrooke*, not *Galus* brooke of a *Romane* captaine, slaine by *Asclepiodatus* and throwne therein, as some have fabuled, but of running through, and from the wall of this Citie. The course whereof, to prosecute it peticularly, was and is from the said wall, to Saint *Margarets* Church in *Lothberrie*; from thence beneath the lower

part of the Grocers hall, about the East part of their Kitchen, under Saint *Mildreds* Church, somewhat west from the said Stockes market: from thence through Buckelsberry, by one great house builded of stone and timber called the old Barge, because Barges out of the river of Thames were rowed up so far into this Brooke on the backside of the houses in Walbrooke streete (which streete taketh name of the said Brooke) by the west end of Saint *Iohns* Church upon Walbrooke, under Horseshew Bridge by the west side of Tallow Chandlers hall, and of the Skinners hall, and so behinde the other houses, to Elbow lane, and by a part thereof downe Greenewitch lane, into the river of Thames.

This is the course of Walbrooke, which was of old time bridged over in diverse places, for passage of horses, and men, as neede required: but since by meanes of encroachment on the banks thereof, the channel being greatly streightned, and other noyances done thereunto, at length the same by common consent was arched over with Bricke, and paved with stone, equall with the ground where through it passed, and is now in most placed builded upon, that no man may by the eye discerne it, and therefore the trace thereof is hardly knowne to the common people.

Stow's *Survey*, Kingsford, vol. 1, pp. 118, 119.

Out of this Royall streete by the South gate of Tower Royall runneth a small streete, East to S. Iohns upon Walbrooke, which streete is called Horseshew bridge, of such a bridge sometime over the brooke there, which is now vaulted over.

Stow's *Survey*, Kingsford, vol. 1, p. 239.

Now for the North side of this Lothburie, beginning again at the East end thereof, uppon the water course of Walbrooke have yee a proper Parrish Church, called saint *Margaret*.

Stow's *Survey*, Kingsford, vol. 1, p. 282.

The following extracts are taken from an unpublished account of the sewers written about 1834:

The London Bridge Sewer was continued along Princes Street in 1834 by the Commissioners of Sewers and carried up to the north side of Lothbury.

From Mansion Street Northward into London Wall and the land to the Eastward, beyond the Auction Mart in Throgmorton Street, was found to consist of indurated Bog Earth to a general average depth of Nine feet; and in Lothbury about 90 feet of that sewer was tunnelled between the walls of a very ancient passage, the floor of which was paved with coarse red tesserae, the whole lying in this layer of bog earth.

The new line intersects the course of the ancient Walbrook which ran from St. Margaret's Church, Lothbury, across the ground now occupied by the Bank of England, and alongside the south wall of Grocers' Hall, and under St. Mildred's Church into the Poultry. At the point of intersection the new sewer was found to be just 16 inches above the deepest part of the Channel which the original watercourse had hollowed out of the stratum of Blue Clay; the new bed being at that point 30 feet 9 inches below the present surface. Masses of Piling with the wall plank-