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Illustrations of Roman London

Charles Roach Smith (1806–90), born on the Isle of Wight and educated in Hampshire, was apprenticed to a lawyer at fifteen, but a year later transferred to a chemist, where he prospered, moving to London and becoming wealthy from a firm of wholesale druggists and his own chemist’s shop in Lothbury, in the City of London. Sewerage and other works in the City meant that Roman and medieval artefacts were regularly coming to light, and Smith’s collection eventually numbered more than 5,000 pieces. He eventually sold it to the British Museum, at far less than its market value, so that it could remain intact. This book, published in 1859, describes the excavations, and uses the finds he and others acquired to illustrate ‘the institutions, the habits, the customs, and the arts of our forefathers’. It remains an invaluable record of finds arising from the Victorian redevelopment of London.

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Charles Roach Smith  
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# Illustrations of Roman London

CHARLES ROACH SMITH



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University Printing House, Cambridge, CB2 8BS, United Kingdom

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Information on this title: [www.cambridge.org/9781108081764](http://www.cambridge.org/9781108081764)

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This edition first published 1859  
This digitally printed version 2015

ISBN 978-1-108-08176-4 Paperback

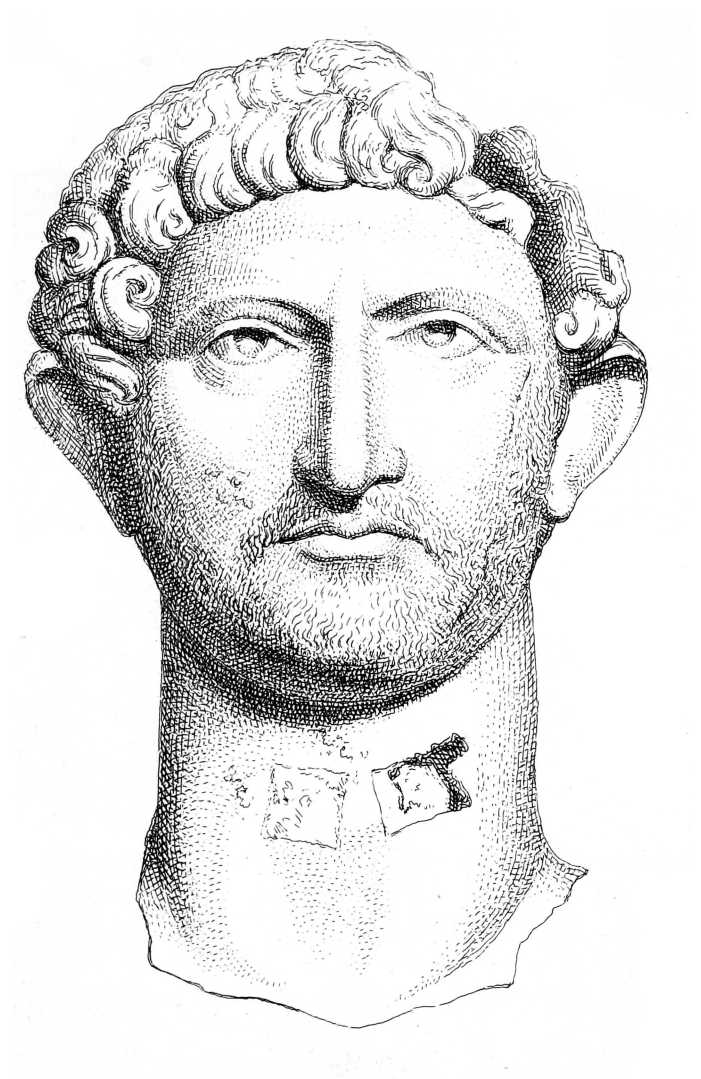
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ILLUSTRATIONS  
OF  
ROMAN LONDON.



*J. G. W. del.*

*Head of Hadrian.  
In Bronze.*

ILLUSTRATIONS  
  
OF  
  
ROMAN LONDON.

BY  
  
CHARLES ROACH SMITH,  
  
AUTHOR OF “COLLECTANEA ANTIQUA;” “ANTIQUITIES OF RICHBOROUGH, RECVLVER,  
AND LYMNE,” ETC.

LONDON:  
  
PRINTED FOR THE SUBSCRIBERS; AND NOT PUBLISHED.  
  
M.DCCC.LIX

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## PREFACE.

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THE present volume is, for the most part, the result of personal investigations made during my residence in Lothbury and in Liverpool Street, in the City of London.

The excavations, which led to those researches, were made for sewerage, for what is commonly termed “city improvements,” and for deepening the bed of the Thames to facilitate navigation.

A wide space in the area of the Roman city has, consequently, been penetrated in various directions, by deep longitudinal cuttings in the centre of streets; and, occasionally, by transverse channels. Where new streets were formed, the foundations of the houses required greater width of excavation; but the sections were not so deep as those for sewers. Extensive as these operations were, they left untouched by far the most considerable part of the site, or level, of the Roman city. The excavations were, in fact, but so many channels, cut here and there, sometimes penetrating through and below the bed of the ancient city, sometimes superficially entering it; and, not unfrequently, so comparatively shallow that they did not pass through the *débris* of buildings of the middle ages.

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Such circumstances were not of themselves the most congenial to an antiquarian explorer. The excavations, moreover, were conducted with rapidity by large bodies of workmen. As regards the sewers, tunnelling was often adopted, relays of labourers working through the night. Even if the corporation of London had thought fit to employ a dozen antiquaries or an archaeological society to watch the excavations, with full power to protect and to preserve, the watchers would have been severely tasked. But the corporation was not embarrassed by any such solicitude. It was compelled to undertake and prosecute these public works; but beyond this it was not propelled by public opinion; and on such a subject as the antiquities of the City, it had no opinion of its own. Volunteers were not encouraged: at the best, they only received a precarious toleration to inspect the excavations; and usually they were denied access to them.

In the meantime, under these disadvantageous circumstances, several collections of antiquities were formed by purchases from the workmen. The principal were those made by Mr. Kempe, Mr. John Newman, Mr. George Gwilt, Mr. Price, Mr. Chaffers, and myself. With the exception, probably, of Mr. Gwilt's, which, for the present, I believe, remains in the possession of his family, exertions were made to secure these collections in some proper receptacle in the city of London; but in vain. My own, as is well known, after having been rejected by the corporation, has found a safe resting-place in the British Museum. The rest are all dispersed. Mr. Chaffers, however, has preserved a faithful manuscript record of his collection, with good sketches of the more remarkable objects; and the Guildhall Library, through my own interference, contains the monumental inscription, fig. 1, pl. ii, of this volume, and the fragment of sculpture engraved in

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p. 33 (which for a long time remained neglected in the City stone-yard). In it are, also, some of the antiquities dug up on the site of the New Royal Exchange, collected by the vigilance of Mr. Russell, clerk of the works. The Guildhall gave a temporary shelter to the inscribed stone represented in p. 29 ; but where this important fragment now is, I cannot say: it was not to be found in the Guildhall very recently, and there is every reason to believe it has been destroyed.

The citizens must share the opprobrium which attaches to the corporation for this indifference to the antiquities of the metropolis ; for when, a few years since, an attempt was made, in a large and stormy meeting, to establish in the City a free library and a museum, they scouted the proposal, under the pretext that the funds of the corporation were adequate for the purpose without the new impost proposed, which would probably have amounted to about one half-penny in the pound ! It is, however, not agreeable to me to be ever censuring ; and I therefore forbear entering into long details in justification of general charges, contenting myself with an appeal to one grand fact, patent to the world, and which no one will attempt to deny. It is, that the City of London has no museum of collections of its antiquities. The severest condemnation of the corporation is in the fact itself.

In the arrangement of this volume I have omitted much which, I think, is often introduced into similar works without any benefit to archæology or to the general reader ; and I have endeavoured, as far as it was practicable, to convey a notion of Roman London from the antiquities themselves. If I had been warranted in so doing I should have chosen to give more plates ; but while studying to show gratitude to my subscribers, I find it necessary to be just to myself. To them I am deeply obliged, because they have contributed to enable

me to bring together into one view more engravings of the antiquities of London than I had, on former occasions, been able to obtain or to afford. Like all works which I have printed, being my own property, the few unsubscribed copies of the *Illustrations of Roman London* will be retained with proper consideration for the compact which tacitly exists between an author and his subscribers.

To the Society of Antiquaries of London my thanks are offered for the loan of the plates which accompanied my communications printed in the *Archæologia*.

Temple Place, Strood, Kent.  
June 1st, 1859.

ERRATUM.

Page 48, line 5 from the bottom, for “figs. 2 to 8” read “figs. 2 to 5.”